

Forsaken

Story: Forsaken

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Summary: Mindy is on the run. Running further than ever before. She was safe, she had freedom; now all that has been taken away. A tangential variation on 'Solitude'. This story is a universe unto itself and has spawned eight other stories, not to mention a cross-over with 'Gotham' and another with 'Stargate:Atlantis'. As of January 2018, early chapters have been updated (1-40).

***Chapter 1*: Forsaken**

Author's Note: *This is my fourth story. As I have mentioned before, I was inspired to write these stories by the many amazing Authors on Fan Fiction who write Kick-Ass Stories. We all know who they are. However, my top author and inspiration has to be Makokam and his epic saga **Precocious Crush**. I am sure many readers will agree with this.*

This story is intended as an alternative, tangent, version based on my other story 'Solitude'. This story takes over at the end of Solitude Chapter 6 - Training. It replaces Chapter 7 - Found, and the chapters that follow. I am not expecting the two stories to come back together. If you haven't read Solitude - please read it. However, the synopsis is basically that Mindy has left New York, Dave and everything behind. I have taken some artistic licence as to events that may or may not have occurred between the two movies.

Also, please excuse any geographical errors as I am relying on Google Earth! I have been to the USA, but that was many years ago.

As usual I look forward, with some trepidation, to any reviews. I promise to accept any and all criticism. Also, I am still British so my spelling and grammar may look and seem strange to some.

I was running.

I was scared.

I was alone.

I had nothing, but the clothes on my back . . . and the blood on my hands.

My safety, my freedom, it had all been forsaken.

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***Chapter 2*: Found**

Day 41

New York City

My cell was ringing.

I checked the name on the phone; it was Marty!

"Hi, Marty, been a while," I offered cheerfully.

"Hi, Dave. I think I might have unwelcome news," Marty said slowly. "I'm in Chicago, you know, getting away from all that shit a few weeks back. Well, I was in a cab on the South Side of Chicago and I saw the cops were doing something near an apartment block. Something caught my eye and I told the cab to stop. Dave, I don't know how to say this, but. . . The cops were loading a motorcycle onto a flat bed. It was a purple Ducati with. . ."

". . .the initials 'HG' on the side," I finished.

Oh, God.

Mindy.

"See . . . see what you can find out, Marty . . . but just keep it quiet: no names, okay," I said. "I need to go, I'll call you later . . . and Marty – thanks."

I couldn't hold it any longer; I sank to the floor and I cried – I lost control completely. I had lost Mindy. She'd been in Chicago, that phone call. . . It had been *her* – it just had to have been.

Where was she now? Arrested?

The Police had her Ducati . . . how could she travel?

Oh, God.

Oh, God.

Marcus' House

I knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" Marcus' voice called, after a minute.

"It's me, Dave," I replied.

The door was unlocked and thrown open. Marcus quickly pulled me in and closed the door.

"What is it, Dave? It's trouble, I can see it in your face. Please . . . not Mindy?" Marcus asked with some trepidation.

"Her motorcycle was just impounded by the Police in Chicago," Dave said quietly. "I don't know what to do . . . I need help. I have a friend in Chicago; he saw the cops take the Ducati. Marty, he looked about and . . . well, there was a murder . . . a man . . ."

"Oh, God! No!" Marcus fell back onto the couch. "I . . . give me a minute."

Marcus got out his cell phone and started making a call. I noticed some papers on the table; they were pictures of vehicles. I recognised the car on the top page: it was red and black; a custom Mustang. It was the fucking 'Mist Mobile'.

Marcus came back after a few minutes.

"I called in a favour. There was a murder, on the South Side of Chicago and they *did* seize a purple Ducati. The

Police think it may have been gang related; the victim was stabbed in a *very professional manner* - their words, not mine. The Ducati was found abandoned, near the body. This happened very early this morning, I believe."

"So, they haven't linked anything to Mindy, yet? Or to Hit Girl?" I asked and I felt relieved at Marcus' expression.

"Not, yet," Marcus replied. "It must have been Mindy; she must have been surprised and just reacted. Oh, God!"

"Marcus, that car . . . why is it there?" I asked pointing at the papers.

"What? Oh, that. It's going for scrap, in the next few days; its been at the pound for almost five years. Belonged to one of those Hero idiots," Marcus said offhandedly.

"I know. But do you know who the last person to drive it was?" I asked. "It was Mindy."

"What?" Marcus looked incredulous.

"Can the car be bought?" I asked.

Two days later

I now had a car.

Mindy, I am sure, will be mad; assuming I ever get her back.

I had just spent \$68,000 of her 'retirement fund in a suitcase'. But I'd worry about Mindy's anger, if I ever get her back. At least I now had transport; I had had a garage change the fluids, plugs, and filters as it had been sitting still for quite a while. I packed my gear and grabbed some 'special items' from the Safehouse. That evil bastard, Red Mist, had shown me some convenient hiding places in the Mustang. Not exactly low key, but it would do. The garage also disabled some of the weird lighting, to at least make the car a *little* less conspicuous. My *gear* also included the full Kick-Ass suit and armour, as well as some other items that I considered might be needed down the line.

My first job – find Marty. My second job – find Mindy's apartment. My third job - find Mindy.

I was never going to stop.

I would find her.

No matter what.

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Chapter 3: First Step

Day 45

Chicago, Illinois

I had finally met up with Marty in Chicago.

After he had stopped drooling over the Mist Mobile – I really needed to change that fucking name – he showed me where he had seen the Ducati being recovered by the Police. I soon found myself standing, almost exactly, where the Ducati had been found on East 78th Street, on Chicago's South Side. There were quite a few apartment blocks nearby; could Mindy have had an apartment in one of them? Possibly, but we had nowhere else to start.

I gave Marty a photo of Mindy and he started checking out apartments while I drove around the area, in the slim hope that I might see my Mindy. I really was grasping at any straw I could get my hands on. Four days had passed since the Ducati had been seized; was Mindy even still in Chicago? Would I even recognise her? Marcus would let me know if she was picked up by the Police; an altogether bad outcome. Every time I saw a petite girl with blonde hair, I slowed to check. None of them was Mindy – I needed to be careful, though, or I'd get myself arrested for kerb-crawling. Chicago was a fascinating city, but also being a city, it was very large. Mindy could be anywhere – if she was still in Chicago at all. Finally, I took Marty back to his folks, at around six in the evening, and then went back to my motel. We had agreed that I would pick Marty up in the morning and we would continue working through the apartment blocks on East 78th Street.

I spent the evening thinking about Mindy. I also considered how much I missed her and I was determined to find her. The drive to Chicago had seemed to take forever, but I had had to keep to the speed limits as much as possible to avoid attracting any Police attention to the Mustang – which attracted enough attention as it was. Before I went to bed, I contacted Marcus to say that I had arrived safely and that so far, I had nothing. Marcus commented that, in this case, no news was also good news.

I went to bed feeling *very* down that night.

I was *really* miserable.

The room I was using stank and I mean, *it really stank*. I'd not even seen any cockroaches but that might have only been because cockroaches had better taste, I thought sourly. It was however cheap and slightly off the grid and at that point, I needed anonymity.

Thanks to the room, *I stank*. I needed to get some different clothes; I'd worn my current clothing for over *four* days. I had a total of \$163 in my pocket: a big come down from \$3million in a suitcase! I had even managed to lose my fucking purse; it must have fallen out during the attack or soon after. I had never thought to check at the time which was so stupid. At that moment, though, I thought about calling Dave again but I decided against it; it would only drag him into the shitty situation that I had found myself in.

I had really fucked up, this time – no question about it. As I looked back, I wasn't really sure *why* I was even going out on the Ducati. I had just wanted to get out for a bit, maybe; it was early on, on that morning, and I would not easily have been noticed. I definitely had *not* expected some fucking cunt to try and take the fucking Ducati off me. He had made a mistake, a *big* mistake: he had pulled a knife and I had then made an even *bigger* mistake as my training had taken over. Within seconds, the guy was dead on the floor with his own fucking knife embedded under his sternum. My hands were covered in blood; the knife must have ruptured his heart and then I must have panicked.

Why the fuck did I panic? I was better than that! I ran. I didn't stop to think. I didn't stop to grab my gear. I just ran. Stupid, *so* stupid! I was *so fucking* stupid. I had a Balisong in my pocket and that was it – no other weapons. I'd had less, though; Daddy had taught me well. Nonetheless, I was going to need every skill that I possessed to survive; I had no idea if the Police were hunting for me . . . yet.

Should I leave the city, or should I use the city to hide? So many questions with so few answers.

I went to bed feeling very down that night.

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***Chapter 4*: Second Step**

Day 47

Chicago

It was ten in the morning.

Marty and I were checking out the last two apartment blocks on our list. The next block of apartments had four floors and a flat roof. Marty started work on the first floor and asked if anybody had seen Mindy. I drove around the block, having a last look before I parked the car by the kerb. As I got out of the Mustang, something caught my eye. I looked down at the base of a bush, tucked almost out of sight was something purple.

I felt my heart skip a beat.

Purple equalled Hit Girl which in turn equalled Mindy – at least I hoped so. I grabbed the item which turned out to be Mindy's purse; I recognised it instantly. It wasn't large or all that feminine – apart from being purple – but it was very Mindy. My hands shook as I opened the purse. Inside were some assorted dollar notes and loose change, two keys and a driver's licence with Mindy's photo, but a different name - Megan Williams, and she lived . . . the address on the licence was in New York City; crap! I found a letting agent card in the purse with an address written on the back: East 78th Street and the apartment building directly in front of me which Marty had just entered.

Holy, fuck!

Jackpot: one of the keys fitted the main door to the building. So, the other key. . . I grabbed a blustering Marty and hauled him up to the third floor. I stopped outside apartment 309 and I inserted the key, paused, and then tried turning it. The key turned easily in the well-oiled lock.

I pushed the door open.

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The apartment was empty, but there was a familiar scent in the air.

There was also a beeping sound coming from beside the door; an alarm panel. Oh, shit! I quickly pulled Marty into the apartment and closed the door quietly. There was only one thing I could try; I punched in the code from the Safehouse in New York. The panel beeped once and the green 'disarmed' light illuminated. I breathed a sigh of relief; that had been close!

I looked in the fridge and that told us that nobody had been in the apartment for a number of days. Mindy would never leave a mess; she was too tidy. It was obvious that she was gone and gone for good. I searched the apartment, easily, considering it was so small – not to mention that I knew some of Mindy's habits. I grabbed her pack and started packing all of her clothes and other things into it. I found her Hit Girl costume and I stared at it for a few minutes before carefully folding it and placing it into the pack. During the search, I had also found a number of weapons and a large amount of cash which I also stuffed into the pack. I hoped that I had found everything that Mindy had in the apartment as I did not want to leave any trace, in case the Police found the apartment. Once I was happy that nothing was left, I locked up the apartment and placed the pack in the Mustang's capacious trunk. Marty and I then drove off.

We drove around Chicago for an hour, thinking hard and trying to find where to go next to track down the elusive Mindy. Suddenly, I remembered something which Mindy had told me during my many training sessions: Mindy had said that drug dealers were the vigilantes ATM. Mindy would need cash and I knew that Mindy could fight; even without her weapons.

Feeling a little happier, I called Marcus and informed him that we had found Mindy's apartment and that we had cleaned it out. I also asked him to let us know if he had heard of any drug dealers being turned over or killed anywhere near Chicago over the past week.

The day had been a bit of a blur.

During the morning, I went out and bought some hair dye. By lunchtime, I had gone from being a petite blonde, to a

petite brunette. It was a start at least and I had also managed to pick up some cheap looking, but *clean* clothes – I binned my old ones. How did I pay for it all? I had managed to increase my available cash thanks to a generous drug dealer who happened to fall unconscious in front of me a couple of days ago. I had had one weird moment, when I could have sworn that I had seen a red and black car that looked *extremely* familiar; but I just could not remember where from. Anyway, that car would be of no use to me whatsoever.

I had been running the streets, after dark, each night to keep myself in trim. I flipped the Balisong around most evenings to relieve the boredom – actually managed to nick myself the other night; first time that had happened since I was eleven! Other times I just sat there and cried; I just could not stop it. I felt complete despair. I needed to kill someone, go back to my predatory ways; it would help alleviate the despair, channel the rage and anger elsewhere.

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It was dark.

I went out wearing black combat style trousers, a black shirt, boots, and a dark purple hooded top. I had fashioned a mask, very similar to that which I had worn when I was eleven. I left via the window and I headed towards what, for me, would be Chicago's more pleasurable areas. It did not take long to find a target; the cunt was busy raping a woman in an alley. He never knew what hit him, as I drew the Balisong across his throat, from behind, and soaked the woman, below, in blood.

"Go!" I snarled at the woman who screamed and ran.

I searched the body and found a nice Glock 26 automatic pistol. It was small and compact, a nine-millimetre. The magazine currently held six rounds instead of the usual ten. It wasn't the newest model and not in the greatest condition, but I would give it a good clean and it should be fine. I would need to find some more rounds, though, but it was a very common calibre so that should not be much of a problem. I wiped the Balisong on the man's clothes and folded it, before returning it to my pocket. I also found a decent sized roll of cash on him which found a new home in my pocket. I briefly looked for any obvious blood on my clothes but could not see any. I left the alley quickly after that.

I made my way back to my room, quickly but via a roundabout route and had a shower. I checked my clothes, again, and myself for blood – all appeared okay. I counted the cash – over twelve hundred dollars which was not bad for a night out. I then lay in my skanky bed and thought about my life to that point and I tried not to think about New York and Dave.

Dave.

I could not believe that he was eight hundred miles away – might as well have been a million.

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Chapter 5: Searching

Day 55

Chicago

The searching continued.

It had been almost two weeks, now, since Marty had first seen the Ducati being seized.

Marty had gone back to New York and I was currently alone again. Marcus had been in contact and he had advised me that there was somebody who was busy taking out or attacking drug dealers plus one or two rapists. Not surprisingly, there were no witnesses to the attacks; any survivors never saw anything, of course. Marcus emphasised, that *no innocents* were attacked; it had to be Mindy.

Marcus was worried, very worried. He felt that the forced exile and loneliness could be affecting Mindy mentally and as a result, bringing out her more psychotic behaviour as a defence and hence resorting to a more predatory behaviour to survive. Marcus was concerned that if this went on, unchecked, Mindy might be lost forever, or worse, the Police would catch her and probably shoot first, ask questions later. I had to find her. She was obviously going out at night so I would need to do the same. Over the past week or so, I had been walking all over Chicago, learning the streets and routes.

Kick-Ass was about to visit Chicago's seedier locations that night.

I was wearing the full Kick-Ass costume with body armour.

I kept to the shadows, as I moved about the City. What would Mindy be dressed like? I would have to be careful whom I approached as it might be Mindy and she might attack first, out of pure feral instinct. This was my third night out and so far, I had seen nothing more than a few lowlifes who crept through alleyways carrying out their nefarious activities. One man told me, reluctantly, of a part of town which had gained a reputation over the past week or so, as a bad place for criminals to be. There was a black and purple menace, apparently, who was killing and maiming.

At last, information – useful information! Mindy was wearing black and purple, not overly surprising, I thought. Purple would make her feel comfortable, something she could feel in touch with, and something that she could relate to and, I hoped, keep some of her sanity. Purple had been a part of her life since she was six. That was good news, keeping in touch with her past life should be mentally stabilising, my amateur psychologist skills told me.

Without a thought for my own personal safety, I headed for the indicated part of town.

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Over the space of three hours, I moved from alley to alley. By ten o'clock, it was getting late and I was not having much success.

I was resting between two dumpsters when I heard a scuffling sound; somebody was moving up the alley. I looked out – carefully – to see a man with a hood pulled up over his head. The man was shuffling through the alley and then, without any warning, something appeared out of nowhere and kicked him to the ground. Before the man could utter a word or put up a defence against his attacker, a Balisong knife was driven into his throat and twisted. I could hear the man's gurgling, as his life ebbed away within seconds.

I moved to stand up and I opened my mouth to call out, but the attacker instantly turned to look in my direction and then fled.

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A thought suddenly occurred to me, as I ran after the attacker: what should I call out?

Should I yell 'Hit Girl' or should I yell 'Mindy'? Using her real name could get *her* into shit and she would *not* forgive me for doing that. However, did she want her Hit Girl identity shouted around Chicago? I could, of course, be completely wrong and it might be somebody else. Although the chances of another teenaged, blood-thirsty vigilante running around Chicago were very slim. Finally, I chose just to yell something generic.

"Hey!" I called loudly and I saw the 'attacker' hit hesitate for just a few seconds, before she continued running.

I felt joy inside me.

It *had* been Mindy; I could tell from the body language. The attacker was petite, with a feminine figure, despite the baggy clothing. She moved like Hit Girl and I knew that Mindy's favourite small blades were her Balisongs and she always kept them razor sharp. Most important of all: *she was alive*. Even better, she was not taking risks. She had not stopped to fight me; she had simply fled the scene. Clever girl.

I was so close; I had her in my sights.

I shot out of the alleyway and across the, thankfully, deserted street. I followed the fleeing girl into another alley where she dodged down a side passageway. She obviously knew where she was going, whereas I did not. I followed her down the same passageway. She was fast, but I was faster with my longer legs, however, Mindy was more compact and therefore more manoeuvrable. I also wore body armour, which was heavy. Nevertheless, I gave it my all but even then, I was losing ground on Mindy.

I was just in time to catch sight of Mindy, as she jumped upwards and with acrobatic ease, she grasped a fire escape and then scrambled nimbly upwards. I ran hard to the same fire escape and easily jumped upwards, but the climb was sapping my energy reserves at an alarming rate. I hauled myself upwards and saw Mindy's shoes vanishing over the parapet at the roof level of the apartment block. I rushed up the remaining levels of the fire escape and leapt over the parapet to find a very empty rooftop. I looked in every direction and down into the alleys that I could see.

She had vanished.

Nevertheless, I still felt joy inside me. I had seen my Mindy. Now, I just needed to find her again and I hoped, talk to her.

I slept well that night.

I missed my score that night.

Somebody had been watching me. They had watched me kill that dealing bastard. I had decided, days ago, that I would pick my fights and only fight where I had the upper hand and where I could guarantee success; an unknown assailant was not a fight to pick, not right now. Strangely, though, the interloper had appeared vaguely familiar in the darkness and that voice – no, that was impossible. I would try again tomorrow night. I was enjoying the killing; it was keeping my anger and my despair in check. But as Daddy had taught me, I had not hurt a single innocent – only the fucking scum that deserved to die.

I did *not* sleep well.

Updated: September 2017

Chapter 6: Contact

Day 57

Chicago

It was not until two nights, and many hours of searching later, that I was finally able to find Mindy again.

Unfortunately, it did not go well, nor was it the meeting up that I had had in mind. I had heard the shouting from the other end of the darkened alley as I was checking out yet another dark and smelly alley or which Chicago had hundreds, if not thousands.

It had been Mindy's 'Hit Girl' voice.

"You fucking cocksuckers! Get the fuck off of me! I'll fucking. . ."

She was in trouble!

I ran towards her voice as fast as I could. As I came around a dumpster I could make out three dark shapes rolling about the alley floor and I figured that the smallest of the three was Mindy – unfortunately, she was at the bottom of the pile! I ran in and kicked the top man in the kidney with my boot, before throwing him against the alley wall where he collapsed, unconscious. I grabbed the next man and pounded his face against the concrete floor of the alley until the concrete started to turn red, only then did I finally let him go.

I turned to face the person in the final layer only to find Mindy glaring up at me, ready to pounce at this new assailant – me. The moonlight glinted, momentarily, across her face. I *knew* it was her; despite the mask and clothing, I would recognise those adorable green eyes anywhere. There was a brief flash of recognition in those eyes and then she scrambled to her feet.

"What the fuck do *you* want? I don't need *your* fucking help, *cunt!* I was managing those fuckers!" she growled at me in feral anger.

Every word stung me. What the hell, had gotten into her?

"Mindy, are you okay?" I asked, feeling a surge of happiness that I had found Mindy and that I was finally able to talk with her.

"Yeah, Dave, everything's *fucking* peachy!" Mindy retorted angrily and the happiness within me started to fade.

"Can we go someplace to talk?" I asked, tentatively as I looked around the darkened alley where it felt anything but safe.

"What the *fuck* do *we* have to talk about?" Mindy retorted and she walked off down the alley while I just stood there; I was stunned at her behaviour. "Well, are you fucking coming, or are you just gonna stand there looking like a dick?"

Not even a smirk, no emotion. I followed her, thoughts racing through my mind with one at the foremost: 'this was *not my Mindy!*' This was an older version of the vicious little girl that I had first met, years before, just after her Daddy had died. I followed Mindy through various alleyways, until we came to a shitty-looking building where she climbed two floors up a dodgy-looking fire escape and then levered open a window, before jumping through. I followed her up and then through the window.

After stepping through, I closed the window and the blinds before turning towards Mindy.

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Mindy flipped the main light on.

She looked a fucking mess – nothing else came to mind. Her clothes were covered in grime as well as dried blood. She pulled off the hooded top and her mask. Her face looked just the same as I remembered it but she was now a brunette, instead of her beautiful blonde colour.

"Had a good fucking look?" Mindy snapped.

Again, no emotion. I pulled off my mask and I smiled at her. She *did not* smile back.

"I missed you, Mindy," I began and I took a step towards her; Mindy stepped back, *away* from me, like I was somebody to be avoided.

"I missed you, too, Dave. But that's in the *fucking* past!" Mindy said and this time I heard a slight crack in her voice.

My Mindy was in there, somewhere; there was still hope.

"What the *fuck* are you doing here, anyways?" Mindy demanded nastily. "How did you *fucking* find me? If you found me then *fucking* anybody can!"

That fucking stung!

"Mindy . . . I came to Chicago looking for *you*. I found out you were here; I was told about your Ducati being seized and I found your apartment. I've been searching Chicago for two weeks . . . looking for you," I explained calmly – even thought I was feeling angry.

"Why the *fuck* would you want to come after *me*?" Mindy retorted like I was some demented idiot. "I'm a fucking *fugitive*, Dave!"

"Cut the crap, Mindy!" I snapped - she was really starting to piss me off now. "You fucking *know* why I came after you; I fucking care about what happens to you."

"*Nobody* fucking cares about me!" Mindy yelled back at me. "It was *your* fucking fault. *You* were the reason that I had to leave New York. It was *your* fucking fault my Daddy died. Just fucking stay away from me!"

I snapped – she had crossed the line.

"Okay, I can take it," I retorted. "Throw all the shit at Dave; just like you always *fucking* do! Why the *fuck* did I put up with you and your crap? I let you beat the crap outta me for fucking weeks! I am beginning to wish that I had never *fucking* met you, Mindy Macready. I have wasted way too much of my fucking life on you. Maybe I should have left you, cowering, in that fucking kitchen cupboard and let you be blown the hell up! You want to be a psychotic, bad-ass bitch, then good luck to you; have a nice *fucking* life!"

I turned towards the window, angrier than I had ever felt.

I tried to reply, but I couldn't.

My throat had gone dry. I watched as he pulled back the blinds, threw open the window and then . . . he was gone. I started shaking and I mean shaking; I'd never felt like that way before: I was scared. Why the fuck did I shout at Dave? Dave was the only person that I had left; but now he was gone.

Well done, Mindy, that was your best fucking decision yet! You stupid, fucking bitch! I lay on the bed and I cried and cried. I could not stop shaking *or* crying. Fuck the bastard; if he was gonna abandon me, too, then I did *not* fucking need him.

I'd survived so far, on my own.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 7*: Wounded**

Day 58

Chicago

I woke up still raging about the previous night.

I had found her.

I had found Mindy.

But *not my* Mindy.

I had meant every word which I had yelled at her. I felt like packing up and going back to New York and giving up on her; I'd lost her, for good. But . . . I decided to give her one more chance.

Just the one.

I started to gather my thoughts and figure out how I could get through to Mindy. I called Marcus and I told him that I had found Mindy. He was overjoyed, but he could tell by my tone that there was a catch. I explained the catch to Marcus and he wasn't exactly surprised. It was as we had discussed: Mindy had withdrawn into herself mentally. She was on autopilot.

I advised Marcus that I was going to have another go at getting through to her and he wished me luck.

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That night, I sat in the darkness of a rubbish-strewn, stinking alley, watching Mindy's window.

Her room was empty, I'd already checked, earlier that evening.

At about ten that night, I clocked a movement in the alley beside the fire escape. It *might* have been Mindy; the build was right. However, something looked off; the person was staggering. Suddenly, the person collapsed onto the floor of the alley amidst the rubbish and God only knew what.

Oh, shit! Please, not Mindy.

I ran down the alley and found a black and purple clad Mindy; she was breathing, but not moving and her eyes were closed. I scooped her up, just as I had done all those years before and I carried her up to her room, via the fire escape and the window. I placed her down, gently, on the bed before I closed the window and the blinds. Finally, I pulled off my mask and dumped my pack on the floor. I then turned on the light. The sight before me did not look good.

I pulled off my gloves and touched her top – my hand came away red; the purple top was soaked in blood. I pulled the top off, over her head. Underneath she wore a black shirt and it too, was sodden with blood. I felt a surge of panic as I ripped open the shirt and my heart sank; her pale skin was covered in blood. I searched her pockets, found the Balisong in her pants pocket and I used it to cut the shirt off her. I searched for the wound, working my way down her left side and then across her stomach to her right side. There, I found the wound; it was under her right arm, just below the level of her breasts and it looked like a bullet wound. I checked the shirt. Yes, two holes, one in and one out. Thank God – there was no bullet stuck in her.

Mindy, what the fuck did you get yourself involved with, tonight? I searched her room and found some antiseptic liquid, sterile gauze, and a bandage. I cleaned the wound as best I could; the bleeding seemed to have eased, which was a good sign. I then covered the open wound with the gauze and wrapped the bandage, tightly, around her chest; thankfully, the bullet just seemed to have grazed her.

Next, I pulled off her boots and pants then checked the rest of her body for wounds. She had some vicious bruises on her left thigh and a small bruise on her forehead; but no more bullet wounds and no other visible, major injuries. Quite a few smaller bruises and cuts, but otherwise nothing else.

Finally, I pulled the sheets and blankets over Mindy and then I sat down in a chair over by the window and I watched

her for the next hour or two before I finally fell into a relieved asleep.

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Chapter 8: Final Step

Day 59

Chicago

I awoke with a start and something was not right.

Something cold was pressing against my temple, it felt like cold steel. I opened my eyes to find a wild-eyed and half-naked Mindy staring down at me; she held a pistol to my head.

"What the *fuck* are you doing in my *fucking* room, asshole?" She growled, dangerously.

"You were shot, so I carried you up here," I explained, calmly.

"Are you *fucking* deaf or just an idiot?" Mindy growled, more dangerously. "Did you not hear me, the other *fucking* night? I don't need *your* fucking help, *cunt!*"

Now Mindy had gone *too fucking far!* I pushed the gun away from my head and I stared up at her.

"Get that gun away from my fucking head, girl! You want to *fucking* shoot me, then go ahead *if* you've got the guts, otherwise *fucking shut up and listen!*" I snarled, viciously, at Mindy, who took a step back and she looked like I had just slapped her.

She did not say anything, but she did lower the gun.

"Mindy, you are a fifteen-year-old girl, but you're fucking behaving like a fucking twelve-year-old! It is time to *grow the fuck up!* I am fucking sorry that I caused you to leave New York! I am fucking sorry that I had a hand in your Daddy dying! I'm fucking sorry for caring about a fucking little bitch, like you!" I yelled at her.

Mindy dropped the gun to the floor and she backed away from me; she was shaking. I stood up and took a step towards her but Mindy flinched away from me.

"But I am *not* fucking sorry for coming back here, last night to give you another chance to come to your *fucking* senses!" I roared, almost directly into her face. "I am fucking *overjoyed* that I was here last night, because a *stupid* little girl got herself fucking shot! Didn't you, *Mindy?*"

I turned around and grabbed something from my pack.

"*You*, Mindy are making mistake after fucking mistake. Mistakes *this girl* would *never* have fucking made!" I yelled and I threw the top of Mindy's Hit Girl costume at her.

She flinched again; just as if I had just thrown a knife at her.

"I'm also *overjoyed* that I was able to clean up your wound and make sure that you were safe! However, . . . I don't know you anymore. You *are not* the Hit Girl or even the Mindy Macready that I once knew and loved, *yes loved*. I'm sorry for getting in your fucking way; you can go back to being a heartless, psychotic, bitch!" I continued, without any emotion in my voice.

I turned, picked up my pack and I started to pull back the blinds.

I was out of there.

It was over.

"Dave – *please* – don't go . . . I . . ." I tried, before I broke down and I started to sob as I sank to my knees.

I couldn't stop shaking; every word that Dave had uttered had hit me like a knife, I had felt every word and I fucking *deserved* every word.

My chest hurt; I was starting to feel light-headed and I felt something running down my right side. I touched my side with my left hand and as I pulled it away and looked at it, I saw that my hand had come away red. Dave grabbed hold

of me and laid he me down on the bed, none too gently.

"You, stupid bitch, you've opened the damn wound back up!" Dave snarled as he ripped the bandage off.

I screamed, as he wiped the wound, very roughly, with antiseptic, then he covered the wound with gauze and wrapped the bandage back around me. I still held my Hit Girl costume in my left hand and I brought it up to my face, so I could look at it. Dave was right; Hit Girl *would not* have made all of those fucking mistakes and, yes, it was time for me to fucking grow up; I was going to be sixteen in two weeks, for God's sake. Yes, I had fucked up the previous night *and* managed to get myself shot. If Dave had not been there for me . . . then I would have bled out and I would probably be very dead right now.

I owed Dave, *again*; he had saved my life and he was about to do it again. I fucking hated being a teenager, it sucked big time. I had never seen Dave get so mad before and he scared me; I could hardly believe that I was scared of him, but I *was* fucking scared of him right at that moment.

"Well, Mindy! What the *fuck* is it going to be?" I snarled, nastily, looking down at her.

I was really wound up now; I was raging. Mindy was trying to force her way *down* through the bed, *away* from me. What was that in her eyes? Fear? What the fuck?

I thought that I might have finally got through to the *real* Mindy Macready, not Hit Girl or that fucking freak from the other night. Before me was the real, fifteen-year-old girl underneath; the girl who had climbed through my window on the night of the 'date-ditch'.

My rage started to die as I sat down on the bed, grabbed her hand and held it tightly.

"Look, Mindy. I didn't come all this way to hurt you or to yell at you. I just wanted you back, I need you and I've really missed you," I explained, quietly.

Mindy stopped crying and she sat up, grimacing with pain.

"I'm really sorry, Dave. I've been a complete bitch to you and I don't know how I can ever make it up to you. I know that I've made some *whopping* mistakes since I left New York and thanks, thanks for saving my life, *again*. I'm really, really glad you've been in my life, Dave. I could never have got by my Daddy dying or my *other problems*, since, without *your* help. Please forgive me. Please forgive me for everything I said to you the other night – I was being childish and stupid," Mindy said, looking very ashamed.

I hugged her, tightly. She dropped the Hit Girl costume, wrapped her left arm around me, and she held on tight. I could feel her jerk as she started to sob again, into my shoulder.

I had my Mindy back, now.

I had found her, finally.

I thought that there would still be an uphill struggle, but I would be there with her, all the way.

Author's Note: *Okay! I have been persuaded to continue this story. Let's see where it goes...*

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 9*: A Fresh Start**

Author's Note: *Okay! I am creating more chapters for this story. I only have a very vague idea, at this point, of where I want to go for the moment, so we shall see how things go. I will also be updating and correcting the previous eight chapters, to bring them up to a good standard. Anyway, please read on. . .*

Day 64

Chicago

Thursday

My head was pounding.

However, the pain in my side was even worse. I was alone, again; Dave had left, yesterday, to head back to New York. He was going to see what the current position was, concerning 'Mindy Macready'. Dave had promised to return by the weekend. Until then he had made me promise to stay in my crappy room and rest, to let the wound heal. I fully intended to do exactly as I was told.

For once!

New York City

It had taken a day or two to perform a thorough-ish reconnaissance of Marcus, to ensure that he was not being followed or watched.

I thought it best that I visit as Kick-Ass so if I were seen, nobody would know that 'Dave' had visited. The idea was to protect both me, as well as Marcus. It was late at night. Marcus had returned home at around ten o'clock that evening as I watched from a convenient, but cold, hiding place. Marcus was alone, as usual. I had crept to the side door and silently opened it using a key that Mindy had given me. The Kitchen was empty. As I moved through the kitchen, I could see Marcus sitting in an easy chair, in the living room.

I placed a hand on Marcus' right shoulder; he jumped.

"Don't move Marcus. Just listen."

I spoke with a slight growl. Not quite as good as Hit Girl's growl, though - I needed more practice. I took my hand away from his shoulder and he turned to look at me.

"Kick-Ass! Err . . . Dave! What are you doing here?" He was astonished but he seemed relieved that it was me.

"I am here as Kick-Ass for our protection. Now, don't ask any questions," I directed. "I need to know what the current situation is, concerning Mindy."

Marcus paused to gather his thoughts.

"Simple! She is a wanted felon. She appears on the streets of Manhattan and she will be arrested. There is nothing I can do to prevent it! I'm not being investigated, not anymore; it was my gun but I had been injured in the explosion. Although, most importantly, nobody links Mindy to being Hit Girl," Marcus explained. "I won't turn her in, if that's what you might be thinking."

"Okay. Therefore, Mindy is still wanted but nobody knows her connection to Hit Girl. She can't come back to New York," I stated simply.

"Have you seen her? Do you know where she is?" Marcus asked, with genuine concern.

"Yes. She is okay; I managed to get through her mental state. I got through to the girl underneath. Marcus, she was shot. But she's okay – I treated the wound; it was only a scratch. I need her and I'm going back, to be with her." Marcus did not appear too happy at that last sentence. "I love her, you know, and I *will* protect her. I will bring her back, but *only* when I know that she will be safe in New York City. Till then, we stay in Chicago, at least for now."

Marcus turned away as he took a deep breath and just said, "Please, just keep her safe. You know . . . She will be sixteen in two weeks. On the 3rd."

I had not known that her birthday was coming up, Mindy had always refused to tell me the date.

"I will always keep her safe, Marcus, always!" I promised.

..._...

I made a detour via Safehouse C, where I collected a large amount of cash and some weapons, including Hit Girl's trusty, and very lethal, bō-staff. Marcus had also given me a case of Mindy's clothes. I had already arranged to put my Dad's house up for sale and that would be taken care of while I was in Chicago. I started driving back to Chicago, that night. I would stay in a motel, when I was too tired and I hoped to get to Mindy by Friday evening.

I had booked us both in, for a few nights, at a decent hotel in Chicago. Mindy could not stay in that shithole, where she was now. We would need to look for an apartment to buy or rent. I intended to stay with Mindy and support her, as she healed, both mentally and physically.

I did not care how long it took; I would stay with her.

Chicago

I was really starting to miss Dave.

My mind was still reeling from the things he had said to me. I really did not know what had caused me to go so mentally bad. The solitude was getting to me again, but I knew that Dave would be back with me very soon. I trusted him. Until then I had my Hit Girl costume to help keep me sane. Every time I touched it, I remembered what Dave had said: '*. . . Mistakes this girl would never have fucking made!*' and that helped me, inside.

I noticed that I needed to get some more hair dye as blonde roots were starting to appear; I was happy to stay as a brunette for the moment. What would I do, if I could not go back to New York? I would be alone again; maybe Dave would visit. Then a thought hit me: I suppose I could be Hit Girl in Chicago; I would need to learn the City, though – but I was well on the way with that.

I knew New York really well, as I had grown up there.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 10*: Together**

Author's Note: *Please be aware that this chapter includes some smut!*

Day 66

Chicago

Saturday

I opened my eyes and I saw Dave smiling down at me with those luscious blue eyes of his.

It took a moment to properly register in my sleep-fogged mind.

"You're back!" I squealed which surprised both Dave and myself.

I sat up and hugged Dave. I was still very sore on my right side, although it was no longer bleeding.

"Hi, gorgeous," Dave said back, giving me a kiss; a deep kiss.

Wow – my second kiss! I felt emotions that I had never felt before as they coursed through my body. I started to feel a bit like that day I called Dave; I was trembling. All that shit the other night was worth it just for this. My love for Dave was reaching out as I pulled Dave down onto the bed and I ignored the shooting pain in my side. Dave looked a little stunned that I was reciprocating.

I just assumed that that was how it was done but he did not seem to be complaining. . .

Mindy had squealed; *never* heard that before!

However, her smile was intoxicating – she must have been glad to see me. Damn! I had only intended to give her a kiss, to say that I was back; I had not expected Mindy to respond in kind. To be honest, I had actually expected a bitch-slap for kissing her. Now, she was pulling me down onto the bed, beside her. . . I had just arrived from New York and it was almost one in the morning which was not exactly the time for that sort of thing, but hey, she seemed happy to see me which had to be good . . . right?

"Hi, gorgeous," I said, gazing down into her green eyes. God, I loved those eyes.

We kept kissing each other, until we both fell asleep.

..._...

I woke up around eleven, later that morning.

I must have really been tired. Mindy was still asleep, beside me – so I prodded her awake.

"What?" Mindy grumbled, as she came awake.

"Time to get out of this dump, gorgeous," I said and I smiled into her green eyes as they fluttered open.

"What?" Mindy, repeated.

"I have booked us into a hotel. Then you can heal somewhere clean and a little more hygienic," I replied as I looked around the room with disgust.

"A hotel?" Mindy asked.

"Yes, a hotel. Then we can start looking for a proper place to live," I suggested.

"We?" Mindy responded.

"Am I going to get more than one or two words out of you?" I laughed. "Yes 'we'. You and me. Dave and Mindy. Kick-

Ass and Hit Girl."

"Let's go!" Mindy said excitedly as she jumped out of bed and grabbed her clothes in a show of unbridled excitement!

..._...

We cleared out Mindy's dingy room, which did not take very long, and I threw her bag into the back of the car.

"Please, tell me that isn't the 'Mist Mobile'," Mindy groaned, when she saw the car.

"It *is* the 'Mist Mobile' but now it's yours. I needed transport and this thing was available, so I bought it. We need to get it resprayed *and* renamed, though," I explained.

"Okay. Been a while since I was last in it, but then I suppose I *was* the last person in it," Mindy said, offhandedly.

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We checked in at the hotel and went up to our room which was enormous and *much* cleaner than the previous place = which wasn't exactly hard.

"Is my suitcase a bit lighter now?" Mindy asked, as she looked around the plushly decorated and furnished room.

"Only a little," I said, apprehensively.

"It's okay, Dave. I'm just fuckin' with ya!" Mindy giggled.

Mindy giggled – that was new, too.

"Let's get that bandage changed. Go get a shower – you really need one – and I'll put a fresh bandage on," I suggested as I threw a towel at Mindy who scowled.

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Twenty minutes later, I heard the bathroom door open, behind me.

"I'm ready, Dave," I heard Mindy say, in a rather seductive voice, which was a surprise in itself.

"Okay," I replied as I got up from the couch, turned around, and then received the shock of my life.

Holy fuck!

Before me was the most beautiful sight which I had ever seen. Mindy stood in the bathroom doorway and she leaned casually against the doorframe. She was smirking. She also looked more than a little bit shy. Above all, she was *completely* naked!

"Mindy, what the hell has gotten into you?" I exclaimed. "I'm not complaining, but wow!"

My brain was not the only thing that was saying 'wow', right at that moment.

"Like what you see, Kick-Ass!" Mindy growled, somewhat seductively and she stared, wide-eyed, at the growing bulge in my trousers.

After a few quick steps, I swept her up and dumped her on the bed. I rapidly applied a fresh dressing to her wound, which had begun to heal reasonably well and did not need a bandage anymore. After that, I could think of only one other thing to do. So, as I stared into those stunning green eyes, I pulled off my shirt and trousers, before I lay down next to Mindy and pulled her towards me for a kiss.

I had *absolutely* no idea what made me pose naked for Dave.

I'd never, *ever*, done anything like it, before. However, what a fucking turn on. Not just for me, but apparently, I turned Dave on, too. He kissed me and I squirmed, the feelings that coursed through me were like electric shocks. They seemed to originate from between my legs before they moved up my body to my breasts. From there they headed for my brain. The sensation was totally new to me – I had not felt so alive as I did at that moment.

Dave's kissing; his tongue . . . wow! Then his hands started to explore. I was starting to feel a little nervous. How far was I going to let Dave go? How far did Dave *want* to go? Oh, well, I supposed that I was committed. . . I squealed! Dave had just touched a nipple. I squealed, again, as Dave touched the other nipple. Damn, they were *very* sensitive! I hoped that I could satisfy Dave; I knew my tits were not very big, especially when compared to his previous conquests. Mind you, he seemed to be enjoying himself at the. . . Fuck! Oh, Fuck! Those damn electric shocks; they were out of fucking control!

I could feel one of Dave's hands, as it moved down across my stomach and the nervousness was back as his fingers continued south. I felt his fingers as they moved through my pubic hair and searched, before they found. . . Wow! Oh, Wow! I felt very damp, between my legs: was that normal? Dave didn't appear to mind! I could not help but wonder if a certain *something else* could give me more enjoyment than Dave's fingers, but that needed more thought – before I went *that* far. I could feel my muscles start to contract and I felt myself starting to shake; I was losing control of my limbs. Damn . . . the electric shocks were completely immobilising me.

Dave suddenly lay back, away from me, as I pulled my legs up to my chest to ride out the shocks that coursed through my body. I could not breathe, for what seemed like hours . . . then I screamed; I could not stop myself as I took in huge lungfuls of air.

"Fuuuuck!" I exclaimed, once I could finally breathe again.

My first fucking orgasm!

"You enjoyed, that, didn't you?" Dave asked as he grinned at me.

"What the fuck did you do to me?" I asked as I produced an embarrassed giggle. "That was . . . unbelievable!"

"Glad you liked it," Dave commented. "First orgasm?"

"Fuck, yeah!" I replied, with another embarrassed giggle.

Dave pulled me to him and he started to kiss me. I could feel a part of him prodding my stomach so I reached down and I pushed my hand into his shorts. . . Wow! It was both soft but very hard and it felt almost hot to the touch. I could hear the catches in Dave's breath, each time I caressed him. I felt pleased . . . I was pleased that I could pleasure him just as much as he had pleased me. I kept rubbing and touching – it fascinated me; it was my first cock! I pulled everything out and I gently ran my hands around, causing Dave to start moaning.

A thought suddenly came to me. I had done a lot of things, *way* out of character over the past few days; so why not something else, I thought! Without further conscious thought, I dived down the bed and grabbed Dave in my mouth, sucking and licking him.

Dave just muttered, "Oh fuck!"

I continued with my ministrations and then suddenly, I heard Dave shout out.

"Oh, shit, I. . ."

Then, seconds later, I felt a hot substance hit the back of my throat and I leapt back, but not before I received another dose, directly in my face and then onto my chest. I swallowed some and spat the rest. I felt something dribbling, very slowly, down my face. It felt . . . I had no idea . . . it felt . . . icky. My hand, which had not let go of Dave, was covered in a sticky, gooey, mess.

Dave just lay there, breathing heavily, unable to say anything. I started to giggle which turned into laughter as all the time I stared at the stuff on my hand. I always thought that such degrading behaviour was something completely gross. Now, though, it felt . . . I did not know . . . erotic? Was that the word? Whatever, I really fucking enjoyed it. The taste was a bit weird, though . . . but I would do it again in a heartbeat! I grabbed some tissues from beside the bed and I had a go at cleaning myself off. Dave looked up and the fucker laughed.

"You look a little sticky, Mindy!" Dave commented, with a smirk as he watched me wiping the area in between my breasts which passed as cleavage.

"You could have fucking hinted about . . . this stuff," I growled, indicating the sticky stuff, currently dribbling down my body.

"Sorry!" Dave laughed with very little sincerity. "You caused it!"

"I suppose, I did!" I agreed.

"Thanks, Mindy. I really do love you," Dave said, giving me a kiss, *after* I had wiped my face.

"I love you, Dave," I replied. "But right now, I need another fucking shower!"

Updated: September 2017

Chapter 11: First Night Out

Day 72

Chicago

Friday

We finally had an apartment.

It was small, but it had two bedrooms and it was located on the third floor of the apartment complex. There was also a secure parking space for the 'car' – we both refused to call it the *other* name. I was now really happy, not to mention that I had Dave! The events of almost two weeks ago were now a distant memory, thank God. I was to be sixteen in two days; shame Dave did not even know but I decided that I would tell him on the day.

I thought Dave was a little concerned with the 'new' me. I had shocked the hell out of him the other day, by posing naked and then making out with him. To tell you the truth I had shocked the hell out of myself, for having done that. Only a few days before, I had held a pistol to his temple; I still couldn't believe that Dave had stayed with me, despite everything that I had done and the way that I had treated him. Nevertheless, I supposed that was the kind of guy Dave was; gentle and caring.

Unless, of course, he was in a wetsuit and wore a jetpack equipped with Gatling guns!

I was very pleased with the new apartment.

It should suit us well, until we get a more permanent place, of course, and Mindy liked it. Talking of Mindy, or rather the *new* Mindy, she had dyed her hair brunette again; to cover up the blonde roots but she had left a single blonde streak on her left side. I considered that it would remind me that *this* Mindy was *different* to all the ones which had come before. I was not saying that I did not *like* the new Mindy, but I thought that she would take some getting used to – to put it mildly! She seemed to enjoy spending time with me, naked. No sex yet, but lots of other very enjoyable activities. She was definitely *not* the shy girl, who had kissed me, a couple of months back after sneaking into my bedroom one dark night.

I had just come up from the 'car', with a surprise for her. I placed it on the kitchen table and called to her, in the bedroom. Mindy appeared, wearing only panties and a bra; nothing surprised me about that girl – not anymore!

"Present for you, on the table," I said and I stepped back a safe distance.

Mindy approached the table, then her eyes bugged out and she squealed and she squealed.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" Mindy squealed, as she picked up her bō-staff and she deftly broke it in two, before she weaved the blades in circles, around her.

"You happy, now?" I asked as laughed hard at the smile on her face.

Mindy was as giddy as a kid on Christmas morning!

I was complete!

I had my swords . . . I loved Dave! He knew not, just what I needed, but what I wanted, and liked. I really could not have picked a better guy, all those years ago. I knew then that he had potential and I was right!

After twenty minutes of holding my swords, I thought it best to put them away, so I reconnected them and placed the bō-staff in a cupboard, behind some jackets. Dave was already smirking at the time I had spent with the swords.

"Well done!" Dave teased. "Didn't think you'd ever put them down!"

"You know me too well, Dave. Anyway, what makes you think I love them so much?" Mindy asked, with a playful look in her eyes.

"Oh, come on, Mindy. The first time I saw the miniature version of you, you were bouncing around Rasul's apartment like a demented Angry Bird, slicing and dicing with those damn swords. I could tell you enjoyed every fucking second of it and you had that ridiculously insane grin on your face, the whole damn time. I know, because I couldn't do anything else, at the time, but watch you!"

"I did not . . . okay . . . I admit it, yes, I suppose . . . I was enjoying myself," Mindy replied but then she paused before continuing.

"I was also showing off to you," she admitted in a reluctant tone as she looked down at the floor.

"I saw you as a potential friend. I had never had one before and you were the first superhero we had found, other than ourselves. That kiss, I blew you, it wasn't a joke," Mindy added and she blushed, furiously.

The memory of Mindy, blowing me that kiss from my bedroom window, reminded me of something.

"When mini Hit Girl and Big Daddy visited my bedroom that night, Big Daddy called me 'Ass-Kick'. Did your Dad call me that a lot?"

"All the time!" Mindy admitted, looking a little ashamed. "I think Daddy was worried that I might get involved with you. He kept trying to stop me showing off to you but he did like you though and he thought you had potential, too."

"Well he was right; you did get involved with me," I teased.

"I wonder what Daddy would think of *us*, right now?" Mindy said, with a faraway look in her gorgeous, green eyes.

That night, we kitted up and went exploring.

We drove the 'car' towards Englewood and parked up around nine in the evening. It was only a couple of days from being a new moon, so the night was reasonably dark. Dave had his full armour on and seemed a bit nervous, but then so was I. It was the first time out, together, for months.

We found ourselves in a freight yard, full of containers, with limited lighting and many dark shadows. We were also beside the main train line and passing trains created a large amount of noise. As expected, we found our first score of the night. Between a pair of large containers, we found two men. They were so busy beating another man, they never saw or heard our approach.

Their loss. . .

"Hey, Cunts!" Hit Girl growled, loudly. "Got a minute to die!"

The two men spun around and dropped the other man to the ground.

"What the fuck are you?" one yelled, as he pulled out a large knife.

"Whatya want kid?" The other man called as he pulled out an equally large knife.

"So, you wanna play!" Hit Girl growled, menacingly.

I could see the two men start to reconsider their bravery. I stood behind Hit Girl and drew my batons as Hit Girl broke her bō-staff in two and she twirled the vicious looking blades. Understandably, the two men started to move backwards, just as Hit Girl swept forward, re-joined her swords and severed the hand of one of the men, letting the hand and knife fall to the ground together. Then she gracefully span and drove a blade into the same man's chest before flipping backwards and driving the opposite blade into the other man's back at chest height. Both men sank to the ground, dead. It was all over in mere seconds.

I could see Hit Girl was smiling, she could not have been happier! She reminded me a bit of Rasul's apartment. I stowed my batons and ran towards the fallen man: he was dead! That pissed me off; I kicked the dead body of one of the men, hard.

"Hey! At least these two won't be hurting anybody else," Hit Girl commented. "Let's go!"

"Okay!" I said, but I still felt unhappy about the situation.

..._...

After we left the immediate area, we kept to the shadows and it was not long before we heard a scream. We ran towards the noise where we heard scuffling behind some thick bushes.

A man was raping a woman.

"The bastard's mine," I insisted as I drew my batons and advanced while Hit Girl stood back, looking a bit uncertain.

I came up from behind the man and grabbed his hair then hauled him off the woman.

"What the fuck!" The man yelled and he tried to reach me with his hands.

Hit Girl ran forward and pulled the woman away before she helped her to cover herself. I threw the man against a tree.

"Rape a defenceless woman, will you?" I snarled as I drove a baton into the man's groin and I felt joy when I saw blood and the man screamed. I swung my other baton, hard against the man's head, killing him. The corpse fell to the ground and I felt no emotion, nothing.

"All done!" I snarled, as I re-joined Hit Girl.

"I've called an ambulance for the lady," Hit Girl advised and she looked a bit concerned.

"Thank you, both of you. That man has raped two of my friends – the cops couldn't hold him. He deserved to die, the bastard!" the woman said, trying to control her tears of relief.

We could see and hear the ambulance now and there was a Police car behind the ambulance.

We blended into the shadows and headed back to the 'car'.

When we were safely back at the apartment, I turned to Dave.

"What the fuck was that about?" I asked.

"He deserved to die!" Dave replied.

"You scared me, tonight. I've never seen you like that. Where did that rage come from?" I asked.

"That first man died. I wasn't going to let this guy get away, to rape again. The woman was right; he'd have probably have got off again," Dave replied.

"I'm the psychotic killer, remember," I reminded my partner. "Not you, Dave!"

Dave looked at me, through tired eyes. I hugged him tightly.

"I suppose I've had a lot of pent up rage, built up over the past few months," Dave admitted. "I actually feel better after tonight."

I hoped that Dave was okay. I thought it was *me* with the mental issues. Mind you, Dave had never killed until he had met me. Kick-Ass just helped people, defended people. Dave was pure, unlike me. I'd been killing for ten years now and considering I was almost sixteen that was something *really* disturbing, to most people, at least!

"Come on, Mindy! Let's get to bed," Dave said, with a smile, but his eyes were dark.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 12*: Sixteen**

Author's Note: *Please be aware that this chapter includes some smut!*

Day 74

Chicago

Sunday

I felt myself being shaken, violently and it hurt.

A high-pitched squeal reached my ears . . . it fucking hurt, too.

"You knew!" Mindy squealed loudly, and then she kissed me.

I looked at the clock.

"For *fuck's sake*, Mindy. Just because you are sixteen, *does not* mean you can wake me up at six o'clock in the fucking morning!" I growled.

Mindy jumped off me and ran into the living room. I decided that I was not going to get any more sleep, so I got up and walked to the kitchen for a coffee. On the way, I noticed a destroyed, purple present, on the couch. Mindy had obviously found my present – three, titanium, 6.5-inch, throwing knives.

"Hello, birthday girl!" I called.

Mindy turned and I swore that she could have been a fucking eleven-year-old. She had this enormous grin and she looked so fucking happy. Mindy ran towards me and she jumped up with her legs wrapped around me. She proceeded to kiss me.

Finally, she said, "Thank you for the knives; I love them. I really do. And thank you for knowing about my birthday."

"You know, I want nothing more than to make you happy," I mumbled back.

..._...

Around nine, we went out and had a 'birthday' breakfast. Mindy was still feeling giddy.

We walked around Chicago, getting to know the neighbourhoods and streets. We were learning what and who were associated with the seedier side of Chicago. Mindy called them potential targets – amongst another dubious comments. After lunch, we returned to the apartment where I turned to Mindy and checked my watch.

"Oh, by the way, I have a surprise for you," I said.

"Tell me or I rip your throat out!" Mindy shot back, excitedly.

My cell rang. I tossed it at Mindy and she caught it, looking confused.

"Answer it, dumbass!" I suggested.

"Hello?" Mindy asked, hesitantly. "Marcus!"

The smile on Mindy's face was enormous, so I left Mindy as she chatted to Marcus.

..._...

Almost an hour later, Mindy handed back my phone. There were tears in her eyes, tears of joy.

"Thank you, Dave," Mindy said, giving me a kiss.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

"Yeah. It was great to talk to Marcus; I did kinda run out on him," Mindy said. "He still has that damn swear jar, though."

"You had a swear jar?" I asked, incredulously. "What was it? A fifty-gallon drum?"

"You saying I have a *small* problem with profanity?" Mindy said, trying to keep a straight face, but she still chuckled.

"*Small!*" I exclaimed.

"You bastard," Mindy said and laughed. "Thank you for today."

"Anything, for the girl I love," Dave said.

I was struggling.

"I want you . . . Dave . . . I want you to be . . . to be my first. . ."

I felt myself get hot as I blushed furiously and I could not continue. Luckily, Dave understood what I was getting at.

"That's a *big* decision to make, Mindy. Are you *absolutely* sure? I definitely wouldn't say no; I love you, but that is why I'm asking, because I *do* love you," Dave cautioned.

I blushed again and I felt all warm and tingly inside. That confirmed it for me – Dave was the right guy; he *cared*. He really cared and he really cared about *me!* Dave was the only person alive, who did not care if I was Hit Girl or Mindy Macready; he cared for me whoever I was.

"I want it now, Dave," I said, impatiently, as I looked into his hypnotic, blue eyes.

It was there. I could see the happiness, the love, the desire. The desire for *me!*

I squealed!

"Are you sure? I know you're sixteen – still not legal – but I suppose, how many of the things we have done together were legal?" Dave asked.

"Yes. It feels right," I replied as I smiled up at Dave with a very suggestive expression.

..._...

We started on the couch, where we kissed passionately.

Dave pulled off my shirt then my bra and he gently teased my nipples with his fingers. Oh, God, the electric shocks again – they ran down my body towards my crotch. My breathing started to hitch. It felt so good, damn him! His lips caressed my neck, tickling me as they moved over my skin, towards what passed as my cleavage. The lips moved down and stopped at my breast before pouncing on my right nipple with a vengeance. The electric shocks were almost unbearable. I could feel his hand on my stomach and I shuddered at his touch.

I squealed!

I could not help it; Dave kept pressing buttons and things happened, for fuck's sake. The electric shocks were getting worse, but they felt so good.

"More! More!" I shouted, without realising it.

I bit my lip and felt a bit embarrassed.

"You want more?" Dave responded, enthusiastically.

Dave picked me up and he carried me through to the bedroom. Somewhere along the way, my pants vanished, before Dave dropped me on the bed.

"Do you want Mindy or Hit Girl, tonight?" I asked.

"They are both the same to me," Dave replied nonchalantly.

I loved this man; he saw me for what I was. He saw me as both Mindy *and* Hit Girl; he did not distinguish between the two. Dave kicked off his shoes then pulled off his shirt and trousers before jumping on top of me and he started to kiss me from my forehead, past my chest and stomach, down to my. . .

I yelped; a rather strange noise to make, I thought, under the circumstances. I felt my panties slide down my legs. Dave was kissing me and his tongue was doing something wonderful. The electric shocks got faster and much closer together. I started to thrash about on the bed. My fists were clenched and I could not keep my hips still. I could not fucking breathe. Suddenly, my legs came up to my chest and I hugged them tightly. I felt like I was having a fucking seizure, every part of my pelvic region burned. I screamed and I took in a breath of air. Damn those orgasms!

"Bloody Hell!" I shouted. "Again!"

Was I fucking *serious*! Those orgasms felt like they could kill!

Dave had found my only weakness!

"Again?" Dave asked with a smirk.

"Fuck me, Dave! I want you, in me!" I begged. "Please!"

"You're absolutely sure?" Dave asked, seriously.

"Fucking stick it in me, Ass-Kick!" I growled and I laughed.

Dave reached over and he opened the drawer, beside the bed. He brought out a condom; it was green!

"Sorry, I couldn't find purple," Dave said, apologetically.

"Close enough; looks like Kick-Ass!" I said and I giggled uncontrollably.

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I pulled Dave's shorts off and I helped roll the condom onto him – it was my first condom.

I was feeling apprehensive at that moment. What was this going to feel like? That was quite a big thing to stick inside me: would it fit? Would it hurt? I did not believe that I still had a hymen left, due to all the gymnastics and martial arts over the preceding decade.

Dave lay down on top of me and he gently inserted himself as I spread my legs for him. It felt . . . I was not sure . . . it felt like nothing I had ever experienced and it felt good. I felt no pain as he eased fully inside me. Good, cherry already popped! One less worry. It started to feel good, the more he moved and the faster he moved. My breathing started to hitch again. The electric shocks began again, originating at my crotch and rushing up to my breasts, as Dave massaged them with his fingers. I squealed, out of control, and then I started to squeal non-stop.

God, I must have sounded ridiculous. Nevertheless, damn it, it was worth it. The shocks started coming closer together. Dave was groaning and his eyes were tight shut. My fists were clenched and pounding his back, hard. Dave went faster and harder; the shocks became faster and sharper. I started to get short of breath and I could not focus on anything, but surviving the shear enjoyment of what was happening to my body.

Suddenly Dave froze as I felt him pulsing inside me – then the orgasm hit. It hit full fucking strength and way stronger than any that I had experienced to that point.

"Fuck! Fuck! I can't. . ." I screamed.

Dave collapsed on top of me and he rolled off to one side. I felt a tremor inside me as he pulled out. The electric shocks were still strong. I did not know if I was going to be able to survive the sensations but it felt so good, so fucking good. Dave, what the fuck have you done to me? I could not fucking move; my legs were numb and my crotch was on fire. My heart was pounding, pounding for Dave. I clenched my eyes shut, tight, to ride out the shocks that still coursed through me body which was used to many things but not limb shattering orgasms.

"You bastard!" It was all that I could say . . . once I was capable of speech.

"Huh?" Dave muttered as he breathed heavily.

"You fucking almost killed me! Fuck it was good! I never fucking knew!" I stammered.

Dave leaned over and he kissed me before he pulled the duvet up over us. I turned and smiled at him. I could look straight at him in bed, unlike when he was standing up. I kissed him back. Disjointed sentences started spilling from my mouth.

"Thank you for everything, Dave. I owe you my life. I don't deserve a man like you. You are too good to me. I'm sorry for treating you like shit, for so long," I said with an apologetic tone.

"Are you talking like a bitch? Because, I remember someone a few months back telling me what happens, if you talk like a bitch!" Dave said with an evil smirk.

"I can't believe you'd use that against *me!*" I groaned as I laughed hard.

We just lay in the bed and rested.

I thought Mindy had enjoyed herself.

Mindy turned to me.

"I want you to be my partner, Dave; you are more than capable and those abs are to die for!" she said with a brief giggle.

I blushed a little but nowhere near as much as Mindy blushed. She was really hot when she blushed and I loved it when she went all shy, not to mention when she talked about my body.

"We *have* to make this work," I responded. "Yes, I want to be your partner."

"I want you to be an *equal* partner, Dave – none of this *Robin* crap. I may be NFL, but I think you aren't too far behind. I want a partner to respect me as I respect them. If I fuck up, I want you to tell me I fucked up. If you fuck up, I will tell you the same."

"Nothing new there," I quipped.

Mindy glared at me and she scowled.

"I love you, when you scowl," I needed. "So, if I tell you that you fucked up, you won't hit me?"

"I promise, I will *try* not to hit you," Mindy growled in reply.

"Growling does not work with me. You should know that by now," Dave continued.

"Okay, Ass-Kick," Mindy smirked back at me.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 13*: Upgrades**

The following day

Monday, November 4th, 2013

Chicago, Illinois

It finally felt like I was back with Dave!

No more counting the days of separation. No more being alone. We were together, in the same city, as a couple. Dave and Mindy. Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. Two badass super-heroes, fighting crime as a team.

Dave had made me feel like a woman, yesterday. I was still feeling light headed and I felt like I wasn't touching the bed, Dave had made me melt at his touch.

Mind you, my crotch was sore, to say the least!

That evening

We went out again.

It did not go well, not well at all. We had walked straight into a fucking shit storm.

It was dark, very dark.

As we came around a corner, we came across eight young men. They were obviously part of a gang and just as obviously, they were out to cause trouble. The moment we saw them, they had had also seen us and we all reacted together. Kick-Ass and I flew at them as escape was not an option. In that instance, though, we did not really want to kill any of them.

It was complete chaos.

I did not really know what happened, but I managed to knock out three guys and Kick-Ass got two, before guns were drawn by two of the men, and I was shot twice in the chest while Kick-Ass was shot about six times. The rounds that hit me, they forced me to the ground, where I was quickly pounced upon. The rounds that hit Kick-Ass' armour, just ricocheted off and pushed him back a bit. Kick-Ass waded in to rescue me and at some point, I was hit on the head, which made me see stars.

The remaining men, after having seen bullets bouncing off Kick-Ass' armour, grabbed their unconscious pals and they ran off into the darkness. Twenty minutes later, we were back in the 'car' and we headed back to the relative safety of our apartment.

We changed in the 'car' as we had before, returning to the apartment in normal clothes.

Back at the apartment

"Fuck!" I exclaimed as I pulled off my shirt to inspect the bruises. "That was a complete pile of shit!"

"You're not kidding!" Dave replied as he checked out my chest where vivid bruises were appearing.

It dawned on me that we could have both been killed; Chicago was a dangerous place.

"You thinking the same thing as me?" I asked.

"We need some proper suits," Dave stated and I nodded as he looked at the impact marks on his armour.

"Damn straight," I replied, as Dave checked out my head, to make sure it was only a small bump and that there was no blood.

We went straight to bed, feeling a bit depressed.

The next day
Tuesday, November 5th

I got up, mid-morning, to find Dave on the couch and I looked over his shoulder as sat there and he scribbled away furiously on a pad.

I was curious.

"Whatya doing?" I asked.

Without saying a word, he turned the pad towards me:

1. *Lightweight and flexible enough to allow full range of movements.*
2. *Stab, slash and bullet resistant to as high a level as possible but still satisfying 1.*
3. *Head protection without affecting movement or hearing/vision.*
4. *Ability to be worn under normal clothing (not essential, but useful).*
5. *Ability to store/carry weapons and other accessories.*
6. *Scare the shit outta them looks.*

"New costume ideas?" I asked.

"Yeah. Just a short list of key requirements that have come to mind," Dave replied.

"Expensive!" I commented.

"We could always borrow Marcus' swear jar," Dave teased. "We'd have thousands within a month!"

"I don't need a fucking swear jar!" I retorted but then I paused, and I felt my cheeks warming up. "OK, maybe I fucking do. But we aren't getting one, cunt!"

We needed time to recover from that bad night out, so I gave some serious thought to our new costumes.

Money was not a major issue; Dave had brought a substantial amount with him. The rest of my funds were safely hidden at the Safehouse, back in New York. If we were going to be digging into *that* cash, we would need to be able to top it back up, afterwards. However, that would be easy, as we would be able to use drug dealers like an ATM.

..._...

A few years ago, I had needed to upgrade my suit as I was growing. Not growing in places I would have liked, but growing just the same. After some substantial digging through Daddy's files, I had eventually found a reference to a guy that had made my Daddy's suit. The guy was called 'The Armourer' and, apparently, he could supply almost anything, off the books, for a price.

I had contacted the guy and arranged for my new costume. All he needed were my specifications and sizes. He asked no unnecessary questions while being very discrete and he treated me with respect. The goods had arrived as requested. Expensive, but the quality of his work was very good. Therefore, I contacted the guy again, advised him of what we were after and gave him Dave's requirements.

He said he had something that might do the job and he would get back to us in a few days.

Three days later
Friday, November 8th

The Armourer called back.

He asked to meet.

I thought this was a bit irregular, but he explained that the suits we were after needed accurate measurements. I agreed to the meet, but with *my* choice of location which I would be able to scout out ahead of time. I thought quickly and gave him a time, a location - and a challenge, so we could identify him.

Dave, naturally, was a bit concerned about meeting up with a total stranger. However, The Armourer had a reputation

to uphold and he would very quickly go out of business, should it got out that he could not be trusted.

***Three more days later
Monday, November 11th***

On the day of the meet, Dave and I scouted out the location.

In this case, it was an abandoned warehouse, just outside of Chicago. Dave and I had scouted it and seen no activity and no immediate problems, apart from a little damp and a lot of dust and dirt.

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We were in our full costumes with weapons, just in case, and we waited in the darkness until the designated time.

A few minutes early, we heard a van pull up outside the warehouse.

It was a plain black, panel van without markings and it did not show any lights, either. Only one man was visible in the cab and the driver's window was open. I silently crept up and as the driver turned to look to his right, towards the building, I shoved my silenced pistol into his left ear.

"Ow! For fuck's sake!" he exclaimed as he turned slowly. "Oh, it's you."

He gave me the challenge that we had agreed on the phone. I opened the van door and checked him for weapons. He had none. I told him to open the van's back doors and he did so while I stood back. The van was empty except for a few items on the floor of the van's load area.

"Okay, what have you got?" Kick-Ass and I asked.

"I thought this might involve both of you," The Armourer said with a disgusting smirk and I took an immediate dislike to the man.

He removed some pictures and samples of material from the van to show us. The pictures showed two matte-black suits. One was obviously for a male and the other for a female. The suits were quite different.

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The male suit was, we were informed, made up of a stab and slash-proof composite material, with additional ballistic protection up to Type II which provided protection against anything up to and including nine-millimetre and .357 Magnum rounds. The back and chest plates would provide additional ballistic protection up to Type IIIA which provided protection against rounds up to a .44 Magnum. The suit provided reinforced carbon-fibre, padded joints for elbows, knees, ankles, and shoulders, as well as groin protection. There were also carbon-fibre composite grieves for the lower legs.

Carbon-fibre, composite material was also used for the sides of the body, above the hips and across the chest at the level of the chest bone; it was used in the area of the collar bones, too, as additional protection. A flexible padded neck shield protected the nape of the neck without restricting movement. The suit included armoured and padded gauntlets that could grab a double-edged blade, without damage or injury. The gauntlets incorporated carbon-fibre composite armour along the outside of the lower arm and full circle below the elbow. A slash-proof, full-face mask, with padding around the top, back and side of the head finished off the suit, along with custom lightweight, armoured boots. The suit was fire retardant and was designed to let the wearer's body breath.

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The female suit was made out of the same composite material, except that it did not have the large chest and back plates. The suit conformed much more to the wearer and it was ultra-flexible. The shoulder, elbow, and knee joints were reinforced and padded. The chest and back plates were made up of multiple sections that flexed together like reptile scales which allowed the suit to move with the wearer without any movement restrictions. The composite protection continued up the neck. A partial facemask went from the crown of the nose, then over and around the head to the nape of the neck. The mask was padded and slash-proof.

The overall protection was less than that which the male suit provided, but still more than my current costume. The ballistic protection was up to Type II. The suit was finished off with conformal gauntlets and boots. The gauntlets could grab blades without damage or injury and had carbon-fibre composite plates to protect the lower arm. Carbon-

fibre composite grieves encased the lower legs and carbon-fibre composite panels protected the outer thighs and the upper arms.

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The male suit had obvious locations for weapons and equipment carriers which were inter-changeable. The female suit was much more subtle with the weapon locations; it used small slots between the scales and on the carbon-fibre plates for holsters and equipment carriers.

"I can customise both suits to include the relevant purple or green/yellow highlights," The Armourer explained. "I can also incorporate a weapons carrier, high in the middle of the back for your batons," he added as he looked at Kick-Ass.

The Armourer then proceeded to take measurements of Kick-Ass and myself. Some measurements were, to say the least, very personal and made me squirm.

"When and how much?" I finally asked having had enough of the man.

It would take about two weeks. The cost was high, but I thought it would be worth it. Our current costumes were of absolutely no use, as the other night had demonstrated rather painfully. There was also a good chance that we could raise hell in Chicago, *before* people worked out it was Kick-Ass and Hit Girl.

The new suits would allow us to hit harder, much harder, without fear of injury.

Author's Note: *I have given Kick-Ass and Hit Girl combat suits in my other story: 'Solitude'. I am using a similar design here. I have tried to describe suits that I believe are realistically possible with current technology. I may have taken some artistic liberties, but hey this is fiction and we are dealing with a universe that has an eleven-year-old assassin! While the ballistic protection described is real, there is more to ballistic protection than just being able to stop certain calibres, but I did not want to go into major, boring, technical detail. I hope you like my ideas for the new suits and I apologise to any writers, if my ideas are similar to their own. I am aware of only one other writer, at this point, who designed new suits for Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. That writer is 'forcedInduction' with his brilliant story 'Fall Damage'. I give full credit to this writer for any similarities between the suits.*

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 14*: Ready for Combat**

Monday, November 25th, 2013
Two weeks later, evening

We received the call and we met up with The Armourer at the same place and using the same procedure as before.

The Armourer threw open the back doors of his van where two packs were visible. He reached in and pulled out the first one, before opening the green-tinted pack.

"Okay, Kick-Ass; try this on for size," he suggested.

Dave pulled out his new combat suit, his face full of geeky, unconcealed eagerness. The base was matte black while the carbon-fibre sections were mainly green-tinted with yellow highlights. The combat suit was in two basic sections: the under-suit, which consisted of the composite material parts and the over-suit, which was made up of the major carbon-fibre elements. Finally, the mask, boots, and gauntlets were added. Keeping his Kick-Ass mask in place, Dave stripped and put the new under-suit on.

It fit like a glove; a padded glove. The elbow, shoulder, knee, thigh, and groin carbon-fibre composite elements were all part of the under-suit. The carbon-fibre grieves slid into place and locked to the knee sections. The boots then locked onto the grieves. The outer-suit, of carbon-fibre composite armour, was put on over the head and locked together between the collarbones and below the sternum. Dave then went behind the van to change masks.

The mask, like the under-suit, fit like a glove and the padding was both light and comfortable. The mask had a green-tinted, carbon-fibre composite surround that would protect the forehead and temples and had a wide strip that ran around behind the head. There were cut-outs to allow him to hear without any problems. The carbon-fibre, this time yellow-tinted, also ran down behind the eyes like side burns and protected the cheekbones.

An adjustable baton carrier was attached to the upper back of the suit. Dave clipped a holster to his left hip so he could grab the pistol with his right hand. He also clipped four other equipment carriers to his lower back before he came out from behind the van.

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "You really Kick-Ass!"

"Good to know," Kick-Ass replied with a smile. "Your turn."

"Okay, Hit Girl," The Armourer said, as he pulled out and opened the second, purple-tinted, pack. "Try this."

With barely concealed eagerness of my own, I pulled out *my* new combat suit. It was matte black, but the carbon-fibre sections were purple-tinted. As with Kick-Ass' combat suit, the colour was quite vivid. The combat suit was, like Kick-Ass', in two sections. However, this time, top and bottom sections. Keeping my mask and wig in place, I stripped and pulled on the bottom section which came up to a point just below my chest. The bottoms were tight, but very comfortable. I pulled on the top section, which overlapped the bottoms. The whole suit felt weird; it seemed to 'flow' as I bent and twisted – I thought it was cool. I pulled on the boots and they felt like a second skin. The gauntlets, again, were like a second skin for my wrists and hands. I went behind the van, just as Dave had done, and swapped my mask and wig.

It felt great, my hair fitted underneath without a problem, as the mask flexed easily and the padding was very comfortable. On closer inspection, the combat suit scales were actually made up of carbon-fibre with a flexible composite material. I clipped two holsters to my waist in front of my hips and a pair of knife carriers to my left and right thighs. Four slim equipment carriers fitted around the back of my waist. My existing cape would attach around the neck, a final embellishment to finish the suit off.

I stepped out from behind the van and Kick-Ass exclaimed, "Wow! That's hot, Hit Girl!"

The Armourer smiled in his creepy way; I really did not like the guy. The suits allowed silent movements and we could both move without any restrictions.

"You do good work," I offered, somewhat reluctantly, and I paid the man, so he could leave.

"Okay, Kick-Ass, happy?" I asked.

"Fuckin' A!" he responded.

We stuffed our old costumes into the empty packs and left.

The apartment

After taking a devious route back to the apartment, we dumped the packs and checked out each other's new combat suit.

"You look so mean, Dave. Wow! Can I get my .44 Magnum out, again?" I asked.

"You can fuck right off, Mindy. I don't know *why* I allowed you to shoot me in the chest, let alone in the fucking back; bitch!" Dave grumbled.

"Okay, hit me!" I ordered and I expected Dave to hesitate, just as he had before.

This time, though, Dave did *not* hesitate. I *had not* expected *that*. He spun around, hard, and his right griever hit me, on my left thigh. The two pieces of carbon-fibre armour came together hard and I was pushed back, but it did not hurt anywhere near as much as I thought it should. I spun around and Dave blocked my leg with his protected lower arm. The weird scales and the underlying material absorbed the blow without effort. We checked the carbon-fibre and scales, closely. There were no marks, no scratches, nothing! We looked at each other.

"These combat suits are fucking cool!" we both exclaimed together, and started laughing.

Mindy started to run around like a kid on Christmas morning.

She grabbed two of her purple gripped pistols and shoved them into her empty holsters before she proceeded to practicing drawing, dry firing, and returning them back to the holsters. Mindy then inserted loaded magazines into the equipment carriers, behind her back, along with the other equipment that she usually carried on her utility belt. Six throwing knives were inserted into the relevant carriers, three per side. Mindy could really move in the new combat suit and she looked very hot, doing it. The suit highlighted the curves on her petite frame.

I had decided, reluctantly, that I needed to be armed if we were going to go after the serious criminals. I hated guns, but I would be stupid not to at least carry one. I examined the weapons that I had brought with me which were now hidden in a cupboard. I selected an automatic pistol at random and tested the weight and feel. I liked it.

"Glock 17 Gen4. Nice choice. Nine-millimetre Parabellum. Seventeen-round magazine capacity. The rail beneath the barrel can accept tactical lights and tactical laser illuminators. I have both, at the Safehouse, back in New York. I also have a suppressor for it, too," Mindy elaborated as she came across the room.

"Little Miss Weapons Specialist," I quipped. "I like the weight and feel."

Mindy grabbed three seventeen-round Glock magazines and she showed me how to clear the weapon and make it safe. She then moved onto showing me how to strip the weapon, clean it, and then reassemble it again. Mindy grabbed a box of nine-millimetre Parabellum and she showed me how to load the magazines. She took her time and she ensured that I was happy with each step before she moved onto the next one. One magazine was inserted into the pistol and the other two into carriers behind my back. Mindy also insisted that I carry a suppressor. My weapon's instructor then showed me how to draw and hold the weapon correctly, including the correct stance. She was a great teacher – patient and calm - keeping things at my level without making me feel like a novice idiot.

Mindy carried her usual pair of SIG SAUER P232 .380-calibre pistols. Mindy explained that my pistol had better stopping power than her SIGs did. She went on to explain that she needed the more compact pistol to suit her smaller hands and because it was easier for her to control and in most cases the pistol was only used to put a bullet into a man's head, *after* they were already on the ground.

"We'll need to arrange some target practice for you," Mindy commented. "At least your foot is armoured so you won't hurt yourself!"

"Cocky, bitch!" I muttered as Mindy grinned.

It was getting late, so we reluctantly removed our new combat suits and went to bed; I still felt excited. Mindy, though, was a damn sight more excited.

I tried to help her calm down once in bed, although I might have just wound her up a bit more.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 15*: A Good Night Out**

Wednesday, November 27th, 2013

Dave had come up with a new name for the old Mist Mobile.

He wanted to call it 'Mindy' because he enjoyed riding in her. I did not think that was very funny, but he said he was joking and instead suggested, 'Speedy'. It was a little lame but it would do for the moment.

Over the past few days, we had been looking for a proper place to live. Somewhere we could have privacy and a secure place for weapons, as well as an exercise area. Dave had also been informed that his Dad's house had been sold. That had given us some more operating capital which we could use to buy a place to live: preferably a house with a basement. Marty had been back in touch and he said that he would come to visit when we had a place sorted out.

It would be good to see Marty; if it were not for him, Dave would never have found me and I would have probably been very dead. In the meantime, Dave had also got himself a job: he was working at a gun store of all things. Now, that was amazingly good thinking on Dave's part: I had to admit, grudgingly, that I would never have thought of that.

Yesterday, we picked up *Speedy*. She – yes, *Speedy* was a girl, I checked – had been resprayed a pleasant navy blue which made it almost invisible at night.

We also needed to try out our new suits.

That night

We crept down the darkened street.

About twenty yards ahead of us was the car and inside the car was the dealer. Across the street was the runner. Kick-Ass was on the other side of the street, heading towards the runner. Several streetlights were out, presumably on purpose to cover the dealer's nefarious nocturnal activities.

I crept towards the car where the dealer was in the driver's seat and the window was down. I nodded towards Kick-Ass who attacked the runner. At the same time, I separated my swords and just as the dealer started to react to his runner being clubbed to the ground, I swung my sword against the dealer's throat. He froze. I could see a bag on the floor, over on the other side of the car.

"Where is your boss?" I growled.

"Fuck you, bitch!" the dealer snarled.

I increased the pressure on the sword and the man braced up. I watched as a trickle of blood ran along my blade.

"Where is your boss?" I growled, again.

"Fuck you. . ." The dealer started, before I slit his throat preventing him from completing his last ever sentence.

I went around to the other side of the car, yanked open the door, and checked the bag. It was full of cash and drugs. I took the cash.

Kick-Ass joined me and we moved on.

"It was a bust; he wouldn't talk," I complained.

"Brave bastard," Kick-Ass responded without emotion.

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Two streets over, we came across something bad, really bad.

Two Chicago police officers were being threatened; they both looked very young: rookies most likely. The two officers had been forced out of their car at gunpoint. There were five cunts, all with pistols, and the cunts wore masks. Both

officers had their backs to their car while the five cunts formed a semi-circle around them. We took a moment and I conferred with Kick-Ass, to work out a strategy. The best solution was for me to go in hard and drop as many cunts as possible, in as short a time as possible.

Kick-Ass would then get the Police Officers to safety.

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"What the hell do you want?" Officer Mason shouted and he sounded scared.

None of the cunts replied. Neither officer had his personal weapon; they had been thrown onto the sidewalk. As Officer Mason watched, a large blade projected through the chest of the second cunt from the left, before being withdrawn which allowed the cunt to drop to his knees and then the pavement. In his place, there was . . . what? An apparition? The apparition was black, but it had some very nice curves and parts of the suit were a vivid purple, especially around the mask. The apparition had an evil smirk and seemed to be enjoying itself. The other four cunts spun around to face the purple apparition.

"Okay, you cunts, let's see what you can do now," the purple apparition growled as it grinned insanely.

The cunt to the apparition's right started to move, but he received a blade in his chest for his trouble and he quickly dropped to the pavement with barely a whimper. The two officers felt themselves hauled from beside the car and pushed *behind* the car into cover. They looked up to see a very large black apparition with green and yellow features on his armour.

"I believe these belong to you," the apparition snarled as he held out two pistols, one in each hand.

The officers took the pistols, with looks of intense confusion.

"Stay here, I'll be right back."

..._...

As I came around the car, Hit Girl was fighting the last two cunts; there were three bodies on the pavement, one of which was still moving. Until, I kicked him in the head, before bringing a baton down onto the head of one of the cunts fighting Hit Girl; he crumpled to the pavement. Hit Girl then drove a blade of her bō-staff into the chest of the final cunt.

"What the fuck?"

We turned and saw the two officers who had glanced, astonished, over the bonnet of their car.

"You guys okay?" Hit Girl growled as she walked over.

"Yeah – thanks!" both Officers replied. "Who are you?"

"For now, we're not ready to reveal who we are, but we're on the same team as you guys," Hit Girl growled.

"Stay safe, guys," I snarled as we left the area.

We headed back towards *Speedy* and we both felt very happy about saving the two police officers.

As we came around a corner, we came across three gang members, very similar to the other night. This time, though, as soon as they saw us, they drew pistols and they started shooting. I braced myself and felt several rounds hit my chest and bounce off. The impacts pushed me back, but I did not lose my balance. Kick-Ass also received several rounds, all of which bounced off his armour. The men looked shocked at their weapons' apparent ineptitude. I quickly took advantage of the lull as I drew both my pistols and shot each man in the legs.

"Who the fuck, are you?" one man screamed out in pain.

"Your worst fucking nightmare!" Kick-Ass snarled back.

Another man appeared around another corner; he raised a MAC-10 and pointed it directly at me. Kick-Ass sprang into action as he wrapped his arms around me and turned his back to the MAC-10. He shielded me with his heavier back

armour while I braced him as thirty rounds pounded his armour, starting low, but rising up his back. The rounds sounded like nine-millimetre, not .45-calibre, which substantially lessened the impact. Seconds later, once the shooting had stopped, I raised a pistol and I shot the man in the head.

"You okay?" Kick-Ass asked as he grimaced in pain.

"Yeah. You?" I asked.

"I think I might have a few new bruises, but I'm still in one piece," Kick-Ass replied.

"You're one lucky cunt," I observed. "Not many people survive having a full MAC-10 magazine emptied into them – let's get the hell outta here."

"Damn straight," Kick-Ass said and he smirked at me.

Once back at *Speedy*, we changed and headed back to the apartment.

Tonight, had gone well and I think we had done some good. At least it was better than the last time we had gone out – which was not all that hard.

Tomorrow, was Thanksgiving and we had a lot to be thankful for that day.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 16*: Watchdogs**

Wednesday, December 4th, 2013

One week later

We had found a house!

It was a foreclosure in northern Chicago, so it was not expected that the sale would take long to go through.

The house was a three-storey, four-bedroom house with a large attic and an equally large basement. The house had a main level, just above the ground and a lower level. There was also a two-car garage round the back. I was working on plans to convert the lower level to an overt training area with mats, and the basement into a covert training area, with a secure armoury and a place to store other . . . err, 'less legal' equipment.

Marty, apparently, was a tech geek and said he would help with the security, once we got the house.

Mindy was starting to get giddy.

We were in the first week of December and Mindy, apparently, loved Christmas. Our biggest problem, at the moment, was training as we did not have a proper training area and we could not pound on the floor in the apartment without upsetting the tenant below. We did what exercise we could at the apartment, including some very limited weapons training. When I was not working, we went out running. Mindy would be really happy, when we could train in private and properly in the new house. For the moment, though, the best workout was when we went out at night. We had been out almost every night, not always in our combat suits. Some nights we simply cruised around in *Speedy* and checked out the districts of Chicago. One essential area to be checked out was the area around the house that we were buying.

The area appeared reasonably nice and safe and it was also close to the Chicago River and Channel Runne Park.

I had spoken with Marcus a few times over the past weeks.

Amongst other reasons, it felt comforting to me to hear his voice and I think he enjoyed hearing my voice, too. I knew that he was living alone – just him . . . and that damn swear jar! Dave had also raised another subject. Not a very appealing subject, neither. Dave wanted to start a College course and he had suggested that *maybe* I should complete my High School education which I had quite literally walked out on. I definitely was *not* going back to school, but I agreed to finish my education from home.

At least I would have something to do while Dave was at work and we could both do our 'homework' together.

Tuesday, December 10th

One week later

The weather was *really* shitty.

It had been snowing for three days and the temperature was very low. One good thing, though, was that we found our combat suits provided very good insulation and protection from the elements.

For that night, we were intending to shut down a key drug dealer and his immediate boss. Despite the weather, the drug dealers were still plying their trade as we watched from halfway up an apartment block. The snow was swirling, quite heavily, and we were almost invisible in the darkness. Between us, we had counted six men, four of whom were the expected watchdogs armed with pistols which looked to be SIG Sauer P226 automatics. The watchdogs appeared *very* professional and they were not engaged in unnecessary chatter nor distraction. Approaching them would be difficult, but not impossible.

The weather was to be our ally that night and we used it to cover out approach as we moved to within ten yards of the first watchdog where I stopped to study him. He was large, very large. I had to put him down hard and I was not going to take any risks, so, I drew a pistol and fitted a suppressor to the barrel. With the suppressor in place, I aimed and I

fired. The watchdog dropped instantly and silently, to the snow-covered ground, leaving a bright red patch of snow which was being rapidly covered in the fresh flakes which dropped out of the dark sky. We moved forward, to where the next two men stood; then it all went to shit.

..._...

The next watchdog was better than I had given him credit for

He must have caught some movement, because he drew his pistol and fired twice – all in one smooth movement; no challenge, nothing. Both rounds hit me, dead centre in the chest, and they knocked me down. Kick-Ass smoothly drew his Glock, just as I had taught him, and without any hesitation, he double-tapped the watchdog in the head, before he swiftly changed target and double-tapped the next watchdog in the chest, just as the fourth watchdog fired three rounds directly into Kick-Ass' chest. I recovered quickly and drew my other pistol as I had dropped the first one, and shot the fourth watchdog in the face. When the first shot was fired, the other two men had started to run. Kick-Ass stopped just long enough to check that I was okay, before he gave chase. The boots on our combat suits proved to be very well suited to the snow and they provided superior grip.

I checked the dead men. They did not have anything special on them, but the other two men had left two large bags behind. I opened the first to find . . . surprise, surprise: drugs. I moved onto the second bag and my eyes lit up. The bag was full of the green stuff: lots of neatly bundled \$100 bills; there must have been tens of thousands of dollars, there. A few minutes later, Kick-Ass returned; he was dragging one man behind him.

"Missing one?" I asked, looking beyond Kick-Ass.

"He didn't survive," Kick-Ass replied coldly as he dumped the man on the ground; the man was still breathing, but unconscious. "The Boss-man."

"Oh, good," I replied triumphantly. "I have his bag of cash."

I searched the Boss-man, not finding all that much, but I did find a business card with a name and a Chicago address. We left him on the ground and headed out of the area, going via *Speedy* to deposit the bag of cash.

The streets were very empty; as you could reasonably expect at that time of night and in the current weather conditions.

Just drug dealers and vigilantes. As far as possible, we kept to the shadows, the flurries of snow helped to conceal our presence, too. After a short walk, Kick-Ass nudged me and pointed across and further up the street. I followed his pointing gauntlet and I could see two groups of two men each. They loitered either side of a small convenience store that was just closing up for the night. It was blatantly obvious what was about to happen.

I motioned Kick-Ass to move across the street, behind the closer group and I would deal with the far group. Ten minutes later, the lights in the shop went out and an elderly gentleman came out. He closed the door behind him and proceeded to secure his shop. The man had a small cloth cash bag under his arm.

The two groups moved forward, towards the shop owner.

..._...

"You cocksuckers have just one chance to make a career change," I snarled. "What's it gonna be, cunts?"

The two cunts closest to me spun around; they both had knives. The other two cunts looked over towards me; they too had knives. The shop owner just stood there and he looked scared.

"Who the fuck, are you, sweet chops?" One cunt, who seemed to be the boss, demanded.

"I am your worst fucking nightmare," I growled and I emphasised that fact as I swung my swords in a menacing fashion.

"We're not scared of some jumped up bitch!" the cunt replied and he turned back to the shop owner.

"You had your chance," I responded and I re-joined my swords, then embedded one blade into a snow drift.

A cunt flew backwards with a Hit Girl sized boot print on his chest.

He hit the side of the shop hard which knocked him out. The boss cunt spun around and he received a boot to the side of his face which flipped him backwards into the snow on the sidewalk. While that was happening, my pair each received a baton to the head and they both crumpled to the sidewalk. I smiled at Hit Girl and she smiled back as she grabbed her bō-staff out of the snowdrift.

"You okay, sir," I growled gently.

"Yes . . . thanks to you two," the shop owner replied.

"You going far?" Hit Girl growled.

"Just to the bank at the corner," the shop owner replied, motioning down the block.

"We'll watch your back till you get there," Hit Girl growled back.

"Thank you, young lady, and good night," the shop owner responded with a smile as he walked off down the street.

"I'll call the police for these idiots," I said as I pulled out my cell.

We headed down the street a short distance behind the shop owner and we watched him deposit his takings at the bank's ATM.

The man then caught a cab and, presumably, headed home.

"Tonight, has been fun," I commented to Kick-Ass.

"Yes, it has," Kick-Ass replied.

Updated: September 2017

Chapter 17: Settling Down

Thursday, December 17th, 2013

Just over one week later

We had the house!

Did I say, we had the house? I was over the fucking moon – Dave said I was giddy with excitement, maybe I was, but for fucking good reason! The builders started work directly. They would stop over Christmas, but they hoped to be completed towards the end of the first or second week in January. We had asked for half of the basement to be walled off and kitted out as a panic room with a secure, and hidden, access door. The ceiling and walls of the room, would also be reinforced. We already had discreet internal and external CCTV throughout the property, thanks to the previous owners. The builders would install similar exercise mats to those that we had at Safehouse C, to the main area of the lower level of the house. The 'panic room' and the associated lower level training area would also get the same wall storage as the Safehouse too. We intended to use the 'panic room' as a secure armoury and as somewhere to keep our combat suits and any other illegal, vigilante related items, safe. The front, side, and back external doors to the property would also be upgraded and reinforced.

The lower level would be really cool, when it was finished. Not only would it have sufficient space for a large training mat and other training equipment, there was also a shower, a small kitchen, a steam room as well as a sauna, not to mention the main laundry room. *Speedy* would have a space in the garage and we had plenty of room on the main level. There was a living room and dining room, as well as a family room, and an office. The kitchen had a large counter for eating. Dave and I had never lived in such a house like this one before; it was huge and very luxurious. Luckily, the previous owners had left plenty of furniture, which was a big help.

Once the builders had finished, Dave would move all his gear from New York, along with *selected items* from Safehouse C.

I walked around the new house with Mindy, that morning.

I had to admit, the house would do us really well. We now had a *permanent* base in Chicago. We had bought the house for a lot less than it was worth and that small fact had allowed the budget to go a *lot* further. I particularly loved the enormous master bedroom; it had an enormous hot tub. Mindy said that she wanted to start doing some real cooking, once we moved in, and this worried me a bit as I knew that Mindy could not cook . . . at all. Up until then, we had been eating takeaways and whatever fitted into the microwave. I had cooked a few things, but not very much. We would just see what happened, I supposed. Mindy's insistence on cooking had mostly stemmed from a few weeks previously, when I *did* cook and we had pizza. Only it was not *quite* what Mindy had expected.

"What the *fuck* is that?" Mindy had exclaimed as she looked down at her plate. "You said we were having pizza."

"It's a *Chicago* pizza, Mindy," I replied with a smirk, expecting trouble.

Mindy was *not* a big one for change.

"It is *not* a fucking pizza; it's deeper than most swimming pools . . . and it looks like a fucking casserole!" Mindy ranted. "I'm from fucking New York – I want a proper fucking pizza, cunt!"

"You finished!" I asked and just laughed.

Mindy had *not* finished – not by a long shot; she was just getting warmed up.

"The fucking sauce is *on top*, for God's sake!" Mindy continued. "My God, I've gone to the dark side! You should be ashamed of yourself, too, Dave; you're a fuckin' New Yorker for fuck's sake!"

"You sound like Jon Stewart," I quipped.

t was safer just to let her rant, so I just ate my pizza and listened to Mindy.

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I was looking forward to Christmas morning as I had a *big* surprise, or two, in store for Mindy . . . both with the help of Marcus. The plan was to spend Christmas Eve in the new house.

The builders would finish on the twenty-third and start again on the twenty-seventh, which gave us some time... Together!

Tuesday, December 24th
Christmas Eve

West Ridge

We moved into the new house on Christmas Eve, as planned.

Mindy was all giddy! Did I say that Mindy was all giddy? It was actually a great feeling. We had left *Speedy* parked in the garage and then come into a lovely warm, cosy house. The builders were well advanced with the basement and they had almost completed the lower level, in fact, the mat was actually ready to be used and we looked forward to testing it out. For the moment, though, we had the place to ourselves. Mindy went around every room, checking into every corner and every cupboard.

That afternoon we changed and we went to try out the mat.

Dave and I faced each other, at each end of the mat.

Neither of us moved, we just looked at one another.

"Well, who's going first?" Dave asked.

"I'll let the pussy, go first," I smirked.

"Off you go then," Dave suggested and he grinned smugly.

The fucking cunt!

He was winding me up, *on purpose*. I would teach him to wind me up and, at the same time, I would remind the green asshole who the fucking boss was! I started to move towards Dave and he started coming towards me. I waited until Dave had covered most of the distance to the centre of the mat, before I flew at him, executing my carefully planned assault. I raised my leg towards his shoulder, then reached out for his arm – I *had* intended to execute a flying arm bar and bring him down *hard* . . . only Dave, apparently, had other ideas.

Suddenly, and completely unexpectedly, my world turned upside down as Dave kept his elbows in and he grabbed my hips, then twisted *me* and put *me* down, very hard! The air was knocked out of my lungs and the next thing I knew, Dave had me pinned to the mat. He had executed an almost perfect defeat of my flying arm bar attack . . . I was shocked, stunned even!

Nobody had ever beaten me when I used that attack – that bitch Mother fucking Russia did not fucking count! I was furious, more with myself for having let myself be put down, than with Dave for beating me. How the *fuck* could he have known *what* I was going to attack him *with*? He was getting good, *too* fucking good! I had spent *months* feeling sorry for myself in a dingy shithole in Chicago while Dave had obviously spent months bettering himself.

Fuck me, I was the fucking loser now. I had just had my ass handed to *me*, just like I always did with Dave. I did not like being on the receiving end – talk about a dented ego! Then it occurred to me . . . I had noticed something in Dave's eye, just before I had attacked. The bastard wound me up and he had known that I would try a flying arm bar attack, just to get my own back on him: the cunt knew me too fucking well!

"Let me the *fuck up*!" I growled at Dave; I tried to be angry, but I just giggled instead.

Dave released me and he stood back so I could get back onto my feet. He still smiled, smugly.

"How the *fuck* did you know *how* to do that?" I asked Dave.

"I've been practicing that manoeuvre for a while; months ago, but I've had nobody to try it out on. Besides, I knew you wouldn't break!" Dave said, meekly.

"Congratulations, Dave – you beat Hit Girl! Not many people manage that. However, being reminded that I am *not* invincible, from time to time, is a good thing, I suppose," I replied.

I smiled and felt very impressed, but tried not to show it, so I just punched Dave, reasonably hard, in the upper arm.

"Do that again and I rip your fucking throat out!" I growled at Dave, but I could not stop smiling.

"Ego healing, bitch?" Dave asked, with an annoyingly knowing smile.

"Yeah, cunt!" I replied, then gave Dave a big kiss.

"I love you, too," Dave said, as he swept my feet out from under me and dumped me on my backside, none too gently!

"Fucking cunt!" I yelled out, but then I leapt up and flew at Dave.

I started small. I let Dave defeat my attacks, then I started to move faster and harder. Dave was actually holding his own, very well, but I was determined *not* to be put down again. I put Dave down several times, but he managed to put me down, too; at least three fucking times! We continued to spar for another twenty minutes, but then I called it a day and rubbed my chest where Dave had kicked me, earlier on. Dave's stamina impressed me, just as much as his strength. Dave was capable of pushing on, despite feeling tired, plus he was able to put considerable strength and weight behind his attacks. That had resulted in the rather vicious kick to my chest which had put me down and winded me for a few minutes. Dave was very apologetic, but I told him to stop being such a pussy and that I had had worse fucking bruises.

I had to admit that Dave had finally made it to the NFL!

Dave suggested that we try out the new sauna and steam room, both of which he had turned on earlier in the day.

I thought that that would be a great idea and I rather shocked Dave, again, too: I stripped off all my clothes and dove into the very steamy, steam room! Dave dumped his own clothes and he followed me into the swirling steamy mists. We cuddled up on the wooden bench; thankfully Dave had thought to put towels down as the wood was very warm.

Dave's hands started to wander which was somewhat enjoyable in my sweaty, naked state. My own hands wandered too and I started to rub things. One thing ultimately led to another and we started to kiss and stimulate one another. Eventually it got *too* fucking warm so we left the steam room and rolled around on towels that we had spread out on the mat. Dave then produced one of his green condoms from his seemingly inexhaustible supply; well, we had to thoroughly test the mat somehow. . .

Twenty minutes later, I felt very satisfied, both inside and out as I struggled to get some sort of feeling back into my overly-stimulated lower regions. My hands shook and I was still breathing heavily from the major orgasm which I had just endured. Dave was also breathing like a fish out of water and he lay flat on his back. I really did love Dave; he really knew which buttons to press, again and again. Unfortunately, the shower in the basement was only big enough for one person which was very annoying; so, we bolted upstairs – still naked – to make use of the much larger shower in our bedroom.

Forty minutes later, we both felt much cleaner and even more satisfied, if that were actually possible. Twice, in one afternoon was definitely a record for me: I did not think that I would be able to walk straight for several days, though. We had *proper* pizza, that evening, not that Chicago crap that *thinks* it is a pizza and we went to bed early.

For some reason we were both *very* tired!

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 18*: Festive Hit Girl**

Wednesday, December 25th, 2013
Christmas Day

West Ridge

It was cold and snowy outside, but toasty warm inside.

I felt happier than I had in a long time; I loved Christmas. I turned from the window and looked over at Dave; he was sleeping soundly.

I could not have that.

For fuck's sake, Mindy!

I opened my eyes to find that I had a slim blonde girl jumping up and down on the bed shouting, "It's Christmas!" like she was Noddy Holder.

"Move it asshole!"

I looked over at the clock. Fuck!

"It may be Christmas Day, Hit Girl, but it is also *fucking* six in the *fucking* morning and Kick-Ass is fucking tired!" I growled.

"Come on, Dave; I've got a present for you," Mindy begged.

She was sixteen and she could kill a grown man, any one of a hundred ways and without a moment's hesitation. But when it came to Christmas, she was just like any normal fucking ten-year-old. I supposed that was why I loved her so much.

God, Mindy.

I threw back the duvet and sat up. Mindy was wearing nothing but an oversize T-shirt and she looked *very* appealing. I grabbed her around the waist and pulled her down onto the bed. She screamed and then she giggled.

"Happy Christmas, Mindy," I said a moment before I kissed her, deeply.

I loved Dave.

He put up with me being a big kid and yes, he moaned, but I knew that he loved me. That kiss was . . . well, it had sent shocks right through me, all the way down to my toes. I was really excited; Dave must have thought that I was a fucking ten-year-old, the way that I was behaving, but I could not help it and I did not give a shit, to be honest. It was only one day a year; what the hell could it hurt?

I placed a large box in front of him; it was wrapped in green paper with a yellow ribbon. Dave laughed when he saw it.

"Come on, Kick-Ass, open it, already!" I growled as I bounced on the bed; I could not keep still. I hoped he would like them – I had not been able to think of anything else to get him.

"Wow, that's heavy," Dave commented as he hefted the box in his hands.

Mindy was bouncing on the bed; talk about a hyperactive child!

I pulled off the ribbon and attacked the paper; Mindy was very good at wrapping things. Under the paper was a plain, but solid, white box. I opened the box carefully; knowing Mindy, it could be anything. Inside the box were two, hard black cases. I pulled the top one out and placed it on the table. Mindy looked like she had ants up her fucking backside.

I opened the case.

"Wow!" I could not say anything else, but my weapons specialist could not keep still, or silent, a moment longer.

"It's a custom Glock 17 Gen4, in nine-millimetre Parabellum. In the case are three seventeen-round magazines, a speed loader, a cleaning kit, and a manual – not that you'll need it," Mindy spat out at high speed, like a machine gun.

The pistol had a subdued green frame, matte black slide, and a subdued yellow backstrap. I checked the other case; it held an identical pistol and accessories. Mindy then passed over another, smaller box; wrapped in the same way. I opened it. It looked like a small torch, but it had a rail which allowed it to fit beneath the barrel of the Glock 17 pistol. Again, my weapons specialist, chipped in.

"It's a Glock GTL-52, combination Tactical Light and Laser Illuminator. It has both a visible laser and an infra-red laser, which can only be seen when you wear NVGs. The IR laser and light are dimmable," Mindy finished as she calmed down . . . slightly.

I was a bit shocked, but very pleased, with the pistols.

"Thanks, Mindy, they're cool," I said, then I got up and gave her a big hug and a long, long kiss.

She started to blush, furiously.

"I have my own custom pistols; now you have yours. I know you only carry one, but it gives you a spare and you never know when you might need to take two pistols out into the field," Mindy explained.

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"Your turn, gorgeous," I said.

"What?!" Mindy exclaimed, excitedly.

"You might want to put some clothes on," I suggested.

Mindy scrambled to pull on some underwear, a pair of purple shorts, and a smaller T-shirt.

"Ready!" Mindy stated, just as excitedly.

"Come on," I laughed and I dragged Mindy downstairs.

"Okay, big present, or little present, first?" I teased.

"Big!" Mindy exclaimed, jumping up and down.

"Okay," I said, then pulled Mindy into the garage. "You missed this last night, didn't you?"

I pushed Mindy towards a large object which was covered in a black tarpaulin. I pulled the tarpaulin off with a flourish, quickly and in one go.

"Oh, my God! It's. . . Oh! Fuck! *How?*" Mindy stammered, incoherently, as she stared at the object in front of her.

"The police were getting rid of it; it was no longer required for the investigation. Marcus pulled some strings and, well, here we are," I explained.

The 'object' in question, was a very purple Ducati Panigale, with the initials 'HG' on the sides. It took Mindy several minutes to get her mind into gear and to finally reach out to touch the motorcycle.

"I *can't* believe it. I never thought I'd *ever* see it again!" Mindy said quietly, as she ran her hands over the purple paintwork with reverent care.

I could not help laughing. I could see tears welling up in Mindy's eyes and they started to spill down her cheeks. Mindy turned around, jumped up, and wrapped her arms around me in a big and rather painful hug. She hugged me for quite a while, until her tears of joy were brought under control.

"Thank you, Dave. You don't know what this means to me," Mindy said, s she looked into my eyes.

"Yes, I *do* know what it means to you, gorgeous," I replied and I felt very happy inside.

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Mindy suddenly dropped down and she stared up at me.

"You said there was *another* present," Mindy said, pointedly.

"I did?" I teased.

"Yes, asshole, you fucking did!" Mindy growled, impatiently.

"Dining room," I said, before I was almost bowled over as Mindy shot out of the garage at high speed.

I followed the Mindy tornado and found her in the dining room where a long box sat on the table, wrapped in purple paper. Mindy looked like she might explode with all her pent-up excitement.

"You get any more excited, you'll blow a gasket, girl," I quipped.

Mindy just glared at me and then she attacked the wrapping on the box, which did *not* take long. Inside the paper was a long, glossy, black box. I think Mindy knew what was in it, as I could see that her hands were shaking. She eased the lid open and she started to squeal. Inside the box, there was a long, thin, purple bag made of silk. Mindy, very carefully, opened the top of the bag and eased out the contents. Her eyes went wide and I could see tears forming again.

Her mouth started opening and closing much like that of a goldfish.

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Mindy pulled the Katana from the bag and she held it out in front of her with two hands.

With cautious movements, she moved the Katana very slowly as she checked out every inch of the weapon before she then removed the sword from the Saya and watched the lights reflect off of the highly polished blade. The unbelievably sharp, mono steel blade was made from high carbon (T10) steel, with a 2.80 Shaku, double Hi and 1.7-centimetre Sori. The blade was finished in a straight Hamon and had been stone polished by hand. The point was formed in a long O-Kissaski. The Habaki and Seppa were of Red Copper. The blade was attached to a twenty-six-centimetre Tsuka which was wrapped in a purple cotton Tsuka-ito combined with black ray-skin. The Katana was finished off with black Fuchi, Kashira, and Tsuba. The Katana was housed in a matte black Saya with purple highlights. The Koikuchi and Kirigata were wood and the Sageo was purple silk.

Mindy gently weaved the sword through the air and she watched the light as it glinted off the highly-polished blade. After a few minutes, I asked Mindy if she and her new sword needed some time together, in private. Mindy blushed and she carefully replaced the sword in its Saya and left it on the desk.

"Who?" she asked tentatively.

"Both of us; Marcus and I," I replied.

We thought it would be the right present for her; two-thousand dollars. Mindy ran and hugged me. When she finally let go, there were tears in her eyes again.

"I don't know what to say, but thanks," Mindy stammered.

"Just seeing you with that sword is enough for me," I replied.

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Mindy immediately got on the phone to Marcus.

I checked my watch; it was not even seven in the morning yet. That meant it was before eight in New York. Not quite as bad as six in the morning. I went to get a coffee while Mindy rattled on about the Ducati and the Katana. She was still very excited. Some forty minutes later, Mindy handed me the phone without a word and skipped, yes, skipped, off to the dining room.

"Merry Christmas, Marcus," I said.

"Got you up at six, did she?" Marcus asked.

"You could have warned me," I complained.

"Where's the fun in that?" Marcus countered.

"She loved the bike and the sword; she was in tears," I said.

"She sounded happy, earlier. Glad that worked out. I hope you are both keeping safe, up there," Marcus said.

"We're fine, Marcus," I replied. "Don't you worry."

"I will always worry about you two," Marcus replied.

"We'll call you in the New Year. Have a good day," I said and cancelled the call.

Author's Note: *I hope I have described Mindy's new Katana sword accurately. Describing the sword features in English did not do them justice, so I used the Japanese terms for what I see as a very powerful weapon which deserves respect. For those who don't know about Katana Swords, I will explain some of the terms described:*

The Shaku is a traditional measurement - 2.80 = 84.80-centimetres.

The Hi is a groove at the top of the blade.

The Sori is the curvature of the blade.

The Hamon is a pattern created by heat-treating the blade.

The Kissaki is the type of tip at the end of the sword. O being the biggest.

The Habaki keeps the sword from falling out of the scabbard (Saya).

The Seppa are installed top and bottom of the hand guard (Tsuba).

The Tsuka is the hilt or handle.

The Tsuka-ito is a material used to wrap the handle or hilt.

The Fuchi is a hilt collar between the Tsuka and the Tsuba.

The Tsuba is a hand guard.

The Kashira is a butt cap or pommel on the end of the Tsuka.

The Saya is the wooden scabbard for the blade.

The Koikuchi is the mouth of the Saya.

The Kirigata is a knob on the side of the Saya for attaching the Sageo.

The Sageo is the cord used to tie the Saya to a belt.

If any of the above is incorrect, please let me know and I will correct the mistakes.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 19*: New Year, New Hit Girl**

Tuesday, December 31st, 2013
New Year's Eve

Christmas was over.

Not a bad thing, really, as Mindy had actually calmed down, quite a bit. It was New Year's Eve. We had considered going out, but had decided to stay in and enjoy ourselves, instead, in every possible way. The builders had been back in between Christmas and New year and they had finished most of their work. They would be back on the second of January and they expected to be finished by the Friday.

I had arranged for both of us to hire a U-Haul truck, at the weekend, and we would go get what was needed from the New York Safehouses.

West Ridge

The day was fun.

Now the lower level was finished, we were able to use *all* the exercise equipment which included the punch bag and two treadmills. Dave managed to sabotage my treadmill which kept accelerating, slowly, but surely. Therefore, I was completely exhausted after we had spent time on the mat, time pounding the bag, and time spent on the treadmills. Dave though, was *not* exhausted and he wanted to play. Honestly, I *did not* have the energy to stop him, so he practically stripped me naked and started doing the most wonderful things to me by exhausted body. I was not complaining or anything, but I was getting even more exhausted, what with the orgasms. Yes *orgasms*, plural; Dave was *very* good to me. It was a shame that I was physically incapable of easily returning the favour, but I needed to at least get some feeling back into my arms before I could do that.

Anyway, by ten minutes to midnight, we were lying in bed, having had a very passionate hour or so. I really was incapable of moving and Dave's supply of green condoms was reduced by one. Dave himself was flagging a bit now too as I had remembered that my mouth could help where my hands could not.

We sat on the end of the bed and casually watched the countdown on the TV.

Once the countdown got to 'one', a naked Mindy dived on top of me and yelled 'Happy New Year' at the top her voice, followed by a very deep and passionate kiss.

When we separated, I responded with a 'Happy New Year' of my own, before I flipped her over and returned the kiss, plus something else wrapped in green which caused Mindy's eyes to bulge out.

Wednesday, January 1st, 2014
New Year's Day

Now, that was a damn good way to start the New Year.

It had just occurred to me that at that time, the previous year, I was still very much a virgin and I had never even kissed a boy. I had not even *wanted* to kiss a boy; not until I saw that stupid 'Union J' thing with those evil bitches. My life had *really* changed over the past twelve months. Okay, I went through a *lot* of shit, including that fight at the warehouse alongside Justice Forever. Then, my escape from New York to Chicago, my weeks of sinking into a feral lifestyle, before yet again, I was saved.

I owed my life to one person and one person only, at that point.

I owed my life to Dave Lizewski.

The one person in my life who got me. The guy who had fucked me, both sides of midnight. The guy who had pressed all my buttons, a few short hours before – last year. The guy who was lying beside me, snoring.

"Ass-Kick!" I yelled as I prodded Dave awake.

Dave awoke and he instantly wrapped his arms around me, in a bear hug, and he held me tight. I could not fucking move. Then I felt a finger, moving slowly up my side; it tickled. I started to giggle, the giggle gave way to laughter, and I could not stop. I tried to swear at him, but I could not produce any coherent sounds. It did not help that Dave was whispering wonderful things into my ear which just made things happen down below and those feelings then clashed with the other feelings that were moving throughout my body from the tickling and the whispering.

When I could not take anymore, I forced my way out of Dave's arms and just lay there panting. Dave stared down at me with an insane grin. He was staring into my eyes and I was sinking into his fathomless blue eyes. I could see his desire and his deep love for me. I could never be separated from Dave, not ever. I really could not believe that I was ever able to live without Dave, both around me, as well as inside me. My God, what was going on with my mind?

I know, I have a not-so-clean vocabulary, but my mind was generally, well. . . out of the gutter. I never used to have thoughts like those, never. Again, I supposed, it had all started that night of the sleepover. I was not complaining, far from it, as I did enjoy those thoughts – I was a dirty bitch, after all.

..._...

Oh, crap!

Dave's hands were wandering again! This *had* to stop; my body *could not* take any more of it. I was so wound up; I thought that my next fucking orgasm could go off like a nuclear bomb and fucking rip me apart. I rolled over onto my front and Dave looked a bit unhappy with that.

"I can't take anymore! Hit Girl is completely wiped the fuck out!" I groaned.

"Is it a happy Hit Girl?" Dave asked, grinning.

"Fuck yeah!" I exclaimed with another giggle as I reached over and pulled him into a deep kiss.

We lay there for another hour and exchanged strange, disjointed sentences that did not really make any sense.

..._...

"I'm hungry!" I said finally and sat up.

"Oh, yes! Ready to go again?" Dave responded and he also sat up.

"For food . . . food!" I exclaimed.

"Okay! I could do with some, too," Dave acknowledged.

I could barely move; my joints were still sore and as for my crotch, well. . . I made it downstairs after getting dressed with Dave's help. It was almost noon, so while Dave put the coffee on, I called Marcus.

..._...

"Happy New Year, Marcus!" I yelled down the phone.

"Happy New Year, to you, Mindy!" Marcus replied with a chuckle. "Did you and Dave have a good evening?"

"Oh, yes! We. . .," I started, then I felt a bit embarrassed as I remembered what we had been doing. "You don't wanna know."

"Oh, a bit of that. I see. No, I *don't* want to know!" Marcus said, sternly.

He sounded a little embarrassed, too.

I watched Mindy on the phone to Marcus.

I saw her blush, badly.

I think Marcus must have asked her what we had done that previous night. Oh, that was so good, last night . . . and this morning. I thought that I got Mindy really, really, wound up. I had a lot fun and I think Mindy did, too. I shoved a cup of coffee in front of her and I started to cook a *very* late breakfast. The rest of the day was spent resting and

recuperating, as we needed to be fit for moving kit out of New York at the weekend.

Plus, we needed to start the year off kicking some real criminal butt.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 20*: Road Trip**

Saturday, January 4th, 2014

Three days later

The builders were finally finished.

We now had a secure armoury in the basement. Officially it was a 'Panic Room', but the security was basically the same. Both rooms were designed to keep whatever was inside, safe and secure. When you came down the stairs from the lower level and if you did not know about the new room, you would never have known it was even there; which was the idea. The door to the new room had been blended into the brick work at the end of the, now smaller, basement. Access was controlled via a discrete keypad which opened the door. I had already moved all of our Kick-Ass and Hit Girl combat suits, weapons, and other equipment into the armoury. The walls had the same layout as in the New York Safehouses and I intended to fill the walls with weapons. So far there was not all that much on display.

I was feeling good about this year. I intended to not repeat a lot of last year's mistakes. This year I had Dave, to guide me. I may be more skilled at being a vigilante, but Dave is much more experienced at life in general.

..._...

We had picked up a medium-sized U-Haul truck, on the Friday evening, before setting off, early on the Saturday morning.

It was cold and it was wet; pretty miserable really. It was going to be an interesting trip which the fog and the snow would *not* exactly help. We had a very long drive ahead of us, eight hundred miles each way. It was nearly nine in the morning when we stopped outside of Toledo, Ohio for gas. Dave had driven and he desperately needed a rest; he was completely exhausted. Dave gassed the truck while I grabbed some food and coffee to help keep us going. I then took over the driving while Dave slept after he had eaten and he had had some coffee. The damn truck was *not* comfortable, but that's what you got when renting on a budget.

We still had five hundred and sixty fucking miles to go, too.

The truck

I awoke with a start as the truck stopped suddenly.

Mindy's driving could be a bit erratic at times. I groaned; my back was sore from the position that I had slept in – cheap, shitty truck!

"Where are we?" I asked as I noticed that we had stopped at a gas station.

"Dubois, Pennsylvania," Mindy stated, simply.

She looked very tired.

"Only another two hundred and eighty miles to go," I commented and I opened the door to go gas the truck.

Mindy vanished, very speedily, to the bathroom. She came back with food and coffee. I took over the driving again and we finally arrived in New York at around ten that evening. We were tired, but we decided to make use of the darkness and we started to load the truck with our, not so legal, cargo. Mindy had smeared the unmarked truck's registration plates with ice and snow to conceal where we had come from. As arranged, Marty had met us at the Safehouse to help us load the truck. All of Dave's stuff, from his Dad's house was there too, and all went in the truck.

Mindy seized all of the weapons she needed and quite a few that she did not. There were many unopened boxes of new weapons and boxes of ammunition stacked in a store room which we also threw into the truck. The Safehouse walls were almost empty by the time we had finished. Some weapons remained, just in case we ever came back to New York and needed them. By the time, the truck was loaded, it was nearly four in the morning. We desperately needed sleep.

The truck was locked in the secure parking area beneath the Safehouse and we went to bed, very tired.

Sunday, January 5th

We awoke the following morning, slightly refreshed.

It was almost noon!

We immediately headed out, hailed a cab, and made for Central Park. We found a late breakfast and started to feel a bit more human. Marcus had arranged to meet us that afternoon, before we headed back to Chicago.

It was mainly for Mindy; she had really wanted to see Marcus.

Marcus' House

"Marcus!" Mindy almost screamed.

"Mindy!" Marcus said happily as they both hugged.

"Good drive, Dave?" Marcus asked.

"Crap," I replied. "Too damn long!"

"Well, I'm glad you made it, safely, and I don't envy you the trip back," Marcus responded.

We chatted for another hour, before it was time to go.

Mindy gave Marcus another big hug and she was crying when we went our separate ways.

The truck

The trip back felt even longer as the truck was quite heavily loaded and therefore slower, if that were actually possible.

We stopped twice on the way back, for gas, and at Toledo, we stopped for sleep, too. I woke up first and stretched to bring my body back to life. I tried to look out the window, but I had to wipe it first as the glass was all misted up. I wiped one hand across the very cold glass and then I froze. Were my eyes deceiving me? Was I still asleep? I saw. . . No. . . *Not fucking possible*. . . He was fucking dead! Eaten by his own fucking shark. What sort of a fucking idiot keeps a shark at his hideout, anyway?

Chris *fucking* D'Amico!

..._...

I punched Dave, a bit too hard obviously, because he jumped up and bumped his head.

"What the fuck, Mindy? Fucking bitch!" Dave almost yelled, before I clamped my hand over his mouth.

"I just saw Chris *fucking* D'Amico! The Motherfucker!" I spat out, excitedly and I pointed through the cleared section of window.

Dave looked out, dubiously.

"*Fuck!* He's supposed to be fucking dead! That fucking shark ate him!" Dave stammered.

"Obviously, not!" I responded, angrily.

We both watched, as Chris D'Amico was helped out of his wheelchair and into the back of a limousine. He seemed to be missing his lower legs and some other parts, but we could not see much detail. The limousine pulled away and we looked at each other.

"The fucking bastard is still alive! He needs to fucking die!" Mindy snarled.

"Hey, Mindy. Calm the fuck down," Dave said, as he pulled me into a hug. "We *both* want his fuckin' legless ass. We *will* get him. He obviously isn't going far like that."

"Sorry. It was a hell of a shock, that's all," I said, smiling up at Dave. Then I recalled earlier, "Hey! Did you call me a fucking bitch, cunt?"

The *cunt* just laughed at me and started the engine to demist the glass. We still had two hundred and forty fucking miles to go and the truck was still *not* comfortable. My fucking ass hurt. God, it was quicker and a lot more fun on the Ducati.

"Did you notice the limo's registration plates?" Dave asked.

"No. Why?" I replied.

"They were from Chicago," Dave said, simply.

The truck

Mindy drove the last hundred miles or so.

I decided to sit back and read a New York paper that I had picked up.

"Fuck, Miranda!" I yelled and almost caused Mindy to swerve off the road!

"What?" Mindy asked, angrily.

My hands were shaking and I could feel tears welling up.

"Miranda Swedlow. You knew her as Night Bitch. She was murdered on New Year's Eve; her body was found in an alley, badly beaten," I said.

"God, I'm sorry Dave. I know you were close," Mindy said.

"I'm sorry, Mindy," Dave said. "I know what you thought of her."

"No, Dave, you *don't* know what I thought of her. I don't give a shit that you were fucking her last summer. I know that you love *me*," I responded. "Miranda helped us out at the warehouse and I respect her for that; she fought really well."

The rest of the trip back was a bit subdued and it was dark when we pulled up outside the garage at home.

We quickly unloaded everything into the garage, beside *Speedy*, before Dave parked the truck and we went to bed.

..._...

I felt sorry for Dave.

I knew that Miranda had been the woman that Dave had been 'plugging', the previous summer. *Night Whore!* I admit, I had felt a little jealousy build inside me when he had said her name, but then I had remembered something else; Dave had told me that it was just sex and that there had been nothing else in it, no love. I had instantly felt better, and also, Miranda had been another Hero; she had fought with us against The Motherfucker and I *did* owe her for that.

Well, we were finally back home. Nearly everything, 'vigilante', was now with us in Chicago, our new home. New York only had a limited use now as a bolt hole. Tomorrow, we would need to get all the weapons into the armoury.

I fell asleep thinking about Dave, Miranda, and my weapons.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 21*: Ninja Attack**

Friday, January 10th, 2014

We suited up soon after seven that evening.

Mindy had checked out my combat suit and equipment and I had then checked hers, before we left the armoury. Once we were ready, we headed out in *Speedy*. We had to be careful that the neighbours did not see anything. On that thought, we had discussed finding a Chicago safehouse where we could suit up and go in and out secretly. That would take time which for now, we did not have. Anyway, we needed to raise some funds if we were going to buy and equip a Safehouse.

We parked up and left *Speedy* to venture into the dark alleyways of Chicago.

It was not long before we found some business.

But not the business that we had expected to find. Down a broad alleyway, we came up behind what could only be described as 'ninjas'. We remained in the shadows and, for the moment, undetected. Arrayed in front of us, but facing away, were six black-clad ninjas – they even had Katana swords in their belts. The ninjas appeared to be staring down four Chicago police officers; all four officers had their pistols out and aimed towards the ninjas.

Suddenly, the six ninjas took a single pace forward and drew their Katana swords. The police officers issued a challenge, ordering them to put the swords down but not one ninja reacted. I could see the police officers exchange worried glances and two conferred. Then a pair of shots rang out and two of the ninjas stumbled backwards before returning to their places in line. The ninjas wore body armour – not a good sign. One ninja drew a knife and threw it at the police officers. The knife flew straight and true before it embedded itself in the shoulder of one officer who fell down and screamed out in pain. The other officers started to retreat, but the ninjas advanced.

I drew my Katana and Kick-Ass drew his batons. I told Kick-Ass to stand back and watch for any backup that the ninjas might have as I ran forward and sliced my blade horizontally through the necks of two ninjas; their heads flew across the alley like bowling balls. Hot red blood erupted from the severed necks as the two bodies sank to the ground. The other ninjas were slow to react to my attack from behind them, but all four ninjas turned around, towards us. This gave the police officers time to drag their wounded colleague to safety.

Four to one. I had faced worse, much worse.

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Two ninjas came at me together. I back-flipped out of their way and drove my blade into the chest of the first ninja as I flew past. I pulled the blade out and the ninja sank to the floor of the alley. The second pair of ninjas charged. I fended off one strike with my Katana blade and took another strike on the armoured gauntlet of my left arm. There was a lot of force behind those strikes. The air was full of a very strong, metallic, smell.

Blood!

The smell and sight of the blood, gave me an adrenalin burst. The smell was intoxicating and I loved it. I had always liked the smell, the sight, and even the feel of warm blood. Although I drew the line at drinking the stuff – I was not a fucking vampire!

I span around, swinging my blade at calf height and my action caused two ninjas to jump up and thus avoid losing their feet. While they were in the air, I kicked out, sending a ninja flying. He recovered quickly, before he re-joined his colleagues. The remaining three ninjas encircled me. Their faces showed no emotion and they appeared to be of Asian ethnicity. One ninja came too close, up behind me, and he received my Katana blade in his stomach which left him rolling on the ground in agony. I faced the remaining pair for a second, before I charged forward, fending off the sword blows with my blade and my armour.

One ninja fell back, lost his balance, and crashed to the alley floor, where I severed both his legs above the knee, sending more blood to join the literal river of blood that flowed down the alley drains. The man screamed and screamed. I whirled around and fought off the last ninja's attacks. He was good and I was tiring. The ninja got inside my sword radius and we came together where neither of us could wield our blades. I stared directly into the man's face. I saw several emotions flicker across his face, before one emotion remained.

Fear!

..._...

I stared into the man's eyes, as I plunged a throwing knife deep into his stomach which cut his internal organs and caused massive haemorrhaging. The man stared back into my eyes as he died. I saw respect amongst the fear. I allowed the man to slide to the floor of the alley, blood, and intestines spilling from his gaping wound.

The two other ninjas that were still alive screamed in agony. I took the same throwing knife and cut their throats. Both men died, quickly; I could show mercy when it was required and those ninjas had fought well. I looked down, as I replaced the knife. I was covered in blood, but I felt good. I had overcome; I had won!

Kick-Ass ran up.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Hell, yeah!" I replied.

I had never felt so alive; the adrenalin that was still pounding through my veins and the smell of the blood was keeping me going. I turned towards the police officers, who were watching in abject horror as I cleaned off my Katana and replaced it in its Saya on my back.

"Are you all okay?" I growled as I approached them. I studied the four men; one had a knife still embedded in his shoulder.

"Christ! I've never seen so much blood!" One blurted out.

"Better their blood, than yours!" I growled, in reply.

"She's right!" the wounded Officer agreed, grimacing with the pain. "Thanks!"

"We need to go," I growled, before I turned and walked away from the scene; but not until I had picked up each of the six Katana swords and their scabbards.

I had to admit, I had not seen so much blood, since Rasul's apartment!

Hit Girl really did enjoy herself when the blood flew. Psychotic . . . that was the only word for it. Nevertheless, I loved her just the same. I managed to find a functioning hosepipe to wash the blood from Hit Girl's suit, on the way back to *Speedy*. The six extra Katana swords went into the cavernous trunk. I persuaded Hit Girl that we should call it a night, as she was exhausted. We drove back home and I helped Mindy get out of her combat suit and then to clean it; I was okay, I had not got any blood on me. Mindy still buzzed, from the adrenalin, and I knew that she loved the sight and smell of blood.

She was quite the mini vampire!

Saturday, January 11th

The following night

We went back out.

It was a Saturday, so we had hoped for some more business and we were not to be disappointed. It seemed that we might have poked a hornet's nest. We had no sooner appeared on the street, than we heard screaming. A man ran around a corner; he had a large wound in his upper arm and blood running down his arm.

"That wound was caused by a sword," I commented.

We ran towards the screams.

As we rounded the corner, we could see ordinary people, running and screaming. Several, had blood on them; one man was sitting on the sidewalk, cradling a severed arm. I had a bad feeling, about the scene. There were eight ninjas and they were terrorising the street; they attacked anybody that came near.

"This stops now, cunts!" I growled loudly as I drew my Katana.

Four of the ninjas broke away and moved towards me. Kick-Ass circled around to prevent any of the other ninjas from interfering, brandished his batons and trying to look menacing. As the ninjas closed, I checked out each one. They were all dressed the same way as those from the previous night. However, that night, I had an ace up my sleeve, or rather on my back.

..._...

I had spent a few hours, that afternoon, practicing with *two* Katana blades.

I had selected the best of those recovered the previous night. Each of the ninjas appeared to have the exact same blades with an easily recognisable colour scheme and type of manufacture. I drew the second Katana from the Saya on my back which also drew a response from the ninjas. They instantly recognised the blade as one of their own. I expected anger, but instead, I saw respect in their faces. Obviously, they now knew that I was the vigilante who had killed six of their colleagues the previous night.

They kept their distance, at least at first. They all knew what I might be capable of and that was with only the *one* blade. I just hoped that I could manage two blades together. 'Only time would tell', I thought, as I closed with the first ninja. He brought his sword up high and then down, fast, towards my head. I was expecting the attack, so I was able to move sideways and block the descending blade before I was cut in half, lengthways. I was then able to drive my second blade into the man's stomach, drawing it from left to right and spilling his intestines into a steaming heap across the sidewalk.

Almost immediately, a second ninja came close and he narrowly missed my shoulder with his blade. I struck back with both blades, parallel to each other, forcing him back, before bringing both blades across, right to left and cutting the ninja cleanly in half. As the man fell in two directions, I heard a sound. Surprisingly, I could hear cheering! I took a chance and looked around me. Members of the public were cheering and shouting. Some even jeered at the ninjas while others shouted support for me and I could just about hear what they were shouting.

"Go, Hit Girl!" and "Gut the bastards!" There were other comments, too, but I could not make them out. Although, I did hear Kick-Ass' name being shouted too.

I briefly wondered how he was doing with the other ninjas.

Kick-Ass

The fuckers were good.

I was fighting the ninjas, hand to hand. So far, I had been able to pull the Katana out of the hands of one ninja, before flipping the blade and stabbing the same ninja in the chest. The other three ninjas kept their distance as they weighed me up. My heavy armour should protect me from the Katana blades; at least I hoped so. One ninja ran forward and I dodged him, cracking him around the face with a baton for his trouble. He fell to the ground, his face covered in blood; I drew the Glock and shot the ninja in the head – I was surprised for that gunshot to receive cheers from the growing crowd. The next ninja ran in while the other ninja went to attack Hit Girl. I had no time for extended combat, so I simply shot the oncoming ninja twice in the head, again to rousing cheers.

I ran after the other ninja with a Katana in hand.

Hit Girl

I heard more cheers, then a much more urgent shout.

"Look out, behind you, Hit Girl!"

It was Kick-Ass voice.

I spun around, and saw another ninja; he was running towards me, Katana in hand. I just had time to slide across the sidewalk, on my knees, before I was caught between all three ninjas. As I went past, I severed the lower legs of one ninja, but the other ninja was out of reach. I sprang back up, blocked the blade of an attacking ninja, before I drove my other blade upwards, through the man's crotch and then pulled the blade out, just before it reached the rib cage. Blood and intestines were spilt out, across the sidewalk. I was galvanised by the metallic smell of the fresh, warm

blood, as I pushed my attack on the last ninja. I could feel myself tiring, despite the adrenaline that pumped through me. Handling two blades, at the same time was exhausting. Not to mention, that it was the second night of ninja shit in a row.

I struck out with the hilt of the Katana, directly into the face of the ninja and the collision broke his nose. Unfortunately, this did not provide the distraction that I had hoped. I managed to kick the ninja in the side of his knee that caused him to go down onto one knee. I span around keeping both blades close together and severed the ninja's head; the inertia of the strike sent it rolling down the street, spewing blood. His body dropped to the pavement, adding another steaming river of blood to that which already flowed to the drains. I felt immense relief; relief that it was all over.

I checked on Kick-Ass; he was uninjured, but he seemed worried about something. I proceeded to collect Katana blades and scabbards, before I re-joined Kick-Ass and we prepared to leave the scene. The whole event had lasted only fifteen minutes.

We could hear sirens, so we left while the crowds cheered us as we vanished down an alley!

Kick-Ass

"You enjoyed that, didn't you?" I said rhetorically and I smiled at Hit Girl as she cradled her stack of Katana blades.

"That makes fourteen blades," Hit Girl replied, happily.

"Keeping score?" I asked.

"Seemed like a good idea," Hit Girl growled.

We placed the haul of Katana blades into *Speedy's* cavernous trunk, before we headed out again.

..._...

Thankfully, we came across some normal cunts – for a change.

They were just the usual, run of the mill, low-life scum. The three men raised automatic pistols as soon as they saw us approach, so Hit Girl drew her Katana and advanced on the men. They opened fire, the rounds had no obvious effect on Hit Girl as her armour absorbed the impacts and she pushed through the force of the impacts. Then, she struck the first man with the hilt of her sword which knocked him out. The next man tried to pistol whip her, but I caught his arm in one hand and punched his lights out with the other. The cunts did not deserve to die; they just needed to be encouraged to change their career aspirations. The third man fell to the ground, tripped up by Hit Girl's Katana. He looked up to find Hit Girl's face a mere two inches from his own and he almost shit himself.

"Time for a career change, maggot!" Hit Girl snarled, before she pulled herself away from the man, walked off up the alley and stowed her Katana.

"Life is good!" Hit Girl, growled.

..._...

Life almost changed as we rounded a corner into another alley.

A man had just finished beating up a woman; he held her purse in his hand and the woman sobbed, uncontrollably. We moved towards the man. Maybe we were high with the successes of the night. Whatever the reason, we did not check the area around us; the man had backup. I heard gunshots and Hit Girl was pushed forward, but she caught herself as she went down to one knee and I heard her cry out with pain. I deftly pulled Hit Girl back to her feet and into cover while at the same time I drew my Glock. The man we had seen had also moved into cover and the woman was running away, down the alley. Behind us, four men entered the alley; they were armed with Heckler & Koch MP5KA4 sub-machine guns, thankfully nine-millimetre, which would not penetrate our combat suits. Hit Girl drew both her SIG pistols.

"Ready?" she asked.

"I was born ready!" I responded with a smile, causing Hit Girl to shake her head but I caught her smirk.

The four men were closing. We stood up and opened fire. The bastards had body armour, so we simply adjusted our

aim. We felt rounds hitting our own armour, the impacts pushed us back, but we were braced for that. Two men dropped with head shots - messy but satisfying – while the other two men dived behind a dumpster. Hit Girl dumped her magazines and inserted fresh ones. I did the same.

"Time to die, cocksuckers!" A young voice, snarled, followed by an exclamation from the men. We then heard the sound of wood striking a skull, twice.

"All clear!" The same young voice called.

We stood up and looked around. Standing before us was a very short, ninja, who stood proudly and examined her work. Just as we were about to reply, a shot rang out and the little ninja flew backwards and landed heavily on the alley floor. Hit Girl and I span around and we fired together. The other man fell to the ground in a puddle of blood with half a dozen bullet wounds in his chest. He was not wearing body armour.

We turned back, towards the fallen mini ninja.

Updated: September 2017

Chapter 22: When Worlds Collide

Author's Note: 'West Ridge' refers to the home of Dave and Mindy as that is the part of Chicago where they live.

Saturday, January 11th, 2014

West Ridge

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl were down on the lower level, standing a few feet away from a couch which held their latest acquisition – an unconscious vigilante.

"Okay, what do we do with her?" Kick-Ass asked.

"I don't fucking know, but she did take out those cunts," Hit Girl replied, suggestively.

"She's too young," Kick-Ass said as he understood what Mindy meant.

"She's older than when you first met *me!*" Hit Girl exclaimed, indignantly.

"You're just . . . *different*," Kick-Ass responded.

"Different? Okay," Hit Girl said and she sounded a little confused.

"She does have some great skills," Kick-Ass admitted. "What was that stick she used?"

"It's not a fucking 'stick', dumbass! It's called a jō, its part of Aikido, specifically Aiki-Jō," Hit Girl lectured with her usual exasperated tone when she was lecturing me on things that she thought I should know.

"She was able to defeat *two* cunts at a time," Kick-Ass commented with a little awe.

"So, can I, dumbass! It's not all that fucking special, you know," Hit Girl growled and she sounded hurt.

"*'She'* can *fucking* hear you, assholes!" a voice called from the couch and we both span around.

..._...

"*'She'*, is called 'Shadow' and *'she'* is getting a bit pissed off!" the girl on the couch stated.

"Okay . . . Shadow . . . how's your head and chest?" Kick-Ass asked.

"My head is fine; it just hurts a bit . . . ow, so does my chest. What the fuck happened?" Shadow demanded as she reached up with a black gloved hand and held the side of her head.

"You fought really well, kid," Hit Girl complimented.

"I am not a damn kid, *Pretty Girl*," Shadow growled.

Kick-Ass laughed.

"Bitchy!" Hit Girl commented, approvingly.

Shadow stood up, somewhat shakily. She was wearing a black Aikido Gi with lightweight black boots. A lightweight stab vest could be seen under the Gi. She wore a simple black ninja facemask that showed only her eyes. Her hands were covered in padded, black gloves.

"Take it easy, Shadow. You took quite a knock to your head . . . after you were shot," Kick-Ass cautioned.

"Shot? I'm fine. I just need to go home. . . ." Shadow said, before she swayed and fainted.

Kick-Ass quickly grabbed her, before she hit the floor and he laid her back down on the couch.

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Kick-Ass left Hit Girl to check out 'Shadow', seeing as she was a girl.

"She has a big bump on her head, right side, lower down," Hit Girl said, after she had examined Shadow. "She'll have a large bruise on her chest, too. Luckily her vest stopped the bullet."

Hit Girl held up a squashed bullet, between two fingers.

They had agreed to leave her mask in place, to protect her identity, at least initially. However, now that she had fainted, there might be a need to find out who she was and where she belonged. Neither of them wanted to violate her identity, but they might not have any choice. Hit Girl assumed Shadow to be about twelve or thirteen, so she must have a parent somewhere, who was expecting her home.

"We can't stay in these combat suits, all night," Kick-Ass said, reasonably.

"We'll take it in shifts. I will take the first shift. You go get some sleep and I'll wake you at six," Hit Girl suggested.

Sunday, January 12th, 2014

Everything was dark.

It must have been still night time which was weird.

A gloved hand reached up and touched the masked face. Relief swept through the young girl as she found that she was still wearing her mask and gloves as well as her full costume. She felt like she was lying on a soft couch. But, where and why? The thoughts were cut off as she felt a pain in her chest hurt every time that she breathed and it felt bruised. Her head hurt as she lifted it to look around. She really could not make out much of anything, though she thought that she could hear breathing, from across the room.

"Hello," the girl called out, apprehensively.

A light clicked on, followed by a voice – a female voice.

"Hi, Shadow, how are you feeling?" The voice asked, kindly.

"How do you know my name?" Shadow asked, tentatively.

"You told us," the voice replied. "Before you fainted."

"Who are you?" Shadow asked and she felt a little scared.

"Me? I'm Hit Girl," the voice responded.

Shadow froze. Hit Girl! Could it be? Hit Girl was her heroine and ultimately, her reason for being.

"What happened to me?" she asked.

"You were hurt, when you came to help us. Thanks, by the way," Hit Girl said as she came over and knelt beside me, she smiled.

"You left my mask on?" Shadow asked, confused.

"Your identity is your own; it's not up to me to violate it," Hit Girl said. "However, you *are* very young and I'm sure your parents will be missing you."

"Okay. My Mom thinks I'm at a sleepover; my best friend covers for me. Can . . . can . . . I trust you?" Shadow asked, as she came to a decision.

"Of course," Hit Girl replied.

..._...

Shadow reached up and pulled off my mask.

"I'm Chloe, Chloe Bennett," she said as she smiled shyly. "And I'm thirteen."

"You did really well . . . for your age," Hit Girl, replied.

"Thanks, Hit Girl," Chloe said and she felt herself blush.

Hit Girl helped the younger girl up; it felt good to get that mask off, she also pulled off her gloves. Hit Girl led Chloe went upstairs and sat down in a kitchen. Hit Girl started making coffee.

"Coffee?" Hit Girl asked.

"Okay," Chloe replied.

It was all very surreal, Chloe thought; Hit Girl, the teenaged assassin, was making her coffee! Once the coffee was made, Hit Girl placed two cups down on the counter, before she sat down herself. Chloe really could not believe that she was sitting down, just a few feet from *Hit Girl* and having coffee with her - oh, dear, fan-girl time.

"So, why did you become a Hero?" Hit Girl asked.

"My best friend . . . he was murdered, back in New York. A couple months back. My parents left New York and moved to Chicago, soon after," Chloe replied, quietly. "His death hit me really hard."

"I'm sorry," Hit Girl said and her tone was genuine.

"I felt I had to do something, to stop these things happening. Josh . . . that was his name . . . he once told me about a young girl, who killed those who deserved it, by the dozen. That girl became my heroine and I wanted to be as good as her, as good as *you*, Hit Girl," Chloe explained.

That was something new to the sixteen-year-old vigilante.

She had no idea that people knew all that much about her. However, by the look on Chloe's face, she could tell the boy had meant an awful lot to her.

"I miss New York, but Chicago is now my home – I just want to be out there, in the real world, making it a better place," Chloe explained.

Dave had once said, almost the same thing to me.

"Shadow's right, you know," Kick-Ass said as he grabbed a coffee and leaned against the counter.

"Kick-Ass, meet Chloe Bennett," Hit Girl said and Kick-Ass nodded. "Chloe is a very young, thirteen."

"I once said very similar words to Hit Girl, not that long ago," Kick-Ass said with a smirk.

Hit Girl ignored her partner's blatant attempt to goad her.

"Do you feel well enough to go home?" Hit Girl asked.

"I don't know," Chloe responded. "I still feel a bit light headed and my chest hurts."

"Will your friend cover for you?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Yes. Can I call her?" Chloe asked, pulling out a cell phone.

"Do it," Hit Girl said and got up from the kitchen counter and pulled Kick-Ass into the dining room.

..._...

"I trust her," Mindy said as she pulled off my mask.

"You sure?" Dave asked and he pulled off his own mask.

"She spills, I kill her," Mindy said darkly, but with a smile.

"Not funny, bitch!" Dave replied. "You know, you two look very much alike. Did you notice?"

"I did," Mindy replied. "Weird, huh?"

..._...

Just as we went back through to the kitchen, Chloe finished her call.

". . . Thanks Abby. Let me know if there are any problems. Bye!"

"Abby?" Mindy asked, curiously.

"Abby is my best friend. She knows that I am Shadow and she covers for me," Chloe replied. But then she frowned as realisation dawned. "Where are your masks?"

"You trusted us, so we'll trust you. I'm Mindy and that over there, is Dave," Mindy said with a sweet smile.

"Hi, Mindy. Hi, Dave," Chloe said and she smiled back just as sweetly.

..._...

Dave grimaced.

Those two girls were going to be trouble; he could feel it. They could almost pass for twins! Chloe was about the same height as Mindy, maybe two or three inches shorter and also of the same build as Mindy, but with very short blonde hair and she had a purple streak in her hair, on the left side. She seemed to have a fire inside her, for fighting against criminal scum. A little like the younger Mindy, Dave thought. Mindy took Chloe upstairs and showed her to a bedroom, then left her to get a shower and some sleep.

It was still only five in the morning, so Dave and Mindy both got out of their superfluous combat suits and went to bed.

Later that same morning

West Ridge

Dave woke up at about eleven; Mindy was still asleep beside him.

He got up and knocked on Chloe's bedroom door; there was no answer, so he gently pushed the door open. Chloe was still fast asleep. The kid must have been tired, Dave thought as he headed downstairs for a late breakfast and some coffee.

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About half-an-hour later, a girl came down the stairs and into the kitchen. At first glance, it could have been Mindy, but it was Chloe. She wore a T-shirt and shorts.

"Morning, Chloe!" Dave offered, cheerfully. "Hungry?"

"Yeah," Chloe replied and she eagerly eyed the cereal and toast that Dave had almost finished eating.

"Sit down; I'll get you some toast and cereal," Dave chuckled as he saw the girl's expression. "Coffee?"

"Please," Chloe replied.

A very polite young lady; very different to her behaviour several hours previously. Then, she was behaving very much like Mindy.

"How are you feeling, now?" the ever-conscientious Dave asked as he pushed a bowl, milk, and cereal towards the girl.

"Much better, thanks. My head doesn't hurt now," Chloe replied, with a smile. "But my chest is very sore and I have a massive bruise."

"I suggest you ask Mindy to check you out," Dave said. "You seem a very polite, young lady."

"I try to be polite; I don't like swearing," Chloe said and she blushed slightly.

"Well, last night, Shadow didn't seem to mind a few bad words!" Dave commented sardonically.

"Sorry, I sometimes embellish Shadow a bit; make her sound more of a bad-ass," Chloe said and she really blushed.

"Not a problem," Dave conceded and he laughed. "Mindy's mouth isn't exactly the cleanest, either."

"Got a problem with my mouth, Dave?" Mindy asked, as she came into the kitchen and sat down beside Chloe.

'God, they looked so much alike,' Dave thought.

"I was just commenting on Shadow's vocabulary, last night," Dave elaborated.

"Oh. Shadow does have a bit of a foul-mouth," Mindy said and she nudged Chloe, who blushed a bit more.

"You can talk!" Dave exclaimed. "Chloe needs you to check out her bruised chest."

"First time getting shot?" Mindy asked.

"Yeah and it hurt," Chloe admitted, then rubbed her chest and grimaced with pain.

"It does hurt, doesn't it? I'll check you over, later, but the bruise *will* heal, in time. We've both experienced being shot," Mindy said with a smile and she looked over at Dave.

"Our combat suits protect us better than vests," Dave said.

"Yeah; I've only got a few small marks from last night," Mindy commented as she pulled her T-shirt up, to show several red welts on her abdomen.

"Better than *my* bruise," Chloe commented.

"What about those?" Dave asked as he pointed at the other red welts, on Mindy's lower arms and below her collarbone.

"That's where I was struck by a Katana," Mindy admitted.

"Your combat suits protect you from Katana blades?" Chloe asked in amazement.

"Our combat suits are top of the line," Dave pointed out.

"Can I get one?" Chloe asked and she smiled sweetly.

"They're expensive!" Mindy growled. "We'll see. Once you're back to full health, we need to see what you can do."

"Till then, no more going out as Shadow and *definitely* not out on your own," Dave cautioned.

I saw a flash of defiance in Chloe's eyes, but it faded, before she nodded.

"Okay, I'll put Shadow on hold, till I heal," Chloe agreed, somewhat reluctantly.

"Sensible girl," Mindy said and she smiled at Chloe.

..._...

They let Chloe stay another hour or two while Mindy checked out her bruise which was nothing to worry about and would heal, in time. Mindy suggested that Chloe not let her parents see the bruise. On the subject of Chloe's parents, Mindy also had a quiet chat with Chloe, concerning secrecy and the consequences, should she let anything about Mindy and Dave, slip. We told her that she could not reveal anything about us and, in return, we would keep her secrets.

"How do I contact you?" Chloe had asked.

Mindy smirked and started to say something. Dave interrupted as he had a feeling that what she was about to say, most probably would have involved shining a signal in the sky, shaped like a certain body part. The scowl on Mindy's face told Dave that he was right.

"You can call us on this number," Dave said with a laugh and he gave Chloe the number of a cheap cell phone. They dropped Chloe off, near to her friend's house and headed back home.

Kilbourn Avenue

"Chloe!" Abby exclaimed, as her best friend came in.

"Hi, Abby!" Chloe replied.

"Where were you?" Abby demanded.

"I can't say, but I helped Hit Girl last night and then she saved *me*! She actually made me coffee and Kick-Ass made me breakfast," Chloe explained.

"Wow!" Abby exclaimed. "You met the *real* Kick-Ass and Hit Girl?"

"I did!" Chloe replied and she smiled broadly.

Updated: September 2017

***Chapter 23*: Marcus**

Three weeks later

Saturday, February 1st, 2014

West Ridge

February dawned, typically cold and wet.

Mindy was happy for two reasons. Firstly, Chloe's new combat suit had arrived. Secondly, and most importantly, Marcus was coming to stay. Admittedly, they had seen Marcus, just the previous month, but Mindy was desperate to show him the new house, top to bottom. In addition, Marcus would stay for the week and not just for an hour in Central Park.

Chloe had been over several times, in the preceding three weeks. During that time, Mindy had assessed her capabilities and she had been suitably impressed.

The first time Chloe had come over was actually a lot of fun.

Almost three weeks previously

West Ridge

Dave sat on the couch, down on the lower level, and he watched Mindy join Chloe on the mat.

Both were bare foot and wearing an aikidogi. Mindy's was black, while Chloe's was white. Dave was amazed at how similar the two girls were: Chloe was about three, or so, inches shorter, than Mindy which showed while they were both bare foot and face to face.

"Now girls, keep it clean: no bitch slapping," Dave teased and he received a glare from *both* girls.

Mindy started the sparring.

"Hit me!" Mindy commanded.

Chloe hesitated for a second and Dave had a good idea what was about to happen.

"I can't . . ." Chloe started.

Mindy reached out to bitch slap Chloe, just as Mindy had with Dave, the previous year. Only, this time, unlike Dave, Chloe deflected the blow. Mindy tried again with the other hand and Chloe again, deflected the blow. Mindy tried several front snap kicks and side thrusting kicks. Chloe defeated one in three successfully and interfered with most of the rest. Chloe in return, managed to place some good solid kicks on Mindy, one of which resulted in Mindy landing on her back which knocked the breath out of her. Chloe was good, very good.

Chloe, Dave noticed, could handle pain quite well. Many times, Dave would have expected her to be in tears, but she controlled her emotions well. Dave was glad that both girls wore different colour aikidogi as it was getting difficult to see who was who as they span, very fast, around the mat. Yet again, both girls successfully threw each other. There was fire in Chloe's eyes as she attacked Mindy. Mindy also had fire in her eyes, and she was enjoying the sparring, although Dave could tell that Mindy was going easy on Chloe which had to be good.

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After a half hour, Dave decided that it was time to call a halt to the sparring and he had to physically separate both girls and dump them on the mat.

"Enough!" Dave almost shouted as he smirked at both of them. "You both did well."

"Well done," Mindy said as she got up and reached down to help Chloe stand up.

"I enjoyed that," Chloe said. "Shame you weren't actually trying!"

Mindy scowled at Chloe. Dave had to laugh; Chloe had the same temperament as Mindy and he decided that it was probably going to be fun having Chloe around – at least he thought so. Mindy had eventually agreed that Chloe could join us, but only on the less-dangerous nights out, at least to start with. Mindy and Chloe had then started to talk about a combat suit. Chloe was happy with what Mindy wore, but she wanted some changes.

There were going to be fun days ahead!

Back to the present
Saturday, February 1st

West Ridge

The new Shadow stood before us.

On the outside, she looked like a mini-ninja.

She wore a dark blue aikidogi with a dark blue hakama. Her face was covered, except for her eyes, with a black ninja scarf. Underneath the aikidogi, Shadow wore a female combat suit, with blue highlights. She carried a fifty-inch, composite wood, aluminium, and carbon-fibre-reinforced Jō. Dave had to admit, she looked very dangerous and in darkness, she was just a shadow. The girl loved the new suit; she had spent the entire morning practising her movements. Mindy said that she would train Chloe to use a pistol, most probably the FN Five-SeveN Mk2 pistol which was small enough for Chloe's hands, but also provided much reduced recoil when fired.

While Chloe and Mindy sparred together in their combat suits, Dave went back upstairs to start lunch. He had just reached the kitchen when there was a knock on the front door.

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"Marcus!" Dave exclaimed. "You're early."

"Yeah, traffic wasn't as bad as I thought," Marcus replied. "Nice place."

Marcus had flown in that very morning and caught a cab to the house, but he was not expected for another hour.

"Mindy's downstairs sparring with . . . err . . . a new friend," Dave said cagily and he took Marcus downstairs to the lower level.

"Wow! This house is awesome," Marcus commented as he followed Dave down the stairs. "Who are the two crazy midgets on the mat?"

"I think you *might* know the purple one: Mindy!" Dave shouted and Hit Girl span around, before squealing with joy and she ran to hug Marcus.

"Err . . . hi . . . err . . . Hit Girl?" Marcus queried.

"Oh, sorry – new suit," Mindy replied, pulling off her mask and she hugged Marcus again.

"Marcus, meet Shadow," Mindy said and she waved Shadow over.

"You can take off your mask. This is Marcus, my guardian, and he knows all about Dave and me," Mindy said to Shadow.

Chloe slowly removed her ninja scarf and mask.

"Hi, I'm Chloe Bennett," Chloe said and she held out her hand to Marcus.

"Marcus Williams," Marcus replied and he shook Chloe's hand.

"Chloe's joining us," Mindy said slowly.

"Oh dear. I was right; your father *was* starting a '*fucked up super hero club*'!" Marcus exclaimed, dubiously.

Dave took Marcus back upstairs, while the two girls got themselves changed.

..._...

After Chloe and Mindy had showered and changed, they headed upstairs.

There, they found Dave and Marcus, deep in conversation. They both had their backs to the two girls and they appeared to be examining something on the kitchen counter.

"Is that what I think it is?" Dave asked.

"Damn straight!" Marcus replied with a chuckle "Oh, and she'll be using it, in about five minutes."

"It'll be full in a day!" Dave exclaimed.

"Her record was fifteen minutes," Marcus replied and he laughed.

"You must have made millions!" Dave commented.

"It was quite lucrative!" Marcus acknowledged.

"Well, she does have a *slight* profanity problem," Dave commented sarcastically.

"*Slight*, are you kidding me?" Marcus replied and he laughed again.

"When you two assholes have *quite* finished!" Mindy growled angrily and both Marcus and Dave turned around to face the raging teenager.

"Hi, Mindy. Marcus brought us a little present, all the way from New York," Dave said, with his dorky grin several times larger than usual.

As the two of them moved apart, Mindy could see that a certain glass jar sat on the counter. She started to feel an intense rage build inside her. The jar had a label.

"*Swear Jar* . . . cool!" Chloe exclaimed with a laugh. "Bet that didn't take you long to fill!"

"I can't believe you brought *that*, all the way from New York!" Mindy growled and glared at Marcus.

"Thought you'd like it!" Marcus teased.

Mindy emitted a sound, somewhere between a growl and a scream, before she stormed off into the living room and dropped onto the couch, all the while muttering obscenities under her breath.

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"Sorry Chloe, we just really enjoy winding Mindy up," Dave explained.

"Don't worry; that was fun," Chloe replied with a chuckle.

"How old are you, young lady?" Marcus asked.

"Thirteen," Chloe replied.

"Bit young, Dave," Marcus commented.

"Chloe's a bit like Mindy," Dave replied. "She doesn't like taking *no* for an answer."

"Another one," Marcus said, dryly.

..._...

Chloe went through to join Mindy and they started to chat together.

"Chloe looks very like Mindy; I was a bit surprised at first," Marcus said.

"I know," Dave replied. "They have very similar temperaments, too. It's hard enough dealing with one Mindy, let alone another."

"I agree; Mindy *can* be a handful," Marcus acknowledged.

Later that afternoon
West Ridge

Once Chloe had gone home, Mindy had insisted on taking Marcus on a full tour of the house.

Marcus was very wide-eyed. If he was impressed by the sauna and stream room, he was completely bowled over by the armoury.

"Just like Damon! You're a complete nutcase, Mindy," Marcus said, and he laughed at the sight of all the weapons that were arrayed around the walls.

Mindy just beamed with pride, so much so, Dave actually thought that she might explode!

"What's with the fourteen swords?" Marcus asked, as he eyed the identical and highly polished Katana blades, neatly lined up at the end of the armoury.

"Accounting," Mindy said and she blushed.

"Those are from Hit Girl's recent victories," Dave explained. "We seem to be having a minor ninja epidemic."

"Impressive!" Marcus acknowledged, then he cast his eyes over the Kick-Ass combat suit. "Good heavy armour."

"It has come in handy once or twice," Dave said, with a smirk at Mindy.

"Yeah! A full MAC 10 magazine," Mindy agreed.

"A MAC 10! I'm glad to see that you are both taking things seriously and looking after yourselves," Marcus said, approvingly.

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They all sat down for dinner that evening and they had pizza.

"Proper pizza!" Mindy exclaimed, happily.

"What?" Marcus asked.

"You don't want to go there," Dave warned.

"Dave tried to feed me a fucking casserole! He said it was a pizza and it so fucking *wasn't* a pizza!" Mindy ranted.

"Oops!" Marcus apologised, as Mindy continued to rant.

Mindy finally calmed down and we enjoyed a good meal together. The first ever for the three of us! Halfway through the meal, Marcus stood up.

"I would like to say something," Marcus said as he stood up. "It is wonderful to be sitting down with my daughter . . . I've really missed her and I know that sitting down is *not* her strongest suit." Mindy blushed.

"But above all, I am so *very* happy, that Dave found Mindy and while she could not come home to New York, at least Dave ensured that she was safe. Without Dave in Mindy's life, I just can't contemplate what may have happened. Now, I don't know all the things that you have both been getting up to since Mindy was eleven *and I don't want to know*, but I am certain that without each other, you both would not be here today," Marcus continued as he raised his glass to Dave. "Dave, thank you."

Dave stood up, as Marcus sat back down.

"Thanks, Marcus. She is violent. She is hormonal. She has the foulest mouth this side of the US and she is Hit Girl. But to me, she's the most wonderful girl in the world and without her, I wouldn't be alive today. Therefore, I have to thank both Mindy, and you, Marcus. You helped to create a strong, independent, and caring, young woman. Thanks!" Dave said.

Mindy blushed deeper and she sank down in her chair.

"Thank you, Dave," Marcus acknowledged with a laugh at Mindy.

..._...

Mindy had put Marcus into the bedroom at the front of the house.

Marcus had noticed that this room allocation had put him as far away from Dave and Mindy's bedroom as it was physically possible to get. He start to mention it, but then quickly thought better of it and he just said that he did not want to know.

"Mindy, you are evil," Dave said, once they were in bed.

"Why?" Mindy asked.

"You wound up Marcus, by putting him in the front bedroom," Dave stated. "He'll think we're fucking!"

"Not right now, but that can always change," Mindy growled, seductively as she dropped her bra and panties to the floor.

"Crafty, little minx!" Dave laughed as he cuddled into the naked Mindy.

***The following day
Sunday, February 2nd***

It seemed that Marcus had been busy.

He had surprises for *both* of them. Apparently, he had heard that Hit Girl and Kick-Ass were now public knowledge in Chicago. Marcus, evidently, had friends in the Chicago Police Department and he had convinced some that Hit Girl and Kick-Ass were only after the nastiest of criminals. That had been backed up by their current activities in Chicago . . . saving the lives of several Chicago Police Officers had not exactly hurt, either. Marcus had also identified a possible Safehouse for Dave and Mindy. Marcus did not really like helping them, normally, at least not directly, but helping to protect them was different and anyway it was not even in his city; therefore, not his problem.

They all drove over in Marcus' car to check it out. The potential Safehouse was in the south of Chicago and in an area which should give them some anonymity, if not class. The building in question was single storey and it had a fenced yard around it. Internally it was open plan, with a small office area. It would be perfect for storing vehicles and changing before and after nights out. The building was currently full of machines and crap, but that could all be moved out. A price was agreed with the realtor and Marcus set things in motion. It would take a lot of work to re-equip the building with security and everything else that it would need to be a secure Safehouse.

Dave and Mindy hoped that Marty could help out with the security and the other electronic stuff that would also be required.

..._...

Next, Marcus had a surprise for Dave.

"Can you ride a motorcycle, Dave?" Marcus asked.

"Not a chance!" Mindy said, laughing.

"I've ridden, once or twice, before I met psycho, over there," Dave replied and he indicated Mindy, who glared back in return.

"Good, well I suggest you take an MSF course, or two, as you're gonna need it," Marcus suggested, cryptically.

"Mindy has her Ducati; you need something that suits Kick-Ass. Now, I thought about a Harley . . . how about a Fat Boy. You can always give it a Kick-Ass make over . . . eventually," Marcus said and he explained further.

"Cool bike!" Mindy said, approvingly.

"I'll be able to practice on Mindy's Ducati," Dave suggested.

"Just 'cause I let you ride me, doesn't mean I'll let you ride my bike!" Mindy exclaimed, before she clamped her hand over her mouth and went very red.

Marcus put his hands over his ears and he closed his eyes.

"I did *not* just hear that," Marcus said, grimacing.

"She has such a way with words," Dave said and he laughed at Mindy's discomfort.

"You'll need to learn to ride a motorcycle first and get the Safehouse set up. You probably don't want your neighbours to see a motorcycle that could be tracked back to Kick-Ass," Marcus said. "Once you are ready, I'll get it shipped up to you. Mindy can also store her Ducati at the Safehouse; it isn't safe keeping it the house."

Three days later
Wednesday, February 5th

West Ridge

Overall, it had been a good couple of days.

Mindy had apparently been shopping online, again. A large, long package was delivered on that Wednesday morning, during breakfast. Mindy opened the packaging very carefully. Inside were several long wooden cases. The longest of which contained an almost identical twin to Mindy's own Katana.

"I needed a second blade," Mindy said simply.

Next, Mindy selected a shorter wooden case.

"It's called a Tanto – a mini version of my Katana, if you like," Mindy explained as she opened the case and removed a silk sword bag.

She pulled the Tanto from the bag and she moved the Tanto slowly as she checked out every inch before she then removed the blade from the Saya and watched the lights reflect off the, highly polished, blade. The sharp, mono steel, blade was made from high carbon (T10) steel, with a 1.01 Shaku, no Hi and 0.5-centimetre Sori. The blade was finished with a straight Hamon and had been stone polished by hand. The point was a long O-Kissaski. The Habaki and Seppa were Red Copper. The blade was attached to a 16-centimetre Tsuka, which was wrapped in a purple cotton Tsuka-ito with black ray-skin. The Tanto was finished off with black Fuchi, Kashira and Tsuba. The blade was housed in a matte black Saya, with purple highlights. The Koikuchi and Kirigata were wood and the Sageo was purple silk. Apart from the size, it looked identical to Mindy's Katana.

Next, Mindy pulled out a large flat wooden case and she passed it to Dave.

"Me?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes, dumbass!" Mindy replied and she laughed.

Dave opened the case.

"Fuck!" he exclaimed and Mindy laughed.

He was speechless.

Inside the box were two green sword bags, made of silk.

"They are *Ko-Wakizashi*, a shorter version of my Katana, but *just* as lethal," Mindy explained.

I pulled the first Ko-Wakizashi from its bag and held it up in front of me and moved the Ko-Wakizashi slowly, from side to side, as I removed the sword from the Saya and watched the lights reflect, off the highly polished blade. The sharp, mono steel blade was made from high carbon (T10) steel, with a 1.52 Shaku, no Hi and 1-centimetre Sori. The blade was finished with a straight Hamon and had been stone polished by hand. The point was a long O-Kissaski. The Habaki and Seppa were Red Copper. The blade was attached to a 16.5-centimetre, Battle Wrapped, Tsuka which

was wrapped in a green cotton Tsuka-ito with black ray-skin. The Ko-Wakizashi was finished off with black Fuchi, Kashira and Tsuba. The blade was housed in a matte black Saya with green and subdued yellow highlights. The Koikuchi and Kirigata were wood and the Sageo was of green silk.

There was an identical Ko-Wakizashi, in the other sword bag. Dave turned to stare at Mindy, who was starting to look a little uncomfortable.

"We are facing some very nasty cunts, Dave, including ninjas. I decided a little while ago, that you needed something a lot more lethal, than just a pair of batons," Mindy, said quietly.

"Wow!" Dave replied. "I don't know what to say. . ."

"I will need to train you to use them and I have ordered additional combat suit attachments, so you can carry them along *with* your batons," Mindy said.

"On the subject of batons," Marcus said. "Mindy asked me to source some new batons for you. Back in a moment."

Marcus went upstairs and he came back down a minute later with a long cardboard box in his hands which he placed down beside Dave. Dave put the Ko-Wakizashi back into their case and he moved the case to one side and then he opened the cardboard box. The batons were black with subdued green and yellow highlights and they appeared to be made from a carbon-fibre based compound and a light steel. They were a bit heavier than Dave's current batons, but the balance was very good.

"They should be almost unbreakable. Mindy said your current batons are getting a bit worn," Marcus said. "Look at the Harley and the batons as a sort of house-warming gift."

"Thanks Marcus, you are a lot cooler than Mindy gives you credit for," Dave said.

He grinned at Mindy, who scowled back.

A further three days later
Saturday, February 8th

The previous few days had been spent touring Chicago with Marcus.

Mindy, especially, enjoyed the time out. She really had missed Marcus and Dave was pleased to see her so happy. Marcus insisted on having a Chicago pizza, which Mindy was *not* amused about, but she went along with it anyway. That time it was in public so Mindy could not rant as she normally would have done.

Marcus was due to leave the following morning, so they had a good dinner out, to enjoy themselves that last evening.

..._...

The dinner was good and by the time they left the restaurant, it was well after nine and they headed back towards *Speedy*. That was when Marcus got a weird feeling.

"We're being followed," Marcus whispered.

Dave had to admit he was a bit surprised that Marcus had gotten the feeling before Mindy and her 'Spidey senses'.

"You sure?" Mindy asked as she casually looked around.

"I've been a cop, a lot longer than you've been a vigilante," Marcus replied.

Dave could hear the footfalls of more than two people behind him and they were closing.

"We turn on three," Marcus directed. "One . . . two . . . *three*."

They all span around to find five men in front of them. Three of them pulled knives as Dave, Mindy, and Marcus turned. The street was empty and dark.

"Evening folks," The man in the centre ordered. "Empty your pockets."

Mindy was standing between Marcus and Dave and she looked at each of the five men in turn before she looked up

at the men either side of her and she nodded.

They each nodded back and then they attacked.

..._...

Mindy delivered a roundhouse kick to the man who had challenged them which sent him crashing against a building, before he crumpled to the sidewalk. Marcus went for the man on the far left as he pulled out and extended his Asp baton. Marcus struck the man hard on the wrist, causing the man to drop the knife and scream out in pain; Marcus then struck the man in the right knee and the man crumpled to the pavement, screaming. Dave took the man on the far right and he delivered a swift and powerful kick to the man's chest which sent him backwards and Dave quickly disarmed him; he took the knife and dropped it down a drain. The man got up and ran for it. By that time, Mindy had floored the remaining two men.

"You two are so lucky that I'm in a good fucking mood!" Mindy snarled at them.

"You two okay?" Marcus asked.

"I'm cool!" Dave replied.

"I enjoyed that" Mindy commented.

"You would," Marcus said with a grimace.

They made it back to *Speedy* without any further trouble and Mindy drove home.

"I'm still not happy with you driving this car," Marcus grumbled.

"For fuck's sake, Marcus; I drove this fucking car when I was eleven!" Mindy exclaimed. "We've been through this!"

"Okay! Okay! Anything for a peaceful life! But I'm *not* bailing you out if you get arrested," Marcus replied.

Sunday, February 9th

The next morning was a bit tearful, for Mindy.

Dave also thought that Marcus was unhappy, too, but he did not show it. Mindy was *not* good at goodbyes, to say the least. Dave and Mindy both thanked Marcus for his help with the Safehouse and Dave promised to start his motorcycle training straight away. Mindy wrapped her arm around Dave and she stayed close as they waved Marcus off in the cab.

They fervently hoped that he would be back in Chicago that Easter.

Updated: September 2017

Chapter 24: Moving Forward

Two weeks later

Saturday, February 22nd, 2014

In the two weeks since Marcus had gone home, a lot had happened.

Marty had been in touch and, apparently, he had been accepted onto a college course at Chicago University. He was intending on taking a major in Computer Science, with a minor in Mathematics. He would be in Chicago for a few years so Dave had offered to give him a room, until he found a place of his own, and Mindy had agreed.

Marty said that he would help provide technical support for their other activities. He would come and stay for a week or two in March, then he would see about finding a place of his own and a job. His course did not actually start until the third week in September.

..._...

Dave had his motorcycle permit.

He had managed to complete the Basic RiderCourse and he had been able to pass the M Licensing Exam. That had given him the Class M endorsement so he was legal to ride a motorcycle. Mindy was actually very impressed that Dave had passed *first time*. Dave thought that she had expected him to fail. He intended to take the Basic RiderCourse 2 in the coming weeks to get some more training and experience. For that course, he would need to hire a motorcycle and he would then be able to gain experience with increasing sizes of motorcycle before he tried the big Harley Davidson. Dave was able to wind up Mindy as he had a *real* licence and not just a fake as she had.

Chloe had spent the past week begging Mindy to allow Shadow to go out on a patrol with Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. In the five weeks, since they had first met Chloe, Mindy had assessed and monitored Chloe's abilities as well as planned Chloe's training, to improve her strength and agility. The past week had also been spent training Chloe on the FN Five-Seven Mk2 pistol which Chloe proved to be a natural at using.

So far, there was not much that Chloe *was not* a natural at, just like Mindy.

..._...

That night was to be the night that they would take Shadow out with them.

Mindy went through the ground rules with Chloe, for about the twentieth time. Chloe had started to complain, but Mindy had cut her off, each time.

"If, you get hurt, I am *not* dragging your sorry fucking ass, all over Chicago!" Mindy stated, very seriously. "*This* will be *your* audition. Fuck up and we forget we ever knew you."

"Okay. But we'll see *who* fucks up tonight," Chloe challenged.

"Tonight, is going to be so much fun," Dave said, sardonically.

..._...

They intended to patrol the area around the new Safehouse which was still going through the final legal stuff, before it became theirs.

They wanted to know what the area was like and if it needed to be cleaned up before they moved in. With Chloe being so new to them, they did not tell her *why* they were patrolling the area. Yes, they trusted her, but she needed to prove herself, to become a full part of their team. It had occurred to Dave that their little team needed a name. So far, nothing workable had come to mind. He had not asked Mindy about a name as he was more than a little scared of what she might suggest!

..._...

It was a twenty-three-mile, forty-five-minute, drive from the house down I-90 and I-94.

The Safehouse, itself, was surrounded on all sides by other industrial units. Eighty metres to the east, was a train

goods yard and across the two hundred metres of goods yard, was a residential district. A hundred and sixty metres to the west, was a large high school. It should be possible to approach and leave the area anonymously. Public transport in the area was also very good.

Not surprisingly, they found business while they were walking up a badly lit alley, between some industrial units, and not far from the Safehouse, when six men jumped out.

"What the fuck do we have here?" one asked, loudly.

"Halloween ain't for fucking months," another said and he laughed.

Kick-Ass, Hit Girl, and Shadow instinctively spread out; Shadow was in the middle with Kick-Ass on her left. Hit Girl drew a Katana, slowly, and she allowed the light from a building to shimmer along the length of the highly polished blade.

"You think you're a fucking ninja, little girl?" the first man jeered.

"Okay, you cunts, who's gonna die first?" Hit Girl growled.

The smile quickly vanished from the first man's face.

"Fuck this!" a third man exclaimed as he pulled out a pistol and shot Kick-Ass in the chest.

Kick-Ass just took a pace back which absorbed the impact from the bullet.

"Fuckin-A! Let's get the fuck outta here!" the second man yelled and they all ran for it.

"Come back, we kill ya!" Hit Girl yelled after them.

"That was interesting," Shadow commented and she laughed, nervously.

"Not all our work is killing. You need to use appropriate force; not every criminal deserves to die. Some just need to look into a career change," Kick-Ass explained.

As they continued their patrol around the top border of the industrial area, some four hundred and thirty metres north of the Safehouse, they passed by a closed store, an Aldi. Some cars were still in the parking lot and as could be expected at one in the morning, there were some idiots trying to steal a car.

There were three of them, teenagers.

..._...

"Go on then, Shadow," Kick-Ass directed, quietly, and he prodded the young girl forward.

Shadow took a good grip on her Jō as she stepped out of the shadows. She felt really nervous, but she took a deep breath and shouted at the men.

"Hey! Cheap shit losers! Stop screwing with a car that somebody probably worked their fucking ass off to pay for!"

The three men turned and one smirked.

"Who's the fucking little ninja?" the man asked, and he laughed, but he stopped suddenly, as Shadow felt Kick-Ass step out of the shadows behind her and prod her forward.

"Fuckin' hell, I think it's that Kick-Ass dude, you know, the one who wasted all those fucking ninjas!" another man exclaimed and he pulled out an eight-inch blade.

The other two men did the same. One of the men came at Shadow with his knife. Shadow ran forward and she struck out with her Jō. The blow smashed the man's wrist, before she spun and drove the end of the Jō into the chest of the next man and the other end of the Jō, she rammed into the remaining man's back. All three men were on the ground and the man with the smashed wrist was screaming. One of the men looked up at Shadow.

"Who *are* you?" the man asked, incredulously.

"I'm Shadow!" Shadow growled back.

She felt a hand gently squeeze her shoulder.

"Good work, kid," she heard Kick-Ass say from behind her.

..._...

"So?" Kick-Ass asked.

"I was impressed. Shadow handled herself well," Hit Girl replied.

"She was nervous, but she fought them off herself. I think she did good for her first night," Kick-Ass said.

"That was good, letting her have a go herself; she needs to build up her self-confidence. I saw her hesitating, but then I remembered that I had felt the same, back when Daddy sent me out alone, for the first few times," I responded.

"I was a little jumpy, my first few times out, too; not to mention meeting a little, psychotic eleven-year-old," Kick-Ass commented.

Hit Girl smiled, and she felt warm inside as she thought back to Rasul's apartment.

..._...

The trio continued their patrol and headed back south, towards the Safehouse and then on to where they had parked *Speedy*. They each removed their masks and covered over the top half of their combat suits. After driving home, they pulled directly into the garage and once the garage door was closed behind them, Mindy turned to Chloe, only to find that the girl was fast asleep on the back seat. Mindy prodded her awake and Chloe reluctantly got out of the car, before she headed upstairs to bed. Chloe had the bedroom on the opposite corner to Dave and Mindy and she had been keeping some spare clothes there, over the past few weeks. Mindy checked in on her, before she went to bed. Her combat suit lay discarded on the floor and Chloe was fast asleep.

Mindy actually felt very happy as she slid into bed, beside Dave. She received a kiss and then he fell asleep.

Mindy followed seconds later.

The following morning
Sunday, February 23rd

Chloe woke up late; it was almost eleven in the morning.

After a refreshing shower, she got herself dressed and headed downstairs for breakfast from where she could smell something delicious cooking. As she walked into the kitchen, she could see Dave standing at the stove and he was shovelling some bacon out of a frying pan onto a plate, beside which, there was also a plate of fried eggs and another of fresh pancakes. Dave turned around and he saw Chloe.

"Morning, kid! Sleep well?" he asked.

"Great thanks," Chloe replied.

"You did really well, last night, Chloe. Well done!" Dave said.

"I second that," Mindy agreed, as she sat down at the kitchen counter.

"Thanks," Chloe said, and she felt herself blushing.

"Hungry?" Dave asked.

"Damn straight!" Mindy and Chloe said together.

..._...

After breakfast, Dave asked Chloe to come into the living room where they both sat down on a couch; Mindy seemed to vanish.

"Okay," Dave said, smiling. "Crunch time."

Chloe felt a bit worried and she had a feeling that Dave must have noticed.

"Don't worry, Chloe," Dave said pleasantly. "Just thought it was time for a chat."

"Okay," Chloe replied, somewhat apprehensively.

"We want you to join our team," Dave explained. "But we have rules. Now, Little Miss Assassin tries to bend and sometimes break the rules and when she does, I come down on her like a fucking ton of bricks. Being a teenaged Hero, sucks. I know from personal experience and Mindy bitches about being a teenager, every other day. However, you will have responsibilities; Mindy always thought she knew everything about life and that her age was irrelevant, but she has learnt the hard way, that she is *not* invincible and despite her physical and mental skills, she is still a sixteen-year-old girl and in a few cases just needed to grow the fuck up. You *will* fuck up, just as Mindy did and I *will* jump down your throat, or kick your fucking ass, to bring you back in line. That is for both your safety and ours. Understood?"

Dave paused in his lecture and Chloe nodded her agreement.

"You will be part of a team, where you will be an *equal* partner. Yes, Mindy and I are the senior partners, but we are all equal. Basically, what that means is that if any of us fuck up, we expect the others to tell us we fucked up. When you fuck up, *and you will*, we will tell you that you fucked up *and* we will tell you why and teach you how to avoid making that mistake again. I've fucked up more times than I care to think about and the famous Hit Girl? She has made her own fair share of fuck ups, most of them due to her age and lack of worldly experience. Therefore, if one of us says, you fucked up, *do not take it to heart*; learn from it. If you fuck up badly I *will* tell you that you fucked up badly and, if necessary, stop you coming out with us.

"I'm used to being kicked, punched, and sworn at; Mindy has tried everything, but when she acts like a stupid little teenaged girl, I tell her that and she tries to look cute and wriggle her way out of it, but that doesn't work with me - not anymore – nor do her threats of bodily harm. While on that subject, Mindy will never intentionally hurt you – she may threaten to dismember you or something similar, but that is just her way. Don't get me wrong; she *is* perfectly capable of carrying out her threats. She *will* hurt you during sparring sessions, but you get used to that and just learn to avoid her kicks and punches. Injuries are a part of our lives, now, and we have all suffered a lot of damage to our bodies . . . but we're still here. You still want in?"

"Yes!" Chloe replied, with a big grin on her face. "I promise to do my best. I know I'm young, but I listen, and I learn."

Mindy reappeared within seconds.

"You sticking with us?" she asked.

"Throw away a chance to work with 'Little Miss Assassin'?" Chloe exclaimed. "Never!"

Mindy glared at Dave, but she smiled at me.

"Welcome aboard, Shadow," Mindy welcomed, with a huge grin.

..._...

Next, they discussed the obvious.

How to keep Chloe's activities secret from her parents and the kids at school. Chloe explained that her Dad was usually off at sea; he was a Commander, in the Navy. Her Mom, so far had not commented on all of her sleepovers with Abby. As for Abby, she lived with her mother, who worked nights, so nobody had noticed Chloe missing at night, so far. Abby's father was in the Navy, too, another Commander.

"You *will* get hurt and you *will* get bruised, out there. We will need to come up with cover stories, or somebody will think that you're getting beaten up, regularly," Dave said.

"I heal quickly," Chloe offered.

..._...

There was a knock on the door, the side door.

Chloe was a bit surprised to see a small pistol suddenly appear in Mindy's right hand. Mindy went over to the door,

checked the spy hole, and then she frowned before she opened the door a crack.

"Go away!" Mindy suggested, before she shut the door.

The knocking continued.

Mindy opened the door again. Chloe could just about make out that it was a young girl who stood outside.

"Go aw-," Mindy started.

"Abby! What the hell!" Chloe yelled, interrupting Mindy.

Mindy stared at Chloe for a moment before she yanked the girl, who was apparently called Abby, inside and closed the door. Mindy put her arm across Abby's throat and pinned her to the wall. The pistol appeared to have vanished, just as quickly as it had appeared.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Mindy growled, dangerously. "How the *fuck* did you find this house?"

"I was worried about Chloe. She never called last night. I pinged her cell; not difficult," Abby explained, quickly. "No need to go all Hit Girl, on me . . . jeez!"

Abby seemed to be a bit of a geek . . . a bit like Marty.

"Mindy, *let her go!*" Dave directed.

Mindy glared at her partner, but she released her hold on Abby.

"You two *must* be Kick-Ass and Hit Girl!" Abby said with a smile.

Mindy looked mad and so did Chloe.

"Look, I won't spill; you have my word. I spill, you kill, right?" Abby said still smiling.

"You've got *that* fucking right!" Mindy growled, angrily.

..._...

After another minute Mindy calmed down.

"Hi Abby, I'm Mindy," Mindy said and she held out her hand.

"Dave," Dave said as he held out his hand.

Abby shook each of their hands, in turn.

"Hi, I'm Abigail Hunt," Abby said.

Abby was about the same height as Mindy, with a slim build and long brown hair.

"Sorry, guys . . . my fault, I fucked up," Chloe said dejectedly and she looked ashamed.

"No Chloe, you didn't. Your friend is just very clever and she obviously cares about you," Mindy conceded. "What does your Dad do in the Navy, Abby?"

"He's an Information Warfare Officer and he spends a lot of his time with computers; I picked up some things," Abby replied. "Need a hacker?"

"A hacker?" Mindy mused, and then she chuckled. "Could be useful. We might need someone to help provide support and comms. You think you could help with that?"

"Definitely!" Abby replied, enthusiastically.

"We'll see," Mindy said, laughing.

Authors Note: *Both, Dave and Mindy's home and the proposed Safehouse, are real properties in Chicago. Admittedly, I have not left many clues, but it would be interesting to see if anybody could identify the area where the proposed Safehouse is located, or even the proposed Safehouse itself. No prizes, but I will let everybody know how clever you are.*

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 25*: Smack Down**

A week later

Saturday, March 1st, 2014

West Ridge

In retrospect, it was probably overdue.

Mindy started to get complacent and she let her guard down. She never even realised that she was doing it. Thankfully, she supposed, she found out during a sparring session and *not* during a fight with a hundred ninjas. It had been a week since they had gone out with Shadow. Naturally, Chloe was itching to go out again, but as Mindy already knew, Chloe was a stubborn bitch, just like Mindy and she was not taking no for an answer. Chloe also wanted to try some 'real' fighting with 'real' cunts. Therefore, the idea had been to show Chloe that she *was not* ready.

It was a Saturday morning and Chloe was on the mat, in her white aikidogi. Mindy came down the stairs, in her similar, but black aikidogi, ready to fight. Abby was over on the couch. Chloe's friend was looking forward to seeing a 'real' fight. Dave was upstairs, on the phone to Marcus about the Harley.

..._...

Mindy and Chloe squared up to each other.

"So, you wanna play," Mindy growled.

"No, I wanna win," Chloe growled back.

Yes, the little bitch had learnt to growl, really well, too, in Mindy's opinion.

"Anything goes," Mindy challenged, and she allowed Chloe to open.

The thirteen-year-old began with a front kick which Mindy easily deflected. Next, came a roundhouse kick which, again, Mindy was able to dodge with a flip backwards. Mindy then returned the favour and she spun her protégé around and down onto the mat, but Chloe kept a good grip on her mentor, and she smoothly flipped Mindy around before she then pinned *Mindy* to the mat. Mindy felt Chloe's pressure on her ease, only slightly, then Mindy took advantage as she grabbed Chloe's leg, pulling her down and that allowed Mindy to roll out from under Chloe who was then flipped her over onto her front while Mindy kept her right arm bent behind her and vertical. Chloe yelled out in pain and Mindy eased her hold before she allowed her friend to stand up.

Chloe was raging, and Mindy could see she that was in pain, but the girl simply ignored it. She sprang towards Mindy, who flipped Chloe high over her head, but Chloe caught herself and expertly landed on her feet, before she reversed herself and skidded onto the mat and swept Mindy's feet out from under her. Chloe then continued with her attack, striking Mindy, none too softly, in her back and it was Mindy's turn to yell out in pain. Chloe let her mentor up with an evil smirk.

Mindy, understandably, was angry and her first decision was to wipe that shit-eating smirk, off her protégé's face. Mindy ran at Chloe, who dodged and threw Mindy down hard, over her shoulder. 'Fuck that hurt!' Mindy thought to herself as she absorbed the pain. They both got back to their respective feet and adjusted their aikidogi, then squared off again. They both raged, and Chloe still had an evil smirk on her face.

Before Mindy knew, what was happening, Chloe threw a very powerful punch into her left side and then as Chloe allowed her weight to settle on her rear leg, she lifted the other leg to the side and whipped it at the knee, which drove her foot into Mindy chest.

The veteran vigilante flew backwards and then she felt nothing.

"You've killed Hit Girl!" Abby screamed.

"Mindy!" Chloe screamed.

'What have I done?' Chloe thought in horror as she ran over to Mindy who was lying on her side, one arm out in front

of her and she was out cold. Chloe's kick had sent Mindy into a pillar just off the mats; she could see a hole in the plaster where Mindy's head had hit. She had also heard something crack, when she kicked her.

Dave came thundering down the stairs.

"What the fuck is going on down here!?" he demanded and then he saw Mindy. "Fuck! What happened?" he asked, looking directly at Chloe.

"I kicked her a bit too hard," Chloe replied dejectedly, and she could feel tears running down her face.

"Don't worry," Dave said. "Shit happens – at least around here it does!"

Dave knelt down beside Mindy.

Mindy did *not* look good. Dave pulled Mindy, carefully, onto the mat and laid her on her back. He checked her head and he could see a large bruise, plus some blood from a few cuts. She was well and truly knocked out, but her breathing was okay, for the moment. A minute or so later, Mindy's eyes flew open and she took a deep breath, then she screamed, and tears started to pour down her face.

"What the fuck!?" Mindy yelled, when she had finished screaming and then she passed out.

"Oh dear, I must have missed something!" Dave commented as he undid Mindy's aikidogi and he was a little shocked by what he found.

Mindy's left side was badly bruised and there was a lot of bruising and swelling on the right side of her chest. The bruise spread from below her collar bone, down to below her right breast.

"Abby, three ice packs, fridge over there," Dave instructed, and he pointed at the kitchen a few yards away.

Abby jumped up and she came back with three ice packs moments later. Dave pulled out a knife and cut off Mindy's sports bra, before placing a thin towel over her chest, followed by two ice packs, which he held in place with bandages. He applied another towel and icepack to Mindy's left side, again held in place with a bandage. He then placed a blanket over her and left her to rest. Chloe was sitting on the couch, sobbing her eyes out. It was obvious that she was feeling immense guilt.

"It was an accident, Chloe . . . shit happens." Dave said, as he sat down beside her.

"Do you remember what I said, two weeks ago? *Injuries are a part of our lives*. She will be fine, believe me. She may kick your ass, when she wakes up, though!" Dave said with a smile and Chloe hugged him, still crying.

When Chloe finally stopped crying, Dave asked her to help him get Mindy upstairs, to bed. He picked up Mindy and took her upstairs, to their bedroom, where Chloe helped get her trousers off and into bed.

Chloe stayed in the bedroom, sitting on the couch, while Dave went downstairs to tidy up and Abby went home.

Two hours later

Mindy screamed, and Chloe ran over to her and knelt beside the bed.

"Mindy, it's Chloe . . . you okay?" she asked.

"Stupid fucking question!" Mindy growled.

"Sorry," Chloe tried.

"I owe you a fucking kicking, bitch!" Mindy growled, angrily.

"I'm really sorry, Mindy. It was an accident; I didn't mean it. *Please* believe me!" Chloe begged, and she felt tears as they began again.

"Fucking cut it out, you evil bitch!" Dave said to Mindy as he came into the bedroom.

Mindy glared at Dave, but then she relented.

"Sorry Chloe. I didn't mean what I said. Not many people get to put down Hit Girl . . . congratulations!" Mindy said, magnanimously.

"I still feel guilty," Chloe said truthfully.

"I'll be fine. Really! I just need some rest," Mindy said with a grimace.

"Can I stay tonight?" Chloe asked.

"No problem, kid," Dave said and smiled at me.

***The next morning
Sunday, March 2nd***

West Ridge

"You are a damn good fighter, Chloe," Mindy said.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, I just got carried away," Chloe said. "But, you did say '*anything goes*'."

"I did, didn't I?" Mindy replied. "Not the first time that my mouth has got me into trouble."

"Nor the last, unfortunately," Dave suggested as he sat down beside Mindy.

Mindy had awoken that morning in a lot of pain. Dave had changed the ice packs and the swelling was going down, slowly. The bruises though, were horrific, Mindy had also broken at least two ribs, and those would take time to heal. She did, however, feel sorry for Chloe. It was *not* her fault; she had just caught Mindy out. Chloe was a very good fighter, especially when she was all riled up.

"Am I ready?" Chloe asked, defiantly.

"Well, I'm fucking stuck here for the duration, so you'll have to *shadow* Kick-Ass," Mindy replied. "*If* he wants a cocky little bitch with him."

"It'll be just like you were there with me, then," Dave commented as he looked directly at Mindy, with an evil smirk.

"Fucking cunt! Ow . . . that fucking hurt!" Mindy yelled as she gripped her ribs.

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 26*: Shadow Patrol**

***One week later
Friday, March 7th, 2014***

West Ridge

"Well, how did it go?" Mindy asked on their return.

"Boring!" Chloe responded.

"Nothing," Dave commented.

"Sorry, kid, but that's what happens some nights," Mindy commiserated.

Dave and Chloe had gone out on patrol together, near to the Safehouse. It seemed that the idiots that they had all met, the last time had taken the offered advice. Admittedly, Dave and Chloe had only been out for a few hours, but most of that time had been spent travelling.

"The walk did us good," Dave commented, smiling.

"Speak for yourself!" Chloe grumbled.

"Okay, grumpy teenager; must be bedtime," Dave chuckled as he pushed Chloe towards her bedroom.

"Night guys!" Chloe said.

It had been a thoroughly boring week, as far as Mindy was concerned. She had been unable to do much, thanks to her healing ribs; however, the bruises were healing nicely. On the plus side, the sale of the Safehouse had gone through; it was now theirs. Marcus had recommended some out of town builders who had a security clearance and could be trusted to keep their mouths shut. The plan was to clear out *all* of the existing crap from the Safehouse and demolish the existing office space. Then, a new, self-contained, structure would be built, inside the main building. This would have accommodation that could sleep six people, complete with a kitchen and dining area, plus showers. Below that, would be office space and a 'panic room'. The 'panic room', of course, would become an armoury. The existing doors and windows would be retained, but upgraded internally with reinforced glass, to keep the outside looking normal.

They would also have a decent, functioning, climate control system installed, too. The main floor of the building would allow for the storage of motorcycles and have space for a few other vehicles as required. There would be space for a large training area, too. From the outside, the building would be almost soundproof; nobody would be able to hear what went on inside. It would be another, very anonymous, industrial unit. The unit would be owned by a shell company, which had in turn been set up by Mindy's daddy. The building work would be expected to take around four weeks.

Mindy soon drifted off to sleep, and she dreamed of her new Safehouse.

***The next morning
Saturday, March 8th***

West Ridge

Chloe joined Mindy for breakfast.

The thirteen-year-old still felt a bit guilty about Mindy getting hurt, but Dave was right; it *had* been an accident. Now that she was a permanent member of the team, Dave had shown her the new Safehouse, just the previous night. It sounded really, really cool, to have a Safehouse, Chloe thought.

Chloe noticed that Dave was absent.

"Where's Dave?" she asked Mindy.

"Dave went to the airport, to pick up Marty," Mindy replied.

Chloe had forgotten all about Marty. She was looking forward to meeting him; Dave had mentioned that he was a geek, just like Abby, but that they had been friends for years.

"I'm looking forward to meeting him," Chloe said. "Dave said that you like him, too."

"If it weren't for Marty, Dave would never have found me, and I would, most probably, be dead, right now," Mindy replied with a faraway look in her eyes. "I'll tell you the story sometime."

..._...

About an hour or so later, Dave and Marty appeared.

"Marty, this is Chloe," Dave said. "Chloe this is Marty."

Chloe shook hands with Marty. He had a big dorky grin on his face which she liked.

"Hi, Shadow," Marty said. "Welcome to the team! I'm Battle Guy."

"Hi, Battle Guy," Chloe answered.

Somehow, Chloe could not quite see Marty as a Hero; nevertheless, Mindy had assured her that Marty *had* fought alongside her and Dave, just the previous year, with distinction. Battle Guy no longer fought, but he would provide technical support when required.

..._...

Chloe enjoyed chatting with Marty; she thought that he was really funny, and she liked that he loved winding Mindy up. Marty thought it was very funny that Hit Girl had been put out of action, and by a thirteen-year-old girl! Neither Mindy nor Chloe saw the funny side, but Dave did.

"Look, cunts! Keep it up and I'll have Shadow break some of *your* fucking ribs!" Mindy growled, dangerously.

"Sorry," said Marty.

Dave just smiled at Mindy and he received a glare in return.

"Okay, Marty and I have some things to discuss, see you two later," Dave said.

..._...

"I'd have thought you'd have hurt Marty, by now," Chloe commented.

"Like I said, earlier, I owe Marty and he *is* scared of me, but he has a lifetime free pass," Mindy said.

"I'll remember that."

"You wanting to go out again, tonight?" Mindy asked.

"Yes!" Chloe replied in obvious excitement.

Later that night

They were expanding our patrol, but still near to the Safehouse.

It was just Shadow and Kick-Ass, but for the very first time they could talk back to Mindy and Marty, back at the house. Marty had brought with him some advanced communications sets, but he would not tell his friends where he had got them. The radios had throat mikes and slim receivers for the ear which would work with the masks of the combat suits. The radios were encrypted, and they could even broadcast the wearer's GPS position to a map on Marty's laptop. Marty had wired up Chloe and Dave, so that they could talk to each other, or back to base. Marty had also explained radio procedure, to both Chloe and Dave. Mindy also had a radio as well as Marty. They would each use their Hero identities as call signs.

"Battle Guy, Kick-Ass. Kick-Ass and Shadow, heading west, away from the Safehouse," Kick-Ass called over the comms.

"Battle Guy copies heading west. I have you both on my map."

'So far, so good,' Kick-Ass thought to himself. The streets appeared deserted, with just the occasional car. Shadow kept to his right and she seemed happy to be back out on the streets. As far as possible, they both kept to the shadows. Kick-Ass checked his watch, it was almost ten-thirty and it looked to be just another boring evening.

"You okay?" he asked Shadow.

"Yeah, I'm okay," Shadow, replied.

..._...

Ahead of the two vigilantes, a young kid came racing around a corner and he cannoned straight into Kick-Ass. Naturally, Kick-Ass stood firm, but the kid fell backwards, onto the sidewalk.

"What's the rush?" Kick-Ass snarled gently.

"Who . . . who are you?" The kid stuttered.

"I'm Kick-Ass!" Kick-Ass replied, and he smiled down at the kid.

"Cool!" The kid's face lit up with a smile. "I need help . . . two men attacked me; they took my stuff!"

Kick-Ass looked over at Shadow and her eyes lit up.

"Wait here, kid," Kick-Ass snarled. "Shadow, stand to! Battle Guy, Kick-Ass. Shadow and I are engaging," he called over the comms.

"Battle Guy copies Kick-Ass and Shadow engaging."

They both walked around the corner and in front of them, they found two men, talking and laughing. They both looked up, as the vigilantes approached.

"Fuck off!" one man shouted. "Before we drop both of you idiots!"

"Try it!" Shadow growled.

The second man raised an automatic pistol and shot Shadow in the chest. The impact of the bullet knocked her backwards off her feet and onto the sidewalk.

"Now, for you!" The second man shouted and pulled the trigger, twice more.

Kick-Ass braced myself and he felt the two rounds collide with his armour. Beside him, Shadow slowly regained her feet.

"You fucking cunts!" Shadow yelled and she launched herself forward, towards the astonished men, with her Jō extended out in front of her.

Neither man knew what hit them, as the pistol clattered to the sidewalk, closely followed by the two unconscious men.

"That was totally wicked!"

The two victorious vigilantes turned to look at the kid; he was peering around the corner all amazed smiles. They dutifully returned the kid's 'stuff' and called the Police. They quickly left the scene before the Police arrived and Kick-Ass called in to explain what had happened.

"Shadow, Hit Girl. You okay?"

"Yeah. My left boob will be totally bruised, though," Shadow replied without thinking.

"Oh dear! Battle Guy just fell off his chair, laughing," Mindy said, with a chuckle. "See you guys later."

Kick-Ass looked down at Shadow.

"Do all of us *really* need to know about your left boob?" he asked.

"Too much detail?" Shadow responded with a chuckle.

"Yeah . . . just a bit," Kick-Ass replied. "Well Done! You put those two down, good and fast – I was impressed."

He could not see Shadow's face, but her eyes lit up with joy and pride. Her reply was smiling, though.

"Thanks," she said.

..._...

The rest of the patrol was relatively lifeless.

A few people recognised Kick-Ass; yelling 'Go Kick-Ass', otherwise it was peaceful. Around one in the morning, they headed back towards *Speedy* and then home. Again, Chloe fell asleep on the drive back. Dave was very proud of her, as despite being shot, she still managed to finish off the opposition. Once back home, Dave prodded the youngster awake and he guided her upstairs, where Mindy helped her get out of her combat suit. The bullet had not penetrated her aikidogi, which was made of a similar synthetic material to the combat suits.

"Must have been a .38 round; not much power. Well done, Chloe," Mindy said as she helped the girl into bed.

There was apparently, a bruise on her left boob. Once Chloe was sorted, Dave turned to Marty.

"You fell off your fucking chair?" he asked, incredulously.

"Sorry. It was very funny," Marty replied, with a chuckle.

"You *have* to admit, it was a bit funny," Mindy said, and she chuckled.

"I hope Chloe sees the funny side in the morning. That bruise *will* be hurting by then," Dave replied, knowingly as he rubbed his own upper chest.

"Let me kiss it better," Mindy said, seductively.

"Okay, time for me to go to bed," a cringing Marty suggested quickly and he left the room at a run.

"You watch your fucking ribs, crazy bitch!" Dave said as he pulled off his combat suit and other clothes.

The next afternoon
Sunday, March 9th

West Ridge

Mindy insisted on debriefing Chloe about the previous night.

Chloe explained everything that she had seen and everything that she had thought and felt. Mindy went through each item to find out Chloe's thought processes, not to mention what her senses were like. Of course, Mindy had grilled Dave the previous night and that morning, for his take on the evening's events. Overall, Mindy was happy that all had gone okay. Chloe was a little concerned about being shot, but Mindy explained that the risk of being shot was why they had expensive combat suits. The comms gear had also performed flawlessly. Marty and Mindy had been able to follow every movement, as Kick-Ass and Shadow had patrolled, via the GPS feedback. Marty also played back the route which they had travelled the previous night, which was 'very cool', according to Chloe. Chloe was not amused when Marty laughed about her bruised boob, but she relented when Mindy started to laugh.

"At least you now know what it feels like to be shot and won't worry about it happening again. I had to train Dave myself for that," Mindy said, smirking.

"Yeah. Think yourself fucking lucky, that some psycho bitch doesn't just shoot you *in the back*, with a .44 Magnum, *without a fucking warning!*" Dave exclaimed, with a glare in Mindy's direction.

"She didn't!?" Chloe exclaimed, incredulously.

"Oh yeah! She so fucking did!" Dave replied, and he grimaced.

Mindy actually blushed, while Chloe and Marty, both laughed.

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 27*: Harley Safehouse**

Three weeks later
Sunday, March 30th, 2016

West Ridge

Mindy awoke feeling *very* tired.

Dave had insisted on keeping her awake for *hours*, but admittedly, he had made himself useful. Her legs were still tingling from the electric shocks and she was fucking glad that her ribs no longer hurt because they had taken a fucking (no pun intended) pounding on the bed, the previous night. Mindy really was not sure of the occasion that brought on all that attention, not that she was complaining in any way. Dave woke up, just then and she could feel his hand . . . Mindy screamed; he was completely insatiable, but then so was she.

She casually reached over with her hand and she found something nice waiting for her.

..._...

"What was all that in aid of?" Mindy asked, an hour later while sitting at the kitchen counter with a coffee.

"Do I need a reason, to satisfy the woman I love?" Dave replied.

"No, of course not, but this was *more* than usual," Mindy said, and she grimaced a bit; she was still feeling the aftershocks.

"Well . . . today is special . . . very special," Dave teased.

"Why?" Mindy asked, feeling somewhat confused.

"This is the anniversary of that completely fucking insane evening, at Rasul's." Dave replied with his usual dorky grin. "You might remember it?"

"Of course, I fucking remember it; I blew you a kiss," Mindy replied, and she giggled at the memory.

"Do I still have potential?" Dave asked, still grinning.

"Oh yeah! But you are most definitely, NFL now Dave," Mindy replied as she leant over to kiss him.

"That night may have been horrific, but it was also the start of a new part of my life. My life with Mindy Macready *and* Hit Girl . . . my life with you. That's why I wanted to celebrate last night, I wanted you to know that I love you," Dave explained.

"You fucking managed that!" Mindy exclaimed happily.

"Had to make sure I wasn't losing my touch!" Dave teased.

"Your *touch* is fine; no fucking complaints there!" Mindy replied honestly.

Two days later
Tuesday, April 1st

West Ridge

"Dave! Why is the bathroom covered in plastic . . .? You fucker . . .! Open the damn door!" Mindy yelled, and she started to pull at the door in a panic, but Dave easily held it shut.

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

Mindy screamed.

"Dave, you are *so fucking dead!*" Mindy yelled.

Dave released the door and took several paces back. The door was thrown open. He thought Mindy was a little pissed, but he couldn't see her expression as Mindy was covered from head to toe in purple and red paint with an additional layer of white powder.

"April Fool!" Dave yelled before he almost pissed himself with laughter (and took a photo).

"Okay," Mindy admitted, somewhat reluctantly as she turned back into the bathroom to clean off. "That was creative."

..._...

Dave had secured three plastic bags to the ceiling; one held red paint, one purple paint and the other baby powder. Each bag had a very small remote-control explosive (supplied by Marty) which he had detonated one after the other. Dave had covered the entire bathroom in plastic, including the ceiling, as protection. Twenty minutes later, Mindy reappeared, and she looked a little cleaner, although her lovely blonde hair was lightly tinted with red and purple.

"I *hate* you right now!" Mindy growled as she headed out of the bedroom.

Dave figured that he might just live long enough to regret his actions, but it had been well worth it!

..._...

The pain!

So much, considering his limited nerve endings.

Mindy had just finished letting Dave know exactly what she thought of his prank, earlier that morning. His leg was burning as was his chest. Mindy was staring down at her partner with an enormous grin. Dave reached out, grabbed her ankle and pulled. Mindy crashed to the mat with a small scream, and then he rolled over and started to kiss her.

Mindy growled and started to kiss him back.

Dave figured that he was forgiven.

..._...

After lunch, Dave went to sooth his aches and pains in the steam room.

Mindy joined him; Dave had a feeling that she was feeling guilty for all the bruises – but probably not. While Dave was in there, he had some inspiration. No idea where from, but Dave figured that he had a name for their fledgling team; that is for the team of Kick-Ass, Hit-Girl, Battle Guy, and Shadow. Mindy actually agreed with his suggestion, which was also a surprise.

They called ourselves: *Fusion*. Definition: '*Fusion - the result of joining two or more things together to form a single entity*'.

The four of them *were* a single entity, a team, bringing criminals to Justice.

Four days later
Saturday, April 5th

The Safehouse

Both Dave and Mindy were jumping with joy, that morning.

Mindy, because the Safehouse was finished and Dave, because his Harley had been delivered. They had signed off the builders, only the previous night and Dave had taken delivery of his Harley at nine that morning. They were both down at the Safehouse; Mindy had ridden her Ducati down, during the night for safety, and it was now parked to one side of the open area with a cover over it. The Harley was delivered in a large wooden packing case, ready to go. For the moment, they placed the crate off to one side, near the Ducati. That previous night, they had slept at the

Safehouse, to try it out. Unfortunately, they had neglected to get any food in; so that morning they went shopping, stocked up the cupboards in the kitchen, and the freezer. They then had a late breakfast before they went to check out the mat.

Dave and Mindy were both very impressed by the quality the work. The building, inside, at least, was completely different and felt comfortable and clean. The accommodation consisted of three bedrooms; two twins and a double. Theirs was the double and had a bathroom; the other two rooms would have to share a bathroom. The kitchen was large enough for a table that could comfortably seat six. Downstairs, they had a briefing room with comfortable couches and a large screen TV. There were also a pair of computers for general use, plus a desk with a computer that was set up for the GPS system on the comms equipment. The armoury was the best bit. It had a reinforced steel door with a code lock. Inside, the walls were set up in much the same way as the Safehouses, back in New York. The next problem was that they needed to move some of the weapons and equipment into the Safehouse, from the house, and that would also include their combat suits.

They would do that, later in that day when Chloe arrived.

..._...

After lunch, Dave arrived back at the Safehouse with Chloe, having gone home to pick up some weapons and equipment as well as Chloe.

He drove straight inside the Safehouse and closed the door, remotely, behind him.

"Love the hair, Mindy," Chloe said, and she smirked cheekily.

"Dave's little joke," Mindy replied, and she smiled sweetly. "Don't worry, I got my own back."

"Yeah, the limp will go away by Easter," Dave quipped. "I hope."

They proceeded to move the weapons and combat suits which Dave had brought from the house into the armoury. It took a while to arrange things to Mindy's picky satisfaction, but she was finally satisfied when the fourteen Katana Blades all went up on one wall. Dave showed Chloe around the Safehouse and he also gave her the relevant codes, to de-activate the complex security system and open the door to the armoury, insisting that she memorise them perfectly. Chloe picked out one of the bedrooms as her own. That meant Marty would sleep in the other room, between Chloe's room and the suite which Dave and Mindy would use.

Chloe wanted to know what was covered up, over by the wall.

"Go take a look," Mindy suggested.

Chloe gently eased back the cover on the Ducati. She got halfway before she dropped the cover and squealed.

"Oh my God! It is a Ducati Panigale . . . in purple . . . I love it!" Chloe said before she squealed again.

"You like it?" Mindy asked, and she smiled at Chloe's excitement.

"When did you get it?" Chloe asked, excitedly.

"Had it almost two years," Mindy replied.

"It's fucking cool!" Chloe exclaimed.

"Wait till you see what's in the crate," Dave said.

Together, they removed the top of the wooden crate and the inside cover, revealing the Harley-Davidson Fat Boy, in black.

"Fuck me!" Chloe exclaimed.

Dave and Mindy both looked at Chloe, curiously.

"Sorry!" Chloe apologised, and she blushed furiously.

"So, you like bikes?" Mindy asked unnecessarily.

"Yeah!" Chloe confirmed with barely concealed enthusiasm.

The rest of the afternoon was spent checking out Dave's new bike, including removing it from its pallet and starting it up. The engine sound was glorious and even Mindy was excited and Chloe positively drooled. As for Dave, he looked like a kid at Christmas. Mindy insisted that he put on his combat suit, so that they could see him on the bike properly.

Dave did as directed and Kick-Ass looked 'fucking cool' - Chloe's words – on the Fat Boy.

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 28*: Spring Vacation**

Author's Note: *I have been asked why I used red and purple paint, in the last chapter. Purple should be obvious as Mindy is Hit Girl. Red is because Hit Girl has a thing about blood. Also, if people ask questions in a review, it would be nice if they register, then I can reply. I am always happy to reply to questions about my stories as I know that I may not always explain things properly, or that I may leave gaps.*

I must also thank 'adm-frb' for his continued feedback and ideas, which help considerably with improving my story writing and content.

One week later
Saturday, April 12th, 2014

It was Chloe's turn to be over the moon.

It was the start of Spring Vacation and Chloe had somebody that she wanted everybody to meet. She was very cryptic, and sounded a bit shy over the phone, but she said that she would be coming over on the Saturday morning. She also mentioned that she had a 'little problem' which would be coming with her too. For security, they also agreed that Mindy would be Chloe's Aikido/Taekwondo instructor which would be good cover for Chloe spending time at the house. Mindy was looking forward to the next Friday as Marcus was coming up for Easter. She really wanted to show him the new Safehouse that he had helped them to obtain. Dave also wanted to thank Marcus, personally, for the Fat Boy. Mindy could not wait for Dave to be ready to go out on his Harley, so she could go out with him on her Ducati. They would be able to patrol larger areas and Chloe could ride on either bike. Which reminded Mindy; she would need to find a helmet for her.

..._...

Just after ten in the morning, there was a knock on the front door.

Mindy pulled the door open and on the step outside, was Chloe, looking very shy and standing beside her was a boy. Mindy invited them both in.

"Dave, Mindy. This is Kyle, Kyle Andrews," Chloe said, introducing the boy and her cheeks went a little red.

"Hi, Kyle," Dave and Mindy replied.

Mindy led them both into the living room, where Dave and Mindy sat on one couch while Chloe and Kyle took the other couch. Mindy looked questioningly at Chloe.

"Okay, Kyle is my boyfriend!" Chloe admitted, and her cheeks went very red.

Kyle was an inch or two taller than Chloe, but otherwise he was slim with brown hair and brown eyes. He looked to be athletic and currently a little shy.

"What's the other problem?" Mindy asked.

"Back in a minute," Chloe said, somewhat reluctantly and she got up and headed back outside.

She was back within a minute.

"Here is my little problem," Chloe said.

The 'little problem', was about four and a half foot tall and must have been about ten-years-old.

"Hi, I'm Curtis," the boy said with a not so sweet smile.

"This little brat is my cousin and I'm stuck with him for the holidays," Chloe explained, and she looked thoroughly disgusted with the fact.

"I'm a little angel," Curtis insisted.

"You make people want to drink acid," Chloe retorted as she sat back down, next to Kyle. Curtis perched on the arm

of the couch, beside Chloe.

"Hello, Curtis. I'm Mindy and this is Dave," I said.

"Hi," Curtis replied politely.

He sounded nice enough, but I was very sure that he could be annoying when he wanted to be.

"I want to see Chloe fight," Curtis said suddenly.

"That could be fun to watch," Agreed Kyle.

"I'd take a piece of that action," Dave added, and he smiled at Chloe.

Chloe scowled at Curtis for a moment before she then looked at Mindy.

Mindy just shrugged and nodded.

..._...

Chloe was unhappy.

"I really hate that little shit!" she thought out loud. "He always winds me up; I just wish I could kick the shit right outta him!"

Chloe explained to Mindy while they were changing, that her Dad was home for the holidays and that her Uncle was over with his wife and Curtis for the week. It was to be the first time, that Mindy and Chloe had sparred. At least since she had broken two of her ribs. Chloe must have looked a bit awkward because Mindy looked directly at her friend.

"I'll go easy on you!" Mindy said, with an evil smirk.

"Thanks," Chloe replied sarcastically, and she began feel a little bit anxious.

..._...

As Mindy and Chloe came down the stairs into the lower ground floor, they could see Dave, Kyle, and Curtis sitting at the side of the mat. Dave seemed to be enjoying himself and Chloe could see that Kyle was too. Both of them appeared to like the idea of watching girls fight. Chloe and Mindy were both wearing their normal aikidogi; Mindy wore black and Chloe wore white. They both squared up to each other on the mat. Chloe was determined *not* to make things easy for Mindy; she had a reputation to uphold.

"Okay, bring it on!" she challenged Mindy.

Mindy dived forward and before Chloe knew it, she was on her back looking upwards while Mindy grinned down at her. Chloe promptly kicked the side of Mindy's left knee and brought her down onto her other knee. She then wrapped a leg around her neck and brought her down hard. For some reason or other, Mindy did not appear to like that, and she forced her way back up, throwing Chloe most of the way across the mat. Chloe landed on her ass and apart from the humiliation, it hurt. She got up quickly and moved towards Mindy before she lashed out with a spinning hook kick and caught Mindy's left shoulder which sent *her* spinning across the mat and onto *her* ass. Chloe smirked down at her mentor and she could see the fire building in her mentor's eyes. Maybe that was *not* such a good idea.

Suddenly, without warning, Dave threw Chloe a three-foot training Jō which she caught and readied myself for Mindy's next attack. The attack came almost immediately, as Mindy jumped up and attempted a flying armbar which almost worked, but Chloe was able to make good use of the Jō, to alter Mindy's attack vector so she still brought Chloe down, just not as hard as it could have been. Chloe did not hesitate, and she immediately got up and attacked with the Jō which Mindy avoided by using her incredible speed and flexibility. Then Dave threw Mindy another three-foot training Jō, to even the odds.

Chloe barely gave Mindy time to ready her Jō, before she attacked. The sound of wood, against wood, continued for a few minutes before Chloe started to tire. Then Mindy made a tiny, tiny error and that error allowed her protégé to trip her up with her Jō. Chloe sent Mindy crashing to the mat with a yelp of pain. Before either of them could attack again, Dave jumped in between them.

"Good fight, girls! Let's call it a draw," Dave said quickly, as he smiled at the two agitated females.

"Thanks, Mindy," Chloe said, and she pulled Mindy back to her feet.

"Good fight, Chloe," Dave commented.

"Whose side are *you* on, anyway?" Mindy accused Dave, who just shrugged.

It seemed that both Kyle and Curtis had enjoyed the fight.

Curtis had a stupid grin on his face as usual.

..._...

"That was cool, Chloe!" Curtis admitted.

"Not bad," Kyle said, and he gave Chloe a quick kiss which made Chloe blush and Curtis pretend to throw up.

Dave took Kyle and Curtis back upstairs to the living room while the girls went to their bedrooms to get themselves changed. He grabbed Cokes for everyone from the kitchen.

"I assume you go to the same school as Chloe?" Dave asked Kyle.

"I do, we're in the same year," Kyle replied.

"Thirteen?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm about two weeks older than Chloe," Kyle replied, and he seemed to be getting nervous.

"You into the Martial Arts?" Dave asked Kyle.

"A little, I've tried a few things, but never really got into it. I wish I was as good as Chloe," Kyle admitted.

"She *is* good," Dave confirmed.

"Chloe said that Mindy is her Aikido and Taekwondo instructor. Could Mindy train me?" Kyle asked.

"Can she train me, too?" Curtis asked, chipping in.

"I'll have to ask her; I'll let you know," Dave replied, to both of them.

Maybe, Mindy had an alternative career as a Martial Arts instructor.

..._...

Chloe, Kyle, and Curtis left around two that afternoon. Once they had gone, Dave mentioned to Mindy what Kyle and Curtis had asked.

"You think I should train Kyle and that little brat?" Mindy asked.

"You trained me, you could train anybody," Dave replied, grinning at Mindy.

"Well, that's true," Mindy confirmed, with a sly grin in return.

"You could make some *legal* cash, on the side," Dave suggested.

"Maybe, I'll try them with an introductory lesson. But *only* if Chloe agrees," Mindy replied.

The next day
Sunday, April 13th

West Ridge

Chloe was back on Sunday morning.

This time with her Dad.

That in itself was not a surprise as Chloe had let Dave and Mindy know the night before. Apparently, when her Dad had heard that Chloe was being taught advanced Aikido and Taekwondo, he had wanted to check out her teacher. That seemed perfectly acceptable, so Mindy had agreed.

"Dad, this is Mindy. Mindy, meet my Dad; Commander Ryan Bennett," Chloe said.

"Commander," Mindy said, shaking his offered hand.

"Hi, Mindy. I just wanted to meet you and see how good you were. Curtis says you're awesome and Chloe has only good things to say," Commander Bennett replied.

"You fight, Commander?" Mindy challenged.

She saw Chloe nod.

"I do," Commander Bennett replied, and he removed his jacket. He was wearing a T-shirt and jogging pants.

"Let's go, Commander!" Mindy suggested, and she led him downstairs.

..._...

"Commander, this is Dave, my partner. Dave, Commander Bennett," Mindy said.

"Good to meet you, Commander," Dave replied.

"You too," Commander Bennett said in reply.

The Commander kicked off his training shoes and squared up to Mindy on the mat. She was barefoot, wearing jogging pants and a T-shirt. The Commander was a complete unknown. Mindy had no idea of his skills or experience. Should she let him win? Should she kick his ass? Should she hurt him? Oh well, he wanted to see how good Mindy was? His mistake.

"Ladies first," Command Bennett offered.

Mindy sized up the Commander; naturally, he was not scared; not of a little girl like Mindy. But then he did not know what really lived inside the teenage girl. Mindy faked a roundhouse kick, before striking with a spinning hook kick. The Commander was successfully faked out; avoiding the first kick before the second kick caught him on the left shoulder and sent the Commander crashing to the mat with a yell of pain. Chloe actually cheered which earned her a glare from her father which Chloe seemed to ignore. The Commander regained his feet and he nodded approvingly before moving in for an attack. He came at Mindy with a feint, followed by a combined roundhouse kick and back kick, which Mindy correctly identified, and she was able to dodge the initial kick, but she was caught by the back kick, but only just, as she flipped away. Mindy still landed on the mat hard though. That time, Dave cheered, but Mindy did not waste her time glaring at him as she knew that he would have just ignored her anyway.

They squared off again, and then it was Mindy's turn to attack. She started with a push kick, immediately followed by a double roundhouse kick. Then, before the Commander could recover from those strikes, Mindy executed a roundhouse kick, followed by a back kick, which sent the Commander down onto the mat, very hard, together with a spray of blood from the Commander's nose. Mindy immediately followed up and she pinned the Commander on his front, holding his right arm up vertically behind him, causing the Commander some pain.

..._...

"Good enough, Commander!" Mindy hissed into the man's ear as she let go of his arm and stepped back.

Chloe was jumping up and down, excitedly, overjoyed that Mindy had won.

"You *are* damn good, young lady," Commander Bennett confirmed as he got up, rather painfully.

"Thank you, Commander," Mindy replied, and she smiled.

"Thanks for the support, daughter," Commander Bennett said to Chloe, who ignored her father and ran over to hug Mindy.

"So, can she train me?" Chloe asked, walking up to her father and handing him a towel. "Mindy good enough for me,

Daddy?"

"Yeah, yeah. If Mindy wants to put up with a little teenaged brat, then good luck to her," Commander Bennett said with a laugh.

"I can handle jumped up teenagers!" Mindy said, and she shook the Commander's outstretched hand. "Good fight, Commander."

"A hundred bucks a month and I hope she learns some new skills!" Commander Bennett replied.

"Oh, she will learn *lots* of new skills," Mindy advised the Commander with a smirk. Well, Chloe had already learnt to shoot, that was a new skill.

It seemed that Mindy had passed that little test.

..._...

If the Commander only knew that his daughter was running around the streets at night, wearing body armour and fighting crime as a vigilante.

If the Commander only knew that his daughter had recently been shot. Not to mention that she had then successfully taken down two armed attackers, single-handed.

If the Commander only knew that *Hit Girl* was training his daughter.

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 29*: Hit and Run**

***The following morning
Monday, April 14th, 2014***

West Ridge

"You enjoyed that fight with Chloe's Dad, didn't you?" Dave asked.

"It was fun; fighting an unknown, like him. I was not sure if he let me win or not. Maybe he just didn't want to hurt a little girl," Mindy replied.

"You are *not* a little girl," Dave stated. "You're Hit Girl."

"I know," Mindy said, cuddling into Dave.

"You going out tonight?" Dave asked.

"I am, with Chloe. Her motorcycle helmet should come this morning; they promised," Mindy replied.

"What about your new apprentices?" Dave asked, smirking.

"Well, Chloe sees it as a good opportunity to hurt Curtis without getting into trouble. They are all coming over in a couple of hours," Mindy said, grimacing.

"You'll be fine, you always are." Dave offered encouragingly.

A couple of hours later

Ten o'clock came with a knock on the door.

On opening the door, Mindy found Chloe, Kyle and Curtis. She invited them in and told them to head down to the basement. Both Kyle and Curtis had come dressed for Taekwondo, wearing T-shirts and jogging pants. By the time Mindy was ready, they had taken off their shoes, ready to start, and they were both standing in the middle of the mat. Chloe stood beside Mindy; both wore an aikidogi.

"Okay guys, this is not the 'Karate Kid' and you won't become a black belt by washing cars," Mindy began.

"Karate Kid?" Curtis asked.

"Google it, kid!" Mindy replied, sharply.

"Sorry!" Curtis mumbled.

"I am not going to turn you two into vigilantes. What I *am* going to teach you, are skills that are to be used for *self-defence only*, never as an offensive weapon," Mindy said, seriously.

Mindy glanced over at Chloe who was smirking. Mindy glared at her, until she wiped the smirk off her face.

"Just so you are both clear and to give you both a chance to back out. You *will* get hurt. If either of you can't take a little pain, then now is the time to leave," Mindy advised the two boys, but she could not resist smirking.

To their credit, neither of the two boys said anything. Therefore, they spent the next half-hour, or so, on warm-up exercises. Next, Mindy showed them the basic stances and demonstrated, using Chloe, how the stances helped to maintain balance and generate power for kicks and strikes. Initially, just the ready, walking, and back stances. Then she let them experiment with punches, primarily the Jab. Mindy demonstrated some punches on Chloe, much to Curtis' amusement. Then, Mindy used Curtis to demonstrate some further kicks which she applied to him, very gently of course. Chloe had wanted to do that, but Mindy had correctly decided that she might break the little kid's ribs or kick him all the way across the room. Mindy then explained about the basic blocks and she had Chloe demonstrate a few of those.

By noon, the class had finished for the day.

"You two enjoy that?" Mindy asked.

"Yes; it was way cool," Curtis replied, excitedly.

"Not bad, thanks, Mindy," Kyle said, smiling.

"You both did well. Keep practising what I have shown you and you *will* get better. Most of this is learning by rote and repeating what you have learnt. Want to try again on Wednesday morning?" Mindy asked.

"Okay," Both boys replied enthusiastically.

That same evening

The Safehouse

"You staying in?" Mindy asked as she pulled on her combat suit.

"Yeah, got some things to do. Chloe like her new helmet?" Dave asked, changing the subject.

"She loves it," said Shadow from the door.

Dave turned to look. Chloe was in her combat suit, but wearing her new motorcycle helmet. The helmet was black with dark blue highlights. It was full face with an internal sun visor.

"That looks really good on you, Shadow," Dave confirmed.

"I agree," Mindy confirmed.

"Thanks, Mindy," Shadow grinned from behind her visor.

..._...

It was dark outside so, as the triggered the main door, the interior lights for the open area turned off. No exterior lights were currently lit. The door opened just four feet and then stopped as did the gate to the compound. With a shallow roar, the Ducati shot out onto the street, the main door and compound gate closing automatically behind the departing motorcycle.

Hit Girl and Shadow cruised through the dark streets, ignoring the attention which they drew.

They were out looking for trouble – not to cause trouble, but to prevent it. Shadow was holding on tight behind Hit Girl and keeping a good look out. Her Jō was secured across her back. Hit Girl had been winding her motorcycle through streets and alleys for an hour and both were hungry. It was almost nine-thirty, so Hit Girl pulled into a McDonald's Drive-Thru, on Archer Avenue, and ordered two coffees from the startled server. They parked up in an alley, removed their helmets and sipped the coffees.

"What the fuck?" Shadow blurted out after a few minutes.

"What did you see?" Hit Girl asked urgently.

"I could have sworn it was Kick-Ass," Shadow said.

"Here? We're over five miles from the Safehouse," Hit Girl replied, dubiously.

"I swear he was standing over there, leaning against that lamp post," Shadow insisted.

"Drink up and let's move on," Hit Girl replied, laughing.

Shadow must be seeing things.

..._...

The man was running down the dark alley.

He could hear the two police officers, not far behind, and they were both yelling for him to stop. The end of the alley was only tens of feet away and once out of the alley, he could vanish, and the police would not be able to find him, at least not that night. The man kept running. Suddenly the man heard the screech of brakes and tyres. He looked up and he saw a purple motorcycle, stopped, at the end of the alley, but what was more worrying, were the apparitions sitting *on* the motorcycle. The apparition in front had its right arm extended towards the man, at the end of the arm was a gloved hand, and in the gloved hand was an automatic pistol with purple grips.

"Stand still!" the apparition growled.

It was an order, not a suggestion, so the man did as he was told, raising his hands to his sides. He could hear the police officers getting closer behind him. Less than two minutes later, when the police officers were only feet away, the apparition nodded, holstered the pistol, and accelerated away.

..._...

"That was cool!" Shadow exclaimed over the discrete comms channel, that only the two girls were using; the circuit was voice activated.

"It was, wasn't it? Fuck . . ." Hit Girl shouted, slamming on the brakes and skidding the Ducati to a halt.

Hit Girl immediately looked behind her, but she could not make out what had first drawn her attention.

"What was that about, Hit Girl?" Shadow asked.

"I'm sorry I didn't believe you earlier, Shadow. I could swear that I just saw that green asshole," Hit Girl exclaimed.

"You sure? We're even further from the Safehouse now," Shadow commented.

"I smell a rat. That green asshole is up to something," Hit Girl growled.

Dave was having trouble keeping a straight face.

It was so cool; Mindy would kill him, but what the hell. He saw the Ducati roar past him and then skid to a stop. Hit Girl turned, and she looked directly at where he was standing less than a second after he had ducked into an alley, the moment he had seen the motorcycle's brake light illuminate. He watched as Hit Girl and Shadow accelerated away, down the street. 'Mindy must be so pissed,' he thought.

She was not stupid, and she must have been on to him by that point, so Kick-Ass needed to up his game.

'What was my man playing at?' Hit Girl thought.

How was he appearing all over Chicago? Was he out on his Harley? That was the only possible explanation, but the motorcycle was not ready, not yet. They rode around for another forty minutes before Shadow complained that she was hungry.

"Shadow, there's a McDonald's not far from here. South Lake Park Avenue, I think. We can get a burger there," Hit Girl offered, turning right, down another alley.

They were diverted, assisting a lady that had been mugged. They had been able to call the police for her, but the assailant was long gone. It was almost another twenty minutes before Hit Girl turned the Ducati into the almost empty McDonald's Drive-Thru. They were both hungry, so she ordered a Quarter Pounder with Cheese, plus a coke, each. She paid and then pulled up at the window to pick-up the order.

"Thank you for your order, please come again!" The server growled, passing out a bag.

Growled? Oh, fuck! Hit Girl looked up and she saw . . .

"You fucking green asshole," she growled dangerously.

"Gotcha!" said a grinning Kick-Ass, leaning out of the Drive-Thru window.

Behind him were two grinning McDonald's employees.

..._...

Kick-Ass joined the two girls in the parking lot; he had his own burger and coke, too.

"How the fuck, did you arrange tonight?" Hit Girl demanded, swallowing a bite of Quarter Pounder.

Shadow leaned in, eager to hear the answer.

"Simple, I used this," Kick-Ass said, holding up his cell which showed a map, on which were three, red dots, all sitting at a McDonald's, in southeast Chicago.

"Fucking Marty! The radios . . . you were listening in . . . you cunt!" Hit Girl exclaimed, as realisation finally dawned.

"Well done! But, how did you get around?" Shadow asked, sounding annoyed.

Kick-Ass waved at a cab, parked just a few yards away – the driver waved back.

"A fucking cab! Sometimes I *really* underestimate you!" Hit Girl offered admiringly.

"Time for me to go; the meter must be in the thousands by now. See you back at Headquarters, Hit Girl, and Shadow!" Kick-Ass said, pompously.

Hit Girl had to laugh. It had been a great night out, to that point. They finished their Quarter Pounders and Cokes, before accelerating away. The girls patrolled around for another hour, working their way back towards the Safehouse. As they approached the Safehouse, they checked out the area; nobody was about. Hit Girl clicked the button on a transmitter, attached to her belt. The compound gate opened four feet, followed almost immediately by the main door of the Safehouse.

The Safehouse

The lights went out and Dave watched as the Ducati with Hit Girl and Shadow entered the Safehouse.

The main door closed immediately, and the lights came back on. Both girls looked tired as Hit Girl parked the motorcycle, turned off the engine and the girls dismounted, stretched their legs and removed their helmets which went into a locker beside the two motorcycles. Both girls removed their masks and comms as they headed towards me.

"Hi, girls. Good night, out? Anything exciting happen?" Dave asked, innocently; he had discarded his combat suit much earlier.

"Yeah! We bumped into this green asshole, moonlighting in a McDonald's!" Mindy growled before she gave Dave a kiss.

"It was a very memorable evening," Chloe confirmed, smiling.

They all headed upstairs, where Chloe went straight to bed.

"You were very good, Ass-Kick. Very good indeed," Mindy said as they slipped under the duvet.

"Thank you, gorgeous," Dave replied.

The following morning Tuesday, April 15th

The Safehouse

They woke up late in the morning as they were all very tired.

Dave had to laugh when he saw the two girls appear as they both looked exhausted and very bedraggled . . . definitely a bad hair day, he thought.

"Don't say a fucking word, asshole!" Mindy growled.

"I second that," Chloe growled.

Oh, fuck! Something clicked in Dave's horrified mind.

"Not both of you? Please, not at the same time," Dave asked, feeling distinctly concerned with his health.

"If it makes you feel any happier, then yes, both of us," Mindy growled, dangerously.

Chloe blushed a little.

"I think I will go find something useful to do, somewhere safer," Dave suggested, leaving the kitchen rapidly.

..._...

Dave generally avoided the two girls, all morning.

Eventually, it was time to get Chloe back over to Abby's, where she had supposedly spent the night. Mindy and Dave then headed home where they chatted about the previous night and Mindy was actually quite pleased that the hi-tech kit which Marty had provided, actually worked.

Thankfully, Dave thought, she did not batter him senseless, despite his having played a joke on her and Chloe.

The next day
Wednesday, April 16th

West Ridge

Chloe, Kyle, and Curtis arrived around ten, as agreed.

Although, it appeared that Curtis was *not* happy. He sported a very nice bruise on his left cheek and he was glaring at Chloe, who just looked a little annoyed. A slightly embarrassed Kyle admitted that Chloe had smacked Curtis when Curtis had commented on her grumpiness and then hinted at Chloe being on her period. Mindy decided to be nasty, so, after they had spent some time on warm-up exercises, she suggested that they should separate into pairs. Mindy selected Kyle which allowed Chloe to partner with Curtis. Naturally, Curtis was not very amused.

Chloe and Mindy spent the next hour instructing their partners on some basic blocks and kicks. Chloe enjoyed this as Curtis spent a lot of the time on his back. Mindy was a little nicer to Kyle as he had not annoyed anybody yet and he seemed to be very aware of why Chloe and Mindy were both grumpy, so, he kept his mouth shut. 'Clever kid,' Mindy thought. By the end of the morning, Curtis was thoroughly pissed off and Kyle was actually doing very well. Kyle had potential; he was a fast learner and he only needed to be shown a movement or stance, a few times before he grasped it. Kyle asked if I would train him; he wanted to continue and learn Taekwondo.

Mindy suggested that he check with his parents first, but if that was what he wanted, *and* his parents were okay with it, *then* she would train him, for a few hours, each week.

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 30*: Easter**

Two days later
Friday, April 18th, 2014

West Ridge

"For fucks sake, Mindy!" Dave implored, for the twentieth time. "Will you calm the fuck down?"

"I can't; I'm too excited!" Mindy exclaimed with an enormous grin on her face.

"Look, Marcus will get here when he gets here and not before," Dave tried.

Mindy had been jumping up to look out of the window for over an hour and it was getting more than a little annoying. Marcus was not actually due to arrive for another half an hour, but Mindy . . . well, she was Mindy. Originally, Marcus was going to fly, but he had called on Thursday to say that he was driving up with a surprise for Mindy. Marcus had refused to elaborate, so Dave was as much in the dark as Mindy. He knew for a fact, that Marcus let slip about the surprise because he knew that Mindy would then behave as though she had ants in her panties.

Marcus liked his little jokes.

..._...

About forty minutes later, Mindy squealed and jumped.

She then threw open the front door and ambushed Marcus as he was about to knock.

"Your fault Marcus; you did wind her up," Dave called out quite reasonably.

"Yeah, good point!" Marcus agreed, grimacing as he staggered in almost carrying Mindy. "Well, I think she's happy to see me."

"It's good to see you, Marcus," Dave said, shaking the outstretched hand and smirking. "Mindy, get down off Marcus."

"Sorry!" Mindy replied, blushing.

"Here, read this," Marcus said, handing me a newspaper article.

I read the article with Mindy peering over my arm. The article concerned the death of one Lieutenant Gigante, in New York, two weeks previously. It detailed how Gigante had been a dirty Cop for many years with links to various members of the D'Amico family.

"That bastard became corrupt when your Father refused D'Amico's offer and he was framed. Gigante deserved to die; we believe he upset Ralph D'Amico and was killed on his orders," Marcus explained. "But his death brought great joy."

We both looked at Marcus, a little confused!

Marcus reached up, removed his NYPD badge from around his neck, and he threw it at Mindy.

..._...

It took Mindy a few seconds to realise that something was different; she had seen Marcus' badge loads of times, but the badge in her hand was very different.

"Fuck me! *Lieutenant!*" she yelled, and she hugged Marcus.

"Whoa! Congratulations, Marcus," Dave said.

"Thanks! The Captain was *very* pleased when Gigante died; he knew Gigante was dirty, but there had never been enough evidence. I took the Lieutenant Exam months ago and was just waiting for a slot. Gigante made that slot available," Marcus explained happily.

"That is so cool!" Mindy exclaimed.

"I'll be back in a moment, need to get *something* from the car," Marcus said rather cryptically.

"*Lieutenant*, now *that* is cool," Dave agreed.

Marcus was back in a couple of minutes. Mindy froze, staring down to the right of Marcus. Dave stared, too.

It was a dog.

..._...

The dog, a very beautiful looking German Shepherd, was looking up at Dave with a somewhat curious expression.

His mind went back a few months, to the previous summer. He suddenly had the glorious picture of Chris D'Amico, with a dog on his balls. Dave envisioned the German Shepherd with a mask and he thought back for a minute before the name jumped into his head.

Tentatively, Dave knelt down and he looked directly into the dog's eyes.

"Sophia?" he asked cautiously.

The dog barked, bounded towards Dave and then started licking his face.

"Good to see you, girl!" he said, stroking her happily.

"You know her name?" Marcus asked, curiously.

"We've already met; Sophia is a Super Hero – otherwise known as Eisenhower," Dave explained, and he received another bark as soon as he mentioned her Super Hero identity.

"Oh, for fuck's sake!" Marcus groaned. "Dogs are Super Heroes now?"

"This dog is special," Dave explained. "Eisenhower is a highly skilled crime fighter, who attacks with just a single word."

"This wouldn't happen to be the mutt who likes chomping on dick?" Mindy asked, with an evil smirk.

"Just like you do," Dave whispered to Mindy, causing her eyes to bug out and her to blush deeply.

Marcus scowled - he must have heard Dave's comment.

"Where did you find her?" I asked, changing the subject, quickly.

"She was handed in, several weeks ago. Nobody wanted her, so she was due to be destroyed. I thought Mindy might like her," Marcus said.

"Well, they're both bitches," Dave agreed, moving away from Mindy very fast.

"I'll give you that one, asshole," Mindy said, pleasantly, which rather surprised Dave.

"Mindy/Hit Girl – meet Sophia/Eisenhower," Dave said, patting Sophia.

Mindy actually looked nervous and she was biting her lip as she knelt down. Sophia looked Mindy up and down and sniffed Mindy's outstretched hand, before she wagged her tail, barked twice, then looked up at Dave as if to say, '*She'll do*'. Sophia allowed Mindy to pat her and give her a brief hug. Mindy got a big sloppy 'kiss' in return and she started giggling.

"Thanks, Marcus," Mindy called out from the floor.

"Another Hero, for the *Fucked Up Super Hero Club*," Marcus exclaimed, putting his head in his hands.

After a late lunch, they took Marcus to see the Safehouse.

"Wow! It's a totally different place," Marcus exclaimed once they were inside.

Mindy gave him a guided tour of the entire building, including the armoury. Sophia enjoyed the tour, too, and she made herself at home on one of the couches downstairs. Dave had a feeling that they would need a larger vehicle, than *Speedy*, as they now had three people and a dog to transport. Dave had asked Chloe to meet them at the Safehouse and she arrived during the afternoon.

"Marcus, you remember Chloe?" Mindy asked.

"I do," Marcus said, smiling. "Hello, young lady."

"Hi, Mr Williams," Chloe replied, smiling sweetly.

..._...

Dave and Chloe had spent several hours over the previous week spraying the Harley-Davidson Fat Boy.

They had refused to let Mindy see what they were doing, and Dave had insisted that Mindy wait for the grand unveiling; which was that afternoon. While Marcus and Mindy watched, Chloe and Dave pulled off the motorcycle's cover. Chloe looked very excited; Dave just had his usual dorky grin. What had originally been, a jet-black motorcycle, had changed completely.

The front and rear mudguards were 'Kick-Ass' green on the top, with half-inch wide, 'Kick-Ass' yellow stripes, curving around the vertical surfaces which were black. The teardrop shapes, on the sides of the fuel tank, were now 'Kick-Ass' green, along with a 'Kick-Ass' yellow outline. The licence plate, above the tail light, read '**KICK**', and when you saw the Fat Boy, side by side with the Panigale, the two plates read, '**KICK HIT N RUN**'!

The paint finish was perfect and looked fucking cool. Dave was in his combat suit and once he was astride the Fat Boy, Mindy could only think of one thing to say.

"Fuck! You Kick-Ass!" she exclaimed.

Not original, she knew.

"It really does suit you, Kick-Ass," Marcus said, with an enormous smile.

"It is very nice," Kick-Ass confirmed. "Thanks for your help, Chloe!"

"It was my pleasure, Kick-Ass," Chloe said, giggling with excitement.

..._...

After the tour, everybody headed back home to put their feet up, dropping Chloe off at home on the way. Marcus was very tired after his long drive, so he was looking forward to the rest. Sophia curled up, happily, on a couch and she soon fell asleep. Marcus had brought some dog food with him and a pair of enormous bowls, one of which was filled with water and was left in the kitchen.

The three of them had a very late dinner and then they all went to bed. Sophia insisted on following Dave and Mindy upstairs and she fell asleep in one corner of their bedroom.

The next day
Saturday, April 19th

West Ridge

They all got up late and had a big breakfast.

Chloe, Kyle, and Curtis were coming over for their weekly training session, that afternoon. Marcus said he wanted to go and see a cop buddy, so he headed out soon after breakfast.

..._...

Around two in the afternoon there was a knock on the door. Sophia appeared from somewhere and she started barking.

"Sophia, quiet! Sit!" Mindy ordered and Sophia sat obediently, in silence.

She opened the door and invited them all in.

"Guys, this is Sophia," Mindy said, pointing at the dog. "Sophia, meet Chloe, Kyle, and Curtis," she said, pointing out each one to Sophia.

Sophia got up and checked out the kids, sniffing each of them. When she got to Curtis, she growled which drew a laugh from Chloe!

"Sophia, no eating Curtis!" Mindy ordered.

Sophia whined, and she started licking Curtis' hand.

"Be good Curtis, or you may be doggie dinner," Chloe said, laughing.

Curtis did not look happy. Chloe thought Sophia was lovely and Kyle agreed. Curtis though was a bit wary of her.

Mindy decided that it was not quite the right moment to show them Sophia's little party trick.

..._...

Curtis was just being kicked down, by Chloe, for about the tenth time when Marcus came down into the basement.

"Hi, Chloe," Marcus said.

"Hi, Mr Williams," Chloe replied.

"Hi, Marcus," Mindy said. "This is Kyle and the little brat on his back is Curtis. Chloe's boyfriend and cousin, respectively."

"Hi, Mr Williams," both boys chipped in.

"Hi, kids," Marcus replied, looking at Mindy questioningly.

"I'm being paid to train these boys in *basic* Taekwondo and Chloe in *advanced* Aikido," she explained, quickly.

"I see," Marcus replied, somewhat dubiously, before sitting down to watch.

Mindy finished the days training, forty minutes later. Curtis was a little sore but was not being put off by all the rough treatment. Kyle was progressing very well, and Mindy noticed that Chloe had difficulty keeping her eyes off the boy. The three visitors went home, leaving just Dave, Mindy, and Marcus. Dave had spent the past couple of hours shopping for food.

"The boys don't know about Chloe being Shadow?" Marcus asked.

"No, they don't!" Mindy confirmed.

***The following day
Sunday, April 20th***

It was Easter Day.

Everybody was up early, and Marcus was starting to cook. Mindy had offered to cook, but Marcus had refused, saying that he wanted to actually eat the food after it had been cooked. Mindy honestly did not have anything to say to that comment, so she just sat down and scowled at Marcus. Dave suggested that Mindy looked adorable which just annoyed the girl even more. There was an enormous ham and loads of other food to go with it. Marcus had Mindy helping to prepare the vegetables – he thought that Mindy was very good with a knife.

While the food was cooking, they chatted about recent events, including the death of Gigante and Marcus' promotion. Marcus wanted to know what Dave and Mindy had been up to with Chloe when they were out being vigilantes. Dave

took him through each night and especially enjoyed telling him about the wind up at the beginning of the week, plus the unfortunate discovery the following morning. Mindy insisted on telling *her* side of the story, too. Dave also got the opportunity to properly thank Marcus for the motorcycle.

Once the food was cooked, they sat down to an enormous meal. Even Sophia got a big chunk of ham, which she was very grateful to receive. Marcus insisted on making another speech.

"It is truly wonderful to be back here again with my family. It gets very lonely in New York. I am very happy to see that you have a life now, both of you, here in Chicago. Admittedly, not a very normal life, but hell, it could be worse," Marcus said. "Mindy could be pregnant!"

Mindy's mouth dropped open in shock and her face went bright red. Dave had to laugh and so did Marcus while Mindy just glowered at them both.

"Sorry, Mindy. I couldn't resist that last comment," Marcus apologised, not very sincerely. "Anyway. Happy Easter to us all."

"Happy Easter!" they all said, raising their glasses.

..._...

It felt really good having Marcus in Chicago and being able to sit down to a proper meal together.

It really gave Mindy a warm feeling inside. She really did miss Marcus; a lot more than she would ever admit to him. Marcus and Dave were her life, all she had, and she would never let either of them go . . . ever. After lunch, they took Sophia for a walk over to the park and Mindy enjoyed running around after the large dog. Dave kept throwing a frisbee for Sophia to fetch. He could throw it a lot further than Mindy could which typically annoyed the girl. She tried to race Sophia, once or twice, but she always lost against the very powerful animal. Marcus also seemed happy to be out with his family and Mindy was really pleased for him that he had got a promotion; it was a long time overdue. By the time they returned to the house, they were all thoroughly exhausted and they just collapsed onto the couches.

Sophia though, she just drank a gallon of water and laid down, staring at Mindy. Mindy thought that she must have dozed off as she awoke with a start and she saw that it was dark outside. Dave and Marcus were snoring and so was Sophia. Mindy looked at the time; it was two in the morning. She decided that she was not comfortable, so she kicked Dave and Marcus awake.

"Come on, you two, it is bedtime," Mindy called out, pulling Dave up the stairs.

Marcus reluctantly followed.

Author's Note: *For those who have not seen Eisenhower attack Chris D'Amico, you can view this attack on YouTube: just search for 'Eisenhower Gets It Started'. I believe this extended scene only appears in the British DVD/Blu-ray. It is a cool scene and I personally think it was better than the scene they did use.*

Updated: December 2017

***Chapter 31*: Kick, Hit and Run**

The next day

Monday, April 21st, 2014

They got up close to lunchtime.

Falling asleep in the living room, had *not* been a very good idea. After a late breakfast, they all went out to the park again, with Sophia. Unfortunately, Marcus had to leave late that afternoon. Yet again, Mindy looked thoroughly miserable and she hugged Dave tightly as Marcus drove off. Then, Mindy spent a couple of hours feeling sorry for herself on the couch with Sophia.

"Come on, gorgeous," Dave suggested. "Fancy a night out on the town?"

"Hell, yeah!" Mindy responded enthusiastically.

Later that evening

The Safehouse

Chloe would not be with them for the night as she was back at school; Chloe was okay with that as Curtis had now gone home.

They took Sophia with them down to the Safehouse, where she made herself comfortable on a couch and went to sleep. A large bowl of food and plenty of water was left for her should she wake up. Dave and Mindy both pulled on their combat suits as usual. Sophia soon woke up and she wandered over to investigate; she had a good sniff at the combat suits, but otherwise wasn't upset by them. Dave had thought that she might have reacted badly to the black combat suits. Her reaction was good as it meant that they could use Sophia as a part of *Fusion* should her participation be desired. They let Sophia have the run of the main building, but not the accommodation.

Kick-Ass climbed onto the Fat Boy and he started the engine. The sound really was magnificent, and Hit Girl quickly jumped onto the Panigale and started her own engine which sounded different: Kick-Ass' was deeper in tone. Hit Girl pushed the door remote; the lights cut out and they both accelerated through the open door.

..._...

It was wonderful, to be finally out with Kick-Ass on his Fat Boy.

They cruised side by side, down the streets of Chicago and between them, they attracted some very appreciative looks and comments. Kick-Ass not only had a new motorcycle, he also had a new mask for his combat suit.

The new mask gave Kick-Ass the option to wear an open front or a modular motorcycle helmet, at that moment a Shark Evoline 3 ST MoovUp Helmet, in black with green and yellow highlights. The new combat suit mask was identical to the original, but full face with the carbon-fibre composite armour wrapping around the back of the head, over the eyes, then down to the bridge of the nose, and around the side and bottom of the eyes, covering both cheek bones. Another piece of carbon-fibre composite armour extended from the nape of the neck, to the bridge of the nose, over the top of the head.

The eyes were protected by an integrated, tinted, shatter and scratch-proof wrap-around lens. A removable, carbon-fibre composite armour and composite-synthetic material shield, clipped onto the cheek guards and covered the nose, mouth and jaw. Once fully fitted, this mask covered all exposed skin. With the new mask, the complete combat suit covered every square inch of his body and looked even more menacing.

As Kick-Ass and Hit Girl cruised up South Western Avenue, they halted at a stop light. A Police SUV pulled up to the left of them, next to Kick-Ass. The window came down on the passenger side and an officer leaned out.

"Hey, Kick-Ass, Hit Girl! I've been wanting to talk to you two," The officer said, smiling and indicating that the two vigilantes should pull over.

..._...

Not wanting to cause any trouble, they both pulled over to the right side of the road, as requested.

"I wanted to thank you both for saving my life, back in January. Those ninjas threw a knife at me and I thought I was a gonna," The officer said: his name tag read 'Murphy'.

Hit Girl could remember that night; the fight with the six ninjas – her first six Katana prizes. She also remembered the wounded officer being dragged away by his colleagues.

"I'm very happy to see you up and about, Sergeant Murphy," Hit Girl growled back.

"I was there, too. Thanks, I might be dead if you hadn't acted," the other Officer, his name tag read 'Fellowes', said.

"Our pleasure," Hit Girl replied. "We're all on the same team!"

"You need anything . . . ever . . . you call us," Murphy said, handing Kick-Ass and Hit Girl a card each with two cell numbers written on it.

"No problem," Kick-Ass growled, pocketing his card. "Glad we could help."

"Love the wheels, Kick-Ass; really suits you," Fellowes called out as they pulled away.

..._...

"That was different!" Kick-Ass commented. "Thought we were gonna get a ticket."

"Or arrested," Hit Girl added.

They moved off and headed north, slowing down to check out alleyways and other areas where trouble might have been lurking. As they drove around, Hit Girl had the distinct impression that their reputation was spreading. Some young men who saw the two vigilantes tended to hide their faces or tried to look innocent. Some failed miserably and just ended up looking guiltier. They stopped to chat with a few groups of people and some were quite happy to point them towards trouble. The vigilante pair did manage to prevent two muggings and something else.

One, they stopped as they cruised past an alley. A brief glance had shown the mugging under way, so Hit Girl accelerated and headed to the opposite end of the alley which was on the other side of the block. The Ducati was very good for speed and Hit Girl made good use of it. Kick-Ass parked and dismounted, before blocking off his end of the alley.

"Kick-Ass, Hit-Girl. I've arrived," Hit Girl called as she parked up and dismounted at the opposite end of the alley.

"Let's move, Hit Girl," Kick-Ass replied.

They each advanced, from opposite ends of the alley. In the time it had taken for them to make their move, the mugging had moved on, and was about to become a rape. The male rapist had his pants around his knees and the woman was trying to scream through the man's hand.

"All right, you sick, twisted, fuck," Hit Girl growled, angrily.

The man flew backwards, as Kick-Ass grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. The man hit the far alley wall, a little too hard, knocking him senseless.

"You okay, ma'am," Hit Girl asked, reaching down to help the young lady stand up.

"Yes, you got here just in time. Thank you." the lady responded.

"Hit Girl. That's Kick-Ass," Hit Girl said.

"Here, ma'am," Kick-Ass said, handing the lady back her purse, before tying the man's hands and feet with plastic ties.

The cell rang.

It was an anonymous call.

"Murphy!" Murphy said, answering the call.

"Present for you . . . West 24th and South Stewart . . . gotta run!" the voice snarled, before the call disconnected.

The veteran police officer stared at the cell.

"Who was that?" Fellowes asked from the other seat.

"I think it was Kick-Ass," Murphy replied, a little unsure. "Something awaits us at West 24th and South Stewart."

"On it!" Fellowes said, switching on the lights and siren, before pulling a U-turn and heading north-east.

..._...

"Look here!" Fellowes exclaimed, eight minutes later as he pulled into the curb.

A young lady, looking a bit dishevelled, was being attended to by a paramedic. On the sidewalk beside her, was a man. The man had his pants around his knees. His hands and feet were secured with plastic ties and the man was unconscious.

"That bastard mugged me and then tried to rape me," the lady explained, as the Paramedic applied a sticking plaster to her face.

"Who?" Murphy asked.

"She said her name was Hit Girl. The other guy was called Kick-Ass. They saved my life," the lady explained further.

Fellowes got on the radio to call for a van to pick-up the pile of shit on the sidewalk.

Murphy had to smile, those two vigilantes definitely had class.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl stayed nearby, until the paramedic arrived and then moved further away.

They saw Murphy and Fellowes get out of their car and look around. 'Job done,' they thought; they had some tame Cops. Once they were happy the situation was under control, they headed to find some food which they took to a park, for a few minutes rest. They had just finished chomping on the burgers, when we heard a scream.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl spun around, and they saw a woman running across the park. The woman saw the lights of the two motorcycles and she turned to run in their direction.

"Help!" The woman screamed. "Help me!"

Three men burst out of some trees and they changed direction to pursue the woman. Kick-Ass moved forward, and the woman ran into him.

"You have nothing to fear!" he told the woman.

Kick-Ass' anger started to rise; the woman was heavily bruised on her face. Hit Girl saw the bruising, too. The men skidded to a halt a few yards away, unsure of what to do. Kick-Ass placed myself between the woman and the men. The men came closer and stopped, then one man stepped forwards.

"Give us the woman and nobody gets hurt," the man ordered.

"Go chomp on a dick, cunt!" Hit Girl growled, drawing a Katana.

"Ninja girl wants to play?" the man sneered.

"Oh, no! Ninja girl doesn't wanna play . . ." Hit Girl growled, launching herself forward.

The hilt of her Katana hit the man in the face, breaking his nose, then she spun around striking each of the other men in the face, one with the hilt of the Katana and the other with the hilt of the Tanto. Hit Girl turned around and crouched down beside the first man who was screaming through the blood of his broken nose.

"Shut up, cunt!" she snarled.

The man was suddenly quiet, shaking but quiet.

"Did you hurt that lady?" Hit Girl, growled.

The man nodded.

"Bad move! Oh, and by the way, my name is Hit Girl," Hit Girl growled, driving her fist into the man's face. "Fear the name!"

Hit Girl then attended to the woman, while Kick-Ass applied plastic ties to the three men: hands and feet.

The cell rang.

It was another anonymous call.

"Murphy!" Murphy said, answering the call.

"Taxi for three . . . West 43rd and South State . . . Gotta run!"

"You're enjoying yourself, aren't you?" Hit Girl asked Kick-Ass as he hung up the cell.

"And why not?" Kick-Ass replied, chuckling.

'That fucking motorcycle was going to his head,' Hit Girl thought.

"Let's go annoy some Cops," Kick-Ass suggested.

They waited until Murphy and Fellowes had turned up, before moving further away. They watched until Murphy and Fellowes got back into their car and drove off. It was late; after eleven thirty.

Hit Girl and Kick-Ass followed the two Sergeants until they parked up in a darkened area.

"Licence and registration!" The deep voice growled.

'What?' Murphy thought, turning to his partly open window.

"FUCKING HELL!" he yelled. "For fuck's sake, Kick-Ass; that fucking mask scared the shit outta me!" Murphy complained.

"That's the idea, Murphy," Kick-Ass growled.

Fellowes was smiling broadly, on the other side of the car.

"I thought Hit Girl was the fucking ninja," Murphy stated.

"She is," another voice growled, from beside Fellowes.

"FUCK!" Fellowes yelled, and he turned to his own partly open window.

"Hi!" Hit Girl growled, smirking.

"You trying to kill us or something?" Murphy asked.

"If we wanted to kill you. . ." Hit girl growled, letting it hang.

"Okay," Fellowes said with understanding.

"Thanks for your, err, donations; much appreciated," Murphy said, smiling.

"Thanks for helping us with them," Kick-Ass growled. "Now if you need us. . ."

"How do we get a hold of you?" Murphy asked.

"Oh shit; you had to ask," Kick-Ass muttered with his hand over his eyes.

"What?" Murphy asked, confused.

"You've been aching to use that fucking line, again," Kick-Ass chuckled, looking at Hit Girl.

"So!" Hit Girl replied with an evil smirk.

"Get it over and done with," Kick-Ass directed with some exasperation, turning away.

"You just contact the mayor's office. He has a special signal he shines in the sky; it's in the shape of a giant cock!" Hit Girl growled.

Murphy just looked at Fellowes, who looked back at Kick-Ass and he shrugged.

"Funny bitch!" Murphy chuckled.

"She is that," Kick-Ass growled, dryly. "Anyway, back to reality; Hit Girl give them the number."

"Asshole! Okay guys you dial: 555-1-FUSION. Got it?" Hit Girl growled.

"555-1-FUSION," Murphy read back.

"That number will accept voice and texts. Don't worry about tracing the number, it won't get you anywhere," Hit Girl, growled.

"Have a good night," Kick-Ass called.

They both vanished into the night, like they never were.

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 32*: Tested**

The next day

Tuesday, April 22nd, 2014

Chicago Police Headquarters

It was late afternoon.

"Hey, Jimmy! Trace this number for me: 5-5-5-1-3-8-7-4-6-6," Sergeant Murphy ordered.

A few minutes later, the officer looked up at Murphy with a confused expression.

"You two having a joke?" the officer asked, sounding annoyed.

"Why?" Murphy asked.

"I've traced the number; here's the damn address!" The officer grouched, turning his monitor, so Murphy could read the address.

Murphy laughed.

"The number traces back to that address?" Murphy asked, incredulously. "You kidding me?"

"You got it," the officer replied, smiling.

"So?" Fellowes asked, a little confused.

"The fucking number traces back to Chicago Police Headquarters!" Murphy exclaimed. "Right fucking here! The clever bastards. They're good, I'll give 'em that."

Murphy's cell beeped a minute later; it was a text message. Murphy checked the cell and he chuckled before showing the screen to Fellowes.

The message read: *NICE TRY! KA.*

Same time

West Ridge

"I told you they'd try," Mindy said rather smugly.

"I know. How the hell did Marty manage to setup and cover the number?" Dave asked.

"God knows!" Mindy replied. "Must be a geek thing."

"Don't forget Kyle and Chloe will be here in thirty minutes," Dave reminded Mindy.

"Oh, yeah! I almost forgot; Kyle's training," Mindy said. "Thanks."

Dave quickly put away the Toughbook, as it was *Fusion* equipment and not to be seen by Kyle. Marty had given us the Toughbook to connect to the computer system at the Safehouse. We could monitor the GPS, listen to the radios, and check the CCTV at the Safehouse, all from home, or anywhere else for that matter. Just that morning, they were able to be notified when somebody traced that particular phone number.

Kyle and Chloe right arrived on time and Mindy took Kyle down to the lower floor. Chloe stayed with Dave, to allow Kyle to get some good one on one time with Mindy.

..._...

Dave spent the next hour chatting with Chloe.

She wanted to see some proper action; like Dave and Mindy had had with the ninjas. Dave explained to her that she needed way more training to allow for that. Plus, Dave remembered that Chloe had never killed, and he was not sure that she would be able to cope with killing, not for the moment at least. Dave decided that he would speak to Mindy about it and see how best to prepare Chloe for that more unfortunate side of being a vigilante. It would happen at some stage and Chloe needed to be prepared.

The first time Dave had killed, it was with a fucking Gatling gun, which was amazing, but not quite the same as staring directly into somebody's eyes as you killed them. That night still haunted Dave. He and Mindy both had nightmares about their activities. Mindy did not like to talk about her nightmares, but Dave knew that she had them and he knew that she knew that he got them, too.

Chloe was such a nice girl, he did not want her to go through horrors like that.

That night Dave mentioned his worries about Chloe to Mindy.

"I was expecting that. Chloe wants more; she wants a challenge. However, she isn't ready. Killing a person, well it may destroy her," Mindy said, then she paused before continuing. "Look at me; I'm damaged goods."

"What the fuck do you mean by that?"

"Come on, Dave! You've seen me; I am *not* normal, not by *any* stretch of the imagination!"

"Okay, you're right there," Dave conceded. "But I still love you for who you are."

Mindy laughed. "I know that, dumbass!"

"Chloe is very much like you, in many ways. But I don't want her to turn into you. Now, I don't mean that in a bad way, but you've been through a lot of shit," Dave commented.

"I know, and you were there for a lot of it. You also helped me get through a lot of my shit. You said wonderful things to me, that night, in your bedroom, just when I needed you the most. Without you, I could never have an even remotely normal life." Mindy said, cuddling into her partner and turning for a kiss. "With you, I can still be Hit Girl, but you keep me controlled."

Dave could not resist Mindy, he just thought that she was wonderful, despite her abnormalities. But, at least the abnormalities were on the inside; the outside was perfect.

Dave let his hands wander over the perfect skin and Mindy screamed in delight.

Four days later
Saturday, April 26th

Finally, it was the weekend.

School had really wound Chloe up that week. There were a group of girls who just – well they thought that they were goddamn perfect – but Chloe thought that they were perfect little bitches. Anyway, she would not let them ruin her weekend.

It was time for Shadow to get out there.

..._...

After chatting with Dave on Tuesday and Thursday while Kyle was training with Mindy, Chloe thought that she had understood why Dave and Mindy were only taking her out on easy nights. Dave had tried to explain how she might feel if she killed a person. He was not all that good at explaining it, nevertheless, he had got the message across. Chloe did not really think that anybody knew how they would react to killing somebody, until it actually happened. She knew that she would only be killing in the self-defence of herself or of an innocent.

Dave had explained that Mindy had a special place in her heart for rapists and those who hurt women and children – basically those who preyed on the weak, those who could not fight back. They fought back for them. Mindy believed that those people should die, and she would kill them, without a second's hesitation. Dave had also mentioned that Mindy took great pride in providing more violent deaths for those people.

Chloe still wanted to become as accomplished as Hit Girl.

That was her dream.

..._...

Chloe turned up at the Safehouse, just after seven that evening.

She walked up to the side door and punched in the code, the door buzzed and clicked open. The girl entered the Safehouse, closing the door behind her and she noticed that all the lights were off. That was strange; Dave and Mindy should have been there, before her. She flicked the light switches, nothing happened.

'Okay, what now?' she thought.

In the limited light that was filtering through the windows from nearby street lights, she could see enough to head towards the briefing room. She made it about halfway across the mat, before she got the feeling that somebody was behind her. Chloe froze, and she felt instant fear growing inside her.

'Pull yourself together, Chloe, you can handle this!'

She spun around, delivering a back kick which connected to something solid which in turn grunted with the impact. Chloe immediately followed up with a roundhouse kick, flooring the attacker. She sensed another attacker coming up behind her and she executed a reverse spinning hook kick which caught the approaching attacker in the side of the head. The attacker went down hard with barely a sound and did *not* get back up.

The other attacker grabbed her from behind, in a bear hug. The teenager braced herself, before sliding her legs apart, lowering myself and then thrusting her arms out, breaking the attacker's hold on her. Chloe then grabbed the attacker's arm, pulling them onto her back and throwing him over her shoulder. The attacker crashed to the mat, hard. Chloe then drove her fist into their stomach, before running towards the armoury. She stopped still, the moment that she heard the sound of a pistol being cocked and she froze, completely, as she felt the cold metal of a pistol, being pressed against her right temple.

"Okay, I give up!" Chloe stammered, and she felt herself shaking from head to toe; she had never been so scared.

Suddenly, the Safehouse lights clicked on and she had to shut her eyes to protect them from the glare.

She felt the pistol being removed from her temple and she heard the weapon being de-cocked. Chloe opened her eyes slowly and as they became adjusted to the light, she saw a smiling Dave walking towards her, clapping. She looked to her right and saw a smirking Marty, holding a pistol. 'Didn't know he was back in town,' she thought to herself as she looked over onto the mat and she saw Mindy struggling to her feet, holding her head.

"Oh fuck! You fucking bastards!" Chloe yelled, relief obvious in her voice, as she then started to cry.

"Sorry Chloe, but we needed to see how you'd react to an unexpected attack. You kept saying you were ready for more," Dave explained, coming up and guiding the girl to a couch in the briefing room.

Chloe could not stop crying.

"I'm sorry Dave, I was just so scared; I didn't know what to do," she explained.

"You did just fine, kid," Mindy moaned, grimacing in pain.

"I'm so sorry, Mindy," Chloe tried, appalled.

"My fault! I should have dodged," Mindy replied, smiling, sitting down beside me and giving her friend a hug. "You actually did very well, considering."

"I thought I was dead when Marty put that gun to my head," Chloe replied. "When did he get here, anyway?"

"Last minute thing," Marty explained. "I have a place to check out on Monday."

"Okay, I'm not ready for anything big," Chloe admitted. "Thanks for pointing that out."

"Don't worry, Chloe. You'll be ready before you know it," Mindy said, smiling kindly.

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 33*: Vendetta**

One week later
Saturday, May 3rd, 2014

The Safehouse

Mindy was standing behind Marty.

In front of him was an enormous, wall-mounted, fifty-inch flat screen, showing a map of Chicago and two red dots, which were pulsing near to the I-55 and north of Archer Heights. Kick-Ass was out on patrol with Shadow, and they had both had a fun evening, to that point.

But that was all about to change.

..._...

The radio speaker jumped to life.

"Battle . . . Battle Guy, this . . . this is Shadow. Kick-Ass is gone. Kick-Ass is in trouble."

Mindy immediately grabbed a spare headset.

"Shadow, Hit Girl. What's happening?" she said, calmly; although she did not feel calm, at all.

"He's gone; I'm so scared," Shadow whimpered.

"Where has he gone?" Mindy asked.

"I . . . I . . . I . . . he was taken . . . I'm alone," Shadow was starting to panic.

"Marty, I'm gonna go get ready," Mindy said, running to the armoury.

"Shadow?" Battle Guy called.

There was no response.

"Shadow . . . Shadow!"

Marty brought up a new console window, over on his smaller computer screen. He selected Shadow's radio and remotely enabled the VOX feature. He would then be able to hear Shadow, without her having to press the PTT (push-to-talk) button. Almost immediately, Shadow could be heard over the speaker; she was sobbing. There were also disjointed words coming over the speaker.

"Shadow! Pull yourself together; Kick-Ass needs you!" Battle Guy ordered.

Sometimes, you just had to be cruel to be kind, he thought. Within a minute, Shadow had sorted herself out enough to reply.

"Sorry, Battle Guy. Kick-Ass was herded into a warehouse; he was fighting eight to ten men. Sorry. That's all I have," Shadow answered.

"Are you safe, Shadow?" Battle Guy asked, with some concern.

"Yes, Kick-Ass hid me. Before he moved down the alley and was ambushed," Shadow replied slowly.

"Stay hidden, stay out of sight. Let us know of anything you see, okay?" Battle Guy directed.

"Will do," Shadow replied.

"Well done, Marty," Mindy said. "Hit Girl is ready to go!"

"Good luck; I'll guide you," Battle Guy replied, pressing buttons and a third pulsing red dot, appeared on the map.

..._...

Hit Girl accelerated out of the Safehouse compound and turned left, before turning immediately right, and right again onto South Western Avenue, heading north. Traffic was light, so she made reasonable time. Five minutes and one and a half miles later, she made another left turn.

She was following Battle Guy's directions, as he followed her via the GPS in her radio.

A warehouse

Kick-Ass was surrounded by several men.

There was very little light, so he could not see much detail. After they had herded him into the warehouse, they had stopped fighting and spread out, covering the exit. A tall, grumpy bastard, stepped out of the shadows.

"It's time to look at your face," Grumpy Bastard sneered. "Take off your mask."

That was the point where Hit Girl usually came up with one of her witty lines, planned well in advance, for every eventuality. Kick-Ass, well, he was not so good at witty retorts.

"No," he snarled. Straight and to the point, he thought.

He could hear Battle Guy talking to Shadow, in his ear, but he could not reach his PTT to communicate with Battle Guy or Shadow. Shadow sounded like she was panicking, which was not good. Grumpy Bastard waved two of his men towards Kick-Ass. He braced up and as he sensed the men get close, he reached out with his fists, cracking each man in the face with his armoured gauntlets. Then, he reached behind his back for his Ko-Wakizashi blades, drew them and he severed the men's carotid arteries. Blood spread, quickly, around the two fallen bodies. All the men raised their pistols into a ready position, all aimed at Kick-Ass. Grumpy Bastard stood with four men, on either side of him.

"Defiant to the end, huh?" Grumpy Bastard asked.

Something twigged in Kick-Ass' mind. The idiot had given him an idea; he was using lines from a movie, not an especially good movie, but a cool movie nonetheless. Only, Kick-Ass had seen the movie, too.

"You are about to die, asshole!" Kick-Ass snarled.

"How do you imagine *that's* gonna happen?" Grumpy Bastard asked, waving his arms to either side, indicating his eight men.

"With my hands around your neck!" Kick-Ass snarled back.

Grumpy Bastard looked a little unnerved; he'd obviously worked out that I knew the movie, too.

"Bullshit!" Grumpy Bastard said, snapping his fingers and eight more men appeared.

The men spread themselves out evenly behind the existing eight men just as Kick-Ass' earpiece crackled into life again. He had heard Battle Guy calming Shadow down.

"Kick-Ass, Battle Guy, you are on VOX. Hit Girl is forty seconds out," Battle Guy reported.

"What ya gonna do, huh? You're on your own. Nothing but you, and your fucking batons and blades," Grumpy Bastard sneered. "We have guns."

Kick-Ass just had to keep the charade going, a minute longer.

..._...

"Kick-Ass, Hit Girl! Ready to move on your mark," Kick-Ass heard Hit Girl call over the comms.

Now, for the endgame, he thought.

"No, what you have are bullets and the hope that when your guns are empty, I'm no longer standing. Because if I am; you'll all be dead before you've reloaded!" Kick-Ass snarled.

"That's impossible! This isn't some fucking movie!" Grumpy Bastard shouted back. "Kill him!"

Grumpy Bastard brought up a pistol, then he and his men opened fire. Kick-Ass turned his back, dipped his head, and braced his legs. Seconds later, there was silence.

"Ready, gorgeous?" Kick-Ass hissed, over the comms as the last brass dropped to the concrete floor of the warehouse.

"Always!" he heard in reply.

Kick-Ass stood up straight and he turned towards the astonished Grumpy Bastard, feeling a lot of bruises. The pain was intense, but he was otherwise uninjured. He saw a movement behind the furthest eight men and he recognised the purple flashes on the combat suit. Kick-Ass smirked behind his mask.

"Our turn," He snarled, launching himself forward as ejected magazines started to hit the floor.

Three of the men on the rear most rank fell to Hit Girl's throwing knives. They were quickly followed by a pair of heads that rolled forward, severed by a single Katana blade. The remaining three men twisted around in panic and desperately tried to reload their pistols; two fell instantly, with Katana blades protruding from their backs. The third fell from a Tanto blade in the chest.

Hit Girl retrieved her blades, wiped them clean, and raced toward the next rank.

..._...

Kick-Ass had reached the group of men over to the left of Grumpy Bastard and sliced open the stomachs of two men, before driving my armoured elbow into the face of a third man. The fourth man turned to run, directly onto Hit Girl's extended Katana.

"You do love your entrances, Hit Girl."

The remaining four men, and Grumpy Bastard, turned towards us both. Two men had reloaded their pistols and raised them towards Hit Girl. Four shots rang out and the men dropped, their heads exploding. Kick-Ass turned to see Shadow, holding her pistol in the classic Weaver stance, two handed in front of her. He nodded his thanks at Shadow, before he and Hit Girl killed one man each with their blades. Then Kick-Ass turned back towards Grumpy Bastard, who had retreated further into the warehouse.

"Die! Die! Why won't you die!?" Grumpy Bastard shouted, firing his pistol at Kick-Ass, who shrugged off each and every round as he continued his advance.

"Why won't you die?" Grumpy Bastard whimpered, staring at the slide of his pistol, locked back on an empty magazine.

Kick-Ass caught up with Grumpy Bastard and pinned him to the wall.

"Beneath this mask, there is more than flesh. Beneath this mask there is an idea and ideas are bullet proof," he snarled, before coldly snapping the man's neck.

He turned back to Hit Girl and he felt little to no emotion; that would come later, he knew. They both stowed their blades and he smiled, but I knew Hit Girl could not see the smile.

"Kick-Ass is clear!"

"Hit Girl is clear!"

"Sha . . . Shadow is clear!"

"Battle Guy copies, *Fusion* is clear!"

..._...

"Why won't you just fucking die, you selfish fucking asshole!" A voice shouted, from the gantry above us. "You too, you fucking purple whore!"

The voice was very familiar. Hit Girl looked directly at Kick-Ass, raging anger in her eyes.

"Well, if it isn't our old pal . . . Chris D'Amico!" Kick-Ass bellowed.

Hit Girl had both of her pistols out and raised, towards the voice. Kick-Ass could see that she was seething with anger.

Shadow also had her pistol raised and aimed in the same direction.

"You gonna come down and see us?" Kick-Ass requested, angrily.

"I would, but some greasy little fucker dropped me into a fucking shark tank! The fucking shark bit my fucking dick off! I have artificial fucking arms and legs, but they don't do working dicks!" Chris ranted. "I fucking owe you Kick-Ass!"

Hit Girl actually started to chuckle, then she laughed, loudly. Kick-Ass had to admit, it sounded very funny and he started laughing too. Shadow joined in the laughter, although Kick-Ass was not sure she knew what she was laughing at as they had never told her about Chris D'Amico, Red Mist, or the Mother Fucker. Maybe they should, he mused.

"Stop fucking laughing at me, you fucking wankers!" Chris yelled.

Hit Girl stopped laughing and she emptied both of her pistols in the general direction of Chris's voice; Kick-Ass did the same with his Glock and Shadow followed suit. Once silence returned, they each reloaded their pistols. The sound of a helicopter's engines and blades, could be readily heard above them.

Chris was gone.

"You guys okay?" Battle Guy asked over the comms. "I heard that fucking creepy bastard."

"We're fine Battle Guy; *Fusion* is coming home!" Hit Girl replied.

Author's Note: *Okay, many will recognise the scene played out in this chapter and chunks of the dialogue. I think many will also identify the movie in question. Hit Girl has plenty of 'how the hell did she get out of that one, so damn easily' type scenes, such as the hallway shoot-out at the end of the first Kick-Ass movie. Now, I wanted Kick-Ass to have one of these scenes. It is time for him to show that he is a bad-ass and no longer that wimpy green asshole cringing in Rasul's apartment. It also shows that Kick-Ass does not always need Hit Girl to bail him out. Yes, Hit Girl helped in this chapter, but I hope I showed that Kick-Ass could have escaped alone, without help.*

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 34*: McKinley Park**

Later that night
Saturday, May 3rd, 2014

West Ridge

Okay, there was a problem.

They knew that it would happen eventually.

Chloe did *not* react well to killing two men. The knowledge that she had just killed two men, never actually registered in her mind till well after the event, which was actually fairly normal. They had all gone back to the Safehouse to change, before heading back home. That had also reminded them all that *Speedy* was far too small. 'Note to self,' Mindy thought. 'First thing, Monday, find an SUV.' Anyway, Marty went straight to bed, Sophia who had actually slept all evening, went back to sleep, and the rest of us went for showers.

Dave went to check on Chloe, when he and Mindy had both showered.

"Err, Mindy," Dave commented, coming back into the bedroom. "Chloe's still in the shower."

Dave and Mindy had spent forty minutes 'showering', so something was wrong with Chloe and it was then that it hit Mindy – Chloe had just killed, for the first time. She knocked on the bathroom door, but she didn't get an answer. Mindy waited a full minute before she knocked again. Nothing. She could hear the shower running, but nothing else, so she pushed open the door and found Chloe huddled in the bath, sobbing. Mindy turned off the shower and wrapped a towel around the thirteen-year-old, before helping her out of the bath and through to her bedroom. Chloe just kept staring into nothing and sobbing.

Mindy tried to get a response out of Chloe, but she got nothing.

..._...

Forty minutes later, Chloe seemed to come back to life.

"I shot those two men . . . I killed those two men . . . those two men are dead," Chloe said, quietly.

"Yes. You shot those two men. You shot them, to stop them shooting Dave and me," Mindy replied.

"I know. But, I just cannot shake the fact that I took two lives, tonight," Chloe responded.

"It won't be easy Chloe, but Dave and I will be with you, always. You need us to talk, we're there," Mindy promised.

"I'm going to have nightmares, aren't I?" Chloe asked, looking scared.

"Most probably," Mindy responded truthfully, feeling very sad. "Dave and I have them regularly; I won't lie to you about that."

"I want to be alone now," Chloe said suddenly.

"No problem. You know where we are, if you need us," I said, leaving the room.

..._...

"Well?" Dave asked as Mindy climbed into bed.

"She will have a bad night," she foretold with all honesty.

At least she had Dave to cuddle into, to help ease her own nightmares.

The following morning
Sunday, May 4th

Mindy awoke to find herself almost falling out of bed.

She turned over and found not Dave, but Chloe! Chloe had wormed herself in between her and Dave. She must have had a nightmare the previous night and she had not wanted to be alone; Mindy nudged Dave awake.

"What?" Dave moaned, tiredly, before noticing Chloe. "Whoa!"

"Must have been a nightmare," Mindy said, grimacing. "Told you she'd have a bad night!"

"Yeah, poor girl," Dave replied with a worried expression on his face.

They both got up and dressed, before Mindy poked Chloe awake.

..._...

"Okay," Chloe said, looking around. "Wrong bed!"

"I assume you had a nightmare, last night," Mindy commented.

"Yeah, sorry," Chloe said, looking a bit embarrassed.

"Don't be sorry, Chloe. We both know what you're going through; we've both been there," Mindy replied, darkly.

"Thanks, both of you," Chloe said, sliding off the bed, still looking a bit embarrassed. "Now I'm gonna go and get dressed."

"She's a strong girl; hopefully she'll cope," Dave said.

Two days later
Tuesday, May 6th

Everything was now very different.

Something that Mindy never thought would ever happen, now had. On Sunday, Marcus had called to tell us that since Gigante's death, a lot of investigations had occurred, in New York. Those investigations had included tracking down a dozen dirty cops and clearing some who were wrongly marked as dirty. That had included one Damon Macready. The Captain had publicly announced his innocence and the reinstatement of pension, back pay, and a large wad of compensation. That had naturally passed to Mindy, so the girl was now a very rich, young sixteen-year-old, according to Marcus. He also strongly suggested that she should invest the windfall in something useful that may also produce additional, legal, income for her and Dave.

By 'something useful', he specifically told Mindy *not* to go out and buy a purple battle-tank or armoured personnel carrier. Mindy was a little disgruntled by the mere suggestion: as if she would; nice idea, but *not* very subtle. Okay, she was still going out looking for an SUV with Dave, but they had had a chat that morning about investment opportunities and Dave had suggested buying an apartment block. That way, they would then have some income and they could probably use an apartment as another Safehouse. Mindy was actually rather surprised and impressed with Dave's quite logical idea, so it looked like Mindy Macready was going into property.

You had to admit, they *would* be the best protected apartment blocks in the city.

Some hours later

It had been a very busy day and they had just spent an awful lot of money.

First off, they had spent \$62,000 on an SUV. A very nice one, if Mindy did say so herself. It was a Land Rover LR4, in Scotia Blue. It had seven seats and only fifteen hundred miles on it. The important thing was that it was spacious. Mindy would pick it up on Friday afternoon.

Secondly, they had found three possible apartment blocks, in and around Chicago. One was just a mile away from the current Safehouse, with ten units. Cheap and anonymous. Another was further east, in south Chicago, with twenty-five units which were currently empty, and it would allow them to acquire a couple of units for their own use. The final one was just to the west of the centre of Chicago and could be useful merely by its location. The area

sucked a bit, but it would be very anonymous. Interestingly, Marty said he liked that one, as it was well located for the University. Anyway, they needed to put a lot of thought into what they were doing. If they bought an apartment block, or maybe two, they would need to find an agent to manage them.

That was going to be a lot of fun, Mindy thought.

***The following evening
Wednesday, May 7th***

The Safehouse

Dave and Mindy had elected to take the evening off from patrol.

Therefore, they headed down to the Safehouse and spent the evening servicing their weapons and their combat suits. Dave's combat suit had taken a lot of abuse at the weekend, from close range weapons' fire. Combined with the fact that Dave had broadened out a bit, the abuse warranted a replacement combat suit sometime in the near future. Dave had some personal suggestions for the new combat suit and, not surprisingly, so did Mindy. Marty was busy researching the history and locations for the apartment blocks which they were interested in. Marty would, of course, get a free apartment.

Mindy's cell started ringing, so she checked the display; it was a diverted call, from the number they had given to the two Sergeants.

"Speak!" she growled.

"Hit Girl! Got business for you: South Damen and West 38th, McKinley Park. Your friends are back," Murphy explained briefly. "Bring swords!"

"Twenty minutes," Mindy growled in reply, checking the clock. It was just after eight.

"We have ninjas at McKinley Park!" Mindy yelled, pulling off her clothes.

Marty started setting up his equipment for monitoring and Dave started pulling his clothes off, too. Eight minutes later, they were on their motorcycles and racing up South Western Avenue. Minutes later they turned right, onto West Pershing Road before pulling over and parking up before the South Damen Avenue junction. They could see lots of flashing blue lights across the park while between the two vigilantes and the lights, they could see. . .

Ninjas!

Over a dozen, plus watchdogs to keep the Police away. Seconds after Hit Girl and Kick-Ass had absorbed the view, the Police started engaging the watchdogs. They both ran towards the ninjas who were facing the Police. Surprise would be on their side, but only for a few seconds.

"*Fusion* is engaging!" Hit Girl called out over the comms.

"Battle Guy copies *Fusion* engaging. Luck guys, stay safe."

..._...

The two vigilantes advanced, drawing their blades. Hit Girl was able to kill two ninjas, before anybody even knew that she was even there. They both, quite literally, lost their heads in all the excitement. Another ninja fell, to Kick-Ass and his Ko-Wakizashi blades. The rest of the ninjas turned as one, to meet the new threat . . . *Fusion!*

The ninjas flew at their new attackers; at least four of the ninjas were wielding two blades. Hit Girl was instantly surrounded, and she was forced to fight several ninjas simultaneously. She felt impacts on her armour, but she was drawing blood. An arm fell to the grass, still holding a Katana, followed by the arm's previous owner, who was screaming. Hit Girl drove a blade into the stomach of a ninja while fending off the thrust from another ninja, with her other Katana. Then, as she spun around to fend off another attack, something impacted the back of her head and she felt weird . . . she started to sway.

Then everything went black.

Kick-Ass

After Kick-Ass had killed the first ninja, he got separated from Hit Girl.

Kick-Ass threw his weight against a ninja, who was wielding two Katana blades. Admittedly, his own blades were several inches shorter, but size was not everything, he thought – just look at Mindy. His extra bulk helped to even things out as he pushed back, absorbing numerous impacts to his armour. The ninja was almost eight inches shorter than Kick-Ass, but he was still able to hit the armour-clad vigilante with the hilt of his blade, across Kick-Ass' mouth.

The new face mask easily deflected the blow and allowed him to keep pushing forwards with no loss in momentum. He managed to grasp one of the blades and yank it out of the ninja's hand while holding both of his own Ko-Wakizashi with his other hand. The ninja was shocked enough to take a few steps back, giving Kick-Ass the space which he needed to grasp the Katana by the hilt and sever the man's neck in one sweep. Kick-Ass could make out Hit-Girl, about twelve feet away; she was fighting two ninjas at the same time. He saw another ninja come up behind her and strike her across the back of the head with the hilt of his Katana. Hit Girl staggered and then fell.

"No!" Kick-Ass yelled. "Hit Girl is down!"

The comms were open, so he knew that Battle Guy could hear him. So far, there were still almost a dozen ninjas remaining. He stowed one Ko-Wakizashi and drew the Glock - no more Mister Nice Guy! Kick-Ass started shooting into the ninjas; advancing on where he had last seen Hit Girl.

Murphy and Fellowes

There were still about a dozen gunmen firing, from behind the trees and SUVs.

Murphy was firing from cover, behind his car. His partner, Fellowes, was beside him. Soon after the shooting started, the ninjas had turned away and started fighting someone else.

"That must be Kick-Ass and Hit Girl – crazy idiots!" Murphy had exclaimed.

There was nothing they could do to help, thanks to the armed men who kept them pinned down. There were at least four Police Officers down, all wounded, but Murphy could see at least six of the gunmen on the ground, and none of them were moving.

One of the defending gunmen moved out of cover, so the officer aimed, and he fired, catching the gunman in the chest.

Hit Girl

Hit Girl regained consciousness.

She was lying on the ground and getting trodden on and kicked as the fight continued above and around her. She could see two black feet either side of her, then the top half of a ninja torso fell down beside her; the dead eyes still staring and that really woke her up. The feet belonged to Kick-Ass and he was guarding Hit Girl while she was unconscious.

"Let me up, cunt!" she growled over the comms.

"Enjoyed your little nap?" Kick-Ass responded.

"Not the best time for a nap, Hit Girl," Battle Guy pointed out.

"Hey, I was tired!" Hit Girl replied, getting up and retrieving her Katana swords.

She was now back-to-back with Kick-Ass. There were five ninjas remaining. Then three, then one, and the last ninja finally fell to Kick-Ass.

They charged towards the gunmen, only about nine of whom were remaining.

Murphy

He saw the last ninja fall.

Then two gunmen fell to their knees, one with a blade emerging from his chest, another when his head exploded from a gunshot, before Kick-Ass kicked the body down. The remaining gunmen stopped firing and they quickly put their hands up. They were obviously more scared of Kick-Ass and Hit Girl, than they were of the Chicago Police Department. As the CPD sorted out the surrendering gunmen, Murphy looked around for the two vigilantes. He could not see them anywhere, but in the distance the police officer could make out the engine sounds of two motorcycles as they accelerated away.

He smiled.

Thanks *Fusion*.

The Safehouse

Dave was worried about Mindy.

She did not seem herself, but at least she was on her feet.

They had made it back to the Safehouse and parked the motorcycles. Dave stowed both of their helmets in the locker and he followed her to the briefing room.

"Hi, Marty," Mindy said, pulling off her mask and comms.

"You okay, Mindy?" Marty asked.

"Yeah, just a sore head," Mindy replied.

"I'm not surprised," Dave said, dumping his mask and comms, before giving Mindy a hug.

Mindy started swaying, so Dave guided her onto the couch.

"You sure that you're okay?" Dave asked, concerned.

"Yeah, yeah," Mindy replied, waving him off.

Dave was not fooled for a second; something was wrong.

"Marty, help me get Mindy upstairs," he ordered

..._...

By the time we had managed to get Mindy to the bedroom, she was uncoordinated and couldn't stand.

We laid her on the bed and I got her out of the combat suit. Mindy was unresponsive and was slurring her words. I checked her head, there was a large bump to one side. That must have been where she was struck by the ninja. It was a concussion.

After removing my combat suit, I placed Mindy into Speedy and drove home, with Marty.

West Ridge

I got Mindy into bed and decided to call a doctor.

Chloe had left me with a card, for a doctor that she recommended. I placed the call and sat with Mindy, waiting.

..._...

About forty minutes later, there was a knock on the door and I went downstairs to open it, telling Sophia to be quiet.

Now, I got a surprise!

"Hi, I'm Doctor Cathy Bennett, you must be Dave," the lady said, walking through the door.

"How do you know my name?" I asked, confused.

Just as I was closing the front door, it was shoved open.

"Hi, Dave!" Chloe said cheerfully, closing the door behind her.

It clicked!

"Dr Bennett! You must be the mother of this delightful young lady," I said, glaring at Chloe.

"Lady? I wouldn't go that far!" Dr Bennett responded. "She's also rarely delightful!"

"Gee, thanks Mom!" Chloe responded, sarcastically, pretending to look hurt.

"Mindy's in the bedroom," I said, showing Dr Bennett the stairs.

..._...

Ten minutes later, Dr Bennett had finished examining Mindy.

"Just a minor concussion. Keep an eye on her. Keep her drinking. Bring her to see me on Friday, at ten in the morning," Dr Bennett said, before turning to Chloe. "Now, I need to get Little Miss Trouble home, to bed!"

"Thanks Doctor!" I said, shaking her hand. "We'll see you Friday; bye Chloe."

"Bye Dave!" Chloe said, waving.

Updated: *May 2015.*

***Chapter 35*: Take a Break**

*The following morning
Thursday, May 8th, 2014*

West Ridge

Mindy was very confused.

Dave had tried to explain why she was in bed, but not being able to remember *how* she had actually gotten there was worrying to the young woman. It kind of reminded her of that morning, when she had collapsed on the Safehouse roof, all those years ago and then woken up not being able to remember anything. Yet again, though, it was the same guy who had helped her.

Mindy was reading a paper that described the 'Ninja Attack at McKinley Park'. Apparently, the Chicago PD had had full control of the situation and had put down the minor public disruption within a very short time. There was no mention of Kick-Ass nor of Hit Girl. Nothing new there; the Police would rather take credit, than encourage or condone vigilante behaviour. Mindy could recall everything up to the start of the fight with the ninjas. After that, it was all a little spotty, but she could remember Kick-Ass standing guard over her as she lay on the ground.

Another surprise, was the Doctor who had come to see her the previous night. Mindy honestly did not remember the visit, but Dave had informed her that it had been Chloe's mother, of all people. That had been very unexpected; we had not even known that Chloe's mother she was a doctor; Chloe had kept that important fact very quiet and I understood that Chloe had been with her mother, too. Marty had said hello, earlier, as he was very worried about Mindy, but she had assured him that she was fine! Dave then insisted that Mindy should stay in bed for the day. She did not complain, although she wanted to, but her head hurt, and she could not walk straight when she went to use the bathroom.

However, Mindy had Sophia to keep her company and the canine was on the bed beside her.

..._...

Dave intended to have a word with Chloe about her mother's job

It would have been very useful to have known about it, rather than to have been surprised. He secretly thought that Chloe had enjoyed it. At least she seemed happier, after what had occurred at the weekend. Mindy had, rather surprisingly, been doing what she was told, and the girl had stayed in bed. Dave had taken her breakfast earlier and she had been able to keep that down, which was a good start. Dave was a little annoyed that they were not mentioned in the paper, but he knew that they had made a strong contribution. The two of them had received a text from Murphy and Fellowes; the message said thanks for *Fusion's* help and that without them, there would have been more Police and possibly civilian casualties. Well, Dave thought, at least somebody was grateful for their presence.

One thing that Dave had *not* told Mindy about yet, was the visit to the hospital on Friday morning, because he knew that she would refuse to go. He was still working out how to persuade her without too much shouting and screaming on her part. Marty had borrowed *Speedy* that morning, to go out and check on the two apartment blocks which were on their short list. Mindy was quite excited about 'going into property'. She was very pleased that Damon had finally been cleared of any criminal activity – well at least the activities that had got him sent to prison in the first place. Since leaving prison he had broken one or two laws, including starting to train a five-year-old Mindy as a vigilante.

Dave had actually started to think about what his life might have been like if Damon had never been framed and Mindy had never become Hit Girl and had therefore grown up to be a normal little girl. Would he have ever gone out as Kick-Ass? Would somebody else have rescued him that night, at Rasul's apartment? Would he have still met Mindy? Without the bitterness, he thought that Damon would have been a great father and Mindy would have turned out to be a wonderful young lady. Ultimately, he owed his life to Frank D'Amico. A nasty thought there; if Frank D'Amico had not framed Damon, there would have been no Hit Girl and therefore nobody to rescue the fledgling Kick-Ass at Rasul's apartment which equalled a very dead Kick-Ass. No matter how much he wished that Mindy could have grown up normally; it would have meant his death.

Mind you, at that point, he would die for Mindy if it meant she could live.

..._...

"Hi Dave, you look pensive," Mindy commented.

"I've been thinking . . . about your . . . about Damon," Dave replied.

"Oh, I see," Mindy said, not meeting Dave's eyes.

"I ended up thinking about . . ."

". . . What might have happened, if my Daddy was never framed?" Mindy interrupted.

"Yes," Dave replied.

"I suppose you came to the same decision, I did," Mindy said. "I lead a normal life, Kick-Ass dies."

"Yeah, crap, huh!"

"What happened, happened. I spent so long, when I was younger, thinking about 'what ifs'. It drove me around the bend. You can't play the 'what if' game, Dave; it will destroy you," Mindy said, sagely.

"I know, but . . ."

"No buts, Dave. I would never trade my life, never. If I did, I would never have met the one person, I needed, the one person I love, more than anybody else," Mindy said, tears in her eyes.

Dave sat down beside Mindy and he hugged her tightly.

"I love you so much, Mindy," Dave whispered.

***The next day
Friday, May 9th***

"Okay Mindy, we're going for a little ride," Dave said, pulling her up off the bed.

Mindy gave her partner a long look and then a scowl.

"You think I'm a little girl who can be fooled?" Mindy growled. "You're setting me up for something."

"Doctor Bennett wants to see you at ten, this morning," Dave explained.

"I don't need to go see a Doctor!" Mindy exclaimed.

"Okay Hit Pansy," Dave challenged. "Give me your best shot."

Dave stepped back, as Mindy lost her balance and fell into his arms.

"Hi, gorgeous," Dave said, giving her a kiss.

The glare he received was not exactly friendly, but he ignored it as he carried the swearing Mindy downstairs.

"Mindy, you cannot use that kind of language at the hospital," Dave cautioned with a laugh.

"Okay, you've made your fucking point," Mindy grouched. "I'll behave!"

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"Hi, Mindy, how are you feeling?" Dr Bennett asked.

"Perfect," Mindy lied.

Dave coughed, and he nudged Mindy, hard.

"Headache, dizziness, and a bit of nausea," Mindy confessed.

"Chloe tells me that you're tough and you don't like showing weakness. There's a time and a place for that, but not here and not right now, young lady," Dr Bennett lectured.

"Lady?" Dave laughed. "I wouldn't go that far."

"I see," Dr Bennett said, with a chuckle. "Mindy is a bit like Chloe."

Twenty minutes later they returned to the car. Mindy had been ordered to take things gently for at least a week; orders which were not received very well. In the car, on the way back home, Dave came to a decision.

"How about a holiday, just the three of us?" Dave suggested.

"Three?" Mindy queried, a little confused.

"Just you, me, and Hit Girl!" Dave replied, smirking.

"I'm sure Hit Girl and I would very much enjoy a holiday. Is Kick-Ass coming? I find Dave a bit boring sometimes," Mindy teased.

***The following day
Saturday, May 10th***

Dave had picked up the SUV, just the previous day.

It was adorable and very comfortable. Marty would look after Sophia while they were gone, and Dave had called Chloe, to tell her that they were going away for a few days. Chloe had told Kyle that Mindy was busy, so he wouldn't get a lesson that week.

..._...

We had one question left: where were we going to go?

Mindy suggested that they just wing it. So, they packed a couple of bags and headed south into Indiana, towards Lafayette. The next four hours were spent driving to Indianapolis and then they found a room for three nights, in the JW Marriott. They ended up with a corner room, on quite a high floor, so the view was amazing!

Together, they had dinner in the room, that first night, so that Mindy could rest.

***The next morning
Sunday, May 11th***

Indiana

Mindy woke up greatly refreshed and she found that her head was no longer sore.

She knew that she was not quite healed, but it was a start. Dave ordered an enormous breakfast, again in the room. After breakfast and a relaxing shower, they both went for a walk around Indianapolis and ended up at the White River State Park, which was very refreshing, and they spent a great few hours together. They went to the zoo, where Dave started comparing Mindy to a fucking meerkat. Mindy knew that Dave said she was cute, but a meerkat was going way too far in her opinion. Typically, though, Dave compared himself to the African Lion.

"In your fucking dreams!" Mindy retorted.

"And why not?" Dave asked, innocently.

Then Dave started reeling off lion facts. The lion was intimidating, like Kick-Ass and, in the pride, the female lions were the primary hunters, like Hit Girl. Mindy had to admit that she could not argue with his logic and being compared to a lioness was a lot better than a fucking meerkat. By the time the two of them returned to the hotel, they were both very tired, but they had a shower and went to eat at the High Velocity Bar, in the hotel. The good food woke them up, considerably.

After stuffing themselves with three courses, including a warm cookie sundae which was to die for, they retired to

their room.

..._...

They were no longer tired and within half an hour, they were both naked in bed and Mindy was having the time of her life.

Dave's touch sent impossible feelings through her and she just melted when he kissed her. Gazing into his eyes, she got lost in their allure and the love pouring from them. Mindy had been warned by Dr Bennett not to do anything energetic; damn! Well, Mindy thought, she would die happy with Dave inside her. No, she promised to behave, so she would behave. Instead, she resorted to less stressful behaviour and she sank down Dave's body, deciding that she was still hungry.

"Oh my God!" Dave exclaimed through clenched teeth.

He was starting to thrash, but she kept going and Dave kept thrashing. Then . . .

Wham!

Mindy felt an intensely warm, almost hot feeling as liquid hit the back of her throat. She kept her mouth wrapped around Dave, so she did not get it everywhere. Mindy was getting used to the taste and she kinda liked it. Was that weird? She had absolutely no fucking idea; but she loved it and Dave kept producing more which was even better. After a short rest, while they both allowed their bodies to recover, Dave started to explore again.

The barely receded electric shocks, started up again and when Dave touched anything tender, Mindy yelped. Dave kept targeting Mindy's breasts, which caused the most beautiful sensations to course through me, the catch being that the sensations were almost too much to endure. He would also target somewhere else, which would have Mindy thrashing about on the bed, barely able to breathe and he had to keep reminding her: 'don't forget to breathe'.

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 36*: Dreams**

Two days later
Tuesday, May 13th, 2014

Indiana

"Happy Birthday, partner!"

Dave opened his eyes, slowly and he grabbed the completely naked Mindy, around the waist and he pulled her down to him.

"Thank you, gorgeous!"

Dave kissed her deeply and she responded in kind. The next hour was sheer bliss.

..._...

After that, somewhat energetic morning, they had to checkout and drive back to Chicago.

Dave thought that Mindy was fully recovered, at least from the concussion, but maybe not from their other activities. He was definitely seeing more Hit Girl in their love making. The short holiday had been exactly what they had both needed; it had allowed them both to relax and to be themselves. Dave commented that they should get away more often and Mindy agreed. The four-hour drive home was not too bad, although the I-65 was not exactly the most exciting drive. By the time they reached the I-94, Mindy was getting excited; excited to be back home.

They did stop a few times, extending the trip back, but it was worth it, and they enjoyed a lovely lunch outside, enjoying nature together.

..._...

By the time they got home, it was around six in the evening and they parked the SUV in the garage; it was a tight fit beside *Speedy*.

They headed into the house and Mindy was knocked down by a very happy and very over excited Sophia.

"Get off me . . . mutt . . . yuck!" Mindy exclaimed, in between licks.

"She missed you," Marty explained, laughing.

It took Mindy several minutes to push the large dog out of the way, so she could get back to her feet.

"Look, Sophia, enough of the kisses; I'm not that kinda girl," Mindy exclaimed, giggling.

"If you say so," Marty smirked. "Looked good from here, though."

Mindy scowled at Marty.

"Sorry, I enjoy a bit of girl on girl action," Marty explained, before heading off upstairs, rather quickly.

West Ridge

Later, that evening, they settled down on the couch together and Mindy gave Dave his present.

"I needed Marcus' help to get this," Mindy said, sheepishly.

Dave unwrapped the present and opened the box inside.

"Wow!" he exclaimed.

"I remembered the 'gay-looking' one that you used to fancy, dude," Mindy teased.

Dave pulled out a custom, black and green, Taser X26P. With it was another holster for his combat suit, additional cartridges, and three batteries.

"Cool! Thanks, Mindy!"

He gave her a big hug and a kiss that kept on going and going.

***The next day
Wednesday, May 14th***

West Ridge

Dave awoke early for once.

It was about eight. Mindy was still asleep as he could feel her beside him. He decided it was time for a bit of fun! Dave reached over, and he ran his hands across her stomach and under her top . . . What the fuck! Those were not Mindy's boobs, or if they were, they had fucking shrunk.

"What the fuck!" said a voice, from the other side of the bed.

That was *not* Mindy's voice . . . or was it? Dave sat up and he turned to look at Mindy, just as a fist connected with his jaw.

"For fuck's sake!" Dave shouted in pain.

"Dave?"

"Yeah," Dave replied, looking down at the bed, beside him.

..._...

It wasn't Mindy, looking back at him, well, not the Mindy whom he had last seen a few hours previously. It was a completely different Mindy, it was not even 'date ditch, Mindy'. No, the Mindy before Dave was a much younger, eleven-year-old Mindy.

"Where the fuck did you come from?" Dave demanded, blinking his eyes.

"I could ask you the same thing, asshole!" 'Mindy' replied.

"You were a bit older and a tiny bit taller, when I last saw you a few hours ago," Dave commented.

"You are not making any fucking sense," 'Mindy' said. "I went to bed last night, in my room at Marcus' house."

"So, you think you're still in New York?" Dave asked. "Try Chicago, short-ass."

"Who the fuck, are you calling, 'short-ass'?" a livid 'Mindy' asked.

"Well, you are kinda short," Dave admitted with a laugh.

However, that just appeared to infuriate 'Mindy' further.

..._...

Okay, it seemed completely impossible.

He went to sleep with a sixteen-year-old Mindy lying beside him, but then he woke up with an eleven-year-old Mindy beside him. He really had been watching too much Sci-Fi. The current Mindy appeared to be from soon after they had killed Frank D'Amico. She was very much like the younger Mindy that would terrorise him, with just a single glance. Now, though, he was no longer scared of her, of course.

"Are you trying to tell me that I've travelled through time?" Mindy asked, incredulously and a little sceptically.

"Well, the last time I saw you looking like that, it was 2009 and now it is 2014," Dave responded. "My Mindy is sixteen."

"Sixteen!? I let you share a bed with me, at sixteen!?" Mindy ranted, then she started to look worried.

"Please, tell me we haven't . . ." Mindy said, looking horrified.

"Sorry," Dave replied, smirking.

Mindy looked positively horror struck.

"You and I have . . . well, you know," Mindy said, blushing furiously.

"I know you have a small birth mark, between . . ." Dave started.

"Okay, that's quite far enough, thanks," Mindy said, holding a hand up, but then her expression changed. "This is bullshit!"

"Come on then, come see *my* Mindy's pride and joy," Dave suggested.

Mindy climbed out of the bed and Dave tried not to laugh.

"You have Bratz pyjamas," he said, still trying not to laugh.

"Dammit!" Mindy grimaced. "Marcus thought it was a good idea."

..._...

I headed down to the basement and showed Mindy the armoury.

She was initially speechless. She took her time examining the weapons arrayed around the walls.

"What's with all the Katana swords?" Mindy asked.

"You noticed. Mindy earned them, each and every one and you'll be pleased to hear that each ninja suffered greatly," Dave said, proudly.

"Good, at least I'm not slacking!" Mindy exclaimed. "Why are you now in Chicago, instead of New York?"

"Long story, but basically, my Mindy had to kill, to save me, as herself. She was forced to leave New York," Dave explained meekly.

"Why did you need saving, cunt?" Mindy asked, unhappily.

"An 'old pal' surfaced and killed my Dad, before coming after me," Dave went on, darkly.

"Who?" Mindy asked, curiously.

"Brace yourself! You knew him as . . ." Dave hesitated. ". . . Red Mist."

Mindy turned purple, before exploding.

"Red Mist – that bastard shot me three times, three fucking times!" Mindy exclaimed. "That fucking bastard got the drop on me – nobody gets the drop on Hit Girl, nobody!"

"Calm down, Mindy! I know you aren't a big fan of that asshole. But you'll be pleased to know that he's been cut down to size. I dropped him into a shark tank," Dave said, putting his arm around her.

It occurred to him that he would never have dared to put his arm around Mindy, back then. Why? Because she'd have ripped his fucking arm off.

"You aren't scared of me anymore, are you?" Mindy asked, annoyed.

"No, Mindy! You're still a fucking handful; a grenade with a very loose pin, but your threats of bodily mutilation have no effect on me now," Dave said laughing.

They left the armoury and headed back upstairs.

As they crossed the mat, Mindy tried to grab me, but I caught her movement. I dodged and seized her by the upper arm and threw her over onto her back.

"Fuck Kick-Ass! You've been workin' out," Mindy said, approvingly, from the mat.

"I try," Dave replied, before Mindy swept his feet out from under him.

Dave went down and he must have caught his head, because he blacked out.

West Ridge

"Dave! Dave!" Chloe's voice.

"Can you hear me, Dave; please!" Mindy's voice. The real Mindy.

Dave opened his eyes. Pain shot through his head and side. Standing above him were Chloe and Mindy, both girls had tears running down their cheeks. He was flat on my back, on the mat, at the house. He looked around, no mini-Mindy.

"What the fuck happened?" Dave growled.

"Sorry, I kicked you, a tiny bit too hard. I'm really sorry, Dave," Mindy said, giving him a kiss. "You've been out for almost forty minutes."

"Wow! I had the weirdest fucking dream," Dave said, sitting up for a moment before a thought came back to me. "Mindy, did you wear Bratz pyjamas a few years ago?"

Mindy's eyes almost bugged out, she blushed, and started to look a bit embarrassed. Chloe laughed.

"You had Bratz pyjamas!?" Chloe exclaimed, laughing. "Hit Girl had Bratz pyjamas!"

"No . . . I didn't . . . How did you?" Mindy stammered. "Dammit! Okay, yes, Marcus thought it was a good idea."

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 37*: The Week of Hell - Day 1**

*Four days later
Saturday, May 17th, 2014*

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

Channel Runne Park

Everything started normally, just like any other weekend.

They got up.

They had breakfast.

Dave headed off to work for a few hours in the gun shop and Mindy took Sophia out for a walk.

All perfectly normal, normal for two secret vigilantes at least

Sophia and Mindy were walking through Channel Runne Park. The weather was good, but cool. Sophia loved being outside and she always enjoyed her walks. All was peaceful, that was until a man a few feet behind Mindy, made a strange noise before collapsing onto the grass. Mindy spun around, instantly on guard, and Sophia started to growl.

You did not need a medical degree to see that the man was dead; what looked very much like the bolt from a crossbow was embedded in the man's skull. Mindy looked around quickly and she pulled Sophia behind a tree. She started to hear screams, and then she called 9-1-1 and reported the dead man. It occurred to her to take some photos with her cell, before leaving the area, very fast.

That event had honestly scared the fucking shit out of Mindy; that could have been her, for fuck's sake, she thought.

Okay, calm down and start thinking.

Was this a contract killing? Was this just a random murder? Was this the start of something bigger?

She put a lot of thought into these questions, on the walk back home.

..._...

As soon as she was home, she started up the Toughbook and sent a text message to Murphy. They had an unwritten agreement to exchange intelligence. He would keep *Fusion* informed of drug dealing activity, for example, and they would pass on anything that was gathered while out and about. For the moment, Mindy advised Murphy of what had just happened in the park.

Ten minutes later, she received a response.

*Morning HG!
How the hell, did you know so fast?
I will pass on what I can. M*

Dave had taken *Speedy*, so Mindy jumped into the SUV with Sophia, and she drove to the Safehouse. They, meaning Marty, had setup a special, untraceable, and secure email address for Murphy to use.

In that way, they could send pictures and other information that could not be passed by text or voice.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

An email appeared in the inbox, while Mindy was servicing her weapons.

It was from Murphy, and provided in depth details of the attack that morning. Apparently, two other people had been shot with crossbow bolts, within the same hour. The man that I had seen, he had been the second to be shot. So far,

the three dead people had absolutely nothing in common.

Okay, that reduced the options from three, down to two. Was this just a random murder? Was this the start of something bigger? Unfortunately, she had a nasty feeling it was a part of the latter. Next question: would their armour deflect the bolt from a crossbow? Her combat suit and Chloe's combat suit? Probably not. Dave's combat suit? Possibly – he had heavier armour. Mindy sent a secure email to The Armourer, requesting details for a shield or similar that could deflect a crossbow bolt.

Mindy was familiar with crossbows and had a couple in the armoury; although she had not used them in years. She inspected the bolts; they were about nine inches long and very lethal. The tips varied, depending on how lethal you wanted the bolt to be. Mindy's were barbed, which meant you could not just pull them out, you had either to push them all the way through or dig them out.

Neither being a very nice option.

[Archer Kill Count: 3]

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Mindy received a call from Dave, asking where she was.

She explained about what had happened in the park. Dave then ranted on about her not telling him about it earlier and she had to apologise, to get him to calm down; at least he cared. Mindy headed back home with Sophia and joined Dave for lunch. They discussed what had happened and she showed Dave the photos which she had taken at the park. She also explained about what Murphy had sent over via email. They both agreed to talk to Chloe and Marty, so that they would both know about the attacks. For the moment, they decided to call the perpetrator, 'The Archer'. It was the best that they could come up with, at least for the moment.

Dave and Mindy had not actually seen Chloe, since they had come back from their brief holiday. She appeared to be avoiding them, which was probably because of the run in with Chris, two weeks previously. Kyle had come over on the Thursday evening for his training and he was coming along very well. With a few more months of training, the kid would be quite skilled. Dave and Mindy discussed how they might defeat an attacker, such as The Archer. The Archer could strike anywhere, without warning, as he had already demonstrated only a few hours previously. Already, the city was starting to get concerned about the new problem.

Dave also brought up another point: Could The Archer be part of another mad plan, from Chris D'Amico?

The idiot must have worked out, by now, that his ninja plan was not quite going according to plan.

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

West Ridge

After lunch, they started training.

Mindy was still worried, but she decided to focus on the here and now. Dave did not seem too put out by the change of events, but Mindy could tell that he was concerned.

Marty came back from looking at apartment blocks and they updated him on what was going on. Understandably, Marty was not very happy, not at all. He suggested barricading themselves into the Safehouse, at least until The Archer was caught.

It was an interesting idea, though very sensible, but not overly practical.

3:15 P.M.

They received another text from Murphy.

Two more people were dead with crossbow bolt wounds! This time it was in Edgebrook Woods, which were a few miles away from the morning's attack. I sent a text back to Murphy, telling him that Fusion were on it!

Marty headed off to the Safehouse, saying he wanted to check on security! Now with The Archer around, Marcus' quip about buying an armoured personnel carrier, may not have been so far-fetched; at least a crossbow bolt wouldn't pierce that!

[Archer Kill Count: 5]

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

The two of them had had an early dinner and then headed down to the Safehouse while Sophia stayed at home.

One of the good things about the Safehouse was that they could drive straight inside and park. Marty and Chloe were already there. Marty was in the briefing room and Chloe was coming down the stairs from the bedroom, she had her combat suit on, except for the mask and comms. Something about her expression did not seem right, but I put it to one side for the moment. Mindy and Dave got changed into their combat suits, but left off their masks and comms. Mindy went off to get her weapons and Dave went into the briefing room, where he found Chloe sitting on the couch, staring at the floor. I went over and sat down on the couch next to her.

"What's up Shadow?" Dave asked.

"I'm not sure I want to go out tonight," Chloe admitted, not looking at Dave.

"I see. Get your mask on!" he ordered, getting up.

"Why?" Chloe asked, confused.

"Mask . . . now!" Dave ordered again, and he walked out of the briefing room.

Marty was giving his friend a strange look, but that was normal for Marty.

4:50 P.M.

Dave pulled on his mask and comms while Chloe was doing the same.

Mindy and Marty were over by the armoury and looking a little confused. Dave went over, and he whispered into Mindy's ear, telling her what Chloe had said and Mindy nodded, looking a little unhappy.

..._...

Shadow and Kick-Ass squared off against each other.

"I don't wanna do this," Shadow said, turning away and walking towards Mindy.

"Shadow, face me!" Kick-Ass snarled.

Shadow stopped, but she did not turn.

"Are you scared, little girl?" Kick-Ass snarled. "Are you scared?"

Kick-Ass watched as Shadow braced up and he saw her hands flex within her gauntlets. Mindy threw Shadow's Jō onto the mat at her feet. Kick-Ass smiled; Mindy had the right idea.

"Answer me, Shadow!" Kick-Ass ordered. "You lost your touch? Maybe Curtis could replace you."

Kick-Ass almost missed Shadow's legs bracing up and her ankles flexing, she was about to act.

Good.

Kick-Ass drew his batons.

5:02 P.M.

Suddenly, Shadow dived forward, seized her Jō and spun around, driving the Jō hard towards Kick-Ass' head.

Kick-Ass had made her mad. He smiled, blocked the Jō easily, and forced it down. He could see the usual fire, burning in Shadow's eyes. That fire, was what was missing earlier, when he had first seen her that evening. Shadow kept pushing forward, hard. She was really mad. It kind of reminded Kick-Ass of Mindy, when she was trying to make a point; like the previous year, when he had first asked to be trained. They fought off each attack, but Shadow was learning each time and adjusting her attacks accordingly, each time Kick-Ass fought her off. Good girl! Kick-Ass eventually managed to catch her with a baton, behind her left thigh, then he flipped her backwards, onto her back.

"You fucking green asshole!" Shadow bellowed, immediately jumping back to her feet.

Kick-Ass could not help smiling. He looked over towards Mindy and she was grinning, too. Shadow dived forward; her Jō was blurring in the air as she drove her attacks forward. Kick-Ass lost one baton and he was forced to deflect blows with his other baton and his armoured gauntlet. He decided that it was time for Shadow to come down to earth, with a bump. He fought off her next attack, jumping up, as she swung her Jō horizontally to try and trip him up. Kick-Ass drove forward, and he caught the Jō, ripping it from her grip and he threw it towards Mindy, who caught it. Shadow was not to be stopped, she swept up Kick-Ass' dropped baton and attacked again, before I stepped toward her and grabbed her arms, pinning them to her sides. Kick-Ass flipped her over and onto the mat face down, holding her right arm vertically, behind her.

Shadow screamed in pain and Kick-Ass immediately let her go, before he stepped back.

5:15 P.M.

Shadow stood up and she removed her scarf and mask.

She was grinning enormously, and that fire was still in her eyes.

"Shadow has her fire back," Dave commented as he removed his mask.

"You okay, Chloe?" Mindy asked, sounding a little concerned.

"If that fucking green asshole wants to put me down, he's gonna have to fight first," Chloe exclaimed.

"Good on you, Shadow!" Marty said, laughing.

Chloe came up to Dave and she actually gave him a hug.

"Thanks, Dave; I needed that. Killing those two men had me thinking; I was starting to judge and second guess myself," Chloe explained.

5:55 P.M.

"Dave, you got a minute?" Chloe asked, looking a little nervous.

"What is it?" he asked. "You look nervous."

"I am. A couple of weeks ago, in the warehouse . . . that man we shot at . . . Chris . . . I noticed Mindy's reaction to him and yours," Chloe said, before trailing off.

"Come on!" Dave ordered, taking Chloe over to a far corner of the mat and sitting down.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

"Chris. . . Where do I start?"

Dave hesitated.

"Chris D'Amico exists, as he is today, because of me. I became Kick-Ass and met Hit Girl, who was waging a war of vengeance, against Chris's Dad, Frank D'Amico. Chris became Red Mist and he tricked his way into my trust. Thanks to me, Mindy was shot three times and blasted out of a window, before dropping over a dozen feet. Mindy's Dad, Big Daddy and I, were seized. Search YouTube and you'll find the video of D'Amico's men torturing Big Daddy and Kick-Ass. Mindy came and rescued us, but not before my mistake had caused the death of Mindy's Dad," he explained.

"What the fuck have I told you, cunt?" Mindy growled, coming over and sitting down. "It was *not*, I repeat, *not* your fault, Ass-Kick! Dave was taken in by Red Mist and Dave was very mild mannered, back then; an easy target. I almost blew Dave away, too, later that same night. But I stopped, letting go of the trigger just before it broke. Best decision of my life."

"I thought that the psycho bitch was gonna kill me, too. She was mad, in more ways than one. She asked, in her own way of course, for help. For some reason, I decided to help and I'm glad that I did. Mindy assaulted the D'Amico penthouse, fucked it all up and she had to be rescued by yours truly," Dave said, smirking at Mindy.

"Fucker! It all went really well; four dead in the lobby, fifteen in the penthouse and then I ran out of weapons and ammunition. What a fucking stupid bitch. I was stuck cowering in the fucking kitchen. Killed a guy with a couple of kitchen knives, then I hid in a kitchen cupboard. Then this big bastard brought in a fucking bazooka, just as Kick-Ass made his entrance and what a fucking entrance. I'd given him my Daddy's jet pack which had a pair of Gatling guns installed," Mindy explained.

"Gatling guns; that must have been cool!" Chloe exclaimed.

"It was," Dave confirmed.

"Kick-Ass killed the three men, who had the bazooka, and he gave me the opportunity to fight Frank D'Amico, while Kick-Ass fought Chris D'Amico. Unfortunately, I was a little bit exhausted by then and the fight did not go well. Frank D'Amico managed to throw me down onto his desk, nearly paralyzing me. I couldn't move, then Frank D'Amico started punching me, in the face, and I kept losing consciousness. Then my knight in a green wetsuit, arrived with a fucking bazooka under his arm. He blew Frank D'Amico out the fucking window; I was so fucking relieved," Mindy explained, giving Dave a hug and a kiss.

"I had to literally scoop Hit Girl off of the desk and we made our escape, in the jet pack. I just wish that I had killed Chris back then, but if I had delayed, then Mindy would be dead. Crap choices we have to make in life," I said, feeling sad.

"Anyway, Chris resurfaced just last year, as The Motherfucker and after he killed my Dad and Mindy was forced to save my life, as Mindy Macready, killing several men, in public, we had a huge fight in his lair. I dropped him into a big tank that had a shark in it. It ate Chris, or so we thought. Mindy then left New York," Dave continued.

"We found out that Chris D'Amico was still alive, a few months back. Two weeks ago, was the first time we've spoken to him, since the fight last year. He hates Dave's guts, as Dave killed his father. But Frank D'Amico killed my Daddy and Chris D'Amico killed Dave's Dad. There are just two D'Amicos left, Chris and his Uncle Ralph. They must both die and fucking soon," Mindy said, vehemently.

Nobody said anything for a few minutes.

"Thank you, both of you, for letting me know about him. I know how much it must have hurt, dredging up all that shit," Chloe said.

"You needed to know Chloe. I'm glad we could tell you, finally; better late than never," Mindy replied.

"Okay. Now that's over, whose bike are you riding tonight?" Dave asked, wanting to change the subject.

"I'm riding 'KICK'," Chloe replied, instantly.

That proclamation generated a nasty glare from Mindy.

"Traitorous bitch," Mindy said, pulling on her mask and comms.

Chloe just returned a smug look, at Mindy's back.

Marty laughed, returning to the briefing room.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Hit Girl climbed onto the Ducati, feeling a little annoyed with Shadow.

It had not exactly been a big surprise that the youngster had wanted to ride with Kick-Ass – but Hit Girl felt annoyed nonetheless. Kick-Ass had given Chloe specific instructions for getting on the Fat Boy, as doing it wrong could overbalance the motorcycle and that beast was heavy. Hit Girl watched as Shadow placed her left boot, on the left foot peg and swung her long right leg over the motorcycle and wrapped her arms around Kick-Ass. Kick-Ass had braced the motorcycle, using his feet, with the brakes on, while Shadow had climbed on behind him. Hit Girl started up her bike and reversed out of the parking bay. Kick-Ass did the same.

"Battle Guy, *Fusion* is rolling!" Kick-Ass reported over the comms and Battle Guy pressed the button to activate the exit sequence.

The lights went out and the door opened, followed by the compound gate. They both accelerated away heading west, up West 79th Street.

8:12 P.M.

Their first stop was checking up on their tame Police, neither of whom had met Shadow.

Battle Guy kept a GPS fix on Murphy's and Fellowes' cells, at all times. Currently, the two Sergeants were stopped, near a cross-section: South Pulaski Road and West 71st Street.

8:35 P.M.

As the three vigilantes approached the cross-section, they saw a Ford Explorer Police Interceptor '8760', parked off to the west of the cross-section, on an empty car park. They pulled up on either side, Kick-Ass to the left, and they pounded, gently, on the windows.

"Evening, officers," Kick-Ass snarled, good-naturedly.

"Hey, *Fusion*! Not seen you in a while. Who's this?" Murphy asked looking back, towards Shadow.

"This, is Shadow," Shadow growled in reply.

"Hello, Shadow. I'm Murphy and that's Fellowes," Murphy said, indicating his partner.

"Hello," Shadow growled.

"Shadow doesn't come out much," Kick-Ass stated, simply.

"We just thought we'd check and see how you two were doing," Hit Girl growled, from the other side of the car.

"Thanks, Hit Girl," Fellowes replied, dubiously. "It's good to be loved."

"Well, we won't keep you two from your doughnuts," Kick-Ass stated, as he started the Fat Boy and Hit Girl started her Ducati.

9:02 P.M.

Shadow was enjoying herself that night.

She knew she had had a rocky start earlier and that she had needed Kick-Ass to explain that to her and kick her ass. She was feeling scared, in case she had to kill again. But, if she wanted to be like Hit Girl, she was going to have to put up with the bad shit, to get the good shit; the good shit being saving innocent lives. She was also enjoying riding with Kick-Ass. Hit Girl would kill her for saying it, but the Fat Boy was way cooler than the Panigale.

..._...

Suddenly, Kick-Ass slammed on the brakes, with Hit Girl stopping just ahead. He turned to look down an alley, across the street. Shadow followed his gaze and she saw five men surrounding a woman. Kick-Ass kicked down the Fat Boy's stand and she climbed off onto the sidewalk, followed by Kick-Ass.

"Hit Girl, look after the motorcycles," Kick-Ass ordered.

"What?" Hit Girl replied, sounding annoyed. "I'm not the fucking valet!"

"Please?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Okay, asshole!"

"Shadow, they're all yours," Kick-Ass proclaimed.

"What?" Shadow said, turning to look up at Kick-Ass in surprise.

"For fucks sake," Kick-Ass snarled, impatiently. "Go! I'll be there if you fuck up."

Shadow had a feeling that he was trying to make another point. She could handle it, she thought, as an idea jumped into her mind. She advanced across the street and entered the alley.

9:08 P.M.

"Welcome to hell!" Shadow growled.

All five men turned to face the voice. None of them looked particularly put out by Shadow's presence.

"Need our help, little girl?" one man asked.

"This is your last chance to walk away," Shadow growled, trying not to sound nervous.

The men looked around, at each other, laughing. One man stepped forward.

"Are you kidding? It's five against one," The leader said, smirking.

"It's three against one," Shadow replied, correcting him.

"How do ya figure that, bitch?" The leader sneered, looking around at his pals.

"Once I take out the leader; which is you, I'll have to contend with one or two enthusiastic wing men," she growled back. "Last two guys always run,"

"You err, done this before, kid?" the leader asked, a little concern in his tone.

Shadow nodded, and the leader moved forwards.

"Remember . . . you wanted this," she growled.

The leader ran forward, drawing a large knife, which Shadow easily battered away with her Jō and followed through with a fist to his jaw. The man staggered back before coming at Shadow again, only Shadow caught him in the groin with the end of the Jō. The man sagged to the ground before she felled him with a crack to the head. Shadow looked around at the other men . . . two moved slowly away.

"Okay, now we know who's who," she growled confidently. "Let's get this done."

Shadow flew forward and brought the Jō down, smashing the lower arm of the next man, before ramming her armoured elbow into his face before she followed up with a back kick to the stomach. Another man landed a punch in her side, but she was able to catch him with a boot to the side of his knee which caused the man to scream, before a fist to the jaw dropped him. Shadow started towards the last two men, who hesitated, before they turned and ran. They ran directly towards Kick-Ass, who felled each of them with a fist to the jaw.

The woman they were hassling had gone, so Shadow re-joined Kick-Ass.

9:12 P.M.

"'Jack Reacher', really?" Kick-Ass asked, dubiously.

"First thing that came into my head," Shadow offered, weakly.

"Okay, let's get back before the valet starts getting too ratty," Kick-Ass laughed.

They returned to the Fat Boy and found a slightly ratty Hit Girl.

"Enjoyed yourselves? 'Jack Reacher', I ask you!" Hit Girl complained.

"Let's go Shadow," Kick-Ass said, mounting and starting the Fat Boy.

Shadow slung her Jō and climbed on behind Kick-Ass. They roared away, leaving a disgruntled Hit Girl to follow in their wake.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and Midnight

The next hour or so of the patrol was uneventful, until they received another text from Murphy.

Two more were dead. Worse, though, one was a kid. Seven kills, all on his first day; The Archer was trying to make a point. That could *not* be allowed to continue. They were all a bit subdued and they were not chatting or winding each other up as they usually did. Battle Guy had received more emails from Murphy which included details about all seven murders.

Apparently, the guy was working to the sniper's creed: 'one shot, one kill'.

10:55 P.M.

They decided to call it a night and headed back to the Safehouse. The Archer was playing on their minds and they were not concentrating on the patrol.

The thought that a crossbow bolt could fly out of the darkness, at any time was, quite frankly, frightening.

[Archer Kill Count: 7]

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 38*: The Week of Hell - Day 2**

The next day
Sunday, May 18th, 2014

[Archer Kill Count: 7]

The following takes place between Midnight and 2:00 A.M.

The Safehouse

They were all feeling very tired, once they had returned to the Safehouse, but none of them felt like sleeping.

Dave, Chloe, and Mindy, all got out of their combat suits, before getting a shower. Marty sorted out a late dinner for them all and they sat and talked at the kitchen table, while eating dinner. Marty had gone through all the information which Murphy had sent over to them. There appeared to be no pattern to the killings; they appeared completely random. Murphy had also informed them that the police, to that point, had accomplished nothing in their investigation. They finished their food and went to bed.

None of them felt like driving back home that night.

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

The Safehouse

That time Murphy called us.

Dave was awoken from a deep sleep. The cell on the table beside his bed was ringing and ringing. He answered it and put the device to his ear.

"Go!"

"The shit has really hit the fan this time, Kick-Ass," Murphy said with preamble.

"The Archer?" Dave assumed.

"No. No more killings, not up until now. The Commander of twenty-first district, he has three kids and two of them are missing. There was a home invasion around six this morning. Their mother is in ICU, their father was at the station. The third kid, well he was staying with a friend. Fuck, Kick-Ass, the two kids are only eight and nine. A boy and a girl. So far, we have no idea why they were targeted. I'll send you everything we have, when I can get it," Murphy explained. "Chicago needs your help."

"We're on it, Murphy. God, I'm sorry." Dave replied, cutting the connection.

Dave just sat there, feeling numb for almost twenty minutes. What the fuck was happening in the City? Chris D'Amico, ninjas, an archer, now the kids of a senior Police Officer.

8:30 A.M.

Dave poked Mindy hard, on her left boob.

"Ouch!" Mindy complained, rubbing her boob. "You fucking cunt!"

Dave shut her up before she could build up steam, by giving her a deep, deep kiss, which made her eyes bug out.

"Okay," Dave said. "That's the nice stuff out of the way!"

"Oh, no. Not more deaths," Mindy said, grimacing.

"Murphy called. Commander 21st District, two of his kids; they were pulled from their beds this morning. Their mother is in ICU," Dave explained.

Mindy was silent for several minutes.

"It has to be that fucking Chris D'Amico," Mindy finally said, angrily.

"I have to agree," Dave replied, reluctantly.

9:10 A.M.

After a shower, they awoke Marty and Chloe, letting them know the news.

"I'll start searching through the intel, from Murphy," Marty said immediately.

"Marty, get breakfast first; you'll work better on a full stomach," Dave suggested, then had a thought. "Could you do with a hand?"

"Wouldn't hurt; know any geeks?" Marty asked, dubiously.

Dave looked at Chloe.

"What do you think?"

"I'll call her," Chloe said, smiling. "She'll love it!"

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

The SUV stopped, and the main door closed behind it.

Abby was *very wide eyed* when she saw the Safehouse and especially the two motorcycles. Dave took her through to the briefing room, where her eyes stuck out about two feet. Any more surprises and her eyes would pop out and be hanging from her face.

"Hi, Chloe," Abby said. "Hi, Mindy."

"Marty, meet Abby," Dave said. "Abby, this is our uber geek, Marty."

"Gee, thanks, Dave," Marty said, pointing to another computer. "Hi, Abby, we have work to do."

They left the two talking, while the operators busied themselves with their own preparations.

Dave gassed up both motorcycles, ready for use that evening

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Marty had found some information in one of the reports sent over by Murphy.

It was circumstantial, but it seemed to hint towards a location to the west of Chicago, near South Archer Avenue and South Central Avenue. It looked to be a large warehouse, of a similar type to that used by Chris, two weeks previously. Dave went out, in *Speedy* to undertake a reconnaissance.

The rest of *Fusion* checked their gear and looked at forming a plan for that night and it was time for lunch.

1:40 P.M.

Dave returned with photos and information on what he had found.

The warehouse was guarded, by large watchdogs, similar to those which they had fought at the warehouse, two weeks earlier. The warehouse could be difficult to storm, but not impossible. The Archer had also killed again.

That time, only one person had died, but that was still one person too many.

[Archer Kill Count: 8]

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

With lots of activity expected for that evening, the operators: Dave, Chloe and Mindy, managed a couple of hours sleep; Dave had a feeling that we would need it. Marty and Abby were still hard at work doing research and going through the information that kept coming from Murphy.

There was also another phone call.

3:50 P.M.

"Go!" said Marty.

"Who is this?" Murphy asked, confused.

"Kick-Ass and Hit Girl are busy . . . and so am I. What do want, Murphy?" Marty said, trying to sound annoyed.

"Sorry. Some urgent information for you. There seems to be another Hero in town," Murphy explained.

"Another Hero?" Marty queried.

"Yeah. The Hero was seen by a pair of officers, late last night. Masked and carrying a spear like weapon. It was dark, so we have no further details. Apparently, the Hero just nodded to the officers, before vanishing. If it had been The Archer, I'm sure he would have shot the officers," Murphy explained.

"I agree. I'll get the information to the team. Thanks Murphy," Marty replied, dropping the call.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

"We have a new piece on the board, Abby," Marty said, explaining further.

"That might complicate things. It means the guys can't just shoot at anybody wearing a mask," Abby pointed out.

"I've just had a thought; you need a name. I'm Battle Guy, so you will need a name, too. We never use our real names when in costume, or over the comms. Think of something and let me know," Marty suggested.

"Cool!" Abby replied excitedly. "I'll think about it."

5:10 P.M.

Mindy came down to the briefing room, after a shower, to find Marty and Abby working hard.

Dave was up and in the shower while Chloe was slowly waking up.

"Hi, guys, any news?" she asked, hesitantly.

"Oh yeah," Marty replied, and he explained about Murphy's call.

"Well, that puts a new spin on things," Mindy responded.

That revelation would complicate their possible actions.

"Oh, Abby now has an alias," Marty said, smirking.

"Battle Guy wouldn't let me use my first few choices, but eventually I settled on: 'Hal'," Abby said, sounding really proud of herself.

"Hal?" Mindy asked, confused.

"Well, she originally wanted either 'Zero Cool' or 'Acid Burn', but I nixed both of those ideas, as she is *not* that cool," Marty explained.

"So, she went for a mad, super computer," Dave said, entering the briefing room with Chloe.

"Could be worse," Marty muttered.

Marty explained to Dave, what Murphy had said earlier.

"That's all we need; another Hero getting in the way," Dave commented.

"Anyway, dinner is almost done," Marty advised.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

They had a good meal, and got themselves caught up on what Marty and Abby had been getting up to while they had been asleep.

Dave had to admit that Abby appeared to be as much of a geek as Marty and she could be quite funny, in her own geeky way. At least it meant that Marty had help, although Abby would be getting a cab home, in a few minutes. She intended to help Marty, remotely, from home. The plan was to leave at just before eight that night and head up towards the warehouse.

They could then make a quick reconnaissance, before moving in.

7:50 P.M.

They mounted up and headed out; and as before, Shadow was with Kick-Ass.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

The warehouse

They parked up about a quarter mile from the warehouse.

The approach was slow, and they kept to the shadows, watching out for anything strange.

They also kept a good look out for The Archer and the other Hero.

9:05 P.M.

The warehouse appeared empty; there was no sign of any activity, anywhere.

They headed towards a fire escape and then up towards a door near the top of the warehouse. The door opened easily, and they headed in slowly. The inside was dimly lit. Nobody was visible. With Hit Girl leading, they headed down towards the main floor. Her cell chirped in her headset and she picked up the call.

"Go!" she growled quietly.

"It's Murphy. Something's happening; I don't know what, but stay away from the area between I-55 and Midway International Airport," Murphy said.

"Too late!" Hit Girl growled, dropping the call. "*Fusion*, we've fucked up!"

"What?" Kick-Ass responded.

"Murphy called. Told us to avoid this area; he doesn't know why," she replied. "I think this is a fucking trap."

She could hear activity and she could see Police Officers with rifles appearing.

"Battle Guy, *Fusion* is busted. The Police are here!"

"DO NOT RESIST!" She ordered. "We do not hurt uniforms."

9:25 P.M.

Surprise, surprise, Chris had set them up again.

At least nobody got fucking shot, Hit Girl reasoned. However, they did get arrested. They were each stripped of all their weapons and their hands were zip-tied, behind their backs. Hit Girl glared at anybody that looked at her. She could tell that Shadow was very frightened, but doing her best not to show it. Interestingly, the Police treated them all with respect and some of the officers actually apologised for what was happening. They were all placed, together, in the back of a Police SUV, before being driven away. At that point things got strange; Hit Girl had expected to be driven east, towards the police headquarters, but no, they seemed to be driving in large circles and they actually passed the warehouse where we had been arrested, twice!

"You lost?" she asked, facetiously.

"Just taking the scenic route," one of the officers replied, politely.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and Midnight

Several miles west of the warehouse

About forty minutes later, they pulled into a badly lit industrial district.

The two officers climbed out and opened the rear doors.

"Out!" both officers directed.

It was strange behaviour and a bit sinister. They all climbed out, which was not easy with your hands secured behind your back.

"Up against the car, hands toward us!" one officer ordered.

They did as we were told.

The next thing Hit Girl felt, was the zip-tie being cut off her wrists; She heard the same happen to Kick-Ass and Shadow.

"Good luck, guys!" the officers said as they climbed back into their SUV and drove off with a wave.

10:34 P.M.

"Okay, what the fuck just happened?" Shadow asked.

"I have no fucking idea!" Hit Girl replied, looking at Kick-Ass, who just shrugged his shoulders.

"Battle Guy, where the hell are we?" Kick-Ass asked.

"You guys okay?" Battle Guy asked, with a lot of concern in his voice.

"The police just let us go," Hit Girl replied, incredulously.

"Cool!" Battle Guy replied.

"You better come and get us," Hit Girl suggested.

"Ten minutes," Battle Guy replied.

It was bad, very bad. Chris had tried to get them arrested and put in jail. They must have had some followers in the Chicago PD or they would have been unmasked, and behind bars, at that very moment. Hit Girl was still contemplating things, when Battle Guy pulled up in the SUV. As he was with them and they were in costume, he was wearing his Battle Guy mask.

Nobody had not seen that in a while.

10:46 P.M.

"Marty, drop us both off, at the bikes and then head home. Chloe can get changed and then you can get Chloe to Abby's. When you're done, get back to our house and arm yourself," Hit Girl said. "If we go down, I want it to be only us two and not you guys."

Marty and Chloe started to argue, but she cut them off.

"Just do as I say, please! Chloe, strip off that combat suit right now, so you aren't caught in it. Get normal clothes when Marty takes you back to our house. Marty lock the combat suit in the armoury. We'll call you, okay," Hit Girl directed, giving Chloe a hug; she could see tears in her eyes.

Battle Guy dropped Hit Girl and Kick-Ass off, close to where they had left the two motorcycles and then reluctantly drove off with Chloe.

Hit Girl and Kick-Ass mounted up and headed back to the Safehouse, taking a longer route than normal, to check for any tails.

11:16 P.M.

They were almost back to the Safehouse, when a shape shot across the road.

It was a masked Hero.

"You see that?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Damn straight!" Hit Girl replied, accelerating. "I'll take the far end of the alley!"

"No problem!" Kick-Ass replied.

Hit Girl rocketed around the first corner and headed up to the next corner. She was at the opposite end of the alley within a minute; she parked the Ducati and peered down the alley. She could not make out very much, so she grabbed her NVGs.

11:19 P.M.

Things were suddenly much clearer.

Hit Girl could make out a shape, picking its way through the alley, making a lot of effort to keep silent and keeping the shadows. Most importantly though, the person was *not* carrying a crossbow.

"Kick-Ass. The person does *not* have a crossbow. They are taking their time and heading towards me. I think it is a woman. Hold on. She's stopped to rest," Hit Girl called to Kick-Ass, over the comms. "Remember, we're not armed."

"Err. Hit Girl. Why would I need a weapon, when I have you? I'm catching up now. Twenty feet. Ten feet. I'm ready to pounce," Kick-Ass reported, cheerfully.

Hit Girl moved to block the exit from the alley. The woman saw the shadow, just as Hit Girl had intended. She turned and as expected she ran away from Hit Girl, straight into Kick-Ass.

She collided quite hard and fell back to the floor of the alley.

11:28 P.M.

Before the woman could get up, Hit Girl placed her boot on her throat.

"Don't move!" she growled as Kick-Ass glared down at the Hero.

It was indeed a woman. She was clad very simply, in an all-in-one overall, plus a simple, bandanna style mask, similar to the type Battle Guy wore. Beside her, there was a short-shafted spear. Hit Girl recognised the type, but she could not remember the name. The woman moved her hand towards the spear, before Kick-Ass placed his boot down onto her wrist, pinning it. He then bent down and seized the spear. The woman looked pissed, but strangely she did not appear scared.

"Chill. We're on the same team," the woman said. "Can I get up now? I won't run, I promise."

Hit Girl looked up at Kick-Ass, who nodded, and she removed her boot. The woman got up slowly and she looked up at Kick-Ass, then at Hit Girl.

"Hi, Hit Girl, Kick-Ass; I'm Hawk," The woman said, holding out her hand.

Neither Hit Girl nor Kick-Ass took it and neither of them said a word. Hawk was about two inches taller than Hit Girl was and obviously older; she had a much bigger chest than she had for starters. Was she jealous? Oh, for fuck's sake!

"Hi, Hawk," Hit Girl growled.

"Hi," Kick-Ass added, handing back the spear.

"Thanks," Hawk said, sounding a little surprised.

"Hit Girl, back to headquarters!" Kick-Ass growled.

"Keep safe," Hit Girl said to Hawk.

They both headed back to their motorcycles, leaving Hawk in the alley.

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 39*: The Week of Hell - Day 3**

The next day
Monday, May 19th, 2014

[Archer Kill Count: 8]

The following takes place between Midnight and 2:00 A.M.

The Safehouse

Once they returned to the Safehouse, they sat down to go through what had just happened.

"Are we still going to be able to operate? Tonight, was very close. I don't care about me and I know you feel the same about yourself getting caught, but Chloe and Marty, no," Mindy said. "We made the decision to be vigilantes; they don't deserve to be banged up for life."

"At least we've met the mysterious new Hero: Hawk," Dave said.

"What do you think about her?" Mindy asked, innocently.

"Nice curves," Dave replied.

"Do you still want to have your dick in the morning?" Mindy growled, dangerously.

"I think I'm safe," Dave replied, grinning nastily. "You'd never give that up."

"Dammit! Okay, she has nice curves, and bigger boobs," Mindy admitted.

"Never noticed the boobs," Dave replied, innocently.

"Bullshit!"

"Okay, let's see what the morning brings. It can't be any worse, can it?" Dave replied, as they climbed into bed.

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

The Safehouse

Mindy woke up, showered, and she got dressed.

She was feeling down. The previous night had been crap, to say the least. She could not believe that they had allowed themselves to be conned by that complete fucking asshole, *again!* Marty had come by in the SUV and picked them both up. Mindy explained about them meeting the new Hero; Hawk. Marty was pleased that we had, at least, found out about that little issue.

Dave and Marty dropped Mindy off at home and went out with Marty, to get some shopping, so it was just Mindy in the house, along with Sophia.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

West Ridge

There was a knock on the door.

After the previous night, Mindy was feeling a little apprehensive about visitors, so she looked through the spy hole first. It was an older, greying man. She opened the door, slightly.

"Yes," Mindy asked.

"I'm looking for Mindy," the man said, smiling.

"Who are you?" Mindy asked, starting to feel a little worried.

"Jack Bay," the man replied.

"You have some ID?" Mindy persisted.

The man held out an official ID, showing that he was a Chicago Police Officer. A very senior Chicago Police Officer; he was a Commander. That could not be good, Mindy thought as she stepped back, letting the man in. She had no choice, she could not fight, not right there on the porch. The man was carrying a very long and obviously heavy, blue holdall. Mindy shut the door and she turned to face the man.

"Why are you here?" she demanded.

The man just looked down at her and he smiled.

"Damn! You have a lot of Damon in you," the man said, simply.

10:06 A.M.

Mindy was speechless.

The man had just mentioned her Daddy.

"What the fuck is going on?" she growled.

"Easy, Hit Girl! Let's go sit down, shall we?" The man suggested, guiding the stunned Mindy into the living room and onto a couch.

He had called her, Hit Girl. Mindy's brain had just crashed; she could not think. The man sat down across from Mindy, placing the holdall on the floor. Sophia came over and she sat on the couch with Mindy; that was good as Mindy could hide her trembling hands in the dogs' fur.

"I've shocked you a bit, haven't I?" the man said, still smiling. "Yes, I know that you are Mindy Macready. I also know that you are Hit Girl, and I know what happened to your father; how he sought revenge on Frank D'Amico. Your father was a good friend and I never believed he was a dirty cop. Marcus came by a few weeks ago, and he let me know that you were here, in Chicago. You seem to have made your mark, along with your good friend, Kick-Ass."

Mindy was still speechless, a state which she was not used to being in, so she let the man continue; she was having difficulty taking it all in.

"I came by to return your weapons," Jack said, nudging the holdall. "Thought you might be needing 'em."

"You had us released, last night?" Mindy asked.

"Not just me. Plenty of officers were annoyed at you three being arrested. Some of the officers owe you their lives, not just Sergeants Murphy and Fellowes. Yes, I know about those two. It looks like Chicago needs *Fusion*, right now, and I believe in what you do. I know you do it for good, not for personal gain. That, is why you got a free pass last night. You are Damon's daughter, so I know he will have passed onto you the same honour, and integrity as he had," Jack finished.

"I don't know what to say, Commander," Mindy replied in all honesty.

"Call me Jack. Here's my number if you need me," Jack said, handing over a card. "I control the 12th District, so if you need my help in 12th District, you call me. You need help in other Districts, you also call me, as I may be able to help or at least talk to somebody who can. Now, about last night; that was set up by some dirty cops, and I hate being used by criminals. You know who was behind it, don't you?"

"Chris D'Amico, the son of Frank D'Amico. He's determined to kill us both, but mainly Kick-Ass, as he killed Frank D'Amico and made Chris lose his arms and legs. We both owe Chris, as he caused the deaths of both of our fathers," I explained.

"I'm sorry. I wish things could have been different for you," Jack said, standing. "Anyway, I'd better be on my way."

"Thanks . . . Jack," Mindy said.

"I have your number and I will call you," Jack said, as he left.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

West Ridge

Mindy was sitting on the couch with Sophia, when Dave arrived back with Marty.

"What is it?" he asked, sensing something was wrong.

Mindy simply handed him a card, without looking up.

"He came to visit me earlier. He knew my Daddy, and he brought back our weapons," Mindy said, pointing at the holdall.

Marty seemed to sense the tense atmosphere.

"I'll get this lot down to the armoury," he said, picking up the holdall.

Dave sat down next to Mindy, once Marty had gone downstairs. She fell into him and she started sobbing, Sophia jumped off the couch and Dave hugged Mindy tightly.

12:28 P.M.

They received another call from Murphy.

Three people were down; two separate killings.

The fucking Archer again.

12:43 P.M.

Mindy had made a decision.

They needed to act, and they needed to act straight away.

They would go out at night, as apparently The Archer seemed to do most of his work during the day. They would patrol in the SUV and wear their combat suits under loose clothing. They would add their masks, comms, and weapons when needed and out of public view. Marty and Mindy agreed, so they all drove down to the Safehouse, but in two cars.

Marty drove *Speedy*.

[Archer Kill Count: 11]

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

As planned, they changed into their combat suits, but left off weapons, masks and comms.

Those extra items were stowed, out of sight, in the SUV. Marty had configured the cell phones to work with the Bluetooth system in the SUV, so that they could communicate while we were out.

Marty had also rigged up a radio in the SUV, so that he would be able to track the SUV's location.

2:20 P.M.

The SUV

They headed out and started a box search of the streets, spreading out from the Safehouse.

It was a lot easier during daylight; they could see an awful lot more. They stopped for a late take-away lunch at a

small fast food place and they ate, sitting in the SUV.

"Hey, it's Kim!" Dave said to Mindy, waving Kim over.

"Hi, Dave! Getting a quick bite?" Kim asked.

"Yeah! Kim, this is Mindy. Mindy, this is Kim," Dave said. "She works at the gun store, started a couple weeks ago."

"Hi Kim," Mindy said, looking a little annoyed, but smiling sweetly.

Dave got the distinct impression that Mindy did not want to sit and chat with Kim, so he said that they needed to move on and said goodbye to Kim.

3:10 P.M.

"I take it, you don't approve of Kim," Dave asked, carefully.

Mindy hesitated before answering.

"I'm not jealous, if that's what you mean," Mindy replied, trying to sound uninterested.

"Mindy, you are the only woman for me. Nothing can beat fucking Hit Girl," I said and Mindy blushed.

"Okay, Ass-Kick!" Mindy replied, laughing.

3:50 P.M.

"What the fuck is that?" Mindy asked.

Dave was watching the road, so Mindy was the eyes for them both; the roads were a lot busier during the day.

"What?"

"I just saw a man pulling two young kids out of a car. They were both kicking, and the man had his hands over their mouths!" Mindy said, thinking hard.

Dave slammed on the brakes and he pulled over. Mindy pointed to the other side of the road, about sixty yards back.

"Just up that alley, beside that red brick building," Mindy explained.

Dave got out and he walked casually back down the street, before stopping to cross the street opposite the alley. There was a rusty white van parked in the alley, but the car Mindy had seen, was gone. The building appeared derelict, however there was evidence of activity near a broken door, to the far end of the building.

He headed back to the SUV.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

The SUV

Dave explained what he had seen, to Mindy.

"I think we should investigate," He said.

"I suggest we let Murphy know," Mindy countered.

"Okay," Dave agreed.

While Dave updated Marty, Mindy called Murphy.

It turned out that Chris was up to no good, elsewhere in the City, which was taking up most of Chicago's available police resources, including SWAT. As it was only a hunch, Murphy couldn't push too hard, but he said that he would see what he could do.

4:35 P.M.

They moved the SUV to a point behind the target block.

There, they were then able to grab their equipment and move closer, to a place where they could gear up completely.

"There won't be enough space for a Katana in there. You might be okay with your Ko-Wakizashi and I can use my Tanto, but I think suppressed pistols would be best," Hit Girl suggested.

Kick-Ass pulled out his Glock 17 and he attached the suppressor. Hit Girl did the same with each of her SIG Sauer pistols.

"Ready," Kick-Ass asked.

"You actually have to ask?" Hit Girl replied, with a smirk.

"Let's go, partner," Kick-Ass snarled.

4:48 P.M.

They advanced towards the rear door and Hit Girl stood ready, while Kick-Ass opened the door, slowly.

There was nobody there. Just inside the door was a large empty room and a staircase. They could hear movement up the stairs. Kick-Ass signalled for Hit Girl to go first. He kept an eye on the door while Hit Girl climbed the stairs. Once Hit Girl was near to the top, Kick-Ass started up after her, covering their backs. He saw Hit Girl brace up.

"Contact!" Kick-Ass heard in his earpiece.

Hit Girl fired two suppressed shots and Kick-Ass heard something drop to the floor. He continued up the stairs; there was a dead man on the bare wood floor, two holes in his head and a large pistol on the floor, beside him.

"One down," Hit Girl said over the comms.

The second floor had a short corridor, with four doors off it; two to the left, one to the right, with another in front.

"Billy, what was that noise?" a voice said from the first room on the left.

The door opened, and a head appeared – Hit Girl double tapped the head. Kick-Ass burst into the room and a large man came at him with a baseball bat. He easily deflected the bat and planted his fist into the man's face, followed by a backwards kick, which sent him into the corner unconscious. Kick-Ass heard more voices, from the room to the right and they were angry male voices. He also heard a scream; a little kid's scream. He shot forward, out of the room as Hit Girl kicked down the last door on the left and he went through the door to the right, hard. There was a man directly behind the door, who was shoved back against the far wall by Kick-Ass' momentum. The man pointed his gun and fired at Kick-Ass, who simply shrugged off the impact and advanced. Another round hit him, then another, before he clubbed the man down with a baton. There was another man there, but he was unarmed. Kick-Ass punched him in the face, putting him down.

Behind the door was a chair and tied to the chair was a small boy of about eight-years-old. He was blindfolded and gagged.

4:56 P.M.

"You're safe now, Ryan," Kick-Ass said, cutting the ties securing the boy's hands and legs.

He then gently eased off the gag and blindfold.

"Stay here and stay down."

The boy looked scared, mostly at the sight of Kick-Ass.

"You're safe kid. Now, I need to go help Hit Girl save your sister," he said.

The boy nodded and crouched down in the corner.

"What's happening, Hit Girl?" Kick-Ass called, over the comms.

"I'm in the end room," Hit Girl reported. "A large man has the girl!"

"How far from the back wall?" Kick-Ass asked as he sized up the dry wall.

"Five feet. Why? You're not gonna . . ."

"Too late! One distraction coming up," Kick-Ass said, holstering his pistol and stowing the baton.

He then turned to the boy.

"Watch this!"

Kick-Ass ran at the wall, turning at the last minute and taking the impact on the heavier armour of his right shoulder blade. The drywall flew apart and Kick-Ass burst through, emerging just behind the thug and catching him with an armoured fist as the momentum carried him past. Hit Girl grabbed the girl and shot the man twice in the head. Kick-Ass heard Hit Girl over the comms.

"You're okay Megan, you're safe."

Hit Girl removed the girl's gag and blindfold.

"Hit Girl?"

"Yes, I'm Hit Girl."

"I'm Kick-Ass."

They went back through to the other room and Kick-Ass scooped up Ryan, carrying him on his left arm. Hit girl picked up Megan and they all headed back downstairs.

"Battle Guy, *Fusion* is clear," Kick-Ass called. "Two rescued."

"Battle Guy copies two rescued. Well done guys!"

5:14 P.M.

They exited the building via the front door.

Outside, Kick-Ass saw several people, who had gathered, attracted by the unsuppressed gunshots. A Ford Explorer Police Interceptor was heading down the street, blue lights flashing. Kick-Ass noticed the number: '8760'; it was Murphy and Fellowes. They stopped at the curb and jumped out.

"Damn!" Fellowes said, impressed. "You did it."

"Look out!" Hit Girl yelled, and Kick-Ass turned to see a blue car heading towards them, down the street.

There was a man hanging out of the right-rear window, with a small machine-pistol in his hands. Kick-Ass grabbed Megan from Hit Girl and he covered both kids with his armour. He felt the rounds as they pounded his back; both kids were screaming.

"You're both perfectly safe," Kick-Ass said as soothingly as he could.

Seconds later, the impacts ceased, and Kick-Ass heard a car crashing, further down the road. He stood up and looked around. Hit Girl, Murphy, and Fellowes were each pointing a pistol towards the crashed vehicle. All three pistols had the slides locked back on empty magazines. Then all three rapidly replaced their empty magazine with a full one. Murphy got on his radio, calling in the events. The crowd had dispersed when the shooting had begun and miraculously, nobody was hurt. But the crowd slowly reappeared and some started applauding.

"You two okay?" Kick-Ass asked the kids.

"Yeah," Ryan replied. "That was awesome!"

"Definitely," Megan agreed.

Both kids were actually smiling.

5:39 P.M.

Other Police vehicles started to appear.

"We need to get outta here," Hit Girl suggested.

"Get the kids to Murphy," Kick-Ass said, pulling out his cell. "I'll get us outta here."

5:47 P.M.

A cab pulled up.

"Cab for Kick-Ass!"

They dived in and the cab took off.

Kick-Ass called Battle Guy and asked him to go get the SUV.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

Several blocks east

They had the cab drop them off several blocks to the east.

"That was the guy you used, to follow Shadow and I that night," Hit Girl said as the cab drove off.

"Yes, it was."

They waited in an alley, until Marty appeared in the SUV, then they dived into the back and pulled off their masks and comms. They stowed their weapons and pulled on loose clothes over their combat suits.

"That was cool. Thanks, Marty," Mindy said, before giving Dave a hug and a kiss.

"Hey! No sex in the SUV!" Marty warned, as he drove back to the Safehouse.

6:48 P.M.

The Safehouse

They were safely back at the Safehouse when Murphy called.

"Wow! Commander of 21st is over the fucking moon. His kids think you guys are the best. Now, catch The Archer and the Mayor will probably give you the key to the whole damn city," Murphy said, laughing.

"Gee, thanks, Murph!" Mindy growled, uncomfortably.

"Enjoy!" Murphy said.

They sat down to dinner, feeling a little happier than they had the previous night.

They were also very tired, so they decided to head home and get some sleep, straight after dinner.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

West Ridge

Dave awoke just before ten, to find a text from Murphy.

The Archer had just killed two more people. That time though, they were both police officers on patrol. That fucking sucked.

He went back to bed, feeling just as bad, as the other night.

[Archer Kill Count: 13]

Updated: *January 2018*

***Chapter 40*: The Week of Hell - Day 4**

*The following day
Tuesday, May 20th, 2014*

[Archer Kill Count: 13]

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

West Ridge

Mindy felt like shit, when she heard about the two police officers. Marty did, too.

But it wasn't completely unexpected.

However, breakfast was a bit subdued that morning, nonetheless.

9:24 A.M.

It arrived.

Eisenhower's body armour.

It was a custom-made combat vest, based on the Special Forces Aerial Insertion Vest. The vest provided Threat Level IIIA ballistics protection, as well as protection against single and double-edged blades. It was dark blue in colour and protected Eisenhower's chest, sides and back. There was also a mask which protected her face, and head. The combat vest had a GPS tracker, so we could keep an eye on where Eisenhower went, if she was off pursuing somebody.

Mindy was excited and so was Eisenhower, once her armour was on. She instantly recognised that she was now her alter ego. Her behaviour was subtly different; she appeared more dangerous. Eisenhower was not the soft, loving Sophia.

Eisenhower was a completely different animal.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

West Ridge

They spent the morning training with Eisenhower and letting her get used to her new combat vest.

She looked really cool with the mask in place. One slight catch was that Eisenhower did not want the mask and vest removed. It took both Dave and Mindy to remove the vest and mask, then Sophia went off to sulk on the couch.

Chloe called, during a break at school, and said that she wanted to congratulate the team on the previous night. She was really impressed and said that the team's actions were all over the newspapers. Apparently, Chloe's Mom thought that the team were really cool; especially Kick-Ass. Chloe thought that was very funny.

"Come on, let's head down to the Safehouse," Dave suggested. "We can grab lunch on the way."

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

They grabbed food from McDonald's on the way to the Safehouse.

At the Safehouse, Dave and Mindy sat down in the kitchen and they ate their burgers while discussing the activities for that evening. The intention was to head to Marquette Park and patrol that area. It was large and there was plenty of cover, plus there was the possibility that The Archer may turn up. So far, all of the deaths had occurred in or around a park. So far, Marquette Park had not been targeted.

They needed to draw the guy out and stop him, soon.

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Dave returned from a trip to pick up a package.

It was from The Armourer and was quite large and very heavy. Inside, Dave and Mindy found several large plates, with attachments for hand grips and straps. They were ballistic plates, contained within a composite material, similar to our combat suits. There were two shields per set. Each shield was the same size, approximately ten by twelve inches in size, with bevelled upper corners, but the Type IV shield weighed in at three and a half kilos, while the Type III shield only weighed just over one and a half kilos. We had four of each shield.

The Armourer assured us that the Type III shield would stop a crossbow bolt, easily. He had included the heavier shields, just in case. Anyway, the shields would come in handy when fighting gunmen as it was a lot easier and cheaper to replace the shields than to repair the combat suits. They spent some time practising carrying the shields, to see how they would work in combat. The Type IV was too heavy for Mindy to carry, but Dave managed fine.

The only catch was knowing where and when to use the shields.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Dave and Mindy continued training all afternoon.

Until, however, they were interrupted by a call from Marcus. He had heard about the rescue of the two kids. He was extremely impressed by our actions and he made Mindy blush furiously, when he told her that he had never been so proud of anybody than he was of her, right at that moment. When Mindy was finally able to talk again, she told Marcus about the visit from the Commander of 12th District. Marcus explained about Jack knowing Mindy's father and that Jack had worked out who Hit Girl was, on his own.

Jack had come straight out with it, asked Marcus and Marcus' expression had answered Jack's question.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

The time for training was over.

After a meal, they started gearing up. Sophia got very excited when we brought out her combat vest and mask, but she calmed down once the vest was fitted, along with the mask. Mindy called Murphy and advised him that they would be patrolling Marquette Park.

Murphy said that he would listen out for anything happening there and let us know as soon as he could.

6:41 P.M.

Chloe arrived.

"What are *you* doing here?" Mindy demanded, angrily.

"I'm coming to help," Chloe replied.

"No, you are not," Mindy replied, strongly.

"I am a member of *Fusion* and you need my help," Chloe replied indignantly.

"You are a thirteen-year-old girl. You are too young to be out there, at least this week," Mindy replied, knowing the response that she would receive.

"You hypocritical little bitch! How dare you say I'm *too young*! You've been doing this since you were five for God's sake!" Chloe yelled back.

"That has fuck all to do with this," Mindy retorted.

"Hey!" Dave bellowed, causing both Chloe and Mindy to turn and face him.

"Cut it the fuck out, both of you. Chloe is a member of *Fusion*, simple as that and she knows the risks, almost as well as we do. We go out as a team," Dave lectured. "You okay with that Mindy?"

"Okay, Chloe, I'm sorry!" Mindy said, smiling.

"Thanks," Chloe replied, and she looked at Eisenhower. "That armour looks cool."

"It does, doesn't it?" Mindy replied, and she started explaining to Chloe the specifications of the armour.

7:21 P.M.

"Guys, got a minute?" Chloe asked.

"Always," Mindy replied.

They sat down with Chloe in the briefing room.

"Go on," Mindy prompted.

"I watched that video, online, last night. I'm really sorry about your Dad, Mindy. That really was a shit way for him to die," Chloe said.

"Tell me about it; I watched the video live," Marty said. "Back then I didn't know about Dave being Kick-Ass and thankfully, I had never met Mindy or Hit Girl."

"You took a hell of a beating, Dave," Chloe said.

"I did, but at least twenty percent of the pain didn't register as I have a few fucked up nerve endings," Dave said, grimacing.

"I have to admit, Hit Girl was seriously scary back then, but she looked really cool at the end of the video," Marty commented.

"That was kinda the plan; I had a bad-ass reputation to uphold," Mindy said, smiling at Chloe. "Those D'Amico thugs; that is why Dave and I do this, people like that don't deserve to live. Anyway, cunt, am I not 'seriously scary' now?"

"To be honest, not so much. I now see you as soft and cuddly Mindy, not the vicious blood-thirsty assassin, Hit Girl," Marty explained.

"Thanks for letting me know more about you guys, it means a lot, knowing that you trust me. It also helps me understand what we do," Chloe said.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Hit Girl attached a slip leash, opened the back of the SUV, and Eisenhower jumped straight in, no hesitation.

Kick-Ass was driving, and Shadow was in the back. Hit Girl climbed in and they headed out towards Marquette Park where they parked up nearby and walked into the park and started a patrol, parallel to Redfield Drive which circled the park.

The complete circle was two and a half miles.

9:20 P.M.

Marquette Park

They had been patrolling for about an hour.

They were also getting a very positive reaction, and many were impressed with Eisenhower. However, the peaceful night was soon ripped apart by a gunshot, followed by a scream. Hit Girl spun around, looking in the direction of the sound, but she could see nothing, so she grabbed her NVGs and scanned again.

"I see four men, running this way. One has a gun," Hit Girl advised the team. "Come on!"

Hit Girl ran in the direction of the men, with Eisenhower beside her. Shadow and Kick-Ass were right behind.

Kick-Ass was calling in the attack to Battle Guy, as they ran.

9:24 P.M.

The four men were in a loose group, the man at the front of the group had the gun and Hit Girl assumed he was the leader.

Fusion closed on the men, who were heading towards the main road, surrounding the park. They intercepted the men just as they rounded a corner and as the first man approached Hit Girl, she stepped out with Eisenhower. The men all skidded to a halt on the wet grass. Eisenhower barked once and the man in front, raised his pistol.

"Move, bitch!" the man ordered.

Hit Girl slipped the leash.

"Schwanz!" she growled.

Eisenhower shot forward and buried her snout into the man's groin.

"Fuck!" The man yelled, dropping the gun and falling to the ground backwards.

"Fuck me!" Shadow exclaimed. "That was fucking cool!"

"Thank you for that observation, Shadow," Kick-Ass said dryly, over the comms.

"Who's next?" Hit Girl asked, ignoring Shadow and Kick-Ass.

The other three men hesitated, before turning and trying to run. But not fast enough, as Kick-Ass and Shadow moved to block their escape.

"Please stay," Hit Girl snarled.

The men froze.

"Eisenhower, drop," Hit Girl ordered, and Eisenhower whined, but she let go of her mouthful, licking her lips in eager anticipation.

"Time for a walk, guys," Kick-Ass snarled.

Hit Girl called in the result to Battle Guy as they walked the men back towards where the attack had begun. The leader was having difficulty walking; shame. They could see the lights of an ambulance flashing a few hundred yards away, so they headed in that direction.

9:38 P.M.

Once they reached the scene of the attack, they found a woman being tended to by paramedics. The woman had been shot in the left shoulder. Two police officers came forward as we approached.

"Evening officers. Four for your care, plus this was their gun," Kick-Ass advised, handing over the pistol.

"Thanks, Kick-Ass," one officer replied, cuffing the first man, while his partner grabbed the next.

A police van appeared quickly to take away all four men and within a few minutes, had driven off again.

"Thanks, *Fusion*," the first officer, his name tag read 'Hill', said as the ambulance drove off.

"We were glad to be able to. . ."

Hit Girl was cut off in mid-sentence as Hill fell to the ground.

[Archer Kill Count: 14]

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and Midnight

Marquette Park

Hit Girl looked down at the officer.

He was dead, with a crossbow bolt embedded in his head. Hit Girl grabbed her NVGs and looked around. The Archer could not have been very far away, and they could tell from which direction the bolt had come.

"There!" Hit Girl yelled, and she pointed to the east.

The Archer had made a mistake; the water would block his escape and force him to turn north or south.

"Battle Guy! We have The Archer in sight," Hit Girl called. "He just killed a Police Officer."

We all pulled shields off our backs. Shadow and Hit Girl carried the lighter Type III shields, while Kick-Ass had the Type IV shield. Kick-Ass and Shadow also put on their NVGs, to allow better vision.

"I have him!" Kick-Ass called.

"Me too!" Shadow added.

The Archer looked to be wearing woodland camouflage gear, making him difficult to see in the dark without NVGs. They could each make out his crossbow and he was feverishly trying to reload. He had not expected to be targeted so easily and so quickly. They ran hard in his direction, closing the gap considerably. Hit Girl skidded to a halt and she snapped off three rounds, causing The Archer to dive to the ground.

Then he came up on one knee and he aimed his crossbow.

10:16 P.M.

The bolt impacted Hit Girl's shield with considerable force, but did not penetrate.

One shot one kill? Not anymore.

Kick-Ass snapped off six rapid shots and they all heard a yell of pain from The Archer, before he ran. Kick-Ass must have hit him in the left arm, as the man made no effort to try and reload the crossbow which he cradled in his right arm. He was running to the north, towards the road. Hit Girl slipped Eisenhower's leash.

"Schwanz!" Hit Girl growled, and Eisenhower shot off into the darkness.

"Battle Guy! Track Eisenhower, she's chasing The Archer," Hit Girl advised.

10:21 P.M.

The chase was uneven.

Eisenhower closed on The Archer, who turned his head as he heard the snarling dog approach. The Archer wore a balaclava over his head, hiding his features, so no one had any idea if he was scared, or not. The dog closed and dived as the man turned around, brandishing a knife in his right hand, having slung his crossbow over his back. Eisenhower buried her snout into The Archer's groin, causing a loud scream of pain to be emitted. The Archer stabbed downwards with the knife, but the knife failed to penetrate the combat vest, however, it did cause Eisenhower pain. Despite the pain, Eisenhower never released her hold on the man's 'items'. *Fusion* caught up and Hit Girl placed the point of a Katana to The Archer's throat.

"Go ahead, make my day," she snarled.

The Archer stopped trying to stab Eisenhower and he dropped the knife.

"Oh, dear. Hit Girl's gone all Dirty Harry," Kick-Ass warned, over the comms.

"So, what; I like Dirty Harry films," Hit Girl growled in response. "Started watching them when I was eight."

"Figures," both Kick-Ass and Shadow said together.

"Battle Guy. The Archer has been taken," Hit Girl called, ignoring Kick-Ass and Shadow.

10:48 P.M.

The Archer was currently being seen to by a reluctant Paramedic and he was surrounded by a dozen, very angry, Police Officers.

The balaclava had been removed and underneath was a very nasty looking individual. He glared at his captors, viciously. They just glared back! None of the police officers challenged us. Many smiled and said thanks, for capturing The Archer.

Things were otherwise sombre, as the body of Officer Hill was being removed from the scene.

11:38 P.M.

The Safehouse

Fusion finally left the scene and they drove back to the Safehouse.

Their feelings were very mixed. The Archer was caught, but another police officer had died. Mindy was putting her weapons away, in the armoury, when she noticed Marty was looking very pensive. He was looking at the Glock 17 pistol that he had pulled out of the belt holster that he now wore every time he was in the Safehouse.

"What's up, Marty?" Mindy asked, once Dave and Chloe had gone upstairs.

"I know I told you that I never wanted to go out again, as a Hero, after the warehouse fight last year, but . . . I know I contribute with intel and comms, but I feel like I need to do more," Marty explained. "I sit safely, while you guys risk your lives each night."

"What you do is crucial to our activities, Marty, and I know you have courage, plenty of it. You want to be trained, fine, but don't rush into it, Marty," Hit Girl advised. "Believe me, you'll know when you're ready."

Updated: January 2018

***Chapter 41*: The Week of Hell - Day 5**

Wednesday

The following takes place between Midnight and 2:00 A.M.

The Safehouse

"Marty can you get Little Miss Shadow back to Abby's?" Mindy asked.

"Sure! You ready, Little Miss Shadow?" Marty asked Chloe and received a nasty scowl in return along with a nod.

"Thanks Chloe! See you on Saturday. If we need you, *we'll call*," Mindy said, with extra emphasis on the last two words.

"Okay!" Chloe said, getting into Speedy with Marty.

00:53 A.M.

West Ridge

As soon as we arrived home, we waited a few minutes for Marty to get back and then all three of us went to bed.

Sophia, especially was very tired and curled up on the couch in our bedroom and went straight to sleep. She had some slight bruising from the knife impacts, but nothing life threatening and she seemed to have enjoyed the evening's activities!

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

West Ridge

We all slept in, thanks to the very late return, earlier that morning.

11:28 A.M.

I woke up and jumped straight into the shower and was joined after a few minutes, by Mindy.

I had a few bruises, from the other day and Mindy helped to soothe them. We were getting quite exhausted from the continued activity over the past few days and that was taking a physical toll on our bodies.

The shit had to end soon!

11:55 A.M.

Once we were dressed, we headed downstairs and started 'brunch'.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

West Ridge

Marty appeared and sat down with us to eat.

We would need to take Sophia out for a walk, once we had eaten. The fresh air should also do us some good.

1:10 P.M.

The three of us (yes, Marty was persuaded to come, too) and Sophia, were walking through Channel Runne Park. It was a pleasant day and Sophia was really enjoying the freedom. Dave had brought a Frisbee and we had Sophia chasing after it.

We talked about what to do next. Chris was still out there causing trouble. If seizing the Police Commander's kids and

The Archer were part of Chris's plans, then he would be majorly pissed by now.

We were the proverbial fly in Chris's ointment!

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

We decided on another daytime patrol.

As before, we changed into our combat suits, but left off our weapons, masks and comms. These extra items were stowed, out of sight, in the SUV. We executed our usual box search around the Safehouse, but didn't see much.

Ultimately we ended up south of Chicago, near I-90 and East 79th Street.

3:35 P.M.

"Stop!" I yelled.

Mindy was driving and slammed on the brakes, pulling over to the side of the road.

"Backup, slowly!" I said.

Mindy slowly reversed the SUV, back down the street.

"Stop! Look who we have!"

Looking down a narrow alley between two properties, I saw a familiar Hero and she was fighting two men.

"Go!" Mindy ordered.

I climbed into the back of the SUV and quickly put on my mask and comms, before grabbing my batons, Glock and Taser. The building directly beside us was abandoned and the front yard was overgrown, so I dived out of the SUV and behind a bush. I moved to the alley and peered down it. The two men were between me and Hawk. Behind the Hero, I could see two more men, coming down the alley.

"Hit Girl, get around the back! Two more heading down," I called over the comms.

"Moving out!"

I heard the SUV accelerate away, then I climbed over the security gate, landing behind the two thugs.

"Howdy cunts!" I snarled.

The two thugs spun around and I could see a relieved grin on Hawk's face.

Neither thug was armed with a gun, but they wielded knives. I waded in and smashed the head of one thug, against the wall of the building, on the right. He dropped hard. The next thug tried to fight, but the alley was tight and I slammed an armoured elbow into the thugs face, putting him down. Hawk was fighting the newer pair of thugs and I could tell that she was getting tired.

"My turn!" Hit Girl growled, appearing at the far end of the alley.

One thug spun around and ran at Hit Girl, who effortlessly put the thug down, before literally walking over him, towards the remaining thug. Before Hit Girl could reach him, Hawk put the last thug down, with the shaft of her short spear, to the side of his head.

3:46 P.M.

"You okay, Hawk?" I asked.

"Thank you, Kick-Ass!" Hawk replied, sounding out of breath. "And thank you, Hit Girl!"

"No problem!" Hit Girl replied, smirking.

"I didn't know you guys came out much, during the day!" Hawk said.

"It's rare, but we do like to keep an eye on what's going on!" I responded. "Hit Girl, back to headquarters!"

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

"Well done with the plates. Smearing them with mud was a good idea!" I said, as we drove away from the area.

"Thanks! What's with the 'Hit Girl, back to headquarters', thing?" Mindy asked. "You've used it a few times now."

"Your Dad used it, the first night we met," I admitted. "It sounded kinda cool!"

"Yeah... Well, sometimes, what Daddy thought was cool, sorta wasn't!" Mindy admitted, grimacing. "A lot of the things he said, didn't always make sense. Like 'Ass-Kick!'"

"But I thought you liked 'Ass-Kick!'" I replied, grinning at Mindy.

"You are *such* a dork!" Mindy replied, shaking her head and laughing.

4:45 P.M.

"So what do you think of Hawk's fighting skills?" I asked.

"They suck, big time! She has some basic skills, but they seem to be more of a defensive measure, than offensive. She's definitely no threat to us, but I intend to keep my distance from her," Mindy replied. "At least for now."

The rest of the patrol was uneventful, so we decided that it was time to head back to the Safehouse.

When we got back, Marty was busy getting himself setup for the evening's activities. The Archer was gone, but we still had Chris and his crackpot henchmen to contend with. Mindy went off to train for the evening, while I headed upstairs for a shower.

5:12 P.M.

When I got back downstairs, Mindy was back-flipping across the mat. Now that girl was really flexible!

"You showering before dinner? Cause I think you're gonna need it!" I needed.

"Cunt!" Mindy yelled back, before cart wheeling toward me. "Okay, I'll go shower!"

It was at times like that, that I knew I was the happiest man on the planet, with the hottest girl, and that girl was Hit Girl!

I went upstairs, with Marty, to get dinner ready.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

Dinner was good and Mindy always looked hottest with her hair up!

We cleared up and headed downstairs to gear up. I couldn't resist giving Mindy a big kiss, as she passed me and she giggled. She might be hot, but she could also be a little strange!

I checked out the two motorcycles, to make ensure that they were both gassed up and ready. As I entered the armoury, I saw Mindy polishing her twin Katana swords and the Tanto.

"You think we're gonna need them, this evening?" I queried.

"You never know, that bastard is totally unpredictable!" Mindy replied, angrily.

I knew Mindy was referring to Chris and she was right! I pulled out my Ko-Wakizashi blades and set to polishing them, before checking my Glock and ensuring that my Taser was charged.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

The safe house

Time to depart!

"Fusion is heading out!" I called to Marty, as we started the Fat Boy and the Panigale.

"Battle Guy copies Fusion is heading out!"

8:35 P.M.

We were cruising near to the east of I-90, when we got a call from Marty.

"Murphy called; there's trouble at East 31st Street and South Martin Luther King Drive. He didn't go into detail, but I think the ninjas are back!" Battle Guy reported.

"We're on it!" Hit Girl responded, accelerating.

We were heading east on East 31st street. As we approached the junction advised by Marty, we turned left and then all hell broke loose.

South Martin Luther King Drive was an eight-lane strip, with a grass median, that had trees along it. Ahead of us were ninjas, well over a dozen of them, plus beyond them were watchdogs, their sole purpose to guard them.

As we headed up the street, side by side, a shape ran into the road and went down on one knee. It looked like The Archer; he had a crossbow! Were there two of the bastards?

He aimed at Hit Girl and fired...

8:43 P.M.

I watched as Hit Girl swerved to avoid the bolt, but she was hit and came off the back of the Panigale.

"Hit Girl is down, another archer!"

Luckily we weren't going that fast, but still the Ducati skidded across the road and flipped over once, before impacting the median. Hit Girl rolled across the road, before coming to rest beside a parked car. As soon as I saw Hit Girl come off the Ducati, I skidded to a halt, veering towards her, as she rolled across the road. I jumped off the Fat Boy, laying it down on its side.

I pulled out my Glock and sent several rounds down the drive, towards this other archer. I heard a yell and saw the archer go down. The ninjas turned and headed in our direction.

Then, I turned my attention to Hit Girl.

She was on her side, not moving, but the combat suit seemed intact and seemed to have protected her, but her helmet was badly gouged and scratched to hell. I opened her visor and was relieved to see Hit Girl grinning up at me, but she was in obvious pain.

I looked down her body and found where the bolt had hit her. It had impacted her lower arm just below the elbow. The bolt had pierced the composite material of the suit and passed clean through! I quickly ripped open a vial of anti-septic and poured it into the wound, causing Hit Girl to scream out, I then wrapped a field dressing around the wound.

"Can you fight?" I asked, looking up at the advancing ninjas. "Cause you're gonna need to in about forty seconds!"

"I'll manage!" Hit Girl said, getting up slowly, before pulling off her damaged helmet and throwing it off to one side.

"Battle Guy, Hit Girl is wounded, but okay!" I called. "Fusion is engaging the ninjas!"

8:56 P.M.

We engaged the ninjas.

Hit Girl could only use one Katana, but seemed to be managing okay. I was slashing my way through the ninjas with both of my Ko-Wakizashi. Blood was flowing and Hit Girl seemed to be in her element! The adrenalin would help her.

As before, the watchdogs were defending the ninjas from the Police. I could hear lots of gunfire, but this time I could hear heavier gunfire, from rifles. The ninjas were falling, before us, but not as fast as I would have liked.

I came face to face with one ninja, bent on revenge for his colleagues and he pushed hard, repeatedly hitting my armour, before I was able to fight off his attack and drive a blade into his stomach and then letting him sink to the blood spattered roadway. I saw Hit Girl receive a hit to her wounded left arm, causing her to yell out and she was pushed down. I surged forward in anger and severed the head of that ninja, sending it flying.

Suddenly another ninja stopped in mid-attack, he had a spear tip jutting through his chest, which was swiftly pulled back out. As the ninja dropped, he revealed a grinning Hawk who span around and hauled Hit Girl back to her feet.

"Just wanted to return the favour!" Hawk shouted.

"Please, join us!" I snarled back with a nod.

"You okay, Hit Girl!" I called over the comms.

"Yeah... I'm fine..." Hit Girl replied, but she didn't sound okay and she was starting to look pale.

9:12 P.M.

There were about eight ninjas left, but I saw quite a few watchdogs running towards us to help the ninjas! As the watchdogs got close, they started to shoot at us, but then the watchdogs started to fall and I saw Police Officers, some in riot and SWAT gear attacking the watchdogs with AR-15 rifles and pistols. I turned my attention back to the ninjas, slaughtering them with renewed energy.

This had to end soon, as I could see Hit Girl was struggling; she must be losing blood from the wound. Hawk was actually doing pretty well, considering! There was more to Hawk than you would think. I slashed the stomach of another ninja, before fending off a blow from a Katana with my gauntlet and driving a blade into the chest of that ninja.

But as the last ninjas fell, so did Hit Girl!

9:24 P.M.

I ran over to the fallen Hit Girl, stowing my blades.

I think she must have fainted, as a minute or two later, her eyes opened and she smiled. I made a decision.

"We need a Paramedic!" I shouted to a Police Officer.

"Yes, sir!" The Officer replied instantly, grabbing his radio.

A worried looking Hawk knelt down beside Hit Girl as a Paramedic appeared and started removing the field dressing, before examining the wound.

"It's a through and through, I'll suture the wounds closed. Keep them clean and they'll heal completely," the Paramedic said.

I removed Hit Girl's left gauntlet and pushed up the arm of her suit, to allow better access for the Paramedic. While the Paramedic went to work, I got up to check on what was happening around us. There were a lot of bodies scattered down the roadway. Police and Paramedics were everywhere and I could see some dead Police Officers, too. Damn! Murphy appeared and I explained what had happened. He said he would arrange for Hit Girl's wrecked Ducati to be taken away.

When I returned to Hit Girl, the Paramedic was applying a bandage to the wound.

"Thanks!" I said.

"No problem, Kick-Ass!" The Paramedic said, packing up his equipment. "It's an honour!"

I helped Hit Girl back to her feet.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and Midnight

"Hawk, can you help me get Hit Girl onto my motorcycle?" I growled.

"Of course!" Hawk replied, with concern in her voice.

I helped Hit Girl over to the Fat Boy and while Hawk supported the weakened Hit Girl, I picked the motorcycle up, before mounting and bracing the beast. Hawk helped Hit Girl onto the seat behind me, before retrieving Hit Girl's helmet and helping her to put it on.

"Hold tight, Hit Girl!" Hawk said, in a concerned voice.

"Thanks, Hawk!" I growled.

10:24 P.M.

The Safehouse

I drove back to the Safehouse slowly, ensuring that Hit Girl kept a tight hold on me.

Once I'd parked and the Safehouse doors were closed, Marty came running towards us and caught Hit Girl, as she fell backwards. I climbed off the Fat Boy and helped Marty remove her helmet, before we carried Mindy upstairs.

Marty went back downstairs, while I stripped the combat suit off of Mindy. I got her into bed and left her to rest. I went back downstairs and explained to Marty exactly what had happened, including our meeting up with Hawk again. I could see that Marty had something on this mind, but didn't want to get into it, tonight.

Updated: *June 2015*

***Chapter 42*: The Week of Hell - Day 6**

Thursday

The following takes place between Midnight and 2:00 A.M.

West Ridge

I didn't get to bed until well after midnight.

Mindy was asleep. I had checked the bandage and it seemed okay; no blood was leaking out at least, but she did still look very pale.

I felt shattered, so crawled in beside Mindy and fell asleep.

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

West Ridge

I awoke soon after eight and sat up, in bed.

My left arm was throbbing, painfully. I felt the bandage, but couldn't remember getting hurt. But it still fucking hurt! I felt an arm wrap itself around my waist and Dave started nuzzling my neck. That incredible feeling, it helped to distract me from the pain in my arm. I started to giggle, as Dave's lips were tickling me!

"You okay, gorgeous? I was a bit worried about you last night, you fainted once we got back here," Dave asked.

"I think so. I'm starting to remember the events of last night," I said. I remembered getting hurt and crashing my Ducati – *that* thought hurt more than my arm!

"We owe Hawk, too. She came to help fight the ninjas and she helped me with you, when you collapsed," Dave said.

"I'll remember to thank her," I replied. "I need a shower!"

"Yes you do!" Dave confirmed, smirking.

8:44 A.M.

The shower made a big difference; I felt human again.

I examined my combat suit and the damage. I would need to order a replacement top and I needed to do it that morning. I got dressed and headed downstairs, as I was feeling very hungry.

"Hi Mindy!" Marty said.

"Morning!" I said, in reply, sitting down at the kitchen counter.

Dave dumped a plate, piled high with bacon and eggs, in front of me.

"Thanks Dave!"

09:48 P.M.

"You think you can still fight?" I asked Mindy.

"We don't have a choice; I must fight," Mindy replied.

"Well, get some rest and let your body recover. I mean it!" I lectured.

"I really love you, Dave!" Mindy said, hugging and kissing me.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

I spent an hour and a half walking Sophia, which did us both good!

The previous night had really worried me; I had almost lost Mindy. Thank God she wasn't hurt badly. I knew we took these risks every time that we went out, but I could not lose Mindy, not again.

At least running around with Sophia helped to distract me from the shitty week.

It really was turning out to be the week of hell!

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

West Ridge

When I got back home, Sophia went off to get a drink and doze on the couch.

Marty had already left in Speedy; he said he had some things to do and then he would meet us at the Safehouse, later that afternoon.

I headed upstairs to check on Mindy. She was still sleeping. I loved watching Mindy sleep, she looked so cute and no, watching Mindy sleep was *not* creepy!

13:02 P.M.

I woke Mindy.

She responded by pulling me into a kiss!

"You must have slept well; your hormones are definitely well rested!" I responded.

"You got a problem with that, Ass-Kick?" Mindy asked, seductively.

"Right now? Not really!" I said, letting Mindy continue with her feelings.

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

West Ridge

We sat down for lunch.

We were both in need of sustenance, after the morning's exertions!

Once we had eaten, we headed down to the Safehouse, in the SUV.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

I received a surprise call. It was on the Fusion number.

"Go!" I growled.

"You can drop the 'growl', young lady!" A voice said and I recognised Jack Bay.

"Okay," I replied, dropping the 'growl'. "What do you want?"

"We think we have pinpointed Chris's headquarters. We intend to assault it, tonight. Considering what we have been facing over the past week, some have requested your team be present. SWAT, specifically, want your input," Jack explained.

"We can do that," I replied, a little surprised.

"If they only knew how young you really were! They know you're young, but not how young. If they knew, Kick-Ass would be fighting them off you!" Jack laughed.

"Where and when?" I asked, ignoring the last comment.

"I'll text you, in the next half hour," Jack replied. "Thanks."

4:22 P.M.

"Dave, Marty! We have a tasking!" I called.

"What?" Both asked, as I sat down in the briefing room.

I outlined what Jack had said.

"Let's get geared up!" Dave said.

4:41 P.M.

As promised, a text arrived, with a time and a place.

"Marty, email coming through showing Chris's HQ and our meeting up point. We meet up at 19:45," I said.

Within a few seconds an email arrived, with the exact location of Chris's HQ: It was off South Princeton Avenue and backing onto I-94 and I-90, in south Chicago. We would meet the Police, a little over half a mile away at a warehouse, so we could all meet without tipping off Chris. Very few knew about our involvement to prevent leaks.

"Okay, the building has three stories and has the Green Line running directly behind it. You'll need to leave here by 19:30," Marty said.

The rest of the afternoon was spent training and getting our gear together.

This was going to be a major operation, so I decided on some heavier fire power. We would have our usual equipment, but this time I opted for the H&K G36C assault rifle. It was light and packed a good punch. I had shown the weapon to Dave some time previously, so I gave him a quick refresher.

I took eight thirty-round magazines, while Dave carried twelve.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

I had to admit, I was feeling nervous.

Teaming up with the Police – now that was something new!

We ate a good meal and finished getting ourselves geared up. We each had a bandoleer, loaded with magazines, which was quite heavy. We would have to travel on the Fat Boy, as my Ducati was wrecked.

7:28 P.M.

We were ready to leave.

We had checked, double-checked and triple-checked, everything. Marty performed a security sweep, with the cameras and then Kick-Ass accelerated out of the Safehouse, heading north.

7:43 P.M.

We approached the warehouse meeting place.

The roller shutter went up, when we were twenty yards away and we drove straight in. In front of us were a pair of SWAT vehicles and several men in body armour; they waved us over. Kick-Ass parked the Fat Boy and we dismounted before heading over.

"Welcome! I'm Matthews, Team Leader," One SWAT Officer said, holding out his hand.

"Hi guys!" We both said and shook hands with all of the SWAT Officers.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

CPD Warehouse

We spent the next thirty minutes, or so, going over the assault plan.

We chatted through the plan, making a few changes. It was interesting that the experienced SWAT team were actually listening to a sixteen-year-old girl! But I supposed that my actions and previous accomplishments spoke for themselves!

An assault plan was agreed on.

A four-man SWAT team would gain entry, via the main door on the first floor, while Fusion would assault from the side entrance. cursory surveys had shown that the first floor was used only for storage. Chris was believed to use the second floor and there were two staircases. One from the front and one from the side. The third floor was also believed to be storage and would be assaulted via a fire escape, by the second four-man SWAT team, who would then gain entry to the second floor, by the staircase.

Battle Guy would act as the communications go-between and would be able to talk to both Fusion and SWAT.

8:15 P.M.

Chris's HQ

We assaulted the building, simultaneously.

It was dark and between Fusion and SWAT, we took out the four patrolling watchdogs, silently.

With a resounding crash, all three entry points were blasted open and we moved in. We gunned down any opposition, as we entered and went up the stairs. As expected resistance was strong. All three teams met up on the second floor, having waded through several watchdogs, per team.

We found ourselves pinned down in a large open area, when many more watchdogs appeared from another part of the building and cut off all access to the stairs off the second floor.

8:27 P.M.

Chris's HQ

It looks like we might have fallen into another one of Chris's traps.

The watchdogs were well armed and seemed to have plenty of ammunition, which we did not!

"Battle Guy! We're pinned down by Chris's watchdogs! Fusion and SWAT are pinned down, we're gonna need help and more ammo!" I called.

"Battle Guy copies!"

What a fucking predicament!

Kick-Ass and I were caught on the second floor, with the eight SWAT Police Officers and surrounded by Chris's men!

The bastard must be loving this, if he was watching.

8:51 P.M.

Chris's HQ

The fight was not going well.

We were pinned down and running low on ammunition. The SWAT Officers nearby seemed to be in the same predicament and were doing their best to conserve ammunition. The escape route behind was blocked by about a dozen watchdogs with automatic weapons. The way forward had over two dozen watch dogs, again armed with automatic weapons.

I was firing single shots with my H&K G36C assault rifle. I was down to three, thirty-round magazines and Kick-Ass was down to four, thirty-round magazines. The SWAT Officers were using AR-15 rifles and were down to their last magazines, too.

Time to call in.

"Battle Guy! Things are not getting any better! We need backup and ammo!" I called over the comms.

"We're working on it!" Battle Guy responded, sounding out of breath.

"We?" I called back.

"Never mind!" Battle Guy responded.

9:01 P.M.

The Safehouse

"That the last?" I asked, feeling exhausted.

"Oh yes!" Marty said, breathing heavily.

"You look good, Marty!" I said, checking out Marty's, 'Battle Guy' costume.

"First time I've worn this in quite a few months! I never intended to wear it again, but needs must!" Battle Guy responded.

"Let's roll, Battle Guy!" I said, climbing into the SUV.

9:17 P.M.

Chris's HQ Second Floor

"Hit Girl, this is Battle Guy! You'll have backup in ten minutes, can you hold?"

"Do we have a choice?" I replied, grimacing.

"If anybody can, Hit Girl can!" Battle Guy replied.

I slithered over to the nearest SWAT Officer.

"Ten minutes! We must hold!" I shouted and the SWAT Officer acknowledged, passing on the message.

The SWAT Officers were down to their very last magazine each and I was in the same position. Kick-Ass was just inserting his last magazine too. I looked up; I could now hear shooting, from the floor above us.

9:28 P.M.

Chris's HQ Third Floor

Bullets were flying everywhere.

As we headed up to the third floor, via the fire escape, we could hear the shooting on the second floor. We continued past, up to the third floor and as we entered the floor, we came under fire. Marty pulled his Glock 17 and shot the first two watchdogs before Murphy and Fellowes were able to provide covering fire, with their AR-15 rifles. Marty and I shot the remaining watchdogs on the third floor. We gathered together the loads that we had lugged up the fire escape then Marty pulled out the industrial disc cutter from its bag and started it up, before digging into the floor.

9:33 P.M.

**Chris's HQ
Second Floor**

"What the fuck!" I shouted, hearing the screeching coming from over our heads. The SWAT Officers were also looking upwards curiously.

Suddenly, the ceiling gave way, almost directly over my head! I looked up and saw a ragged two-foot by two-foot square.

"Hi!" Shadow yelled, happily, through the hole. "Catch!"

Where the fuck had that little bitch come from?

Shadow and somebody else started dropping down equipment. First came three heavy packs, followed by two tins of 5.56-millimetre ammunition, each holding one thousand rounds, plus two more ammunition tins. While I was guiding the equipment down, Chris's watchdogs started to target me. Shadow hung down from the hole and started firing her pistol into the watchdogs.

I opened the first two packs and found ready loaded magazines for our G36C rifles, as well as some grenades. I dragged two tins of ammo over to the SWAT team.

"Hey! Can you make use of these?" I asked, smirking.

The Officer's eyes bulged open at the sight of two thousand rounds of life-saving ammunition.

"Fucking hell, Hit Girl!" The Officer yelled, pulling the lid of one tin open and throwing the boxed rounds out to his team, who started loading magazines, as quickly as was humanly possible.

Kick-Ass loaded a fresh magazine and opened fire, on full automatic, keeping the heads of the watchdogs down, while the SWAT guys reloaded.

9:38 P.M.

**Chris's HQ
Second Floor**

"Fire in the hole!" I yelled and threw a pair of hand grenades, towards the larger group of watchdogs, in front of us and ducking down quickly.

There was a pair of deafening explosions and some of the watchdogs were no longer shooting, but there were still quite a few left! I looked up at the hole, above me and grinned at not just Shadow, but Battle Guy, in his full costume and a grinning Murphy, holding an AR-15 across his chest. Damn! This was the first time that we were all in combat together, fighting side by side with the Chicago PD!

Two of the SWAT team looked up in surprise at the explosions and their expressions quickly changed to approval, before they went back to their frenzied magazine loading. The SWAT Officers started to fire again, so I opened the third, longer pack, pulling out one of my latest acquisitions and passed it to Kick-Ass. Kick-Ass put down his G36C and picked up the much bigger weapon, before pulling open another ammunition tin. This time the ammunition wasn't boxed, it was in two hundred-round belts. Kick-Ass loaded the first belt and stood up, opening fire on the watchdogs in front, with the H&K 121 machine gun at his shoulder. The first belt was gone in about forty seconds, with Kick-Ass sticking to short bursts, to prevent the barrel overheating.

The SWAT guys were very impressed by our display of fire power! The watchdogs, however, were not, as Kick-Ass was pretty accurate and anyway, the 7.62-millimetre rounds cut through any protection the watchdogs were using!

9:51 P.M.

**Chris's HQ
Second Floor**

When only four of the watchdogs in front of us remained, Kick-Ass turned his attention to the other watchdogs, who were blocking the stairs to our rear. Several fell under the onslaught from the machine gun. The machine gun fire

finally ceased, as we had used up the four available belts of ammunition. We had agreed a course of action with the SWAT. At an agreed signal we would attack the remaining watchdogs and put an end to this.

"Hey, Kick-Ass!" Shadow called down. "Catch me!"

"What?" Kick-Ass asked, looking up.

"Catch me!" Shadow called again.

Kick-Ass put the H&K 121 down and held his arms out. Shadow dropped down from the floor above and was caught by Kick-Ass.

"Thanks Kick-Ass!" Shadow said, with a chuckle, as Kick-Ass dropped her to the floor.

9:55 P.M.

**Chris's HQ
Second Floor**

"Are we ready?" Kick-Ass bellowed.

We got a thumbs up from SWAT.

"Go!" Kick-Ass bellowed.

At the agreed signal, Fusion and SWAT, stood up and advanced on the two groups of watchdogs, pouring bullets into the enemy.

9:59 P.M.

**Chris's HQ
Second Floor**

The last watchdog finally fell and silence descended on the building.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and Midnight

Chris's HQ

Everybody literally sagged, once the firing had stopped.

Everybody was exhausted; Kick-Ass, Hit Girl and SWAT! We had seized Chris's HQ, but as usual the fucking bastard had escaped! The SWAT leader came over and shook hands with Kick-Ass, before giving me a kiss! I was shocked, but a little pleased and felt myself blushing.

"Thanks Hit Girl; you saved our lives! Without that ammo, we were fucking history!" The SWAT Team Leader said, smiling. "Sorry Kick-Ass! You can kick my ass, all you want, but it was worth it to kiss Hit Girl!"

"No sweat!" Kick-Ass said, graciously, then more seriously. "Just don't get in the habit of it!"

The SWAT Team Leader laughed, before he shook hands with Shadow and then Battle Guy, who had come downstairs accompanied by Murphy and Fellowes. Battle Guy actually looked good in his costume. Kick-Ass and I hadn't seen him in it since the warehouse fight, the previous summer. He was wearing a pistol belt and holster, with his Glock 17 pistol.

"You look pretty cool, Battle Guy!" I said, approvingly.

"It's a one off, Hit Girl! But I'm glad I could help." Battle Guy replied, smiling. "It felt good, though, I got to kill several of the bastards!"

10:32 P.M.

We packed up our gear and loaded to the SUV.

I was impressed! The SUV had had its plates swapped and they now read 'FUSION'! I had been a bit concerned when I first saw the SUV, as somebody might try to trace the plates. Marty had also covered up the visible VIN numbers. We really needed to get a proper SUV for Fusion operations.

We actually received a hell of a send-off by the Police Officers and SWAT. Marty dropped Kick-Ass and me off, to pick up the Fat Boy, before heading back to the Safehouse with Shadow.

11:25 P.M.

The Safehouse

Once back at the Safehouse, I turned to Shadow.

"What the hell, were you doing there, young lady?" I asked, pulling off my mask and comms.

"Marty called me. He said that he needed help and that you and Dave were in trouble!" Chloe explained, pulling off her mask and comms, before clearing her pistol and stowing the weapon in the armoury.

I followed her, watching as she handled the weapon both safely and correctly. I was impressed; Chloe never made a mistake with firearms. I really couldn't be mad with her; her help had been much appreciated!

"Thanks, Chloe!" I said, pulling her into a hug and getting a hug in return.

"Yeah, thanks, Chloe. You did really well and I enjoyed you dropping in!" Dave said, grinning.

"We'll drop you off on our way home," I said, looking at Dave, who nodded.

11:45 P.M.

We were all back in our normal clothes and the SUV had the correct plates.

"Marty! I'm going to get you some proper SWAT gear to wear, plus a proper mask," I said. "No argument!"

"Okay!" Marty allowed. "Just for emergencies though."

Marty drove Speedy and took Chloe home, while Dave and I took the SUV.

Updated: *June 2015*

***Chapter 43*: The Week of Hell - Day 7**

Friday

The following takes place between Midnight and 2:00 A.M.

West Ridge

It was good to be home.

We were all fucking knackered, but we were also glad to be alive. Once we were in bed, Dave and I started to chat about the night's events.

"We owe Marty and Chloe!" I said.

"Damn straight! But what can we do to thank them? Chloe has proved that she can more than take care of herself and that she can be very useful, as a full member of Fusion and an equal partner," Mindy said. "I'll have to think of something for them both."

"We might be dead right now, without them!" I admitted.

"Anyhow, you looked fucking cool with that machine gun; you really fucking kicked ass!" Mindy said, giggling.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

West Ridge

Yet again, we were so tired, we slept in.

Over breakfast, we discussed the previous night's actions. It was a great experience, fighting side-by-side with SWAT and it was the first major gun battle that I'd fought. The Gatling guns didn't count! We also discussed what we expected to be facing next. Chris was losing his hold on Chicago, or at least we hoped so!

Marcus had been on the phone again, wanting to know what was happening, as apparently it had got out that Hit Girl had been injured! Mindy assured him that she was fine, but apparently Marcus didn't believe her, so Mindy threw the phone at me in disgust.

"You speak to the stubborn old git!"

"Hi Marcus! Little Miss Adorable is in good health. She has a small hole in her lower left arm, but nothing serious and she was checked out by a Paramedic at the scene. It was another archer, he fired a bolt at Hit Girl, but only hit her in the arm. Unfortunately she came off her bike and the Ducati was wrecked. She fought well, though; you know how stubborn she can be! She wouldn't let a simple wound get in her way!" I explained, ending with a laugh. Marcus had to agree with that! At least I was able to put his mind at rest about Mindy. Once Marcus was gone, I updated Mindy on the call.

"Marcus says you are a stubborn little bitch, who needs her ass kicked and if you don't behave he'll come and kick it, himself!" I said.

"I'd like to see him try!" Mindy exclaimed, without thinking.

"You'd actually hurt Marcus, to stop him kicking your ass?" I queried.

"Dammit! Of course not!" Mindy grumbled, blushing slightly.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

West Ridge

"Well somebody needed to kick your ass!" I laughed, looking down at Mindy, who was looking very annoyed with herself, as she sat on the mat.

"Thankfully, not very many people can," Mindy grouched. "That hurt, cunt!"

"You heal quickly, stop complaining and you're still gorgeous, whether or not your butt is bruised!" I laughed.

"You know what infuriates me about you the most? That I can't stay infuriated with you!" Mindy said, laughing, too.

1:04 P.M.

I sat down and prepared a secure email to that horrible man, The Armourer.

He might make my skin crawl, but he had always supplied the best equipment, which so far, had kept us all alive. I had ordered a new combat suit top for myself, as well as a surprise for Chloe and something else for Marty. I have also taken the opportunity to order a new upper, outer-suit for Dave, as his current armour has taken a lot of abuse and while it does not show any evidence of damage, it would only be able to take so much, before it failed. I would not let that happen, Dave was far too precious to me.

I would rather be penniless, than without Dave!

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

We didn't know it, but the rest of the day would be a roller-coaster ride, with one hell of an ending!

2:34 P.M.

We were at the Safehouse, with Sophia. Marty was downtown somewhere, in Speedy.

The weapons from last night required cleaning; two H&K G36C assault rifles and an H&K 121 machine gun. We also had lots of empty magazines to refill! Just as we were finishing the two G36C rifles an alarm went off in the briefing room.

"What the fuck is that?" I asked, jumping up.

As we entered the briefing room, we could see that the large screen, with the map of Chicago had zoomed in to an area of the City, the area was towards the south of Chicago and south of I-94. There was a pulsing red circle, labelled 'Speedy'; somebody had hit the panic button on the radio in Speedy!

Dave tried to call Marty on his cell. There was no response.

We tried the radio, but again, there was no response. The position was rather strange, it was a Chicago City Auto Pound!

I rang Murphy.

2:58 P.M.

"Murphy! We have a problem. We think one of our team may be in distress, at the Auto Pound near I-94. Could you check and see if anything's happening, down there?" I asked.

"No problem, Hit Girl. Give me five minutes," Murphy replied, then dropped the call.

3:06 P.M.

"Go!"

"It's Murphy. Nobody can get any response from the Auto Pound and strangely we have no units anywhere near it!" Murphy said. "Something stinks!"

"We're gonna head down. Should take us thirty minutes," I said.

"Fellows and I are leaving now. It'll take us about the same. We'll meet you at East 103rd Street and East 106th Street," Murphy said, before dropping the call.

We rapidly suited up and jumped into the SUV, remembering to take the fake plates to swap later on. We left our masks and comms off, as usual and covered up our combat suits. Our weapons were hidden in the back, with Eisenhower.

3:13 P.M.

Dave was driving and he put his foot down. We headed south west and exited I-94 at the East 111th Street exit. We swapped the plates on the SUV and completed our suiting up. Then we headed north up I-94 and turned off at East 103rd Street. During the trip we tried to call Marty repeatedly, without any success; we were now very worried.

3:48 P.M.

Kick-Ass pulled the SUV over at East 106th Street.

About two minutes later, Murphy and Fellowes pulled up beside us, blue lights flashing. Murphy explained that all communications with the Auto Pound had ceased earlier that morning and that two delivery drivers had complained about being turned away, at the gate.

"We need to go in hard; our team member is in there somewhere!" I insisted.

"We have Eisenhower, to hopefully sniff him out," Kick-Ass said.

Murphy and Fellowes agreed; there wasn't time to get reinforcements there, although they had been requested. They both wore ballistic vests and had AR-15 rifles. They would go in first, as we needed them to smash through the gates of the Auto Pound.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

Police Auto Pound

The Police SUV, blue lights flashing and siren sounding, smashed through the locked gates of the Auto Pound, before coming under fire from the watchdogs, manning the entrance.

We accelerated through the gates close behind and stopped the SUV behind some parked SUVs. We immediately jumped out and started shooting at the watchdogs. We had brought the G36C rifles with us, just in case.

4:09 P.M.

The last watchdog fell and I ran forward and checked on Murphy and Fellowes. Fellowes had a small wound to his left leg, but was otherwise okay. I pulled out my cell and pulled up the tracking application.

While Murphy and Fellowes guarded the entrance, Kick-Ass and I got back into the SUV and headed deeper into the Auto Pound, which was enormous.

4:12 P.M.

We followed the dot on the cell and skidded to a halt beside Speedy. I jumped out, only to find that Speedy was empty!

Strangely though, I noticed that the hidden compartment in the rear seat had been opened and that the pair of Glock 17 pistols, normally inside, were gone. I checked the immediate area and found both pistols, with their slides locked back on empty magazines, about fifty yards away behind an impounded Corvette that had several bullet holes in the side. There was evidence of a struggle and I found something else, I held it up for Kick-Ass to see.

"Recognise it?" I asked.

"That belongs to Hawk!" Kick-Ass replied, correctly identifying the short spear.

"It looks like Marty and Hawk had to fight," I said. "How the hell Hawk is involved, I have no idea!"

"Use Eisenhower!" Kick-Ass said.

"Eisenhower, find Marty!" I ordered and let her out of the SUV. Eisenhower ran off in an easterly direction.

"Let's go!" Kick-Ass yelled.

I followed Eisenhower's tracking signal on the cell.

4:16 P.M.

"Next left!" I called. "Third right!"

We caught up with Eisenhower. She had stopped beside a giant car crusher. Four watchdogs were there; we took cover and opened fire. There was a car in the crusher and I could see movement. I recognised the blue of Marty's mask.

"I think Battle Guy and Hawk are in the crusher!" I called to Kick-Ass.

We dropped two of the watchdogs, before one triggered the crusher. That watchdog received a knife to the throat! Kick-Ass dropped the final watchdog with a head shot. I ran forward and shut off the crusher.

"You know how to operate a car crusher?" Kick-Ass asked, a little surprised.

"Long story, but yeah, I've done it before, kind of!" I replied, remembering a yellow Range Rover.

We went over to the car in the crusher and pulled open the door.

4:21 P.M.

"Knew you'd find us!" Battle Guy said, cheerfully.

Beside him Hawk smiled at us.

"I assume the story behind all this will be good!" I said, glaring at Battle Guy.

Both Battle Guy and Hawk looked a little sheepish!

"I saw Hawk being seized by those watchdogs and tried to intervene, without much success. I eventually got her away, but then we were cornered. We managed to wound a couple of them, before we ran out of ammo!" Battle Guy explained, rather weakly.

"Sorry, it was my fault! I should have had my back to the wall; then they couldn't have come up behind me!" Hawk admitted.

Kick-Ass smirked at me and I grimaced back, knowing exactly what he was thinking!

"Now Hit-Girl, we always keep our backs where?" Kick-Ass growled, laughing.

"Funny cunt!" I growled back.

4:38 P.M.

We pulled up beside Murphy and Fellowes.

The two Police Officers were being checked over by Paramedics and we saw that two other Police vehicles had arrived.

"Thanks guys!" Kick-Ass said to Murphy. "Sorry about the mess!"

"Glad we could help. You got your man?" Murphy asked.

"We did, thanks!" I replied.

5:01 P.M.

We pulled over at a quiet point off East 115th Street. Marty was behind us, in Speedy.

"You're safe Hawk. The Police will never know you were there," I said. "If you need us call: 555-1-FUSION."

"Thanks, Hit Girl, Kick-Ass. It looks like I owe you twice, now," Hawk said, smiling.

"You helped us, the other day. We're on the same team, remember," Kick-Ass said.

Once Hawk was gone, we headed back to the Safehouse.

5:45 P.M.

The Safehouse

"Well you had a fun afternoon, Marty!" I said, as we got out of our combat suits, back at the Safehouse.

"Sorry, guys," Marty said. "I should have called you first!"

"Well, you were helping a fellow Hero! No harm done, just more of Chris's watchdogs have now been put down," Dave responded, cheerfully.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

We sat down to dinner and chatted about the afternoon.

Marty was still feeling a bit embarrassed by the whole episode, but we reminded him that without his equipment, we would never have been able to find him. Marty also thanked Sophia, for her help.

"Maybe we should put a GPS tracker on Marty," I suggested.

"Funny, Hit Girl!" Marty said, smirking.

"I thought you said that last night was a one off, Marty, you starting to enjoy the action?" I asked.

"No! Just wrong place, wrong time!" Marty said, grimacing.

"I know how you feel!" Dave replied. "Story of my life!"

7:02 P.M.

Dave and I went back to our weapons cleaning, unfortunately we had had to start again!

It took a while, but we finally had some clean weapons and reloaded magazines. We also cleaned the two Glock pistols, reloaded them and stowed them back into the hidden compartment in Speedy.

7:58 P.M.

We got a call.

This time from our new friend.

"Help me!" Hawk said. "I'm in shit again!"

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

The Safehouse

"What have you done?" I asked, glaring at Marty.

"I got a line on that Chris D'Amico! I followed him and now I'm stuck! He doesn't know I'm here... Yet! I'm in a warehouse, near the terminal," Hawk explained.

"You are running out of favours, girl!" I cautioned.

"Thanks..." Hawk replied, before the call cut off.

"Marty can you get a fix on her phone?" I asked.

"Give me a few minutes and I'll let you know!"

"Dave, we need to head out," I growled. "That stupid, incompetent bitch is in trouble again!"

"Hawk?" Dave asked, smirking.

"Oh yeah!"

"That girl is trouble; kinda reminds me of you!" Dave said, laughing.

I just glared back.

"I have a position!" Marty called. "Not far from that fucking Auto Pound. End of South Stony Island Avenue."

8:12 P.M.

We headed out in the SUV with Eisenhower.

The trip was going to take about thirty-five minutes. We brought the H&K G36C assault rifles with us, plus as much ammo as we could handle.

8:45 P.M.

Chris's Warehouse

We pulled up without lights, using NVGs and parked behind a row of rail oil tankers.

"Battle Guy, Fusion is moving in," Kick-Ass reported.

"Battle Guy copies Fusion moving in!"

Kick-Ass and I got out, along with Eisenhower.

We readied our weapons and headed towards the warehouse, wearing NVGs. We approached the warehouse and I could see two watchdogs, who seemed to be walking the perimeter. They met up and then turned around, to go back around the building. Once they had separated enough, I moved in and slit one man's throat, while Kick-Ass went after the other guy, with Eisenhower.

Kick-Ass returned stowing his Ko-Wakizashi, with Eisenhower trotting along, happily, beside him.

"Any problems?" I asked.

"Always the tone of doubt!" Kick-Ass responded.

"I... Okay, let's just head in," I said, laughing at Kick-Ass.

"Battle Guy, two down, heading inside," Kick-Ass called in.

"Battle Guy copies two down and Fusion heading inside!"

We found a door and I stared at the card swipe.

"You might need this, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass said, smirking and holding out a swipe card. "I got it off my guy!"

"A smart-ass Kick-Ass; that's all I fucking need!" I growled, swiping the card.

As soon as the door clicked, I pulled it open and went inside, followed by Kick-Ass and Eisenhower.

9:09 P.M.

The inside of the warehouse was mainly shadows.

There were piles of wooden crates, which blocked out a lot of the illumination from the lights above. The passageways, though, were brightly lit.

"Let's even the odds!" I growled, heading over to an electrical panel and pulling the main breaker.

The building was instantly plunged into darkness and we heard several shouts of annoyance. Our NVGs allowed us to see very well, however.

"Remember, Hawk is here somewhere!" I warned.

"God knows where, though!" Kick-Ass replied.

We headed further into the warehouse, our assault rifles up and ready.

9:16 P.M.

Two watchdogs were coming in our direction, we took one each, two shots to the head.

We started to hear loud shouts, in response to our shooting. We moved forward dropping another watchdog, before Eisenhower started whining and sniffing the air.

"Eisenhower is onto something!" Kick-Ass said, over the comms.

"Follow her," I said.

"Eisenhower, go!" Kick-Ass said.

Eisenhower moved off, slowly sniffing the air and moving in between the crates. She took us deeper into the warehouse, before stopping outside the door of an office. Eisenhower then whined and looked up at me.

9:24 P.M.

Kick-Ass put a boot into the door, sending it smashing into the wall.

I covered the doorway, while Kick-Ass went in and looked around.

"Found it!" Kick-Ass called.

"I am *not* an 'it'!" I heard Hawk say, indignantly.

"You're a pain in the butt!" Kick-Ass replied.

Kick-Ass appeared with Hawk.

"Can you shoot?" I asked.

"Yeah, of course," Hawk replied.

I passed Hawk one of my pistols and a spare magazine.

"I want that pistol back!" I growled.

We moved back towards the door, that we had come in by. Three more watchdogs fell, two to me and one to Hawk! We made it to the door and were back outside.

"Battle Guy, we've got Hawk!" Kick-Ass reported. "We are outside the building!"

"Battle Guy copies you have Hawk and are outside the building!"

9:42 P.M.

"You have transport?" I asked Hawk.

"Yeah, thanks again, guys!" Hawk replied.

"Just don't make a habit of this!" I replied, accepting back my pistol and spare magazine.

9:55 P.M.

Once Hawk had vanished into the darkness, I turned to Kick-Ass.

"Shall we tidy up?" I asked.

"Why the hell not!" Kick-Ass replied.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and Midnight

We went back into the warehouse and worked our way down the building.

We caught and killed, four watchdogs. I received several shots to my armour, which I shrugged off. We saw two more watchdogs run off, towards another door and we followed. The last two watchdogs ran east, towards another warehouse. We were able to track them using the NVGs, before Hit Girl went down on one knee, aimed and shot both watchdogs.

"I'm curious about where they are heading; they made a point of going in this direction," I queried.

"I'm game, you never know what we might find," Hit Girl replied.

We walked towards the other warehouse and started walking the perimeter. As we approached the first corner, we heard some people coming our way. Suddenly Eisenhower started behaving strangely, she strained on her leash and started growling viciously! Three men came around the corner, a few yards ahead of us.

..._...

Six gunshots rang out and two bodies dropped to the alley floor. Hit Girl did not holster her two pistols, but kept them aimed at the one man, left standing. I was struggling to hold Eisenhower back.

"Oh this is perfect! Are you really that stupid? There's two of us and just one of you! Do you really have a hard-on to die?" Hit Girl growled. "Oh, I forgot, you can't get a hard-on!"

10:34 P.M.

"Chris D'Amico!" I snarled.

"Fuck!" Chris said, assessing his new situation.

"Sorry Eisenhower, he has nothing left for you to chomp on!" I snarled, vindictively.

"You fucking bastards!" Chris yelled.

"I've been waiting so fucking long for this!" Hit Girl growled, savagely, but with an enormous grin on her face. "Three rounds, remember, *Red Mist!*"

Hit Girl squeezed the trigger, three times.

"Shows over, Motherfucker!"

Chris crashed backwards, onto the ground.

I walked forward, Chris was still conscious and looking directly up at me. I aimed the Glock, at the point between his eyes. I felt zero emotion.

"God, I'm glad I don't have a son like you! Time for a family reunion!" I snarled, pulling the trigger once.

Hit Girl sagged and started to cry, before she fell against me.

"You okay?" I asked, sensing her relief.

"Yeah!" Hit Girl replied.

"Time to go home!" I said, smiling down at her.

"Thanks, Kick-Ass!" Hit Girl replied. "My Daddy... He would have been proud of both of us!"

"You know we have a long walk ahead of us!" I said. "Damn, that jet pack would have come in handy, right now!"

10:42 P.M.

"Hold on!" Hit Girl said suddenly. "Just want to make sure!"

"What?" I asked, as Hit Girl turned around and walked the dozen or so yards back to the body of Chris D'Amico. Both Eisenhower and I stared curiously after her.

Hit Girl drew a Katana and brought the blade down swiftly, severing Chris' head. Hit Girl then calmly cleaned off the Katana and stowed it. She stood staring at the severed head, for a second or two.

"I'm so fucking glad you're dead, cunt!" Hit Girl said happily, before sending the head flying across the ground, with one swift kick.

Blood flew into the air and across the ground.

Hit Girl laughed.

Updated: *June 2015*

***Chapter 44*: Recovery**

Saturday

The Week of Hell was finally over!

A lot of bad things had happened and a lot of good people had died.

But a lot of bad people died, too and that had included one who had very much deserved to die, so much, much more, than the rest!

Finally, Chris D'Amico was no more!

Even better, both Dave and I had put him out of his misery. I got revenge for his shooting me three times, in the chest and Dave had implemented the coup de grâce, with a brilliant choice of words. Shame Chris was not fully aware of the true significance, of those words.

On top of that Chris had left us a small gift!

It seemed that Chris and his watchdogs had just left their vehicle and Dave had found the keys when he had searched the pocket of one of the watchdogs. We had continued around the warehouse and found a parked SUV. So we had seized it as loot; well Chris wasn't gonna need it anymore, as he had kinda lost his head!

The SUV was a beauty; it was another Land Rover product, a brand-new Range Rover, in black. Even better it was armoured. Thank you Chris D'Amico!

It was now time to recover and move on.

The Safehouse

I awoke to a knocking on the door of our bedroom.

"Mindy, Dave!"

It was Chloe!

I looked at the clock. It was half past seven, in the fucking morning!

"Shadow, do you *really* want to die!" I yelled.

"Never gonna happen!" Chloe said, grinning at me from the open door. "I just thought I should knock in case you two were 'busy'!"

"'Busy'? You mean Dave might be fucking me?" I asked, with an evil smirk.

Chloe blushed.

"Sorry, Chloe! Couldn't resist fuckin' with ya!" I said, laughing.

"You really are an evil bitch, Mindy!" Dave said, from beside me.

"So, what happened? It's all over the news; Chris D'Amico is dead! Apparently they found the body early this morning..." Chloe explained, then stared directly at me. "They then found the head a little while later!"

I felt my face warming up.

"So!" I said, quietly. "I got carried away!"

"She severed his head *'just to be sure'* and then kicked it, like a fucking soccer ball!" Dave elaborated.

"So cool! How do you feel now that Chris, is no more?" Chloe asked, looking at us both.

"Pretty damn good!" Dave replied.

"Almost as good as the first time I had sex with Dave!" I mused, without thinking.

Both Chloe and I blushed that time.

"That good was it!" Chloe asked, facetiously.

"Oh yeah!" I replied, giggling and burying my face into Dave's chest, as my face started to burn!

"What is the fucking racket?" Marty demanded, coming into the room. "Oh, hi Chloe!"

"Morning Marty!"

We all got up and showered, before getting breakfast.

Dave cooked a massive meal and then we sat down and went through the previous day's activities, explaining everything to Chloe. She was quite shocked about Marty almost getting killed, along with Hawk! But Chloe did point out, that without Hawk, we might never have been in a position to kill Chris!

I had to agree with her logic. We owed Hawk and more than a little. But we still had our reservations about her, as she seemed very good at getting herself into shit!

Anyway, we decided that we needed a rest; time to recover, as our bodies were exhausted after seven straight days of activity. Not to mention that I have a hole in my left arm and I was involved in a motorcycle crash! That was the most depressing bit about the entire episode, my Ducati was wrecked!

"Oh, I almost forgot to ask! Why the fuck is there a big black, rather cool looking, SUV parked downstairs?" Chloe exclaimed.

"You saw that did you?" Dave replied, smirking.

"I'm not fucking blind!" Chloe responded.

"Wow, young Chloe has developed a *really* foul mouth!" I commented.

"Little rich coming from you!" Marty responded, delicately.

I scowled at Marty, then smiled.

"Okay, I'm not the best person to complain about profanity! I said, smirking at Chloe.

"The SUV was a gift... From Chris D'Amico," Dave explained. "Well he didn't exactly need it anymore!"

"I hope it's not gonna have another lame name, like '*Speedy*'!" Chloe groaned.

"Yes, that name was lame," Dave said. "I actually thought of calling it '*The Beast*'!"

"Why not just '*Beast*'?" Chloe suggested.

We all agreed on '*Beast*'. Marty would transfer the '**FUSION**' plates to the new vehicle and fit the relevant communications equipment.

Abby turned up later that morning, and after going loopy over *Beast* and hearing about the past events, she got to work with Marty, checking out the new SUV.

They were both very impressed, from the geek point of view. The armour was to Level IV and should stop 7.62-millimetre rounds. There were also a good set of run-flat tyres and Chris had thoughtfully left a small armoury in the trunk!

Chloe went out to see Kyle, while Dave and I went out to get some fresh air, without having to worry about being attacked by an Archer!

Dave suggested going via his work, so we drove over to Plainfield.

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"Hi Dave," Roger said.

"Hi Roger! This is my partner Mindy. Mindy, this is Roger, my boss!" Dave said.

"Hi Roger," I said, with a smile.

"Wow!" Roger commented. "You never told me how hot Mindy was!"

I felt myself blushing!

"Ignore him, Mindy, he'll chase anything with tits!" Dave said, laughing.

"I know; Mindy's off limits!" Roger said, dejectedly, wandering off.

"I'll be back in a minute... Go drool over some guns!" Dave teased.

I glared at him, but I had to admit, though, that there was a damned nice selection there and I did kinda enjoy checking guns out! I was checking out a good selection of Smith & Wesson pistols, when I heard my name.

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"Mindy, how are ya? I thought I saw Dave."

I turned around to find Kim.

"Hi, Kim, I'm doing fine, you?" I replied.

"A bit shattered, been a hard week!" Kim said.

"Tell me about it!" I commented. "It's been 'The Week of Hell!'"

"Want a coffee, I'm just about due for a break?" Kim asked.

"Why not?" I replied. I couldn't think of a good excuse to decline and I could do with a drink.

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We sat and chatted for about half an hour, before Dave reappeared.

"You two seem to be enjoying yourselves!" Dave said. "Should I be worried?"

"Maybe!" I replied, grinning.

"Okay," Dave said, slowly.

"We should have Kim over for a meal," I suggested.

"Don't see why not!" Dave replied.

"How about Monday evening?" I suggested.

"Don't see a problem with that," Kim replied.

"We'll see you then and I'll text you the address," Dave said.

***The following morning
Sunday***

West Ridge

I woke up late, to find that Mindy had got up already.

I showered and dressed, before heading downstairs, but as I got to the bottom of the stairs, I heard giggling, a lot of giggling! I looked into the living room and saw Chloe and Mindy rolling around the couch, very nearly pissing themselves with laughter!

"What are you two watching?" I inquired.

It was a minute before Chloe could talk.

"Family Guy; they're showing it all day!" Chloe managed, before disintegrating into laughter.

"Fuck this!" I said.

I enjoyed Family Guy, just as much as the next guy, but I could not listen to those two giggling all day! I headed out to the garage; I'd get breakfast out – the fucking laughter was getting louder!

"Can I join you?" Marty asked desperately, appearing in the garage.

"Please do!" I replied.

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After breakfast, Marty and I went out to have a look at the apartment blocks that Mindy was interested in buying. The two apartment blocks were very different.

The first apartment block was just under five miles east of the centre of Chicago. It had seventeen units that were a mixture of one, two and three bedroom units. It was also close to the Pink Line. The area was not the best, but it was relatively safe and of course we could make it safer!

Marty was interested in having an apartment there, due to its proximity to the University.

The second apartment block was about nine miles south of the centre of Chicago and about four miles to the east of the Safehouse. It was a lot larger than the first apartment block, with twenty-five units, which were a mix of one and two bed units. Currently the entire block was empty, but we expected that to change, easily enough. This block was on a nice leafy, tree lined street, in a nicer part of Chicago and near to the Red Line. We intended to convert one or two of the units into a second and maybe a third Safehouse.

Mindy had made offers and we were awaiting a response, which may take another few weeks. Marty had found a reputable agent, who could handle the apartments and tenants for us. Marty had thoroughly checked out the properties, to make sure that there would be no surprises!

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By the time we got back home, it was almost four in the afternoon.

We parked in the garage and went into the house. Not surprisingly, the two girls were still giggling and laughing away, in the living room! I noticed that Sophia was asleep on the couch on the lower floor; she must have had enough of all the giggling. Marty went up to his room and I joined Sophia to train.

I had been training for about twenty minutes when Marty appeared and asked to join in. That was a bit of a surprise, but Mindy had hinted the other day about Marty wanting to join in more with Fusion, when we were out and about. It had occurred to me that we did have Abby, to provide technical support, which would free up Marty to come out with us. Admittedly both Abby and Marty would need training to bring them up to scratch.

Marty, was training Abby in everything she would need to know about the technical side of Fusion. Marty would need a lot of training, before he could go out as a vigilante. Yes, he had been out before, but nothing major, and the warehouse the previous year, well that had just been a total free for all! Marty had managed very well the other day, when he had come out to help us at Chris' headquarters. He had managed to kill some watchdogs that day, too and he had seemed to enjoy it.

I had to admit, though, that I had spent almost my entire life with Marty and he had always been a little overweight. I could not quite imagine him being fit enough to fight the way Mindy and I did. However, Mindy turned *me* around and that had been no small task! I also could not quite imagine Marty using Taekwondo, either. Maybe he would be a weapons guy, more than a Martial Arts guy.

I suggested a few warm up movements for Marty to start with, then went back to my training. Forty minutes later Marty was dripping sweat and looked completely exhausted. I smiled, Marty was really putting a lot into this.

He was obviously serious!

The next day
Monday

West Ridge

We made preparations for dinner that evening.

Dave had acquired a large ham and I was going to cook it, with Dave's help. Marty was going to be out with some new friends of his, so it would just be the three of us. Preparing the food was a bit of a nightmare, but we got it done and of course, I was very good with knives!

Kim was expected to arrive about six that evening.

Once the food was safely cooking, I went to get changed, while Dave got things ready in the dining room.

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Kim arrived on time, at six.

We invited her in and sat down in the living room, while we waited for the food to finish cooking. Strangely, Sophia seemed to be okay with Kim. Usually, Sophia was a little wary of strangers. It was as if Sophia already knew Kim, which was impossible. We chatted for about twenty minutes before the food was ready.

Dave served the food and we sat at the table in the dining room and started eating.

"Kim, tell us about yourself. What did you do before you started at the gun store?" I asked.

"Well, I originally spent time as a flight attendant, with Delta and got to see the world; well bits of it anyway!" Kim replied.

"Anywhere nice?" Dave asked.

"London was good and I enjoyed the longer trips to Tokyo, but they were very tiring. The best was probably to Australia; I liked Melbourne," Kim replied.

"What did you do after that?" I asked.

"I joined the Chicago PD," Kim replied.

Dave and I exchanged a glance at that!

"I spent some time at District twenty-one, after the academy. I enjoyed pounding the streets, had a few close calls, then I finally got injured a few months ago and decided it was time to leave and move on," Kim replied.

"How were you injured?" Dave asked.

"I got shot in the leg; it took a while to heal, but I decided enough was enough. Now though, I miss the excitement of chasing bad guys and feeling good when I put somebody away, or help somebody out," Kim explained.

"Must be nice," I commented, trying to keep a straight face.

"What is it you do, Mindy?" Kim asked.

"I spend my time providing training for people in Taekwondo, Aikido and also general fitness," I replied.

"That would explain why you and Dave look so trim," Kim commented, eyeing up Dave.

I saw Dave smirk at me... Ass!

The rest of the evening went well and we all enjoyed the meal.

Afterwards we had coffee in the living room and I am sure Kim was trying to come onto Dave!

Mindy and I decided we wanted to have a Fusion celebration.

We intended to have a night out; just the four of us. Mindy called Chloe and advised her that we would pick her up at seven in the evening, on Friday, and she should dress smartly. Mindy said she would have a surprise for me and wouldn't tell me what she would be wearing, but insisted that both Marty and I wore a suit!

I had told Mindy about Marty training on Sunday and she had told me about what Marty had said the previous week. We talked about him joining 'the operators' – the fighting side of Fusion. I believed that he could be an asset, but only once he was physically fit of course. Marty joined us daily, when we trained and Mindy had set out a training schedule for him, to gradually increase his fitness and we said that we would allow him a few weeks, before we took him out jogging. He also joined us each day when we walked Sophia.

Mindy's wound was healing nicely, but she still needed a lot more time before it healed completely. I also know that it was hurting Mindy a lot more than she would admit, but that was just typical Mindy! Mindy had become more determined to improve her blade skills and spent many hours with either a Katana or her Tanto. I had also noticed a change in her, since I had killed Chris; she seemed happier, a lot happier. Chris D'Amico as Red Mist was a stain on Hit Girl; a failure for Hit Girl. Now I had helped remove that stain and erase that failure. I also felt that we were now closer, much closer than ever before.

The one thing that concerned Mindy the most, though, over and above the injury, was the loss of her pride and joy, the purple Ducati Panigale. I knew that she missed that machine, more than anything else; it has been a part of her.

Mindy had not spoken about the Ducati at all since the night it was wrecked, but I knew she missed it hugely.

***Chapter 45*: Being Alive and Being Together**

*That same week
Friday evening*

West Ridge

Mindy, refused to allow me in the bedroom while she was getting ready, so I had to use the spare room!

Marty and I, naturally, were ready fairly quickly. We both wore suits; mine was a dark blue and Marty's was more of a lighter blue and we both wore vivid ties, Marty's was a royal blue and mine was green.

We waited for almost thirty minutes before Mindy finally came downstairs.

"Oh for fuck's sake, you two!" I exclaimed. "It's only a dress, for God's sake!"

Both Dave and Marty were, apparently, speechless and Marty's eyes were bugging out and Dave seemed to be drooling!

"Fuck me!" Dave said.

"Not right now, Dave," I replied dryly and blushed!

"Wow! You look fucking awesome, Mindy!" Marty said, in apparent astonishment.

"Thank you Marty; always the gentleman!" I replied, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

I had to admit, I had knocked them both for six!

I was completely astounded.

Mindy was wearing an ankle length dress, with a single shoulder strap over her right shoulder and a slit up the left leg, almost to the top of her thigh. She also wore gloves that went over her elbows, thus covering the bandage on her left arm.

The dress was, of course, purple! Mindy's hair was tied up and she looked lovelier than I could ever remember.

"I'll take Dave's drooling as a sign he approves, too!" Mindy said, somewhat sarcastically.

I grabbed my cell and took a few pictures, to remind me of the night. Plus, I thought Marcus would be very impressed! I did notice though that Mindy was not wearing high heels, as I knew that she hated the things. The shoes she wore were simple, but still very nice looking shoes.

Right now, every part of me yearned for Mindy!

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We pulled up outside Chloe's house and I went to knock on the door.

It was opened by Dr Bennett.

"Hi Dave. Wow, very smart!" Dr Bennett said. "Chloe is almost ready."

I waited a couple of minutes, before a very smart young girl came down the stairs looking a little shy. I had to admit that I had never seen Chloe wearing even a skirt before. She always wore trousers or shorts. This time though, she was wearing a very nice blue dress that came down to just below her knees.

"Very nice, Chloe," I commented approvingly.

"Thank you, Dave," Chloe replied, blushing deeply.

"It's very good to see Chloe in a dress, for a change!" Dr Bennett said, smiling. "Have a good evening!"

I drove south, into Chicago and pulled up outside the restaurant, where a valet parked the SUV.

Chloe was very impressed by Mindy's dress and Mindy approved of Chloe's choice, too. Considering both girls hated wearing dresses, they both turned out looking perfect and Mindy was attracting quite a lot of attention from other diners, mainly of the male variety.

We sat and ate a full three course meal. It was really good to finally be able to relax and enjoy each other's company and have fun! Chloe really enjoyed herself and got a couple of approving looks from other younger diners, which made her blush. Marty kept telling jokes, which caused us all to laugh and he often timed the punchlines for when we had our mouths full, or were taking a drink!

At one stage the Maitre'd inquired as to what we were celebrating.

"Being alive and being together!" I replied, simply and that was what we all raised our glasses to. We had all risked death and been shot at, not to mention that Mindy had been injured.

Mindy, Marty and I, all had good reasons to be happy, as Chris D'Amico was dead and gone. Chloe understood our happiness and so she was able to join in to.

"Dave, when you put him down, you said those words, the exact same as that last time. That meant a lot to me and ever since that day, so long ago, I have always known that you care about me, deeply. I thought that those words, said by his father, would be the last words that I ever heard. You repeating those words closed off that whole affair and I can now forget about it!" Mindy said, emotion flooding across her face. "Although I'll never forget the sight of you with a damn bazooka!"

We all laughed. We could; a whole sordid chapter of our short lives was closed!

"I meant every word, Mindy. I enjoyed saying them again," I admitted.

"If you hadn't been so caring and the only link to my purple side that I had left at that time, I probably would not have revealed my true identity to you," Mindy said, wiping away her tears.

"I'm forever grateful that you did, Mindy!" I said, leaning over to give her a kiss.

We left the restaurant before ten and took Chloe home, before we all headed home ourselves.

We would see Chloe and Abby, the following morning.

The following morning Saturday

West Ridge

"What is that cool music?" Mindy asked curiously, coming into the living room.

"This? You don't know?" Dave asked, incredulously. "It's a classic!"

"You've never watched 'Battle of the Planets'?" Marty demanded, just as incredulously.

"No, never," I responded.

I had to admit the intro theme was very cool.

*Battle of the Planets! G-Force!
Five incredible young people with super powers!
And watching over them from Centre Neptune, 7-Zark-7!
Watching, warning against surprise attack by alien galaxies from beyond space!
G-Force! Fearless young orphans, protecting Earth's entire galaxy!
Always five, acting as one! Dedicated, inseparable, invincible!*

"Sounds a bit like Fusion... 'Always five, acting as one! Dedicated, inseparable, invincible!'" I admitted. "I suppose I am a 'fearless young orphan!'"

"You'd make a good 'Princess' and I'd be 'Mark',' Dave said, laughing.

"Don't even think of calling me '7-Zark-7', asshole!" Marty growled.

"I have to admit; I did consider 'G-Force' before I thought of 'Fusion!'" Dave admitted.

"You're a complete dork!" Marty said, laughing.

"Coming from you, that's a compliment!" Dave laughed.

"You two watching these cartoons, all day!" I asked.

"Yeah! 80's Cartoon Marathon! 'Battle of the Planets', 'Terrahawks', 'ThunderCats', 'M.A.S.K.' and more!" Dave replied.

"You are a real pair of geeks!" I groaned.

"And you aren't? I've seen you glued to Star Trek Voyager and *don't* try to deny it! We had to put up with you and Chloe quoting Family Guy all week! I have had enough of hearing that the 'Bird is the Word' or anything about the 'Freaking FCC!'" Dave retorted.

"Okay! I'll join you!" I said, sitting down and cuddling into Dave.

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"Hey, cool! Battle of the Planets, I love it," Chloe said, sitting down beside Mindy.

"Can I join in?" Abby asked.

"Yeah, sit down," I said.

The next afternoon Sunday

West Ridge

We all enjoyed a peaceful weekend, with no Fusion activities.

Now that Chris D'Amico had met his demise, the city of Chicago was going back to normal. Kyle was over for his training, which he had missed out on, over the past few weeks, with only a little training.

"Okay, Kyle!" I said. "Hit me!"

"You're a thirteen-year-old girl!" Kyle complained, receiving a slap across the face.

"What the..." Kyle started, before receiving another slap.

"Act like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch!" I said, with a giggle.

"Hey, that's my line! Did Dave tell you about that?" Mindy asked.

"Yeah!" I replied.

"That hurt, Chloe!" Kyle moaned, rubbing his cheeks.

"Well, man up then will you, just take a minute and dig deep for a bigger set of balls, 'cause you're gonna need 'em before we're through!" I said and saw Mindy roll her eyes in exasperation.

"My balls are fine, thanks!" Kyle replied indignantly. "You wanna check?"

Mindy burst out laughing and I felt my face burning. I span around and kicked Kyle to the floor.

"Thanks, Chloe!" Kyle said, standing up and rubbing his chest.

"No problem!" I said, throwing an evil smirk at Kyle, before the fucker kicked my legs out from under me and I crashed to the mat, letting out a surprised scream.

The bitch just laughed even harder!

I had to admit Kyle impressed me there, but all's fair in love and war! I sprang up and tried to kick Kyle's legs out from under him, but he dodged and span me around and back onto the mat, this time face down. The fucker was getting good!

I thought Mindy might piss herself, if she did not fucking stop laughing.

I walked over to Mindy.

"You think this is funny, bitch?" I asked, seething with rage.

Mindy looked up at me, she was very red in the face and looked to be in pain!

"I'm sorry!" Mindy giggled. "Kyle's line was just brilliant!"

"It was, wasn't it," Kyle said, laughing.

"Okay, enough is enough! Do I need to break both of you, to get respect?"

Both of the fuckers just burst out laughing and ignored me completely!

***Chapter 46*: The Bo-staff and The Balisong**

***The following week
Tuesday, West Ridge***

Chloe did not turn up this evening.

It was just Kyle.

Apparently, Chloe was grounded for the next twenty years!

Kyle explained that Chloe had gotten into a fight at school, which had put another girl and two boys down hard. The girl had a concussion and of the two boys, one had a broken arm and the other had two broken ribs.

I inquired about Chloe.

Chloe had a black eye, bruised jaw and bruising to her chest and stomach.

I asked who had started the fight.

It was the other girl. It was something to with the fact that Chloe was more interested in athletic activities, rather than fitting in socially. The girl smacked Chloe across the face, but Chloe didn't react. So the two boys joined in, one of whom gave Chloe the bruised jaw when he slapped her, very hard.

Chloe then fought back.

I was worried and tried to call Chloe, but her cell was turned off. I decided I would visit Chloe at home later, when I was finished with Kyle.

Morton Grove

I pulled up outside Chloe's home, got out and went up to the door.

I knocked and Dr Bennett answered the door.

"Mindy!" Dr Bennett said, waving me in and closing the door. "I wondered if you might appear."

"I heard about Chloe and was worried!" I said.

"Thank you for your concern, Mindy," Dr Bennett said. "She's upstairs, second door on the right."

I went upstairs and knocked on the the relevant door.

"What!" Chloe called, angrily.

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I pushed open the door and went in.

"You don't sound very happy!" I said, smirking.

"Mindy!" Chloe yelled excitedly, getting up off her bed and giving me a hug.

"Careful," I said, seeing Chloe grimace, as she hugged me.

"I keep forgetting about the bruises," Chloe complained. "I can't even wear a bra, for God's sake!"

"Bet Kyle'll enjoy that!" I teased.

"That is *not* funny, Mindy!" Chloe said, glaring, but blushing anyway.

"Sorry, couldn't resist!" I apologised. "How are you feeling?"

"Very sore and very annoyed for letting my guard down and getting into that fight," Chloe explained. "I'm grounded till I'm twenty-one, too!"

"What did the school say?" I asked.

"They said that although I had acted in self defence, I used 'excessive force!'" Chloe said, with an exasperated tone. "I'm also suspended! For three days!"

"It could be worse!" I said. "You don't look too bad."

"The bruised jaw makes it sore to eat, but my chest makes it sore to breathe!" Chloe explained and showed me her bruised chest and stomach. The whole of her front, from just below the neck, down to just above her waist, was bruised.

"No broken ribs?" I asked.

"None, thankfully!" Chloe said.

"Will your Mom let you come over on Saturday?" I asked.

"I hope so, you can ask. Slight problem from Sunday. The little cunt is back for eight weeks; most of Summer Break! With these bruises I can't kick the shit outta him!" Chloe said.

"It looks like the bruises will heal, soon." I said. "I'll talk with your Mom and hopefully see you on Saturday. Just you, not Kyle, okay?"

"Okay?" Chloe asked, looking confused.

"See ya!" I said and headed back downstairs.

I managed to persuade Dr Bennett to let Chloe come over on Saturday and to let her stay the night.

Four days later
Saturday
The safehouse

I had received all the new equipment that I had ordered and was sorting it out, down at the safehouse.

I'd driven down in Speedy and Dave would follow with Marty and Chloe, once Chloe arrived at West Ridge.

Dave had his new armour which, according to The Armourer, was tougher and should absorb more of the shock, causing less bruising. My new combat suit top was a good fit and had a little more give around my chest, which seemed to have expanded! Dave had noticed that I had bought new bras and said that he thought things were slightly bigger! I actually felt quite pleased, as I always felt a little self-conscious around women with larger breasts. The items I had ordered for Chloe and Marty were also here. Chloe would be the first to receive her new gifts. I was secretly looking forward to handing these over, as it would allow me to reconnect with my past. I hadn't told Dave about the gifts for Chloe and Marty, so that they would be a surprise and I knew Dave would have a bit of fun at my expense, too!

I heard the garage door go up and the SUV pull in and park.

"Hi, Chloe! How you feeling?" I asked.

"Not so sore," Chloe replied.

"Able to wear a bra now?" I asked, with an evil grin.

"Yes... I'm wearing a bra!" Chloe replied sharply, blushing slightly.

"Sorry, couldn't resist!" I said. "Chloe go sit over on the mat, I'll be over in a minute."

Chloe looked a little confused, but went over and sat down in our 'chatting corner'.

I took Dave to one side and explained that I had presents for Chloe. Dave nodded and we both went over to sit down

with Chloe, who looked a little apprehensive. Marty headed into the briefing room and his computers.

"Don't worry Chloe!" I said, sitting down. "You've coped with worse!"

Chloe grinned, still looking apprehensive.

"Okay... You've proved that you are a capable member of the team. You've proved that you can be trusted. You've proved that you can follow orders, at least, most of the time! But we've all lapsed there, at some stage or another!" I said.

"Some more than others!" Dave said, looking directly at me.

"Funny, Ass-Kick!" I growled.

"We've decided, that you have now earned yourself a permanent position, on the team. You are now the the third most senior 'operator' in Fusion. By 'operator' we mean those who go out and fight. Marty and Abby are not operators, they are our technical support," I said.

Chloe looked a little stunned.

"Thanks, Mindy," Chloe said slowly.

I got up and went into the briefing room, where I picked up Chloe's presents and returned to the mat.

"I have some presents for you; look at them as are your graduation presents, " I said, before looking at Dave. "And no smart-ass, wise cracks, from you!"

I passed the first present over to Chloe.

"Wow!" Chloe said, sounding a little overwhelmed.

"That is a bō-staff. I used to use one, before I got my Katana blades," I explained and saw Dave wincing.

I had bought a custom made bō-staff, very similar to mine. It was made from a reinforced composite material, which would resist a strike from a Katana. The twin blades, at each end of the bō-staff, were made from a reinforced steel, similar to a Katana blade and were a foot long, with extremely sharp, pointed, blades. The entire bō-staff was almost five feet in length and the main section was a dark blue. I showed Chloe how the bō-staff separated in the middle and became two swords.

Chloe was speechless, but looked very excited! Dave just looked a little worried.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"It's cool, I'll need a lot of practice to learn how to use it, without cutting myself in half!" Chloe replied.

"Now, you won't be able to use it properly until those bruises are healed on your stomach," I said. "But until that happens, you can learn to use these."

I passed over a small wooden box, which Chloe opened, slowly.

"Wow!"

"Those are a pair of custom Butterfly Knives or Balisongs, to use the proper name," I said and Dave groaned.

"I am starting to get some very nasty flashbacks!" Dave complained.

I ignored him!

The knives were very similar to my own that I had received for my eleventh birthday, all those years ago. The overall length of the weapon was 9.4-inches, with a 4.2-inch blade. The handle was made from titanium, with the blade being made from strengthened steel. The two knives were identical in every way.

"So that you can train without losing most of your fingers, you can use a training balisong," I said, passing over a training balisong.

"I really don't know what to say, Mindy! I'm overwhelmed," Chloe stammered.

"Dave and I... We just want you to feel part of the team and we want to thank you for all your help," I explained. "Including what you did at Chris's headquarters."

"I agree!" Dave acknowledged.

I then showed Chloe the basic movements to use when flipping the balisong. I flipped both blades, very fast, one in each hand. Chloe looked mesmerised, but Dave looked pained!

"Problem Dave?" I asked, smirking, as I knew what the problem was.

"You know full well what the problem is!" Dave said, smirking.

"Am I allowed to know this big problem?" Chloe asked, curiously.

I looked at Dave, but he waved me on.

"Okay... Dave first met me when I was eleven and I was a bit of a show-off. I saw what I did as a kind of 'game'. Dave, or rather a very inexperienced Kick-Ass, got himself into a bit of a situation and was about to be killed, so I stepped in to help him. For some reason, I thought he had potential and I kinda had a minor crush on him, although it was almost a year later before I actually realised it was a crush. When I was eleven, I didn't understand those feelings, but I still wanted to get to know him," I explained.

"Anyway... I was shitting myself and then suddenly Rasul, the owner of the apartment stopped advancing on me; he had a blade sticking out of his chest! The blade was removed, Rasul fell and I saw Hit Girl for the very first time - a very short Hit Girl! You wanna say it?" I asked.

"Why not... I stared down at Kick-Ass and the people in the apartment, before saying: '*Okay you cunts... Let's see what you can do now*'," I growled, trying to sound younger.

"Creepy!" Dave admitted. "Then, Little Miss Assassin proceeded to slaughter everybody there, about six or seven people, using her bō-staff and a balisong: '*Hey, I got one of those!*'"

I laughed at Dave's impression of me.

"Yeah... The little bitch smiled her way through the entire slaughter. She was like a damn Angry Bird, bouncing around the apartment, killing everything in sight and all the time showing off to me! Then her perfect plan went wrong and she almost got killed, while commenting on my choice of taser, except Big Daddy used his sniper rifle to kill the last man and then she got a mini lecture from Daddy!" Dave said, smirking at me. "'*Now Hit Girl, we always keep our backs where?*'"

"'*To the wall Daddy, I know. Um, it... it won't happen again. Nice shot, by the way*'," I said slowly, thinking back.

"Sorry, if I brought back old memories," Dave said, quietly.

"Not to worry, they were parts of my life, when Daddy was still alive and I like remembering them. In this case they were also the time that I first met the man I love," I replied. "Sorry, Chloe. I'm getting all soppy, not very Hit Girl!"

"You have nothing to apologise for, Mindy. It just feels good to know that you both trust me enough, to talk about such personal and private events, right in front of me!" Chloe said, biting her lower lip and looking uncomfortable.

"You are a part of our little family, our inner-circle, if you like. We trust you one hundred percent and I only trust three other people as much; Marcus, Dave and Marty. We five are the inner-circle. Nobody else knows this intimate information, about Hit Girl's life. To tell you the truth, even Marcus doesn't know everything, but that's only because he doesn't *want* to know!" I explained, smiling at Chloe. "Plus we know you won't tell anybody else."

"Thank you, both of you," Chloe said, bursting into tears. I got up and hugged her tightly.

Next I gave Dave his new armour, which he was really impressed with.

"You trying to keep me alive or something?" Dave asked, facetiously.

"Asshole!" I replied.

"Marty, I have some kit for you!" I said, ignoring Dave's hurt look.

"For me?" Marty asked.

"Yes, Marty," I replied. "You, I definitely *do* want to keep alive!"

I handed Marty a mask, similar to Dave's original mask, in that it covered the entire head except for around the mouth. It was black, but with a large blue strip running around at eye level. The eyes were covered in impact resistant lenses, that replicated Marty's eye requirements. This meant that he wouldn't require his glasses, when in costume. The mask even had Battle Guy's white, five pointed star in the centre above the eyes.

"Fucking wow!" Marty said.

"That is awesome!" Chloe exclaimed

I handed over the rest of Marty's kit. It was a complete SWAT outfit, except that the suit was made out of the same, composite material as the combat suits. I had also bought a slightly non-standard, set of body armour for Marty to wear over the suit.

"That should make you safer when you are out with us. Once you are trained, we can customise the suit further," I said.

"Thanks, Mindy. It is really cool!" Marty commented.

Two days later
Monday afternoon
West Ridge

Curtis came around.

"Hi Mindy! Hi Dave!" Curtis said, smiling.

"Hi Curtis!" Mindy and I, both said.

Chloe looked none to happy about Curtis being here, but apparently Chloe was supposed to be keeping an eye on him! Curtis was still not a big fan of Sophia, who kept following him around and staring at him!

"Remember Sophia, no eating Curtis!" Chloe said and laughing at Curtis' discomfort.

Chloe can be a nasty bitch when she wants to be! But, I suppose that makes two of them!

***Chapter 47*: Shadow Revealed**

Two days later
Wednesday
The safehouse

"Guys! We have a problem... A stalker... He has appeared each evening for the past two nights," Marty said. "Dead on eight-forty, each evening!"

"Well, we'll just have to set up a surprise for him, tonight!" I said.

That evening
The safehouse

We were all ready and in combat suits for eight that evening. Marty and Abby would stay in the briefing room and lock the armoured door.

Shadow and Hit Girl would be ready inside the side door, while Kick-Ass would step out and grab the stalker, the moment that he reappeared.

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Dead on eight-forty, Marty called that the stalker was there, standing by the side door. I was already outside, hiding in the darkness.

"Go!" I snarled.

I moved forward and grabbed the stalker, with one hand across his mouth, before the side door clicked open and I dragged the stalker inside. The stalker seemed familiar, close up. I dragged him onto the mat and threw him down.

"Ouch!" Curtis yelled.

"Curtis, you little rat!" Shadow exclaimed.

"What ya gonna do, bitch!" Curtis retorted.

"Kick you so damn hard..." Shadow started, angrily.

"I know your shadow-y little secret!" Curtis interrupted, with a smug look on his face.

"And who are you going to tell!" I snarled, viciously. "Before I rip your tongue out!"

Curtis tried to back away, but Hit Girl suddenly appeared behind him. I think the combat suits scared him, as I was sure that he knew who we really were.

"I'm sorry Hit Girl, I won't tell. I promise," Curtis said quickly.

The boy was actually starting to cry.

I stood Curtis up, he was shaking and I looked at Chloe.

"Do I look like I care?"

"You can't hate him *that* much?"

"Can't !!"

"You're okay Curtis, don't worry!" Mindy said, pulling off her mask and smiling down at the boy, before glaring at Chloe.

"It's really dangerous out there at night, Curtis," I said. "Not very clever!"

"I got a cab. I wanted to see where the evil bitch was going, each night!" Curtis explained.

"Well, I know where the evil bitch is going with you!" Shadow said, advancing towards Curtis, who hid behind Mindy.

"Enough!" Mindy called out. "Leave him alone!"

"Okay!" Chloe said, reluctantly, pulling off her mask.

"You look really cool, you know!" Curtis said, smiling up at Chloe.

"Thanks, rat!" Chloe said, with a forced smile.

"Abby, Marty, you can come out now," I called.

"You tell anyone, you even dream or think about us, I *will* kill you!" Mindy said, seriously and Curtis looked like he was going to cry again.

"I would never do anything that would hurt my Chloe, never!" Curtis said, hugging Chloe, who seemed a bit lost for words.

"Can I, please, set Eisenhower on him, just once?" Chloe begged.

"No, evil bitch, you can't!" Mindy laughed.

I was really pissed off.

Curtis had no fucking right following me. Abby was bad enough, but that's two people I've led to Dave and Mindy! Only four days ago, Dave and Mindy said they trusted me and I do this to them! I was really feeling low, right now.

I was sitting in the Kitchen, while Dave and Mindy had a quiet chat with Curtis, in the briefing room. I felt sick, I really did, I wouldn't blame Dave or Mindy, if they kicked me out of Fusion!

I heard voices on the stairs and a smiling Curtis appeared, behind him was a smiling Dave.

"Chloe, Mindy wants ya!" Dave said, smiling.

I got up and headed downstairs, with my mask in my hand.

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Mindy was in the briefing room and she turned as I came in. She had a big smile on her face, which vanished as soon as she saw me.

"Mat, move!" Mindy ordered.

I turned and walked over to the mat, Mindy followed.

"What's up with your face, Chloe?" Mindy asked.

"I just feel bad about Curtis following me; that's two people I've led to you now!" I said, weakly.

Mindy slapped me.

"What the fuck!" I exclaimed.

Mindy slapped me again, harder.

"Act like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch!" Mindy snarled. "Remember!"

Chloe looked horror struck.

"Get your fucking mask on, bitch!" I growled.

I ran over to the armoury and grabbed two training bō-staffs. When I returned Chloe had her mask on, but she still looked uncomfortable. I threw a staff at her, before pulling my own mask on.

I prodded her with the bō-staff.

"Fight me, Chloe, before I slap you stupid!" I growled.

"I let you down, Mindy," Chloe said.

"For fuck's sake, Shadow! If I winged like a bitch, every time I let Dave down..." I said in an exasperated tone.

"But..." Chloe started.

I had had enough! I moved forward and swung the bō-staff hard, at Shadow's head, but seconds before it hit, another bō-staff intercepted my bō-staff. This time Shadow's lip had curled. She pushed back on the bō-staff, hard and I let her push me back. Chloe was actually rather good with the bō-staff, which annoyed me a bit! Mind you, the bō-staff was very much like the Jō that she usually used. She will just need to learn how to use the blades... To kill.

We continued sparring for another few minutes. I had inserted a few flips, into my fight to avoid Shadow's bō-staff and noticed that Shadow had copied my movements, to avoid *my* bō-staff! She was getting too good, so I flipped Shadow onto her back, with my bō-staff. I noticed that we had attracted an appreciative audience, Dave, Marty, Abby and Curtis. Curtis was wide eyed and looked amazed. I pulled Shadow to her feet and she pulled off her mask. She had an enormous grin on her face.

"Thanks, Mindy!" Chloe said, as I pulled off my mask.

"*That was totally wicked!*" Curtis blurted out, causing Chloe to blush.

"You enjoyed that, did you?" I asked.

"Chloe is awesome! Not as good as you, but then nobody is!" Curtis said and this time I felt myself blushing!

"You're so sweet, Curtis!" I replied.

"Like fuck he is!" Chloe said, laughing and giving Curtis a hug, making *him* blush.

"Damn! You slap hard, Mindy!" Chloe said, rubbing her jaw.

"Don't I know it!" Dave quipped, getting a glare from me.

Two days later
Friday evening
The safehouse

We geared up, ready for a night of fun.

Abby and Marty, were in the briefing room, getting their kit ready. Dave, Chloe and I, were in the armoury putting on our combat suits. Eisenhower was dozing on the mat, beside Beast. Tonight I took along my bō-staff, as did Chloe. This was so that I could show her how to use the weapon, in combat. I retained my Tanto and one Katana. For transport, we covered the blades of both bō-staffs, to protect each other and the interior of Beast.

For tonight we were heading out to a part of Chicago that was well known for various illegal activities. We had only been out once, since the 'week of hell' and needed some good working up, on the job, so to speak. We had met up with Fellowes and Murphy; Fellowes had recovered from his leg wound and was fully fit again. We also learnt that The Archer had never made it into custody. He apparently vanished on the way back to the nearest District! This was no surprise to anyone, as he had killed thirteen people, including three Police Officers. It was nice to know that he was now dead! It was also useful to know that the Chicago PD, had it's own internal justice!

We drove out and headed towards the northern part of central Chicago. It was after ten o'clock and fully dark, when we parked Beast in a secluded alley. Shadow and I, removed the covers from our bō-staffs and we started our patrol. Kick-Ass, had Eisenhower on her leash.

Our first catch of the night, walked straight into us and made the mistake of attacking, with what looked like a large

machete. I executed a perfect sideways stab, with my bō-staff, piercing the man through the chest. I pulled back the blade and let the man fall to the ground, dead.

"That was smooth!" Shadow commented.

Kick-Ass picked up the machete and examined it.

"Fresh blood; somebody just died!" He growled, angrily.

Eisenhower was sniffing in the direction that the man had come from. So we headed in that direction, following Eisenhower. After we had walked about two hundred yards, we found a body. It was a young woman and most of her clothes had been ripped off and there was blood everywhere from multiple wounds, which seemed to match the machete. I had no sympathy for the dead man, but I called Battle Guy and advised him of the situation, I suggested he make an anonymous call to the Police, with the location of both bodies.

We moved on.

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About forty minutes later, we hit pay dirt!

There was a pair of alleyways that intersect, about halfway down. They cross perpendicular to each other and the crossing is the private refuge of a certain drug dealer. Everybody knows to keep away from these two alleys. The Police generally keep away, because it would be a kill zone. However I rarely turn down a challenge, although in hindsight, maybe I should have walked away!

We scouted out the cross-section. There were twelve men visible, of which two looked to be 'bosses', the rest were just hired help, although one or two may be runners. Naturally they all looked to be armed!

"Battle Guy, we have twelve targets, we are engaging!" I called.

"Battle Guy copies twelve targets and Fusion engaging!"

"Shadow, you stay with me!" I cautioned.

"What about me?" Kick-Ass asked.

"You're big enough to look after yourself!" I replied.

"Oh well, I suppose I get a bitch and so does Shadow!" Kick-Ass retorted, patting Eisenhower.

I heard a laugh from Shadow, but I had to smile as it broke the tension. Well done, Dave!

The plan was for Kick-Ass and Eisenhower to advance from the south, where there was only one watchdog. Shadow and myself would advance from the east. We hoped to remove the first three watchdogs, without alerting the other watchdogs. We all moved together. Shadow and I, advanced forward, our bō-staff blades ready to quickly and cleanly remove the two watchdogs. We both stabbed together, the blades severing the men's hearts in two, killing them. We removed our blades, letting the dead men sink to the floor of the darkened alley. It was just after midnight and now Saturday morning.

"Hit Girl and Shadow have two down!" I reported.

A second later.

"Kick-Ass has one down!"

It seemed that the watchdogs were guarding the northern and western alleys more, than the other two. We now had a direct line to the two 'bosses'. There were two SUVs in the alley and the 'bosses' were beside one, in the cross-section. The other SUV was parked in the northern alley. So far, nobody had noticed the deaths of three watchdogs.

"Kick-Ass, Hit Girl and Shadow are ready to move on the 'bosses'," I called.

"Go!" Kick-Ass ordered.

I moved forward and came up behind the first boss and pushed him against the wall, with a hand over his mouth and

a blade of my bō-staff to his throat.

"Not a sound!" I growled. The man nodded.

I saw Kick-Ass place a Ko-Wakizashi to the throat of the other boss and heard his growl, "Not a sound!"

Shadow covered my back, while I watched both bosses. We pushed them down, behind the SUVs and bound their hands with plastic ties. Surprisingly nobody had noticed the 'bosses' vanishing from sight, yet! Eisenhower stood guard over both 'bosses', who seemed very afraid of the large dog, in battle armour.

Then all hell broke loose! Somebody must have spotted us, from vantage point. A voice suddenly shouted through the darkness.

"Get them, you idle bastards!"

The remaining six watchdogs all advanced on the SUV, that we were hiding behind. This was not good, I saw Kick-Ass pull out his Glock and I nodded, in response, slinging my bō-staff onto my back and drawing both of my pistols. Shadow did the same, slinging her bō-staff and she drew her pistol. I saw Shadow's eyes looking worried and smiled.

"Don't worry Shadow, all will be fine!"

The firing started.

I started firing at the watchdogs, none of which seemed to be wearing body armour.

This of course helped, as I watched the 9-millimetre bullets ripping onto my targets. I saw a runner being taken down, by a bullet from Shadow and I watched as all of the watchdogs collapsed, either dead or dying, onto the cold concrete of the alley floor. Silence descended on the alley and I could hear sirens in the distance. I reported in to Battle Guy, that the targets were down.

We searched the alley and SUVs, recovering a large amount of cash. We left any drugs that we had found. With a large holdall, full of cash, we headed back towards Beast. The two 'bosses' had received injuries, during the battle and died. None of their wounds had been inflicted by us, but all were from bullets fired by the watchdogs!

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We were only a hundred yards from Beast, when we heard men approaching.

We were being chased!

We all started running, fast!

We got to Beast, I threw the hold-all full of cash into the back and Eisenhower jumped in beside it. Shadow climbed into the back seat and just as Hit Girl and I were climbing in, four men burst into our alley and started shooting. Hit Girl pulled her door shut, I started Beast, put it into gear and accelerated away. Several rounds impacted the rear door.

***Chapter 48*: The Vigilante Doctor**

***Back at the safehouse
Saturday, 1:00 A.M.***

Hit Girl had been shot, four times!

Twice in the right thigh and twice into her right side. Both bullets were still embedded in her thigh, but the other two had gone straight through. The shooter had been firing an H&K MP7 with rounds that were able to pierce Hit Girl's armour. We needed a doctor, but couldn't take Hit Girl to the hospital. Currently she was laid out on one of the couches, in the briefing room and she was in considerable pain.

"I'll call my Mom; it'd be safest!" Chloe suggested. "I'll get the little shit to tell her where to go!"

"You hope that keeping our masks on will help?" I asked, unconvinced.

"We can try. Abby and Marty can go upstairs and stay out of the way. Hopefully she won't recognise any of us!" Chloe said, hopefully.

"Hopefully!" I replied, not convinced at all.

Chloe called home.

It was late, well early, so I didn't know what Dr Bennett would say. I could hear Chloe on the phone.

"Look you little bastard, get my Mom here now or I'll break your scrawny little neck and you fucking know I can and will!"

"A little harsh, Shadow!" I commented, when she had hung up.

"The little fuck deserved it!"

About five minutes or so later, Chloe's cell buzzed with a text message.

"They are on their way," Chloe said, apprehensively.

"What the hell are you getting me into Curtis. I get mugged, I'll kill you!" I said to the boy, sitting beside me.

"They need your help. It's Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. Somebody's wounded, that's all I know," Curtis replied. "They know me, never mind how!"

The area was very dark and looked like the ideal place for a mugging or even a murder! I double checked that all the doors were locked! How the hell was Curtis involved, with those vigilantes? I have a bad feeling about this!

Curtis told me to stop beside a steel mesh gate.

He then sent a text and seconds later the gate opened, followed by the main garage door of the building, inside the compound. I drove into the darkened building and saw the mesh gate and garage door, closing behind me. This filled me with a sense of foreboding! I stopped my Jeep SUV beside two large SUVs, that I recognised as a Range Rover and an LR4.

As the garage door closed behind me, the lights came on inside the building and I saw two menacing looking people standing in front of me. The taller one, I thought must be Kick-Ass, but I wasn't too sure about the much shorter one, although I was starting to get an idea!

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I turned off the ignition and got out, seeing Curtis climb out his side and walk over towards the shorter vigilante.

"You must be Kick-Ass! Where is the wounded person?" I asked, getting straight down to business. I was concerned, I didn't feel like my life was at risk, but I was cautious.

"This way, Doc!" Kick-Ass snarled.

Kick-Ass took me across a training mat, towards a large, two storey, brick structure and a door to the left hand side. Through the door I found a room, that looked like a combined command centre and briefing room. On the couch lay a young woman, in a black armoured suit, with purple flashes.

"You must be Hit Girl!" I said, kneeling down beside her.

I could see hastily applied field dressings, on her right thigh and right side.

"Curtis, get my case from the Jeep," I ordered, then looked up at Kick-Ass. "Tell me what happened!"

"She has two bullet's embedded in her thigh and two bullet wounds to her side," Kick-Ass said.

Curtis appeared lugging my medical case. I opened it and put on some gloves, before probing Hit Girl's wounds. She screamed at each touch.

"Calm down Hit Girl... Or should I say Mindy!" I said, feeling sure I was correct.

"What?" Kick-Ass and the short vigilante said, together.

"I am not *that* naive, Dave and I am also *very* sure that the short-ass ninja, over there, is my daughter!" I said, conversationally.

"Oh fuck!" Shadow said, not too quietly.

"I heard that, young lady!" I said, with a smirk, as my daughter appeared from under her mask.

"Hi Mom!" Chloe said, apprehensively, looking a little shy.

"We'll talk later, midget ninja!" I said, turning back to Mindy.

"Can you get the bullets out?" A now unmasked, Dave asked.

"I can. We need to get the suit off her. Can I use the table?" I asked, it looked sturdy enough to hold Mindy's weight.

"Yes. Chloe clear the table," Dave said, and started to pull off Mindy's combat suit, very carefully, starting with the mask.

Ten minutes later Mindy was lying on the table, which was covered with a white bed sheet.

She was in nothing but her underwear and Chloe was holding her hand, to reassure her, as Mindy kept passing out with the pain.

Dr Bennett cleaned the area around the wounds and injected some local aesthetic, around the thigh wounds. The upper wounds were okay for now, the important wounds were the thigh ones, with the embedded bullets.

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Forty minutes later, Dr Bennett stood back from the table and pulled off her bloody gloves.

"All done! I've removed the two bullets, closed up the wounds and dressed them," Dr Bennett said. "I would recommend getting Mindy to bed."

"I'll get her upstairs right now," I said, picking Mindy up; she was currently passed out. "Come and help me Chloe."

I carried Mindy upstairs and Chloe helped me tuck her into bed.

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I went back downstairs.

"Thank you Dr Bennett, for all your help," I said.

"No problem, I like to help. Any chance of a coffee?" Dr Bennett asked.

"Upstairs," I said, leading the way.

"You know Abby and this is Marty," I said, as we entered the kitchen, where Abby, Curtis and Marty were sitting at the table.

"Hello Abby, Marty," Dr Bennett said, holding out her hand, which Marty shook. "Nice little safehouse you have here!"

"Thanks," I said, smiling and poured a coffee for Dr Bennett.

"So," Dr Bennett said slowly, looking directly at Chloe, who visibly shrank into her chair. "My thirteen year-old, vigilante daughter, has been running around the streets, killing people!"

"I won't insult you, by denying it. But she only kills in self-defence or in the defence of others," I said quickly. "Chloe is a fully trusted member of our team. She has proved her worth and her courage, way beyond her years. Very few people know mine and Mindy's story, but Chloe is one of them, because we trust her and she is part of our inner-circle. Mindy and I trust her, with our lives."

"It's okay Dave. I've killed people in my life and sometimes it has to be done. I had a feeling that Chloe was up to something, once we moved to Chicago. The pretence of staying with Abby was a good try! When did she join you two?" Dr Bennett asked.

"Towards the end of January. We came across Chloe, when she helped us one evening," I replied. "She got herself shot!"

"I was wearing your old vest, so I was okay, but a little bruised and I was also knocked unconscious," Chloe said, shyly.

"At least you were thinking, when you went out! I assume you are all wearing proper body armour?" Dr Bennett asked, looking closely at Chloe's combat suit. "Type II?"

"Yes," I replied, a little surprised. "Type IIA. My combat suit is heavier, Type III."

"I have fifteen years of service in the Navy, as a Doctor, Dave. I went into hostile areas, several times and had numerous opportunities to rely on my body armour, giving me the chance to return the favour," Dr Bennett replied, darkly.

"How many..." Chloe started.

"I won't ask about your body count, if you don't ask about mine, young lady!" Dr Bennett said, meaningfully.

"Mindy has been doing this for over a decade and knows what she is about and how to keep the team as safe as possible," I said.

"That's obvious, I can see that. I know what you do is dangerous and injuries will happen and no, I won't stop you Chloe... Unless your school work starts to slip!" Dr Bennett said.

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"I am a bit surprised to hear that, Dr Bennett," I said, honestly.

"There was a bit of trouble, when Chloe's father and I were young. We were both packed off to join the Navy, but we met up again at College; we were both sponsored by the Navy. That was when Ryan and I got together properly, he had this great Ford P.O.S. and the back seat was very useful!" Dr Bennett said, reminiscing, with a smile.

"Ugh! Yuck!" Both Chloe and Curtis exclaimed.

"Don't complain Chloe; you were conceived on the back seat of a US Navy sedan!" Dr Bennett said, with an evil smirk.

"Mom! Gross!" Chloe exclaimed and Curtis sniggered, which earned him a hard punch to the arm. "I don't want to hear about you and Dad... Ugh!"

"I thought you always wanted a little brother?" Dr Bennett teased.

"I've seen Curtis, no thanks!" Chloe replied, grimacing.

"Hey!" Curtis exclaimed, indignantly.

"The next problem will be explaining this to your father, Chloe!" Dr Bennett said.

"You can't!" Chloe exclaimed.

"I can't hide this from your father... Besides things slip when we're in the sack together!" Dr Bennett said laughing and Chloe went bright red.

"He'll ground me till I'm ninety-five!" Chloe groaned.

"We'll see, dear. When did the little guy get involved?" Dr Bennett asked, looking at Curtis.

"Less of the little!" Curtis grouched.

"The little fuc... The annoying rat followed me here!" Chloe explained. "Abby tracked me a while ago, too. She never goes out, but helps Marty with the technical and comms side."

"You are very high-tech here; I'm genuinely impressed!" Dr Bennett said. "So, I suppose I am now the official medical support for Fusion!"

"Only if you want to be. We can't force you," I said, hopefully.

"Considering that my only daughter is running around Chicago, shooting people with an FN Five-seveN, I will need to provide what assistance I can!" Dr Bennett proclaimed, with a smile.

Dr Bennett left, with Curtis, to head home.

The Doctor recommended that we keep Mindy resting, for at least a week, to allow the wounds to begin healing. Dr Bennett had also commented on the healing wound, on Mindy's left arm. I said it was from a crossbow bolt three weeks ago and that a paramedic had fixed the wound up, at the time.

Chloe was allowed to stay, to help with Mindy. I left things till after six in the morning, before I carefully placed Mindy, into the back of the SUV, with Chloe. Marty would take Abby home and see us later at the house. I drove home slowly, so I didn't hurt Mindy, who was still out, thanks to the drugs that Dr Bennett had given her to help her sleep and to deaden the pain.

I was really worried about Mindy. Her young body had taken a lot of punishment over the past few weeks and I was very worried that her body may not be able to take much more stress, at least for now. Mindy would also be pissed, as she had been wearing the new top for her combat suit! I suppose the large amount of cash that we seized tonight, would pay for a new suit, easily!

Once we were home, I carried Mindy upstairs and Chloe helped me get her into bed. We then both went to get showers and go to bed ourselves, as we were both very tired. Before she went for her shower, Chloe gave me a hug and told me that Mindy would be okay. Chloe was a very caring and perceptive young lady.

***Chapter 49*: Purple Power**

***The following week
Friday night
Police Warehouse***

Murphy had called, passing on a message and inviting Fusion to a meeting.

Apparently nothing was wrong, but SWAT wanted to say thank you, for the events that occurred the other month.

We arrived in Beast. The meeting was in the same warehouse, as last time. Just as before, the shutter opened, as we approached and closed behind us. The warehouse was empty except for a single SWAT truck and a Police SUV. In front of the vehicles were the eight man SWAT team, as well as Murphy and Fellowes. They all had big grins, on their faces.

Once we had parked and got out, we approached the group.

"Fusion, we owe you our lives, all of us. Plus many other Police Officers and members of the public," Matthews began.

"Firstly, we owe you these," Matthews said and indicated two, one thousand round, tins of 5.56-millimetre ammunition.

I had to smile.

"Thanks guys!" I said.

"No problem, Hit Girl!" Matthews said and slapped the side of the SWAT truck. "We have a surprise for you!"

The SWAT truck started up and pulled forward about a dozen feet.

As it moved, something was revealed that had been hidden behind it.

My mouth dropped open, I was speechless!

It was purple and had the initials **'HG'** on either side, above the front wheel. The rear plate read **'HIT N RUN'**.

I finished my slow walk, around the brand new Ducati 1199 Panigale R and I turned to the Police Officers.

"I don't know what to say!"

"Yours did get wrecked, while coming to help us!" Murphy said. "Plus there was a reward for getting rid of Chris D'Amico! We thought you'd prefer the reward in the form of a new motorcycle!"

"Here, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass called, holding out a brand new, purple, helmet.

"You knew!" I responded.

"Of course!" Kick-Ass said, smirking.

"It looks damn cool!" Shadow said.

"Damn straight!" Agreed Battle Guy.

I was so excited.

I had my Ducati and it was purple!

I was still sore, from the bullet wounds, but I was *not* going to let that take away my excitement! I followed Beast back to the safehouse, trying not to go fast, or do anything stupid... But I just had to find out, to remind myself of the awesome power that was between my legs! I accelerated hard and heard the engine and exhaust noise increase and

felt the huge acceleration threatening to rip me off the seat. My God, that adrenalin rush was awesome! There is only one thing I enjoy more, between my legs...

We made it back to the safehouse without any mishaps. I pulled up beside the Fat Boy and turned off the engine. I could feel my legs shaking, as I jumped off and pulled off my helmet. I looked over towards Beast and saw Kick-Ass, Battle Guy and Shadow appear, all removing their masks and all three were grinning. I pulled off my mask, too.

"You look a little excited!" Dave said, sarcastically and laughed.

"Okay, I had a little fun! It's not that often I get something so powerful, between my legs!" I said, then instantly regretted it and felt my face warming up. "Other than Dave!" I said, quickly and felt my face get even hotter.

"Really!" Marty and Chloe said together and looked at Dave.

"I think Little Miss Giddy, needs to calm down!" Dave said, keeping his composure a lot better than I was!

The safehouse

An hour later, I had calmed down enough to get back to Fusion activities!

Abby had stayed back, at the safehouse and monitored our trip, to see the Police. She was amazed at the Ducati, as we all were, except for Dave, who seemed to know all about it. Dave is very good at keeping secrets!

I called Abby out of the briefing room and took her into the armoury.

"Abby, as you know, we had that issue last week with Curtis. Now if that had been somebody else that had wanted to do us harm, then we may have had a fight on our hands. Everybody here is trained on at least one weapon, except for you. Marty has his Glock and now you need a pistol, in case of any problems, okay?" I explained.

"I think so!" Abby said, apprehensively.

"Chloe says, that you have never used a pistol before, right?" I asked.

"Yes," Abby responded.

I scanned the armoury and selected a Glock 26 Gen4 from the wall. This was a sub-compact 9-millimetre 10-round pistol. I showed Abby how to clear it and check that the weapon was safe. In this instance, the pistol was not loaded. The pistol fitted Abby's hands very well. I also selected an Aurora mini-suppressor and a combined laser/illuminator for the pistol. I told Abby to practice with the pistol and once I knew that she was safe, I would allow her to start some target practice.

"This will be your own personal weapon. You must look after it, keep it clean and in functional order. You never know when you might need it and you don't want it to jam on you, in the middle of a fire-fight!" I cautioned.

I had got Marty to install a pair of small gun safes into the briefing room, so if they were surprised one evening, they could defend themselves. Marty kept his Glock in one safe and Abby would use the other safe, for her Glock. Marty had fitted a large gun safe, on the upper floor, in which several weapons were stored, for an emergency.

I was taking no chances, in case we were invaded and I saw it as money well spent!

The next morning

Saturday

Morton Grove

Dr Bennett had requested that Dave and I drive up, to collect Chloe today, as she had some items to give us.

Very cryptic, but we drove up anyway, pulling up outside Chloe's house. Before we could knock, the door flew open and Chloe pulled us both in and into the Kitchen.

"Hi, you two!" Dr Bennett said, smiling. "I have some things for you."

"Okay," Mindy said.

Dr Bennett pointed to several items on the kitchen counter.

"These two black cases first. Leave one case at the safehouse and the other at your house. With either case I can perform minor surgery. I'll be able to cut, glue, stitch, splint and patch most injuries, with those two cases. It is, basically, very similar to what a combat medic might carry. That green bag contains blood expanders; I hope we won't ever need those. The red bag should be placed into Beast, as your mobile kit. Again I can perform minor surgery, or talk you through more limited first aid. The remaining six, smaller, packs are Personal Trauma Kits, you will each carry one; it may save a life, yours or somebody else!" Dr Bennett lectured.

"Thank you, Doc!" I said, appreciatively.

"Why?" Mindy asked, curiously.

"If you and my daughter, are going to gallivant around Chicago, getting into dangerous situations, then I need to do what I can to keep you all alive! I know injuries will happen, as we have seen," Dr Bennett explained, looking at Mindy, who blushed.

"I remember when Chloe first killed, about seven weeks ago, beginning of May..." Dr Bennett said, before being cut off by Chloe.

"How could you know that?"

"I'm your mother! You had nightmares for a week and at least three of the nights, you slept in *my* bed! I assume they were bad guys, who deserved to die?"

"Two men about to shoot Mindy. Chloe double tapped each man, in the head, from a good distance!" I said. "She has very good shooting skills."

"I'll match my rounds against her's, any day!" Dr Bennett challenged. "I will also expect you all to have a full medical check up, which I will administer, each month. That way we can ensure that you are all healthy and prevent any major problems escalating."

"Any of you push yourselves regularly till you drop and go over and beyond?" Dr Bennett asked.

"Hey! What are you two looking at me for?" Mindy demanded, indignantly.

"Well, you can be as stubborn as a mule and push yourself till you drop!" I said.

"Well the physical will be important then; especially for you two girls, as I assume you two will want kids, eventually?" Dr Bennett asked.

Mindy and Chloe both blushed, bright red!

"I assume that you're sexually active, Mindy?" Dr Bennett continued.

Mindy couldn't blush any more, so she just stayed silent, looking mortified.

"Mom, they make almost as much noise as you and Dad do!" Chloe said, laughing, causing Mindy and I to grimace.

"Well, at least I know *you* aren't active yet!" Dr Bennett said, looking at Chloe, who just stood there with her mouth hanging open, completely mortified.

It was several minutes, before Mindy and Chloe regained their composure, enough to talk.

"Mom, you are *so* embarrassing!" Chloe exclaimed, angrily.

"Oh, I haven't even started yet!" Dr Bennett said, laughing. "Just thought I would have a bit of fun!"

We did as we were told and distributed the medical supplies, where we were instructed.

I was very impressed with what Dr Bennett had done for us and I hoped we would never need to use her offerings. However past results have shown me getting wounded, regularly!

Oh and Dave thinks he's *really* fucking funny. Apparently he found an interesting device, in a little shop, the other day

and thought I would like it!

"Go on Mindy, turn it on!" Chloe said, smirking.

"Yeah, go on Hit Girl!" Dave said.

I had a bad feeling about this! I flipped the switch and...

"Oh, you funny bastard!" I laughed.

Chloe hooted with laughter and Dave tried not to laugh, but gave up.

The device Dave had bought, projected an image onto the ceiling and in this case, Dave had swapped what ever the image should have been, for a giant cock!

Dave and Chloe got a hold of themselves, just long enough to finish things off.

"How do I get a hold of you?" Dave asked, innocently.

"You just contact the mayor's office. He has a special signal he shines in the sky; it's in the shape of a giant cock!" Chloe replied, struggling to keep a straight face.

Both of them then melted into hysterical laughter!

"You two cunts, think you're so fucking funny!" I growled, but couldn't resist laughing, it *was* funny!

***Chapter 50*: Wrong Place, Wrong Time**

Three days later
Tuesday

Today was strange, very strange.

Chloe and I were held hostage, with interesting results. Results, that I have to thank Marty for!

We were out in Chicago and we intended to go shopping. Due to recent security concerns, I had insisted that all Fusion members should always carry some form of basic comms with them, either a cell or a radio. Now, carrying our normal tactical radios as a civilian, would attract attention, as it was not easy to conceal and were not *technically* available to civilians! Marty, though, had found a compromise where as long as we were within a couple of miles of a main radio, i.e. Speedy, Beast, the SUV or a safehouse, we could carry a much smaller radio and use concealed communications headsets. This we were doing today, to test the system.

We had parked the SUV in the centre of the City and we were walking about a half-mile away. Marty and Abby were at the safehouse and monitoring the test. Dave was at home, with Sophia, Curtis and Kyle.

The first stop was to be the bank, so we could get some cash. I generally hated using cards, as they tended to leave an electronic trail. I also wanted to treat Chloe to a girls day out. We were chatting happily, as we entered the bank, so I didn't notice anything wrong. We queued up as usual and had been there for only about eight minutes. Marty was telling us jokes over the comms and we had to try and ignore him, so we didn't give the game away. We each had a small transceiver, which was hidden under our clothes, never mind where! In our left ear we each had a small ear bud, which contained a built-in microphone and a very thin wire, that ran down, under our clothes, to the transceiver. Our hair, especially mine, covered the ear bud and wire. I suggested to Chloe that she let her hair grow a little.

Suddenly I heard a commotion behind me and span around to see three security guards being clubbed to the ground by masked men. They were using what looked like leather billy clubs, or saps. Then AR-15 rifles appeared, in the hands of three of the men. Another two men were busy, securing the security guards' hands.

"Don't move! Don't fuckin' move! Put your hands in the air! Put your hands in the air! Put 'em up!" One man, with a gravely voice yelled.

"Get on your knees! Get on your knees!" Another man, with a British accent, shouted.

"We want to hurt no one! We're here for the bank's money, not your money. Your money is insured by the federal government, you're not gonna lose a dime! Think of your families, don't risk your life. Don't try and be a hero!" Gravely Voice said, loudly.

"Get down and stay down! Hey, you, get over here and get down!" British Accent yelled, at several bank workers.

I grimaced. They were idiots, not just for quoting from 'Heat', but following the whole fucking script!

..._...

"Battle Guy, the bank has just been seized!" I whispered, dejectedly.

"Copy that, Hit Girl!" Battle Guy replied.

"Five men, AR-15s. They think they're following the fucking script of 'Heat!'" I whispered, as I got down onto the floor, facing Chloe.

"Cool! Copy five, plus AR-15s and they like movies!" Battle Guy replied, with a snigger.

"Funny cunt!"

I heard one of the men speaking on a cell. He was reading out his demands to the cops, I caught the second demand and actually laughed.

"Like that's gonna happen!" I said, quietly, looking at Chloe, who had heard the same thing and looked at me, with a smirk.

"Repeat that, Hit Girl!" Battle Guy called.

"The idiots have just announced their demands. Demand number two: They want Hit Girl down here!" I said.

"You what? Now *that* is funny!" Battle Guy said and I could hear laughter from Hal, in the background.

"Better call Jack Bay. He knows who I am, he can cover," I said to Battle Guy.

"Doing it now!" Battle Guy replied.

Oh this was fucking brilliant! Here I am, a hostage and one of the hostage takers' demands is me! Dave is gonna fucking love this and milk it for all it's fucking worth!

"Does Kick-Ass know?" I asked, tentatively.

"He's inbound to suit up, right now!" Battle Guy replied.

Oh fuck!

Okay, think! These guys are complete idiots!

"Battle Guy, Shadow and I are gonna wind these fuckers up!" I said, coming to a decision.

"Copy that!"

..._...

"Hey! Asshole, how long are we gonna be lying here?" I said, sitting up.

"Get down, bitch!" Gravely Voice said, aiming his AR-15 at me. I didn't flinch.

"Big gun, huh! Compensating are we?" I responded and tried to ignore Marty and Abby laughing, in my ear.

"What?" Gravely Voice shouted.

"That big?" I said, holding my thumb and forefinger, about three inches apart and looking at Chloe, who giggled and held up her own thumb and forefinger, about an inch apart.

This seemed to annoy Gravely Voice!

"You fucking bitch..." Gravely Voice started, before British Accent told him to 'shut the fuck up'!

I could hear some sniggering, from other hostages and at least one hostage taker!

Gravely Voice and British Accent were arguing, but they had left me sitting up, so I could now look around. There were approximately sixteen bank customers and about twelve bank workers, lying on the floor. That included me and Chloe.

I had started to lose track of time, when I heard another voice in my ear bud, the one I had been dreading!

"Howdy, gorgeous!" Dave said. "Hit Girl rescued you yet?"

I whispered something vile and obscene.

"You foul mouthed, little bitch!" Dave retorted, laughing.

"Hiya, shadow!" Curtis said, in the most annoying way possible.

"Talk about little dicks!" Chloe muttered and I laughed.

"Be nice! Does Hit Girl know about your 'My Little Pony' panties?" Curtis responded.

"Fucking little... I'm gonna cut his fucking balls off, when I get outta here!" Chloe seethed, going bright red.

I hate to say it, but I laughed and the look I got from Chloe, was anything but friendly! The laughter from the safehouse *did not* help!

..._...

"Fuck this!" Chloe said, jumping up and turning to British Accent.

"Hey, wanker! I need a piss and right the fuck now!" Chloe said, without fear or shame! I had to admit that it didn't even sound like Chloe or Shadow! By the chatter over the comms, even Curtis sounded shocked.

Chloe was wearing shorts, which showed off her long legs and she was flaunting these and Gravely Voice was looking! Chloe did in fact look older, than thirteen and she actually could easily pass for a fifteen year-old, which really fucking sucked! At thirteen, I looked thirteen! I checked Chloe up and down; I knew that she was carrying a weapon somewhere, but couldn't for the life of me see where!

"Well, I'm waiting limp dick!" Chloe said, angrily.

"Take the slut, to the fucking bathroom!" British Accent said, to one of the other men.

"Go suck a cock!" Chloe retorted, as she was led to the bathroom.

I was trying my best to keep a straight face, but failing and I could hear hysterical laughter at the safehouse.

"Hey, gorgeous! I'm on my way and Curtis is speechless and has gone very red!" Dave called and I heard Beast starting up. "I have your combat suit, with me!"

"Hey, boss! Bay has been on the phone and he's heading onsite, to co-ordinate. He knows you and Chloe are in there and unmasked!" Battle Guy reported.

Chloe came back from the bathroom, a few minutes later, smirking. She came over and sat beside me.

"The bathroom has a window, not big enough to get out of, but big enough to get a combat suit in!" Chloe muttered, having heard the conversation with Dave.

"Nice idea! I'm ten minutes out; Murphy is providing escort!" Kick-Ass said and I could hear a siren in the background.

..._...

"You carrying?" I whispered.

"Stupid fucking question!" Chloe snapped back. I don't think she's forgiven me for laughing at her underwear!

Chloe stood up again.

"Now what, slut?" British Accent asked and got a vicious glare in return.

"Let's just pretend, for a moment that I'm Hit Girl..." Chloe started.

"In your fucking dreams!" I muttered.

Chloe must have heard me, as she hesitated, but otherwise ignored me.

"... Why would you want her?" Chloe continued.

"That bitch killed my brother and I'm gonna kill *her*!" Gravely Voice said.

"You... You are gonna kill, the most vindictive, the most sadistic and most violent, assassin out there? In your fucking dreams!" Chloe retorted and several murmurs of agreement, were heard from the hostages.

She's trying to apologise, for getting angry with me! She's killing time and distracting the idiots, too! This girl can really think on her fucking feet!

After what felt like only a few minutes, I heard my saviour's voice!

..._...

"Time to use the bathroom, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass called.

I took a deep breath and stood up.

British Accent came over, looking pissed.

"What the fuck now?" British Accent yelled. "This is turning into a fucking nightmare!"

"I need to use the bathroom," I said.

"No!"

"I'm on my period!" I said, staring directly at him and he seemed to wilt.

"Do you have no fucking shame?" Kick-Ass asked, laughing.

"Look, I'm not fucking bleeding all over the damn floor, cunt!" I continued.

"No!"

"Come on! All I need to do is stick a fucking Tampon in, for fuck's sake!" I said, grimacing and it didn't help that I could hear Dave, Abby and Marty laughing.

"Need a hand, love?" British Accent asked, smirking.

"Need help getting it up, or does your pal, there, help you?" I retorted.

"Go... Jesus Christ! Go hold up a fucking bank, he said, it'll be easy..." British Accent shouted and continued ranting.

..._...

I went into the bathroom and locked the door behind me.

I went over to the window and found Kick-Ass standing outside and below the window, behind him was a cop; it was Fellowes. Kick-Ass passed in my complete combat suit, plus my pistols and my bō-staff, which was a tight fit and had to come in, in it's two sections. I kicked off my clothes and pulled on the combat suit, shoving my clothes out of the window, to Kick-Ass, who passed them to Fellowes. I checked that my pistols were loaded and that the bō-staff was ready, before unlocking the door and stepping out.

"Shadow, Hit Girl is about to attack! Stand to!" I called. It felt strange not to be wearing the throat mike when in the combat suit, but that wasn't really a problem.

I slipped through the open door, into the main area of the bank.

..._...

"Okay you cunts!" I growled, attracting everybody's attention. "Let's see what you can do now!"

I swung my two swords in menacing circles, before nodding at Chloe and throwing myself towards the hostage takers. Before they had had a chance to even raise their weapons, I had stabbed the first two men, through the chest and was moving onto the next pair, flipping onto and over a desk and landing behind the two men, then ramming my swords home, into their backs. The last man fell, as Chloe rammed her balisong into his stomach and almost lifted the much larger man off his feet!

"I am *not* a fucking slut, bastard!" Chloe snarled, as the man died.

I admit Chloe's behaviour today, was rather surprising.

I reconnected my swords and slung the assembled bō-staff, over my back.

"Kick-Ass, get us outta here!" I growled.

The main door of the bank burst open and Police Officers threw blankets over all of the hostages and took them outside, including Chloe, who was grabbed by Murphy. When I got outside the bank, I found that the hostages were being shepherded to one side and into Police vans, so hopefully nobody would notice that Chloe and I weren't there. I noticed Murphy slamming the back of Beast shut, before wandering away, smiling. I saw Jack Bay and nodded in his direction; receiving a nod and a smile in return. I pulled off the bō-staff, placed it on the back seat and then climbed

into Beast, to find Kick-Ass staring at me.

"Back to headquarters, Kick-Ass!" I growled and couldn't resist grinning till it hurt. Kick-Ass accelerated away.

"Welcome back, Hit Girl and Shadow!" Abby called.

"Thanks, Hal!" I replied.

"Yeah, thanks, Hal!" Chloe said, popping her head up from behind the rear seats.

We decided to retrieve the SUV later, but for now we just wanted to get back to the safehouse.

The safehouse

When we pulled into the safehouse, everybody was there!

They all started applauding, as we got out of Beast.

"That had to be the most entertaining morning that I have had in a long time!" Marty exclaimed, with his huge, dorky grin.

"Glad we could be so entertaining!" I said, dryly, pulling off my mask.

"Honestly that was way cool! Marty almost died!" Abby said, giving Chloe a hug.

"You really have a foul mouth, Chloe!" Curtis commented. "And I'm sorry about the panties! You really were cool *and* scary today, but I did find you a bit embarrassing!"

Curtis ran over and gave Chloe a big hug. Chloe was a bit confused.

"I'm glad you're safe!" Curtis said.

"Okay, I won't cut your balls off!" Chloe replied, looking a bit uncomfortable.

"My Little Pony?" I asked.

"I'll say nothing, about your pyjamas, if you say nothing about my panties!" Chloe growled, with an embarrassed grin.

"Deal!" I replied, feeling my face warming up and Dave was laughing.

After we had returned our comms to Marty and I had dropped off my weapons, in the armoury, I went upstairs with Chloe, so we could both get changed.

Chloe had blood on her from 'British Accent', at the bank and she was shaking a bit.

"You okay?" I asked, as Chloe paused, outside her room.

"Not really!" Chloe replied, looking pale.

"Come on, into our room," I said, pulling Chloe into the bedroom, before closing and locking the door.

Chloe broke down onto the bed and started sobbing. I left her there, while I dragged off my combat suit. I knew what this was about. Chloe had killed before, several times, in fact. But always at a distance, or in the dark. This was the first time that Chloe had killed, so intimately, while staring into her mark's eyes. It was also the first time, that she had got blood on her hands, literally. I knew the reaction, I had been there, years ago, but at half her age.

Chloe looked up from the bed.

"I was scared today, but being scared gave me the courage to stand up to those men. But that asshole who called me a slut... That hurt and I felt that I had to do something about it... But..." Chloe ran out of steam.

"I know, but you weren't expecting that rage to build up and allow you to ram that balisong into that bastard and almost lift him off the ground! You weren't expecting to see, what you saw in his eyes, as he died! I've been there, I

know exactly what was going through your mind and it is entirely normal. Killing from a distance is very different, to killing face-to-face. You can see a lot of things go through somebody's emotions, as they die and you remember them all. You just learn to push those feelings and memories down deep and bury them. It's not easy and it takes time to learn how to do it properly, but I'll help you get through this, okay?"

"Thanks, Mindy! I'm glad I did it and he deserved it, but I still feel bad about it!" Chloe said.

"You will, but you will also learn to bury those feelings," I said and felt very sorry for Chloe. "You did very well today and I will admit you surprised me, with your actions, which were bang on!"

"Can I come back to your place?" Chloe asked. "I don't want to go home tonight... I... I might need to talk..."

Chloe sounded a bit insecure, but I said okay and I knew Dave would understand.

***Chapter 51*: Positive Publicity**

The following afternoon Wednesday

Mindy Macready, was now a Landlord!

I now owned two apartment blocks, within Chicago. There was also an agent, to manage the letting of the apartments.

The first apartment block, in Lawndale is the smallest and Marty wants to take an apartment in this block, as it will be closest for when he starts University. I have directed the agent to let a two bedroom unit to Marty, at a reduced rent. I have also provided cash for Marty to secure and equip his apartment, so he would be able to support Fusion from there, if required. Marty was expected to move in, sometime in late August.

The second apartment block, off South Cottage Grove, is a larger block and currently empty, but the agent is working on this. We have taken ownership of one, two bedroom unit on the fourth floor and one, one bedroom unit, on the first floor. Both are intended to become safehouses, in this case B and C, respectively. The current safehouse will become safehouse A. Building work will begin immediately to secure both apartments and equip them for Fusion. The fourth floor apartment has access to the roof, which is flat and it is possible to move across several of the adjacent buildings, over the flat roofs. This would allow covert access to and from, the safehouse.

..._...

On another positive note, we received a call from Jack Bay, concerning the bank yesterday.

It seemed that the only thing the idiots did almost right, was to try and disable the CCTV, but they managed to fuck that up, too! Mindy Macready on YouTube, would not be very useful! The views from the available CCTV cameras, proved to be interesting, when combined with our ball caps and sunglasses. The only people who got a close up look at us, are dead! Apparently, as is often the case, first hand eye witness statements seemed to disagree. Depending on who you asked, Chloe was anything from Chinese to Caribbean, with dark skin! The description for me, couldn't agree on the colour of my hair, either, plus most agreed that Chloe and I were definitely adults and probably 'hookers'! Wearing ball caps, might of helped, but maybe it's time to dye my hair again, I had let it go back to my natural colour, but maybe I could go red...

Anyway, there is an entertaining new YouTube video that had received a decent amount of hits: *'Hit Girl and Shadow, show their attitude!'*, plus a variant that focused on Shadow: *'Don't mess with Shadow!'*. It definitely helped that we used fake voices, when we were winding up the cunts! The video showed everything that happened, from the start of the attempted heist, to the end; with Shadow stabbing 'British Accent'. I had to admit, it was very cool watching myself in action, flipping across the desk and taking down the four men. First time I had ever actually 'seen' myself in action. According to some of the comments, Shadow's stabbing was also very popular.

The favourite quotes, among others, seemed to be:

'Big gun, huh! Compensating are we?'

'Go suck a cock!'

'You are gonna kill, the most vindictive, the most sadistic and most violent, assassin out there? In your fucking dreams!'

'Okay you cunts! Let's see what you can do now!'

'I am not a fucking slut, bastard!'

The audio wasn't brilliant, but you could understand all that was being said.

I was actually very proud of Chloe, who was a little embarrassed and dreading going home! Dave thought it was really cool and yes, he had heard everything that went on, but he liked the video anyway! Apparently he enjoys seeing me flipping around the place!

That evening
Safehouse A

Chloe still seemed insecure, so Dave suggested that he take her out.

I agreed, as I still had wounds to heal and didn't want to over-stress them anymore than I already had! Just for once, I was going to be a good girl! Out of character? Yes, but the sensible thing to do!

At seven o'clock, I grabbed Chloe and took her upstairs to her bedroom.

"Get changed, you're going out with Kick-Ass and you leave in five minutes!" I said.

"Why? I'd rather stay with you," Chloe said.

"I want you to go out and have fun. Remember, Dave has been through everything that you have, admittedly, I was a bit more harsh with him than I was with you... Talk to him and listen to what he has to say," I said.

It was after ten and the evening was warm.

Kick-Ass and I headed towards the water, in Beast.

Kick-Ass parked up and ten minutes later, we were standing on the top of a twenty-seven storey building on the South Shore, looking across at the City of Chicago. It was actually a wonderful sight, all lit up.

Kick-Ass pulled off his mask and sat down cross-legged, with his back against the top of the lift shaft.

I pulled off my mask and sat down opposite him.

"You know, Dave, you look super gay sitting like that!"

"Funny you should say that... Years ago I spent three months pretending that I was gay! Speak to Marty, he enjoys telling *that* story!" Dave replied.

"I assume you aren't..."

"No, I am not gay, although some people thought I was after I was found stabbed and naked, following my first outing as Kick-Ass, which *did not* go according to plan!" Dave replied, looking rather embarrassed.

"When did you first see people die?" I asked, tentatively.

"The night I told you about, at Rasul's. When Little Miss Psycho, sliced and diced, showing off to me!" Dave replied. "That really shook me the fuck up! I was ready to quit, right there. I was in waaaaay over my head! Didn't help when I then got a visit, from two fucking nut cases!"

"When did you first kill?" I asked.

"The night when I rescued Hit Girl, with the Jet Pack and Gatling guns. I shot three guys, from a distance, but it scared the hell outta me! Then of course I blew Frank D'Amico out of the window, with a bazooka. There, I was closer and got to look into his eyes, as he saw his own demise. I felt no emotion, at that point, but later on, it hit me. Admittedly, killing with Gatling guns or a bazooka, is not very personal, but both times I did it to save somebody, somebody I owed. At that point, I felt one hundred percent responsible for Mindy's Dad's death, so I felt I had to act, to back her up and save her life... Twice!" Dave elaborated.

"It took me a while to start to come to terms, with what I had done. I never have got over it, really. I always hate having to kill, but in this line of work, it is necessary. Kill or be killed! Some choices suck, big time! Killing eats away at you, but I have Mindy to talk to and she knows what I am going through. I don't even want to think about how many people have died, at Hit Girl's hands and I have never asked, but I believe Mindy remembers every single person, that she has killed. But after ten years of killing, she is able to bury the emotions. She can be a real hard bitch, sometimes, but that is just her way of dealing with things."

"Now, this is between you and me, *nobody* else!" Dave cautioned. "What shocked me the most, about Hit Girl, when I first met her, was how cold she was, about what she did. Even when her Dad died, she never cried, or showed any emotion, except maybe anger and a desire to kill *me*! She channelled her anger into revenge and went after Frank

D'Amico. She fucked up; she wasn't thinking correctly when she acted in the heat of the moment. If she had stopped, taken an hour to collect her thoughts, then maybe she might have been able to assault Frank D'Amico, without my help. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but at the time, not very helpful!"

"Any of that make sense?" Dave asked, finally.

"Yeah, it does," I admitted and it did. The more I understand how Dave and Mindy operate and cope with what they do, the more I am able to reconcile myself, when I am forced to kill and take part in unspeakable acts. There are times that Mindy scares me, but I know that she would never hurt me, at least not intentionally!

Have I made the right choice, about being a vigilante? So far, I don't regret it, but the time may come, when I *will* regret my choices and actions. I have to admit that Mindy has a 'Jekyll and Hyde' personality. She can switch instantly, from being sweet and lovable, to being a vicious, blood-thirsty killer! I aspire to be like Hit Girl; but is that what I want to become? I understand that Damon, Mindy's Dad, was a little unhinged, to put it politely! Mindy only had her Dad, to keep her right, but I have Dave and Mindy and both are doing everything they can to help me. The partnership, we agreed on, months ago, was working. Every time I made a mistake, or I encountered a problem, one or other of them was there to help me. It helps a bit that my Mom knows about Shadow and what I do, but I can't talk to her about this, even though I know my Mom is hiding something from me; something about her past. Dave and Mindy are like a big brother and big sister to me and I feel like I can talk to them about anything.

After forty-five minutes on the rooftop, we headed down and back to Beast.

"Kick-Ass, Battle Guy! Er... Can you come back to the safehouse!"

"Problem?" I asked.

"Possibly!" Battle Guy replied, cryptically.

..._...

Forty minutes later we pulled into the safehouse.

When the lights came back up, I actually considered reversing back out. On the mat were four people. Mindy looked unhappy, Marty looked concerned, Curtis was smirking and Dr Bennett, wow, *I* felt scared! I pulled off my mask and looked down at Chloe, who pulled her mask off, very slowly. She looked scared, too.

Safehouse A

I think I was shaking; I knew why my Mom was here, I was dead.

My life was over, Mom will probably lock me in my room and wall up the door!

I got out of Beast and moved slowly towards my Mom.

My Mom met me half way, Curtis started to follow, but one look from my Mom and he retreated and hid behind Mindy.

"Where do we start?" Mom began. "*Go suck a cock!*" and *'I am not a fucking slut, bastard!'*. Do any of these ring a bell?"

"You saw that, did you?" I said, smiling briefly.

"My daughter, the vigilante, was one thing! I know you have taken a life, more than one, in fact. But I never expected to actually see my daughter *take* a life, on the damn internet!"

I didn't *dare* say *anything*!

"I will admit, though, that you didn't have much of a choice. It wasn't *your* fault, the bank was seized and I did admire your bravery. I also admired the way you stood up to those bastards and considering *my* past experiences, I can't hold *that* against you. The bastard deserved what he got!" Mom finished.

"So, I might just live past tonight?" I asked, tentatively.

"If you keep your wits about you, like you did at the bank, then yes, you probably will! Even '*...the most vindictive, the most sadistic and most violent, assassin out there...*' says you were brilliant!" Mom replied, looking at Mindy, who blushed and Dave laughed.

I ran forward and gave my Mom a big hug. My Mom let something slip: '*considering my past experiences, I can't hold that against you*', what did that mean?

"Isn't it past Curtis' bedtime?" I asked, smirking at Curtis, who glared back, quite effectively.

***Chapter 52*: Thoughts Of What Could Have Been**

***The following week
Monday, Morton Grove***

I woke up with very mixed feelings.

Today would have been his fourteenth birthday!

But he was dead! His death was the reason that I was now in Chicago.

I miss him so much, it hurts! Days, like this just suck. At least I have others to be with today and I know that I can talk to Mindy, later on.

I miss you, Josh!

West Ridge

When I got to Dave and Mindy's house, Dave was out, with Marty.

"Curtis, go amuse yourself with something sharp, I need to talk with Mindy," I said.

Curtis glared; the little shit has been learning how to glare properly, by watching *me*! He went through to the living room and started watching TV.

..._...

"You need to talk?" Mindy asked, sounding a little apprehensive.

"Yeah, privately!" I said, looking towards Curtis.

"Come upstairs," Mindy said.

We went upstairs to Dave and Mindy's bedroom and sat on the couch. Mindy closed the door, after Sophia had come in and curled up on the bed.

"What's the disaster?" Mindy asked.

"I need some advice, about guys," I asked, feeling a little embarrassed.

Oh fuck!

"I am not the best person, for that!" I replied, blushing.

"Why?"

"I only got interested in guys, properly, last year... And well, I've only been involved, with one guy..."

"So... Before you got interested in guys, you were interested in girls..." Chloe asked, smirking.

"Do you really want to die!" I growled, menacingly.

"Sorry, just askin'!" Chloe responded.

"Chloe, you are a friend and a partner, so I will let that *implication* slide! I am *not*, nor have I ever been, a fucking dyke!" I growled.

"Shame!" Chloe said, shamelessly, with a grin.

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Just fuckin' with ya!" Chloe assured me.

"Okay!" I said slowly, not entirely convinced. "Getting back on track..."

"Dave was your first?" Chloe asked.

This was getting a bit personal, but it was Chloe and I liked to act like a big sister for her, when needed.

"Yeah, Dave was my first kiss, last year. I kissed him, minutes before I left New York," I explained.

"I... It... Today, would have been Joshua's fourteenth birthday... I miss him," Chloe said.

Ah, finally, the reason behind this weird conversation.

"I honestly, have nothing to relate to, on that subject. I have only ever lost my Daddy, I never knew my Mother. I suppose I came close to believing that I had lost Dave, after I left New York; I kinda went a little bit nuts!" I explained, feeling slightly embarrassed.

This was different, I talked to Dave, but not about girly things. Somehow I felt comfortable, talking to Chloe and she seemed to feel comfortable talking to me. It kinda felt good inside. I am not a people person, I kill people, I don't *bond* with them! At least, that was the way it was, when I was with Daddy. He never allowed me to have friends and did not like the way that I talked about Kick-Ass! Now though, I have a friend, I have a partner: Dave. I also have Marty and Chloe, not to mention Sophia, Abby and I suppose, Curtis and Kyle! That is a significant increase, over a few years ago!

"By 'a little bit nuts', I assume you slaughtered people, violently!" Chloe stated, with a laugh.

"Actually, yes," I replied, feeling a bit embarrassed, with the admission. "I lost control of my emotions and let Hit Girl control me, which was not good for certain low life scum in Chicago!"

"And it took Dave, to bring you around," Chloe stated.

"It did, again!" I replied. "I owe Dave an awful lot!"

"I hope I find somebody as amazing!" Chloe said, blushing.

"You will. I did, although I did have to kick him into shape first!" I acknowledged.

We went back down to the living room and were very surprised by what we found.

Curtis was flipping Chloe's training balisong and was actually quite good with it!

"What the fuck, do you think you are doing with that?" Chloe exploded.

"What does it look like?" Curtis retorted. "You said: 'go amuse yourself with something sharp!'"

"He's actually rather good!" I commented.

"What!" Chloe said, angrily.

"He's been watching you and learning; bright kid!" I said, glaring at Chloe, who got the message.

"Okay! Just don't mess with the real ones! I don't want you mutilating yourself; only I'm allowed to do that!" Chloe growled. "Besides, you'll probably cut your own dick off!"

"She's right, Curtis! Touch a real Balisong and I'll cut your fucking hands off!" I said, seriously.

"When can I get a knife?" Curtis asked.

"Come back and ask me again, once you've started puberty!" I suggested.

There had been one other issue raised, since the attempted bank heist.

With the new YouTube video appearing, the old ones were dug out, too!

Everybody watched Kick-Ass, on his début outing, getting his ass kicked, but otherwise getting the job done! Plus that immortal quote: '*I'm Kick-Ass!*', that brought him to the attention of the world... And me! That was the night that I first saw him and Daddy had coined the name 'Ass-Kick! I had to smile at that, it was a happy memory... '*That doesn't even make sense!*'; I could remember myself saying that, to Daddy.

Unfortunately, with that video came *the other one!* The one that neither of us liked very much! I had to admit, I was appalled, when I watched it and saw how Kick-Ass was being beaten, but also how my Daddy was being beaten. I'd always avoided watching *that* video, but I felt I had to now. We watched it together, just the two of us. I felt Dave flinch, everytime Kick-Ass was hit. I flinched, everytime Daddy was hit. I vividly remembered the warehouse and the killing, my Daddy helping me, as he burnt. By the end of the video I was shaking and Dave was holding me tight. That night was not fun, all the nasty nightmares came back, for both of us!

Dr Bennett had, of course, seen these other two videos. She thought that the Kick-Ass début, was amusing! I had to laugh and Dave just scowled. Then Dr Bennett mentioned *the other one!* She was appalled, with what she had seen and said she was very sorry about my Daddy. Dr Bennett said that she understood, why we were pursuing the D'Amico family; they were pure evil.

What ever happened, I would never let anyone betray us again, there would *not* be another 'Red Mist' episode, ever!

Chapter 53: Parents and Guardians

Author's Note:

'West Ridge' refers to the home of Dave and Mindy, as that is the part of Chicago, where they live.
'Morton Grove' refers to Chloe's home, as that is the part of Chicago, where she lives.

Four days later
Friday morning
West Ridge

This day was going to be *really* crappy.

I couldn't believe it, I had fucked up, big time!

"You missing something?" Dave asked, coming in from the garage, lugging several large bags.

"Yeah..." I replied, slightly distracted.

"Might these help?" Dave asked, throwing a small packet at me and reading off of an identical packet. "*The Perfect Tampon for: A teen looking for high performance protection to help keep her in the game!*"

"Fucking asshole! But thanks, I forgot to get any!" I replied and felt myself blushing! Okay maybe the day wasn't going to be so bad!

"I really hope I didn't just hear Dave reading from the back of a tampon packet!" Chloe said, following Dave in from the garage.

"Hi Chloe! Unfortunately, you did!" I said, with a grimace.

"Ugh!"

"Well Little Miss Bleeds-a-lot, forgot to get any!" Dave said, happily. "I have the dates marked on my calendar, in scarlet!"

"You need any?" I asked Chloe, ignoring Dave.

"No thanks, I have plenty!" Chloe replied, blushing a little.

"Oh yes, I almost forgot, you two are in sync!" Dave said. "*Bloody nightmare!*"

"You wanna kill him?" I asked Chloe. "I really can't be bothered!"

"Nah! Today sucks enough!" Chloe replied.

The evil asshole just started laughing.

"You hungry, girl?" I asked.

"Definitely!"

I proceeded to cook some bacon and eggs for us all. Dave said I was actually getting quite good at it and the eggs were actually edible! Asshole! At least Dave knows not to antagonise me, when I am cooking with a knife close to hand!

I dumped a full plate in front of Chloe and another two plates, for me and Dave.

"Hey, asshole! Breakfast is ready!" I called.

..._...

Once breakfast was completed, we settled down for a peaceful morning, as Chloe and I both felt sore.

Dave, of course, had no sympathy for either of us, as usual!

There are times, that being a teenager *and* being a woman sucks, big time!

That same time
Morton Grove

"Hey, where's Chloe?" Commander Ryan Bennett asked his wife.

"With friends," Dr Cathy Bennett replied. "She took Curtis, reluctantly!"

"Oh, okay. I thought I might spend some time with her today," Ryan replied.

"You'll have plenty of time. Anyway, I need to talk to you about something, Ryan"

"Oh, am I going to like it?"

"Probably not, to be honest! You remember what happened to us, all those years ago?"

"I'm not likely to forget it, Cathy! Why?"

"You've seen that vigilante video, that's been going around, recently?" Cathy asked, delicately.

"Oh, the Chicago bank thing? Spread around the ship, like wild fire! Everybody loves those guys and seeing them in action, well..." Ryan said, excitedly.

"What did you think of them?" Cathy asked, innocently.

"The two young women were really good. That Shadow is something else, though, most of the crew think that she's really hot! And that Hit Girl, wow!" Ryan replied, enthusiastically.

"Shadow didn't seem... Just a little bit familiar?" Cathy prompted.

"Not really, why should... No... You have *got* to be fucking kidding me!" Ryan exclaimed, as comprehension dawned. "You telling me that Shadow is..."

"...our daughter; our thirteen year-old daughter!" Cathy confirmed. "Chloe *is* Shadow!"

"Fuck me!"

Cathy frowned at Ryan.

"I mean... I... Part of me says: 'Fuck!' and another part of me says: 'My daughter is being trained, by the best!', but I keep coming back to: 'Fuck!'. I am completely astounded!" Ryan admitted, finally.

"Tell me about it!" Cathy admitted.

"Screen grabs have been printed out, by the tens of dozens and are probably in every rack onboard! I don't even want to think about what those young kids are doing with that picture at night! Damn, I can't exactly order them taken down, can I? I can't exactly say that it's my daughter they're in love with, she'd be behind bars in seconds!"

"Talk about a problem child!" Cathy said.

"The young vigilante, that I have been cheering on and saw kill a man, was my own daughter!" Ryan muttered incredulously.

That same afternoon
West Ridge

Chloe and I were sparring.

We were being cheered on by Abby and Curtis. Marty was out and Dave was upstairs.

"You're getting slow, Mindy!" I goaded.

"In your fucking dreams, short-ass!"

"Come on down, guys," I heard Dave say and looked up.

"Hi, Commander, Dr Bennett," Mindy said, with a wave.

"Hello Mindy," Dr Bennett said.

"Hi, Mindy, kids," Commander Bennett said. "Just thought I'd pop over to see how my little girl was doing, er, with her Aikido."

"She's doing very well, Commander!" Mindy replied.

"Well, I thought I'd try her out!" Commander Bennett challenged.

"You can try, Commander!" I replied and Mindy left the mat and my Dad dropped his jacket and kicked off his training shoes.

"Give me your best shot, *Chloe*," Commander Bennett said.

A little over five minutes later, Commander Bennett was flat on his back, with Chloe's knee in his chest, pinning him down.

"You had enough, Daddy!" Chloe said, sarcastically.

Commander Bennett, nodded and Chloe let him stand up.

"Okay, let's see what you can do now...!" Commander Bennett said, with a smile. "...*Shadow!*"

"Okay... What...! What did you say?" Chloe blurted out, after a short hesitation, when the penny had dropped.

Oh! Dr Bennett has told the Commander... This should be good. I looked over at Dave, who just shrugged.

"I've seen you in action, *Shadow*... I will admit, you *are* very good..."

"You're not gonna let me go out again, are you?" Chloe, said angrily, glaring at her father, who didn't flinch.

"I know you think I'm too hard on you Chloe, but I just don't want you to make the same mistakes your Mom and I made," Commander Bennett replied.

"Yeah, yeah, I've heard it all before, *Commander!*" Chloe shot back, insolently, before turning away from her father.

"Chloe, look at me!" The Commander called.

Chloe turned on reflex and glared at her father.

"Chloe, when I heard about your, er, extra-curricular activities, I was a little shocked!"

"To put it mildly!" Dr Bennett said, receiving a glare from her husband.

"Looking again at the bank footage, I was proud of you, very proud!" Commander Bennett said, looking directly at Chloe.

Chloe just blinked, I don't think she'd ever heard something like that, from her father! Up till now, I'd had the distinct impression that they didn't quite get on, not like a father and daughter should.

"Thank you, Daddy!" Chloe said, happily, giving her father a big hug and I could see tears in her eyes.

"I love you, Chloe and I always am, very proud of you! You really have improved and I suppose I have you to thank for that... Hit Girl..."

I didn't miss a beat, I had expected that.

"You said you wanted Chloe to learn some new skills..."

"I did, didn't I and I suppose I can't complain; she is learning from the best!"

I actually felt myself blushing!

"Daddy, do you want to... Mindy can we?" Chloe asked, excitedly.

I smiled. "Commander, let's go for a drive!" I said.

Safehouse A

Forty minutes later, we pulled into Safehouse A.

"Commander, welcome to Safehouse A," I said, getting out of the SUV.

Chloe and her father, got out of the SUV and the Commander was looking around, wide eyed! He really liked the Fat Boy and the Ducati.

"I prefer the Fat Boy; sorry Mindy!" Chloe stated.

"Not a problem. I can go faster on my own!" I grinned.

"So this is where you train, properly?"

"Yes, Daddy. Come on..." Chloe replied, pulling her father towards the armoury.

..._...

"Oh wow!" Commander Bennett said, examining the weapons and blades.

"This is mine," Chloe said and dragged her father over to her combat suit.

"Wow, that is very neat, love the aikidogi and the hakama! Surprised it's not dumped on the floor, like normal!"

"Oh she used to, until I explained to her how much the damn thing cost!" I growled, making Chloe blush with embarrassment.

"That is my bō-staff and my Jō, plus my firearms," Chloe said proudly, showing her father the FN Five-SeveN and FN P90, to change the subject.

"You have a P90?"

"I have a P90!"

"She has a P90!" I confirmed. "Chloe is a crack shot with it, too!"

"You look after your team, Mindy!" The Commander acknowledged, as we headed upstairs.

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"Each member of the team has weapons and equipment selected to suit their individual skills and capabilities. Dave has a Glock 17, as he has bulk and strength, he has also had cause to use the H&K 121 that you saw downstairs. Chloe has her FN Five-SeveN, as it is small enough for her hands and has a reduced recoil, that suits her arms and body. The P90 was selected for the same reason. Dave and I use the H&K G36C, when required," I explained, over a coffee. "Kick-Ass' combat suit has heavier armour than ours, mainly because Dave can handle the extra weight, but our combat suits must be flexible enough for Martial Arts, which limits the armour that we can carry. We also have shields that can stop a fifty-calibre round, if called upon."

"Chloe mentioned that you were partners, how does that work?"

"All of us in Fusion are partners; Dave, Marty, Chloe and myself, so far. We look after each other and Chloe has proved herself, on many an occasion. We all trust Chloe with our lives and have done so. Yes, Dave and I are the senior partners and I have been doing this for many years, since I was six. Chloe is also part of our 'inner-circle', of

which there are only five people, so far. Chloe is now, the third most senior member of Fusion. Operators rank over the Technical Support guys, so to speak. Marty has been with us much longer than Chloe, but with her combat experience, Chloe ranks higher. She may be young, but she can think on her feet; as she proved at the bank! I'd complain about her language and complete lack of shame, but I'm not any better!" I explained, blushing a bit, at the end.

"I am genuinely in awe of your accomplishments here, Mindy! I suppose now might be the best time to tell Chloe that she is now the favourite pin-up girl, in every rack, onboard my destroyer!" Commander Bennett said, casually.

"What...! I suppose I should be flattered!" Chloe said, blushing.

"Look, Mindy. Tomorrow night, the whole team, come over for dinner, at our place!" The Commander offered.

I looked at Chloe, who nodded excitedly.

"Yeah, no problem... Oh, hang on, Marcus arrives tonight; he's my guardian," I said, adding. "He knows all about Fusion."

"Bring him along. We'll have something in common and it'll be nice to be able to discuss *my* vigilante daughter, with another parent, who has a vigilante daughter!" The Commander suggested, smiling.

Chloe and I looked at each other and we both cringed at the thought of Marcus and Commander Bennett, discussing us!

Chapter 54: The Calm Before The Storm

Author's Note: *Please be warned, there is moderate smut in this chapter!*

***The following night
Saturday
Morton Grove***

I was nervous, very nervous.

In fact, I don't think I had ever felt this nervous! Why *should* I feel nervous, this is stupid!

Dave, Marty, Marcus and myself had just arrived at Chloe's house.

Marcus arrived last night, from New York and when I had told him about the dinner, he was *very* keen to go! Now that worried me; for Marcus to be keen about *anything* that involves Hit Girl is, to say the very least, rare and possibly disturbing!

I was dressed in a short dress, that I had bought earlier today just for the occasion and it was, of course, purple! Dave and Marty refused to dress up and just wore smart pants and a shirt.

Commander Bennett answered the door.

"Wow, Mindy that is a very nice dress! It's a shame that I very rarely get to see Chloe in a dress! Come in, all of you!"

Abby was with Chloe and Curtis, in the living room, Dr Bennett was in the kitchen. Both Abby and Chloe jumped up, as we came in.

"Hi Mr Williams!" Chloe and Abby both said.

"Hi girls!" Marcus replied.

"Marcus, meet Commander Bennett," I said.

"Ryan," Commander Bennett said, introducing himself. "My wife, in the kitchen, is Cathy."

"Hi, it's good to finally meet another vigilante parent!" Marcus replied, shaking Commander Bennett's hand.

I looked at Chloe and grimaced.

..._...

About twenty minutes later, we were all sitting down at the table in the dining room and we had started eating.

I was still feeling nervous and apparently my nervousness was justified.

"So, Ryan, what was it like finding out that you had a vigilante, for a daughter?" Marcus asked, innocently, with a smirk in my direction.

Both Chloe and I shrank down in our chairs. Dave, Marty and Curtis all laughed. Assholes! Commander Bennett smirked at Chloe, before answering.

"Well, one minute I have a sweet, innocent, little girl and then the next minute, I have a vicious, evil, foul mouthed young vigilante!"

Chloe blushed and concentrated on her food. Curtis almost chocked on a potato, while laughing, too much! I just glared at Marcus, while giving Curtis a *hard* slap on the back.

"Well, I have some wonderful stories for you, Ryan. Most of which I think I'll tell you in private, otherwise I might be the next target of Hit Girl!" Marcus said. "On that subject, though, while it *is* nice to know that Mindy could kill me, any one of a hundred ways, I know that no matter how much I wind her up, she will never lay a finger on me!"

"Don't I know it!" I grimaced, stabbing my steak, viciously, causing some laughter.

"So, how did you get involved, with Mindy?" Commander Bennett asked Marty.

"Pure accident really. I've know Dave since kindergarten, almost. I'd seen the Kick-Ass' début video and thought it was way cool! But I would *never* have guessed that Dave was Kick-Ass, I mean who would?" Marty explained.

I laughed at that and Dave grimaced.

"A few years later I joined up with some other vigilantes, in New York and met Kick-Ass, for the first time. I then discovered that Kick-Ass was Dave! I was shocked, really shocked!" Marty elaborated.

"Yeah, right, '*Batman*'!" Dave quipped, with a laugh and Marty scowled.

I laughed, too, as I had heard about Battle Guy's *first* 'back story'! Dave briefly elaborated about *that* story, while Marty squirmed! After which, Marty continued.

"Well, I joined Kick-Ass and Hit Girl in a monstrous fight, against Chris D'Amico and we won! I still didn't know that Mindy and Hit Girl, were the same person! I mean, who would? Mindy was this shy girl, who kept herself to herself, while Hit Girl, well..." Marty finished.

Now it was *my* turn to squirm!

"Marty, Mindy and I went to the same school and I helped her get over the death of her father. I was supposed to be looking after her at school, not that that was necessary, as she hospitalised two bullies, on her very first day!" Dave explained. "You don't try and extort lunch money out of Hit Girl, even if she *is* only eleven!"

Now I was blushing and concentrated extra hard on my steak. I could feel eyes on me from several directions and Marcus was smirking! I remembered that first day, at school, it was kinda fun!

"Well, Mindy vanished from New York, after the big fight and Marty worked out that Mindy and Hit Girl, were one and the same. During one of his visits to Chicago, Marty discovered that Mindy was in Chicago and I went out in search of her. The rest is, as they say, history," Dave finished, smirking at me.

"Did Mindy continue as a vigilante, then, after her father died?" Dr Bennett asked Marcus.

"Well, she stopped for a while, but then, when she was around fourteen or fifteen, she started avoiding school and planning Hit Girl's grand return!" Marcus replied, making me squirm again. "You know how these teenager's are! She almost managed to pull a 'Ferris Bueller' on me, but she slipped up and I banned her from ever being Hit Girl again!"

"Yeah, that was *quite* a roller-coaster ride!" Dave admitted. I glared at Dave, willing him not to mention the 'date ditch'.

"She did what she was told?" Commander Bennett asked, surprised.

"Reluctantly! Now I think back, I don't think I did the right thing, forcing her *not* to be Hit Girl and to be Mindy Macready. Well, she did her best, she really did, but Hit Girl is who she is, who she will always be. You can't just will somebody to be who they are not," Marcus replied. "It tore me apart watching her internal torment."

I had never heard Marcus say anything like that before, but it made me feel good inside.

"I have to admit, it sounds familiar: I regularly hear a certain expression, which I suppose could be paraphrased into '*Once a Hero, Always a Hero, there are no ex-Heroes*'!" Commander Bennett said.

"Very true!" Marcus agreed.

"I agree, but with Marcus' attempt to humanise Hit Girl, I got to see a different side to Mindy. The softer, more caring side and well, I started to fall for her, in between getting the smelly stuff, literally kicked outta me! I was already her best friend, but Marcus was determined to stamp out Hit Girl and stop Mindy seeing me, thankfully he ultimately failed," Dave explained. "Mindy and Hit Girl are one and can never be separated, her training is so ingrained."

"Now, I don't know if Chloe will be the same or not and I know that she has lost somebody that she really cared about, which prompted her to become Shadow. We've been doing our best to educate her about Fusion and that we're not just about killing and maiming. We do, what we do, to help those, who can't help themselves. Yes, we have an underlying reason to be and that, is to eradicate the D'Amico family. That is the reason why Hit Girl was originally

created and I helped her fulfil that initial reason for her existence. Since then Chris D'Amico and his alter egos appeared and he had to be stopped!" Dave elaborated.

Curtis and Abby were listening to every word. Curtis actually had a fork of food poised in front of his mouth, but was listening so intently that he had forgotten all about it! Chloe of course, had heard all of this before, as had Marty and Marcus. Commander Bennett and his wife, looked impressed by what they had heard.

"Thank you, Dave, Marty and Marcus. That was good to hear. How Chloe develops, *is* important to us, but we are happy that she is in the right hands and rather she be out with you, Mindy, than out there, on her own!" Dr Bennett said, smiling at me and causing me to blush.

..._...

After dinner, we sat down in the living room for coffee.

I had to admit that I didn't feel quite so nervous any more. I actually felt comfortable, around Commander and Dr Bennett. I saw that Marcus, seemed to approve of what I was doing and how I was preparing Chloe for what was ahead.

Dave and Chloe were chatting with Abby and Curtis. For now, I sat on my own, which gave me time to think.

Was I doing the right thing? There was no preventing Chloe from going out as Shadow; she would do that on her own if I refused to take her. The best I could do was teach her how to protect herself and how to survive. Just what my Daddy taught me...

Although, naturally, I'd try to do it in less of a serious manner. My Daddy also taught me that it was all a big game, but that illusion came crashing down that night I was shot and my Daddy died! Chloe will *not* see this as a game, I need to show her that this is serious and people die. I've almost died on at least four occasions and three of those occasions required Dave to rescue me! So far Chloe has not been injured, in any way, just bruised. Me? I've been shot five times, in almost as many weeks, the latest requiring a doctor, to stitch me up!

"You okay, Mindy?" Marcus asked, walking over.

"I think so, just thinking about things... I hope I can make the right decisions, concerning Chloe!" I replied.

"I think you've done fine, so far! I'm proud of what you've done with your life and I am sure Damon would be proud, too," Marcus responded, with a genuine smile.

Four days later
Wednesday
West Ridge

This was the first chance that I had had, to sit down with Chloe, since the dinner.

"How have you been, since last week's, revelations?" I asked.

"I've been good. I'm actually pleased it all came out," Chloe replied, looking directly at me and smiling. "I'm getting on with my Dad, a lot better now. I would have hated trying to hide Shadow from him."

"I'm pleased to hear that, I really am," I replied. "... This is really difficult for me to say, but... I don't want you to be me..."

"I don't understand. You don't want me to be Mindy, or you don't want me to be Hit Girl?" Chloe asked, looking genuinely confused.

"Both. Mindy and Hit Girl are the same person. Currently, Chloe Bennett and Shadow are two different people and that's the way it should stay," I explained.

"But, right now, you are Mindy, you are sweet and caring, not like Hit Girl," Chloe replied.

"Chloe, that is where you are wrong. I *am* Hit Girl, twenty-four-seven. Thanks to Dave's influence, what you see, as Mindy Macready, shows up. Mindy Macready, is just Hit Girl, but a Hit Girl that is under control. Without Dave, I wouldn't be able to control Hit Girl, I mentioned that before. You can turn Shadow, on and off, at will. I can't do that

with Hit Girl, I *really* wish I could, but I can't," I explained. "I'm damaged and I don't want that to happen to you."

Chloe looked worried.

"I've noticed you copying what I do; now that's fine, but I don't want you taking it too far. Not least because Curtis is copying *you*! I don't want you to be damaged, like me. Your Dad was right, you were a sweet, innocent, young girl and you can stay that way. I'm not saying ditch Shadow, but don't let Shadow control you like I let Hit Girl control me! Please, learn by my mistakes, Chloe," I said.

"I will Mindy, don't worry. I'll always listen to what you and Dave say, always!" Chloe replied.

That night

"You still worried about Chloe?" I asked.

"Not for the moment; we'll see how things go," Mindy replied, smiling up at me.

Mindy was lying on the bed, wearing just a towel. I had just come out of the shower.

"We've had no action for over three weeks, excluding he bank, of course! This feels like the calm before the storm, I dunno, it just doesn't feel right!" Mindy grouched.

"I can help you feel better!" I said, dropping my towel and pulling Mindy's open; she didn't resist, but she did blush! I could see the scars, from her bullet wounds and the cross-bow bolt. Her perfect, soft skin, was permanently marred, but I didn't care. Battered or bruised, she was still the young woman, I loved! I ran my hands over her pert nipples.

"Does that feel right?" I asked, as Mindy screamed at the touch.

"You damn well know it does, asshole!"

I let my left hand drift down her body, feeling Mindy tense, as I passed her soft, but solid stomach. My right hand continued to massage her left nipple, causing her breath to hitch and for her to moan. Mindy's breathing stopped, as my hand entered her, soft, pubic hair and started exploring what lay beneath.

"Oh, God!" Mindy finally breathed.

"Don't forget to breathe!" I whispered into Mindy's ear and she moaned again. Her eyes were tight shut.

I gently pushed a finger in and Mindy braced up, before she let out a loud moan. Her eyes flew open and almost bugged out, but she smiled! I continued exploring, with both hands. Mindy started to buck and thrash, on the bed. I continued to fondle her nipple and that special place, down below and this caused Mindy to thrash even more, before...

I screamed!

I couldn't help it! All those pent up emotions, from the past few days, just exploded across me, damn, damn, I couldn't breathe. I remembered my lover's words: '*Don't forget to breathe*'. Every muscle in my body had seized up, especially those in my legs and around my crotch! I pounded the bed, with my right fist, the other fist pounded on Dave's back, before opening and I dug my nails in deep, causing Dave to yell out in pain!

Then I went limp and let out a scream, before sucking in air, like I had never breathed before!

"You liked that?" Dave asked, with his dorky grin.

"God, yes! Wow! You're getting better!"

"You are orgasming harder!" Dave replied, laughing.

I lay there, for what felt like hours, getting my breath back. My chest was heaving and Dave was watching my breasts go up and down!

..._...

"Okay, cunt, my turn!" I growled, flipping Dave onto his back and kissing him deeply.

I felt his erect member, between my legs, begging for entry. Not yet!

I stared into his luscious, blue eyes and as usual, I could see his love and desire for me and I knew that would never change. I went back to kissing, I felt his tongue and it felt...

I decided to exercise *my* tongue, somewhere else. I slid down and perpendicular to his body, before grabbing him and taking him into my mouth. Dave drew a sharp intake of breath, before letting out a small moan, which steadily increased, as I ran my tongue around him.

Now, I thought, how far was I going to take this? I remembered what happened months ago, at the end of October, when I first took this all the way and then again in Indianapolis! Oh, what the fuck, I loved the taste and the feeling!

Minutes later and after a lot of moaning from Dave, he started to thrash around and suddenly, I felt that warm, almost hot, feeling, as that liquid hit the back of my throat. I tried to keep my mouth wrapped around Dave, so I didn't get it everywhere, but I failed. I swallowed what I could, but then I had to let Dave go and received a shot, directly into my face, that dribbled down to my mouth, I licked off what I could reach and giggled! I felt a little weird, but then maybe I am weird, I have absolutely no fucking idea!

"Happy?" Dave asked, looking down at me and laughing!

"Very!" I giggled, grabbing my towel and wiping my face off, before scrambling up Dave and giving him a long, deep kiss.

When I let go, Dave just lay there, panting, then he reached out, with his hands and started massaging my nipples.

"Oh, fuck!" I exclaimed, before collapsing onto the bed and Dave rolled on top of me.

***Chapter 55*: Jail Break**

The following day
Thursday
New York City

2:34 A.M.

The explosion ripped, violently, through the prison block.

Alarms sounded across the island, well before the dust had started to settle. Mixed in with the sounds of alarms and falling rubble, were the sounds of men screaming. Those that did not scream, were already dead.

The dead were scattered around, several of the bodies, badly mangled in the explosion, or by falling rubble. It was sheer devastation. Men stumbled about, mauled, some missing limbs.

One man and one man alone, was smiling.

His time had come.

One of the coldest, most evil and calculating men, that the United States of America, had known, was about to be free!

..._...

A group of men, clad in black combat uniforms, ran through the devastation, shooting anybody who stood in their way, prisoners and guards alike. No quarter was given, as the men knew full well that their Boss would show none to them, if they failed and he had a very long reach!

The attack was a total surprise, to all, except for Ralph D'Amico. The relevant authorities had been bribed, threatened, black-mailed or worse, *whatever* worked! Very little resistance was put up, within the prison. Within twenty minutes, Ralph D'Amico was flying away from Rikers Island and heading for freedom. This matched a *sudden*, and *coincidental*, breakdown of local radar cover, meaning that he was impossible to track. He was now free, to launch his attacks on the two Cities. He wanted *both* Cities, as both Chicago and New York had a certain reputation and if he ran both, then his position would be unassailable.

However he had a *large* fly in his ointment and that fly was called *Fusion!*

Later that morning
D'Amico Penthouse
New York City

Ralph D'Amico exited the elevator and walked towards *his* new home.

"Who do you work for?" D'Amico suddenly asked, of one of the men, lining his route.

"The D'Amico Family!" The man responded, proudly.

"Wrong answer!" D'Amico said dangerously and turned to the man following him. "Get rid of him!"

The man following behind, Rico, pulled a stiletto knife and stabbed the man in the stomach, allowing him to fall to the floor and bleed out.

"Who do you work for?" D'Amico asked, of the next man, lining his route.

"You, sir!" The man responded, carefully.

"Fast learners, aren't they?" D'Amico laughed, as Rico pushed open the double doors, into his office.

D'Amico looked around approvingly.

"You've done well, Rico!" D'Amico said. "Thank you."

"By your command," Rico replied, closing the doors behind his Boss.

"Get that sorry, sack of shit outta here and clean up that fucking mess he made!" Rico ordered and two men jumped immediately into action.

Rico walked off and took station, over by the tall, floor to ceiling, panoramic windows and helped himself to a coffee on the way. Rico was the right hand man for Ralph D'Amico and could be just as ruthless and evil. It was a *requirement* for the job, many had failed and been replaced. With Ralph D'Amico, 'failed and been replaced', meant death. D'Amico rarely got his hands dirty, but was *not* above some dirty work, when it appealed to him. Rico was there, when the nephew, Chris, had tried to muscle in, with his own brand of evil. Ralph D'Amico was scathing, when it came to his nephew, especially now that Chris was dead and had failed, so miserably.

However, Chris was still a D'Amico and therefore there was a debt to be cleared. Ralph D'Amico was 'old school', when it came to how he ran his business. He had lost a brother and a nephew. Although he detested the nephew, he would still seek revenge for *both* dead relatives.

The targets had been identified, only this time, there would be no more stupid, ill thought-out plans.

That same evening
D'Amico Penthouse
New York City

The man was dragged through, from the elevator and into the room on the left.

He found himself being dumped, unceremoniously, into a chair. Two guards remained, on either side of him. D'Amico walked over, from the bar that was to the left of the large picture window.

"You must be Bartolemeo," D'Amico said, conversationally. "From Chicago."

The man was nudged sharply, by Rico.

"Yes!" Bartolemeo said, insolently.

"You worked for that cretin of a nephew of mine," D'Amico continued.

"Yeah!"

"Now you work for me, or you don't work!" D'Amico explained. "Or breathe, at all!"

"Sounds fair!" Bartolemeo admitted, reluctantly and knowing that he had no choice.

"Now, you will return to Chicago and get your cretins together and then I will send you instructions. You will follow those instructions, without a single deviation. Do I make myself clear?" D'Amico instructed.

"By your command," Bartolemeo acknowledged, he was learning.

Later that night
D'Amico Warehouse
New York City

The warehouse was enormous and very new.

The man was secured to a chair, he looked petrified. Rico stood in front of him and to the man's right. Directly in front of the man was the cause of his fear.

"Now, Sergeant, tell me, how did you survive the purge, after Gigante?" D'Amico said, calmly. "You turned, didn't you?"

"No, I... I didn't... I..."

The man screamed, as the machete, severed the fingers of his right hand. The man with the machete, stood back and looked towards Rico, who raised a hand.

D'Amico stared down at the man, with no emotion.

"Now, let's hear what you have to say."

"Fuck you, D'Amico scum!" The man yelled, through the agony.

D'Amico shook his head sadly, nodded to Rico and walked away from the scene, closing his mind to the screams, as the machete dug deep, again and again and again; then the screaming stopped.

***Chapter 56*: Red Mist - Take Two**

The following day
Friday
Chicago

With that *major* problem, yesterday morning, I decided we might need some extra support.

Only one other person was available and she was borderline useless, but we had no choice! I'd give her a short trial and if necessary kick her into touch. Dave wasn't so sure, but he agreed.

Let's see what Hawk could do!

That evening

I was out with Hit Girl and we were keeping an eye on some drug dealers, when my cell buzzed with a text.

'Sorry. Busy tonight. Will call tomorrow. Mindy.'

I decided to call Mindy, as nothing else was happening right now and Hit Girl herself was off checking on something.

The phone rang and then was answered.

"Hello?"

"Hi Mindy, it's Kim," I said.

"Oh, hello Kim!" Mindy replied. "Now isn't the best time, I'm kinda in the middle of something,"

"Never mind, so am I..." I stopped talking, as Hit Girl approached.

"Good, I'll see ya..." Hit Girl said, before she stopped talking and looked at me strangely.

"Bye!" We both said together and I heard it in stereo.

"What the fuck!" We both said, again in stereo.

I hung up the cell.

"Mindy?"

"Kim?"

"I'd never have guessed!" Hit Girl/Mindy growled.

"Neither would I!" Hawk/Kim replied.

So Kim is Hawk; I really would never have guessed, but it does explain why Sophia took to her so quickly! Dave will fucking love this! The only people Kim hasn't met, so far, are Marty and Chloe. Hawk has met Battle Guy and Shadow, but not Marty and Chloe. I don't like this, at all. I'm getting a bad feeling about this. I've had this feeling before, but when? Suddenly I remembered and felt rage boiling inside of me!

"Battle Guy, we're coming back in and I want *Kick-Ass* and *Battle Guy* there, too!" I said over the comms, before turning to Hawk.

"I think we need to talk, girl!" I said.

Safehouse A

"Dave, Hit Girl called and she's coming back in; she sounds pissed. She's bringing Hawk, too and she asked for 'Kick-

Ass' and 'Battle Guy' to be here," Marty said.

"Mindy's bringing Hawk to the safehouse? Something bad has happened, I can feel it and if she wants 'Kick-Ass' and 'Battle Guy' to be here, that means we need to get changed, Battle Guy!" I replied grimly.

..._...

About fifteen minutes later, I had changed into my combat suit and Marty was in his Battle Guy gear. A few minutes later, the lights went out in the safehouse and the main door slide open, allowing Beast to pull in.

I noticed that Hawk had a blindfold on and that Hit Girl did *not* look happy. Once Hit Girl climbed out, she went around the other side of Beast and hauled Hawk out, throwing her onto the mat, violently.

"What the fuck?" Hawk yelled, as she fell, before Hit Girl threw her onto her back and knelt down, holding her Tanto to Hawk's throat.

"Er, Hit Girl... What's happening?" I asked, feeling very confused.

"Kick-Ass, meet Kim Burgess!" Hit Girl said, pulling off Hawk's mask and blindfold, she blinked in the bright light.

"Kim?" I exclaimed, seeing her, by now very frightened, face. "Kim is Hawk?"

"Yup!" Hit Girl replied.

"I would never have guessed, but it does answer a few questions," I acknowledged.

"Yes, it does!" Battle Guy responded.

"What are you doing?" Kim asked, almost sobbing.

..._...

"You are a fucking cop and you were sent to infiltrate us, am I right?" Hit Girl snarled, viciously.

"No Mindy... No... I left Chicago PD, I promise!" Kim begged.

"I don't fucking believe you, *bitch!*" Hit Girl snarled, pushing the blade further and causing a little blood to run down the highly polished blade.

Kim screamed.

"Scream all you like, nobody will hear you. I am sure you know of my reputation, *bitch!*" Hit Girl growled, pulling her Tanto away and kicking Kim, across the mat.

Kim lay on the mat, sobbing and curling up in pain.

Hit Girl came over to me and Battle Guy.

"Pure accident, really! We both found out who each other was together! She's a cop and I need to be sure that she isn't a fucking plant. This may get messy, if either one of you want to leave, then please do so," Hit Girl said, conversationally.

"I'll stay to make sure you don't go too far, purple menace!" I said, feeling very concerned.

I hadn't seen Mindy like this in a while, she was cold and calculating. I had to remain to keep Hit Girl in check.

"I'll stay, too. Call me, if you need me," Battle Guy said, heading off to the briefing room.

Hit Girl proceeded to work Kim over, throwing and kicking her around the mat, ignoring the screams of pain.

Finally Kim couldn't move and she was in a lot of pain, not to mention the blood. Hit Girl dragged her over to a steel support and sat Kim against it, none too gently.

"You ready to talk, *bitch?*" Hit Girl growled, ominously.

"I am *not* a spy... I am *not* even a cop any more... *Please* believe me... You are my friends... I would never hurt either of you... I owe you both my life!" Kim begged, between sobs of pain and fear.

"You know what I can do to you, if I find out that you are lying to me, don't you?" Hit Girl growled, menacingly.

"Yes..." Kim screamed, staring up at Hit Girl and then looking over at me. There was genuine fear in her eyes and no hint of deception.

"Hit Girl, a minute..." I said, heading over to the briefing room.

"Don't fucking move, *bitch!*" Hit Girl snarled, before following me.

..._...

"She's telling the truth," I said. "Don't you think you've gone a bit far?"

"No!" Hit Girl replied, with a smile.

"She's innocent, Mindy and I trust her," I insisted.

"Okay, we'll dump her and forget we ever knew her!" Hit Girl responded, smirking.

"I know you don't mean that," I said, pulling off my mask.

"Okay, maybe I went a *bit* far, but I had to be sure. She could have been another '*Red Mist!*' You remember how *that* went, don't you..." Mindy retorted, pulling off her mask and comms. Her face showed absolutely no emotion.

"You know how I feel about that night, Mindy! Don't *fucking* joke about it, you evil *bitch!*" I replied and started to feel anger, towards Mindy.

"Who said I was joking!" Mindy replied coldly, heading upstairs.

Oh, this is just fucking great!

..._...

I went back out to Kim and helped her up, she was still sobbing.

"I'm sorry Kim, Mindy went too far! But... She had her reasons, we've been betrayed before and Mindy's Dad was murdered the last time," I said, helping her into the briefing room and onto the couch.

"Hi Kim, I'm Marty," Battle Guy said, pulling off his mask.

"Hi Marty, I must look like shit," Kim said, trying to smile.

I let her get her breath back, for a few minutes.

"Okay Kim, let's get you cleaned up," I said. "Come on."

I took Kim upstairs to the kitchen.

"I assume you have clothes on, under your costume?" I asked.

"Yeah," Kim said, stripping out of her costume. She was wearing shorts and a t-shirt underneath.

"Fuck!" I exclaimed.

Kim had considerable bruising on her thighs, stomach and back, plus a split lip and bruised cheek.

"Go relax in a hot shower, then we'll get you home," I said. "I'll find some clothes for you to borrow."

Kim went into the bathroom and I went to find Mindy. I was feeling very angry, after seeing the injuries on Kim. Mindy went too fucking far!

..._...

I found Mindy in our bedroom, she was just getting dressed, after having taken a shower.

"You happy?" I asked, angrily.

"Dave, take your fucking tampon out, for fuck's sake!" Mindy growled.

"*What!*" I responded. "What the *fuck* is wrong with you, tonight?"

"I was trying to make sure nobody else got killed," Mindy threw back. "By a *friend* of yours!"

"Yes, Red Mist was *my* fault and yes Kim was a friend! There's nothing I can do about Red Mist, but you did not need to beat the crap out of her!" I yelled back.

"Well you *fucked up* once, you'll probably do it again! Last time I lost my Daddy, I'm not losing anything else I care about!" Mindy responded, darkly.

"Okay, what else might you lose that you fucking care about!" I shouted back.

"*You*, asshole!" Mindy said and tears started falling.

"That is no *fucking* reason to beat the shit out of somebody! You went *too* fucking far!" I retorted, angrily.

"I did it because I *love* you!" Mindy retorted, she was really mad.

"Bullshit, you did it because you *could* and you fucking *enjoy* it! Just fucking admit it!" I yelled back, getting angrier and I turned and went downstairs.

Marty appeared at the bottom of the stairs, looking very concerned.

"Keep out of this Marty, for your own sake. I can take her shit! Can you look after Kim? Make sure she gets some clothes and let her stay here tonight," I said.

"No problem Dave, I'll stay tonight and make sure she's safe. I'll go find the ice packs," Marty replied.

About five minutes later, Mindy came downstairs and she still looked mad.

"Well, bitch, you cooled down yet?" I asked, calmly.

"Oh yes, I'm cool, calm and collected, Dave! I'm surprised you're not upstairs fucking Hawk, she *is* a much better specimen than *me*, after all!" Mindy said, spitefully.

"Have you lost your *fucking* mind?" I spat, incredulously.

"Possibly! But that's me isn't it? I'm a heartless, psychotic bitch, *remember!*" Mindy screamed back.

What the fuck is going on? She's fucking lost it! I reached out a hand to touch Mindy, but she grabbed my arm and swung me around, before throwing me hard, onto the mat. She followed through and started attacking me, I felt her kicking and punching me as I lay on the mat.

I couldn't put up with this any more! I forced myself up, throwing her backwards and Mindy crashed onto the mat, she was beyond mad! She launched towards me, but I think her anger was clouding her judgement, as I was able to grab her and spin her around, before throwing her down hard, onto her back. The breath was knocked out of her lungs and she screamed in pain. I knelt across her legs, pinning them, before pinning her chest down, with my right fist.

"This fucking ends now!" I bellowed at her.

Mindy struggled, but I had her pinned down well.

"Get the *fuck* off of me, before I *fucking* kill you!" Mindy screamed.

"Not until you calm the *fuck* down!" I yelled back.

"I am going to *fucking* kill you, you worthless piece of shit!" Mindy spat.

I could see Marty standing by the stairs, with Kim. They were both shocked.

..._...

Suddenly, Mindy reached a hand behind her and a second later, I had a SIG Sauer P232 pistol, at my left temple. I froze, but I saw Marty dash into the armoury and reappear with my Taser.

"Now!" I yelled, pushing myself back and away from Mindy, as Marty brought the Taser up and fired it, from about 20 feet away. The barbs hit Mindy in the chest and she shook for about three seconds, before going still. Marty disconnected the wires from the Taser, rendering Mindy safe to touch. I checked Mindy's pulse, she was okay, but unconscious. I removed the barbs swiftly and Marty brought the first aid kit, so I could treat the small wounds.

Mindy started to come around, almost immediately. Marty inserted a fresh cartridge into the Taser and stood ready. I had already removed the magazine from the SIG and ejected the chambered round, throwing the empty pistol towards Marty, who pocketed it.

..._...

Mindy opened her eyes and looked directly up at me.

She seemed much calmer.

"What did I do?" She asked, simply.

"What do you remember?" I asked.

"I don't know... Why is my hand shaking? Ouch! Marty did you just *fucking* Taser me?" Mindy asked, looking around and seeing the discarded Taser cartridge and wires, plus Marty aiming the Taser.

"Sorry, Mindy, you were about to shoot Dave!" Marty said.

"Oh God... I remember now!" Mindy said, then she saw Kim. "Oh God, I'm so sorry Kim, I really am!"

Kim came over and helped Mindy up.

"Come on, you were having a flashback or something, I think. Marty explained about Chris D'Amico and Red Mist. I'm so sorry about your Dad. You thinking that I might be a plant must have set you off," Kim said. "I've seen it happen before, to cops."

Both girls headed upstairs, Kim helping Mindy, who was now crying.

I looked at Marty.

"Well I'm glad that's fucking over!" I said.

"Yeah! First time I've ever fired a Taser! It's pretty cool!" Marty said.

"At least it worked. The last time I fired a Taser, I didn't *quite* get the desired result!" I said, grimly.

I helped Marty tidy up and dispose of the deployed Taser wires, before stowing the Taser and Mindy's pistol.

I closed up the armoury and we both headed upstairs to bed. I headed into our bedroom and found Mindy lying on the bed, examining her Taser wounds.

"Now you know what it's like to have a Taser fired at you; Marty enjoyed the practice!" I said, smiling.

"Funny cunt! I suppose that's payback for me shooting you twice, without warning!" Mindy said, smiling back at me.

"Not even close! I love you Mindy and always will, no matter what you do to me!" I said, pulling her into a deep kiss and Mindy started crying, but she continued to kiss me.

"I love you Dave Lizewski!" Mindy said, cuddling in close. "And thank you!"

***Chapter 57*: Emotion - Part I**

The following week

Saturday

Safehouse A

"What *is* she doing?" Chloe asked, quietly.

"Packing!" I replied.

"What for? World War Three?"

"She *is* Hit Girl!"

"I know, but..."

"Look, if you two assholes are just gonna fucking annoy me, then you can fuck off!" Mindy interrupted, sounding rather annoyed.

..._...

It had been a difficult week.

Kim had been in a lot of pain, when she had woken up last Saturday morning and Mindy had felt really bad about what she had done and so did I! However Kim had accepted the reasons, for Mindy attacking her. Yes, Mindy went too far, but there *were* a few mitigating circumstances. Kim went home and is currently recovering from her injuries.

Mindy and I, though... Well the fight didn't help and although I didn't feel resentment towards Mindy, I was very concerned by her behaviour, no matter what triggered it and I felt that the fight had had an affect on our relationship. But I hoped that the love between us, would overcome this hurdle as it has many others.

Chloe was a bit shocked when she found out about what had happened and actually laughed when she heard that Marty had used the Taser on Mindy. Mindy was *not* amused and actually made Chloe blush with her profane retort!

Mindy was heading off to New York, for a few days, to see if she could track down Ralph D'Amico. She was taking Chloe, as backup. I would remain here in Chicago, in case anything blew up here and I had Marty and Sophia, as backup. If things blew up in New York, then I could head out to help. I was a bit concerned about us splitting up, but Mindy persuaded me that it would be a good idea, as we needed to investigate D'Amico in New York, but couldn't just leave Chicago undefended. I had insisted that she at least take Chloe with her. Dr Bennett had agreed to this, which was a bit of a surprise!

Talking of Marty.

Marty has made enormous progress, both with losing weight and getting fit. I won't say he is quite half the man he was, but not far off! It has been over two months, since he first started training with us and he is still serious about becoming an operator! Abby is also doing very well, too, as his potential replacement.

Later that afternoon

"Oh, I was wondering what you two were doing in the shower together!" I quipped.

Both girls glared at me and together they were kinda scary!

"Okay, it's not like I thought you two were... *Getting up to anything*... Er... Together!" I said, slowly, with a smile.

"You thought we were naked and might be fucking!" Mindy suggested, with a scowl.

"Possibly!" I replied, hopefully.

"Well we *weren't* naked!"

"So you were..."

"And we weren't fucking! How could you even...!"

"Okay! Like the new hair colour... Do the drapes match the carpet?" I asked facetiously. I think I was living dangerously, right now, but what the hell!

Chloe's mouth dropped open, in shock!

"No... And they ain't gonna, either! I can't believe you even *asked* that, Dave!" Mindy growled, blushing. "Get your damn mind out of the fucking gutter!"

"Sorry, couldn't resist fuckin' with ya!" I replied.

Chloe was blushing, too, but she still scowled at me!

Both girls had dyed their hair. Mindy was now a Soft Amber and Chloe was a Chestnut Brown.

My sordid imagination! Although watching two girls 'at it' was definitely a fantasy of mine, maybe when they're older...!

..._...

"You sure you have everything?" I asked, tentatively.

"Yeah, I think so," Mindy replied.

"The sink is still in the kitchen!" I teased.

I received a nasty glare in return! The glare quickly turned to sadness.

"I'm gonna miss you, Dave," Mindy said, quietly.

"I'll miss you, too, gorgeous," I replied, feeling sadness inside of me.

***Sunday morning
New York City***

We arrived in New York and Marcus was waiting for us.

He did not look pleased.

"Problem, Marcus?" I asked, with a worried feeling.

"I received a visitor three hours ago! Six in the damn morning!" Marcus replied, looking like he normally did, whenever strange things occurred in his life, especially things that involved Hit Girl!

"So it arrived then!" I responded, in a weak attempt at humour.

"Oh yes! One enormous wooden crate, delivered by a criminal, if ever I saw one!"

"Er, I assume the crate is safe?" I asked, tentatively.

"Yes, it is! You know what I think about you using my house as a 'base of operations!'" Marcus said, scowling.

"Well, I couldn't exactly have it delivered to the safehouse!" I retorted.

"Mindy... I... Sometimes, I really don't know what to do with you!" Marcus said, shaking his head.

"I know what you mean, Mr Williams!" Chloe laughed, from the back seat.

"Thanks, bitch!" I growled.

***Four hours later
Marcus' House***

"Time to go!" I said, inserting a magazine into a Glock 26, pistol and placing the pistol into a concealed holster, in the small of my back.

"I'm ready!" Chloe replied, doing the same, with her FN Five-seveN pistol.

"You girls, be careful!" Marcus warned, trying to keep the concern out of his voice, but failing. Marcus definitely seemed uncomfortable with two armed teenagers in the house, lucky for him he doesn't know what else I brought with me, or he might have a damn coronary!

"Hey, it's me!" I quipped.

"That's what I'm afraid of!" Marcus replied, sardonically.

We headed a few blocks north, before hailing a cab that would take us to a certain location, to the west.

..._...

"Stop here, please!" I called, to the driver.

I passed over the fare and a tip, before getting out with Chloe.

I felt strange inside; I had not been to this block for over three years.

"You okay, Mindy?" Chloe asked.

"Yeah, sorry. It just feels a bit strange being back here," I explained.

I walked down the block, and looked up at a particular building. Some of the units had broken windows and some were boarded up. The unit on the top floor seemed to have better quality windows, than the others. I smiled, it was home, sort of or at least it had been.

"Come on, I'm just being stupid!" I said, unlocking and pulling open the main door.

..._...

I stopped outside the apartment on the top floor and took a deep breath, before I inserted the key... Or tried to...

What the fuck? The key wouldn't go in properly...

My mind went into instant overdrive... The lock had been changed... Somebody was here... In *my* safehouse!

"Stand to!" I growled.

Chloe pulled out her pistol and chambered a round.

"The lock has been changed!" I said, pulling out my lock picks.

A minute later the lock turned.

I replaced my picks, pulled out my Glock and racked back the slide.

"Go!" Chloe said and I pushed open the door.

..._...

There was nobody, in the living room, but I did notice a complete absence of dust; there should have been a ton of it!

It felt strange, as I entered the apartment and my heart started to beat faster. All sorts of emotions flashed through me, along with the dreaded flashbacks. The flashbacks varied, between my Daddy, Dave and Marcus. The last flashbacks were the most disturbing, as they were after my Daddy had died. I saw myself starting to breakdown, when I saw the two cups of hot chocolate, with marshmallows, that I had made, then I saw myself start packing equipment into my pink suitcase. I saw myself almost shooting Dave, letting go of the trigger just before it broke. I saw myself looking at the jet-pack and that brought a smile to my face. The smile grew, as I remembered shoving the instructions at Dave. I remembered waking up with concussion, the following day and Dave helping me pack, to go with Marcus.

Get with it Mindy! I shook it off.

I signalled Chloe to keep an eye on the main door and the door to the gun room, on the left.

I first cleared the bedrooms and bathroom. Nothing, apart from the fact that almost everything was clean, at least in my old room and the bathroom. My bed no longer had pink bedclothes; the bedclothes were now blue!

I returned to the living room and stared at the closed door, the door to the gun room.

I listened at the door and could hear somebody moving around, in the kitchen.

This story continues in 'Feral, Chapter 9 - Emotion - Part II'...

***Chapter 58*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 1**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 10 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 1', which should be read first..

Author's Note: Please note that New York and Chicago are in different time zones. Therefore New York times are one hour ahead of Chicago. I have attempted to take these timings into account.

The next day
Monday

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 A.M.

West Ridge
Chicago

0:55 A.M.

Mindy called last night.

She told me all about this boy, called Joshua, who had been staying at Safehouse A, in New York. I understood that Mindy almost killed the boy! Not a surprise really; I would never invade a safehouse that belonged to Hit Girl, unless I was hoping to die! Apparently he was the boy that Chloe loved and was supposed to be dead! The kid had been in a coma and had only come around sometime in February. I rather thought that the story was a bit far fetched, but then a few years ago, I would never have believed the story about an eleven year-old assassin, called Hit Girl!

Mindy called again, about ten minutes ago, advising me that Marcus was going out of town for a few days. Mindy is intending to hunt down Ralph D'Amico, with Chloe's help and possibly this Joshua kid.

The following takes place between 4:00 A.M. and 5:00 A.M.

4:34 A.M.

The Fusion number rang.

It was Jack Bay and he had some very bad news.

Fusion was being hunted, by the Chicago PD.

Now he said that so far, he did not know who was calling the shots or who had initiated the investigation, but for now Fusion must go dark and *not* appear in public, day or night.

Jack would contact me, when he had further information.

I tried to get back to sleep, but couldn't, so I got up and started training.

The following takes place between 5:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.

5:54 A.M.

I was hungry and dripping with sweat, so I grabbed a hot shower and then went to find myself some breakfast.

The following takes place between 7:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M.

7:15 A.M.

Marty appeared downstairs.

"How long have you been up?" Marty asked.

"Since half four! Jack Bay called..." I said and explained the call that I had received.

"That sucks!" Marty said and went off to get breakfast.

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M.

***Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago***

8:22 A.M.

Sergeant Voight was *not* happy.

The task he had been given went against everything that he believed in!

"Right listen up!" He called, as he walked out of his office.

"Kick-Ass!" he said, putting up a, not so good photo, up on the board.

"Hit Girl!" Another, not so good photo went up.

"Shadow!" Another, this time much worse photo, went up.

"Now, I don't agree with this tasking and I sure you don't either!" he said to the three men and one woman, in front of him.

"You fucking kidding, me?" Olinsky asked. "Those guys are heroes!"

"Damn right!" agreed Lindsay.

"We have an expert on these guys; he's from the NYPD. He should be here any minute... Here we are!" Voight said, walking down the room, towards the stairs.

"Hey, appreciate you coming!" Voight said, holding out his hand. "Hank Voight!"

"Marcus Williams," Marcus said, introducing himself and shaking the outstretched hand.

"Antonio Dawson!"

"Erin Lindsay!"

"Adam Ruzek!"

"Alvin Olinsky!"

"Okay, you guys are nice! What's up with that battleaxe downstairs?" Marcus asked, with a smile.

"There isn't enough time in the day!" Olinsky offered, with a smile.

"I assume you are all up to speed as to why I am here," Marcus said, nodding at the photos and grimacing.

"I think it's horse shit!" Olinsky stated, causing Marcus to smile.

"So we are all agreed!" Marcus said, before continuing and walking up the room. "Ralph D'Amico, serial, evil bastard!" Marcus fished out a photo and stuck it to the board, on top of the existing three photos.

"Slippery bastard, blew his way out of Rikers a little over a week ago," Marcus explained, angrily.

"We heard about it!" Voight said, grimly.

The meeting was then interrupted.

"What the *fuck* is going on in this place?" Matthews asked, coming up the stairs. "I hear you're chasing Fusion!"

"Slow down, SWAT!" Voight said, heading Matthews off. "We are *not* investigating Fusion; we're after those that are!"

"Lieutenant Marcus Williams, NYPD, meet Sergeant Craig Matthews, CPD SWAT!" Voight said, introducing Matthews and Marcus.

"Hi Lieutenant!"

"Sergeant!"

"SWAT, are the biggest fans of Fusion out there! You need our support, we're there Voight!" Matthews said.

"Okay, get out there, find out who is driving this and get back to me!" Voight ordered his team, before heading back into his office, followed by Marcus, as the rest of the team headed downstairs.

The following takes place between 9:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

9:28 A.M.

I received a call from Marcus, of all people and he was in Chicago!

He explained what was happening and that instead of tracking down Fusion, Voight and his team were now tracking down whoever set Fusion up! Marcus asked me to call Mindy, as he wanted to stay away from her, so that no connections might be made.

I had kicked Marty out of bed and let him know what was happening. He was shocked, but grabbed breakfast and was now on his computer, digging for information.

I dropped a text to Kim and advised her to stay off the streets, both as Kim and as Hawk.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

10:00 A.M.

I put my cell away, after calling Mindy.

It was really good to hear her voice again and to know that all was well. I did miss her, enormously. You never realise how much you'll miss someone, until they are gone! I rang Dr Bennett to let her know that I had heard from the girls. As expected, she really missed Chloe and worried all the time about her.

I took Sophia for a long walk, as there didn't seem much else to do right now and it would give me time to think. I left Marty digging through things and headed over to the park.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

12:05 P.M.

The walk was invigorating and made me feel a lot more with it. I worried a lot about Mindy and also about Chloe. Chloe is like a little sister to me and I don't want anything to happen to her, but I also know that I can trust Chloe to have Mindy's back, when required. I also hope that Chloe will be level-headed when dealing with Mindy and her sometimes psychotic nature!

I miss Mindy enormously, we've only been a part just over a day, but I miss her. I also know subconsciously that she

is over eight hundred miles away, just like before!

On entering the house, I found Marty chatting with Abby.

Abby was doing really well and passing all of Marty's geek tests! With Abby providing comms and technical support from the safehouse, Marty would be able to come out with us, as an operator. For now though, with Fusion technically grounded, we would stay away from the safehouse. This was okay as Marty could still access everything he needed to, from here.

It also gave me time, to train with Marty. Abby joined us when we trained, learning some basic defensive movements. Which I hoped that she would never need, but you never know!

The following takes place between 1:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

1:23 P.M.

Dr Bennett came over for lunch, with Curtis.

Both were missing Chloe and were worried about what the two girls might be getting into. I was the same, so it seemed sensible to support each other. Curtis really did seem down and was really worried about Chloe, which was a bit of a surprise considering how badly Chloe usually treated the kid!

It seemed that Chloe was not all that good at calling her mother, in fact she had called only once, since they had got to New York! I promised Dr Bennett that I would let her know all was okay, whenever Mindy called.

I also updated Dr Bennett with the Fusion problem, so that she knew what was going on.

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

2:55 P.M.

Dr Bennett stayed with us for the afternoon, while Marty and I trained.

Abby and Curtis insisted on joining in! That little kid really does have a lot of energy and for that matter, so does Abby!

The following takes place between 3:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

3:15 P.M.

After a shower, I sat down to speak with Dr Bennett and we chatted about Fusion and other things. Dr Bennett reminded me that she was available at any time of the day, or night. I suggested that she take the name 'Medic' and she agreed, as it fitted what she did as a doctor. We then discussed a secure way of contacting her, without revealing her own identity and therefore Chloe's identity.

I asked about Curtis and what his parent's did.

Apparently, Curtis' parents were both lawyers and lived in Washington DC. They provided their services for quite high fees and were very successful.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M.

4:33 P.M.

Dr Bennett went home, taking Curtis with her.

I went up to our room and sat down with a book that I had been reading for a project that I was working on. I was hoping to be able to surprise Mindy with a new skill, but for now I was still learning and it may be some time before I am skilled enough to show it off. Only Marty knew what I was learning and it wasn't easy keeping it a secret from Mindy as she was always suspicious!

The following takes place between 5:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

5:55 P.M.

The rest of the day proved to be boring, to say the least.

I hoped Mindy was having more enjoyment than I was, at the moment.

Then I got a phone call. It was Jack Bay. He wanted to meet me and me alone, at his house in Vernon Hills. He gave me an address and suggested that I come as myself, for about eight, this evening.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M.

***Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago***

6:30 P.M.

"So, what have you got," Voight asked his team.

"Not much, we know that somebody has put word out about Fusion. But that's it, we're leaning on everybody that we can!" Lindsay advised.

"Well, obviously you're not doing enough, I don't care how you do it, but I want something concrete!" Voight responded, obviously annoyed.

"It must be D'Amico; he has a nasty reputation and many people are too afraid to talk," Dawson said.

"Well, just make people more scared of us!" Voight suggested.

The following takes place between 7:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

***Plaza Hotel
Chicago***

7:22 P.M.

I had just finished a late dinner and was back in my room.

Voight had called and advised me of the lack of progress. I told him that I wasn't surprised. D'Amico had a long reach, a very long reach! He was scary when he was behind bars, but now...

My thoughts also drifted a few miles away to Dave and his team. Things could kick off in Chicago, any time! I also thought about Mindy and Chloe, hundreds of miles away, back in New York City. I hoped that Mindy wasn't going to do anything stupid. She can over react at times and go off and make stupid mistakes. Thankfully she has Chloe with her, which should help and at least provide some competent backup to Mindy.

That Ralph D'Amico is capable of anything! That man has no boundaries, *at all!* I just hope that Mindy leaves at least some of New York City still standing, by the time that she has finished with him! It worries me that she might go too far, to accomplish her mission, just like she did with Frank D'Amico, all those years ago.

Damn, I wish Damon was still here, at least Mindy would listen to him!

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

***The Farm
Vernon Hills
Chicago***

8:02 P.M.

I turned left off of I-60, up the driveway to a large property set back from the road.

The drive had taken about forty minutes and just to be safe, I had Sophia with me. I pulled up outside the house and found Jack Bay waiting for me. We had met, just the once, after the Week of Hell.

"Hi Dave, you okay?" Jack asked, holding his hand out.

"Yes, thanks, hope you don't mind me bringing Sophia," I replied, shaking his hand.

"As long as she doesn't repeat anything we say!" Jack joked and lead me inside.

"You have a nice place here, Jack," I said.

"Thanks, we like it."

"Is that Mindy's mother?" I asked.

I had noticed a large photo, on the mantelpiece over the fire. The man was Damon, in NYPD uniform. The woman, had Mindy's eyes, her hair and her looks.

"That is Mindy's mother," Jack confirmed.

"Damn! If Mindy grows up to look like that, then I'll be a very lucky man!" I commented.

"She was lovely, a lot of people were very jealous of Damon!" Jack said.

At that moment a tall woman with brown hair, walked in.

"My wife, Natalie," Jack said, introducing the woman.

"Hello, Mrs Bay," I said.

"Natalie, this is Dave, Mindy's partner and Sophia."

"I'm really pleased to meet you Dave. Jack told me that Mindy was being looked after by a strapping lad," Mrs Bay said, with a smile.

"Thank you, you have a lovely place here, Mrs Bay," I replied, feeling a little embarrassed.

Mrs Bay vanished into another room, while Jack and I sat down to talk.

Jack explained about Voight's lack of progress, not his fault, but nobody was talking. That didn't surprise me, as D'Amico scared *me*, so I knew how others might feel! We discussed things for another hour; he was concerned about Mindy, in New York. I explained that she wasn't alone, but that she had another member of our team with her.

The following takes place between 9:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

***The Farm
Vernon Hills
Chicago***

9:15 P.M.

"Thanks Jack, I'll call you when I hear anything from Mindy," I said, shaking Jack's hand.

"I'll do the same, when I hear from Voight, or anybody else," Jack replied.

Sophia and I got back into the SUV and headed back home.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

10:02 P.M.

I arrived home and explained everything to Marty, who had been waiting for me to get back.

We then headed to bed, all the driving was a little exhausting.

You are advised to read 'Forsaken, Chapter 59 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 2' next...

***Chapter 59*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 2**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 11, Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 2', but you should read this chapter first...

***The next day
Tuesday***

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 A.M.

***Southside Firehouse
Chicago***

0:22 A.M.

The alarm had sounded and Truck 83 was leaving for an emergency.

Eighty yards down the street, a man watched as the Fire Truck pulled out, with lights flashing. He waited until the front wheels of the truck touched the road, before pressing the button on the device in his hand...

...Truck 83 came apart and half a dozen men died, instantly.

The night sky was lit up, for miles around. Flaming debris fell onto the Firehouse, setting it alight, just as other vehicles were pulling out of it. The Ambulance, directly behind Truck 83 exploded, as red hot metal and flames touched off the fuel.

The surviving Firefighters tried to fight the fire with what equipment was available, but they were fighting a losing battle.

Eighty yards away, a car pulled away smartly and headed north.

0:44 A.M.

The phone rang. I grabbed it.

"Voight!"

"Disaster, CFD has just been bombed!"

"Get my team in, right now!"

The following takes place between 1:00 A.M. and 2:00 A.M.

***Plaza Hotel
Chicago***

1:22 A.M.

I dragged myself out of a deep sleep.

The damn phone.

"Go!" I said, grumpily.

"It's Voight! D'Amico has escalated, a Firehouse just blew up!"

"I'm on my way!"

The following takes place between 2:00 A.M. and 3:00 A.M.

**Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago**

2:05 A.M.

Sergeant Voight was *not* happy.

The team were all at their desks, looking very concerned. Perched on the corner of one desk was Marcus.

"That bastard has escalated; this is now a war! Nobody fucks with my City! The gloves are off, you lot get out there and get me some intelligence, *any way you can!*" Voight said, loudly and angrily.

All, but Marcus and Voight, flew out of the building.

"Where do we start?" Marcus asked.

"Let's go get breakfast. We need to go see a colleague," Voight suggested.

The following takes place between 3:00 A.M. and 4:00 A.M.

**West Columbia
Chicago**

3:04 A.M.

The Fusion number rang.

What the fuck now; I need fucking sleep!

"Hi, Kick-Ass?" A voice, that I didn't recognise, asked.

"Who?" I snarled.

"You don't know me, but my name is Hank Voight. I got your number from Sam Fellowes; we really need your kind of help."

I knew who this guy was, well sort of, but I wasn't supposed to know; so do I trust him?

My personal cell chirped, with a text message, it was from Marcus.

'Trust Voight'

Straight and to the point. One question answered!

"Okay, Voight, speak!"

"I'm heading the team that's supposed to be investigating and targeting *you*. I don't agree with the investigation. A Firehouse has just been bombed; now, our New York liaison, suggests that this is the work of Ralph D'Amico, who escaped jail just over a week ago! I believe that your team are very familiar with the D'Amico family!"

"We are!" I replied, angrily.

"So far, we have my team, SWAT and our New York liaison, plus of course, Fellowes and Murphy," Voight said. "The word has gone out; we are not pursuing you guys, we are pursuing those who are *after* you guys. I assume they are the same as those who blew up the Firehouse and nobody fucks with *my* City and survives!"

The following takes place between 4:00 A.M. and 5:00 A.M.

**West Columbia
Chicago**

4:11 A.M.

I gave up trying to get back to sleep.

That call from Voight had disturbed me; D'Amico was going all out! I couldn't believe that he had targeted a Firehouse. What could they possibly do to him? D'Amico was flexing his muscles, letting everybody know, what he can do and will do, if people don't drop into line.

I called Mindy, to remind her to be careful.

If D'Amico was bombing things in Chicago, then he would probably start bombing things in New York, too. I wasn't completely surprised, therefore, to hear that there *had* been an explosion, in New York, last night! I told Mindy to be *very* careful and that I wanted her and Chloe back alive.

I went to wake Marty.

It was time to head down to Safehouse A and start work.

The following takes place between 5:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

5:15 A.M.

We grabbed breakfast, on the way and were now hard at work.

We were receiving regular emails, full of data, from Voight and Jack Bay.

All this Data needed to be sifted through and Marty was finding it hard going.

The following takes place between 6:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

6:37 A.M.

Three new faces appeared in the briefing room, just after six.

"Hi Dave, Marty! We heard the news and wanted to see what we could do to help," Dr Bennett said, pushing Curtis and Abby into the room.

Marty's eyes lit up.

"Hal!" Marty exclaimed. "Great to see you; major data dump, dig in!"

While Marty and Hal waded through the Police data, I got up and suggested that we take Sophia for a walk. Abby was a lot better than me, when it came to sifting data, it must be a super geek thing!

I am *only* a geek, *not* a super geek!

The following takes place between 7:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M.

***The Park
Chicago***

7:31 A.M.

Sophia enjoyed the walk and she also enjoyed chasing Curtis, who was slowly warming to the large, ball chomping dog!

Dr Bennett was a bit subdued, more than normal and it was obvious why. I think she had come over to be near others and so that she might find out what was happening in New York.

It was good to be able to talk with somebody else, who had the same worries, too.

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

8:37 A.M.

Young Curtis was completely exhausted by the time we got back to the safehouse, so he lay down on the couch, after a large drink of water and fell asleep. Sophia joined him on the couch, after getting a big drink herself.

Marty and Abby had managed to sort through most of the emails and they were able to make some sort of sense of things. The explosion at the Firehouse had sent a ripple of fear throughout the City. There was genuine fear, among the Police and Fire services, as to who might be next.

I didn't want to contemplate the level of fear in the civilian communities.

The following takes place between 9:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

The rest of the morning was spent digging through intelligence.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M.

***Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago***

10:04 A.M.

"So we have nothing!" Voight exclaimed.

"Everybody is afraid; too afraid to talk!" Lindsay replied.

"He's good, is that fucking D'Amico. He has the place locked down tight. We must find his man, here in Chicago. If we can't get to them from the bottom up, we go top down!" Marcus offered.

"Good advice, people, let's move!" Voight ordered.

The following takes place between 11:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

11:55 A.M.

I put the cell down and explained the substance of the call to Dave.

"So, did she ask to speak to *me*, Marty?" Dave asked.

"No. She seemed too excited!" I replied, laughing.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

12:35 A.M.

"I have something!" Abby called.

"What have you got!" Marty asked.

"I have a name: Arkady Orlov," Abby replied.

The following takes place between 1:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

***Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago***

1:04 P.M.

"We have a name! Fusion's intelligence guys are obviously better than mine! Get me everything about him, everything!" Voight said, sounding slightly happier.

1:25 P.M.

"Arkady Orlov, Russian immigrant. We have an address..." Lindsay said.

"Well let's go..." Voight said and vanishing down the stairs.

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M.

***South Carpenter and West 56th Street
Chicago***

2:04 P.M.

The vehicles of Voight and his team skidded to a halt outside the house of Arkady Orlov. Everybody got out and advanced on the house. Olinsky and Ruzek went up to the front door, followed by Voight. Dawson and Lindsay headed around the back of the house.

Suddenly, two shotgun blasts rang out, blasting the front door from the inside.

Olinsky and Voight were to each side, but Ruzek caught part of the blast and fell back down the steps. Olinsky fired off a dozen rounds from his AR-15 and kicked down the remains of the front door. Simultaneously Dawson kicked in the back door. Lindsay went in with her pistol up and reported the kitchen as clear.

Olinsky found Arkady Orlov dead, in the hallway; he was riddled with AR-15 bullets. Voight was down with Ruzek, who was bruised but okay, thanks to his vest. Voight got up and went to see Orlov.

"Fuck! We needed him alive!" Voight yelled. "Tear this place apart, find me something!"

The following takes place between 3:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

***Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago***

3:58 P.M.

"Kick-Ass?" Voight asked.

"Yeah!"

"We struck out; Arkady Orlov wanted to go out in a blaze of fucking glory and we helped the bastard!" Voight explained.

"Those were probably his orders," Kick-Ass replied.

"I agree, D'Amico *would* issue orders like that!" Voight responded.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

4:04 P.M.

"Did you find anything else of use?" I asked Voight.

"We found weapons and certain items related to bomb making. He was definitely involved in something, we just don't know what yet!" Voight replied.

"Well, one less, is still one less!"

"Oh and pass my thanks to your intelligence team; they are damn good!" Voight said, before ending the call.

4:15 P.M.

"Abby, Marty, congratulations! Your info was bang on and Voight sends his thanks. Keep up the good work Abby!" I said, causing Abby to blush.

The following takes place between 5:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

5:08 P.M.

We were all quite cheerful, as we sat down to dinner that evening.

Today started badly, but we have had a slight success!

I also understood that to receive a compliment from Voight, like that, is quite rare.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

6:18 P.M.

Abby went home, while Marty and I tidied things up.

We were just about to head home, too, when we got a call.

It was Voight.

"We've found a building; thought you guys might like to join in!" Voight said.

Voight gave us the address and said he would meet us at eight.

Marty and I got ourselves geared up

The following takes place between 7:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

Beast, driving through Chicago

7:08 P.M.

We were on the way to the meeting point in Beast.

7:47 P.M.

We arrived and met up with Voight.

The building was a commercial property, with an empty shop, on the first floor. Voight and his team were ready to assault the building and just waiting for us.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

Suspected D'Amico Facility, Chicago

8:02 P.M.

We moved in.

Voight and his team would go in from the front, while Fusion would go in from the rear. I kicked in the rear door and went in, G36C at the ready, followed by Battle Guy who was similarly equipped. We could hear the noise of Voight and his team, doing the same thing. Curiously there was no shooting, nothing. This stank!

We met up with Voight's team and moved up to the second floor.

8:24 P.M.

We had a problem.

It was a trap!

Do you know why we knew it was a trap? It was the sign that said: '*THIS IS A TRAP!*' We had all walked into a large room and the sign also told us that all the exits were booby trapped, both the windows and the doors.

This fucking sucked, and apparently, I was not the only person who thought this!

"Anybody got any ideas?" Voight asked.

"Let me check this out," Battle Guy said, putting down his weapon and checking out the booby traps.

The following takes place between 9:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

***North Kilbourn Ave
Chicago***

9:06 P.M.

I had just had dinner and was back in my room, on my laptop.

I really needed to get a new one, this one sucked, big time!

My bag started to beep, it was the Fusion radio. Marty insisted I carry one, just in case. It was set to beep, when a call was coming through and I would have to enable the call, with a decryption key. I grabbed the radio out of my bag and put on the headset, before punching in the decryption key. I then checked that my door, was closed and locked!

"This is Hal, go ahead!" I called.

"Hal, this is Battle Guy... Long story, but basically we're trapped in a building, booby trapped exits, hastily installed explosives and sensors, with a central detonator," Battle Guy explained.

"Tell me what you need; I'm online with the safehouse, now."

Confirmed D'Amico Facility

Chicago

9:27 P.M.

Battle Guy was talking complete gibberish to Hal!

I assumed that it meant something to those two; they were thick as thieves when it came to super geekiness! Marty had traced all the cables and wires that related to the booby traps. They seemed to be hastily installed, without much attempt at concealment. I assumed that they didn't expect to trap somebody good, inside!

Battle Guy had found the main control unit, which typically had a timer. We had till ten-forty-five, that evening. To top it off, Voight's radios were jammed; but not our comms!

North Kilbourn Ave Chicago

9:50 P.M.

"You still on that laptop, Abigail?"

"I'm working Mom!" I called. "Something important!"

"I need you to do something for me."

"Mom, I'm busy, give me a minute!" I called again. "Jeez!"

"Battle Guy, I'm sending you the specs now," I called, getting back to business.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M.

Confirmed D'Amico Facility Chicago

10:10 P.M.

"What have you got, Battle Guy?" Voight asked.

"I have the specs for the central control unit. I just need time to deactivate it and get us out of here," Battle Guy said, calmly.

"Wake me when you're done," Voight said and closed his eyes, sat down and leant against a wall.

10:40 P.M.

"You almost there Battle Guy?" I asked.

"Couple more minutes!" Battle Guy replied, alternating between his phone, the radio and the control unit. He had been doing that for the last half-hour and kept requesting more information from Hal.

10:44 P.M.

"Well, we gonna go boom?" I asked, calmly, although I definitely did not *feel* calm!

Battle Guy finally looked up, with a smile. "Well, we should know in the next sixty seconds!"

10:46 P.M.

"We still alive?" Voight asked, opening his eyes.

"You sound unhappy about that!" Olinsky stated with a grin.

The following takes place between 11:00 P.M. and Midnight

**Confirmed D'Amico Facility
Chicago**

11:15 P.M.

Chicago PD bomb disposal arrived and cleaned up the explosives.

That whole evening sucked!

We headed back to the safehouse.

You are advised to read 'Feral, Chapter 11, Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 2' next...

***Chapter 60*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 3**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 12 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 3', but you should read this chapter first...

The next day

Wednesday

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 A.M.

Safehouse A

Chicago

We got to bed at around a quarter past midnight.

This was turning into another 'Week of Hell', but at least we actually got some sleep, last time!

12:32 A.M.

I finally managed to put the phone down, after talking with Mindy. The conversation kinda wandered and turned into phone sex, which apparently woke Chloe! Anyway it was really good to hear Mindy's voice and she had some, well, very dirty things to say!

The following takes place between 1:00 A.M. and 2:00 A.M.

Chicago Police Department

District 21

Chicago

1:30 A.M.

The timer ran down to zero and the bomb exploded.

The District 21 Headquarters bulged and then shattered, masonry exploded everywhere and the building collapsed in on itself.

It was total devastation.

Plaza Hotel

Chicago

1:47 A.M.

"Lieutenant Matthews!" I said groggily, into my cell.

"I think somebody found out that we weren't investigating Fusion!" Voight said.

"Come again!"

"District 21, just got bombed!" Voight said, angrily. "Fifteen minutes ago!"

I sat bolt upright in bed.

"Casualties?"

"A dozen so far. We're just lucky it was during the early shift. I think you're gonna need to head back to New York, while I find a new place to work out of," Voight advised.

"Thanks Hank. My condolences," I replied.

"Thanks and many thanks for your assistance, I'll keep you in the loop."

The following takes place between 2:00 A.M. and 3:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

2:09 A.M.

Voight had just called with *extremely* disturbing news.

The District 21 headquarters, had been destroyed by a bomb.

D'Amico was making his feelings felt and I felt sick to my stomach; this man needed to die, he was pure evil!

The following takes place between 7:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

7:31 A.M.

I woke up and found Marty in the kitchen.

I explained what had happened to District 21.

Marty was *not* happy; D'Amico was escalating and escalation was very bad, for everyone!

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

8:01 A.M.

The package had arrived!

I opened it, with Dave watching. Inside was a carefully wrapped smartphone, with the SIM and battery removed.

"Okay, give me an hour or so, one phone hack, coming up!" I said, flipping on the signal jammer.

The following takes place between 9:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

9:18 A.M.

I had the phone's contents downloaded, without a problem and I now knew the guy's full life story! I emailed everything to Mindy and sent her a text to tell her that it was on it's way. I would go through the information properly, myself, just in case anything was of use to us here, in Chicago.

9:58 A.M.

I suddenly had a thought.

That Joshua kid, in New York, had better have his wits about him, as according to my calendar today was the start of the two girl's monthlies! I had a nice chuckle at that, until...

My cell rang, it was the Fusion divert.

"Go!" I snarled.

It was Fellowes.

"Morning, Kick-Ass! We need you, right now; we're in shit, but then what's new! West Harrison and South Sacramento, bring guns!"

"Thirty minutes, guys!" I replied, dropping the call.

"Marty, gear up!" I yelled.

I also called Abby and asked her to get down to Safehouse A.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M.

Chicago

10:15 A.M.

We left the safehouse and headed north, towards Fellowes and Murphy.

10:44 A.M.

I stopped Beast, about sixty yards back from the junction. We had approached from the east; we could hear weapons fire and saw a Police SUV being blasted by men with automatic weapons.

I called Fellowes.

"Where are you guys?" Fellowes shouted, over the noise of weapons fire.

"About sixty yards east of you. We can see the men firing at you. Who are they?" I asked.

"Don't know. Whole damn City went to hell about an hour ago. Cops are being engaged, all over the fucking city!" Fellowes replied.

"Okay, *we're* engaging!" I said, hanging up the cell.

I explained what Fellowes had said, to Marty.

"We take those shooters down, now!"

10:52 A.M.

We moved down the sidewalk, using trees and cars for cover.

Frightened pedestrians and drivers had fled the scene. Abandoned cars in the street made good cover, as we got closer. Ever since the 'Week of Hell' we had been carrying four Heckler & Koch G36C assault rifles, as standard kit in Beast. Battle Guy, had recently learned how to use one, so this would be his first outing with the weapon.

We took up positions behind an abandoned vehicle, aimed our weapons and started firing into the men, who were facing away from us. Four men dropped immediately, followed by another two. The remaining man dived down and away, to the right. Battle Guy shot him, with the help of the laser sight, on his weapon.

The following takes place between 11:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

Chicago

11:02 A.M.

We came out from cover and advanced towards the dead men and the Police SUV. We checked over each of the dead men, to ensure that they were dead and none were going to popup behind us! I found Battle Guy's target and grinned, it was a single shot dead centre of the forehead. He must have been looking directly at Battle Guy, when he fired. I was impressed, with Battle Guy's marksmanship!

We headed over to the Police SUV.

"Anybody home!" I snarled.

"Funny bastard!" Murphy said, sticking his head up.

"Anybody important hurt?" Battle Guy asked.

"Just my pride and the SUV!" Fellowes replied. "This is not going to go down well!"

I cast an eye over the Police SUV, it had one or two holes, or maybe several dozen, actually!

"Bit of paint, bit of filler and it'll be good as new!" I quipped.

"Forgive me, if I don't laugh!" Murphy responded, with a grin.

"Who were those clowns?" Battle Guy asked.

"No idea! This is happening across the city, it's fucking ridiculous!" Murphy exclaimed.

"We need to go, we'll see where else we can help, good luck and keep us informed!" I growled, angrily.

11:12 A.M.

We climbed back into Beast, reloaded our weapons and headed west.

"Fusion, Hal. I'm ready to provide support. I am getting a ton of shit from Bay and I need time to process it all!"

"Good on you, girl!"

11:23 A.M.

"Well that didn't last long!" Battle Guy yelled, as we turned left onto South Independence Boulevard.

In front of us were two Police cruisers with four Police Officers crouched down behind and firing pistols towards a group of gun men, who were behind an SUV. We accelerated past the Police cruisers and placed Beast between the Police and the gun men, using Beast's armour for cover. The four Police Officers moved forward and joined us.

"Thanks, Fusion!" One Officer shouted, over the shooting.

"Glad to help," I responded, firing my G36C, at the gunmen.

South Independence Boulevard was six lanes wide, with a wide grass median and dotted with trees.

Battle Guy maintained short bursts with the Police Officers, keeping the gunmen occupied, while I moved forwards using the, not very large, trees for limited cover. I managed to drop two gunmen, before another two gunmen started running towards another SUV, across the median. I fired after them, but missed.

"Fuck!" I yelled, angrily.

We didn't have Eisenhower with us, unfortunately, so I ran back to Beast. The left hand side of Beast had a lot of damage from bullets, but none had passed through. I climbed in.

"Battle Guy, get in!" I called, starting the engine.

Once Battle Guy was in, I accelerated after the gunmen, leaving the four Police Officers shocked, but alive.

11:34 A.M.

I stopped.

Beast blocked the gunmen's SUV, causing the men to run further down the boulevard, towards an abandoned elevated rail track and using the large buttresses for cover. I was hit several times, by bullets, which did not deter my advance. I was running low on ammunition and was being careful with what I had left.

A Police cruiser skidded to a halt, beyond the elevated track and two Police Officers, with AR-15 rifles, started to attack the gunmen, who refused to surrender and were eventually cut down.

Once the gunfire had died down, one of the Police cruisers from earlier, came down to us and I pointed out the SUV

for them to recover. The Officers gave their thanks, then Battle Guy and I, headed back to Beast.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M.

Chicago

12:07 P.M.

We reloaded our weapons and magazines.

I had to admit that Mindy had been very astute, when she had increased the ammunition load out for Beast. Between us, we had already consumed over a hundred rounds so far this morning.

We stopped for a bite to eat, before continuing our patrol

The following takes place between 1:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M.

Chicago

By half past one, we were heading south.

1:38 P.M.

We got passed a call, via Hal, from Murphy.

Murphy reported an emergency, at the intersection of West Douglas Boulevard and South Sacramento Drive. There had been a bad traffic accident and the attending units were under fire and couldn't treat or rescue the injured.

"We're less than five minutes away!" I replied, putting my foot down.

As we approached the junction, we could see smoke from a fire and we could also hear gun shots.

The actual scene was chaos.

We pulled up beside a red and black fire truck, 'SQUAD 3'.

Several Firefighters were crouched behind the truck, sheltering from the bullets flying around. Beyond them we could see one Police cruiser, with a Police Officer shooting an AR-15 rifle. Another Police Officer was on the ground, obviously wounded, but still moving. In the middle of the junction were five vehicles, three of which were smashed up and I could see people still in the vehicles. Flames were coming from a small truck, causing the smoke. Another fire truck, 'ENGINE 51' and Ambulance '61' were off to the left; their crews were pinned down, too.

1:41 P.M.

We got out of Beast and headed over to 'SQUAD 3'.

We were met by a Lieutenant, with 'SQUAD 3' on his helmet and 'RESCUE SQUAD' on his right arm.

"Can you help? We must get to those people, before somebody dies!" The Lieutenant yelled, over the gunfire.

The gunmen were in amongst the trees and were not readily visible.

"We'll do what we can!" I yelled back.

"Battle Guy, let's get that Officer to safety!" I ordered.

I ran forward to the wounded Officer. He had been hit in the left arm, two shots. Battle Guy and I dragged him into the shelter of 'SQUAD 3' and left him with the Firefighters, who started on first aid.

Battle Guy and I grabbed a Type III shield each, from Beast and started approaching the crashed vehicles. From there, we could identify the closest gun men and started firing single, aimed shots hoping to dissuade them from their actions.

1:53 P.M.

We could have done with a sniper rifle, right now. Maybe I'll get Mindy to buy me one, but right now we needed to come up with a plan.

I ran back to the Lieutenant.

"Would it help for us to escort your guys over to the cars?" I shouted.

"The cars would shield us, while we check on the accident victims!" The Lieutenant replied, loudly.

I had a sudden thought.

"Could your hoses create a fog, to cover everybody?" I asked.

The Lieutenant didn't immediately respond, but started talking into his radio and within less than ten minutes, two streams of water fog were arcing across the street, causing a dense mist. All of the Firefighters and the Paramedics rushed forwards. One team of Firefighters started to extinguish the flames, while the Paramedics and members of 'SQUAD 3' started attending to the injured drivers.

The following takes place between 2:00 P.M. and 3:00 P.M.

Chicago

2:02 P.M.

Battle Guy and I, moved forward, shields up and we got very wet.

We advanced through the mist and as we became visible, started to receive impacts on our armour and shields. We went back to aimed shots, taking out two gunmen and advancing forward.

2:22 P.M.

There were still five gunmen left.

At least, while they were targeting Battle Guy and me, they weren't targeting the Firefighters and Paramedics. The gunmen started to move up and two fell to shots from Battle Guy, the remaining three gunmen started to run, but we cut them down with aimed shots. We then checked each gunman, to make sure they were dead, before we headed back towards Beast.

I spotted the Lieutenant and headed over to him.

"All clear, Lieutenant! You can cut the fog!" I called.

"Thanks!" The Lieutenant replied, before speaking into his radio and within a minute the water fog ceased.

2:56 P.M.

"You guys were great, thanks!" The Lieutenant exclaimed, once things were under control.

"Glad we could help!" I replied.

The following takes place between 3:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M.

Safehouse A

Chicago

3:40 P.M.

It felt great to back at the safehouse.

We could both get out of our combat suits and have a shower.

"That was a fun morning!" Abby said, once we settled down with a coffee, in the kitchen.

"Not funny, Abby!" Marty responded, with a grimace.

Once coffee was out of the way, Marty and I restocked Beast with ammunition and replaced the fired G36C assault rifles, with fresh ones. I sat down to clean both used assault rifles, while Marty examined the damage to Beast.

The following takes place between 4:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

4:50 P.M.

All the weapons were cleaned and Beast was reloaded.

The damage to Beast's bodywork was purely cosmetic. For now, Marty filled the bullet holes and removed any rough edges. They would require a proper repair job later. The damage to the glazing however was permanent. The two, main, side windows, would need to be replaced.

Mindy goes away for a few days and we trash Beast! But then again, it was designed for exactly that situation and performed perfectly.

The following takes place between 5:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

5:22 P.M.

The three of us sat down to dinner and I had to sit through Marty's jokes, with a few of Abby's thrown in.

I will admit that some of Marty's jokes tended to be a just little bit *too* disgusting, for a thirteen year-old girl! But Abby enjoyed them and reminded us that she was *almost* fourteen. This also reminded me to ask when Chloe's birthday was and Abby told us. Marty made a note, so that we wouldn't forget and miss it!

After dinner, I left Marty and Abby chatting about some computer related things, while I sat down with Sophia.

You might have thought it strange that I was sitting down and talking to a large dog, that liked nothing better than to rip a man's testicles off! You might be right, but talking to a dog is slightly less creepy, than talking to yourself. As a bonus the dog generally didn't argue with you! Besides I'm used to talking with a complete bitch, but as she is in New York... Sophia enjoys the interaction, I think...

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

6:43 P.M.

Sophia had had enough and wandered off downstairs to have a snooze.

I gave up trying to work out what that lunatic Ralph D'Amico would do next! I followed Sophia downstairs and took out my frustrations by training.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

8:13 P.M.

With my frustrations suitably eradicated, I went to see what Marty and Abby were up to.

They were wading through mounds of paper and checking things off a computer screen.

"You two enjoying yourselves?" I asked.

"I think so, most of this shit is encrypted. You bored Sophia out of her mind, yet?" Marty asked, with a chuckle.

"Ages ago; been training," I replied, with a scowl.

"Yeah, I can tell, Jeez!" Abby said. "You need a shower!"

"Okay hint taken!" I laughed.

I went to grab a shower.

8:38 P.M.

I thought that Abby was on to something, but I'm not sure what.

We had a ton of crap to sift through and a lot of it was encrypted, Abby had a brilliant analytical mind and was able to find patterns quite quickly. I enjoyed working with her and we made a good team, but I would admit that she got through that stuff quicker than I would, too.

Abby had found a document in the watchdog's email, from that phone that Chloe had seized. It referred to an event that was due to happen soon. So far we had no idea in what City or when this 'event' would take place. Whatever it was, it involved a lot of people, nearly two dozen.

I explained what we had found to Dave, who agreed that this might be important.

"Keep pursuing it, it's all we've got at the moment, guys and if it can help the girls, we need it. Well Done!" Dave said, smiling.

The following takes place between 9:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

9:29 P.M.

"Okay, I think it's an attack against the Police," Marty confirmed.

"CPD or NYPD?" I asked.

"No idea yet."

"Keep on it," Dave said.

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

10:43 P.M.

"Anything else, guys?" I asked, looking into the briefing room.

Both Marty and Abby were shattered and looked it.

"Not yet, we've almost decrypted all the data; we'll know soon," Abby said, turning back to the computer screen.

The following takes place between 11:00 P.M. and Midnight

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

11:32 P.M.

"Got it! Marty am I reading this correctly?" Abby asked, tiredly.

"It looks like something's building in New York, near Central Park. That fucking bastard is flexing his muscles!" I said. "Call it in to the girls!"

I looked at Dave.

"The girls are in for a world of hurt, unless they can stop this," I said, sadly, looking at Dave's pained expression.

11:42 P.M.

I grabbed my cell and dialed Mindy.

"What?" The voice growled.

"Hey, growly girl!" I laughed.

"Oh, it's you Abby! What's up?" Mindy asked, sounding a bit tired.

"Something is brewing in Central Park. You girls wanna investigate? You might need your assault rifles!" I explained.

"How the hell, would you know what's happening in Central Park?" Mindy asked, incredulously.

"As my hero, Alec Hardison, says: '*Age of the geek, baby!*'" I replied. Geeks rule!

"Funny! Send us what you have and I'll apply *leverage* to get grumpy out of bed!" Mindy responded and hung up the cell.

I assumed that 'grumpy' would be Chloe! Oh dear!

I rapidly sent everything I had to Mindy via email and then got ready to head home.

You are advised to read 'Feral, Chapter 12 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 3' next...

***Chapter 61*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 4**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 13 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 4', but you should read this chapter first...

***The next day
Thursday***

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

0:54 A.M.

The Fusion number rang.

Am I never gonna get a fucking night's sleep!

"Hi, Kick-Ass?" It was Fellowes and he sounded rattled.

"What's up?" I asked, guardedly.

"I think I'm in trouble... I'm being followed... I just left shift and I was heading home. I called my wife and there's a strange car, down the street! I need help Kick-Ass!"

"Head for Marquette Park and keep circling. I'll find you," I snarled, cutting the connection.

"Marty!" I bellowed, running downstairs, to the armoury.

The following takes place between 1:00 A.M. and 2:00 A.M.

***Marquette Park
Chicago***

1:18 A.M.

My cell rang.

"Stop the car!" Kick-Ass ordered.

I looked around and pulled over. The vehicle following me, was about forty yards back and it pulled over, but on the other side of the road. I watched, fear growing inside me. Then I saw more vehicle lights and a large motorcycle pulled up, beside the car that was tailing me.

1:20 A.M.

I rammed my fist through the glass and into the cunts face!

The second cunt, tried to grab for his gun, but the window on the other side shattered and a pistol was rammed into his face.

"Too, slow!" Battle Guy snarled.

"Let's go!" I ordered, accelerating towards Fellowes.

Battle Guy ran back and jumped into Beast.

I pulled up and Fellowes lowered his window.

"Lock-up and get into Beast!"

Fellowes did as he was told and got in beside Battle Guy, as soon as he pulled up.

The following takes place between 2:00 A.M. and 3:00 A.M.

***The Home of Sam Fellowes
Chicago***

2:08 A.M.

Sam Fellowes had a wife and a son, who was eleven.

We pulled up, without lights, a hundred yards short of his house. Fellowes had called his wife and she was ready to leave, having packed one bag, with just the essentials. I sized up the SUV that was parked about ten yards from the house. I could make out four large men, inside. Further up the street was another, identical, SUV that carried another four men.

Okay, eight men, two groups. Damn! Mindy was a lot better at this!

"Battle Guy, I'm gonna try the 'in your face' Hit Girl approach; I'm gonna grab a G36C and hose them both down. While they're distracted, get the wife and kid. Use Beast as protection," I ordered.

"Sounds like a plan!" Battle Guy agreed, although I don't think Fellowes was so sure.

I grabbed an assault rifle, loaded it and pulled back the cocking handle. I then walked down the sidewalk, leaving the Fat Boy parked behind somebody's SUV. I managed to get to within twenty yards, before I was spotted. The men were armed with UZI machine pistols and sprayed 9-millimetre rounds at me, which would not penetrate my armour. I fired back and emptied two magazines into the first SUV, which was not armoured; unlike Beast, which pulled forward and onto the sidewalk outside Fellowes house.

Fellowes ran inside, grabbed his wife and son, then returned to Beast, pushing them into the back seat. Battle Guy floored it and left the area, once Fellowes was in. As soon as he had gone, I emptied another magazine into the far SUV, before running back to the Fat Boy and accelerating after Beast.

The following takes place between 3:00 A.M. and 4:00 A.M.

***South Cottage Grove
Chicago***

3:18 A.M.

We pulled up a block away from the apartment block, with the safehouses.

Battle Guy remained in the SUV, as lookout and to keep an eye on the Fat Boy.

I showed Fellowes, his wife, Sharon and his son Cameron, up to an apartment on the third floor. It was newly completed and had two bedrooms. The apartment was part furnished, with a double bed in one bedroom and a single bed in the other. The living room had just a couch. The kitchen had a table with four chairs and there was an electric kettle, microwave and stove. There was also a basic selection of mugs, plates and bowls, including cutlery. Unfortunately there was no food!

"I'll drop back later, with some supplies. Stay here and don't contact anybody. Don't leave the apartment. Turn off your cells, remove the batteries. Here is a new phone. Our number is on it," I said. "I'll call you later. Now get some rest,"

"Thank you," Sam Fellowes said, giving his wife and son a hug.

3:50 A.M.

As I drove back towards Safehouse A, I had a disturbing thought.

"Battle Guy, call Murphy! If they got to Fellowes, then they might have got to him!" I called.

The following takes place between 4:00 A.M. and 5:00 A.M.

***The Home of Paul Murphy
Chicago***

4:24 A.M.

We pulled up twenty yards away from the home of Paul Murphy.

Everything seemed normal. No sign of SUVs and there was a car in the driveway.

False alarm... Almost!

There was a loud explosion and the front of Murphy's house, just bulged out, before flames roared up the structure.

Fuck!

I ran towards the house, with Battle Guy close behind. I could hear screams and one of the screams was a child. I ran harder.

Were these suits fireproof? I couldn't remember!

I smashed through the side door and into the property. Damn it was hot, my mask filtered out some of the smoke, but I still kept my head low, below the smoke.

"Anybody here?" I yelled.

"Here!" I heard Murphy's voice.

I headed towards the rear of the house and found Murphy on the floor, of what had once been a kitchen. He was bleeding and his wife was trying to staunch it. A young boy of ten or eleven, was sitting on the floor crying.

"Kick-Ass, meet Rachel and Brad," Murphy smiled, through the pain.

"Brad, come with me," I said, as I pulled out a field dressing and passed it to Rachel.

"Thanks," Rachel said, as she ripped open the dressing and wrapped it around the wound, tightly.

I took Brad outside and put him into Beast, then I went back for Murphy and his wife.

With the help of Battle Guy, I managed to get Murphy into Beast, with his wife and son.

The following takes place between 5:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.

***South Cottage Grove
Chicago***

5:12 A.M.

We pulled up a block away from the apartment block, with the safehouses, as before.

Battle Guy remained in the SUV, as before.

I called Fellowes down and he helped me carry Murphy up to the apartment, next door to the Fellowes family.

"That wound is bad," Fellowes said, looking at hit.

"I'll get a Doc," I said.

"I'll stay with Paul. Rachel, take Brad next door," Fellowes suggested.

I headed upstairs to Safehouse C, which was on the fourth floor. The apartment was also complete and had a reinforced door and walls.

I pulled out my cell and sent a text. My cell rang two minutes later.

"Hello?" I said.

"This is Medic!"

"Medic, this is Kick-Ass. We need you at South Cottage Grove, apartment 302. We have a cop in hiding and he's wounded bad," I advised.

"I'm on my way!" Medic responded.

I grabbed some coffee and long life milk, that we stored there and took them downstairs and gave them to Sharon Fellowes. I also handed one of the pre-packed medical cases to Fellowes, ready for the Doc's arrival.

I knew it would take almost fifty minutes for her to arrive, so I sent Battle Guy back to Safehouse A, while I waited here.

Battle Guy left after he had thrown a cover over the Fat Boy, for now.

The following takes place between 6:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M.

***South Cottage Grove
Chicago***

6:00 A.M.

Dr Bennett arrived at apartment 302.

I remained with her, as a guard. She expertly cleaned up Murphy and dressed the wound, which had been caused by failing masonry. It seemed that there would be no permanent damage.

6:35 A.M.

Dr Bennett left, saying that she would return tomorrow morning, to check on the wound.

We both headed up to the safehouse, upstairs.

"Thanks Doc," I said, pulling off my mask.

"Not a problem. You heard from New York?" Dr Bennett asked.

"Not since last night. They were both fine then, just exhausted," I said.

"As are you, Dave. You like like hell!" Dr Bennett commented.

"Nothing I can do about that! Shit keeps happening first thing in the damn morning!" I grimaced.

"You are missing Mindy, too. I can tell. I miss Chloe and strangely, so does Curtis! Considering how badly Chloe treats that kid, it's a surprise he still loves and cares for her, like he does!"

"Yeah, Curtis does tend to get the raw deal!" I laughed. "And yes, I miss Mindy, enormously."

The following takes place between 7:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M.

***Safehouse C
Chicago***

7:10 A.M.

Dr Bennett left, to go home and I took the opportunity to grab a shower and something to eat from the freezer.

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

8:13 A.M.

I was back at Safehouse A and Marty was asleep. Lucky for him!

I was unable to sleep, so I started to read through the hundreds of pages that Marty had printed out, concerning the cell phone that Mindy had sent over.

The following takes place between 9:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

9:37 A.M.

"Hey, Dave!"

I heard my name and dragged myself awake. I found myself on the couch, surrounded by paper. I must have fallen asleep!

"Hey, you okay?" Marty asked.

"I think so, yeah," I replied.

"I'm hungry, you want breakfast?" Marty asked.

"Definitely, I'm starving and I'm sure Sophia is too!" I replied, looking down at Sophia, who was fast asleep on the floor, I gave her a little nudge and she came awake, reluctantly.

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

10:42 A.M.

The breakfast woke me up, properly!

I really needed the energy and so did Marty. It really was strange seeing a 'thin' Marty, instead of the usual 'large' version! Marty had also changed his eating habits and was now eating healthier foods that fitted in with his new lifestyle.

Suddenly I bolted up straight. Damn! I'd forgotten all about Mindy and Chloe! They went out last night to Central Park, to fight. I couldn't believe that I had forgotten all about them; I must be more tired than I had thought!

I picked up my cell, to call Mindy, when it rang. It was Jack Bay.

He was checking in to see if I knew anything about Murphy and Fellowes, as they had both vanished with their families and there was obvious evidence of attacks on their homes! I advised him that we had placed them into safe accommodation, but we would be keeping the location secret, for now.

Jack agreed and said thanks.

The following takes place between 11:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

11:12 A.M.

I called Mindy and checked that she and Chloe were okay, before telling her about this morning's fun and games. Mindy was very worried about this escalation, directly against those that supported Fusion. She then explained about Central Park. D'Amico must be pissed about that!

However, I agreed about D'Amico possibly giving us all the run around.

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. and 1:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

Voight had provided is with Arkady Orlov's phone and computer, after they had been through them, of course.

Marty and Abby were busy going through them; it looked to be a race between our geeks and the CPD's geeks!

12:52 P.M.

I provided Marty and Abby with a constant stream of food and drink, to keep them going. Marty lived on coffee and Abby enjoyed energy drinks. I had to make myself useful somehow. Sophia made herself useful, by keeping Marty's bed warm.

That dog can be really lazy at times!

The following takes place between 1:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

Progress was slow, but at least progress was being made.

I was starting to get nervous about everything. We had to keep one step ahead of D'Amico, but so far we were just reacting to him. He had scored too many hits and killed too many people, but we had barely scratched his organisation. I felt like we were building up to something big, at least if we could just have a major success, to boost moral and start the ball rolling towards D'Amico's down fall.

We were all feeling the effects from lack of sleep and too much caffeine. But we had no choice and so far no major arguments had started. Marty's humour helped on that side. I felt like a spare part, at the moment; I could do nothing until Marty and Abby, or Voight, found something.

It was really frustrating! I tried not to think about the girls in New York, as that just depressed me!

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

6:52 P.M.

I had just got off the phone with Chloe.

I hoped Mindy was gonna behave and not do anything stupid. She was pushing herself, way too hard, but that's just the way she worked. Please be careful Mindy!

I looked down at Sophia; she was missing Mindy, too.

The following takes place between 7:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

7:12 P.M.

I decided to go out; I needed to think!

I started to gear up.

"Where do you think, you're going?" Marty asked.

"Out, I need time to think!"

"You can't go out alone! Not when things are like they are!" Marty said.

"I can handle myself!"

"Against twenty cunts?" Marty queried.

"Probably," I replied, rather weakly. Marty was right, I wasn't thinking. I'm starting to make mistakes, just like I warned Chloe about, with Mindy!

"Sorry Marty, I wasn't thinking!"

"You're exhausted, we all are; I'll come with you. Abby can monitor us," Marty said. "I could do with a change of scene!"

7:33 P.M.

"You still with us Hal?" I called.

"Oh yeah, Eisenhower and I have your backs!" Hal replied.

"Eisenhower?" I asked, looking at Battle Guy, who just shrugged.

"Say hello, Eisenhower!" Hal said.

Battle Guy and I both heard a bark, over the comms!

"Eisenhower has comms now?" Battle Guy asked.

"Oh yeah!" Hal replied, with a laugh.

"That girl is nuts!" I said to Battle Guy.

"We heard that!"

I had to laugh; Abby was a great addition to the team. I would need to speak to Mindy, about making her a full member of Fusion.

7:52 P.M.

"Hey! Over there!" I said, pointing across the street and making a U-turn, before roaring down an alley and slamming on the brakes.

In front of us were three men, holding two more men at gunpoint.

Battle Guy moved over to the driver's seat, while I jumped out. I wanted a fight.

"You fuckers are in the wrong fucking place!" I snarled.

"You don't run this town Kick-Ass; D'Amico runs this town, now," Dead man walking, number one said.

"That fucking runt!" I snarled. "Keep fucking dreaming, cunts!"

I drew both Ko-Wakizashi and moved forward. Three pistols were fired in my direction, I ignored the rounds and advanced, slashing at two wrists and severing two hands. The third man dropped with both Ko-Wakizashi blades in his chest. I was pissed.

"You two, speak now, or you're next! Do you work for D'Amico?"

"God no, I swear!" Both men said, honestly.

"Go!"

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

8:02 P.M.

I turned and found my way barred by two more men.

"D'Amico?" I asked.

They both nodded and one raised a baseball bat, the other a large metal bar.

I stowed the swords and drew my batons. Back to basics!

Battle Guy left Beast and stood beside me, with a Type III shield on his left arm and a riot baton, in his right hand.

The cunts waded in first, Battle Guy and I beat off each attack and forced them back in to the street, where we started to attract a crowd.

I could hear people shouting and cheering.

'Go Kick-Ass!', 'Down with D'Amico!' and 'Fuck D'Amico!'.

This felt good, back to the old-school stuff, no firearms, just the old-fashioned Kick-Ass of old!

"They don't like you!" I snarled to the ape, I was fighting. "And neither do I!"

I was fighting the man, with the metal bar. Battle Guy had the other guy and was doing pretty well, too. Every time the man swung at Battle Guy, his bat was deflected by the shield, followed by a hit from the baton. I was enjoying the fight, with my batons, as I hadn't used them properly in quite a while.

8:12 P.M.

This fight should have been over minutes ago, but I was having too much fun and so was Battle Guy; for him this was good training. For me, this was looking back to the beginnings of Kick-Ass; no fancy firearms, just me and my batons.

"Okay, guys, workout over!" I called over comms.

"Copy that Kick-Ass," Battle Guy responded.

We then both brought our weapons down and put the two men out of their misery. There was cheering around us and two Police Officers came forward to arrest the two watchdogs, ignoring us both, apart from a brief smile and a nod. These two cunts would live; hopefully Voight could get something out of them.

8:44 P.M.

We enjoyed the mini patrol and stopped at a McDonald's for a burger, before heading back to the safehouse.

It had been one hell of a day, but at least we had finished off by putting some of D'Amico's guys out of action!

The following takes place between 9:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

9:55 P.M.

I got out of the shower and headed downstairs.

Abby had gone home and Marty was going through some last bits of paper work.

"I'm gonna go get some sleep, before any more shit kicks off!" I said.

"I'll be right behind you! Sophia's already asleep," Marty said, pointing at the couch.

*You are advised to read '**Feral, Chapter 13 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 4**' next...*

***Chapter 62*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 5**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 14 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 5', which should be read first...

The next day

Friday

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 A.M.

I received a text from Mindy advising that Safehouse A in New York was gone!

I called her and got her to explain what the hell had happened.

To say that I was shocked, was an understatement! But I was glad that they are all okay, including the boy. I was actually looking forward to meeting this kid. He gets himself into almost as much shit as I do! Or should I say did?

The following takes place between 7:00 A.M. to 8:00 A.M.

Safehouse A

Chicago

7:40 A.M.

I woke up feeling really sore. I had got to that freaky stage where I couldn't sleep, I ended up pacing around the house and talking to Sophia, who seemed to enjoy following me around! What the hell I was talking to her about, I really didn't know and Sophia wouldn't tell me.

I had spent time thinking and had finally come to a decision. It was a decision that Mindy may not agree with, but it was important and we needed more support. I had no idea if she would respond positively to my request, or not. In fact I had not talked to her much, since Mindy had attacked her.

I woke Marty up and told him that I was heading back to the house, with Sophia, to meet somebody.

He said good luck and went back to sleep!

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M.

West Ridge

Chicago

8:37 A.M.

I made the call and arranged for her to come to the house, at around ten that morning.

I grabbed a shower and had breakfast. Then I just sat about and working out what I was going to say to her.

Finally I gave up and took Sophia for a walk.

The following takes place between 9:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

The Park

Chicago

9:37 A.M.

Dr Bennett called to say that she had visited Murphy and checked on his wounds. She had redressed them and he was healing fine. Both families were in good spirits and appeared to be coping well with their forced move.

West Ridge

Chicago

9:45 A.M.

We returned from the walk. It was a good distraction and Sophia enjoyed herself. This week she had spent too many hours cooped up in the safehouse.

I was nervous, I had no idea why.

Maybe because my partner tried to kill her! But that wasn't exactly true; my partner does not *try* to kill people, she just kills them, there is no try!

The following takes place between 10:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

***West Ridge
Chicago***

10:12 A.M.

"Hi Kim, thanks for coming!" I said, carefully.

"I'm glad you let me come Dave," Kim replied, with a smile.

"I never expected to hear from you again, considering..." I let it hang.

"Dave, I don't hold it against Mindy. She apologised, so that's that, time to move on!" Kim said.

"Will you join us, we need more hands and guns; it may be dangerous and you may come up against people you know!" I said.

"I'd love to help. I need to avenge my ex-colleagues that died at District 21! I can handle myself," Kim replied.

"You know a guy called Voight?" I asked.

I saw Kim sit up and nod her head.

"Yes, I know Voight, why?"

"We're working with him and his team," I said.

"I can manage, but I might need some kit, my old stuff was really crap!" Kim said, grimly.

"You can borrow some of Mindy's combats and a vest. We can supply you with firearms. Use your existing mask and spear," I suggested.

"Thanks Dave," Kim replied, enthusiastically.

"It's only temporary; Hit Girl and Shadow would need to approve you properly," I explained.

"No problem, I won't let you down; not again!"

The following takes place between 11:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

I took Kim down to Safehouse A and got her kitted out.

I also took the time to check her out on the G36C and a Glock 17.

Marty was very pleased to see Kim and they spent quite a lot of time chatting. Kim seemed to like Marty's brand of humour.

Mind you, Marty did kinda save Kim's life during the week of hell!

The following takes place between 12:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

Kim stayed with us and insisted on learning the weapons perfectly.

I also started training her in some key defensive movements. Kim had been taught a lot of defensive moves in the Chicago PD, so she had a good basis to build on, plus she was very flexible. Marty had noticed and commented on that, not me!

Abby joined in, as she seemed serious about learning to defend herself. Plus it was kinda funny watching her do some of the moves! Abby was very proficient with her pistol, which was good to see.

The following takes place between 3:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

The rest of the afternoon was spent resting, as we were all knackered. Kim went home.

I had tried to call Mindy, but had got no response. I assumed that she was busy and hopefully not doing anything stupid!

The following takes place between 7:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

7:32 P.M.

Marty, Abby and I finished off our evening meal.

We all hoped to get some rest tonight. I was very impressed by Abby's stamina and told her so. Marty joked that it would come in handy, when she got 'involved' with a boy. Abby then threatened him with a virus in his comms kit and Marty backed down fast!

My cell rang and I hoped it was my Mindy, but no; it was Voight.

"I have a man that I am sure you'd like to meet!" Voight said. "I'll text you the address."

"You got it!" I snarled, hanging up.

"Back to business, guys!"

There was silence.

"Well, don't all get excited at once!" I laughed. "Marty we have an interrogation!"

Abby went through to prepare the comms, while I got changed. Then I had a thought.

"You coming Sophia?"

Two barks were my answer, followed by Sophia rocketing into the armoury.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

***Voight's Warehouse
Chicago***

8:02 P.M.

We pulled up inside the warehouse and the roller shutter was brought down, behind us.

Battle Guy and I got out, then I let Eisenhower out.

In front of me was, I assumed, Voight, another man and Matthews.

"Kick-Ass, Battle Guy, this is Olinsky and Voight," Matthews said. "And this must be the intrepid Eisenhower!"

Eisenhower looked up at Matthews, then over to Voight and Olinsky, before she wagged her tail and barking twice.

"She won't eat any of you," I advised.

"Good to know!" Olinsky laughed.

"You have a client?" I asked, getting back to business.

8:24 P.M.

The man was strapped to a chair, which in turn was bolted to the floor.

"Time for some Q and A!" Olinsky said, cheerfully, ripping off the man's gag.

"Look I'd like to help you if I could, but I can't!" The man said.

"You see that!" Olinsky said, waving his fist in the man's face, before hitting him across the face with it.

"Fuck!" The man screamed.

"Smarts, doesn't it, getting slammed in the nose, fucks you all up. Get that pain shooting through your brain and your eyes fill up with water. It 'aint any kind of fun!" Olinsky said, conversationally, before looking over to me.

I walked over and the man tried to push back, away from me.

"Now!" I growled. "This can go easy, or it can go hard!"

"You have to arrest me, I have rights!" The man squealed.

"Sorry! We aren't the Police!" Matthews said, walking away and out of sight

"Neither are we!" Voight said, walking off with Olinsky and also vanishing out of sight.

I had to smile at them; they were like Marcus, *plausible deniability!*

8:30 P.M.

"Bartolemeo, I presume."

"I have no idea, what you are talking about. I want a lawyer!"

I pulled out my Glock and pressed the muzzle into the back of his hand. The man squirmed and tried to pull his hand away.

"You don't get it, do you? There *is* no lawyer! There *is* no Police! Just *me!*" I growled.

"Okay, I am Bartolemeo! Please..." Bartolemeo begged.

"Wimpy little bastard, aren't you?" Battle Guy commented.

"You've caused a lot of problems, men have died, *good men!*" I snarled, punching the man across the face, causing blood and a tooth to fly across the concrete floor. I was feeling no emotion, except hatred, towards this man. He worked for D'Amico, he deserved nothing!

"You are not from around here, are you?" I commented, reading a file that the Chicago PD had hastily assembled on

Bartolemeo.

"I'm allowed to travel, it's a free fucking country!" Bartolemeo yelled, through his pain.

"Not for scum like you!" I replied.

"Now... Simple question... Who is pulling your strings?"

"As if I'm gonna answer that question! I tell you I'm dead!"

I already knew the answer, but someone once said: '*Don't ask a question, you don't know the answer to*'.

I kicked the man in the kidney.

"You fucking bastard!" Bartolemeo yelled, once he was able.

"Eisenhower! Schwanz!" I called.

The man screamed, as his manhood was chomped on.

"Fair exchange... Your dick, for a little information!" I growled.

"Fucking ouch!" Olinsky laughed, reappearing. "Remind me never to piss you off, when that dog's around!"

I got approving grimaces from Matthews and Voight, who had also reappeared.

8:57 P.M.

He caved, much to Eisenhower's displeasure!

Olinsky and Voight made notes, plenty of notes.

The following takes place between 9:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

***Suspected D'Amico Headquarters
Chicago***

9:47 P.M.

We gathered near to the building.

Battle Guy and I were going in on the first floor, via the main entrance. A four-man SWAT team, was going onto the second floor, via a fire escape. The final four-man SWAT team, would enter via the rear, on the first floor.

Voight and his team would be ready to mop up.

Tonight, I was taking a page out of Hit Girl's assault guide and I was *not* going to be subtle. No sneaking in; I had brought a new toy. Everybody in the building had been identified as an armed watchdog, there would be no innocents in the way.

The building had a pair of plate glass doors, *shame*, they were gonna need some more glass.

9:58 P.M.

I fired two breaching rounds from the Remington Model 870 shotgun, which shattered the glass doors and I headed in, before all of the glass had hit the ground. Two men stood up from behind the reception desk, reaching for their pistols, seconds later both men fell back down again, with large wounds from my shotgun. Only the first two rounds, in the magazine had been breaching rounds!

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M.

***Suspected D'Amico Headquarters
Chicago***

We came around another corner and found three more watchdogs, Battle Guy dropped two with His G36C and I dropped the final one, with the shotgun. We met up with the first floor SWAT team, who had cleared the rest of the floor, successfully and without injury. We advanced towards the staircase and proceeded up, as we could hear gun fire above us.

At the top of the stairs we found the other SWAT team, engaging half a dozen watchdogs. I slung the shotgun and readied my G36C, Battle Guy already had his up and firing.

10:09 P.M.

Facing ten weapons, the watchdogs didn't stand a chance and were soon lying dead or dying.

None of the SWAT team were injured and neither were any of Fusion. Voight and his team moved in and started looking for intelligence.

Voight and I had a quiet chat, this had been far too easy. Not even a dozen watchdogs and not much intelligence either!

It didn't feel right, we both agreed on that.

You are advised to read 'Feral, Chapter 15 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 6' next...

***Chapter 63*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 6**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 15/16/17 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 6', which should be read first...

***The next day
Saturday***

The following takes place between Midnight and 1:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

0:30 A.M.

We finally arrived back at the safehouse.

Tonight had been, interesting!

There had been a result, but it seemed not to be the result we had been hoping for. Voight and I had both agreed that D'Amico was perfectly capable of conning us. D'Amico was a complex adversary, who was skilled at planning and scheming.

I would not put it past him to sacrifice watchdogs just to wear us down.

The following takes place between 5:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M.

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

5:35 A.M.

I woke up with a start.

I still felt like crap, my sleep deficit was not going away. All my muscles ached.

Sophia looked over at me and whined.

"Fancy a jog, girl!" I asked and got a muted 'woof', in answer, as Sophia got up and stretched.

The following takes place between 6:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M.

***The Park
Chicago***

I finished my jog around the park, I was exhausted and so was Sophia.

However we were both happy, the jog felt good.

I collapsed onto a chair, in the kitchen, while Sophia went and wolfed down a gallon of water, from her bowl.

Marty passed me an energy drink and a coffee.

"You two looked to have enjoyed yourselves!" Marty commented.

"I needed to unwind and apparently so did Sophia. Being a dog *and* a doggie Super Hero, seems to be hard work!"

The following takes place between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

8:05 P.M.

Marty and I finished breakfast and I grabbed a shower.

Abby arrived, along with Kim. They both started training on the mat, practising the moves that I had taught them both.

I took the opportunity to go shopping, as we were getting rather low on decent food. The safehouse had stocks of frozen and dried food, for emergencies, but we weren't there yet, so we needed some good, fresh food.

Dr Bennett had provided the necessary supplies for Murphy and Fellowes, to keep them going.

The following takes place between 9:00 A.M. and 12:00 P.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

The rest of the morning was spent weapons training.

I instructed Marty, Kim and Abby, on various weapons that Mindy had previously taught me how to use. We even managed some target practice! Abby was very keen to learn, even though she never expected to use any of the weapons.

The following takes place between 1:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

After lunch, we all sat down to go through the latest emails from Voight.

There was a lot of information and we hoped some of it might lead to more D'Amico facilities.

The following takes place between 5:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

5:05 P.M.

I was looking forward to a peaceful evening.

I was exhausted and so were Marty and Abby.

Kim was with us and the four of us sat down to enjoy an early evening meal and chat together, with Marty inserting jokes periodically.

The following takes place between 6:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M.

Safehouse A
Chicago

6:18 P.M.

My cell rang; it was the Fusion divert.

"Go!" I snarled.

"It's Voight! As we thought, we've been fucking had! That bastard played us!" Voight growled, angrily.

"Explain!"

"Bartolemeo and the Chicago headquarters? Well that was all a fucking screen. Now, Bartolemeo must have slipped up, as he gave us information that led us to the real HQ. I also believe that Bartolemeo was in the dark about this, obviously D'Amico didn't trust the rat! We also dug through that stuff your partner obtained in New York. We've pinpointed the HQ, but it won't be easy to assault, plus I think they might be on to us; we're gonna have to move in soon! I'll send the address, get here as soon as you can," Voight explained.

"We'll be there as soon as we can!" I replied.

"Marty, Kim, gear up!" I yelled, running to the armoury.

"What's up?" Marty, Abby and Kim asked.

I explained Voight's call and Abby got her systems ready, while Marty, Kim and I geared up.

The following takes place between 7:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M.

7:43 P.M.

I slammed on the brakes and Beast skidded to a halt.

Gunfire was all around us. I could see SWAT and CPD, exchanging fire with watchdogs. I saw Voight behind a black SUV, reloading his pistol. Olinsky had an AR-15 and was taking aimed shots at the watchdogs defending the building.

Battle Guy, Hawk and I, got out and readied our weapons. We were all carrying the G36C. I had given Hawk a crash course, yesterday afternoon, in using the G36C. I went around to the back of Beast and pulled out my H&K 121 and loaded a two-hundred round belt and slung another belt in a pouch.

"Hal, Fusion is engaging!" I called.

"Hal copies, Fusion engaging!"

"Hal is much nicer to talk to than Battle Guy!" I commented.

"Thanks asshole!" Battle Guy replied, with a chuckle.

I ran over towards Voight, receiving a few impacts on my armour. I raised the 121 and let loose a short burst, the heavy rounds causing a lot of heads to turn, as they impacted on the building and sent watchdogs scurrying for cover. This gave the CPD and SWAT time to regroup.

"Welcome! You brought the heavy stuff, I see!" Voight commented.

"I do like to kick-ass"! I replied and Olinsky laughed.

7:51 P.M.

We opened fire again. The resistance here was definitely stiffer than last night's effort.

The following takes place between 8:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

8:02 P.M.

We managed to force the watchdogs back and into the main building.

The main door was glass and had already been shattered. The watchdogs were taking cover inside and on either side of the door, including behind the reception desk.

"Any innocents in there?" I asked Voight.

"None!"

"Try one of these," I suggested, throwing him a hand grenade. "On one!"

"That's what I'm talking about!" Voight said, with a big grin.

"Three, two, one! Fire in the hole!" I called, pulling the pin and throwing the grenade, Voight did the same and we both ducked behind a wall.

A few seconds later there were two explosions, plus some screams.

Voight and I leapt up, pouring rounds into the building, followed by Olinsky, Hawk and Battle Guy.

8:22 P.M.

We were pinned down on the second floor, at the top of the stairs.

I had the H&K 121 on it's bi-pod and was sending short bursts towards a barricade, set up by the watchdogs. Thankfully these watchdogs, were not expecting this kind of heavy calibre round and quite a few dropped as bullets went straight through their defences. Voight was using my G36C and getting kills. He seemed to enjoy it, too! But I knew that he had lost colleagues over this past week and wanted blood.

SWAT were at another staircase and were forcing their way through and would come up behind these watchdogs and they knew it, backing down another corridor, deeper into the building. There was *no* escape, as the building was completely surrounded. Voight's team was around the perimeter, with many other very angry cops.

8:48 P.M.

We had kicked down the barricade and joined up with SWAT. Hawk and Battle Guy were behind me; both of them using me and my heavier armour as cover. I noticed that Hawk kept giving Voight quick looks and I knew why. Voight seemed to be ignoring her, completely. The watchdogs moved back, covering their retreat, but losing men all the same.

We were relentless in our pursuit.

The following takes place between 9:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.

9:02 P.M.

We were moving through narrow corridors, from a junction.

SWAT had split off into two teams and gone left and right, we kept going straight ahead.

A dozen yards down the corridor, there was a group of watchdogs and they were barricaded behind a large photocopier, which was proving quite effective. I had used up all the ammunition for the H&K 121, so I left it in a doorway and sent Battle Guy back, for more ammo, while I started shooting with my G36C, as Voight was now using an AR-15 dropped by a watchdog and using salvaged magazines.

9:09 P.M.

Voight took a pair of rounds in his vest and was thrown backwards. Hawk was distracted by another watchdog, who suddenly appeared out of a doorway, to her left. I moved back towards Voight and I as I did so, I fell backwards over a dead body. The two watchdogs came out from behind their shelter and both advanced towards me, with their pistols up. I tried to bring the G36C to bear, but I wasn't going to be fast enough.

9:12 P.M.

Suddenly, I heard four rapid shots and both watchdogs fell, with two shots each, in the head.

A gloved hand reached down and pulled me up; I turned to face this new shooter and come face to face with Medic, she was wearing black combats, a combat vest and a black mask, similar to Battle Guy's old bandanna, plus a subdued Red Cross arm band on her upper left arm and lightweight black combat boots. On her back was a small black pack, which I presumed was laden with medical equipment. On her right hip was a holster for her Beretta M9A1 pistol. I could also see that she had a throat mike, for her comms.

"You okay, Kick-Ass!" Medic asked.

"Yeah, what are you doing here?" I asked.

"I heard what was happening and I'd already been piecing my kit together, just in case, ever since this week began!" Medic replied.

"What will your daughter say?"

"We'll cross that bridge, when we get there!"

"Is the little guy with Hal?" I asked, careful not to use real names.

"Yes," Medic confirmed.

"Hal, this is Kick-Ass; Medic is with us!" I called.

"Hal copies Medic onsite!"

9:15 P.M.

Hawk had taken care of her watchdog, allowing Medic to check on Voight. He was only bruised and slightly stunned. She helped him back down the corridor, where Lindsay helped Medic to get Voight downstairs. Olinsky came back from checking out some offices and the three of us: Olinsky, Hawk and I, headed down the corridor, past the bullet-riddled photocopier.

"Hope it isn't rented!" Olinsky quipped.

9:21 P.M.

Another group of Watchdogs appeared, just as Battle Guy returned with two more belts and my H&K 121. He had taken the time to load a belt and passed it over, I slung my G36C, taking the 121 and opened fire, cutting down eight watchdogs within a few seconds. They weren't so much cut down, as cut apart!

"Hamburger!" Olinsky joked, smiling broadly.

9:27 P.M.

We met up again with SWAT; they had two men down, due to injuries.

There was one more floor left and we approached the stairway, carefully.

SWAT went up first, with it's six remaining team members and immediately came under fire. One member was shot and fell back down the stairs. The wounded man was dragged away by Battle Guy. Medic reappeared and started treating the wounded man. That was one gutsy woman, Chloe should be really proud of her!

I headed up the stairs and brought my 121 to bear and opened fire. This allowed the, now smaller, SWAT team to advance on the last group of watchdogs, who were guarding something important; at least their determination made it seem important.

9:38 P.M.

We finally whittled down the watchdogs, they were tough.

Damn! I forgot how heavy this bastard gun is, or maybe I'm just shattered. Let's get this over with! I jumped up and received several bullets, to my chest armour. This was not a good idea, but what the hell. I charged the final watchdogs finishing off my last belt.

Silence descended on the building.

"Not clever dude!" Battle Guy commented.

"It worked, didn't it!" I replied.

"This time!" Battle Guy admitted, grudgingly.

9:43 P.M.

We moved past the dead watchdogs and reached a large steel door.

Battle Guy inspected it for booby traps, before hauling it open.

We all passed through the steel door, with weapons raised.

"Fuck!" Hawk said.

"Bloody Hell!" Olinsky commented.

Arrayed in front of us was what could only be called one thing...

A bomb factory!

Masses of explosives and the associated detonation equipment were in racks. It was a one stop shop for bomb makers! The SWAT guys were wide-eyed at what had been found. D'Amico could have destroyed the entire City of Chicago with what was here and still have enough to destroy most of Manhattan!

This had been a *major* victory!

This was D'Amico's main source of bombs!

The following takes place between 10:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M.

10:01 P.M.

We spent quite a while checking the building for any more watchdogs, before handing the entire site over to the bomb disposal guys to clear. We were all happy. Nobody from SWAT or the Police, had been killed, but there were a lot of injuries.

10:34 P.M.

Battle Guy, Hawk and I finally clambered into Beast, after stowing our weapons in the back.

Then my cell rang.

It was Mindy.

"Mindy?" I asked, no response. "Mindy?"

"The bastard escaped!"

"I'm so sorry! Are you all okay?"

"I'm bruised and battered, but okay. Shadow has wounds, to her right shoulder, as well as a lot of cuts and bruises. But..." Mindy seemed to falter.

"What?" I asked, cautiously.

"Josh... He took four bullets, fired by that fucking asshole D'Amico... They were meant for Shadow, but..."

"Oh God, I'm so sorry, Mindy," I replied, feeling appalled at the news. "I assume Shadow is *not* taking this well!"

"How the fuck can someone cope, losing the same fucking person *twice*, for fuck's sake!" Mindy said, before the call was lost.

I told everyone what had happened, they were appalled too.

The following takes place between 11:00 P.M. and Midnight

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

11:14 P.M.

We were all completely exhausted, by the time, we got back to the safehouse.

Dr Bennett, stripped off her gear and changed, then she and Curtis went home. I understood that she had got changed at the safehouse, earlier this evening, surprising Abby! I let Dr Bennett know that the girl's were safe, but that Josh had been killed.

I suggested that Kim and Abby go straight to bed, while Marty and I secured everything and got out of our gear. God I'm glad it's all over! I grabbed a shower and just sat in bed for a while, with Sophia.

I then sent Mindy a text: 'ALL SAFE. JOB COMPLETE. CHICAGO SAFE.'

The reply came back: 'BASTARD ESCAPED. NY SAFE.'

11:54 P.M.

I received another text from Mindy: '*LOVE U. SLEEP TIGHT.*'

I replied: 'LOVE U TOO. SLEEP TIGHT.'

You are advised to read 'Forsaken, Chapter 64 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 7' next..

***Chapter 64*: Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 7**

This chapter is in parallel with 'Feral, Chapter 18 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 7', but you should read this chapter first..

***The next day
Sunday***

The following takes place from Midnight

***Safehouse A
Chicago***

We Slept.

You are advised to read 'Feral, Chapter 18 - Sleep of The Vigilante - Day 7' next...

***Chapter 65*: Healing**

This chapter follows on from 'Forsaken, Chapter 64' and 'Feral, Chapter 18'...

The next morning

Monday

Marcus' House

New York City

5:22 A.M.

I looked in on the girls, before heading into work; there was a lot of clearing up to be done in the City!

First, I checked in on Chloe, but she wasn't in her bed.

Next, I went onto Mindy's room and found *both* girls fast asleep in Mindy's bed. Chloe must have come through during the day or night and crawled into bed with Mindy. They had both slept clean through yesterday; they really were knackered, plus the fact that both girls were wounded! Seeing them both lying there asleep, it was difficult to see them as anything other than two teenaged girls, but I knew better; these two were hardened vigilantes, who had won a great victory.

My first stop, on the way to work, was to visit the hospital. I wanted to check on the status of the boy; last I heard he was at death's door. As far as the two girls are concerned, he had died on the way to the hospital. However, I got a call, early yesterday morning to say that he was alive, but it would be touch and go. I didn't want to get the girl's hopes up, just in case and Chloe had already lost him twice, she couldn't survive going through it a third time!

I had left a note on the kitchen table, asking Mindy to call me, as soon as she woke up.

I haven't heard from Dave, so I can only assume that he was wiped out, too!

6:36 A.M.

Man, my head hurts!

"Ow, get that elbow out of my ribs, bitch!"

"Sorry, Mindy!"

"What's the fucking time?"

"Er... Just after half six, on Monday morning!" I replied. "I think we may have slept in... I've never missed an entire day before!"

"I have; you get used to it!" Mindy grouched. "Anyway, what the fuck are you doing in my bed?"

"Sorry, I had a nightmare... I think," I replied, a little unsure of myself.

"Okay, I'll let you off, but people might start to get ideas, if we keep sleeping together!"

"Funny! Damn, I need a shower and no offence, but so do you!" I said, wrinkling my nose.

"How about a bath! I am really sore and could do with the lovely hot water!"

"Sounds like a good idea. Who goes first?" I asked.

"Neither, it's big enough for both of us... But don't get *any* ideas... And *don't* tell Dave... *Ever!*" Mindy cautioned, then smirked. "And keep your hands to yourself!"

Damn, it felt so good, to sink into the bubbles and hot water!

My body was covered in bruises, not to mention my left side, where I had been kicked, which was now blue and purple. Now I like purple, but not on my skin! I admit though, that I am a lot better off than Chloe, this time around. I saw her bruises, as she got into the bath; she was fairly well covered too, not to mention that she had been shot, twice. They were both shallow wounds, thanks to Joshua absorbing most of the bullets' energy!

I couldn't think about Joshua right now and won't bring it up, as I knew that it would be too painful for Chloe.

"We are two bruised and battered bitches, aren't we?" Chloe commented.

"Tell me about it, but it's nothing I haven't had before!" I replied.

"Yeah, but you didn't get shot, *this time!*" Chloe groaned.

"One advantage we have, is that we are both young and our bodies *will* heal quickly," I replied, smirking. "How's the shoulder?"

"Hurts like hell, but I can live with it!"

..._...

We lay there, for what felt like hours.

It felt wonderful and whenever the water got cold, we let some out and more hot water in.

I jumped as my cell rang; I had brought it into the bathroom with us. It was Dave and we had been in the bath for about forty minutes, according to the clock.

"It's Dave, now don't make a sound!" I warned Chloe, who just grinned, mischievously.

I answered the call.

"Hi Dave!"

"Hi gorgeous! How are you both?"

"We're okay. We just woke up and I'm having a bath!" I replied, casually.

"Hi Dave! I'm having a bath, too!" Chloe called over.

Fucking bitch!

"Both of you, in the *same* bath?" Dave laughed. "I thought you said, you didn't go in for that kinda thing?"

"Mindy has such a lovely soft touch, Dave!" Chloe called, laughing. "She really knows where to put her fingers!"

"Shut up, *bitch!* Don't fucking encourage him!" I shouted, blushing madly, but laughing anyway.

I could hear Dave laughing hard, at the other end of the connection.

"You got anything useful to say, cunt, as I have a bitch to drown!" I growled.

"I just wanted to know that you were both okay," Dave replied, calming down.

"What about you guys?" I asked.

"We're all fine. No major injuries, just a lot of bruises, but you know how that goes! How are Chloe's wounds?"

"She's in pain, but okay, for now. Although, she's about to be in a load more fucking pain!" I replied, glaring at Chloe, who was now giggling uncontrollably.

"I'll call you later, don't get yourselves *too* excited, now!" Dave teased, dropping the call.

I glared at Chloe.

"You are one *evil*, little bitch! Dave will *never* let this lie, you know that, don't you?" I said, grinning, before splashing

Chloe and starting a water fight!

"I'm sorry, I just couldn't resist it!" Chloe replied, semi-apologising, but still laughing and splashing back.

Safehouse A
Chicago

I put my cell down and just stared at the floor.

I was glad that both girls, were safe and that they were obviously in high spirits!

I tried to get the image of two teenaged girls, naked in a bath together, out of my mind! I couldn't wait till Mindy was back here, with me, in Chicago. They really must have been exhausted to sleep so long! I had woken up yesterday evening after a good many hours of sleep and so had Marty, Kim and Abby. They had all done really well, especially Abby, who had been invaluable to our efforts.

I watched as the mesh gate slid open, letting in Dr Bennett's Jeep SUV, followed by the safehouse main door sliding open. By the time I had got up and walked out of the briefing room, Sophia was bounding down the stairs and Dr Bennett was getting out of the SUV, along with Curtis, who gave Sophia a big hug and got an enormous wet lick in return.

"I thought you guys might like some breakfast!" Dr Bennett said.

"Yeah, she cleaned out most of the McDonald's Drive-Thru!" Curtis added.

I opened the back door and found a pile of McDonald's bags. We carried them all upstairs to the kitchen and I kicked Marty, Kim and Abby, out of bed.

"Breakfast, come and get it!" I yelled.

..._...

"Heard anything?" Dr Bennett asked, looking worried.

"Yeah, I just called them. They woke up a little while ago and are now having a bath... *Together!*" I replied, with an evil grin.

"Yuck!" Curtis offered.

"They both okay?" Dr Bennett asked, ignoring Curtis.

"They are both okay, just hurting a little. They should be back home tomorrow," I replied.

"Thank God!" Dr Bennett replied, grabbing some food and a coffee.

The other three drifted in and also grabbed some food and a coffee, before digging in.

Nobody talked much, we all just ate, glad that we had survived!

..._...

About an hour later, my cell rang.

I answered and raised the cell to my ear and instantly regretted it!

"*He's alive!*" Mindy yelled, jubilantly.

"Joshua?" I asked, tentatively.

"Yes, Marcus just called. The boy's alive and he'll stay that way! He's lost a lot of blood, but he survived!" Mindy explained, happily.

"How's Chloe taking it?" I asked.

"I don't really know. She hasn't said a word, since I told her. She broke down almost immediately and started sobbing. I assume with relief!" Mindy replied.

"I'll pass it along. I suppose you're gonna go along to the hospital?"

"Yeah, once Chloe has recovered; as I'm not fucking carrying her!" Mindy replied.

New York City

We had been told that we could see Josh, later that morning.

Chloe had sorted herself out and apologised for going to pieces on me! I told her not to worry about it, not to mention the fact that it had made me feel slightly uncomfortable!

We headed out, on the BMW and met up with Marcus, at the hospital. He advised us that Josh was a mess and that we might be in for a shock.

..._...

Josh was in a private room and had what looked like dozens of wires vanishing under his bandages and bed clothes.

He was awake, but looked drowsy. He smiled when he saw the three of us. What skin we could see, was various shades of black, blue and purple. Chloe actually winced.

"I look that bad, do I?" Josh whispered.

"You've looked better!" I replied.

"So have you!" Josh whispered back and tried to laugh, but grimaced with the pain of trying.

"Sorry, Josh," I said, feeling very concerned.

"It only hurts when I laugh," Josh said, getting his voice back.

"Well don't laugh then, dickhead!" Chloe responded, tears running down her cheeks.

"What are you crying for?" Josh asked.

"I was so scared, that I had lost you again," Chloe admitted.

"I couldn't let him kill you," Josh replied, smiling.

"So, are you intact?" I asked.

"They removed one bullet, the other three went straight through me. Nothing major was hit, thankfully. But the wounds hurt like hell!" Josh replied.

I saw Chloe peek under the bed clothes and smile mischievously.

"What?" I asked.

"He's still got the most important bits!" Chloe replied, with a giggle.

"You *had* to check him out?" I asked, incredulously.

"Taking advantage of a wounded boy, Chloe?" Marcus asked, with a laugh.

Josh looked a little embarrassed.

"Well, you've seen *me* naked, does that mean I can see *you* naked?" Josh asked.

"No, it certainly does not!" Chloe replied, forcefully, but she still blushed.

"You liked what you saw?" I teased.

"I dunno, I've nothing to compare him with!" Chloe replied, shyly. "But, yeah."

"Great, thanks! Could we change the subject, please?" Josh asked, a little pink colour, rising in his cheeks.

..._...

We weren't allowed to stay long, so we headed to Safehouse C, to start packing our kit and taking it over to Marcus'.

The kit would be shipped back to Chicago, tonight. Marcus was not overly pleased about receiving another, dubious, late night visitor, but was pleased to have all the incriminating evidence removed from his house, as soon as possible!

Chloe and I were due to fly to Chicago, early tomorrow morning.

Suffice to say, that last night with Marcus was happy and enjoyable, thanks to Josh being alive, but subdued as I would be leaving Marcus again. But Marcus promised to come to Chicago for a few days, once he had cleared up the mess that he said I had left all over New York!

***Chapter 66*: Home**

Author's Note: *For anyone of a sensitive disposition, there will be smut later on...*

The following day

Tuesday

West Ridge

Chicago

The two girls, were flying in and would catch a cab back to the house.

They were due to arrive any minute.

I was nervous and so was everybody else. The house was busy; everybody was here: Marty, Sophia, Abby, Dr Bennett and Curtis. Kim had wanted to be here, but we agreed that might not be a good idea, at least not yet.

The cab finally pulled up and Curtis yelled out.

"They're here!"

..._...

Just as Mindy was about to open the door, I threw it open and Mindy dropped everything and jumped into my arms! Chloe ran to her Mom, for a hug. I was very surprised to find that Mindy was crying and gripping me very tightly. I could hear Chloe in tears, too. It was quite an emotional homecoming.

"Dave, I want you," Mindy said. "Right the fuck now!"

"What, right here on the couch...?" I replied.

"Why the hell not?"

"In front of everybody?"

Mindy pulled herself away from me and looked around sheepishly. I didn't think that she even noticed anybody else was here! Mindy blushed very red.

"Maybe *not* such a good idea!" She muttered.

"Thank God for that!" Dr Bennett said, sounding relieved.

"That could have been quite a show!" Marty said, looking unhappy.

"Eww! That's disgusting Marty!" Chloe said.

"What's everybody talking about?" Curtis asked, innocently.

"Ah, so innocent, yet so horrible!" Chloe laughed.

"You used to be innocent, once upon a time and not all that long ago either," Dr Bennett commented, to Chloe.

..._...

Mindy climbed down off of me and smiled.

"It's good to be back, among friends. I missed you all," Mindy said, shyly.

"I missed everyone, too; a week with Mindy, was a new experience!" Chloe said.

"Hey! You said that you enjoyed yourself!" Mindy retorted.

"It was better than a week with Curtis, but that's not really saying much!" Chloe responded, smiling at Curtis and

getting a scowl in return.

"You do look like hell girl," Marty commented, looking at the visible bruises on Chloe's face.

"Well I was shot twice! The bruises are nothing."

"Chloe did well; I was very proud of her and impressed by both her bravery and her courage, not to mention her standing up to me, when things got a bit heavy!" I said and looked at Chloe, who blushed. "If it wasn't *completely* impossible, I'd say that she was getting nearly as good as I was, some years ago!"

"Well done, Chloe! It took me *months* with Hit Girl, to get even the *smallest* compliment!" I quipped.

"Well you did suck!" Mindy replied, making everyone laugh.

"You may be interested to know that the bravery runs in the family. Thanks to 'Medic', I am alive today. She took down *two* watchdogs, double-tapped each of them in the head!" I explained.

"Mom went into action?" Chloe was astonished.

"I'm not exactly *over the hill*, young lady!" Dr Bennett said, sounding offended. "I saw no reason why you kids should get all the fun!"

"I wouldn't exactly call it *fun*, Mom!" Chloe groaned.

"Thank you, Dr Bennett or rather... Medic!" Mindy smiled, causing Dr Bennett to blush.

Sophia pounced on Mindy and then Chloe, pushing them both to the ground and licking their faces. It took both of the girls to finally push Sophia away, so they could get up and I handed them a towel to clean their faces. Both girls had giggled their way through the licks!

Sophia had missed them both, greatly.

A couple of hours later, Chloe went home with Curtis and Dr Bennett.

Dr Bennett said that she would come by tomorrow, to check over Mindy's bruises.

Marty suddenly seemed to vanish, discretely, along with Abby.

We were finally alone.

"You still want me?" I teased.

Mindy didn't respond, but just dived on top of me, pushed me onto the couch and started kissing me, as if it were her last kiss on earth.

"Don't mind us, we'll just head down to the safehouse for a few hours!" Marty called, vanishing out the door, with Abby.

God she felt *and* tasted really good!

..._...

As soon as the front door clicked shut, Mindy went crazy and started pulling off her clothes and within a minute she was astride me completely naked.

I was shocked!

"What's wrong?" Mindy asked in confusion.

"Wow, there are a *lot* of bruises on that lovely body, of yours!" I replied, looking everywhere.

"Is that all you're worried about?" Mindy asked, relieved, pulling at my trousers.

Sophia appeared, looked at Mindy, woofed and closed her eyes, before heading downstairs in disgust!

I helped Mindy pull off my clothes and that first touch of her naked body against mine, felt like heaven.

"You've got a bruise or two, too!" Mindy commented, running her hands across my chest, while I did the same.

Mindy squealed, as my hands ran over her hardened nipples and she then made me gasp as her hands found me.

I sat up and Mindy crossed her legs behind me. I felt myself slip inside her, that lovely warm, soft feeling. I felt Mindy tense as I slid in and we started kissing and kissing, like never before. The time apart had been torture; now we could make up for it!

I grabbed Mindy and stood up, the kissing continued as I headed towards the stairs but we ended up against the wall and I continued to thrust inside her. Then the kissing ceased abruptly.

"God, I've missed you Dave, I really have!" Mindy breathed.

"You are so gorgeous," I responded, struggling to breathe.

I pulled out and carried Mindy upstairs, still kissing. We landed on our bed and started again, in earnest; I dived onto Mindy's right breast, causing her to scream, as I took the nipple into my mouth. She really *did* taste good! My left hand worked it's way south and caused another intake of breath, as I started gently teasing that most tender of spots. I was definitely getting the reaction I desired and Mindy was definitely enjoying herself, as she writhed on the bed, beneath me.

"Dave, get in me now!" Mindy growled, sounding very Hit Girl like!

"Yes, ma'am!" I replied and Mindy giggled.

I removed my hand and replaced it with something else and started thrusting hard and fast. Mindy started to moan and then screamed, closely followed by her finger nails digging into my skin. I could feel the blood running down my back, but damn, it felt good.

Suddenly, I reached my climax and literally exploded into Mindy, who screamed and lay back panting and trying to breathe. I collapsed on top of her and started kissing her, for all I was worth.

"I love you, girl, I really do!" I gasped, in between kisses.

"I love me too, but I love you so much more!" Mindy replied, with another giggle.

Ten minutes later, we were both relaxing in the tub, enjoying the soothing hot water.

Mindy couldn't keep her hands to herself!

"I hope you weren't like this, when you were sharing a bath with Chloe!" I said.

"I am not a fucking dyke; I have *never* felt up another female...!" Mindy stopped, as I started laughing and then she blushed.

"Got you going there!" I said, still laughing.

I stopped suddenly as Mindy grabbed me and started rubbing her hands up and down. I grabbed Mindy's breasts and massaged her nipples gently, causing her to moan and groan. Mindy started to thrash around and the water started to go everywhere. I gently played with her pubic hair and what was hidden beneath...

"Oh God, Dave, I want you..." Mindy stammered.

..._...

Minutes later, we were on the bathroom floor and Mindy's, beautiful green eyes bulged, every time that I thrust into her.

Damn, this was one hell of a homecoming!

Twice in one afternoon!

Damn!

Maybe we should spend time away from each other more often!

We were finally resting in bed, when my cell rang.

It was Marty.

"Is it safe to come home yet?" Marty asked and I could hear his grin from here!

"Yes, Marty, you're safe!" I replied, smirking at Dave.

"Shame!" Marty replied, as he hung up the call.

I giggled and rested my head on Dave's chest, as Dave ran his hands through my hair. It was so good to feel Dave's hands on me, after a whole week apart. I missed his soft touch, I missed his smell and being able to watch his, often geeky or dorky, expressions. I definitely missed him being inside me, that's for certain!

..._...

We finally got dressed and went downstairs, as we were very hungry.

Sophia was in the kitchen; she gave us a very disgusted look and covered her eyes with her paws!

It wasn't *our* fault that she wasn't getting any!

Marty had dropped Abby off at home and gone on to see a friend, whom he had brought back with him and he asked if we would we mind a visitor. Marty looked kind of shifty!

"I'd like you to meet my girlfriend..." Marty said, as he led us both into the living room.

"I think you know Kim!" Marty finished.

To say I was shocked, was a bit of an understatement!

Maybe I should have noticed something, but well, there were other things happening at the time. I looked at Mindy.

"Hello Kim," Mindy said, with some embarrassment. Well Mindy had tried to almost kill Kim!

"Hi Mindy, you look good, considering and I'm sorry about D'Amico," Kim replied.

"Thanks. Dave tells me you were a great help, last week," Mindy said.

"I wanted to help, Dave was a little short handed."

I watched Mindy fighting with her emotions.

"You need a *hell* of a lot of work and it *will* be hard work! But... if you want to help, then you can join us... But only in a probationary position. You *will* need to work to gain a full position," Mindy said, with an evil smile.

Marty was all smiles and so was Kim.

"You don't know what this means to me, Mindy, thanks!"

"Yeah, well, I have my softer moments!" Mindy growled, heading off into the kitchen.

"Welcome to Fusion, Hawk!" I said.

Dave had explained how Kim/Hawk had helped them and provided much needed support.

It's not that I didn't like the girl, she just... Well... Tends to fuck things up! But I did almost kill her, so I did owe her and Marty seems hot on her... Yuck!

Damn, I really am going soft!

Maybe Dave fucking me twice in one afternoon, has fucked my brains!

A thought suddenly occurred to me! Chloe hasn't met Kim yet; I will have to arrange something, later in the week.

..._...

Today was very tiring, for so many reasons and I was glad to be able to get to bed, again!

Dave immediately started putting his hands all over me and every time he touched a nipple an electric shock shot through me, damn, could I do all this again? My crotch was sore, to say the least, not to mention the fact that the rest of my body was covered in bruises!

I let Dave play with my breasts, as I didn't have the energy to fight him off; I just had to tolerate the shocking sensations!

Finally, I gave up and started investigating Dave's body; naturally there was only one item, that appealed to me!

Was it possible to wear that component out?

I hoped not!

***Chapter 67*: Birthday Desires**

The following day

Wednesday

West Ridge

Chicago

Dr Bennett had come over around lunchtime, as promised.

I was examined head to toe and pronounced 'relatively' healthy! Luckily, I was just bumps, bruises and a few contusions.

"How are Chloe's wounds?" I asked, delicately.

"I've seen worse, she was lucky. It could have been a lot worse if it wasn't for the armour that you got for her and that boy slowing down the bullets," Dr Bennett replied.

"I'm sorry I put your daughter into that position, Dr Bennett," I said.

Dr Bennett looked at me strangely.

"Mindy, I do *not* hold you responsible for my daughter's well being. Chloe has decided that she is old enough to make that decision herself. I expect you to guide her, but not to make decisions *for* her. Chloe is very strong willed, so I doubt she would listen to you anyway!" Dr Bennett replied.

"Tell me about it! Chloe read me the riot act last week and stood up to me, despite the fact that I had just hit her! Now, I am not proud of that and I still regret doing it. I can be impulsive at times and well, normally Dave is around to steer me, but Chloe took charge when she needed to. Chloe doing that stopped me from doing something stupid and getting myself killed," I said, felling a little ashamed.

"I didn't know. Chloe never said anything about it," Dr Bennett said, sounding a little surprised.

"We agreed to keep it a secret. I haven't even told Dave; he would go ballistic if he found out and so would Marcus. Chloe really is a wonderful girl and on that subject I need to get your permission about something," I replied. "I want to get her something big..."

That evening

Morton Grove

Chicago

Dave, Marty and I arrived at Chloe's place, that evening, for a meal.

"Happy Birthday, Chloe!" We said, as we went in.

Chloe looked a little embarrassed at all the attention!

"Thanks!" She said.

"Fourteen! Not a bad age for a vigilante!" Mindy said, with a smile.

While we were waiting for the meal to be ready, we all sat down in the living room and I passed Chloe her birthday present.

"It's only part of your present. The other part hasn't arrived yet!" I said.

The present was wrapped in black paper, with a blue ribbon.

I carefully pulled off the ribbon, the present was quite heavy. I gently removed the paper and revealed a black, plastic case. Next, I placed the case gently on the table and opened it. Inside was a pistol, it was an FN Five-seveN pistol, brand new. The pistol was black, with a blue inlay on the grip. The barrel was also threaded, to allow a suppressor to

be attached. The suppressor was included along with two magazines and a cleaning kit. There was also a combination laser and light unit for mounting under the barrel.

I didn't know what to say, I just stared at Mindy.

"You lost your pistol, to that asshole! I already had this for you, so now you really do need it!" Mindy said, smiling.

I felt myself crying, how stupid!

I looked up at my Mom and she smiled back and nodded her approval.

"Not bad Chloe!" Abby said.

"Cool!" said Curtis.

Two days later
Friday
West Ridge
Chicago

I was starting to feel a lot more human!

The extra rest had done me good. I had been catching up on things and placing orders for equipment, to replace those items that had been consumed or lost, over the past week in both New York and Chicago. My Ducati was now back in Safehouse A and the weapons had all been cleaned, along with the combat suits.

Last night, Kick-Ass and Hit Girl had visited Murphy and Fellowes, which went down very well with the two young boys! Although, Cameron Fellowes said that he would have preferred to see Shadow, too!

I advised Sam Fellowes that he could go back home and that Murphy could stay until he had alternative accommodation. They were both very appreciative of Kick-Ass and Battle Guy's actions, in saving them and their families.

Today, I went to pick Chloe up, in the SUV.

I asked Chloe to come for a drive with me; she was a bit mystified, but came with me, anyway. I pulled up near a piece of waste ground and turned off the ignition, finally I turned to Chloe.

"This looks interesting," Chloe said. "Now I assume you're gonna kill me!"

"Very funny!" I replied, laughing.

"So, why all the cloak and dagger?"

"Just felt right, I suppose. I want to talk to you, about *lover boy!*" I said with a smirk.

"You want to talk about Joshua?"

"You haven't mentioned the boy *once*, since we got back to Chicago, but I know you miss him; I'm not *that* out of touch with growing up and relationships!" I replied.

"Oh," Chloe responded, biting her lower lip.

"Look, the boy should be able to travel by the end of next week. Do you want him in Chicago? Do you want to see him again? Do you want him in Fusion? I can help with all these questions, but I won't do anything without *your* say so. I think the kid has potential, admittedly I didn't like the British twat at first, but he learns fast and I don't mind having him around," I explained, with a smile.

Chloe looked a little surprised.

"Thanks Mindy. Yes, I *do* want to see him again, he saved my life, almost giving his. I *would* like him to be in Chicago, so I can see him and yes, if you think he can hack it, then having him in Fusion could be good," Chloe replied,

blushing a little.

"Okay, I will set things in motion. I have been coordinating with the relevant people, both in New York and Chicago. I'll keep you informed. So far only myself and Dave know, nobody else," I said.

Chloe was a little stuck for words and sat there quietly for a few minutes.

"Mindy... I..." Chloe started to cry.

"Look Chloe, you helped me last week, I just wanted to return the favour, we're partners remember," I responded. "See why I came all the way out here?"

"Yeah!" Chloe replied. "You know, I feel strange around Josh. I have feelings that I have never felt with anybody else... Is that good?"

"I don't know. As I've mentioned before, I don't have much experience in that department! However, when I am with Dave, I feel like I can't be without him. When we are apart I yearn for him, constantly," I said.

"Sounds like the way I am with Josh," Chloe admitted, smiling shyly.

"What about Kyle?" I asked.

"We've been drifting apart, but we're still friends and I think he knows that my heart is elsewhere!" Chloe replied, smiling.

***That evening
West Ridge
Chicago***

"It all went well, with Chloe?" I asked.

"Yeah, she loves Josh!" Mindy replied.

"Not a surprise, considering what you told me!" I said. "You called Marcus?"

"Straight after I dropped off Chloe," Mindy replied.

New York City

"Hi, Josh! How are you feeling?" I asked.

Josh was sitting up in his hospital bed and looked cheerful.

"Hi, Lieutenant! I'm feeling a lot better, thanks," Josh replied.

"We need to talk about your future," I said. "You cannot go back to breaking into safehouses and living on your own; you are only fourteen. Now I have an offer to make to you; you don't have to accept, but I would *seriously* recommend considering it."

"I'm open to any suggestions!"

"It is time to stop trying to be a vigilante in New York, I believe you might have a new future in Chicago, where you can receive proper training and where, apparently, there is somebody who loves you."

***Chapter 68*: Rapid Fire**

The following day

Saturday

Safehouse A

I had arranged some fun for everybody.

We would all meet at Safehouse A, for ten in the morning.

By 'all', that included myself, Mindy, Marty, Kim, Chloe, Abby, Curtis, Dr Bennett and, of course, Sophia. Mindy and I, along with Marty, Sophia and Kim, had been there since nine, setting things up.

Sophia was asleep, as usual, on a couch in the briefing room. To one side of the mat, we had setup two tables and about twenty yards away, a wooden stand, backed with ballistic steel. It was what we used as a range to keep up our skills. We used suppressors, as the soundproofing wasn't good enough for fully automatic fire, or large bore weapons.

Arrayed on the table were a selection of weapons: two Glock 17 pistols, two Glock 26 pistols, an FN Five-seven pistol, a P90 PDW, a G36C assault rifle, two SIG Sauer P232 pistols and a Browning Hi-Power. All the weapons were fitted with suppressors and had several magazines available, all currently unloaded. Beside the weapons was a small pile of boxes, with the relevant ammunition and a bin for the used brass cases.

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Curtis's eyes lit up when he saw all the weapons.

Up until now, Curtis had never been allowed to properly see our weapons and we had never allowed him in the armoury, for obvious reasons.

"Wow!" Curtis exclaimed. "Can I touch them?"

"You can fire them all, if you want," Mindy said, smiling.

"Cool!"

Everybody else was used to weapons of some sort, but this was to be some fun target shooting, so we were all looking forward to it, even Dr Bennett!

I also wanted to have a bit of fun of my own!

"Okay, let's have some fun first! Who wants to test a bullet proof vest?" I asked.

Nobody stepped forward.

"Who votes for Curtis?" I asked, laughing.

Every single hand went up, including Dr Bennett's. We even got a bark from Sophia.

"Hey! That's not fair; stop picking on the little kid!" Curtis exclaimed, indignantly.

We all laughed.

"Mindy, why don't you go first and show everybody how it's done!" I suggested, smirking.

Mindy reluctantly strapped on a vest and went and stood at the end of a mattress, set there for her to fall back on.

"Ready?" I called.

"Just get on with it, ass!" Mindy growled.

"Okay, lets start with the .38," I suggested, but did not pick up a SIG Sauer. Instead I reached under the table and grabbed another, *slightly* larger, pistol!

"I've been so looking forward to this, for over a whole damn year!" I said, smiling so hard it hurt!

I pulled back the cocking lever, brought the pistol up and aimed it.

"Dave, that is *not* a .38, that's a fucking..." Mindy said, her voice rising steadily in pitch, before being cut off.

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Mindy's exclamation was cut off by the loud report of the .44 Magnum, then as the bullet impacted Mindy's vest dead centre, she was carried backwards onto the mattress.

"You fucking bastard!" Mindy yelled.

I just laughed!

"Okay, I *suppose* I deserved that!" Mindy grouched, getting back to her feet. "Fucking ouch!"

Everybody else started laughing and I explained about Mindy shooting me, *in the back*, with one of these damn cannons! Mindy walked back and took off the vest, rubbing her chest hard.

"That'll leave a mark!" Chloe grinned, trying not to laugh.

Mindy just scowled!

Next up was Curtis, who wanted to see what it was like. Chloe wanted to use the .44 Magnum on him, but I suggested the .38, as the .44 would probably break every bone in his body! Chloe reluctantly agreed, but she still got to shoot Curtis!

"My dream, ever since Curtis was born! I finally get to shoot him!" Chloe grinned, while receiving a vicious glare from Curtis, as he got back to his feet, rubbing his chest!

..._...

After everybody, including Dr Bennett, had been 'shot', we moved onto target practice.

First up was Mindy versus Dr Bennett.

They both selected Glock 17 pistols and each loaded five rounds into a magazine. They then inserted the magazines and together fired all five rounds. Once the weapons were cleared and safe, Chloe went to get the targets. Mindy scored forty-nine out of fifty, while Dr Bennett got a perfect fifty! Mindy was *not* happy, but she still shook hands with Dr Bennett, magnanimously.

Next up was Chloe versus Abby. They followed the same procedure and Chloe achieved a score of forty-six, while Abby got a score of thirty-two.

Marty managed a score of forty-five, while shooting against Kim, who got a score of forty-eight.

Last up was myself versus Curtis.

For this, Chloe helped Curtis. She crouched down behind him and held the P90, while she let him aim it, using the laser. Chloe loaded a magazine with five rounds, fitted it to the top of the P90 and then let Curtis pull the trigger, five times. Curtis' target was completely unmarked, while I scored a perfect fifty and again, this annoyed Mindy, no end!

Curtis was very unhappy about missing the target, so after checking with Mindy, Chloe loaded forty rounds into a magazine and helped Curtis to aim the weapon, before she selected full automatic fire and let Curtis pull the trigger, holding it down. The weapon was empty in a little over two seconds. Chloe cleared the P90 and set it down on the table.

Curtis looked up at Chloe with such an enormous smile, that Chloe looked a little confused. Curtis then hugged Chloe really tightly.

"Thanks Chloe. That was the most amazing thing I have ever, ever done in my life. You are totally awesome!" Curtis exclaimed, still hugging Chloe, who looked really uncomfortable! "I love you, Chloe."

"No problem Curtis, I love you too!" Chloe mumbled, feeling a little embarrassed. I remembered what Dr Bennett had

said about how Curtis loved Chloe, despite the horrific way she treated him! Dr Bennett smiled at Chloe's discomfort and laughed. After that, Curtis never left Chloe's side, for the rest of the day!

Chloe actually went soft on Curtis and helped him fire *all* of the weapons and she even showed the kid around the armoury. He loved the Katana blades and the combat suits, but Curtis was a little disturbed, when he saw the damage to the shoulder of Chloe's combat suit. This seemed to have an affect on Chloe's attitude toward Curtis.

"Mindy, you got a moment?" Chloe called from the armoury.

I followed Mindy into the armoury, Chloe was there along with Curtis and they were standing in front of the original, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, costumes that we kept there.

"Curtis wants to know why you don't wear the wig and cape any more and so do I?" Chloe asked.

Mindy looked at me and I just shrugged.

"I don't know really. I wanted to change the way I looked and we also needed some decent suits that could protect us, when we went up against armed cunts. I admit I do miss the cape and the wig, as Daddy designed them both for me," Mindy replied, smiling down at Curtis. "You think I should still wear the wig and cape, Curtis?"

"Yeah, you'd look really cool!" Curtis replied, happily.

"Maybe I will, then," Mindy replied.

..._...

At lunchtime Marty and Kim went out to get an enormous pile of pizzas.

When they both returned, we all enjoyed some good pizza, chatting about anything that came to mind. It was actually kinda cool, eight people and a dog, sitting on the mat in the safehouse eating pizza! Sophia enjoyed sharing Curtis' pizza, before returning to her snooze.

After lunch we settled down to some different training. Chloe partnered with Curtis and Abby, showing them some basic defensive movements. Mindy and I partnered with Dr Bennett, who wanted to refresh her skills from years before. Marty, naturally, partnered with Kim!

I had to admit Dr Bennett was very good and could move quite quickly. There was definitely a lot more to Dr Bennett than you would think! Surprisingly Chloe wasn't pounding on Curtis, as normal, but was actually teaching him moves, along with Abby. Curtis was a fast learner and seemed to be picking things up well. I understood that the kid would be ten, in a little over a week. He would be going home, too, at the end of next week as school would be starting soon, which Chloe wasn't looking forward to, very much.

I had a chat with Dr Bennett about Chloe, just to see how she had been settling back in, after New York.

"She's been good, surprisingly there doesn't seem to have been much in the way of nightmare's. Not sure if that is good or bad!" Dr Bennett said.

"You mean that Chloe is getting used to killing! I understand that Chloe undertook her first interrogation, while in New York and promptly threw up afterwards!" I commented.

"She is a very different girl, to that which left for New York. I seem to have my little girly girl back again! I can only assume that finding out that Joshua was alive, has given her a new reason to live. I liked the boy, only met him a couple of times; Chloe was too embarrassed to bring him around much!" Dr Bennett explained with a smile.

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The day had been a great success.

It had allowed everyone to have a bit of fun, after the nasty week that we all endured and it also gave Mindy a chance to focus on anything other than Ralph D'Amico. Mindy was not happy that he had escaped, naturally. It wasn't her fault, he was just a very good planner, as we had all seen! Both cities were slowly getting back to normal. Nobody had any idea where, or when, Ralph D'Amico would appear again. But when he did and it was when, not if; we would be ready. We now had a good team building, we even had our own medical support! D'Amico had killed a lot of people and he would be back, that was certain.

For now we had to train and prepare. We had at least one new member to train up and that would take months. We had to repair and replace equipment, including Beast. Mindy was not happy to see the damage to Beast, but pleased that we were able to put the vehicle to good use. Marty was sourcing some replacement armoured glass, via one of Mindy's contacts.

West Ridge

Mindy and I were back home, with Sophia.

Marty was out with Kim! They seemed to be spending a *lot* of time together!

"Well done Dave, that was a brilliant day!" Mindy said, giving me an enormous kiss.

"You're not too pissed off about the .44 Magnum?" I asked, with an evil smirk.

"Not really. It's not like I didn't deserve it! But that was still fucking evil; you've been hanging out with me too long, I'm starting to rub off on you!" Mindy replied, kissing me deeper and for longer.

"I only get the best bits of you!" I said, kissing back.

***Chapter 69*: Two Wheels Are Best**

The following day

Sunday

Safehouse A

I had been shopping online; actually I had placed the order last week, while in New York, but with a slight amendment, when I had got back to Chicago.

Four large packing crates were delivered to Safehouse A, early this morning. Yeah, my courier delivers on a Sunday and at three in the morning!

I was with Dave, who I had forced out of bed, to come and help me.

I checked the crates and first of all and opened the one that was for me!

After a bit of unpacking, I finally had parked in front of me, a brand new motorcycle! The Alpine White, BMW R 1200 GS Adventure motorcycle looked cool. This was to be my own personal transport, for when I was Mindy Macready. The motorcycle was pre-fitted with a pair of aluminium panniers, an aluminium top box and a tank bag. I was really looking forward to taking this out, both on the road and off...

"If it isn't the blades, it's the damn motorcycles! You look like you're gonna have a damn orgasm, right there!" Dave commented, dryly.

I ignored him, I was far too excited.

I checked the next three crates and ignored the second one, leaving it for now and we pushed it to the back of the safehouse. Dave and I unpacked the other two crates, covering the contents with a pair of tarpaulins.

I drove the BMW back home, followed by Dave in the SUV.

There would be a lot more space in the garage at home, once Marty moved out and took Speedy.

Later that afternoon, Dave and I took Chloe down to safehouse A.

I thought that Chloe felt something was amiss.

"What's going on?" Chloe asked, cautiously, as soon as we got out of the SUV.

"Scared Shadow?" I teased.

"Hell no!" Chloe replied, confidently.

"Right, the other week you complained about riding on a bike with me," I growled.

"Do you really blame her?" Dave asked, grinning.

I ignored him.

"Well I thought it was time that *you* learnt to ride!" I said, pulling the tarpaulin off the first item.

It was a Honda CRF100F motorcycle, in red and white.

Chloe was speechless.

"Think you're up to it, Chloe?" I asked, smiling.

"I..." Chloe tried.

"Look if Kick-Ass can learn to ride, any asshole can!" I stated, ignoring the look of annoyed disbelief on Dave's face.

"I can do it!" Chloe finally said.

"You will learn on this little thing; it has no power and can't be used on the road, but it *will* be easier for you to learn on, especially when you come off and you will! Now, once you successfully learn to ride this thing, then I will move you on to the next step..." I said, pulling off the next cover.

"Fuck!" Chloe said.

It was a Honda CRF250L motorcycle in slate grey and navy blue. This motorcycle had a licence plate: **SHADOW**.

"This one is road-legal and more than twice as powerful. Keep up with this bike and then you can look at something sportier!" I said. "Late birthday present!"

Chloe said nothing, but then threw herself at me and hugged me so tightly I couldn't breath. I literally had to prise her off of me.

"Thanks Mindy, you really are wonderful!" Chloe said, smiling. "I can see why you love her Dave!"

I felt myself blushing badly!

That evening West Ridge

"That seemed to go down well!" I commented to Mindy.

"I think she's really looking forward to it. It was a good idea to get her Mom's permission first though!"

"Just what we need... Another damn psycho on two wheels! What did Dr Bennett say?"

"Well, she said that Chloe is determined to break her pretty little neck somehow, so why not let her break it by coming off a motorcycle, at speed!" Mindy replied.

That same evening Morton Grove

I was annoyed!

I had asked one simple question and they all yelled at me!

'NO!'

Why is that the one word people, *always*, say to me?

I only asked if I could join Fusion!

They all behaved like I wanted to borrow a gun and kill somebody!

I was very annoyed, so I had asked Mindy one simple question...

"So Hit Girl, how old were *you*, when you started slaughtering people?"

"Not old enough!" Mindy had replied.

So that was the end of that!

I will admit that I did enjoy the day. Firing all those guns was totally awesome and for my Chloe to help me was even better!

Talking of Chloe, I did get a big shock when I saw her combat suit; I mean, I knew that she had got hurt in New York and I had seen the wound while the dressing was being changed; Chloe never knew that I was watching. The wound was pretty horrific, to say the least! But seeing the damage to the armoured suit, was a bit much! I knew that the suit was designed to stop bullets, but these two bullets cut straight through the armour, the flesh of Chloe's shoulder and then back out through the armour again! Chloe could have been killed and then I would have lost the one person in the world that I respected the most.

I had tried to talk to Chloe about the wound and the damage to her combat suit, but she refused to talk about it. I kept asking, but just when I thought Chloe was about to hit me, she just quietly asked me to drop it and that she would tell me about it, when she was ready.

I was very young, but I knew that being a vigilante was very dangerous and any of them could get hurt, at any time, or worse!

Two days later
Tuesday

It was Abby's birthday.

I had spoken with Marty and suggested he find her a suitable gift. That gift would also be a big thank you for her work, with Fusion. Marty had managed to find the latest and the hottest laptop, he could find for Abby and it cost over seven thousand dollars!

I officially made Abby a full member of Fusion, she had definitely earned it! Dave had explained that she seemed a little nuts, at times, including putting comms on Sophia!

The team was now looking very good!

There was still a lot of training to do and I was itching to get back out and start fighting, but we still all had some recovery to do. Chloe's wounds were healing nicely, under the care of her Mom and the rest of us were getting back to normal. In the interim I had Kim to train that was when she wasn't glued to Marty, at the waist and lips! I wondered if they were fucking yet?

***Chapter 70*: Joshua**

Four days later
Saturday
Chicago

Joshua was in town and Chloe was going loopy!

Dr Bennett rang to tell me that Chloe was bouncing up and down like a kid on Christmas morning; Dave replied that he knew what that was like!

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Wednesday was *not* fun, though; it was the first anniversary of the murder of Dave's Dad! Dave was pretty much out of it, for the entire day. I spent as much time with him, as I could, as I did feel at least partially responsible for his Dad being murdered!

"It was *not* your fault, Mindy!" Dave kept saying.

"I know! I just feel that I could have done more," I kept replying.

Finally Dave had had enough of my whining...

"Look Mindy, we both had parts to play in the deaths of each other's fathers, but neither of us were responsible, okay?"

"Yes, *okay*! I still..."

"Mindy!"

"*Okay*, jeez!"

This year was also going to be the first anniversary of a lot of things, mostly bad; the next few months would be hard on us both.

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Anyway, back to the British brat!

He had partially recovered from his wounds and could now walk unaided.

He still had a lot of recovery time ahead of him, but he was young and should heal fast. Marcus had arranged for him to be fostered by Jack Bay and his wife; which meant that there would be somebody, with sufficient clout, to keep the kid on the right track! It would be quite a while before Josh was able to do any more vigilante work, but I would be able to start training him, as he heals.

Josh would be living at 'The Farm', as Jack called it.

I went up there the other day, with Dave and Sophia. Jack said we could use The Farm for Fusion, if required, as it was relatively isolated. This actually gave me an idea for Chloe and the new skills she would need to learn. Jack agreed and Dave brought up the two motorcycles in a van, yesterday. The possibilities of The Farm also gave me some other ideas, too!

I had to admit that I was a little shocked to see a photo of both my Mom and my Dad, but pleased all the same.

That afternoon
The Farm

I would admit that I was a bit wary about all of this.

My wounds still hurt and the flight did not exactly help them! But the painkillers helped and it was only a short flight. Marcus had rented a car at the airport and we drove north, to what was to become my new home. I was nervous, very

nervous.

Marcus turned off of the main road, through a gate and onto a short track, towards a large house. It looked nice, this would be my home. Marcus stopped the car.

"You ready, Josh?" Marcus asked, with concern in his voice.

"I think so," I managed.

"Come on," Marcus said, leading me up to the front door.

Before Marcus could knock, the door was thrown open.

"Hi, Josh, I'm Jack Bay!"

I shook the extended hand, before being pulled inside.

"Josh, this is my wife, Natalie," Jack said, indicating a smiling woman, who stepped forward to shake my hand.

"Hello, Josh and welcome."

"Hi!" Was all I could think of to say. I felt a little uncomfortable, but Jack and Natalie seemed nice and according to Marcus, they knew all about Fusion and the circumstances of how I was hurt. This included what happened to my father and how Mindy had found me. At least I wouldn't have to try and hide all that crap!

Natalie showed me upstairs to my room; it faced the rear of the property, overlooking a small river. There was a bed, with blue bedding and a chest of drawers, plus a cupboard. It looked like the room had been freshly decorated and furnished, just for me; the blue carpet was new, too. They had really gone all out for me!

I said thank you and dumped my pack, then we went back downstairs.

Marcus and Jack were chatting like old friends, which I understood they were. I felt weird being in the company of two senior Police Officers, considering my previous activities and that both of them knew all about Hit Girl! I still had to meet Kick-Ass and the other members of the team.

Jack went through the house rules, which were basically that I could go anywhere, but I must let Jack or Natalie know if I left the property. Marcus then let me know that Dr Bennett would visit regularly to check on my wounds and where necessary I would go see her at the hospital, in Chicago. Marcus also reminded me that I would be going to school in a few weeks and that sucked! However, he also told me that I would be going to the same school as Chloe and that definitely *didn't* suck!

"Thought that might put a smile on your face!" Marcus laughed.

"Oh, is this the lady friend?" Natalie asked, making me blush.

"Yeah," Marcus replied. "Josh got shot, protecting Chloe."

"Well done Josh, very chivalrous!" Jack said, approvingly. "A typical Englishman!"

That same afternoon
West Ridge

"Hi Josh, I'm Dave!" I said, letting Josh and Marcus in.

"Marcus!" Mindy squealed and ran over for a hug.

"Josh!" Chloe squealed and ran over for a hug.

"You must be the kid Chloe talks about twenty-four seven!" Marty quipped. "I'm Marty and this is Kim."

"*I do not talk about him all the time!*" Chloe retorted, letting Josh go and blushing slightly.

"Well, Marty's not *that* far off!" Abby added. "Hi, I'm Abby!"

"Hi, everyone!" Josh said, looking a little overwhelmed.

"This is Sophia," Chloe said, pointing down at a rather large dog.

Sophia looked up and studied Josh, before licking his hand.

"You're safe, she won't eat you!" Mindy announced, then smirked. "Or worse!"

"It's so good to see you up and about, Josh!" Chloe announced, happily.

"At least I have clothes on this time, so no peeking!" Josh grouched and Chloe blushed.

That evening
West Ridge

We all sat down for a meal.

It was a 'lets all get to know Josh and vice versa' meal.

Josh spent the first half hour telling us about all that happened, after he had come out of the coma. It was interesting hearing about his, not so successful, attempts at being a vigilante!

"I know how you feel kid; my first few times out, didn't *quite* go according to plan!" I commented, to some laughter around the table.

"My first night out went a bit wrong, too!" Chloe admitted.

"You did help Dave and I!" Mindy said.

"True, but I got myself shot and knocked out!" Chloe growled.

"But the vest protected you and Mindy insisted that we took you home!" I said. "Turned out to be a good decision, if you ignore the bitchiness!"

"Chloe, bitchy?" Abby asked, smirking.

"Funny!" Chloe said, scowling at Abby and me.

"Ignoring the fact that Mindy was trying to kill you, did you recognise Chloe, the first time you saw her?" I asked, receiving a scowl from Mindy. "Was she how you remembered her?"

"The hair was a different colour and a bit longer, but the eyes were unforgettable," Josh replied, blushing a little. "Otherwise she was the same as I remembered, but maybe a bit taller and she's grown in other places, too!"

Chloe blushed at that last comment and concentrated on her food.

We had all agreed to avoid talking about Josh's Dad; that could come later. We just wanted to keep things 'happy', for now. Josh told us about his trip to Chicago, when he came looking for Fusion. Mindy looked a little uncomfortable, when Josh described seeing us getting back into Beast and driving off. Chloe then explained about Mindy getting shot. He also described, in some detail, the events that had almost ended with Mindy cutting his throat.

"It was kinda cool, being attacked by two beautiful girls! Closest I've ever got to being between a girls legs!" Josh admitted, causing both Mindy and Chloe to go bright red and everybody else to laugh, including Marcus.

"Well, Josh, you have a lot of potential problems ahead of you... Mindy being one of them!" Marcus quipped, receiving a scowl from Mindy in return.

"I can handle the bitchiness, I've survived worse!" Josh replied, with a smug grin aimed at Mindy.

"Just think yourself lucky that you're still healing or I'd really show you bitchiness!" Mindy growled, menacingly.

"Bring it on!" Josh replied, with a cheeky grin.

"Marcus, you never finished your story about Mindy and her first..."

Mindy quickly cut Chloe off.

"Chloe, you had your mother to help you and guide you through puberty. I... And no offence Marcus, but you were, well, completely useless when it came to puberty and er, female things that occurred *during* puberty! End of subject... Sorry Marcus!"

"No offence taken!" Marcus replied, smirking. "It was rather a nasty 'period' in your life!"

"You're being very quiet through all this Dave," Chloe said, meaningfully, digging for more.

"*Don't* bring me into this! I have nightmares about Mindy starting puberty, I was there! Plus she would *really* hurt me, if I dared reveal *anything!*" I said, ignoring Mindy's glare. "But I will say that there are some *really* epic stories that even Marcus is unaware of!"

I felt Mindy's glare of hate boring into me!

..._...

After dinner we all sat and chatted for a while.

Marty went to take Abby home and said he was going to spend the night with Kim. Both Josh and Chloe, were spending the night with us.

"Now Chloe, stay in your *own* bed tonight!" Mindy suggested with a smirk.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Chloe asked innocently.

"Well, you do have a habit of waking up in somebody else's bed!" Mindy reminded her.

"Oh yeah!" Chloe admitted, looking awkward.

"I'm sure Josh would love your company, but he still has injuries that need to heal!" I commented.

"I can't believe you just said that!" Chloe exclaimed, blushing with embarrassment.

"I can listen out for them!" Marcus suggested, smiling.

"He will, too!" Mindy said.

The following morning
Sunday
West Ridge

Chloe was still in *her* bed, when I went to wake her!

"You don't trust me do you?" She grouched.

"I trust you! I'm just fuckin' with ya, kid!" I laughed.

Josh needed a little help getting dressed, as his wounds were a bit sore from all the travelling yesterday. Chloe was very concerned about this and offered to help, but instead Dave got Josh sorted. The kid now had a lot more potential scars on his chest and stomach!

After breakfast, Chloe and Josh went into the living room to talk. Dave and I went to take Sophia for a walk, leaving them both alone, for a bit. This was both to let them have some time together, plus to show that we trusted them.

..._...

About an hour, or so, later we got back and as we entered we could hear the two kids talking, in the living room.

We didn't think they had heard us come in, so we kinda listened in...

"Chloe, why did you become Shadow?" Josh asked.

"It was after I lost you. I kinda wasn't myself. My parents decided to move away from New York, as I was starting to lose it and going back to the same school... It really hurt, very day I was there," Chloe explained.

"But why *Shadow*?" Josh persisted.

"Well, I was missing a big chunk of me, you. You could say that I was a *shadow* of my former self. I thought that being a vigilante might help to put myself back together, sort of..." Chloe explained further. "Sounds kinda lame, doesn't it!"

"No, it doesn't," Josh replied. "I'm sorry I put you through all of that."

"It wasn't your fault Josh," Chloe replied. "And thanks to Dave and Mindy, I didn't get a chance to do anything stupid!"

"You mean, like I did, in my feeble attempts at being a vigilante!" Josh said.

"You were all on your own, then. But now you have *us* to help you. Give Dave and Mindy a chance, they are really good people and have done everything they can to help a moody bitch, who doesn't always show how grateful she is!" Chloe said and I saw her hugging Josh.

"I know, but why would they want to help a little shit like me and a Brit to boot!" Josh replied.

"We all have something in common... D'Amico. Mindy's Dad was killed by Frank D'Amico. Dave's Dad was killed by Chris D'Amico. Your Dad was killed by Ralph D'Amico. My best friend was also *almost* killed by Ralph D'Amico. Finally, Ralph D'Amico tried to kill *me*, so I owe him, plus the bastard still has my pistol and I want it back!" Chloe responded, anger building in her tone, before subsiding. "Dave and Mindy care, they have *both* been through what you have. Dave learnt the hard way that you need proper support to be a vigilante. Dave and Mindy will give you that support. Please give them a chance, Josh!"

There was a significant pause.

"I will, I promise," Josh finally said. "That Mindy can be a real bitch, when she wants to be!"

"Oh, you've seen nothing yet!" Chloe replied, laughing.

"Hi! Glad to see that you're both still dressed!" I teased, walking into the living room with Dave.

"Mindy!" Chloe exclaimed. "How long have you been there?"

"Long enough to hear about why you became Shadow," Dave replied. "Sorry for eavesdropping,"

"Oh... Sorry if I said anything out of turn," Chloe said.

"You did fine, Chloe," I said, smiling and Dave and I sat down, across from Chloe and Josh. Both kids looked to have been crying, at some stage.

"You been having second thoughts, Josh?" Dave asked.

"Just getting my mind in order. I trust you both, but I suppose I just needed reassurance from Chloe," Josh admitted.

"Glad you're still onboard kid!" Dave said.

"So, you still gonna use 'Feral'?" I asked.

"No! That name was for a past life, when I was alone. I am no longer alone, I have you guys," Josh said, smiling.

"Well?" Chloe asked, in anticipation. "What name are you gonna use?"

"Jackal!"

***Chapter 71*: Jackal**

The same afternoon
Sunday
Safehouse A

"Damn!"

"What was that Josh?" Dave asked, curiously.

I was in the Land Rover Discovery, they call it an LR4 SUV over here. Dave was taking me to their main safehouse.

"I walked right through this area a couple of times, when I was in Chicago looking for you guys!" I explained. "I walked past several buildings and thought that any one of them could be a safehouse and I was right!"

I watched as we approached a generic looking factory unit and Dave pressed a button, mounted on the dashboard of the SUV. A wire mesh gate slid to one side, allowing us entry and closed behind us, the door to the building then slid open and Dave drove inside.

..._...

Dave stopped inside the darkened interior and I watched as the door closed behind us, then lights came on, illuminating an amazing sight.

I actually had trouble taking it all in!

In front of me was a very large mat, of the sort used for martial arts training. Beside us was parked the black SUV, that I had seen previously. I got out and my eyes went wide, when I saw a pair of hyper-cool motorcycles. The purple Ducati was obviously Hit Girl's and I assumed the green and yellow Harley to belong to Kick-Ass.

"Damn, those are cool!" I exclaimed.

Dave was actually laughing at me!

"Your face, Josh; talk about changing expressions!" Dave said, then pointed at the SUV. "That is Beast, which is currently down to replace some damaged glass."

I could see the bullet holes on the left side, plus the damaged glass. Close up I could see the armoured glass and bodywork. I went for a closer look at the two motorcycles. They were just awesome! Dave had to pull me away from them and over towards a two story brick structure, built within the main building.

"This building has accommodation, the Armoury and our Command Centre and Briefing room," Dave explained and he took me on a tour of the upstairs first.

There was a kitchen with a large table for eating and a corridor led off to a bathroom and three bedrooms. One was obviously for Dave and Mindy, with it's own bathroom. The other two rooms each had two beds and one room was obviously for females.

Downstairs, Dave showed me the Armoury.

"Damn!" Was all I could say, when I saw the weapons, swords and the combat suits arrayed all around me!

..._...

"Like what you see?" Dave asked, grinning.

"Bloody hell! You have everything in here!" I replied.

I just couldn't take it all in, my brain was overloading! I could see pistols, assault rifles, a machine gun. There was also over a dozen Katana swords. My attention was drawn to the original Hit Girl and Kick-Ass costumes and then to the newer combat suits. I recognised Hit Girl's and Shadow's, but hadn't seen Kick-Ass' up close. I spent a couple of minutes with Chloe's combat suit and reached out to touch the wrecked right shoulder, where she had been shot.

I felt Dave put his hand on my shoulder and I looked up at him.

"You okay, Josh?"

"Yes. Just seeing the damage brought back memories, mixed memories."

"You need to talk, we're all here to listen. We've all been through hell at one stage or another and can relate," Dave offered.

"Thanks," I replied.

Next we headed into the Briefing room and Command Centre. Again, I was amazed by the sophistication of the equipment on display. Enormous computer screens and several computers were at one end of the room. The other end, had comfortable couches and a large table.

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Dave sat down on a couch and indicated for me to sit down opposite him.

I was starting to feel nervous.

"Time for a chat, Josh," Dave said, as I sat down across from him.

"Go ahead," I said, apprehensively.

"This is the same shit I told Chloe, so don't feel singled out. We want you to join the team, but we have rules," Dave started.

"Now, Little Miss Assassin tries to bend and sometimes break the rules and when she does, I come down on her like a fucking ton of bricks. Being a teenaged Hero, sucks. I know from personal experience and both Chloe and Mindy bitch about being a teenager, almost every other day. However, you will have responsibilities, Mindy always thought she knew everything about life and that her age was irrelevant, but she has learnt the hard way, the *very* hard way in some cases, that she is *not* invincible and despite her impressive physical and mental skills, she is still a sixteen year-old girl. You *will* fuck up, just like Mindy did and I *will* jump down your throat, or kick your fucking ass, to bring you back in line. That is for both your safety and ours. Understood?" Dave lectured and I nodded my agreement.

"You will be part of a team where you will be an *equal* partner. Yes, Mindy and I are the senior partners and Chloe is number three, but we are all equal. Basically, what that means is that if any of us fuck up, we expect the others to tell us we fucked up. When you fuck up, *and you will*, we'll tell you that you fucked up *and* we will tell you why and teach you how to avoid making that mistake again. I've fucked up more times than I care to think about and the famous Hit Girl has made her own fair share of fuck ups, most of them due to her age and lack of worldly experience. So, if one of us says you fucked up, don't take it to heart, learn from it. If you fuck up badly *I'll* tell you that you fucked up badly and if necessary stop you coming out with us and get Jack to ground you. Chloe actually stood up to Mindy, in New York the other week and put her in her place," Dave continued.

So that was what the slap across Chloe's face was all about!

"I'm used to being kicked, punched and sworn at; Mindy has tried everything, but when she acts like a stupid little teenaged girl, I tell her that and she tries to look cute and wriggle her way out of it, but that doesn't work with me any more, nor do her threats of bodily harm. While on that subject, Mindy will never intentionally hurt you, she may threaten to dismember or castrate you, but that's just her way; don't get me wrong, she *is* perfectly capable of carrying out her threats. She *will* hurt you during sparring sessions, but you get used to that and just learn to avoid her kicks and punches. Chloe actually cracked two of Mindy's ribs a few months ago, when she failed to avoid *her* kick. Injuries are a part of our lives. Now, we have all suffered a lot of damage to our bodies, but we're still here!" Dave finished. "So, *Jackal*, you still want in?"

"Hell yes. Thanks Dave. I promise to do my best, I know I'm young and I haven't a damn clue about what I'm doing, but I'll listen and I'll learn," I said, with a big grin on my face.

I actually meant it too. Chloe was right, I could trust Dave and Mindy, they would support me for as long as I wanted the support. This was everything I wanted, I knew it was going to be hard work. I had to finish my recovery and then get my body back into shape again!

But for all that Dave had just shown me, it would be worth it!

That evening
The Farm

Dave had dropped me off, back 'home'.

Natalie had an enormous meal waiting for me. The three of us sat down to eat and I told Jack and Natalie about what had happened since I had left yesterday.

I now had a 'secure' cell phone, which Dave had given me, so I could be contacted and could call Chloe, whenever I wanted! I gave this number to Jack and Natalie.

I went to bed that evening, feeling *very* happy with my 'new' life.

That same evening
West Ridge

"Did Josh enjoy himself?" Mindy asked.

"Just a bit! I thought his eyes were gonna pop out of his sockets, when he saw the safehouse!" I laughed, then went serious. "He kinda spaced out a bit, when he saw Chloe's combat suit, though."

"I'm not surprised!" Mindy replied.

Later that same evening
Morton Grove

My phone chirped with a text message.

I saw who it was and started to bite my lip, subconsciously and as I read the message, I could feel my cheeks getting warm.

Damn, that boy had a dirty mind, but I liked it!

***Chapter 72*: Masks**

One week later
Saturday

Well, that had been a fun week!

Firstly, on Monday, Chloe was in tears! The reason? She missed Curtis, who had gone home last Friday! Monday was Curtis' tenth birthday and Chloe had wanted to be with him, strange considering she usually can't stand the sight of him! Thankfully she got over that; I don't really know how to cope with crying teenagers, that's more Dave's kind of thing!

Also on Monday, Marcus went home! It was good having him to stay, but he still had a lot of mess to clear up in New York, some of which was mine!

Secondly, on Wednesday, we had reached the next anniversary: The Funeral, The Van and The Warehouse fight, closely followed on Thursday by the anniversary of my kissing Dave and leaving New York, for what I thought was for good!

Talk about emotions! I couldn't stop the damn things, I just hugged Dave and cried. Marty was having flashbacks and kept his sanity by explaining everything he knew to Kim and Chloe. Chloe had never heard the story about what had occurred that day, so was enthralled by the whole thing. She was particularly amazed by my antics on top of that van, while rescuing Dave! Not to mention my threatening to rip a man's cock off! Chloe actually asked permission to reuse that one, one day!

Josh had also survived his first week with us, too! Jack has been dropping Josh off with us, on his way to work each morning. Like Marcus he still has some clearing up to do in Chicago, some of which was Dave's mess!

Dave's little fun day, a couple of weeks ago actually proved very useful. Ignoring Dave's, unwarranted, revenge against sweet, innocent, Mindy Macready, I did learn some very useful things; archery, was one of them. According to Kim, she was very good at archery, when at both high school and college and had mastered the compound bow. I was also talking to Dr Bennett and learnt that Chloe was a competent archer, too; the little minx, hadn't mentioned that, not even when we were fighting The Archer! Dave also mentioned that among his many hidden skills, knife throwing being one of them, Josh could also handle a crossbow! Now, I am familiar with the crossbow; Daddy taught me how to use one, when I was ten. I have never used a compound bow though, but I thought that I would look into them and maybe get some for training and maybe to use operationally. They would be relatively silent as a weapon, as I learnt with The Archer!

Anyway, back to the present...

Between us all, we had discussed making changes to our combat suits.

Chloe needed a new top, as her's was wrecked by Ralph D'Amico. Marty needed some proper armour for his Battle Guy costume and Josh needed his first combat suit, as did Kim. Dave and I already had newer, more advanced armour, so we would be okay for now, at least that was what I thought, until The Armourer showed me some of the items that he could supply!

Hit Girl: This new combat suit would be very different! My upper body had different armour, that would still allow me to flex and move as I could before, but the protection was now up to Type III-A around the chest, stomach and back, the extra protection also wrapped around the sides. This new armour was black, with a purple tint and trimmed with purple and fitted on top of the under-suit, in a similar way to Kick-Ass' current suit. I had new gauntlets that were slimmer than previously, but still able to handle blades without injury. On the back of each gauntlet was an extra layer of purple armour, to allow me to deflect blows from swords, or other melee weapons. The gauntlets extended up my lower arms to the elbows, with extended sections to protect the elbow joints. These connected with armour that extended down from each shoulder, protecting the shoulder joints with Type III-A armour and extending down over the upper arms. The gauntlets were black, but the shoulder and upper arm armour sections were purple. Additional armour extended up from my chest to protect the collar bones and neck.

The under-suit was like that worn by Kick-Ass, but it was in two halves. This was mauve and made of a composite material that provided Type II protection. I had additional armour on my thighs, which also supported my Tanto, on

the right and three throwing knives on the left. The purple armour from the thighs, extended down to just above my knees. My combat suit boots, were as before, but Mauve and provided good grip and protection for my feet and ankles. Type III-A armour wrapped around my lower legs, connecting with my boots and rising up to protect my knees, before connecting to the thigh armour. The lower leg armour was black, with purple highlights.

I had a separate utility belt that went around my waist and attached to the armour, at the rear of my combat suit and to points, on the front armour, just above my crotch. On this belt were my new, larger pistol holsters, as I had changed my pistols. I had various pouches, including a custom pouch for the communications gear at the back. My Katana swords had mountings for their Sayas, on the armour at the back of the combat suit.

The combat suit was finished off with my mask. This covered my entire head, except for my jaw. There was armour protection around the top and back of my head, extending down to the nape of the neck and around the sides. There was also protection for my cheek bones. The mask was dark grey and supported my purple wig that I had abandoned at the end of last year. Also back was a newer cape in a very deep purple, I believed that they called it 'tyrian purple'. The cape was a made of the same composite material as the under-suit, but in only two layers, making it light, but still able to deflect bullets and blades. This attached around the back of my neck, while still allowing me to seize my swords.

I mentioned changing my pistols.

In New York, I had selected the Glock 19 Gen4, as it had more stopping power than my SIG Sauer P232 pistols. I had decided to continue with these pistols and now had a pair of Custom Glock 19 Gen4 9-millimetre pistols, with purple grips, of course! This pistol had a fifteen round capacity and could take additional items, such as a light and laser, plus a suppressor.

Shadow: Shadow was a challenge, as usual! Her combat suit had been damaged and soaked in Josh's blood, so needed to be replaced. Chloe was also growing in height, as well as broadening out in other places, so needed a larger size anyway!

There was a new under-suit, just like mine and this was slate grey. The extra armour was the same for Shadow, as were the gauntlets, except that instead of purple, slate grey had been substituted and the armour and gauntlets were navy blue. Shadow had the same boots and lower leg protection, again with navy blue instead of purple. The mask was also the same as mine, although Shadow would retain the black ninja scarf, over the combat suit mask.

There was also a new aikidogi, in navy blue. Shadow's utility belt was attached in the same way as mine and carried her communications and other equipment. Her pistol holster was fitted on the left side, so that the pistol could be drawn with her right hand, across her body. Her left thigh had attachments for a pouch that could hold two fifty-round magazines for her P90. As Shadow would, eventually, be riding a motorcycle, the hakama would no longer be compatible and was, therefore, omitted.

Battle Guy: This was a challenge, too. I obtained a SWAT style combat uniform in cobalt blue, but made from the same composite material, that provided Type II protection. Over this there was Type III-A armour for the lower legs, knees and thighs. There was a combat vest that had Type II protection, but with additional panels of Type III-A over the chest and on the upper back. There was also Type III-A protection for the shoulders and upper arms. Gauntlets covered the hands and lower arms. These were dark grey, as was the other armour. The combat vest was black. The combat suit was finished off with a pair of black combat boots and his current mask.

A black webbing belt, had pouches for communications and other items. There was a holster for his Glock 17 and another for a Taser, the same as Kick-Ass'. I had added the Taser, as he obviously seemed capable of using one properly! He would also carry a Type III shield, in navy blue, with a white five-sided star in the centre. As far as a melee weapon was concerned, I was going to train Battle Guy on the Gladius, or short stabbing sword. There was an attachment for this on his belt.

Hawk: Now, the difficult one! Hawk basically had the same suit as Hit Girl and Shadow, except that the highlights and trim were chestnut brown and navy blue. The utility belt had a holster for a Glock 17 and a Taser, as well as the usual pouches for communications and other equipment. Her mask had a more beak like point to it, over her nose and had feather-like highlights, in a combination of chestnut and rufous browns, on either side.

The intention was to train Hawk to use the bō-staff. I had had a bō-staff made for her, very similar to Shadow's, however this staff was designed to be stowed in two halves and attachments for these were provided on the back of Hawk's combat suit. They could also be used independently or joined together at the base to form the staff.

Jackal: Now for the little twat that likes to throw himself in front of bullets! I decided to have some fun with his combat

suit! There was a tan and reddish-brown under-suit, over which was the Type III-A armour. This heavier armour covered the chest, stomach and back, wrapping around each side. There were also extensions to protect his collar bones. Additional Type III-A armour extended over the shoulder joints and down the upper arm, joining up with the armoured gauntlets. Lighter armour ran around the pelvic and groin regions. Armoured combat boots attached to Type III-A armour that covered the lower legs and extended up, over the knees. This then joined onto Type III-A armour that protected the thighs. There was no utility belt, instead pouches attached directly to the combat suit. There were attachments on the upper thighs for two pistol holsters, configured to allow the pistols to be drawn across the body. Low on the back, above the equipment pouches were a pair of combat knives, mounted horizontally with a grip pointing in each direction. On his back was a mount for a single ninja-to sword.

The back armour was black, with silver highlights. The front armour was black, with tan highlights. The arm and leg armour was a reddish-brown, as were the gauntlets.

The mask was *very* different! The main mask was very similar to Kick-Ass' and generally of a tan colouring, with black and silver highlights. The shape of the front of the mask, was along the lines of a jackal with a distinctive tan coloured 'snout', which protected the jaw and extended out a few inches. The upper parts of the front of the mask were the same colour as the rest of the mask, tan with black and silver highlights. The other, very distinctive, feature of the mask, were the ears! Now Chloe might kill me, but I thought it would make Josh look both cool and much more sinister.

Why more sinister? Because when you look at Josh, you see a young kid of about twelve, even though he is actually fourteen! He is the same height as Chloe, which is below average, like I was and still am! Most criminals and cunts would look at him and probably ignore him. It doesn't help that Josh's voice hasn't fully broken yet, meaning that he doesn't sound very menacing, not like Kick-Ass, who can instil fear into anybody, with just a well worded snarl! I am hoping that the mask will instil some fear on it's own, without Josh having to use his voice, which I'm sorry to say, may be cute, but definitely *not* scary! The snout is not solid, but could be used as a blunt weapon, the main reason is the addition of voice changing technology, which Josh would be able to choose to enable or disable as required. This would make his voice unrecognisable to anybody who knows him and should hide both his age and his British accent.

Anyway, back to the ears!

They stick up about four inches and are flexible, so they won't get in the way and are made of a material that will resist them being chopped off! The ears are tan on the back and black, with silver highlights at the front. The entire combat suit was topped off with a black and silver hood, which attached at the rear of the base of the mask, covering the jackal mask and putting it into shadow, increasing the fear that the mask could instil.

Safehouse A

Everyone put on their new combat suits, except for me of course; I felt a little left out, but I already had newer armour anyway!

"Damn you look hot, Shadow!" Jackal said, in a deep voice, that sounded nothing like Josh.

"Keep your mind out of the sewer for a few minutes, Jackal!" Hit Girl laughed.

Jackal ran his hands, appreciatively, across Shadow's new armour and I noticed that Shadow seemed to be enjoying it. I cleared my throat, loudly.

"Er, kiddies, let's control the hormones and leave the petting till later, shall we?" I growled and Jackal rapidly removed his hand, which had been resting on Shadow's backside!

"You never pet me like that!" Hit Girl pouted.

"I prefer to ravage you naked!" I growled and saw Hit Girl's eyes almost pop out of their sockets!

"Far too much information Kick-Ass!" Shadow growled.

Battle Guy and Hawk looked on and Hawk giggled! Eisenhower was examining the new combat suits and having a good sniff. She seemed to approve.

"I love the ears, Jackal, but where's your tail?" Shadow teased.

"I don't have one!" Jackal growled back, sounding annoyed.

"You did, the last time that I looked..." Shadow replied, facetiously.

"Do I need to separate you two?" I growled, dangerously. "I'd say 'get a room', but that is *not* where you two should be, at least for another two years!"

Hit Girl brought out Jackal's weapons.

"Now *Jackal*, this is a pistol, the bullets come out of this end..." Hit Girl started and then laughed, before she passed two FN Five-seveN pistols to Jackal.

Jackal checked the pistols were clear, before placing them into his holsters. Hit Girl then handed over two Fairbairn-Sykes fighting Knives, these Jackal inspected before inserting them into their special locations on his back.

"You get your Ninja-To when I am convinced that you won't injure yourself or any of us, while using it!" Hit Girl said, with a smirk and received a steady look from Jackal, but due to his mask, we couldn't see his expression, which was probably for the best!

Later that afternoon
Safehouse A

"Okay, let's go through everybody," I suggested.

"Hit Girl, any problems?"

"No, Kick-Ass, the new suit is perfect, feels good too!" Hit Girl replied, grinning like a Cheshire cat and she did look hot, too!

"Shadow?"

"Fits like a glove and feels awesome!" Shadow replied with a giggle.

"Battle Guy?"

"Love the new armour, comfortable too," Battle Guy reported.

"Hawk?"

"Feels like a glove, can't wait to get out and about!" Hawk said, smiling at Battle Guy, causing Hit Girl to roll her eyes.

"Lover boy... Sorry, Jackal?"

"Frickin' Awesome, dude!" Jackal growled, making everyone laugh. That voice thing was really weird. Marty says it would do Darth Vader too, as well as C-3PO and a Goa'uld from Stargate!

"Turn that damn thing off!" Hit Girl laughed.

We had spent the early afternoon practising moving in the new suits and getting used to them, including testing the communications, which for Hawk and Jackal were new. So far nobody had any issues, which was good. Apart from Josh, everyone else would be able to go out and test the new combat suits, Josh would stay at the safehouse with Abby. The six of us: Kick-Ass, Hit Girl, Shadow, Battle Guy, Hawk and Eisenhower, would be going out tonight. Kick-Ass, Shadow and I, on two wheels, the rest on four.

..._...

"Now Jackal, keep you hands to yourself! You too Ha!" Shadow cautioned, as she climbed onto the Fat Boy, with Kick-Ass!

Jackal had removed his mask, but was still wearing his combat suit and looked a bit unhappy about being left behind, but his wounds prevented him coming with us, plus he needed trained first.

***Chapter 73*: Russians**

***Later that evening
Saturday***

We had driven around the immediate area several times, to get accustomed to being out together.

I also needed to get back in touch with my Ducati!

"You finished catching up with your best friend yet?" Kick-Ass asked over the comms.

My response was *not* polite!

"Bad Hit Girl! The FCC do not allow that sort of language!" Hal scolded.

"I'll tell you what you can do with the freakin' FCC!" I responded, laughing.

"I think Jackal blushed!" Hal reported.

"Jackal was always a softy!" Shadow chuckled.

"Hey! Leave the new kid alone!" Jackal retorted.

It was going to be one of those evenings! Time for a change...

"Hal, I need a location for our two CPD friends," I called.

West Washington Boulevard and North Laramie Avenue

As we approached the intersection, we could see a Chicago PD SUV parked up at the side of the road.

Kick-Ass pulled up on the driver's side while I pulled up on the passenger's side and Battle Guy pulled up directly behind.

"Well, well, well! Enjoying your doughnuts, Officers?" I snarled.

Murphy lowered his window.

"Comedy duo's back!" Murphy said, with a grin.

"Somebody looks different!" Fellowes commented, checking out Hit Girl.

"Not bad, still looking hot!" Murphy said.

"Hey! You're married Officer! Plus, she's spoken for!" I growled, meaningfully.

"Only kidding, Kick-Ass!" Murphy said, still grinning.

"You remember Battle Guy," I said, as Battle Guy appeared beside me, with Eisenhower.

"I do, hi!" Murphy said.

"And Shadow!" I said, pointing behind me at Shadow and then at Hawk, as she appeared beside Hit Girl.

"Hi Shadow and you must be Hawk! Hi!" Fellowes said.

"How you guys doing? Family okay?" Hit Girl asked.

"They're fine. Thanks to you Kick-Ass," Murphy said.

"We did what we could," I replied.

**Oak Park area
Chicago**

Battle Guy and Hawk had moved off towards Columbus Park, in the KAM.

Eisenhower needed to stretch her legs, at least that was their excuse!

Kick-Ass, Shadow and I had headed north-west, where we parked the motorcycles and walked down the dark street.

As we passed a dark alley, we could hear voices. Nothing out of the ordinary, but the difference here, was that the voices were not speaking English...

"Я ненавижу эту чертову город!"

"What the fuck does that mean?" Kick-Ass asked, quietly.

"Translates as: *'I hate this fucking town'*," I said.

"You speak Russian?" Shadow asked, incredulously.

"She does!" Kick-Ass acknowledged.

"Теперь, когда ублюдок Д'Амико пошло, мы взять под контроль своего народа и ебать эти американцы."

"That fucking cunt!" I snarled, angrily.

"What?" Shadow asked.

"Sorry, rough translation: *'Now that bastard D'Amico has gone, we take control of his people and fuck these Americans'*."

"We need to ask these two some questions!" I growled. "Follow my lead."

"Hal, we are engaging a pair of Russians!" Kick-Ass reported.

"Hal copies you are engaging two Russians!"

..._...

I moved forward and towards the men.

"Эй, влагалища!" I growled. [*Hey Cunts!*]

"Какого черта" One man replied. [*What the hell?*]

The other man tried to bolt, but Kick-Ass ran forward and threw him against a wall, knocking him out. I grabbed my man and flung him against the other wall, roughing him up, but he stayed conscious.

"Кто вы работаете?" I growled. [*Who do you work for?*]

"Перейти на хуй!" The man snarled. [*Go fuck yourself!*]

"Может быть, позже! Кто вы работаете?" I growled. [*Maybe later! Who do you work for?*]

I pulled out a pistol and a suppressor, then joined them together. The Russian followed every move, with widening eyes. I think he was getting scared!

"Кто вы работаете?" I growled. [*Who do you work for?*]

There was no response.

"Что я отстреливать в первую очередь?" I growled, menacingly. [*What do I shoot off first?*]

"Вы не посмеете!" The man said. [*You wouldn't dare!*]

"Вы знаете, кто я?" I growled. [*You know who I am?*]

"Должен ли я?" The man replied, with pretend nonchalance. [*Should I?*]

"Ах, да! Ищу Хитов Девочка!" I growled, menacingly. [*Oh, yes! I am Hit Girl!*]

The man braced at that!

"Твой член, может быть?" I suggested, ramming my pistol into his groin. [*Your dick, maybe?*]

He spilled.

"You recording this, Hal?" I called.

"Since the beginning!"

The Russian was talking fast, almost too fast for me to keep up, so I let my comms send the man's speech to the safehouse where it would be recorded and I could translate it later.

I asked Kick-Ass to dial a friend.

"Voight!"

"Evening Sergeant!" I snarled.

"Kick-Ass! How ya doing!"

"Good! Now, you remember those Russians?"

"Fuck yeah!" Voight replied, angrily.

"We have a pair in custody, they seem to be left overs from our good friend Ralph D'Amico!" I said. "Thought you might like a private chat! I've sent you the address."

"Thanks, I'll have a *gentle* word with them!" Voight said, sounding a bit happier.

"Hit Girl, you ready?" I asked, putting away my cell.

"Two neatly packaged Russians!" Hit Girl replied, before turning to the two bound Russians. "*Прощай придурки!*" [*Goodbye, assholes!*]

Safehouse A

We all met up, back at the safehouse.

Josh had removed his combat suit and hung it up, in the armoury. It had been good for Josh to see what happens at this end of Fusion, while the operatives were out on the streets. Naturally, he now went to help Chloe get out of her combat suit, but got his hand slapped, when he went further than the additional armour!

I had to laugh, poor Josh was a little embarrassed!

It was, unfortunately, the only happy thing in my mind at the moment. It now looked like we had Russian Mafia in Chicago. The two men we had come across this evening were most likely 'Shestyorka' or 'Associates', these were the lowest ranks of the Mafia and were usually men who had yet to earn respect and trust within the organisation. If they had been 'Boevik', which literally translates as 'Warrior', then we would have had an almighty fight on our hands; think Mother Russia with balls! There had to be some in Chicago somewhere, they worked for a 'Brigadier' or 'Avtoritet', which translates as 'Authority'. These in turn work for the Boss or 'Pakhan'.

A typical structure or 'Bratva' called for a Boss to control four Brigadiers, who then had half a dozen Warriors and Associates. Now, being Russian, nobody really trusts anyone, so there are usually a couple of 'Spies' who ensure that the Brigadiers do what they are told and don't get too powerful. These spies reported back to the Boss as required.

The enormous, motherfucker of a question was whether we could tackle a Bratva and survive. I just couldn't believe

that Ralph D'Amico worked for, or with, the Russian Mafia! He would be certifiable to get involved with them! Then again maybe he is certifiable, but no, Ralph D'Amico was calculating; he would only get involved with the Russian Mafia if there was something major in it for him.

I needed to meet with this Hank Voight. Marcus said he was a good guy to know and had the same mindset as Hit Girl, when it came to certain types of criminals!

..._...

"Mafia, huh!" Dave said, matter of factly.

"Yeah!" I growled, sitting down in the kitchen.

"You never said that you spoke Russian!" Chloe exclaimed, pulling out a chair and sitting down.

"There are a lot of things I haven't told you, Chloe Bennett!" I replied, coldly.

"Sorry, jeez!" Chloe muttered and got up to get a coffee.

"That was uncalled for!" Dave said, disapprovingly.

"Chloe, Dave's right, that was uncalled for and I'm sorry," I said, feeling ashamed for treating Chloe like that.

"You're upset about the Russians, aren't you?" Chloe asked, sitting back down, with her coffee.

"I am. We're talking hardened men, who get off on killing, and *before* you say it, yes, I sometimes get off on killing, too. But these guys get off on killing *anybody*, including innocents," I explained. "Dave, call Marty, Abby, Josh and Kim up here, please."

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Once everybody was in the kitchen, I started talking. I explained about the Mafia and how they were made up and what we might expect.

"These bastards know we are in Chicago and we've just assaulted and had arrested two of their men. We may now be targets. Take extra special care, when coming to any of the safehouses. If in doubt walk away, we cannot lose our safehouses, especially not this one. Help each other and try not to go anywhere alone. From now on, ensure that you have comms with you, at least a cell, preferably one of ours that we can track. Abby you should operate from home, as far as possible. Marty, you have your apartment. We will only use this safehouse after dark and when we are certain nobody is watching. Marty you have setup some extra anti-eavesdropping, anti-spy shit haven't you?"

"By 'shit', I assume you mean expensive and high-tech equipment and yes we will know if anybody tries to enter a safehouse or bug them, but I will do regular sweeps anyway. I can have our mobile command centre ready in two weeks. We still keeping it at The Farm?" Marty asked.

"Yes. The Farm is an unknown for the Mafia. We have never used it and neither are there any links to it. So we should keep it that way. Can you setup a place like we have downstairs, in Jack's basement?"

"Easy!" Marty said.

"All of the safehouses are fully stocked, if required. I'm hoping that those two Russian idiots won't reveal that they were arrested, or assaulted by us, 'cause they know that if they did then they would most probably be killed by their own side. This is serious, I shit you not!"

On that depressing note, we all went off to bed.

***Chapter 74*: Training Wheels**

Two days later
Monday
The Farm

Chloe was very nervous.

Bag of nerves, might be a better description!

She was wearing her full motorcycle leathers, with boots and her helmet.

I had taken a quick turn around the marked out track that I had laid out in a field at The Farm, to show her what to do. Now I pulled up on the Honda CRF100F and climbed off.

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"Your turn!" I said.

Chloe tentatively climbed on and I took her through the Honda's, very basic, controls: ignition switch, clutch lever, front brake, throttle grip, engine stop button, rear brake pedal, gear shift lever, fuel valve and kickstarter. Currently the engine was running and the gearbox was in neutral, so we could ignore some of the controls for now. I showed Chloe the positions of the gear shift lever; horizontal for neutral, first gear, one notch down and then second to fifth gears above the neutral position.

For now Chloe would probably stay in first gear! I explained how the clutch operated and let her pull the clutch lever, then push down on the gear change lever.

"Ready?" I asked, smiling encouragingly.

"Yes..." Chloe said, sounding anything but positive!

"Let in the clutch *gently*. Remember, when you stop you must pull the clutch lever or you *will* stall. Ignore the front brake for now. Use the rear brake, down here. Twist the throttle backward to go faster, twist it forwards to go slower."

"Okay..."

"Don't look at the front tyre, try to look ahead and don't worry if you fall, okay?"

Chloe nodded, still very apprehensive.

"Apply a little gas, then let in the clutch *gently*! Try and follow the course, keeping it *slow*!" I said, encouragingly.

I watched as Chloe twisted the throttle gently and let in the clutch... She moved, jerkily, but she moved and kept moving. I gave a thumbs up to Jack, who was filming Chloe with a camera; he smiled back. Chloe managed a full, but shaky, circuit, before coming to a halt beside me, pulling in the clutch.

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The look on her face was priceless! Her smile went from ear to ear!

"Was that good?" I asked, laughing.

"Wow... That felt awesome!" Chloe stammered.

"Well keep going then. Go around a couple more times and then we'll try second gear!" I said. "Just keep it *slow*; I'm the speed menace, not you!"

I had brought Chloe up on the back of the BMW, this morning, keeping it slow and steady, as I didn't want to put her off. She was building up her confidence well... Oops, she took that turn a bit tight and came off onto the grass.

I ran over.

"You okay?" I called and could hear giggling!

"That was cool! I let it get away from me, then fumbled things a bit," Chloe explained getting back up.

The engine had stalled, so I righted the Honda and held it for Chloe to remount.

"Okay, put the gears into neutral... That's right... Now clutch and kick-down *once*, just here... There we go, engine running. Now off you go..." I said, and walked away.

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Chloe pulled up beside me after another two laps.

"Ready for second gear? Or do want a break first?" I asked.

"I'll take a break!"

"Press and hold that button, till the engine cuts out... Now push the stand down and dismount. Ignition off. Perfect," I said, smiling.

Chloe pulled off her helmet, as we walked over to the house. Jack was still filming and followed us up to the house.

"You enjoy that, Chloe?" Jack asked.

"It was totally awesome!" Chloe replied, still smiling insanely!

"You looked cool!" Josh said, encouragingly.

I had advised Josh to keep out of the way, in case he either inspired Chloe to do something stupid or otherwise distracted her! The course I had laid out covered about a quarter mile, or four hundred and fifty yards. It should give Chloe plenty of space to get used to the motorcycle and the controls, especially the gears. Jack offered to film her learning, so that Dr Bennett could see the results. I kept my helmet on during the filming, as I did not want to be filmed at all and Jack respected this!

I let Chloe spend some time with Josh, while Jack's wife Natalie, got lunch ready. I called Dave to let him know how things were going.

"Hi gorgeous!" Dave said, on answering the phone.

"Hi lover!"

"Chloe broken her neck yet?"

"No, Josh is checking her neck out right now! She's doing really well; only came off once and started giggling!"

"Good! Oh, a large, long parcel has arrived for you. Damn heavy!"

"My compound bows!"

"More toys!" Dave groaned.

"Stop moaning, ass!"

Lunch was over and was very good!

I'm glad I had my leathers zipped up tight, Josh had his hands everywhere!

I was now back on the Honda and it was an awesome feeling. I managed to start it and move off, *without* any help. Now I just need to pull the clutch lever and flip the gear selector up two notches for second gear... Well here goes... Wow... I'm going faster... Too fast... Twist throttle forward... Slowing down... Better!

I managed a circuit in second gear!

Mindy and I were wearing our concealed comms, for ease of communication.

"You're doing well, keep going and keep looking forwards. I'm right behind you, ignore me completely, I will keep out of your way," Mindy said, in my ear. I glanced to my right and saw Mindy about ten yards back, on the BMW and following me around the course.

"When we get around the next corner, shift into third, one notch *up*, okay?" Mindy said.

"Okay!"

I turned around the next corner and pulled the clutch lever and flicked up the gear change lever, one notch, then let the clutch lever out, gently. Cool... Third gear!

"Josh find any damage, when he checked you over?" Mindy asked and I almost lost control of the Honda, so my response was *not* very lady like!

"That was totally uncalled for!" Mindy laughed in response.

After another eight circuits, Mindy guided me through slowing and shifting down, back to second and then stopping. It felt brilliant, I could now ride a motorcycle! I knew I still had a long way to go, but it was an impressively good start!

I turned off the engine and wheeled the Honda into the barn and secured it to a post, with a thick chain. I gazed longingly at the other Honda, currently under a tarpaulin and similarly secured. Marty had been round and equipped the barn and surrounding property with security measures, so we would know if anybody went anywhere near the motorcycles. Mindy had warned me, very seriously, to never ride the motorcycle if she wasn't here with me and I promised.

"You are one smart young lady!" Jack said.

"She is that!" Mindy acknowledged pulling off her helmet.

I felt my cheeks warming up and knew that I was blushing at all the praise.

"You do look lovelier when you blush!" Josh teased, grinning.

Josh's comments didn't help either, they just made me warm up in other places!

That evening ***Morton Grove***

"What the hell!" I exclaimed, as the front door burst open and a tornado came into the living room.

"I did it!" The tornado yelled, happily.

The tornado turned out to be my daughter!

"Had sex!" I responded, facetiously.

"No, better!" Chloe said, smiling from ear to ear. Oh, she has so much to learn!

Thankfully Mindy came in and *calmly* passed me an iPad and I pressed play, on the video.

"I see!" I said, impressed by what I was watching.

Once the video was finished and I could no longer put up with Chloe bouncing up and down on the couch, I turned to her.

"Congratulations!" I said, feeling genuinely proud of my daughter.

"I got up to third gear!" Chloe squealed.

"Simmer down Chloe!" I said.

"Sorry, Dr Bennett! I tried to calm her down, but..." Mindy tried.

"You'd have more chance holding back a tsunami!" I laughed and gave Chloe a big hug. "Go email your father."

Chloe was gone in a flash!

"Well done, Mindy! That can't have been easy, I am surprised she was so successful!" I said.

"Your daughter is a very intelligent girl and a very fast learner," Mindy said. I was starting to feel embarrassed at all the praise Chloe was getting!

"Thanks Mindy, you're a brilliant influence on her!" I said and watched as Mindy started to blush.

***Chapter 75*: Jackal Training**

Two days later
Wednesday
West Ridge

Josh has now healed enough for his training to start!

"You're gonna go easy on me, aren't you?" Josh asked, sounding worried.

I grinned at Josh, like a crocodile about to kill its prey!

"Should I be worried?" Josh asked, looking at Chloe.

Chloe just grinned back, "Oh, yeah!"

"You two are so fucking evil!" Josh growled unhappily.

"It's why you love me!" Chloe said, blowing a kiss.

"Well I've led a short life, but an entertaining one!" Josh whined.

"Quit the whining, jeez!" I complained, before kicking out at Josh, aiming for his stronger left side. The bullets had hit him on his right side, so I was going to be nice, to start with...

"Oh no you bloody don't, bitch!" Josh said, smartly moving out of the way and swinging around in a fast roundhouse kick, which I dodged.

"That all you've got Brit boy!" Mindy growled.

"Just getting warmed up, Yank; expected more from you!"

"Cheeky little wanker!" I growled, impressed.

Josh then span around in a fast double roundhouse kick, which I tried to dodge, but then he changed the second roundhouse kick into a spinning hook kick. The kick caught me on the right shoulder, sending me spinning to the ground. The fucker tricked me!

"Good to see that you're not *all* talk!" I said, getting back to my feet. That kick hurt! Josh is actually quite good!

Josh kept up with my attacks, for the next ten minutes, before he started to tire and I noticed him gripping his right side.

I called a halt.

"You okay Josh?" I asked, concerned.

"Sorry, I don't want to sound like a wimp, but I think I need to sit down," Josh said and he was starting to look pale.

I got a vicious glare from Chloe!

Josh saw the glare too.

"Chloe I'm fine, I can look after myself, okay. Mindy's done nothing wrong, so cut that crap out, right now!" Josh said and Chloe looked a little embarrassed.

"Sorry, Mindy," Chloe said.

"Don't worry, I've not broken him!" I teased and Chloe blushed a little, but all the same, I was a bit worried about Josh.

The Farm

After lunch we headed up to The Farm, for a different form of training.

Kim was waiting for us when we arrived. I parked the SUV beside the barn and I opened the tailgate. Inside were four large, black cases and I handed one to Chloe and another to Kim.

"Okay! Show us what you two can do!" I said.

Chloe and Kim, placed the cases down on a table and opened them up.

Chloe let out a small squeal.

Kim just said, "Wow!"

Inside each case was a custom Oneida Kestrel compound bow. Each bow was flat black with black carbon fibre limbs. Also with each bow was a quiver of eight arrows.

"You two familiar with these?" I asked.

"Compound bows, yes, but not elite bows like these!" Kim said, picking one up and looking it over.

"Same as what Kim said!" Chloe replied, looking the other bow up and down, in awe.

Both Kim and Chloe then pulled out an arrow each and after a brief check of the mechanisms, sent the arrows down range, to a target at the opposite end of the barn. Both arrows impacted the target, with a solid bang and both Chloe and Kim had enormous grins on their faces!

"Damn, those are powerful weapons; those shots would have hurt!" I exclaimed.

"Okay Mindy, you've fired a cross-bow, right?" Chloe asked.

"Yeah, but this is very different," Mindy said.

"What about me?" Josh asked.

"You'd better not, not in your condition. Mindy stressed you too much earlier!" Chloe said, grinning at me.

Bitch!

"I'll give you a personal lesson when you're better!" Chloe promised, with an evil grin.

"Can't wait!" Josh said, blowing Chloe a kiss and making her blush.

"Talk about hormones!" I groaned.

"Okay, key parts of the compound bow: nocking point, peep sight, arrow rest and forward sight," Chloe explained, pointing to each part in turn. "Normally... Mindy pay attention!"

"Sorry!" I said, sheepishly; I'd been checking a text from Dave.

"Before I was so rudely interrupted... Normally we would use a 'release'; this helps prevent sore fingers and makes an accidental release more difficult. Now we will have our armoured gauntlets, which will protect our fingers and the release won't be compatible with combat. We have them, in the cases, so we can use them, if you wish," Chloe continued and showed how to strap on a release, to her wrist.

"Next: nocking the bow. A properly nocked arrow contacts the bow at only two points, the rest and the string. This ensures that at no point during the shooting process, does the arrow make contact with any other surface, which could send it off course. Begin by placing the arrow through the rest; in this case a 'biscuit' rest, for obvious reasons. This rest is most suitable as the arrow won't fall off, which benefits us. Next, take the arrow and rotate it so that the one off-coloured vane is facing upward. Press the nock firmly onto the bowstring in the centre of the string loop, until you hear a click. If the off-coloured vane is facing upward, the arrow is in the rest and the nock has 'clicked' onto the bowstring, the arrow is properly nocked."

"Stand roughly perpendicular to the target, though the exact angle isn't important, the stance is mostly determined by personal preference and any roughly perpendicular stance will work, as long as it is not extreme enough to cause the body to twist, during the shot. After a few shots, you'll settle into a natural stance that is comfortable for you... Hit Girl

are you listening? Are you pissing me off on purpose?"

"I would never do that!" I said with an evil smirk.

"Yes you would, bitch! Now listen, or you aren't shooting a single fucking arrow!" Chloe ordered, angrily.

Okay, pushed too many buttons; I remember vividly what happened last time Chloe stood up to me!

"Okay, for those interested in learning... Place your non-dominant hand on the grip... Your *other* 'non-dominant' hand, Joshua, jeez! Your hand should be directly behind the grip so that there is no twist, when the bow is drawn. The hand is only there to support the weight of the bow and give the dominant hand the necessary resistance to draw the bow. Straighten your arm to put the bow into position for the draw," Chloe continued.

"Begin by clipping the release onto the string loop, directly behind the arrow, then pull back on the string. The bulk of the power should come from the muscles in your back. Additionally, make sure the bow grip is centred in your hand, with the force of the weight running straight back through your arm. Even a minimal amount of twisting can make the draw more difficult, and extreme twisting can cause injury. Once the bow is drawn, you will feel the amount of pressure that it takes to hold it, decrease. This is one of the major benefits of compound archery; at full draw, it only takes fifteen to twenty percent of the total draw weight, to hold the string back. That's good for wimps like Joshua!"

"Hey!" Josh moaned.

"You'll find that the nock naturally settles somewhere on your face. This is called your anchor point. Everybody's is different, so use what you feel is best. You might need to adjust it to look through the sight. Now another advantage of the compound bow is attachments. You have the optical sight, but we can also add a laser sight... Thought you'd like that Mindy! I assume you know how to aim and pull a trigger, Hit Girl?" Chloe finished, with an evil smirk. "See it's easy, even Hit Girl could manage it!"

"Evil little bitch!" I growled.

"Oh, I learned from the best!" Chloe said, grinning.

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Twenty minutes later we had all embedded several arrows into the target. Josh only managed to send a couple of arrows down range, before he started to go pale again.

It was actually quite good fun. These bows could make damn good weapons! I needed to look into some proper arrows, I've already come across explosive tips, I want to see what else we can get together!

"Thanks Chloe, you're not a bad teacher!" I said.

"Thanks Mindy. I'm starting to respect my school teachers a lot more now! They put up with a hell of a lot of shit!" Chloe replied.

That evening West Ridge

Marty was finishing his packing and moving to his apartment today. Kim was helping him and would be keeping him company tonight!

Mindy was arguing, after watching some eighties television.

"Absolutely not!" I said.

"It would be really cool!" Mindy whined.

"Not seeing it! You *cannot* paint Airwolf purple!" Marty exclaimed.

"Why not, that helicopter is so *me*!" Mindy insisted.

"Sometimes you're as nutty as squirrel shit, Mindy!" I groaned.

"That's not fair!" Mindy whined.

"You need a hand Marty? I need to find some sanity!" I begged.

"Cunt!" Mindy growled.

"No, I'll be fine, Speedy's loaded and Kim's waiting," Marty said. "I'll leave you with Little Miss Nutty!"

Marty got an evil glare, but Mindy still got up to give him a big hug.

"Thanks Marty, it's been great having you here. I hope your apartment is good for you, we'll come around one evening!" Mindy said.

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"It won't be the same without him here," Mindy said, once Marty and Kim had left.

"At least he won't be living in a mad house!" I said.

"You trying to say something!" Mindy asked, indignantly.

"Trying, no!" I said, laughing and Mindy scowled.

"Don't worry, we now have the house to ourselves!" I said, grabbing Mindy and she screamed as I threw her onto the couch.

I dived after her and we started kissing, while I pulled at her t-shirt; Sophia took one look, woofed and fled downstairs!

Chapter 76: Scramblers

Two days later
Friday
The Farm

We were back up at The Farm.

Chloe was having her second motorcycle lesson. For this a field wouldn't be adequate, but to start with, I sent her to complete ten circuits of the field, to get herself re-acquainted with the motorcycle. Again, we had driven up on the BMW and I sat with Jack, enjoying a coffee while Chloe started the motorcycle herself and set off riding around the field.

"She's progressing well!" Jack said, approvingly. "You're a good teacher Mindy; Damon would have been very proud!"

I felt myself blushing at the compliment!

I had sent a copy of the video that Jack filmed last time, to Marcus. The asshole actually asked if the video was R-rated and would there be a lot of blood! Just because I was training somebody in the damn video, does *not* mean it's going to be all bloody! Marcus watched the video and said he was actually very impressed with me and said my Daddy would have been very proud, too! He also said it was very *normal*, for a change!

Once Chloe had completed her circuits, I got on my BMW and led her out a back gate; we were going off-road, along a track beside the river. This would take us several miles out and back. It would give Chloe a good run and let her experience off-road riding. Plus, I could exercise *my* new motorcycle! I was looking forward to this, as Dave's BMW was in the mail! This would mean that we could both go out together, which would be great fun!

I had obtained some GoPro Hero4 Cameras and attached a pair, in waterproof mounts, to the front and rear of my BMW, so I could film the ride. I had done the same to Chloe's motorcycle. There *should* be some interesting footage later, as my cameras were also connected into our comms system. My motorcycle had a Fusion radio in the left Pannier, with an aerial mounted on the top box. I had lunch packed into that top box, too, as well as some other emergency accessories!

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We started off along a track making idle gossip. Chloe kept bringing Josh into the conversation. It appeared that she was looking forward to going back to school next week, as she wanted to see her friends and show Josh off to them! Apparently, she would have the hottest boyfriend in the grade and the best bit was that he was British! We rode along the extremely twisty route for about four miles, before we pulled up.

"You enjoying yourself?" I asked.

"Awesome!" Exclaimed a grinning Chloe.

"Let's try some more slow speed manoeuvring. That is very important to learn, so you can control a heavy motorcycle at very low speeds," I said. We moved off slowly and I had Chloe play 'follow the leader' with me, as I led her in ever increasingly tight and slow turns. Once or twice Chloe had to put her feet down, to stabilise the motorcycle, but she did very well otherwise and her balance was brilliant.

We stopped for lunch beside the river and enjoyed some sandwiches. It had been a great morning.

"So... What does this *personal* training, you have in mind for Josh, involve...?" I asked, innocently. "Keeping up Anglo/American *sexual* relations?"

Chloe almost choked on her sandwich and her eyes bulged out.

"Mindy... I... I don't know..." Chloe stammered, before blushing and running out of steam.

"Aww, you are so sweet!"

"Mindy!" Chloe growled dangerously.

"Watching you shows me what I missed out on, growing up and I'm starting to regret it. You actually make me feel more like a normal girl everyday! That sounds weird, sorry."

"No it doesn't, Mindy. You helped me get my life back on track. Without you I would never have found Joshua and he might now be dead, ignoring you trying to cut his head off, of course!" Chloe said, grinning.

"Do you *have* to keep bringing *that* back up? I apologised to the kid, I even treated his wound!" I moaned.

"You still owe me for that slap, Hit Girl!" Chloe said smugly, rubbing her cheek.

"Jeez! Hit Girl's being held for ransom by a fourteen year-old girl!" I grimaced.

"Oh yeah!" Chloe said, smiling.

"Okay, Shadow get your ass back on that damn motorcycle, you can dream about riding Josh, later!" I said.

Chloe gave me a very nasty look indeed!

It was almost two, by the time we got back to The Farm and Chloe was exhausted. I had made her ride over some quite rough terrain, including tight corners and steep drops.

Later that afternoon ***The Farm***

Now it was Joshua's turn to learn!

I had bought Joshua some motorcycle leathers, in dark grey, with gauntlets, boots and a black helmet. His jacket and trousers had a composite armour lining, just like Chloe's and mine. He also now had his own personal concealed comms, which linked back via a Fusion radio installed at The Farm.

As with Chloe, I explained the circuit in the field, which Josh had already seen Chloe use, but going over it again was important.

Josh explained that he had had some limited experience with motorcycles and had ridden smaller scramblers, years before. I pointed out the essentials of the motorcycle: ignition switch, clutch lever, front brake, throttle grip, engine stop button, rear brake pedal, gear shift lever, fuel valve and kickstarter, as I had done with Chloe. I showed Josh the positions of the gear shift lever; horizontal for neutral, first gear, one notch down and then second to fifth gears above the neutral position. I explained how the clutch operated and let Josh pull the clutch lever, then push down on the gear change lever.

"Ready?" I asked, smiling encouragingly.

"I was born ready!" Josh said, with enthusiasm.

"Let the clutch in *gently*. Remember, when you stop you *must* pull the clutch lever or you *will* stall. Ignore the front brake for now; use the rear brake, down here. Twist the throttle backward to go faster and twist it forwards to go slower."

"Okay," Josh acknowledged.

"*Don't* look at the front tyre, try to look ahead and don't worry if you fall, okay?"

Josh nodded and started to look a little apprehensive.

"Apply a little gas, then let in the clutch *gently*! *Try* and follow the course, keeping it *slow* and don't forget, we drive on the *right* over here!," I said, laughing.

"Yeah, the wrong side of the bloody road!" Josh scowled.

I watched as Josh twisted the throttle gently and let in the clutch... He moved, reasonably smoothly too, which was impressive. He hadn't been lying about riding before. Jack was filming Josh with a camera, just in case he fell off! Josh managed a full circuit, before coming to a halt beside me, pulling in the clutch without stalling.

"Not bad, Josh," Chloe said, smiling.

"Very good!" I agreed, impressed.

"That was cool! I'd forgotten what it was like. My Dad used to take me on small scramblers, when I was about nine or ten," Josh explained, looking a little sad for a moment, before smiling.

"Okay, lets see you work up the gears, then," I said, encouragingly.

Josh went back out and worked his way up to third gear, quite successfully and managed two circuits, before he shifted down and came to a stop beside Chloe and I.

"You are a natural Josh, I am impressed; you're not the dumb shit, Chloe said you were!" I teased.

"I never said that!" Chloe exclaimed indignantly.

"Just fuckin' with ya!" I laughed.

"Thanks, Mindy. I enjoyed that, hopefully when I'm fully healed I'll be able to go out on a motorcycle properly," Josh said, smiling.

"No problem, Josh, "I said, smiling back.

I think I have some more shopping to do! With all this spending I'm gonna need to go out and get some more cash from those generous drug dealers!

***Chapter 77*: New Kid**

The following week

Friday

Josh and Chloe had both survived their first week at school!

From what Mindy has told me, Josh has apparently gone down very well with the other kids at the school, as they all seemed very curious about a foreign kid, not just a new kid.

Josh, though, *has not* survived this week completely unscathed!

I had quite a few concerns, on that first day back at school.

This was not just a new school, it was an *American* school and I had barely got used to my *last* American school, before I ended up in a coma. It was a little easier having Chloe with me, so at least I knew somebody! Of course, there was also Abby, but I found her a little too weird at times! I met Chloe's other friends: Avery and Riley, who both seemed to go all girly, when they met me, which was a little bit embarrassing. Chloe seemed to enjoy showing me off to everybody! It was also a bit daunting meeting Kyle, Chloe's ex-boyfriend. However, Kyle seemed to be a really good guy, as he said that he understood about Chloe's feelings for me and he wasn't going to get in the way, but he still wanted to be friends with Chloe and also with me. Kyle is very popular around the school, so that has helped me greatly with settling in.

I have also made two friends of my own: Mike and Ethan. We seemed to have a lot in common, but I had to be careful when any conversation turned to vigilante's or Hit Girl and Kick-Ass! Mindy had threatened me with major bodily harm and permanent damage to my, currently non-existent, sex life if I breathed even a single word about Fusion! I wasn't alone, as I understood that Chloe had received the exact same lecture!

Chloe had also given me a *very* detailed account of what she would do to me, if I looked at *any* another girl, at school! I thought that Chloe had been spending far too much time with Mindy!

All in all, it had been a good week. My injuries had been explained away, as wounds from a building collapse, which had killed my father; the best lies are often the truth, at least that's what Mindy says!

Josh had gone down really well at school, this week and I loved the looks that I got from those bitchy girls that normally tried to look down on me! They usually have the hot boyfriends, but Josh is *very* desirable around school and he is *mine*!

I had also warned Josh, with some *very* graphical descriptions, of what would happen, if he even *looked* at another girl! Those descriptions were definitely worthy of Mark Millar! My Mom doesn't like me reading those comics, but considering what else I get up to, they are rather tame!

Mind you, Mindy went *completely* ballistic with Josh on Sunday.

She happened to see Josh getting changed out of his combat suit, after some more training. Josh had quite a few bruises on his body, which he had tried to explain away as the results of that day's sparring. Mindy, however, was *not* convinced, as the bruises were obviously a few days old and nothing that had been done, during sparring, would have caused that sort of damage.

Finally, after a few graphic threats from a *very* angry Mindy, Josh admitted to having used the motorcycle a couple of times last week, while Jack and Natalie were out. That was why he was so good, during the 'first' training session! I wasn't at the safehouse during this, but Dave was and I understood that he had had to physically restrain Mindy, from hurting Josh; Dave said that Josh actually feared for his life, again! Mindy was yelling and screaming at Josh about being *totally* irresponsible and a lying little bastard, among other, very colourful, descriptions of his behaviour.

Mindy ranted on, about Josh, for most of Monday, too! Finally, on Monday evening she had calmed down and driven up to The Farm. She then sat Josh down and *calmly*, well calmly for Mindy, talked through what he had done. Josh, I understood, was very apologetic and promised *never* to do something that stupid again. Jack, meanwhile, had also gone ballistic and grounded Josh, initially till he was twenty-one! Jack then relented and grounded him for the next two weeks, which meant that, outside of school, we couldn't talk, text or email, which sucked and made me *really*

angry with Josh, too! Mindy said that she would have lots of *exciting* work lined up for Josh, on Saturday and Sunday!

Now, as with most schools, there are the usual idiots who liked to cause trouble.

In this case, we had three in our grade: Raymond Miller, who was the leader, Corey Davis and Paul Martin. Chloe explained that they enjoyed going around causing trouble and she herself had punched Miller, at least twice and he seemed to enjoy it, which just infuriated Chloe even more! I have learnt the hard way, that you *don't* want to infuriate Chloe, if you want to enjoy a pain free life. Chloe does *not* hit like the average girl!

I received a visit from this trio, who thought it would be good fun to pick on the new British kid. Chloe defending me, didn't exactly help my image in their eyes, either! I just ignored them and told them to fuck off, but I had a feeling that I would probably be hearing from them again and soon!

I'm currently in the bad books of Jack, Dave, Mindy and Chloe. Why? I kinda got a bit Jealous of Chloe riding that Honda, so I took a few rides around the field, when Jack and Natalie were out on Tuesday and Thursday. I came off a few times and once I landed badly, when the motorcycle actually landed on top of me, causing the heavy bruises that Mindy had seen. I was actually quite scared, when Mindy kicked off; she looked like that day when she tried to cut my throat. Dave had to physically restrain her and it really hit me then, what I had done. Mindy came to see me on Monday evening and I knew that I had really let her down, big time! I'd also let down Jack, too, which really upset me. Thankfully he wasn't as hard on me, as he could have been. The worst was Chloe; she was pissed, as I wasn't allowed to use my cell to communicate with her. She actually spent the next few days dropping 'grand theft auto' into nearly every conversation, which started to get a little annoying, after the first few hours, let alone two days later!

But I took it like a man, stiff upper lip and all that!

Now that Chloe and Josh were at school and Marty was at university, we had limited our Fusion activities.

We obviously couldn't have Chloe or Josh going to school on a Monday with lots of injuries that weren't there on the previous Friday! However, we would still have training each weekend and nothing during the week, as they would *both* have homework! Marty would help where he could, between his studies and would act as our technical support from his fully equipped apartment. Abby would also help where she could, of course. If an emergency cropped up, then we might call on everybody, but *only* in an emergency. Otherwise it would just be Hit Girl, Kick-Ass and Eisenhower, although Hawk said that she might come out some evenings.

The other problem with those two being back at school, was that Mindy was now bored during the day.

Take Wednesday for example:

"What's that?" I asked.

"Just making a list!" Mindy said, cheerfully.

I looked over Mindy's shoulder.

"Arrows?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm making a list of all the different types of arrows I will need," Mindy explained.

"You like the compound bow then?"

"They're really cool!"

I looked down the list.

"Interesting... Syringe... *Okay!* Flashbang... Listening device... Now *they* seem useful, but these... No... No... *Hell, no!*"

"I know some are a *little* unorthodox!" Mindy admitted, looking excited.

"Unorthodox! Where the *hell* do you get these, seriously warped, ideas from?" I asked, incredulously. "Ever heard of aerodynamics? A Katana arrow! Seriously!"

"*Okay*, jeez! Maybe I let my imagination get the better of me!" Mindy growled, in exasperation.

"There's no *'maybe'* about it! I agree with some of them, maybe half a dozen, but the rest... They are just seriously messed up, Mindy! Plus, are you really going to be followed around by a truck, carrying all of these? Maybe get a trailer for the Ducati?"

"I was only having a bit of fun!" Mindy whined.

***Chapter 78*: Jackal Humility**

The following day
Saturday

9:00 A.M.

Josh was going to suffer another full day of training!

He also needed to make reparations for his wrongdoings.

"You have got to be kidding!" Josh groaned.

"You *will* clean every single weapon!" I confirmed.

"But there's dozens!" Josh whined.

"Six Heckler & Koch G36C assault rifles, two FN P90 personal defence weapons, six Glock 17 pistols, two Glock 18 pistols, four Glock 19 pistols, two Glock 26 pistols, one MP5K sub-machine gun, two SIG Sauer P232 pistols and two Heckler & Koch MP7 personal defence weapons!" I said, with a smile.

"Who the hell fired all these? Did I miss a damn war?" Josh continued to whine.

"Dave and I enjoyed a little target shooting yesterday, I was bored!" I admitted, with an evil laugh.

"This will take hours!"

"Got somewhere else to be? It is now nine o'clock in the morning. Your first shift will last two hours," I said and left a very unhappy Josh in the armoury.

"That was just evil, Mindy!" Chloe said.

"Well, he needs to learn that I don't accept failure. I went soft on Dave, but nobody else and that includes you, Shadow!" I growled. "Come to think of it Dave never goes soft with me!"

"Eww, that's just gross!" Chloe groaned, pretending to vomit.

"Okay, before I wipe the floor with Jackal, I'll practice with you!"

"Bring it on, Soft Girl!" Chloe challenged, diving at me and kicking my legs out from under me.

"Hey, I wasn't ready!" I complained.

"Playtimes over, Hit Girl!" Chloe growled. "You snooze you lose!"

"I never, play!" I growled back and threw myself back to my feet and towards that grinning bitch.

Chloe put up a very good defence, but she has a habit of telegraphing what she is about to do; it only happens rarely and the signals are easily missed, but I have learnt to recognise them. Well she can learn the hard way!

"Damn, they're fast!" I heard a voice say and was momentarily distracted, as I saw Dave and Kim standing beside the mat.

"They are that!" Agreed Dave.

I just caught Chloe's back kick, on my thigh, as I tried to twist out of her way, but ended up on the mat again! I was getting mad.

"How you doing, Mister GTA?" I asked.

"That wasn't funny the first, nor the hundredth time!" Josh moaned, elbow deep in a Heckler & Koch G36C assault

rifle.

"Well, if you can't handle the time..." I started, grinning.

"...Don't do the crime!" Kim finished, with a laugh.

"Bloody funny, the pair of you!" Josh grouched.

"I'll leave you in peace, only twenty-six left to do!" I said. "You're lucky we only fired a small selection of the armoury!"

Kim and I left the armoury, ignoring the obscenities Josh was muttering under his breath, some of which I hadn't heard before, even from Mindy, who was very proficient on the subject!

"Okay Hawk, let's see what you can do now!" I said and received a brief glare from Mindy, as she whirled around the map, sparring with Chloe.

11:00 A.M.

"Right, first shift is over, Jackal!"

"Thank God!" Josh breathed.

"You have fifteen minutes to take a break, then I want you on the mat," I said.

"Oh yes! That sounds like fun!" Josh commented, with a smile.

"Get your mind out of the damn gutter!" I growled in response.

..._...

Fifteen minutes later I was facing off with Josh.

"Hit me!" I ordered.

Josh came at me with a roundhouse kick, which I easily deflected, then Josh switched to a jumping roundhouse kick, which caught me by surprise as well as in the shoulder, sending me flying into Chloe and we both landed in a heap.

"Two for the price of one!" Josh said with a smug grin.

"I'll give you points for creativity, but..." I replied and flew at Josh with my own jumping side kick, which sent Josh across the mat.

"That all you got!" Josh said, between gasps of pain.

I took a deep breath and started circling Josh, while he got up and started turning with me, never letting me out of his sight. We both gauged each other and tried to work out the other's game plan.

"Get her Josh!" Chloe shouted.

"Oh, I will!"

"Thanks for the support, bitch!" I yelled at a smirking Chloe.

Josh was slowly edging towards me, but unlike Chloe, Josh *did not* telegraph his actions. This kid knew some advanced kicks, so could use any one of over a dozen potential kicks, not to mention variations and combinations of the kicks! I also knew that Josh had mastered feints, too, which were very difficult to detect and counter correctly, before the real kick occurred.

Finally he moved, but I was able to catch his foot and twist him around and dump him hard on the mat. I think I hurt him this time, as he yelled out in pain when he hit the mat. I approached him, to check that he was okay, but then found myself flying backwards, as Josh grasped my left ankle and pulled. But I was able to kick out with my right foot and continue into a back flip, landing reasonably cleanly on my feet.

"She's like a damn cat!" Josh groaned, picking himself up.

"Okay bitchy, let's see you fight us both!" Chloe challenged, standing next to Josh, on the mat.

Chloe looked at Josh and nodded encouragingly. Josh nodded back, with a forced smile; he was in pain.

"Bring it on, little kiddies!" I growled.

"This is gonna be good!" I said to Kim.

"I've never seen Mindy take on more than one at a time!" Kim said.

"Oh, I have; she can handle half a dozen, easily!" I replied.

I saw Mindy flexing her muscles and she started to circle Josh and Chloe, who were preparing themselves for the fight. I noticed some whispering between them both, as they both agreed on a plan of attack.

Who would strike first? I thought that Mindy would wait to see what the pair come up with; I was sure that she'd want to see how creative they could be.

Okay, I saw that; Chloe was getting ready to move. Mindy has focused on Chloe. Oh crap! Josh just launched at Mindy, blind-siding her, while her attention was on Chloe. That was clever, Chloe knows that she tends to telegraph her actions and she also knows that Mindy knows, so she used that weakness as a distraction! Josh attacked with a reverse spinning hook kick. The kick caught Mindy on the back of the head, as it should and Mindy went down, but only for half a second, as she instantly recovered and flipped off to one side and then back towards Chloe, delivering a jumping side kick, before running at the side of the armoury and executing a perfect reflex kick!

A reflex kick is a stunning acrobatic kick, used only by the most highly skilled.

In this case, Mindy ran up to the wall of the armoury and leapt, planted one foot, high, on the wall, extended her leg and boosted away from the wall towards Josh, now with accelerated height and power and lashed out with the other leg. Josh was caught completely unprepared and found himself flying through the air and landing on Chloe, who was just picking herself up, from Mindy's last attack!

"Fuck! That was awesome!" Kim exclaimed.

Mindy had landed on the mat, like a cat, as she usually did. She was breathing heavily and looked really pleased with herself.

"Not bad, Hit Girl; seen better!" I quipped.

"You complete ass!" Mindy growled, as I gave her a hug.

Mindy then went to help Josh and Chloe up off of the mat. Josh was groaning with pain and so was Chloe. This was the second time somebody had been dumped on top of her!

"Not quite how I envisioned Josh lying on top of me!" Chloe commented, before realising what she had just said aloud and blushed bright red.

"A few less clothes, might have been nice!" Josh teased, before Chloe punched him, hard, on the shoulder.

"Well done Mindy!" Chloe conceded. "Hit Girl is still the greatest!"

"It was never in doubt!" Mindy said, giving Chloe a hug.

"Mindy's never one to let her fame go to her head!" I quipped, receiving a glare from Mindy.

"Dave, tell Josh that I am not completely cold and heartless," Mindy said.

"I would never lie to Josh!" I replied, smirking.

"I am warm and loving, ass!" Mindy insisted.

"Could have fooled me!" Josh added.

"Okay, actions speak louder than words! I think Josh has learnt his lesson and we should all help Josh finish off those

weapons! If Josh would like some help, of course?" I asked.

"Please!" Josh begged.

Later that day
The Farm

We all met Marty, up at The Farm.

Marty and Abby had spent the morning putting the finishing touches to our new van. This van was to be our Mobile Command Centre, for if we needed to go out of town, or if a safehouse got compromised. It would be stored at The Farm.

The vehicle itself was a brand new, black, long wheelbase, mid roofed, Ford Transit van, with tinted glazing. Marty and Abby had equipped the rear of the vehicle with computers, screens, communications, a generator and various other equipment relevant to our operations. Between this van and Beast, we should be able to operate anywhere. While the new van was not protected to the same standards as Beast, it still boasted Type II and Type III-A armour, in essential areas. The vehicle was also air conditioned. From the outside the vehicle looked like any other van, so shouldn't attract attention.

Now, considering that two geeks had built this van, it had a geeky name: 'Lucille'! This was a reference to one of Abby's heroes, Alec Hardison, from the Leverage television show! Not my choice of name, but then the van is geek central, so I left it all to them! However, while the van was mainly for support, I did insist that a gun safe was covertly installed in the vehicle, just in case! I liked Marty's idea for a Command Van, although initially I did suggest a Command Truck, with full armoury, but Dave said a big purple, forty foot trailer, would not be very subtle, despite being fun to drive!

Even Jack thought that the van was good. He remarked that it was better than what Chicago PD used, which Marty and Abby took as one hell of a compliment!

..._...

While we were at The Farm, Dave received a delivery.

It was his own 'civilian use' BMW R1200-GS Adventure in Racing Blue. We considered the same colour as mine, but decided on something different and not green! For now, Marty would get the motorcycle equipped with the necessary communications and video equipment, similar to mine.

Sometime next week, I would take Dave out, so he could test his new ride!

***Chapter 79*: Exposed**

Author's Note: *Please be aware that this chapter contains crude language and insinuations!*

The following day

Sunday

Safehouse A

Something happened this afternoon, between Josh and Chloe, exactly what I didn't really know!

Everything seemed to have gone well; Josh had been forgiven and Mindy had given him and Chloe some constructive training. Now they seemed to be avoiding each other and would not look each other in the face. I could only assume that one or the other had said or done something, out of turn!

Mindy and I both tried to find out, but neither Chloe nor Josh were saying anything!

Three days later

Lunchtime

Lake View High School

I had to tell somebody!

At lunchtime I sat down with Mike and Ethan.

"Can you two keep a secret?" I asked, tentatively.

"For you, Josh, of course!" Both replied.

"Something happened on Sunday!" I started.

"What?" Mike asked, eagerly.

I leant closer to my friends.

"I saw a girl, completely naked!" I said, feeling my face start to warm up.

"On TV?"

"No, in the shower and for real... Like four feet away from me!" I explained.

I had to tell somebody!

At lunchtime I sat down with Avery and Riley.

"Can you two keep a secret?" I asked, tentatively.

"Of course, Chloe!" Both replied.

"Something happened on Sunday!" I started.

"Tell us then!" Riley insisted, excitedly.

I leant closer to my friends.

"My boyfriend saw me in the shower!" I explained.

"You mean, *completely naked*?" Ethan asked, grinning.

"*Completely!*" I acknowledged.

"Who?"

I didn't want to say, but...

"Chloe!" Mike blurted out.

"Yeah!" I confirmed, reluctantly.

"Did you see, like, everything?" Mike asked, grinning.

"*Everything!*"

"Even..."

"*Everything!*" I repeated, with a smug grin.

"Well, what did you do?" Avery asked.

"I just stood there!" I said.

"And he saw...?"

"Everything!" I confirmed.

"You didn't scream at him or cover up?" Riley asked, surprised.

"No and I don't know why!" I replied, a little unsure of myself.

"She just stood there?" Mike asked, incredulously.

"Letting you see her... Bits?" Ethan asked.

"Yes, she just stood there... Then she smiled at me!" I said, thinking back and smiling warmly at the thought.

"She smiled?" Ethan asked, amazed.

"I tried to say something, but as a great man once said: '*The problem is, God gave man a brain and a penis and only enough blood to run one at a time*'. He was right!"

"Did he say anything?" Riley asked.

"No, but something else did!" I said, feeling my cheeks get *very* warm. "There was obviously no blood in his brain; so it must have gone somewhere else! But I *definitely* got a reaction!"

"Like where?" Avery asked, then sudden realisation hit her. "Oh... *Oh...*!" And she blushed.

"She noticed, too!" I said, feeling myself blush. "Damn! She was the hottest thing I had *ever* seen!"

"You are one lucky git!" Mike said.

"Yeah, you have one of the hottest girls in the grade *and* she let you see her naked!" Ethan added.

"So how did you *feel*?" Riley asked, with barely concealed anticipation.

"I don't know. I've never really had feelings like that before, but damn, those feeling were wonderful; those feelings felt so good!" I admitted.

"Wow!" Riley responded, wide eyed.

"You know, if he had wanted it, I would have let him fuck me, right then and there!"

"So how did she make you *feel*?" Mike asked, with enormous anticipation.

"I don't really know. I have never felt like that before. Nothing in those magazines *ever* had that affect on me!" I admitted. "I suppose I just felt so attracted to her!"

"Awesome dude!" Ethan responded, gleefully.

"You know, if she had wanted it, I would have done it, right then and there!"

"I even considered pulling him into the shower with me! Even now, that sounds so hot!" I said, blushing madly and giggled.

"Why didn't you?" Riley asked, all excited.

"I don't know, maybe I was scared. We are only fourteen and that would have been too fast, much too fast! In hindsight, one thing would have led to another and..." I said.

"My sister, Zoe, she had sex for the first time last year, when she was sixteen. She said she was glad that she had never had sex earlier; she said it felt good waiting and just touching and playing, but never sex. It made the wait all the more worthwhile," Riley said, lost in her thoughts, with a strange smile on her lips.

"So, should I take it to the next level... Touching? Then go no further?" I asked.

"Why not? A bit of touchy, feely can't hurt and by the way, Zoe says boys make a hell of a mess when they get excited!" Riley said and giggled.

"Maybe you should have dived into the shower with her?" Ethan said, with a smirk.

"I considered yanking off my shirt and shorts and diving in, but something told me to hold off. I might start something that I cannot, or rather should not, finish," I said.

"You mean sex!" Mike said, blushing as he said the word.

"Yeah. But I am not ready for that and I don't think Chloe is either. Yeah, I'd love to have sex with her; I'd be bloody stupid not to, but no, it would be moving way too fast and I respect Chloe too much to want to throw everything away, just to lose my virginity," I said, surprised at my own logic. "We are only fourteen!"

I just wish I knew what Chloe wanted!

"Honestly, you should move to the next level. Josh is fucking hot!" Riley said, blushing again.

"Keep your hands off and your legs closed, Riley!" I growled, then grinned. "He is a good catch!"

"You never know, British dick might taste good!" Avery said, making me spit out a mouthful of Coke.

"I cannot believe you actually said that, Avery!" I exclaimed, before relenting. "You could be right! Yuck... I don't think I could ever do that, though!"

I just wish I knew how Josh felt!

Chapter 80: The Next Level

Author's Note: *Please be aware that this chapter contains crude language and insinuations!*

That weekend
Saturday
West Ridge

We had a lot of things planned for this weekend, so both Josh and Chloe had stayed the night.

Surprisingly, Josh wasn't up early and neither was Chloe!

I went upstairs and saw that Josh's door was open and the room was empty; but Chloe's wasn't quite closed and I could hear voices, two of them, in Chloe's room. I pushed the door open and stopped in surprise.

Chloe was not in bed alone!

"Should I be worried?" I asked.

Neither Chloe nor Josh said anything, but both blushed bright red!

"Need a condom, Josh?" Dave asked, having followed me in and Chloe's mouth dropped open and her eyes almost bugged out; Josh just blushed a deeper shade of red!

"We were not *fucking* !" Chloe exclaimed. "We're not ready for that, we're just..."

"Exploring?" I prompted.

"Yeah, something like that!" Chloe offered, hiding further under the duvet.

I noticed that there were various items of clothing on the floor! I grabbed one end of the duvet and Chloe's eyes went wide...

"*No Mindy!*" Chloe screamed, as she grabbed for the duvet, before it slid too far.

"Thought so!" I laughed.

"Naked?" Dave asked, with a smirk.

"Oh yeah!" I confirmed.

"Just remember Chloe, you can't fight crime when pregnant!" I said, ignoring Chloe's look of horror and walked out, followed by a laughing Dave!

That complete bitch!

I *cannot* believe she actually said that! I was totally mortified!

I turned to look at Josh, who was trying not to laugh.

"It was *not* funny, cunt!" I said, as I threw back the duvet, then jumped up and locked the door. I noticed that Josh's eyes followed my naked body, all the way to the door and then back again to the bed!

"Like what you see?" I asked, coyly and I took my time on the way back.

I think Josh was totally speechless, but another part of him had *definitely* responded!

We had decided to just enjoy our bodies; *absolutely no sex!* Josh had only been in bed with me for ten minutes, before Mindy and Dave appeared and the little rat had forgotten to close and lock the door. He only came through to talk, but I wanted more and teased him by pulling off my underwear and dropping it onto the floor, while still covered up by the duvet! I noticed an immediate reaction in his shorts when I did that! He had slide into the bed, before he

dumped his shorts and t-shirt. Just when Mindy came in, I was running my hands over his stomach, heading downwards, while Josh was running his hands over what passed for my breasts. We had shot apart very fast!

Now I could enjoy!

I had never touched one before, but it was now in my hand and it felt soft, but hard, at the same time and it was very warm. It felt even better because I knew that it was me that was making it get hard and warm! Josh's hand moved slowly and hesitantly down my stomach, but I grabbed it, just as he got his fingers into my pubic hair.

I wasn't ready for that, not yet! I was also feeling a little ashamed at being wet down there, despite being told that it was completely normal.

"Not yet!" I growled to Josh. "You need to earn that!" Josh moved his hand back up to my chest and I went back to...

I noticed that the more I touched and played with it, the more Josh's breath would catch; I thought back to what Riley had said about this and I remembered that she said it could get messy!

And she *wasn't* kidding! My hand was eventually covered in... Yuck, it was gross, but warm and made me feel really good!

Josh seemed to enjoy himself too!

Damn!

That was one *hell* of an experience. I actually saw Chloe naked, again and she was okay with it!

I'd only wanted to try and talk about what happened, but Chloe took her underwear off and she well... Ordered is probably the best word... Ordered me to get into bed! Just seeing her underwear on the floor, sent all the blood south again, so I scrambled into bed, feeling embarrassed. Then Chloe gave me a look and I slipped my shorts off along with my t-shirt. I can't say what I felt, it was just so unreal. But I was really turned on, if that's the right phrase. Inside me, my brain and my dick were both telling me that I was lying naked in a bed with a girl, who was also naked!

Chloe was running her hands across my chest and stomach, before heading south. I was feeling nervous and also a lot of other previously unknown emotions! I turned towards Chloe and ran my hands over her breasts; not big, but nice and compact, like she is. This was a first, touching bare breasts and without getting slapped! They felt really good and I got a reaction when I touched the nipples, Chloe's breath seemed to hitch, then the door opened and Mindy appeared.

I just thought: 'Oh Fuck!'

..._...

Once Mindy and Dave left, Chloe threw back the duvet and exposed me completely, before she jumped up to close and lock the door. Then she turned and kinda took a slow walk back. I had enjoyed seeing her from the back, but the front... My dick approved that was for certain! I just hoped I could control myself! Chloe had some lovely curves and my eyes moved from her grinning face, over her chest and down to her crotch.

Then she jumped back into bed and her hands went everywhere, it was difficult to keep control! I tried to slide my hand down her stomach and just got to her crotch, when she stopped me, then it happened; I lost control completely!

I thought Chloe might be upset, but she just giggled and made a face.

Josh and Chloe appeared downstairs, about forty minutes later.

Both of them looked very pleased with themselves!

"You've got clothes on!" Mindy teased.

Both Chloe and Josh just scowled in response, going slightly pink in the face.

"You two enjoy yourselves?" I asked, with a smirk.

"Yes, we did!" Chloe admitted firmly, trying not to grin or smile. "Can we change the subject please, I'm hungry!"

I was busy cooking breakfast and suddenly had an idea.

"Sausage, Chloe?" I asked, pushing over a plate piled with cooked sausages. "Not British I'm afraid!"

Chloe blushed deeply and muttered something about bacon and eggs, before turning away and Mindy was howling with laughter!

***Chapter 81*: Hormones**

Author's Note: *Please be aware that this chapter contains crude language and insinuations!*

Later that morning

Saturday

The Farm

I had gone soft, really soft!

Ass-Kick says that it's my feminine side coming out!

Did Hit Girl actually have a feminine side? Marcus always wished that she had one and I suppose Dave did too.

I had a couple of surprises for Josh and one for Chloe.

"Let's start with young Mister Grand Theft Auto!" I suggested.

"Am I ever gonna hear the end of that?" Josh groaned.

"Probably not," Dave said, laughing.

"I really don't know if you deserve this Joshua, but..." I said pulling off a tarpaulin.

"Fuck!" Chloe exclaimed.

Josh was speechless; his mouth just hung open.

It was a twin to Chloe's Honda CRF250L, only instead of begin Slate Grey and Navy Blue, it was Silver and Tan, with the registration plate: '**JACKAL**'.

"Bloody hell!" Josh stammered when he finally got his voice back.

I saw his face flicker between different emotions and at one stage I was certain he was about to burst into tears! Instead he came over and gave me a big hug, which was a surprise that I hadn't quite planned on and it kinda freaked me out a bit!

"Thanks, Mindy! You're wonderful; I don't care what the others say about you!" Josh said, thankfully letting me go.

"I'm glad that's over! Now Chloe keep a firm hold of Joshua for this one, so he doesn't invade my personal space again, but keep your hands in plain sight!" I laughed. "Dave!"

Dave pulled off another tarpaulin, revealing two identical motorcycles. These were Honda CRF250R 15YM off-road motorcycles, with Honda World modifications and livery.

"These two are for off-road use only, as yourselves: Chloe and Josh; you are both too young to be able to go on the roads anyway. These are also two and a half times as powerful as that shitty little thing over there," I said, pointing at the Honda CRF100F motorcycle. "Now, I thought you two could get used to these new motorcycles for an hour or two, then we could all go for a ride, just the four of us."

"Cool!" Chloe exclaimed, all smiles.

"Read these, before you even attempt to start them!" I suggested and threw a copy of the Owners's Manual to each of them. The controls were basically the same, so there shouldn't be any major problems.

Half an hour later, Chloe and Josh were slowly edging around the field on the new motorcycles, primarily getting used to the larger and heavier frame, plus the fact that the motorcycles were much more powerful and thus much more dangerous. Both Josh and Chloe were well aware of these facts and I think they were both intimidated by the new machines. Both of them wore a harness over their leathers, which held a GoPro camera, so we could record their antics!

Dave was very happy with his new motorcycle; we had both ridden up together, I had Chloe and Dave had Josh. Jack and Natalie came out to watch and Jack was very impressed with how they both handled the larger machines.

Josh had been with us a month now, but it felt a lot longer. Jack and Natalie were very pleased with him, excluding the motorcycle incident! Jack actually mentioned that if that was the worse thing Josh did then he was going to do well. Jack admitted that his own teenaged years were a little haphazard and he managed to get himself in a lot of trouble, but refused to elaborate further! Natalie enjoyed having Josh around too, as she now had more things to keep herself busy, which she enjoyed.

The plan was to get Chloe and Josh used to riding these new motorcycles, as they were of similar power and physical size, to the road-legal machines that they would use as Shadow and Jackal. Once they could handle the bigger machines, I could then take them out on the road, but not before they learnt traffic signs and regulations, so we wouldn't have any accidents! Dave had suggested that maybe I should learn some traffic regulations, too, including speed limits; so I suggested where he could stick his speed limits, politely of course!

We eventually headed out, down the same track that Chloe and I had used previously.

I led the way, followed by Chloe, then Josh and with Dave at the rear. We rode slowly, while Josh and Chloe got used to their motorcycles on uneven terrain, as they were a good twenty kilos heavier, not to mention that the seat was twenty centimetres higher and the machine itself was also thirty centimetres longer!

I had also warned both of them, *especially Joshua*, that they should never, *ever*, take these motorcycles out on their own! Josh moaned about me singling him out and insisted that he had learned his lesson, but accepted he my warning, anyway!

At lunchtime we stopped and sat down under some trees to eat our sandwiches.

"Dave, you got a minute?" Josh asked, meaningfully.

"Okay," I replied, looking at Mindy, who nodded with a smirk. We had expected something like this.

Josh and I walked a short distance away, before sitting down again.

"Dave... I... This is a little embarrassing, but... I only have three people in the whole world that I can talk to about certain things: you, Mindy and Chloe. Now, considering what this is about, Mindy is out and considering it is about Chloe, she's out too. I know we've only known each other for a month, but you and Mindy are like an elder brother and sister to me. Anyway, this is a guy thing and well you are a guy!" Josh said, looking shy and embarrassed.

"Thanks for noticing," I replied, grinning.

"How many girls have you been with, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Mindy would be my third," I replied, honestly.

"So you're very experienced in the opposite sex, then?" Josh asked, still looking embarrassed.

"I don't know about 'very', but I have experienced different people," I said.

"Well... You know some of what happened this morning!" Josh started, looking even more embarrassed.

"You were in bed with Chloe and you were both naked, then '*Boom Goes the Dynamite*'?" I suggested and Josh went bright red.

"That was accurate, I suppose!" Josh finally admitted.

"I assume you two didn't..." I prompted.

"No, it went all over her hand; I never went '*down there*'!" Josh said, looking even more uncomfortable.

"So, what actually prompted all of this... Er... Activity?" I asked, curiously.

"Last week, at the safehouse, I er, walked in on Chloe, in the shower," Josh explained, grinning.

"And you liked what you saw?" I asked.

"Yeah, definitely, but what was weird, was that Chloe never tried to cover up, or scream at me! You know, the usual reaction if a boy walks in on a naked girl!" Josh replied.

"So you thought that Chloe enjoyed you looking?" I suggested.

"I suppose. She didn't exactly complain! Is that normal?"

"Considering what we do, I'm not sure if any of us are exactly 'normal'; Mindy most definitely isn't! As for Chloe, she has her moments, but she seems to be a fairly normal fourteen year-old girl. However, I was a geek and hung around with geeks, so never got anywhere near a girl, till I was almost sixteen! There were some fun times, behind the dumpsters at the comic shop though!" I responded. "That was where I lost my virginity!"

"So you two are intending to take it slowly?" I asked Chloe, who looked very uncomfortable and I wasn't exactly enjoying the conversation either! But I couldn't exactly refuse to listen, could I?

"Yeah, I wouldn't even let him touch '*down there*'!" Chloe said, blushing wildly. "How did you feel, the first time Dave saw you naked?"

"Funny story there! You have to remember that I was going through a rather wild time, a little similar to Josh's experiences in New York. You know, trying to survive, but things kept going to shit! Well after Dave found me and helped me regain my more human side, I kinda surprised him after a shower, by coming out completely naked! Dave just stood there, for what felt like an hour, staring, but I enjoyed it and I had never felt so feminine, at least to that point in my life! That was my first ever 'making out' and I loved it!" I said, with a big grin, remembering.

"So Josh's reaction was normal, then?" Chloe asked.

"I suppose and you know that I haven't had that much experience with boys, at all!" I reminded her.

"I know, but you have gone beyond petting through clothes and making out with nothing on, we've only just played around a bit and we didn't really make out, just explored each other's bodies! I also got a gooey mess all over my hand, too!" Chloe said, blushing bright red.

"Now that bit I love! I assume it was under the duvet, so you didn't actually see it happen?"

"No, I didn't see it happen," Chloe confirmed, hiding her face, behind her hand.

"Oh, you must, it's cool! Although I must warn you; if you're using your mouth, be careful as they explode without warning and I got a face full the first time, but I loved every moment and I kinda like the taste, too! Don't use your teeth either, they don't like that!" I said, then laughed at Chloe's horrified expression.

"It's the most personal thing you can do for the guy you love, but it *must* be *your* choice; never feel you have to do that! Now, as for '*down there*', I was nervous, very nervous that first time... Let me guess, you were nervous because with all the stripping naked and being in bed with a naked boy, you got a little over excited and you were worried about what Josh might feel, when he put his hand '*down there*'?"

"Yeah," Chloe said, shyly.

"It's all normal, hey newsflash! You're a girl and Josh is a boy, it's biology bitch!" I said, wishing I hadn't used *her* phrase!

"I suppose!" Chloe replied, looking sheepish.

"The best thing I enjoy, is Dave going '*down there*' with his hand, fingers, even his tongue! Now, don't look grossed out, it's the best feeling ever, short of full on sex!" I insisted. "I have a feeling that you have never had a full on orgasm."

Chloe looked very embarrassed and was peering out between two fingers of one hand. She just shook her head.

"Trust me, it is the greatest feeling *ever*! I used to get off killing, but now I've discovered something even better and that's Dave messing about '*down there*'! Be warned, though, don't let yourself go too far. Once hormones and emotions are in control, you can *lose control* and the next thing you know, you're done! I would suggest speaking to

your Mom and getting on the pill or something similar!" I said.

Chloe just shook her head, wildly!

"Think about it. Your Mom lives in the real world and will respect your wishes, plus I think she'll be pleased that you're being responsible. She knows how you feel about Josh and will probably be expecting this. I know you aren't wanting to have full on sex for another couple of years, but it doesn't do any harm to be safe! Talk to your Mom, when you get home," I advised.

"Can you help..." Chloe asked.

"No, I cannot; besides if your Mom thought I was pushing you into sex, she'd double-tap me in the head one night!"

Chloe didn't have a response to that one!

"Can you give me some clues, as to what I should and shouldn't do? I don't want to rely on the internet for things like this!" Josh asked.

"Do what comes naturally. Enjoy her body, but don't abuse it; get too rough and she'll tell you, or slap you most probably! If you're unsure about anything *ask*; she might be too worried to tell you that you're hurting her. Even though you might be having the time of your life, always remember that it's about giving as much as about receiving and that is what makes it fun. It's a two way street, always remember that!" I advised.

"Chloe stopped me from putting my hand between her legs; was I doing something wrong?" Josh asked.

"I doubt it! If Chloe doesn't want you exploring '*down there*'; don't push the issue, let her come around in her own time. In the same way, if you are unhappy with how she handles *you*, then say something! Chloe won't know what will hurt and what won't, but you *will*, believe me! There's a good chance that Chloe will let you know when she wants you to go 'down there', but be gentle. Don't go stampeding in like a herd of elephants, she won't thank you for it! She says slow down; slow down. You're both new at this, so take it slow and learn as you go. Ignore advice from other guys at school; in most cases they haven't a fucking clue!"

"Thanks Dave!" Josh said, looking relieved.

"I'm always available, if you want to talk, about anything! I did a lot of listening some years ago, when my 'girlfriend' thought I was gay!" I said and Josh gave me a very strange look indeed. "Ask Marty, he loves telling that story! Come on, lets get back to the girls!"

"Thanks Mindy, you're great to talk to!" Chloe said, smiling.

"Here's the boys back!" I said, getting up.

"All sorted!" Dave asked.

"Oh yeah!" I replied.

"You knew?" Chloe asked, indignantly.

"We had a feeling you two might want to talk. That's why we arranged this little ride," Dave explained.

"You are too good to us!" Josh offered, smiling at Chloe.

"Tell me about it!" I said, getting back onto my BMW. "Let's roll!"

The ride back to The Farm was fun!

Mindy insisted on taking us on a very tortuous route, round tight bends and down into ditches. This really taxed my muscles, as this motorcycle was heavy at slow speeds, but I managed it and so did Chloe.

I enjoyed today, not just because of the chat with Dave, but the motorcycle ride was awesome.

I couldn't believe that Mindy had bought those two motorcycles for Chloe and I to ride. I was also completely stumped, when I first saw the other motorcycle, which would belong to Jackal! I had started to feel *really* guilty, about abusing Mindy's trust and going out on that other motorcycle, alone!

One thing I did notice, was that the ride back had a lot more conversation, but nobody mentioned anything about this morning!

Once back at The Farm, we cleaned down the motorcycles and put them away.

Chloe asked me to drop her off at home and she said she'd see us later. I had a feeling that she was building up the courage to speak to Dr Bennett, about certain things! Dave gave me a strange look, but I just told him not to worry about it and we headed back home. Josh rode on the back of Dave's motorcycle, allowing me to have a little bit of fun!

One minor problem occurred on the way home; I got pulled over by the Police and not just *any* Police Officer either. It was Murphy and Fellowes! I started to feel nervous. I had to make sure that I behaved like I had never seen them before! Dave was a couple of miles behind and I told him to ignore me and keep going, so as not to arouse suspicion.

I pulled over and the large Police SUV pulled in behind me. I turned off the ignition and raised my visor. Murphy climbed out, while Fellowes stayed in the SUV.

"Good afternoon, ma'am," Murphy said.

"Afternoon, Officer," I replied, before asking. "What seems to be the problem?"

"You were going a little bit fast, at the last off ramp," Murphy advised.

Damn!

"I'm sorry, the motorcycle's new, still getting used to it!" I tried.

"You seem like a well behaved, young lady, so we'll just leave it as a warning! There's no need to ride like you're Hit Girl!" Murphy said, laughing. "Can I see your licence and registration, please?"

My heart skipped a beat when he mentioned my alter ego! I handed over the requested documents and Murphy ran a quick check of my name and registration details, which, of course, came back clean!

"Thanks, ma'am! Nice bike, just keep below the posted limits!" Murphy advised, heading back to the SUV.

I pulled down my visor and restarted the motorcycle before heading off, carefully.

"Thanks God, that's over!" I breathed.

"Do I need to post bail?" Dave asked with a chuckle.

"Ass!" I growled in response!

Later that evening West Ridge

Chloe was back and she had the most enormous grin ever!

"So the talk went well?" I asked, as Chloe physically dragged me into another room, away from Dave and Josh.

"I expected yelling, but no. She sat me down and we talked, mother and daughter. I explained my feelings for Josh and she said she understood and that she thought I was being very mature and responsible, asking about protection. Mom says she'll get me sorted out next week!" Chloe explained, almost jumping up and down with happiness.

"Well done, Chloe! Told you it'd be fine!" I said, smiling.

"Oh, I mentioned to Mom about the whole double-tapping thing and she said no, that wasn't her style. Mom said that if she wanted to kill you, she could, but without leaving *any* evidence!" Chloe explained.

That sent a chill down my spine!

"Well, I'll definitely sleep better knowing that!" I grimaced and Chloe laughed.

Mindy and I were in bed and Sophia was curled up, on her couch.

"I enjoyed today, it was fun! That BMW is a great motorcycle; I felt good on it, both on and off road. At least I didn't get pulled for speeding!"

"Okay, I was going a bit fast; it's the purple part of me, it takes over sometimes!" Mindy tried, with a smile.

"Weak excuse!" I replied, dubiously.

Suddenly the peace was broken by a loud scream, followed by a yell. Both sounded like Chloe!

"I think Chloe's a screamer!" I commented and Mindy started giggling.

"That'll be the first orgasm!" Mindy said, still giggling. "How about giving me my next one?"

"I'd be pleased to!"

***Chapter 82*: Mafia**

The following morning

Sunday

West Ridge

Dave and I were in the kitchen having breakfast when Josh and Chloe appeared.

"So, how was it for you, Chloe!" I asked, innocently.

"Sounded *very* good from where we were!" Dave added and smirked at Josh. "You must have hit the spot, boy!"

Chloe just bit her lip and refused to say anything, but both had insane grins on their faces! Dave dished up some breakfast.

"Hope you washed your hands, Josh, after...!" Dave teased, just as Josh was reaching for his plate.

Chloe exploded.

"Okay, jeez! I had my first orgasm and it almost fucking killed me; scared the shit outta Josh, too!" Chloe exclaimed, with a giggle.

"And..." I prompted.

"It was awesome!" Chloe said, as she giggled and smiled till it must have hurt, with both hands over her face, as she blushed bright red!

"Well done Josh! You must have magic fingers like Dave!" I said, laughing.

Chloe actually leant over and gave Josh a kiss on the cheek, which made then him blush bright red!

Later that morning

Safehouse A

We rode to the safehouse and settled down to some *constructive* training.

By constructive, I meant separating Chloe and Josh, so that they could concentrate on the task in hand!

We got the compound bows out again and started practicing, using special training arrows, which had safer points. For a bit of fun, Dave wore his combat suit and allowed us to shoot at him, which also gave him an opportunity to try some defensive moves against the arrows, both with and without shields. The idea was that if Dave could deflect an arrow, then so could an enemy, so we would then come up with a defence, against the defence!

I was very annoyed to find that Chloe was a lot better, than me, when it came to aiming the bow. We also practiced with a quiver; learning to shoot an arrow, pull another arrow and shoot again, in as short a time as possible. This wasn't easy! I enjoyed the opportunity to shoot things at Dave, but I kept missing, which was starting to irk, especially as Chloe was almost always on target and Josh wasn't far behind! That must be the *persona* training! I had to admit, Chloe had quite a spring to her step now! She had told me earlier, that she had watched Josh this time and agreed that it was cool, but still refused to use her mouth!

By lunchtime, I had worked out the bow and was getting my arrows on target. There was no weapon that Hit Girl couldn't master! I went out to grab some pizzas, while Dave got out of his combat suit and Josh and Chloe tidied up the bows and arrows.

We enjoyed the pizzas and had a good laugh, mostly at Josh's and Chloe's expense!

"Okay screamer!" I said to Chloe, getting up and heading to the armoury.

"I am *not* a screamer!" Chloe insisted.

"So what was that scream at eleven o'clock last night, then?" I asked.

"A one off!" Chloe growled.

"Nothing wrong with it! Just so the neighbour's don't hear!" I quipped and received a nasty glare in return.

"Okay! No more sex talk! Here," I said, passing Chloe a training bō-staff. "Go and burn off some of that sexual tension!"

"Jackal, here boy!" I called, with a smirk.

"Woof!" Josh said, appearing in the armoury.

"Josh, you're only encouraging her!" Chloe advised.

"I can handle Mindy, don't you worry!" Josh replied.

"Okay! Josh, this is a 'Ninja-To'. It is smaller than a Katana, but larger than a Tanto and has a straight blade," I explained, handing him the sword, still in its saya. "Be *very* careful, as you pull it out, or you might lose those *fabulous fingers* that Chloe enjoys so much!"

I watched as Josh, slowly eased the blade out and his eyes went wide, as he examined the highly polished sword. I noticed that his hand seemed to be shaking. Josh seemed nervous about wielding the blade.

"Try some moves with it. Just don't kill anybody!" I said, seriously and suggested a few basic moves.

Once Josh had mastered some of the basic moves, primarily for defence, I decided to put him to the test. I grabbed a Bokken, or wooden practice sword.

"Now watch me, I'm going to move slowly, much more slowly than for real and I'm gonna be gentle," I said.

I don't think either Josh or Chloe actually believed me, but in this instance I was going to go slowly, so he could learn. He needed to master the basics, before we could move on. There was a time for fun and games, but also a time for serious training.

I showed Josh how to deflect basic attacks and let him work up the pace, as well as showing him some more complex attacks for him to defend against.

An hour later, I called time.

"Well done Josh!" I said. "You did well, very well. I'm impressed!"

"Thanks, Mindy!" Josh replied, with an enormous grin.

"Wow! I think Mindy likes you!" Chloe said, laughing. "Finally!"

That evening ***Safehouse A***

It had been almost a month, since we last went out and I *hoped* that the Russians would have settled down!

Battle Guy was running comms, from his apartment. Kick-Ass and I would be on our motorcycles, hurray! We would patrol out, from the Safehouse, towards the centre of Chicago.

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We had been out almost an hour and it was such a rush, being on my Ducati and being with my partner; I couldn't have been happier!

We were cruising east, side by side, when I registered a gun shot and immediately slammed on my brakes and skidded to a halt. I listened and heard another gunshot, so I span around and accelerated back, before I then took a left turn. Kick-Ass made a rapid one-eighty and followed.

"Battle Guy, I heard two gunshots... Hold on, I have two men exchanging shots... One just went down hard!" I called, skidded to a halt and drew a pistol.

"Battle Guy copies"

"Stop!" I yelled and received a bullet as a reply.

Kick-Ass stopped beside me.

"Fuck! Battle Guy, the dead man is a Cop! In pursuit now!" I called and the accelerated after the running assassin, followed by Kick-Ass.

The man vanished into a multi-storey parking lot. I skidded around a car exiting the parking lot and passed through the barrier, before it came down and I then headed directly at the man, who raised his pistol and fired at me. I swung in behind a parked SUV, climbed off and returned fire, just as Kick-Ass came past at speed, on his Fat Boy and cracked the man around the head with a baton, putting him down.

Kick-Ass came back around and stopped.

"Battle Guy. The shooter is down hard! We're all clear!" Kick-Ass called.

"Battle Guy copies all clear!"

..._...

I went over to check on the downed man, he was coming around.

"ублюдок!" The man said, rubbing his head. [*Motherfucker!*]

"You speak English cunt?" I growled.

"Of course I do, bitch!" The man responded.

"You killed a Cop, why should I let you live?" I growled.

"You shouldn't, because then I'd come after you!" The man promised.

"Your threats mean nothing to me, cunt!" I responded truthfully.

"You wanting to go to war, against us?" The man asked, incredulously.

"This is *my* City! I will not have Cops killed, in *my* City!" I growled, angrily. "By murdering Russian scum!"

"Don't start what you cannot finish, Hit Girl!" The man advised, then I shot him in the head!

"Let's go Kick-Ass!" I said and walked over to the Ducati.

We could hear sirens approaching, so left the scene fast.

"Battle Guy! The Russian is dead, we're clearing the area!" I called.

"Battle Guy copies!"

"Kick-Ass, I think we're going to war!" I growled.

"Could be fun!" Kick-Ass replied, dryly.

An hour later
South Chicago

"Knock! Knock!" I yelled, as Kick-Ass gave the door a good kick.

As the door burst open, I rolled into the room and came up with both pistols aimed and shot the first two men that raised weapons. The next pair of men managed to get off two shots each, all of which impacted my armour and almost made me lose my balance, before Kick-Ass nudged me forward with his foot and double-tapped each man in the head. I jumped up and moved forward, with Kick-Ass beside me.

A head appeared and Kick-Ass promptly removed it, then the big guns came out. I threw myself down, as I recognised the distinctive sound of an AKS-74U assault rifle. Kick-Ass followed, ignoring the two rounds that hit his armour.

"They seem to have some impressive firepower!" Kick-Ass said, calmly.

We both holstered our automatics and pulled around our G36C assault rifles. The AKS fire continued, over our heads. I slowly moved forwards, towards the doorway, that had the muzzle of an AKS-74U assault rifle sticking out of it. I reached up and grabbed the fore-sight, dragging the weapon through the door, closely followed by it's operator. I drove my fist into the man's shocked face, knocked him out and pulled the assault rifle out of his hands, before removing the magazine and throwing it across the room, which drew more automatic fire. This time it was smaller nine-millimetre rounds.

"Let's move Kick-Ass!" I called and advanced through the doorway. I fired several rounds into one man, who dropped his CZ Scorpion EVO 3 A1 sub-machine gun and followed the weapon to the floor, very, very dead. There were two more men, armed with the Scorpion sub-machine guns and they fired several rounds into my armour, before Kick-Ass cut down one man and I killed the other. There were no more Russians, so we started searching the rooms.

We found evidence of drug trafficking, involvement in grand theft auto and also people trafficking. There was also a large stash of weapons. These cunts needed to be taken down, they were a plague on Chicago. Unfortunately there was very little evidence

"Battle Guy, we're clearing out. I just have one or two items to pick-up," I called and got a strange look from Kick-Ass.

We called in the result to Voight and headed back to the safehouse.

"What the hell have you got strapped to the back of your motorcycle?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Spoils of war!" I replied, happily.

An hour earlier

After leaving the scene of the Cop killing, we had gone to meet Hank Voight.

"Sergeant Hank Voight, meet my partner, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass said.

"Damn! You never mentioned how hot she was!" Voight replied, grinning.

I actually felt myself blushing, but thankfully the mask covered my cheeks!

"She's spoken for, Sergeant!" Kick-Ass warned, with a chuckle! "And yes she is!"

Voight thanked us for catching and killing, the Cop killer, before getting down to business.

"That fucking asshole, Ralph D'Amico, has left the Russian Mafia dug in all over Chicago!" Voight said, angrily. "Now, those two assholes you caught last month, had some good stories to tell, including some addresses. Unfortunately, we would need somebody who was completely psychotic to go after these Russians. There are some complete nut jobs in the CPD, but none *that* psychotic!" Voight explained.

"Oh, I can help you there!" Kick-Ass replied, looking directly at me.

"I am *not* psychotic!" I growled.

"Yeah, *right!*" Kick-Ass laughed.

"Okay, you have your girl, Voight!" I responded.

"Wonderful!" Voight said, with a laugh. "I thought as much!"

We had then left Voight and headed towards that first address that Voight had provided.

Safehouse A

Back at the safehouse, I unloaded my new toys.

"Okay, what did you ah... acquire?" Dave, asked, pulling off his mask and comms.

"Снайперская винтовка укороченная," I replied.

"What?" Dave asked, following me into the armoury.

"SVU - Short Sniper Rifle," I replied placing the two large, plastic cases onto a table, before pulling off my mask and comms.

I opened both cases and revealed two compact sniper rifles.

"The 'Dragunov OTs-03 SVU' short sniper rifle," I said, happily.

"You have ammunition for those things?" Dave asked, hanging up his weapons.

"You really need to ask?" I replied, rolled my eyes, then pointed to a metal tin of 7.62x54-millimetre rounds; The writing on the tin was in Cyrillic.

"My mistake!" Dave replied, laughing.

***Chapter 83*: At War With The Mafia**

Two days later
Tuesday

Well today's trip to school, was *not* fun!

Dr Bennett picked me up, this morning; as Jack was busy. I felt rather uncomfortable and avoided Dr Bennett's gaze, as she smirked down at me. It didn't help that Chloe kept grinning and every time she looked at me, she blushed! It was fairly obvious that Dr Bennett knew, or at least suspected that I had been running my hands all over her naked daughter. I just really hoped that she had absolutely no idea about how far I *had* gone with her daughter! I was very glad when we finally arrived at school and I could say goodbye to the smirking Dr Bennett.

As we walked into school, we met Avery and Riley. Riley obviously couldn't contain herself and must have read Chloe's guilty look.

"Did you?" Riley asked, excitedly.

"Hell, yeah!" Chloe replied. "It was fucking awesome!"

I blushed and legged it, fast, looking for Ethan and Mike!

West Ridge

I was planning our strikes against the next Mafia strongholds.

The attack the other evening was easy, as they weren't expecting an attack. This time, though, they would be ready and with improved defences. I would need to work out a strategy and this was *not* proving to be a very easy task!

Lake View High School

I was getting approving looks and smirks from Avery and Riley, all morning!

This was getting *very* embarrassing! The smiles from Chloe didn't exactly help either! Ethan and Mike were a little slower to catch on, but eventually worked out why Chloe, Avery and Riley were chatting and giggling together throughout most of the morning. I was dreading lunchtime, but it came and once Ethan, Mike and I had sat down, along came Chloe, Avery and Riley, who sat down across from us. Avery and Riley were smiling and looked directly at me, Chloe however, was avoiding my eyes and looked acutely uncomfortable.

"Well, Brit boy!" Avery prompted.

"What!"

"You seem to be very er... Talented, from what we hear!" Riley said, with an evil grin.

"*What* did you tell them, Chloe?" I asked, indignantly, looking directly at Chloe, who continued to avoid looking at me.

"Not much...", Chloe muttered, blushing violently.

"Tell us *everything*, Avery!" Ethan asked, excitedly.

"Don't you *dare*!" I said as strongly as possible.

"Well, according to Chloe...", Avery started, ignoring me completely.

I decided to just bury my face in my arms and try to be invisible!

West Ridge

Dave and I had gone out in the SUV, to do some daylight reconnaissance.

We had identified the next three addresses, which all seemed to be a part of the same Bratva. I was intending for them all to come down over the next two, or three, nights. Kick-Ass and Hit Girl, would make the assaults, with Battle Guy and Hawk, in support.

In this case, Battle Guy and Hawk would be in Lucille, parked a couple of blocks away. Kick-Ass and Hit Girl would be using Beast.

Lake View High School

Would this day of torture never end?

I now had Mike and Ethan giving me approving looks and probing me for further information, which I refused to provide! For now, only Ethan, Mike, Avery and Riley knew *some* of what had occurred the other night and I had hoped that was as far as it was going to go!

Unfortunately, Abby overheard somebody talking about a British ninth-grader, who seemed to be very talented in the bedroom! She tracked me down earlier and wanted to know all about it. I suggested that she go see Chloe, as Chloe seemed *very* happy to blurt everything out, to everybody!

Oh well, I could have a worse reputation, I suppose!

Later that evening West 35th Street

Battle Guy and Hawk were in place, with Lucille, by around seven that evening.

They had the first Russian building under surveillance. Kick-Ass and I left Safehouse A at around eight and drive over in Beast. We had taken great care to ensure that all of our equipment was correctly configured and ready for instant use. Kick-Ass would go in with his H&K 121 machine gun and a spare belt. I would stick with a G36C, but carried extra ammunition instead of one of my Katanas. Both Battle Guy and Hawk had G36C assault rifles ready for use, if they needed to come as backup.

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Battle Guy had identified that the Russians were wide awake and ready. He had seen four men, all armed with AKS-74U assault rifles. These were professionals and they didn't smoke, which would damage their night vision, or talk unnecessarily. Dave and I were both wearing AN/PVS-21 low profile NVGs. These were new and were the latest available; Marty as usual, refused to say where he had got them! These were cool, as they had a built-in heads-up-display. In this case, Battle Guy was sending us live images of the Russian watchdogs. We could approach from their blind spot, but still be fully aware of the watchdog's locations.

We parked up, half a block behind the Russian's building and headed up the fire-escape of the building next door. Once on the roof we headed over towards the Russian's building. We could see no men on the roof, so we both jumped across; I had to smile remembering the first night meeting Kick-Ass and his hesitation, when doing this! Now he didn't hesitate for a millisecond! We landed and rolled; not easy for Kick-Ass with a giant machine gun! We headed over to the edge of the building, while watching the image of the Russian watchdogs, three stories beneath us. They were all looking out, never up. Not as professional, as I thought!

"Battle Guy, we are in place on the roof, above the Russians!" I called. "Setting up the ropes now."

"Battle Guy copies, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, in position and setting up!"

..._...

Kick-Ass and I were poised on the edge of the roof top, wearing harnesses and with ropes attached to a strong point on the roof. We were coming down on two sides. I would come down on top of the four watchdogs, patrolling outside the main door. Kick-Ass would come down and through a large glazed window, on the second floor.

"Kick-Ass, five seconds!" I called.

"Kick-Ass, copies!"

I pulled the pin on the flashbang grenade and dropped it, I followed four seconds later, just as it exploded and shattered the first floor windows and the ear drums of the four watchdogs and blinded them too. I dropped down to a balcony, on the second floor and shot each of the watchdogs through the head with a Glock 19 as they rolled on the floor, holding their heads. I dropped the harness and kicked open the door from the balcony.

"Kick-Ass, flashbang!" I called, as a warning.

I threw another flashbang and waited on the balcony for the explosion. Just after everything went white, I burst inside. Kick-Ass made his entry through the large window, glass flying everywhere. That was actually quite cool, from this point of view!

"Hit Girl, your left!" Kick-Ass yelled and I instantly threw a knife, that impacted the oncoming Russian's throat, bringing him down, gagging.

That was a first.

I had never gone down the side of a building before, but it was cool!

Yet again, it was a result of Mindy's expert training and her faith in my abilities, which often exceeded my own! Bursting through the window was also very cool and easy with the combat suit protecting me! Once through the window, I looked around to get my bearings. The room was dark, as all the lights had been shattered by the flashbang grenade, but our NVGs allowed us to see what was happening. I saw a Russian come up on Hit Girl's left side and yelled out to her; she killed the Russian with a knife to the throat. Damn, that girl had good reflexes!

Suddenly two more Russians appeared, but before I could say anything, they dived at Hit Girl, who was, at that moment, facing away from them. One Russian threw a punch, hitting her left cheek and she fell back against the wall. Hit Girl drew her Tanto and slashed open the Russian's stomach, which looked rather less gory, than usual, in the green tinted view, through the NVGs. I ran forward and drove the butt of the H&K 121 into the side of the next Russian's head. He obviously hadn't seen me in all the chaos!

"Before you ask, I'm okay!" Hit Girl reported, shaking her head and raising the G36C to her shoulder; I did the same with the 121. We could hear shouting, mostly in Russian, but some in English.

Hit Girl moved off, towards a short corridor and I followed, watching for any sign of movement. At the end of the corridor, I could make out movement, then a few bullets impacted the wall beside us. I let off a dozen rounds, down the corridor and heard screams. I fired random bursts down the corridor, to keep their heads down, while Hit Girl cleared the rooms on the left side of the corridor.

I kicked open the first door and found an empty room, I moved down to the next room and stumbled as a couple of rounds hit my armour. They were powerful rounds, which hurt! Just as I approached the next doorway, the door opened and the front sight of an AKS-74U assault rifle stuck out. I grabbed the weapon and hauled it out of the room, stabbing the attached Russian through the back, with my Tanto; he died instantly, as I severed his backbone. I checked the room and it was empty.

"Both rooms clear, Kick-Ass!" I called.

"Copy rooms clear!" I heard in reply, as Kick-Ass fired another burst past me. Kick-Ass looks really cool when he fires that huge weapon, from his shoulder!

I felt Kick-Ass come up behind me and looked up to see the enormous barrel of the 121, extending past my right shoulder. Why I should get turned on by that, I really didn't know! Focus Hit Girl, focus! I moved forward, followed by Kick-Ass. As we came out of the corridor I could see movement and then bullets started to impact the walls and our armour. I dove left and Kick-Ass dove to the right.

Kick-Ass set up the 121 on its bi-pod and poured fire across the room. The large bullets carved through furniture and men, before his first belt ran out and he had to change it. While he did this, I started firing with my G36C and moved forward. A Russian appeared to my left and I elbowed him in the face, before two more Russians jumped on top of me and started punching me very hard. I hit out with my armoured elbows and fists, connecting with flesh and bone, but these Russians seemed oblivious to the pain that I was causing them.

"Kick-Ass, I need help!" I called.

"I'm a little busy, give me a minute!" Kick-Ass replied and I could hear him breathing heavily.

Just as I went down to change the ammunition belt, I felt three men land on top of me and start hitting me with rifle butts and fists.

"Kick-Ass, I need help!" I heard Hit Girl call, in my earpiece.

"I'm a little busy, give me a minute!" I called back, lashing out with my fists and elbows, using my armour as a weapon.

Eventually I managed to hit one of the men, in the face with my elbow and he went crashing backwards, blood exploding from his broken nose. I braced my legs and pushed myself up, using every ounce of strength I could bring to bear and forced the other two men back, but not before I received a heavy blow to my head, which made me see stars for a few seconds. This did not deter me, though, as I started pounding one of the men, with my fists. I was able to catch a glance of Hit Girl; she was buried under two large men, but still fighting. I knew I had to get to her fast, as the two men were too heavy for her to battle alone.

I managed to get an arm free and reached up for a Ko-Wakizashi, bringing the butt down hard on the head of the next Russian, which put him out, I then ran the last Russian through, with the blade. I ran over towards Hit Girl, who was still fighting hard.

"I'm coming Hit Girl!" I called.

"Finished your coffee, have you!" Hit Girl growled, angrily.

"Finished your coffee, have you!" I growled, feeling angry.

Then I got a nasty shock, as I saw the tip of a Ko-Wakizashi emerge from the chest of the Russian, directly on top of me and blood ran down over my combat suit. I threw the man off and was able to punch the other Russian in the face, so I could force my way back to my feet. Kick-Ass drove his Ko-Wakizashi into the stomach of the remaining Russian.

One of the Russians was still moving, on the other side of the room so I shot him in the head, with my Glock 19.

"Battle Guy! Targets are down, exiting now!" I called.

"Battle Guy copies that targets are down and you are leaving!"

We made a brief search for any useful information, including checking out the floors above and below, but we found nothing useful and no more Russians, before heading out of the building and past the four dead watchdogs. The entire assault had taken twenty minutes and so far, no CPD had arrived; Jack Bay was slowing down any response, as far as possible. We ran back to Beast and Kick-Ass drove us away from the Russian's building, fast and back to Safehouse A.

As soon as we reported as clear, Battle Guy drove Lucille back to Safehouse A. We both arrived separately, using caution to check for tails or surveillance. None were detected and we all made it back safely.

Safehouse A

Hawk and I arrived back first and got changed out of our combat suits.

About ten minutes later, Beast pulled into the safehouse and Kick-Ass and Hit Girl emerged, pulling off their masks and comms. I noticed that Mindy looked very unstable on her feet. Kim went over and helped Mindy into the briefing room. In the more direct light I could see heavy bruising, Dave had bruising to his head too.

"Should I call Medic?" I asked, concerned.

Kim was checking over Mindy's face.

"Yes," Kim replied. "Better to be safe than sorry!"

Morton Grove

"Chloe, I need to go down to Safehouse A. You want to come?" I asked, picking up my case.

Chloe looked worried.

"What's happened?"

"Mindy and Dave have been hurt," I replied.

I saw Chloe's face go from worried to panicky and saw tears appear in her eyes.

"I don't think it's anything serious, just precautionary," I said.

"I want to come!" Chloe said, running upstairs to get dressed.

Safehouse A

Mindy was out of her combat suit and lying on the couch in the briefing room, with a large ice pack on her face. I was sitting in a chair, drinking a coffee and keeping an eye on Mindy. I had insisted that Marty and Kim go home and thanked them for their help. Reluctantly they left, in Speedy.

About forty minutes later, Dr Bennett pulled into the safehouse and Chloe came running into the briefing room.

"What's happened? Are you guys okay? What's happened to Mindy?" Chloe blurted out.

"Calm down, Shadow; its just a few bruises," I advised her.

"Good, I was worried!" Chloe said and sounded relieved.

"You don't say!" I replied, laughing.

Dr Bennett came in and looked down at Mindy.

"Let's start with you, shall we?"

Dr Bennett examined Mindy's bruised face and said it was nothing to worry about and that there was no sign of a concussion. She checked out the bruises on Mindy's chest and left side, where the Russians had hit her the hardest; again, nothing to worry about. The combat suit had prevented worse injuries.

Next, Dr Bennett moved on to me. I was pronounced healthy, but bruised. I thanked Dr Bennett for coming all the way down here, at this time of night, but she shrugged it off, saying it was much more exciting than the boring 'crap' at work!

Chloe gave both Mindy and I big hugs, before leaving with her mother. We decided to spend the night here at the safehouse, rather than drive all the way home tonight, as we were both very exhausted.

I helped a very tired Mindy upstairs to bed and after getting her under the duvet, collapsed beside her.

The following morning

Wednesday

Lake View High School

Chloe looked worried.

"Have you heard from Dave or Mindy, this morning?" She asked me.

"No, should I have?" I replied.

"Oh crap, I forgot to tell you. They assaulted the Russians again, last night and Mindy got banged around a bit and so did Dave! They called my Mom down to check them out, late last night. I've been texting them both, but nobody answers and it's like eleven now!" Chloe explained.

"They'll be very tired and are probably still asleep. Anyway, they probably saw it was you and are now ignoring your messages!" I replied, laughing.

"It's not funny Joshua! Mindy was a mess when I saw her last night!" Chloe shouted back.

"Tell the whole school, why don't you?" I growled, pulling Chloe away from the crowds of people. "Your job is going to get us all in trouble one of these days! It's bad enough that the whole damn school thinks I'm fucking you or that I am some expert at getting girls off! I'm getting bloody requests now!"

"Sorry! I had to tell somebody; it was awesome!" Chloe replied, then smiled and tried to look cute and innocent. Annoyingly, I couldn't resist her when she was like that!

"My Dad always warned me that girls and women were devious!" I replied, but smiled back at Chloe.

I dug out my mobile and called Dave.

"Hello trouble, what's up?" Dave asked, sounding tired.

"Chloe's worried and thinks you're avoiding her texts," I explained.

"I've only just woken up; we had a difficult night," Dave said.

"I heard. You both okay?" I asked.

"Yeah, just a few bruises!" Dave replied. "Mindy's face looks a bit like she was hit by a truck, but she'll be fine."

"Okay, I'll tell Little Miss Moans-a-lot here! Take care, bye," I said and hung up the call then turned to Chloe. "They're fine, they were asleep."

"I do not *moan*, Joshua!" Chloe moaned.

"I know you worry about them, but they're fine," I said, giving Chloe a hug.

Safehouse A

I'm actually glad that Josh called; I was sore and needed a shower.

Mindy was still asleep, so I left her and went to soak my bruised body.

About ten minutes later, I was still in the shower when I felt a pair of hands on my chest and Mindy rubbed up behind me. I pulled her around in front of me and tried not to wince, but Mindy saw my expression.

"That bad?" She asked.

"Just don't go looking in any mirrors!" I advised, with a laugh.

"Thanks, partner!" Mindy said, punching my chest lightly.

"Makes no difference to me, you always look gorgeous!" I said, making Mindy blush. She really did look bad, on the left side of her face, where she had been punched; the bruise was purple!

"Is it sore to move your jaw?" I asked.

"Not so much, but I can live with it."

"Got plenty of make-up with you?" I asked.

"Not enough for this!"

"Once we're done here, we'll head home and then you can rest," I said, smiling down and hugging Mindy. I hated seeing her visibly injured and this looked worse than it really was.

West Ridge

We spent the rest of the afternoon doing not very much, while we let the aches and pains in our bodies heal. Mindy had insisted on cleaning and checking the weapons that we had used last night, before we left. I also cleaned the blood off of Mindy's combat suit.

Sophia was glad to see us, as ever, but I think she knew that Mindy was hurt so Sophia stayed with her all afternoon. Mindy was annoyed and unhappy about being so badly bruised. The attack had been successful, but she hated getting hurt; Hit Girl should not get hurt! Mindy's bruise, as well as mine, meant that we would not be able to attack the other two addresses, until the bruising went down. I was happy with this, as it would allow us time before the next attack. Mindy worried that this would give the Russians time to build up their forces, I agreed, but there was nothing that we could do about it.

Kim had come over to check on us both and she was glad we were okay. She only stayed twenty minutes, before heading home, but Mindy was glad of the visit.

Chapter 84: Driving

That weekend *Fusion Warehouse*

Mindy had leased a large, open-plan, warehouse.

Marty had checked it out, to make sure that it was secure and had installed his own security systems, the previous weekend. The warehouse was enormous, about ninety-five thousand square feet and would provide a large space for anonymous training. We arrived onsite about six in the morning, for an early start. Dave and I had been down at the warehouse yesterday, to get things set up.

Dave and I drove straight into the warehouse, before closing the remote roller door. We then got out of the SUV and I opened the rear door. Chloe and Josh were fast asleep, with Chloe cuddling into Josh. I poked them in their kidney's and they both bolted awake.

"Fucking, ow!" Josh groaned, holding his side.

"Ouch!" Chloe moaned, rubbing her side.

"Wakey, wakey, kiddies!" I yelled.

"Why the hell are we here at this time in the morning, for God's sake?" Josh moaned.

"Okay you two, listen up!" I said, loudly. "You both know about the Russians. This week was hell! This is nothing like Ralph D'Amico. Now, if you think I'm normally a bitch, you ain't seen nothing yet; ask Dave! I'm gonna come down hard on both of you, to get you trained; yeah, I enjoy being a complete cast iron bitch and I enjoy making people miserable, but in this case, I'm doing it to keep you both alive; I didn't get this bruise on my face giving Dave a fucking blowjob! Understand?"

Chloe and Josh looked a little but shocked at my outburst, but both nodded, suddenly waking up.

"I have an intensive two days planned for us all, but especially for you two. Now, if you want out, just say so and you can leave Fusion, till this all blows over. I give you both this chance, as you are the youngest. Otherwise I intend to work you both to the point of passing out. If I think either of you can't hack it, then I'll tell you," I explained, seriously. "I shit you not, this is fucking serious. Ralph D'Amico was nothing compared to what we now face. I know you are both only fourteen and Josh is still healing inside, but I need you both and I believe in both of you. Please take this training seriously, as it *will* keep you alive, trust me!"

"I'll do whatever you say Mindy," Josh said, looking worried.

"Me too, Mindy," Chloe said.

"I don't mean to scare you both, but I promise I *will* do everything I can to keep you both alive," I finished.

"Please tell me this doesn't mean '*Super Bitch*' is back!" Dave whined.

"In all her glory!" I quipped, in reply.

"Oh, you two don't know what hell is coming your way!" I smiled, darkly.

..._...

"What are those doing here?" Chloe asked, pointing at two cars, parked beside a large black, twin-axle, box trailer.

"Those are part of your training, young lady!" I said cryptically and walked over towards the trailer.

Dave dropped open the back of the trailer. Secured inside were the two Honda CRF250L motorcycles, with the '**SHADOW**' and '**JACKAL**' registration plates and my Ducati, plus some other equipment.

"You two little dears, are gonna learn some driving skills, both two wheeled and four!" I explained. "By the end of this weekend, you *will* both be able to ride your road-legal motorcycles and drive a car, with both manual and automatic gearboxes."

"But, we're only fourteen!" Chloe moaned.

"Chloe, when I first met Little Miss Psycho, over there, she was able to drive Speedy, with a stick shift, at eleven years-old!" Dave said. "How the hell she reached the pedals, I'll never know!"

"Funny cunt!" I growled, with a laugh. "You saying I was short?"

"Well you were only about three foot tall!" Dave replied.

"Four feet and nine inches, thank you, ass!" I replied, indignantly.

"Still kinda short!" Dave insisted.

I ignored him.

"If I could do it at eleven, then two teenagers like you, should have no problems! I bought those two cars, so that you don't fuck up anything decent, like Beast or the SUV, plus only Speedy has a stick shift and you are *not* fucking *those* gears up! The Ford Focus, in black, has a manual gearbox, the other Focus, in silver, has an automatic gearbox," I explained, before continuing. "Okay! Why do I want you both to learn to drive a car? Because if something happened to Dave, myself or the others, then you may have no choice! I want to know that you could jump into *any* vehicle: Speedy, Beast, Lucille or even a fucking Jaguar and be able to get out of harms way! I would have to be dead before I would let it happen; but I would also expect you to be able to ride my Ducati, too!"

I noticed that Josh winced at my pronunciation of 'Jaguar'! I was just digging for a reaction and got it.

"Problem, Josh?" I asked, innocently.

"Do you really have to massacre that word? It's Jag-*you*-ar, not Jag-*wahr*; there's a bloody 'u' in it!" Josh exclaimed, looking very serious. "Damn yanks!"

Chloe actually burst out laughing and so did I.

"Josh, don't take life so seriously!" Dave said, chuckling. "Mindy said that on purpose, just to wind you up!"

Josh blushed a little, before responding.

"If you say so, Kick-Arse!" Josh replied, smirking.

"Okay cocky cunt!" I said, unlocked the black Ford Focus then drove it away from the wall and into the centre of the warehouse, well away from any supporting pillars. I stopped, left the car in gear, pulled up on the parking brake and turned off the ignition, then removed the key and got out, slamming the door.

"Show us what you can do!" I said, throwing the key at Josh.

I caught the key and just stared at it!

Now what?

I walked over to the car.

At least I went to the correct side; always a good start! I opened the door, got in and pulled the door closed. Okay! I stuck the key in the ignition and turned it... I got the shock of my life, as the car tried to bolt forward, so I let go of the key. I looked up and Mindy was almost pissing herself with laughter! Chloe looked shocked, while Dave was smirking and trying not to laugh.

Okay, think this one through!

This car has a manual gearbox... I thought back to my Dad's car in the UK. It was a Ford Mondeo and when my Dad got in the first thing he did was wiggle the gear lever, with his left hand. This would be different because the yanks drive on the wrong side of the bloody road, so I would need to operate the gears with my right hand. My Dad would also push his left foot down, on the left most pedal. Are the pedals the same in the US, as in the UK? I pressed the pedal furthest to the left and I heard a small thunk, as something released. I moved the gear lever around, or tried to, but it would only move backwards, but then I could 'wiggle' the lever. Now, the car should be out of gear! I turned the

key again, the engine started and I let the key go.

I looked up again and Mindy was smiling approvingly; she walked over, opened the passenger door and got in, pulling the door closed.

"Well done Joshua, you worked that out a lot quicker than I expected!" Mindy said, and she sounded genuinely impressed and I felt my cheeks warming up.

"Thanks!"

"Okay Josh, the engine is running. Now, in this car we have six gears, five forward and one reverse. Currently the car is in neutral; to change gear you need to use the clutch, which I think you found earlier, yes?"

"This pedal, on the left?" I asked.

"Yes, the pedals are the same, no matter which side of the road you drive on. From the left, clutch, brake, accelerator or gas. Happy?"

I nodded.

"Okay. The gear arrangement is generally the same on most cars, using an 'H' format, although reverse tends to move around a bit! So, initially we want first gear, which is left and then forward, but before you do that, you need to push down firmly on the clutch, yes, all the way to the floor. Now hold it there!" Mindy explained.

"With your right hand, move the stick to the left and then forward, you'll feel it slot into place. Keep your foot on the clutch. This is the same as the motorcycle, except it's a pedal instead of a lever, okay?"

"Yes," I responded, concentrating.

"Normally you would operate this lever here, which is the parking brake; you would probably know it better as the handbrake. For now, I will operate it, so you can concentrate on the clutch, okay?"

"Okay," I said, sounding nervous.

"You remember how you let in the clutch slowly, while applying a little gas? Do the same here; don't worry, it's not an easy technique to master!" Mindy advised, encouragingly.

I let off the parking brake and Josh pushed down on the accelerator a small amount, then gently eased off the clutch, but also eased off the accelerator, too and stalled.

"No problem. Turn off the ignition... Put yourself in neutral... Good... Now start the car... First gear... Okay, clutch out slowly, while pressing down on the gas, just a bit more..."

We started to move forward, slowly and very jerkily, but we moved!

"Okay, take your foot off the gas and at the same time, press both feet down on the clutch and the brake pedals... Gently with the brake, but all the way to the floor with both pedals... Now!"

We stopped gently...Ish. I pulled up on the emergency brake.

"Ready to go again?" I asked, smiling as encouragingly as I could.

"Yeah, this is cool!"

We repeated this another half dozen times, with Josh getting better, each time.

I kicked Josh out and reversed the car back to where we had started.

..._...

"Okay, young lady, your turn!" I said, with an evil smirk.

A very nervous Chloe got in the car.

This time, though, I showed her the gears and how not to do what Josh had done! A little while later, Chloe had managed to move off half a dozen times, improving at each attempt. Chloe was grinning wildly, by the time she had finished.

It was approaching breakfast time and we were all hungry, so Dave vanished out to get something for us all to eat.

"You two enjoy that?" I asked, knowing that they had.

"It was cool Mindy, thanks!" Both replied.

"Well, that was a bit of fun to get you both started. Next you will need to learn all the controls in the car, what the gauges and warning lights mean, how to check the oil, washer fluid etcetera. You will also learn how to change a tyre. Driving is all about knowing how to maintain the car, too," I explained.

I spent the time, till Dave got back with food, going through the basic controls inside the cars, as well as a brief look at the warning lights. Once Dave got back, we sat down on some fold-up chairs, at a trestle table and ate breakfast.

After breakfast, I had Chloe and Josh change into their combat suits, minus masks and weapons.

The reason behind this, was that I wanted them to learn to ride their Fusion motorcycles. Unlike going off-road, if they came off here, it was concrete and their combat suits would protect them. See, I could be caring and considerate when required! These motorcycles were very similar to those that they rode last weekend. Once they were changed, I had them group around Chloe's motorcycle, which Dave had pulled out of the trailer and the motorcycle was now leaning on it's stand.

"Okay, these are similar to those you rode at the weekend. Obvious differences are: instruments, lights and some extra switchgear," I explained. "These motorcycles also have an extra gear. Which means how many, Chloe?"

"Six?" Chloe responded, a little unsure.

"Not bad; five plus one equals six! Okay let's start with the instruments: speedometer..."

"Which Mindy's motorcycles have, but may as well not, considering that Mindy ignores them completely!" Dave quipped.

I glared at him before continuing.

"The speedometer, odometer, a clock and the all important fuel gauge!" I finished.

"Yeah, very important, because you drink fuel faster, when you go faster, eh, Hit Girl!" Dave added.

Chloe and Josh both laughed.

"Ignore Ass-Kick!" I said, calmly. "You also have some warning lights: neutral, coolant, turn signals and high beam. All happy?"

"Yeah!" Both kids answered, enthusiastically.

"The ignition switch is up here, plus you have a battery and therefore a starter button, here on the right along with a stop switch. On the other side, you have the turn signals and headlight switch, plus a horn!"

I turned on the ignition, checked the motorcycle was in neutral and set the stop switch to 'RUN', before pressing the start button. The motorcycle jumped to life. Chloe's eyes lit up in excitement.

"Just don't soak the seat straight away, Chloe!" I teased and got a nasty look in return. I ignored her and went over to Jackal's motorcycle and watched as Josh did the same things, starting *his* motorcycle.

I sent them both off to pull on their masks, comms and helmets. Due to Jackal's mask, he had an open face helmet and I deactivated the voice module, as we kinda preferred his real voice, for some strange reason! Dave and I both pulled on our comms, as with both motorcycles running it would get loud in here. I was already in my leathers, so I pulled on a helmet and started my Ducati, before riding a few figure of eights, to warm up my tyres. My Ducati sounded kinda cool inside the warehouse, too!

"Okay, kiddies, follow me!" I said.

Dave stayed near the SUV watching and acting as overall guard, watching for anything happening that I might miss, such as somebody falling off!

"Use whatever gear you feel comfortable in, but cover your brakes and try not to bounce off anything!"

I led them on a tour of the warehouse, with a few figure of eights, around pillars. Once we had done three successful laps, I gave them further instructions.

"Next, you need to start using your turn signals, watch for my signals and copy me, remembering to cancel them afterwards!" I instructed and continued riding around my circuit, with Chloe and Josh following.

"You both okay?" I asked.

"Perfect thanks, Hit Girl!" Chloe replied.

"Doing great, Hit Girl!" Josh replied.

I had to admit Josh was right, they *were* doing well. Dave was constantly updating me on how they were doing, using a discrete second channel, that only I could hear; I was pleased. We continued riding around the warehouse, in and out of the pillars, for another hour, before I stopped, with Josh and Chloe pulling up on either side of me.

"Cut your engines!" I said, turning mine off, too. It was useful that this warehouse had powerful extractor fans to remove the engine exhaust!

"Okay, you two can ride in a straight line and you can ride around corners and you can stop. Next we need an *emergency* stop. This needs to be controlled, otherwise you will either be sliding across the black top, along with your motorcycles, badly injured or you will go flying over the front of the motorcycle with the same result! Ideally you should be keeping an eye on the road ahead, so you can predict and adjust your speed accordingly. Now, as you both know, shit happens, without warning!" I explained.

"Emergency stops are difficult, as I've already mentioned. As you know, you have two brakes, front and rear. Now, if you use the rear brake too heavily, in an emergency, the back wheel can slide and overtake the front, which is *not* a good idea! Just use the front brake, the spinning rear wheel will help resist a slide. This will take practice and experience and to make matters worse, the surface is a huge factor in stopping. This includes loose gravel, water, ice and oil; you don't want your wheels locking up! The best solution for you guys is don't drive too fast for the conditions! Me, I'm a lunatic, as Dave will tell you, so follow my advice and ignore what I do!" I said, seriously.

"Okay, let's start slow and practice," I said.

I let Chloe and Josh, practice on there own, at first, as they gained experience. They didn't come off which was good, neither were they going very fast! Next, I had them ride up the warehouse one at a time and then randomly shouted: "Stop!", to see their reactions. They weren't too bad and managed to stop each time, the skill would build up the more they went out on the motorcycles! The warehouse floor had also gained some nice black tyre marks!

Once we had finished the emergency stops, I had Chloe and Josh park their motorcycles and get out of their combat suits. Josh enjoyed helping Chloe with this task and Chloe seemed to enjoy the help!

..._...

After a lunch of pizzas, we went back to the cars.

Once the main floor of the warehouse was clear of obstacles, I put Josh back in the manual Ford Focus, with me and Chloe in the automatic Ford Focus, with Dave. With a shaky start we managed to start driving, slowly, in circles, in and out of the pillars. After about forty minutes, we swapped over, so Chloe could gain experience with the manual gearbox. Neither got past third gear, but that was okay and it was *very* good progress, especially when you considered that they had never driven a car before this morning!

Today was totally awesome!

I really couldn't believe what I had accomplished so far. I had driven a car and a real road-legal motorcycle! I wasn't expecting to be able to learn to drive a car till I was at least fifteen! This was so cool and to be learning to drive a stick

shift, was even cooler! I couldn't wait to tell Mom and when Dad was home, I hoped he would be impressed too.

Some of my excitement was tempered by the knowledge of why Mindy was teaching all this to us. She did scare me a bit, with her initial lecture about the Russians. We would be in harms way, so all this training was necessary to help us stay alive! I wouldn't let Mindy and Dave down. They needed me, so I was going to do everything possible to help them! I was also very sure that Josh thought the same way.

For the next hour I put them both to work, figuring out how to jack up the cars, to change a wheel!

I will admit that Dave's assistance was required to loosen the wheel nuts! Both of them managed to figure things out and change the wheel, putting on the spare. I then had them take the spare off and put the original wheel back on! Josh grumbled a lot, but still got the job done. Neither of them had realised how heavy a fifteen-inch alloy wheel and tyre were, till they tried to pick one up!

Following this I left them for ten minutes, to work out how to open the hood (or bonnet for Josh)!

When I returned Josh was smiling smugly, with an open hood, while Chloe was looking very grumpy and with a closed hood. Chloe had found the handle to release the catch, but couldn't manage to release the catch under the hood! I showed her where this was and how to operate it and prop the hood open. I then guided them around the engine, identifying key components: coolant, brake fluid, battery, fuse/relay box, air filter, oil cap and dipstick, plus the windshield (or windscreen, as Josh insisted it was called) wash. I promised them that I would test them on everything that they had learned, tomorrow!

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It was now getting close to four in the afternoon and we had had a *very* long day, so far.

We secured the motorcycles, back in the trailer and parked the two cars, before gathering up our equipment, including Josh's and Chloe's combat suits. We then took the SUV to Safehouse A.

Safehouse A

We sat down to a quick meal, once we got back.

"So, did you enjoy today?" Dave asked, during the meal.

"That was the most awesome Saturday, in a long time!" Chloe replied, with a big grin on her face.

"I learnt a lot!" Josh admitted.

"Well that's a good start!" Dave laughed.

"Okay, after you've finished I want both of you to go and get some sleep, *in your own rooms!* We will be going out tonight, so you will need to get some rest. If you do not get enough rest, then I will *not* take you, understood?" I asked.

"Yes, Mindy," Chloe and Josh replied, together.

***Chapter 85*: Shadow Archer**

That same evening
Saturday
Safehouse A

Dave and I woke up and showered around nine, we then woke up Josh and Chloe, which wasn't easy.

We each had to drag a kid out of bed and then we suggested that they both got a shower, preferably individually! Finally they both appeared, looking much more awake, having had a shower and we had a quick meal of sorts, before suiting up.

The plan was to take the KAM and make a short patrol.

This would be Jackal's first patrol, so naturally he was very nervous, but we all helped to ensure that he was properly geared up with his pistols, throwing knives and Ninja-To. Shadow was wearing a black combat quiver on her back, with eight, standard, high performance arrows; my trick and custom arrows, weren't ready yet! She carried a compound bow, as well as her usual pistol. This would be a first, for Fusion and hopefully a good test of the compound bow in action. Chloe was our best archer, so she deserved to try it out first.

Battle Guy would be monitoring us, from his apartment and he would ensure that for this run, at least, we would avoid locations that were know to be used by the Russian Mafia.

I had decided that I liked Josh too much to get him killed on his first trip out!

Kick-Ass was driving and we were heading north, to start with. One thing we had noticed with Jackal, which we hadn't really noticed before, was that on comms, he sounded normal, as he used a throat mike. This was a bit weird because when you were close by him, he sounded *very* strange!

We headed north, up South Western Avenue and then east, along West Garfield Boulevard, where we parked up, near the S Normal Boulevard and the rail yard. It was very dark and there wasn't much activity. In hindsight it seemed obvious, but at the time it never occurred to *any* of us that there was anything out of order!

A boy, of about ten or eleven years old, suddenly appeared in the middle of the road and yelled one word: "Help!"

Then he was dragged off by a large man, into a semi-derelict building, just off of the road. We immediately advised Battle Guy of what was happening and jumped out of Beast, then ran down the sidewalk towards the building. The main door was just closing, when Hit Girl bounded up the steps and kicked open the door. We followed. The boy had vanished, but the man was pushed back, as the door flew open; Hit Girl grabbed him.

"Where is the boy?" Hit Girl growled, menacingly.

The man did not answer, or didn't understand. He just shrugged, which just made Hit Girl mad.

"Where is the boy?" Hit Girl growled, again.

Four men appeared in the doorway, four very large men, with pistols. The man Hit Girl was holding, smiled, then the bullets started to fly. Hit Girl flung the man past us and into the men at the door, who fell back with two falling down the steps. As we moved towards the door, more men advanced up the steps, firing pistols and AKS-74U assault rifles.

It was a fucking ambush!

"I hate to state the obvious Hit Girl, but I think this is an ambush!" Kick-Ass stated, rather obviously.

"You don't say!" I growled, dryly, in response.

Heavy rounds impacted the wall above us and chips of plaster, brick and concrete flew off and impacted our armour. I looked around, there were perhaps a dozen armed men and they were using large calibre weapons, probably 7.62-

millimetre, which would tax our Type III armour. We could not afford to be exposed for long. Kick-Ass and I fired off several rounds from our Glock pistols and saw three men drop at the doorway, then I saw a man drop, with an arrow in his chest, closely followed by another. I turned and saw Shadow concentrating on aiming another arrow. I didn't think that any of the Russians had noticed Shadow and her bow. Jackal started firing one of his FN pistols, and managed a hit.

We were taking them down, but far too slowly! We also did not have a lot of ammunition with us for a prolonged fire fight. Battle Guy was aware of the situation, but was too far away to be able to provide support. We would have to get out of this ourselves! I pulled out a pair of canisters from my belt and grabbed the pins.

"On my mark, run for that doorway!" I ordered and received acknowledgements.

"Three - Two - One - Mark!" I yelled and threw the two M18 smoke grenades, about a half dozen yards away. Two seconds later an immense cloud of violet smoke pulsed out of the canisters, covering our withdrawal, further into the building.

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We ran through a doorway and into a larger area, which was thankfully empty. This gave us a minute or two to get our breath back and work out a plan of escape. From this area were four doors, two seemed to go further into the building and one led into a room with no windows or other exits, so we selected the remaining doorway and ran through.

We made it twenty feet, before running into two Russians who were armed with pistols and did not look like fighters; but they died anyway, in a hail of bullets from Kick-Ass and myself. All was quiet for the next dozen yards, which concerned me no end and eventually Kick-Ass voiced it.

"I got a bad feeling about this!" Kick-Ass commented.

"Back at ya!" I replied.

We came out into a more open area, which seemed to be a meeting room. Almost immediately six Russian Kryshas burst into the room.

..._...

A Krysha is an extremely well trained and powerful Mafia soldier, normally called upon when heavy muscle is required. Only Kick-Ass had the physical bulk to battle these guys hand to hand; a Krysha could snap the rest of us in half, single-handed!

"Do not fight them hand-to-hand, or you *will* lose!" I advised over the comms, firing several shots from my pistols, before swapping out the magazines. There was not enough space for me to use a Katana, so I left it stowed. My Tanto would have to do, although I managed to fell one Krysha, with two knives in the chest.

Kick-Ass pulled out his Ko-Wakizashi and attacked two of the men. I headed towards the other three, trying to keep myself between them and Jackal. I saw Shadow notch an arrow and she took down one of the Krysha, but was shot in the chest before she could get another arrow ready; she fell back and rolled under a large table to get her breath back.

"I'm okay, I'm okay!" Shadow called over the comms.

I continued to battle with my two Kryshas, but then one of them screamed, simultaneously with the sound of a gun shot; Shadow had shot the man in the leg, from under the table! He fell down to one knee and then his head exploded, as Shadow despatched him with another shot! With that distraction I was able to Kill my Krysha with the Tanto. Kick-Ass had killed one Krysha and was finishing off the next, with a slash that took the man's head clean off!

I took another good look around. This building had definitely seen better days and I was surprised it hadn't collapsed yet. Some sections of the ceiling were held up with temporary support pillars. There were no windows, but there was evidence of where some had been bricked up, long ago! Shadow reappeared from under the table and stood with Jackal.

I could hear loud voices, conversing in Russian, but couldn't make out what they were saying, but they were getting closer. I headed towards another doorway, which seemed to go to the next door building. I looked through and found another room, not a big one, but there was a doorway on the opposite wall. I heard the voices again and the

Russians were there, bullets started to come through the previous doorway.

Hit Girl grabbed Jackal and shoved him away from the bullets, towards a doorway that led to a corridor and hopefully a room with an exterior wall and a window.

We ran down the corridor, I was in front, with Jackal immediately behind me and Hit Girl was covering from behind. I could hear Jackal's breathing, he sounded as scared as I was. Bullets were impacting everywhere, we had almost reached the doorway at the end of the passage, when a Russian Krysha suddenly appeared from a passageway on the left, he shoved me into the wall, hurting my shoulder. Hit Girl swung her Tanto, stabbing the man in his right shoulder and he dropped his pistol.

"Shadow, *run*, follow Jackal!" Hit Girl yelled.

I turned and ran after Jackal then into the room. I turned to watch Hit Girl fighting with the Russian Krysha and she managed to smash his head against the wall, knocking him senseless. Hit Girl picked up her Tanto and ran towards me. I could hear Kick-Ass still fighting, further down the corridor.

Just as Hit Girl reached the doorway another Krysha appeared and caught hold of her; they both rolled into the room and started fighting on the floor. I moved to help, but a face appeared in the doorway and threw two objects into the room, before hauling the steel door shut.

I focused on the objects and my eyes went wide, then I threw myself to the floor, behind what was left of an interior wall, with my arms over my head.

"Grenades! Get down!" Hit Girl yelled.

The grenades went off, behind the wall, which disintegrated. Apparently it had been a supporting wall, as the beam it had been supporting, fell, blocking the doorway.

The beam had collapsed into the room, in a large cloud of plaster, dust and brickwork.

The only person *not* choking, was Jackal, as his mask filtered out the dust, but we were all covered from head to toe in choking dust. I looked around; the beam had caught Hit Girl on her shoulder and on the side of her head; she wasn't moving. Jackal was half buried under plaster and bricks, on the far side of the beam. I felt a hand grab my upper arm and looked up. The Russian Krysha, seemed uninjured and had pulled himself out of the debris; he looked pissed and he hauled me to my feet and swept up my pistol from the floor where I had dropped it.

I managed to reach behind me and grab an arrow from my quiver. I stabbed the Krysha in the hand, making him release me. He punched me hard, in the shoulder, with his other hand. I screamed and fell to the floor, then I scrambled away from the Russian and reached for my bow, grabbed hold of it and notched the arrow.

Hit Girl was trying to move, but she couldn't get back to her feet; the Krysha had his foot planted, firmly, on her shoulder. Jackal pushed, desperately, against the fallen beam, but couldn't bring his pistol to bear.

The Russian Krysha aimed the FN Five-seveN pistol directly at Hit Girl's head and grinned.

"До свидания, Хит Девушк!" He said, sounding *very* happy. [*Goodbye, Hit Girl!*]

"Shoot him, dammit!" Jackal yelled and I released the arrow, a second before Hit Girl was shot in the head.

"Ешьте дерьмо, ублюдок!" I yelled. [*Eat shit, motherfucker!*]

Kick-Ass was attacking the door, trying to get in, but the door was completely blocked.

"Hold on Hit Girl, I'm coming!" Kick-Ass yelled, sounding desperate.

"The doorway is blocked!" I called. "Can you get around to the west side? We have a window, but we might need your help; Hit Girl is hurt!"

"On my way, Shadow!" Kick-Ass replied.

..._...

The Russian Krysha lay on the floor.

He seemed to be still smiling; his eyes were open, but vacant.

"He dead?" Jackal asked, trying to look past the fallen beam.

"I sincerely hope so, unless he enjoys having an arrow bisecting his head! It does look kinda cool, though!" I replied, immediately wondering why I had said that. I climbed over to Jackal and helped dig him out of the rubble, without dislodging too much more!

"Help me with Hit Girl," I said, kneeling down and brushing debris away from Hit Girl's face.

Hit Girl was trying to move, but seemed uncoordinated. I dug around her legs and freed them, Jackal helped me pull her out and roll her onto her back.

"Hit Girl, can you hear me?" I said. "Hit Girl?"

"I can hear you," Hit Girl replied very quietly.

"Where are you hurt?" I asked.

"I... I'm okay. Help me up!" Hit Girl said and tried to push herself up. Jackal and I helped her to her feet and supported her. I checked that her Katana and Tanto were in place, before we guided her over towards the window. That was when I got a surprise.

"Fusion this is Medic, I am en-route to Safehouse A. Advise any injuries!"

"Medic, this is Shadow!" I called, thinking it a bit redundant, as my Mom would surely recognise her own daughter's voice! "Hit Girl is behaving strangely and is not very responsive, she was hit by a falling beam; Jackal and I are supporting her to make our escape!"

"Any blood or sign of injury?"

"None visible, but we're all very dusty," I replied. There was something comforting about hearing my Mom's voice, as I was feeling very scared, right now.

"Shadow, this is Kick-Ass, we need to get out now, before reinforcements arrive! Can you see me?"

I looked out of the window, after removing some dust from the glass.

"I have you! I'm gonna smash the window and push Hit Girl out, you need to catch her!" I said and pulled out my pistol, which I had reclaimed from the Krysha; I had already lost one pistol to Ralph D'Amico! Mindy would be really pissed if I lost another, plus this one was extra special!

I reversed it and smashed out as much of the glass as possible. Then Jackal and I shoved Hit Girl out feet first and Kick-Ass caught her, lying her down on the grass, beside the house. I jumped down, followed by Jackal and Kick-Ass ran to get Beast, while Jackal and I guarded the confused Hit Girl.

"Battle Guy, Fusion is out of the building. Kick-Ass is getting Beast!" I called.

"Battle Guy copies Fusion out of building and awaiting transport!"

A minute later Beast skidded to a halt and I pulled open a rear door and with Jackal's help pushed Hit Girl in, but before Jackal and I could get around to the other side, bullets started pounding Beast. Jackal and I ran, then dived for cover, to the side of the building, but were forced round the back.

..._...

"Go, Kick-Ass, we have alternative transport!" Jackal yelled and Kick-Ass roared off, heading back to Safehouse A and medical assistance.

"You *cannot* be serious! You are a grade A, British nutcase!" I exclaimed, when I saw what he was looking at!

"Fuck off!" Josh replied, climbing on.

"Hit Girl will chop your dick off!" I warned.

"No, she's gonna give me a bloody medal! Now move your *fucking* arse, Shadow!"

I climbed up behind him and started shooting at the corner of the building.

"You know what to do?" I asked.

"Well, the key's in the ignition, if I set this thing to that 'circle-arrow' symbol and press this..." Jackal mumbled and the engine roared to life.

"Cool!" I commented, as I changed out my magazine and fired at the Russians.

I felt Josh slip into first gear and ease forwards.

"Take it gently, asshole!" I whispered, as we accelerated forward, slithering a bit on the grass, then the tyre bit in, as we hit the black top and we roared off after Beast.

"Kick-Ass, we've escaped and we are on our way!" I called over the radio, feeling sore from where a number of bullets had hit my back armour. "In style, I might add!"

Early morning

Sunday

Safehouse A

It took only ten minutes to speed through the empty streets and it wasn't long before I slammed on the brakes in the safehouse.

Medic was already there and helped to pull Hit Girl out of Beast and I carried her through to the briefing room and placed her on the couch. Medic immediately started checking Hit Girl out, before removing her mask.

"Where the fuck are those two little shits?" I said. Then over the comms. "Jackal, Shadow! Where are you?"

"Two minutes; got a little lost, can you open the gate, we ain't got a remote!" Shadow replied.

I ran to the main door and hit the button to shut-off the lights and open the door and gate. A minute later I saw a pair of bright headlights coming slowly up the road, before turning towards the safehouse and finally in the gate and then into the safehouse. I had to laugh; Mindy would... I didn't know exactly what Mindy *would* do or say!

"So Mr Grand Theft Auto rides again!" I said.

"It was all him!" Shadow explained, climbing off with a grimace of pain.

"Well, when needs must!" I commented, turning back to the briefing room.

Mindy was sitting up and Dr Bennett was helping her to remove her combat suit.

"You okay?" I asked, with a smile.

"Could be better, I think, my fucking head hurts like hell and so does my shoulder!" Mindy replied. "Are the rats back? I understood they didn't come back in Beast."

"No they er, found alternative transport!" I said and Mindy scowled.

"Am I gonna like what they've done?" Mindy asked.

"Let's worry about that later!" I said and helped pull off her boots.

"You two!" Dr Bennett called to Josh and Chloe, who were standing in the doorway. "Get out of those suits, get upstairs, get showered and wait in the kitchen. I'll be up soon to check your wounds! Move!"

Josh and Chloe positively fled out of the door and shot upstairs!

I smiled at Dr Bennett, "You have a commanding manner!" I said, with a laugh.

"Got to keep those two on their toes!" Dr Bennett said, grinning.

"They are thick as thieves, those two!" Mindy commented.

"Not far off the mark actually!" I warned.

Mindy's eyes narrowed.

"What does that mean?"

"They acquired another motorcycle to get back here! It seems to be a Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R, in Black! Josh rode it, with Chloe on pillion." I explained. "Apparently the keys were in it! It's kinda like your Ducati!"

"Well done young Joshua!" Mindy said, grinning. "And it is nothing like my Ducati; not even in the same fucking league! It's like comparing you to me!"

"Thanks!" I growled.

"At least tracking signals don't work in here!" Mindy said.

"Okay, Little Madam, here," Mindy made a growling noise, when Dr Bennett said that! "Has a concussion and significant bruising to her right shoulder. She needs to rest."

"I have Russians to kill; I don't need rest!" Mindy stated and tried to get up, but fell back onto the couch, holding her head.

"You - will - rest!" Dr Bennett stated. "Or I can always sedate you!"

"I'd like to see her fucking try!" Mindy muttered under her breath.

"Try me, Hit Girl!" Dr Bennett challenged.

"FUCK!" Mindy screamed.

"Mindy looks so cute, when she pretends to be pissed and she knows that she can't use violence to get her own way!" I quipped. "Although the book of Hit Girl says that when all else fails, turn the air blue!"

Dr Bennett laughed, while Mindy just tried to look pissed.

"Hit Girl need a hug?" I asked.

"This sucks!" Mindy shouted, before starting to giggle. "My fucking head hurts!"

"I'm used to the moody sixteen year-old!" I said. "And the moody fifteen year-old, the moody fourteen year-old, the moody thirteen year-old, the moody twelve year-old and the moody eleven year-old! I've seen 'em all!"

"Ass!" Mindy growled, but with a huge smile.

"Well, I'd better go check up on Bonnie and Clyde!" Dr Bennett said, heading upstairs.

Josh and I had separate showers, for a change!

When my Mom appeared we were both sitting in the kitchen, with a hot chocolate each, with extra marshmallows. Josh had a towel wrapped around his waist, while I had my towel covering up a bit more, but revealing a bit too much thigh, which I had tried to cover without much success!

"Were you hurt, Josh?" my Mom asked.

"Not really, the others protected me for the most part," Josh replied, then my Mom turned to me.

I looked down at the floor.

"Well, young lady?"

"I was hurt on my left shoulder," I replied.

My Mom started prodding and manipulating my shoulder, which kinda hurt a bit.

"Just some bruising, nothing to worry about... What the hell is that?" My Mom demanded. She had seen the red mark, left over from the bullet that had hit my chest.

"I was shot," I admitted.

My Mom examined the red mark, then looked at me, before asking another question.

"Where else? Don't attempt to lie, either!"

"I... My back, I was shot several times, as we escaped..."

My Mom spun me around, causing my towel to slip off, but I managed to grab it and maintain *some* dignity!

"So Josh *hasn't* seen you naked yet?" My Mom asked, innocently.

"Oh I have, quite a few times!" Josh said, smiling broadly.

"Joshua!" I growled, blushing.

"Oh, sorry!" Josh apologised, with a slight blush.

My Mom finished prodding my back, I had a few bruises from some of the larger calibres.

"You need to take more care, Chloe!" My Mom cautioned.

"Yes Mom, I will," I promised.

"You staying here, tonight, or coming home with me?"

"I have a choice?" I asked, incredulously.

"Chloe, I trust you, okay!" My Mom said, before turning to Josh. "Besides young Joshua, you just remember that I carry a very sharp scalpel and can turn you into a eunuch in two seconds!"

"What's a eunuch...? Oh... Not good!" I said, blushing as I worked it out.

"Tell me about it!" Josh said seriously and crossed his legs!

I laughed, I couldn't help it!

"You stay here and make sure Mindy behaves herself! As far as I can tell, she only *really* listens to you, my dear daughter!"

***Chapter 86*: War Plans**

That same morning
Sunday
Safehouse A

Dr Bennett headed home, alone.

Josh and Chloe went to bed in their own rooms and promptly fell asleep; they were completely knackered! I got Mindy up to bed where, despite her moaning she also promptly fell asleep, thanks to the cocktail of drugs that Dr Bennett had forced her to take, before she left.

Me, I collapsed beside Mindy and fell asleep, after checking that all was secure, around the safehouse. I also called Marty and advised him that we were all safe, which he had worked out anyway, as he had listened into everything that had happened. He said that he would probably come over to the house, later tomorrow. I also sent a text to Marcus, letting him know that Mindy had been injured, but that she would be okay and that it was nothing serious.

Before I got Mindy to bed, she had insisted on checking out Josh's new acquisition. She commented derisively on it only being a 2013 model, but she was still impressed that Josh had acquired a twenty-thousand dollar motorcycle! Not just that, Mindy was also impressed that he managed to get Chloe and himself back to the safehouse, on the thing, without killing themselves! It was a very powerful machine, but Mindy insisted it was nowhere near the Ducati!

Personally I think Mindy's a little jealous of Josh, right now!

Later that same day
Sunday
Safehouse A

None of us woke up till about noon.

I ended up sleeping on the couch in the briefing room, after finding myself on the floor beside our bed. On getting up off the floor, I found that somebody else had wormed themselves into the bed and pushed *me* out! I had left both girls sleeping and headed down to the briefing room.

"Hi Dave!" Chloe said and nudged me awake, before she pointed to a coffee on the table.

"Hi Chloe, you okay?" I asked; I had sensed that something was not right.

"I wanted to apologise for kicking you out of your own bed, last night!"

"You had a nightmare?"

"Yeah! Mindy almost died last night and with my own gun. I kept reliving that event over and over again, except this time, she died every time, no matter what I did..."

Chloe then started to sob and cuddled into me. Last time this happened, it was Mindy! I had to admit that apart from what was said over the comms, I had no idea what actually occurred in that room, last night.

I suggested to Chloe, that she walk me through the whole thing, from the moment they entered the room, to leaving via the window.

Chloe spent the next twenty-five minutes doing exactly that and I never interrupted, but just let her talk. At one stage the tears started again, but I coaxed her on. By the end of her explanation I was shocked and impressed. Considering Mindy was completely out of it, after the explosion, the two kids managed to hold it together *and* dispatch a Krysha!

I nodded to Josh, who had appeared in the doorway, during Chloe's explanation.

"You two did *extremely* well; I am really impressed by the way you both handled yourselves last night, *well done!*" I said, smiling at them both, as they both blushed deeply with pride.

"I second that!" Mindy said, coming into the briefing room and smiling at Chloe. "I heard the end of your explanation.

Thank you Chloe! You join the, thankfully very short, list of people that I owe my life to! Dave heads that list, by the way!"

Mindy then turned to Josh, who was still beaming with pride.

"As for you Mr Grand Theft Auto! I am very impressed by your two-wheeled toy out there! Well done for that; you thought on your feet and showed great initiative. It also shows that you have what it takes to become a great vigilante! Not as good as me though!" Mindy said, with an evil smirk.

"I'm just glad you're alive Mindy," Chloe said, giving Mindy a hug, but letting go quickly as Mindy grimaced. "Sorry!"

"Got bruises in places I don't care to mention!"

"Okay, let's get dressed and go home!" I suggested.

That afternoon
Sunday
West Ridge

Once we got back home, Mindy refused to go to bed, but I insisted that she at least lie down on a couch in the living room. I actually threatened her with Dr Bennett! Apparently, Mindy didn't want to be sedated, so she finally complied and also with the help of Chloe, who threatened to put her on the couch herself, the hard way!

Mindy was looking very battle worn! Her face was still a mess and her right shoulder was all sorts of fun colours! The concussion was also making it difficult for Mindy to think straight and this also meant that she was very cranky!

Marty and Kim came around mid-afternoon to check on the wounded Hit Girl. Marty also had an interesting recording to play to us.

..._...

"Er, Chloe, you got a minute?" I asked. "In the living room."

Chloe looked up from the mat.

"Yeah, Dave," She replied.

Once Chloe had sat down in the living room, Mindy turned to her.

"Don't look so nervous!" Mindy said, laughing.

"Sorry, I wasn't sure why I was being summoned," Chloe admitted.

"When did you learn Russian?" Mindy asked.

"Oh *that!* I just learnt the odd phrase, in case we met any Russians," Chloe said, blushing a little.

Marty pressed 'play' on his tablet computer; it was Chloe's very distinctive growl: "Ешьте дерьмо, ублюдок!"

Chloe blushed further now!

"Very creative! *'Eat shit, motherfucker!'*" Mindy laughed. "Just what I might have said!"

"I had forgotten hearing that, last night," I admitted.

"Now we have *two* foul mouthed bitches!" Marty commented.

"Technically Mindy, is still the best at that!" I quipped.

"You record all the conversations?" Chloe asked.

"I do, just in case!" Marty acknowledged. "I heard you say something in Russian last night and got Mindy to translate it this morning."

Later that evening

At around five, there was a knock on the door!

Mindy immediately tensed up. Marty and Kim had left and Chloe and Josh were downstairs and we weren't expecting anyone! I went over to the door and grabbed a pistol from a drawer on the way. I noticed that a pistol had materialised in Mindy's hand, seemingly from nowhere!

I looked through the peep hole.

It was a Cop.

I slowly opened the door, holding my finger up to my lips, then I turned to Mindy.

"It's a Cop; he's following up on a stolen Kawasaki motorcycle!" I called.

Mindy went white!

"How the fuck did they track it here?" Mindy asked and she sounded panicky.

"Cause I'm good!" Marcus said with a laugh, as he came into the living room. "Tracked you all the way from New York!"

Mindy looked from Marcus to me and then her eyes narrowed considerably.

"You complete ass, Dave!" Mindy growled, before grinning, as Marcus sat down and gave her a hug.

"You okay, kid?" Marcus asked.

"I've had worse! But, what are you doing here?" Mindy asked.

"Can't I come by and check up on my little girl?"

"I've not been your *little* girl for quite a while!"

"You'll *always* be my little girl!" Marcus insisted. "Dave let me know about your injuries and after speaking with Jack, I decided to fly up."

"Dave, Marcus did *not* need to be told that I fucked up!" Mindy growled and looked angry.

"Mindy, I care about you; get over it!" I said, simply and Marcus nodded his agreement.

"Okay, I won't argue; I see I won't fucking win! Jeez!" Mindy grouched.

"Now you be a good *little* girl and rest!" I insisted, with a smirk. "Got a minute Marcus?"

They both *really* infuriate me!

But they know I won't ever hurt them!

Dammit!

This was really starting to piss me off! I managed to get suckered into a damn ambush, then knocked out! My two protégés outdid themselves by killing a Krysha (Chloe was getting really good with that damn bow), rescuing their master and then escaping! Not to mention Josh pinching a twenty grand super-bike! Me? I walk away with a pair of sniper rifles. Josh? He rides off on a fucking super-bike! That actually rankles inside and is that jealousy? Jealous of a jumped up British twat?

Not to mention that the little bitch threatened me, if I didn't rest! Hit Girl gets no fucking respect and that needs to fucking change, dammit!

My thoughts drifted to that little boy that started the ball rolling, last night. He had an American accent, not Russian. Who was he? Where did he go? Was he in trouble? Too many damn questions, as usual!

The only thing I did know, was that Fusion was now at war with the Russian Mafia. Unfortunately, I would be out of it for a week or so, but that wouldn't stop me from planning out the war!

..._...

Dave and Marcus returned about twenty minutes later, with Josh and Chloe, in tow.

"Okay Mindy, let's hear the latest Hit Girl story!" Marcus said, sitting down on the opposite couch.

"I can tell the first part, but Chloe and Josh will need to finish things, as I was out of it for a while!"

An hour later Marcus turned to Chloe and Josh.

"Thank you, both of you! Mindy may be a total nut job, just like her father, but I love her and hate it when she gets hurt, as Dave does!" Marcus said, with a smirk.

I felt myself blushing furiously.

"Thanks Marcus," Chloe replied and sounded a bit lost for words.

"Thanks Lieutenant," Josh said, blushing.

"Josh, please call me Marcus, you've earned it kid! You're all part of one big *Fucked Up Super Hero Club!*"

***Chapter 87*: Celebrations and Remembrance**

Three days later
Wednesday
West Ridge

Today was Marty's birthday!

Marcus was still with us, due to upcoming anniversaries, so we enjoyed a meal together, which Chloe, Josh and Abby were allowed to attend, despite it being a school night! We had a lot of fun, as it always was when Marty started telling his jokes. I noticed that Marty and Kim were *very* close now, sickeningly close! But I couldn't fault him, Kim was a very beautiful woman and she seemed to love Marty, especially the *new* Marty!

It was left to Dave to come up with some embarrassing stories, of which there were a hell of a lot! Those two really got themselves into a lot of shit, when they were young. I'm really surprised Dave lived long enough to even become Kick-Ass!

It was fun to find out more about Dave's past, as it was so very different to my own.

The next morning
Thursday
West Ridge

Today was expected to be a *very* bad day, as anniversaries go, that is.

Why?

So many bad things happened!

One catastrophic thing *almost* happened!

But also a couple of good things occurred!

Shall we put the good and bad shit in order then?

Firstly, that complete, traitorous, utter bastard, Red Mist conned Dave. Then I was shot, *three fucking times!* I *really* haven't got over that yet; thinking about it just makes me want to hit something! Next, my Daddy was kidnapped and then tortured to death, but not before I was able to kill them all and if not rescue him, I at least got to speak with him, one last time... *'You are the kindest Daddy in the world. I love you too, Daddy. I love you too, Daddy. Sleep tight.'*

Dammit! I miss my Daddy so fucking much!

That catastrophic thing? Well that was me almost killing Dave, in the safehouse (that no longer fucking exists). I was mad and at the time, blamed Dave, but he had been badly beaten too. The stubborn bastard actually stayed to help me, too! He saved me twice and killed that bastard, Frank D'Amico; that was the first *good* thing! The thought of Dave with that fucking bazooka always made me smile!

The second good thing?

It was the best decision that I had ever made: I told Dave my true identity, I told him I was Mindy Macready and shook his hand; we became partners, of a sort and here we are, years later and still together, fighting for good.

"You okay?" Dave asked, hugging me tightly, as I cried.

"Yeah, I have you! I'll always be okay when I have you!"

This time last year I was alone, in this very city. Dave had made contact and I had fucked everything up and almost lost him for good. But he came back. Why does he keep coming back? Because he loves you, you stupid bitch, *despite* all the fucking shit that you dish out! I hugged Dave tighter, I didn't want to let him go, not now, not ever.

"What have my ribs ever done to you?" Dave asked as he struggled to breathe.

"Sorry!" I said quickly and eased my grip.

"Let's go get breakfast!" I suggested.

..._...

Marcus was in the kitchen, when we got down there.

He didn't look happy, which was understandable, as he had watched his friend and former partner getting tortured, live on the internet!

"How you doing?" He asked.

"Been better; story of my life!" I replied weakly.

"Hi Dave! How you handling it?"

"The nightmares were as vivid as ever! Don't regret a thing! I'm not saying I want to repeat it all, but..."

"I know!" Marcus offered.

"I'd like to think it would get easier as the years pass, but it's the same now as it has always been, but at least I have Dave, this time!" I said.

"I assume there still isn't any sign of any Hit Babies!" Marcus laughed, changing the subject.

My face suddenly felt *very* hot!

"Not the conversation for breakfast Marcus!"

..._...

We both received a very nice text from Josh and Chloe, as they both knew about what had happened that night, all those years ago. Josh and Chloe had watched *that* video together and were both understandably horrified! I thanked them both for their thoughts.

They really were great kids.

Marcus was heading back to New York this evening, but it was good that he could be here, during what was a difficult time, for us all. For now, at least, we could support each other and talk about the good old days! It also gave Dave and Marcus the opportunity to swap stories about yours truly! Nothing I could do about it, so I just glared at them both, but they just fucking ignored me! Okay, I've made a few mistakes in my young life, who fucking hasn't! Admittedly most peoples mistakes didn't involve sharp blades and guns, plus the odd item of explosive ordnance!

My life sucks and I hate being a fucking teenager!

The following morning Friday

"Thank God that's over for another year!"

"Tell me about it!" Dave muttered.

"Okay, back to the rest of our lives!" I said, jumping out of bed. "I have a war to plan!"

"You do that! Wake me when you're done!"

"Lazy green asshole!"

I needed to get my body back into shape, so I took Sophia for a run around the park.

It was painful, but pain is good for the soul, well that's what Daddy always used to say! It was okay when I was little, I didn't feel pain much. Mind you, my body has been through a hell of a lot over the past few years!

First time I was shot, was when? I was nine and my Daddy gave me hell for it, as I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I won't tell Dave this story, 'cause the cunt would laugh himself stupid! I'm half surprised he hasn't noticed the scar! Okay, I was shot in the fucking ass! Left side, very low down and it hurt like fuck, not to mention that I couldn't sit down for over a week, which made taking a piss rather challenging! My Daddy laughed, he thought it was 'piss' funny and said it would teach me a lesson! Mind you, I laugh every time I think about it now!

As I ran around the park with Sophia, I was mentally planning our next assault on the Russian Mafia and that was something I was good at! By the time we had run all the way home, I had a very good plan coming together in my mind, not to mention some fun for this evening! However I had one major gauntlet to run, most possibly worse than the corridor at the D'Amico Penthouse! What was that immense hurdle? Dr Bennett!

Dr Bennett insisted on a full, top to bottom, physical before I would be allowed out. Dr Bennett also assured me that if I avoided the physical, then I would regret it. Normally I would ignore threats like that, but her smile was somewhat disturbing! So I submitted myself to the physical, which I passed, but *not* with flying colours I might add. Dr Bennett was not happy with my right shoulder, which she said had not yet fully healed. Nor was she happy with my other bruises that were scattered all over my body, as they had not fully healed, either!

I wasn't the only one to endure a physical either! Dave, Marty, Kim, Josh and Chloe also suffered through one too! We couldn't complain; at least we are all healthy and we would also need to be in top condition for the work we did! We were all pleased to hear that Joshua was now almost one hundred percent healed; Dr Bennett said that it must have been due to all that extra exercise Chloe had been giving him!

That evening Safehouse A

Dave and I were suiting up for a brief trip out.

This was not to be anything special, just a bit of fun! On a more serious note, it was to make sure that I was ready to go back out and into action. Dave insisted that we have a check run and I agreed, which kinda shocked Dave, as he had expected to have a massive argument over it! I agreed because I thought I was finally getting around to understand that people force me into these things because they care about me and don't want me to get hurt. Whether it is Chloe, Dr Bennett, Dave or Marcus, they were not doing it because they enjoyed it, as I might. They were just trying to prevent me from doing something stupid. It actually felt really good knowing that I had lots of people willing to look out for me and tolerate my often wayward behaviour to ensure that I was safe!

I never thought that the Russians were stupid, but one obviously was! The dick had actually reported his motorcycle stolen to CPD. Jack Bay had accidentally lost the report, but I now had the address for the idiot! Marty, with Lucille and of course Kim, had followed the guy to another address. This one was *not* one of the Russian Mafia locations that we were already aware of!

I had borrowed the Kawasaki from Josh, with his permission of course! We headed out, towards the address of the Kawasaki's *previous* owner. Kick-Ass was with me, on his Fat Boy and armed with a G36C, in case things kicked off. But we had both agreed that the moment things turned ugly, we would leave.

We arrived at the address stealthily and checked out the area. It was nothing special, just a fairly common residential neighbourhood, so we should be safe and there were also no tell tales indicating a possible ambush.

While Kick-Ass kept watch, I executed some very creative doughnuts, on the road outside the guy's house, before the guy quickly came running out, yelling his head off.

"Hey! That's my fucking bike! сволочи!" [*Bastards!*]

"Not anymore, cunt! Легко пришло! Легко идет!" [*Easy come! Easy go!*]

I accelerated away and pulled a wheelie as I went! Kick-Ass followed, keeping his G36C visible, to dissuade any retaliation.

"Well that's one way to get their backs up!" Kick-Ass laughed.

"Damn, that was fun! I replied.

***Chapter 88*: Home Run**

Two days later
Saturday
Safehouse A

It was time to get back in the saddle, quite literally!

We were going to kick some serious Mafia ass!

This was also going to be the first night out for the two kiddies and their motorcycles.

"You will do as I say, every fucking step! No show-boating, Jackal!"

"Hey!"

"Just 'cause you can pinch a damn motorcycle, doesn't mean you can ride one in every situation. Got it!" I cautioned.

"Yes!" Both kids agreed.

"Okay, let's roll!"

Southern Chicago

It was dark and getting cold.

Traffic was fair, so we were able to cruise and keep a good pace. I wasn't on the Kawasaki, but on my Ducati, which was much better. Abby was in the Command Centre at Safehouse A, while Marty and Kim were geared up in Lucille. Currently Marty had cameras on the Russian Mafia building. We had our NVGs on, so we could approach stealthily and via the heads-up-display, we could see that the Russians were expecting a possible attack, but seemed not to be expecting one at this site; there were token defences but that was all. Marty had counted twenty-three men of which around a dozen seemed to be Kryshas. Shadow was carrying her trusty compound bow, although this time, her quiver was packed with fun; these new arrows would be a game changer!

Both Shadow and Jackal were doing well with their motorcycles and successfully kept up with Kick-Ass and I. They seemed to be taking things seriously and kept together, side-by-side, behind me, with Kick-Ass following. We kept the speed down, so as not to attract attention and to give Shadow and Jackal a good learning experience.

We pulled over about twenty yards from Lucille, which was about forty yards from the Russian Mafia building. None of us were showing any lights and we hoped that the building between us and the Russians would mask our engine noise.

..._...

Kick-Ass and I headed towards the Russian Mafia building, followed by Jackal and Shadow. When we got to within ten yards of the Russians, we readied ourselves for the assault. First, though, Shadow would prepare the way ahead. Arrayed in front of her were four arrows, each of a special design with payloads near to their tips. Shadow would fire these in rapid succession, which she was now an expert at.

As the clock ticked towards ten o'clock, Marty gave us a countdown and Shadow notched her first arrow.

"This is Battle Guy! Ten seconds - five, four, three, two, mark!"

Shadow released her first arrow, scooped up the next arrow and released it into the air, before repeating the operation with the next pair of arrows; it only took a few seconds for all four arrows to be in the air and heading for their targets.

..._...

The first pair of arrows landed in the grass, each one near a group of watchdogs who were guarding the exterior of the building and *none* of the watchdogs noticed the arrows landing. A split-second later both arrows detonated in a bright flash of light and a deafening explosion. The next pair of arrows impacted the double, wooden, door of the

building. Nothing appeared to happen immediately and a watchdog at the door, leant closer to the the arrows, inspecting the attached payloads.

"Ready to breach in ten!" I called.

"Detonating in three, two, mark!" Battle Guy called and the last two arrows detonated violently, blasting the doors to matchwood and shredding the nosy watchdog!

"Fusion, forward!" I called and we all ran towards the shattered doors; on the way Kick-Ass clubbed the fallen watchdogs before they could recover from the flashbangs. We raced through the doorway, Shadow was in front with her P90 up and ready to fire. I followed behind, with Jackal, while Kick-Ass kept an eye on our rear. We could hear men shouting in Russian; there was total confusion, which was perfect for us and we would take every advantage we could get!

"Battle Guy and Hawk are leaving Lucille!" Battle Guy called. They would provide backup and ensure no more Russians came in behind us.

Our first targets appeared round a corner and Shadow opened fire, dropping three Russians, while I took down a fourth with my G36C.

"Ha! Four down, moving on!"

"Ha! Copies four down!"

Another twenty yards and Shadow had her P90 ripped from her hand and she was thrown, bodily, against the wall by a Krysha; Shadow screamed in pain and fell to the floor. I shot the Krysha in the head, just as four more came from a passageway to the right and I was punched in the face again! Why can't these bastards leave my fucking face alone! I span around in anger and cut the man's throat with my Tanto and let him bleed out. Shadow was back up and drove her compound bow into the face of another Krysha breaking his nose, before she kicked the man's left knee, putting him down. Jackal followed up with his Ninja-To through the man's heart.

Kick-Ass was engaged in a blade fight with a Krysha, who was armed with a machete. The other Krysha came at me and I used his momentum to throw him behind me, where I shot him in the head with a pistol. Kick-Ass finished off his Krysha with a blade across the man's stomach, emptying his entrails onto the floor.

We moved on, after changing out magazines and checking each other was okay. Shadow was a little shaken, but okay to continue. The first floor was clear and now we had a large set of stairs in front of us, with an unknown opposition at the top. There was definite movement, but we had no idea what was up there. Cue Shadow and her bow!

Shadow notched another flashbang arrow, before aiming for the ceiling at the top of the stairs. We all covered our eyes and ears, ready for the visual and auditory assault. Once the bright flash had occurred and the explosion was echoing around the building, Kick-Ass and Jackal ran up the stairs; Kick-Ass with his G36C and Jackal with his P90, which I had spent some of the past week exhaustively drilling him on.

At the top of the stairs I saw several bodies, all of them moving and trying to clear their heads.

One managed to aim and fire off his AKS-74U assault rifle, before I shot him, but I heard Jackal yell, as the bullets impacted his armour and he fell backwards down the stairs.

"Hit Girl! Get Jackal, he's coming down the hard way, got shot!" I called.

"Copy that!" Hit Girl replied.

I moved forward and shot anybody I saw with a weapon, which turned out to be four of them, the other three I clubbed into unconsciousness. More AKS fire erupted, from further along the passageway and I dove through an open doorway into an empty room.

"We have Jackal, he's shaken up, but okay. He's staying downstairs, to watch our backs." Hit Girl reported.

"This is Kick-Ass, I'm pinned at the top of the stairs!"

"I'm on it!" Shadow reported.

About a minute later I heard Shadow's voice again.

"Fire in the hole, cocksuckers!"

This was followed by an explosion, seconds after Shadow had released an arrow towards the other end of the corridor. I heard screams as the explosion reverberated around the building and dived out of the room and joined Shadow, who slung the bow on her back and raised her P90.

"Good shooting, kid!" I growled, as we moved forward together, along the corridor.

There were three doors at the end of the corridor.

"You take the first door on the left, I'll cover you," I called to Shadow.

"I'm with you Kick-Ass!" Hit Girl called and touched my shoulder, so I knew she was there.

"Going in!" Shadow called and kicked in the door and dived in, rolled forward and came up on one knee. I followed to find a large, portly, man with his hands raised and Shadow with her P90 pointed directly at the man's head.

I ran forward and secured the man's hands with plastic ties.

"Stay there, asshole!" Shadow growled.

Hit Girl took the next door on the left, which led to an empty room. There was just the one door left. I waited until Shadow and Hit Girl were ready to cover me, then I kicked the door open and promptly received several bullet impacts to my chest armour. There was a pair of Krysha in the room, apparently guarding a store room beyond. I fired several rounds which hit the two Krysha in the chest, but they just staggered back.

"The bastards are wearing body armour!" I called, over the comms.

"This is Hawk, we're taking fire outside!" Hawk called.

"Jackal, go support Battle Guy and Hawk!" Hit Girl called.

"Jackal moving outside!"

This was getting complicated!

Shadow came forward and fired several rounds at each Krysha, her rounds passed through their body armour and dropped them both.

I ran out the doorway and found Hawk and Battle Guy behind a car and taking fire from several men, who had arrived in a pair of SUVs.

Both of them were replying with their G36C assault rifles. I engaged, from the cover of the doorway, cutting down one of the men. Unfortunately, I then received several shots in return!

"Hawk! I'll cover, so you can flank them!" I called.

"Copy Jackal! Ready to move in five, four, three, two, mark!" Hawk called, as I hosed down the two SUVs and Hawk dove towards the far side of the road and cover behind another vehicle. I quickly swapped out the magazine and continued firing, slower this time, to conserve ammunition.

As the two Krysha fell to the floor of the room, I kicked open the door to the storeroom and Shadow went in, with her P90 up in front of her. The light mounted on the side of the weapon illuminated a small room and a second later the beam settled on a boy, wedged into a corner and scared shitless.

"We're the good guys! We're here to rescue you!" Shadow said quietly and smiled down at the boy.

Shadow picked the young lad up off of the floor. He must have been about ten or eleven and was bleeding from a cut to his forehead, not to mention several hefty bruises. He was the same kid that we had seen the other night.

"Hi, I'm Shadow, what's your name?"

"Tommy," The boy answered in a shaky voice.

"Where do you live?" Shadow asked.

"Nowhere... I was kidnapped... From New York..." The boy answered.

"What?" I asked, turning around, as Shadow came out of the store room. "Your name is Tommy and you were kidnapped from New York? From outside a store, looking after a dog?"

"Yeah, couple of years ago, I'm ten and a half."

I looked at Hit Girl: "It couldn't be!"

..._...

I saw several emotions spread across Hit Girl's face, before her face went dark and she stormed through to the office across the corridor. I followed, sure of what she was about to do.

"You fucking bastard!" Hit Girl yelled, throwing the man to the floor. "You take kids! You hurt kids!"

"You *cannot* hurt me, I have diplomatic immunity!" The Russian said, smiling smugly through his pain. I noticed a green passport on the desk with Cyrillic writing, that I assumed was a diplomatic passport.

Hit Girl raised her pistol and pointed it directly at the Russian's face.

"Diplomatic immunity!" The Russian repeated and the bastard looked very sure of himself, as he pointed to the passport, on the desk.

I saw Hit Girls trigger finger tighten and then the Russian's brain's spread over the wall behind him.

"It's just been revoked!" Hit Girl growled and smiled, before she turned and left the room.

"Grab the boy, let's go!" Hit Girl ordered. "Hal, we have the boy! Exiting now!"

"Hawk! What's happening?" Kick-Ass called, as we headed towards the stairs. He was carrying the boy on his left arm, allowing him to keep his G36C ready for action, in his right hand.

"Doing well, last couple to take down!" Hawk replied.

By the time we got down to the destroyed main door, the shooting outside was over.

"Exit is clear!" Hawk reported.

We left the building and headed towards Lucille. Hal called Voight and told him to meet us a few miles up the road. Hawk took Tommy and with Battle Guy, drove to the rendezvous, the rest of us followed on our motorcycles.

A few miles up the road

I dialled the number: 212-012-86669.

"Hello?" A familiar woman's voice answered.

"Shannon?" I asked.

"Yes, who is this?"

"You may remember me, I'm Kick-Ass!"

"Kick-Ass! Hi, how are you doing?" Shannon Morgan asked, excitedly.

"I have somebody who wants to talk to you," I said and handed the phone over.

"Mommy?" The boy asked, tentatively.

The boys face suddenly lit up and tears streamed down his face.

Bingo!

I looked at Mindy and I was sure that I could see tears of joy in her eyes.

***Chapter 89*: New In Town**

Five days later
Thursday
West Ridge

We all felt pretty good about the previous weekend's events.

Tommy was now back with his family, in New York, after his terrifying ordeal. Voight and Jack Bay had seen to that. I was annoyed about even *more* bruises to my face; they were never going to heal at this rate! Chloe had some vivid bruises on her back, but otherwise we seemed to have survived and we felt that we had done some good at the same time. Indications were that the Russian Mafia was badly dented and had curtailed almost all of their activities in Chicago, which was a great victory!

Voight, as expected, didn't give a shit about the diplomatic passport and thanked us for the intelligence gold mine that this last building had provided. In hindsight shooting that man might not have been the best idea, but at the time I was raging and he deserved it.

The past few days had been spent getting the aches and pains out of muscles and joints and letting the bruises fade. We had all had a visit from the dreaded Dr Bennett, who passed us all fit, except for the bruises and the fact that we were all very exhausted. Chloe had been surprisingly quiet this week, but I just put that down to her getting stuck into school work and recovering from her bruises. Josh was constantly sending texts, which were starting to get on my nerves right now, as they were almost constant!

I was also very pleased that my new arrows had worked so perfectly and that Chloe had delivered them so accurately, too! I decided that I would need to get some practice in with these compound bows, myself.

..._...

I received a weird call from Voight this afternoon:

"Hey Hit Girl, you doing good?" Voight asked.

"I think so!" I growled back.

"You have a pair of heroes, who dress all in black and are about five and a half feet tall?" Voight asked. "Speak with a British accent?"

"No we don't. We all have colours on our combat suits. Plus, we are all American," I replied. Josh was technically American; well at least half! "Why?"

"We've had some reports of these two causing trouble. Just wanted to know if they had anything to do with you guys! Didn't think so, though; they aren't disciplined like your team, Hit Girl!"

I enjoyed that complement!

"Well, we'll keep an eye out for them, if you wish!" I said.

"If you could; we've had no success so far!" Voight said.

..._...

I relayed all of this to Dave, who was also a little puzzled.

"Josh?" He asked, tentatively.

"Josh is too short!" I laughed.

"True. Well, at least Voight *thinks* we're disciplined; obviously doesn't know us too well!"

"Hey! We are disciplined!" I growled, giving Dave a punch on the arm. "Well, I am, at least!"

"Come on, let's go for a ride; see if we can't find these guys!" Dave suggested.

Later that evening

We headed out on our BMW motorcycles, as ourselves, cruising through Chicago.

The leathers and helmets allowed us to wear concealed comms and carry a concealed weapon, which in this case was a Glock 26 for each of us. I enjoyed riding, side by side, with Dave, anonymously, through the streets, with the odd detour down an alley, looking for these mysterious British vigilantes. We enjoyed chatting to each other over the comms, too. I actually hoped Marty wasn't recording this conversation, as it got a little dirty at times!

About nine, Dave slammed on his brakes and turned into an alley, cutting his lights. I followed suit.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"Two people, dressed in black! Just ducked in behind the fourth dumpster, down on the right!" Dave replied.

"Plan?" I asked.

"Go around the far end, call me when you get there! Give you five minutes?"

"I'll be there in less than two, ass!" I replied and accelerated away.

..._...

Just under two minutes later, after a fast and fun ride around the block, I entered the far end of the alley, with my lights on full and started down the alley.

I saw movement and two black shapes ran off down the alley.

"They're coming your way!"

I saw two black shapes heading my way, and advanced towards them on foot.

They saw me and hesitated, then turned to check behind them and saw the dazzling lights of Mindy's motorcycle.

Both of the black shapes moved; one jumped and climbed up a fire escape, while the other scrambled over the dumpsters, jumping past me and out of the alley. I didn't pursue; I wasn't equipped for that.

"Well it looks like we've confirmed that these two actually exist!" I said to Mindy, as she pulled up beside me.

"True. They seem very athletic, don't they. I'm reasonably sure one of them is a girl, too!" Mindy replied.

"Brother and sister vigilantes?" I asked.

"Weird, huh?"

"About as weird as an eleven year-old vigilante!" I reminded Mindy.

"Oh yeah! I forgot about that!" Mindy laughed.

We continued our evening, driving around, but never saw the two black vigilantes again; we must have scared them off.

I had a feeling that it would only be time, before we met again.

On the way home we stopped off and grabbed a late night burger, which tasted totally crap, but food was food! It also wasn't often that Dave and I got to spend time out together, doing something that we both enjoyed and Dave used the time to wind me up, with kisses and questionable comments!

I won't say that I didn't enjoy it, but there was a time and a place for everything!

That place was the bedroom and the time was when we got home. We were then able to continue with Dave's dirty thoughts.

***Chapter 90*: Young Love**

Two days later
Saturday
West Ridge

The weekend had arrived and with it trouble!

Josh had arrived first and he *was not* happy!

He was ranting about Chloe; apparently she had embarrassed him at school yesterday and he wanted *payback*. He told me that the moment he saw Chloe again, he was going to floor her and apparently he didn't give a shit about the consequences! I was actually impressed, I had never seen Josh so focused or so angry; I had better keep those two apart today!

I went upstairs and took a shower. Dave appeared as I was getting dressed and I told him about Josh and that we would probably need to keep him and Chloe apart today.

"Oh shit!"

"What...?"

"I just let Chloe in; she went downstairs to see Josh," Dave said.

"Oh fuck!"

I ran downstairs, with Dave close behind me.

As we got to the bottom of the stairs I could hear shouting; Josh and Chloe were well and truly at it! I rushed down the next flight of stairs to a major fight. Josh was raging and kicking out at Chloe. Chloe in turn was fighting back, as expected! Josh's face was a mess; it looked as though Chloe had punched him hard, in the face. Chloe so far seemed unmarked, but that was before Josh kicked her legs out from under her and then span her around, so she landed on her front, with her face absorbing some of the blow. I saw blood fly from her nose and she screamed in pain. Josh moved in to attack her again, but I had had enough and I ran towards them both, then kicked Josh to the floor with a well aimed kick to his chest.

Dave went to scoop Chloe off the mat.

We sat Josh and Chloe down and cleaned them both up.

"What the fuck are two playing at?" I growled angrily.

Chloe's face was bruised, but thankfully for her, her nose wasn't broken. Josh's face was bruised too and he had a black eye.

"He attacked me, so I fought back!" Chloe said.

"Well you fucking deserved it, you fucking psycho!" Josh retorted.

"Calm the fuck down, both of you!" Dave roared, getting an instant reaction from Josh and Chloe. "So Chloe embarrassed you, fucking get over it and grow the fuck up!"

"Don't you dare come here and start fighting like that, Chloe! I really expected better from you; *don't* let Josh provoke you. So Josh looked at another girl, get the fuck over it! He's a boy; I thought you'd worked that out! Boys can't control their urges; they think with their dicks!" I said.

"You two gonna be friends now?" Dave asked.

"With her? Fuck that!" Josh retorted angrily.

I noticed that Chloe looked upset with Josh's response.

"Right! Both of you little shits sit down and neither of you are leaving till you both make up and start talking to each other! Anybody starts or takes part in a fight and I'll make you *both* regret it!" I said vehemently. "Joshua *sit!*"

I went back upstairs with Dave.

"How long?" I asked.

"Five minutes!" Dave said, chuckling.

Five minutes later

I went back downstairs and... Oh...!

Josh and Chloe were kissing and well... I couldn't really tell where Josh finished and Chloe started! Josh's left hand was up her top and his right hand was caressing her backside. Chloe was moaning and seemed to be enjoying herself!

"Don't let me disturb you two!" I tried, but I was completely ignored.

I went back up to Dave.

"Well they've made up! Must have been a while since they last *interacted*, if you get my drift!"

"I see!" Dave said and laughed.

Twenty minutes later

I wandered down to check on Josh and Chloe, as we hadn't heard a word from either of them!

They were still at it!

"Er, Chloe, don't suppose you fancy covering up?" I asked, averting my eyes, as Josh seemed to have stripped Chloe topless.

Chloe looked up at me and then down at her chest, blushed and held her t-shirt over her chest; Josh looked up and blushed too!

"Love won out in the end then?" I asked with a smirk.

"Yeah, we were both being stupid idiots!" Josh admitted.

"Speak for yourself, Josh!" Chloe said. "Seriously though, we're both sorry, Dave!"

"Yeah, we are!" Josh agreed.

"You seemed to be enjoying yourselves, I have to admit!" I commented and went back upstairs to allow Chloe to get her bra and t-shirt back on.

..._...

"They're okay; Chloe was topless by the time I got down there, but they did both apologise for the fight! If we'd left it another twenty minutes, they'd probably have been having full on sex!" I told Mindy and she laughed.

Josh and Chloe soon appeared from downstairs looking a bit sheepish and both apologised again for their behaviour.

After lunch we settled back down to training.

I concentrated on Josh and his Ninja-To; improving his movements and cuts.

"Mindy, have you ever thought of starting a training centre for this kind of stuff?" Josh asked.

"You mean a dojang for Taekwondo?" I replied.

"Yeah, you're really good at teaching. Hell, you trained Dave; Marty told me that he was a complete wimp, not that long ago!"

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Josh!" I replied. "I am good, aren't I?"

"Josh, her ego is big enough; don't encourage her, please!" Dave said.

"I really hate to admit it, but Josh is right! You *should* open a dojang and teach others how to defend themselves," Chloe said.

..._...

As well as getting Josh using his weapons correctly, I wanted to get Chloe into some more advanced movements with her body. This generally involved back flips and other more advanced movements that might assist her, when in a combat situation. Chloe, in general, was very flexible and should be able to cope with these enhanced movements, easily.

I started her off with some simple exercises, to loosen up her body. Then demonstrated to her what I wanted her to learn, which Josh thought was really cool, as I managed a couple of back-flips in the limited space available.

"You think I can do that?" Chloe asked and sounded a little unsure.

"You can do anything that you put your mind to, Chloe," I replied.

..._...

Over the next hour, I managed to get Chloe performing a good back flip, which would improve with time and practice.

"That was pretty cool, Chloe!" Josh said.

"Thanks!" Chloe replied and blushed a little.

I had a thought.

"What about you Josh?" I asked.

"Me?" Josh asked, incredulously.

"There's absolutely no reason *why you* couldn't do a back flip!"

"Okay, I trust you... I think! Just go easy, I like my neck intact!"

..._...

The next hour was fun!

Josh was *not* the acrobatic type, but with Chloe's assistance we managed to get him doing a reasonable back flip, it need a lot more work, but it was a start! Chloe and I had tried *not* to laugh at Josh's attempts, but Josh didn't seem to mind; he seemed to see it all as a bit of fun too!

I advised Josh to keep practising, as he might need such skills at some stage in the future.

..._...

I had explained to Chloe and Josh about the two vigilantes that Dave and I had observed the other night and who seemed to be out causing trouble.

Surprisingly, it was Josh who asked the intelligent question that had not even occurred to *me* yet!

"What *are* they accomplishing? Are they acting for good, or for bad?"

I was actually stumped by the question.

"That was a very well reasoned and thought out question Joshua!" I commended him.

"Always the tone of surprise!" Josh moaned and Chloe and I laughed.

"You have your moments, Josh!" Chloe said, giving him a hug and getting a kiss in return!

"So far these two vigilantes have just been getting in the way. They haven't hurt anybody that we know of! They haven't stolen or damaged anything. I think they're just kids, out being kids!" I reasoned.

"How would you know what 'being out and being kids' would be like?" Dave asked.

"Okay! I don't, but you know what I mean, ass!"

"The only thing we know for certain, is that they are British!" Josh said.

"You're not alone, kid!" I quipped.

"No, I have Chloe!"

"Yuck!" I groaned.

That evening
Safehouse A

"You ready, Jackal?" I asked.

"I was *born* ready, Shadow!" Jackal replied.

"Bit sure of himself isn't he!" Kick-Ass commented.

"Cocky little shit, more like!" Hit Girl chuckled.

"He does look kinda cool, though!" Abby added.

"Thank you, Abby!" Jackal growled, with his voice modulator active.

"He *sounds* cool, too!" Abby commented.

Southern Chicago

The night was dark and cold.

I hated these late nights, I never felt safe walking home; what young woman *does* enjoy walking home alone after dark!

I had this weird feeling that I was being watched. I stopped and looked around, but saw nothing out of the ordinary; just a few cars heading home. I continued walking up the street, towards home.

A few minutes later, I felt something jammed into my side.

"Into the alley bitch, now!" A voice said, into my ear.

I started to shake, but complied. I was sure that I had just heard a large motorcycle not too far away, but I was pushed into the alley and then shoved against the wall.

"Purse, jewellery, everything!" The man ordered.

I sensed movement close by and heard a voice, a British accent!

"You don't want to do that, dickhead!"

I looked up and to my left and saw a figure wearing all black, on a fire escape above me.

"Who the fuck says?" The mugger asked.

"I do!" Another voice growled.

I looked to my right and saw another figure; this one clad in black and purple armour. It was Hit Girl!

Hit Girl strode forward, grabbed the mugger and threw him bodily across the alley.

"That wasn't very nice!" The black clad, British vigilante exclaimed.

"Fuck off you British twat!" Hit Girl growled. "I'm working here!"

"You okay, ma'am?" Another voice asked. I turned to see Hit Girl's partner, Kick-Ass.

"Yeah, I'm fine, just a little shaken, is all!" I replied.

"You should go, you will be safe!" Kick-Ass said.

"As for you two!" I growled.

"What you gonna do Hit Girl?" The black clad vigilante said, as he was joined by another, similarly clad, partner.

"Oh wonderful, it's the Dynamic Duo!" I growled and rolled my eyes.

"Let's go Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass called.

"Yes, time to go Hit Girl, listen to your boyfriend now!" The other black vigilante said and laughed. This one was definitely a girl.

I was getting very annoyed with these British vigilantes.

"I advise you both: *keep out of my way!*" I growled.

..._...

Kick-Ass and I headed back over to Shadow and Jackal.

"Why is it that all the Brits I come in contact with are cocky bastards!" I growled.

"You love us deep down!" Jackal replied.

"Very deep down!" I grimaced.

"That hurts!"

"Get over it!"

Chapter 91: Jumping

The following morning Sunday

Well it was kinda useful meeting those two new British vigilantes, I suppose.

They got under my damn skin though!

I really needed some stress relief, so I was glad that I had arranged something fun for today.

The Farm

"Hi Jack!" I called.

"Morning Mindy! Josh is inside, on his laptop; please go in Chloe!" Jack replied and Chloe rushed in.

"Those two are almost inseparable!" I laughed. "How's Josh doing?"

"He's doing good and he's a great help around the house; a perfect gentleman! You look shocked, Mindy."

"Well, Josh isn't *always* the 'perfect gentleman'! But, it seems, he knows when to be well mannered and when not! He's a good kid and I don't regret recruiting him; at least not yet!" I said.

"You are a good judge of character, Mindy and your training of Josh and Chloe is first rate; Damon would be very, very proud to see what you have built. Marcus says the same; you do know we talk regularly? I'll go get the love birds, so you can head on out!" Jack said and I felt really good inside.

My plan was to take the Honda off-road motorcycles out again. Only this time, I intended to teach Chloe and Josh some more advanced motorcycle riding, including slow speed manoeuvres, alternative stopping and a bit of fun with wheelies and jumping! I had selected a good site where they could both learn to jump and if things didn't go well, they would have a soft landing, well, hopefully.

..._...

After riding for twenty minutes, we arrived at the location that I had chosen.

"You two look nervous!"

"We both want to keep our necks intact, if that's at all possible!" Josh said and Chloe readily nodded her agreement.

"Okay! Most important; always remember that what goes up, *usually* comes back down again! So you not only need to learn how to take-off, but it also helps if you learn how to land, preferably in a safe manner!" I explained. "As you approach the jump, look for the smoothest part, it will help you keep a straight line, so that you aren't knocked off by a bump. Now, assuming that you also *want* to land, after taking off, it's a good idea to checkout the landing zone, *before* you ride. For us, operationally, that may not always be possible, but we do what we can. Don't take chances if you can avoid them; you tend to live a *lot* longer!"

Josh and Chloe still looked nervous.

"Now, your bodies. Your *own* body, Josh! Grip tight with your legs, keep good control of the bike by not gripping too tightly with your hands. You need your hands for the controls, so try to resist a tight, reflexive, grip. Next you're gonna need good throttle control. This is gonna be your first jump, so keep to a medium power setting and slightly pause as you approach the jump, before bringing on the power until *both* wheels are off the ground. If you back off too early, then the front of the bike *will* dip down, which won't be good! When you go up the ramp, to take-off, don't drop off the back of the bike! You do that, then you pull up the front wheel, which may not end well! You two scared yet?"

They both looked petrified!

"Keep your head over the handlebars and resist any temptation to move backwards. When you land, apply a bit of power and job done! Ready?"

Chloe looked at Josh, grinned and then turned to me.

"Let's go!" She said, warily.

Firstly, I took them both over the jump, on foot, so that they could examine the ramp and the landing zone. Then I suggested that they go, one at a time. Chloe reluctantly volunteered to go first and I guided her over the comms.

"Keep it slow... Look for the smoothest part of the ramp... Keep your legs tight together... Good general advice that, not just for now! Don't grip too tightly with your hands... Okay, you're airborne... Power... Not bad!"

Chloe came back around to us and her eyes were sparkling!

"That was so awesome!" Chloe almost yelled.

"Okay boy, your turn! Keep it slow... Look for the smoothest part of the ramp... Keep your legs tight together... Don't grip too tightly with your hands... You're airborne... Apply power... Control the skid! Well done, Josh!"

That was close; Josh almost lost control on landing, but he reacted well and corrected just in time!

"That was fun!" Josh said, dubiously, once he had stopped beside us.

"You didn't enjoy it?" Chloe asked, incredulously.

"I did, but it was just a bit scary!" Josh admitted.

"Wimp!" Chloe stated.

"Chloe, just 'cause you've become a fearless speed freak, doesn't mean *everybody* has!" I said, with a laugh and Chloe scowled.

"Give me time, I'll get there!" Josh said.

"I agree!" Dave agreed.

..._...

After a couple of hours we had all been over the jump, including Dave! Josh was feeling a lot more confident about jumping and his landings had improved. I enjoyed the jumping, too and so did Dave. Jumping the BMW motorcycles was not easy, mainly due to their weight. The kids off-road Honda motorcycles *were* designed for the larger jumps, however. I missed jumping, as my Ducati was *definitely* not designed for them!

Anyway, I didn't mention the speed demon!

I am a little concerned by her 'need for speed'! As Dave very happily reminded me, I am *not* a great deal better! However I have absolutely no desire for Chloe to break her little neck! Chloe, however, seems completely oblivious to the fact that there *are* consequences to riding fast and without due care and attention!

I reminded Chloe that I had come off my previous Ducati and that it *had* hurt, a lot! Thankfully that had been at a relatively slow speed and I could have been badly hurt, if I had been riding at my usual pace! Chloe just didn't seem to get it. Her motorcycle riding skills are very good, I admit that, but she needs a *lot* more experience.

..._...

I was now a bit dubious about covering wheelies, as Chloe was definitely enjoying her adrenalin buzz! I was a little concerned that she would do something stupid!

Oh well!

Forty minutes later, Chloe was on her backside again, which must be well and truly bruised by now! Chloe has come off the back of her Honda, *twice*! She just won't give up and insists on pushing it to the limit. Josh managed reasonably well, but was *much* more cautious and needed a lot more work!

I decided that now was as good a time as any to call it a day, before Chloe broke something that didn't heal!

That night
Morton Grove

"What the *hell* happened to you?"

"Josh and I got into a fight, yesterday morning!" I offered and tried to go up to my room.

"Back here young lady! Sit down!"

I turned around.

"I'd rather not, my ass is bruised to... Well you know; I came off of my motorcycle this afternoon, *twice*... Don't laugh, it hurt!"

"I'm waiting!" Mom said sternly.

"Okay, I smacked Josh and we started to fight, but Josh refused to hit me. He kicked my legs out from under me and I landed on my face!" I explained rapidly.

"So, you two made up, then?"

"Yeah!" I replied and hoped that the conversation would end there, but my Mom looked at me closely.

"Maybe instead of 'made *up*', I should have said 'made *out*'!"

"Mom, we are *not* having this conversation!" I said as forcefully as I could.

Mom just stared at me!

"Okay, jeez! We made out on the mat and well... Josh got carried away and I kinda lost my bra and t-shirt. Then Dave came down and saw me topless!" I explained, with my face feeling *very* hot.

"What are you complaining about; it's not like there's much to see!"

I just stood there with my mouth open; I couldn't believe my Mom had just said that!

"Sorry, Chloe; couldn't resist!" My Mom said and laughed.

"Josh never complains!" I retorted, then instantly regretted it and clamped a hand over my mouth!

"Is that so! Don't worry, if you're *very* lucky your tits may grow as big as your mouth!"

***Chapter 92*: Archer Girl**

Three days later
Wednesday
Lake View High School

"Josh!"

It was Kyle.

"Hi, Kyle! What's up?"

"You're British, right?"

"Yes," I said slowly.

"And you have a British accent."

"Yes... Where you going with this?" I asked, confused.

"There are rumours that there's a team of new vigilantes out there and they have British accents..."

I now knew where this was going!

"... Are you one of them Josh?"

"I promise you that I am *not* one of those new vigilantes!" I replied.; actually proud of myself, as I didn't lie!

Kyle didn't look convinced.

"Chloe could be the other one!" Kyle exclaimed, suddenly.

"As if! Chloe's scared of the dark; she could never be a vigilante!" I retorted.

"Oh, okay!" Kyle said and walked off.

Later that day
Lake View High School

"Joshua!"

It was Chloe.

"Hi, Chloe! What's up?" I tried and smiled at her; she looked mad.

"You're stupid, right?"

"Depends!"

"Why did you tell Kyle that I'm scared of the dark?" Chloe demanded.

"All I could think of at the time! He thought that I was one of the new British vigilantes and you might be my partner!" I explained.

"Oh! That could have gone worse, I suppose!" Chloe admitted.

"Yeah!" I agreed.

"Good thinking!" Chloe said, kissed me on the cheek and then ran off.

That evening

Western Chicago

The man crept down the alley and waited at the entrance to the street.

He didn't need to wait long. The woman walked down the street, completely oblivious to the trouble awaiting her. As she got level with the entrance to the alley, the man raised his right arm; the hand held a pistol. The woman saw it and screamed, but stopped suddenly, as something streaked past her and hit the attacker, square in the chest.

The attacker started to convulse as nineteen pulses per second coursed through his body. Then the man fell to the sidewalk and convulsed once or twice more, before lying still.

"You okay!" A voice growled.

The woman turned to see the famed vigilante, Hit Girl!

"Yeah, he never got the chance to do anything!" The woman replied and gazed down at the man, on the sidewalk. There was an arrow, lying beside the man, but the point was not a point, it was a pair of electrodes, which had pierced the man's clothes and impaled themselves into the man's skin.

"You're safe now!" Hit Girl growled.

"Thanks!" The woman said as she walked off, down the street.

Hit Girl crouched down to remove the arrow and check the man's pulse. He was already starting to come around.

"Nice shot!" I commended her.

"I thought it was good, too!"

"The ever modest Hit Girl!" I said dryly.

"Well looky what we have here! Halloween aint for weeks, kiddies!"

We turned to find a group of a dozen young men, some of whom were obviously under the influence of alcohol.

"What happens next is *your* choice!" Kick-Ass snarled. "I suggest you leave!"

"We don't like vigilantes in our town; we suggest that *you* leave!" The 'leader' suggested strongly.

I really didn't want to hurt any of these youngsters.

"Kick-Ass, batons only!" I cautioned.

"Way ahead of you!" Kick-Ass replied and I saw him with his batons ready.

"You go first!" I suggested.

"Brawn before beauty!"

"Time and a place, ass!" I laughed.

I drew my swords and advanced a dozen feet behind Kick-Ass. The 'leader' started to look worried; he pulled out a pistol, an old Browning Hi-Power.

"That all you got!" Kick-Ass snarled, as he continued forwards.

The leader snapped off three rounds, which Kick-Ass ignored.

"Fuck this!" Several guys shouted and turned to run.

Kick-Ass stared down the 'leader' and as he got closer, Kick-Ass simply stowed his batons and then reached out and plucked the pistol from the 'leader's' hand.

"I'll take that!" Kick-Ass announced, expertly ejecting the magazine and dumping the chambered round into his hand,

with the magazine.

The 'leader' and his remaining team vanished.

Four miles away

"Goddammit!"

"Will you two stop trying to give us both heart attacks!" Sergeant Sam Fellowes complained.

"Those doughnuts'll get you first!" I growled.

"So... What do you jokers want?" Sergeant Paul Murphy asked.

"Present for you!" Kick-Ass announced and passed over a plastic bag.

"Okay! Not doughnuts! Browning?" Murphy asked.

"Took it off some idiot who said he didn't like vigilantes!" Kick-Ass explained.

"You don't want it?" Murphy asked Hit Girl.

"I have several already, thanks!" I growled in reply.

"I'll bet!" Fellowes allowed.

"Oh yeah, almost forgot! You'll find a mugger, four miles back, he's waiting to be picked up! Enjoy your doughnuts!" I called, as we walked off, back towards our motorcycles.

A few miles further north

We hid our motorcycles in an alley and continued our patrol on foot.

Kick-Ass took the lead and climbed a fire-escape onto the flat roof of an apartment block. We were able to walk along the flat roofs of the next few blocks and had a good view of several alley ways and streets. It was getting late and approaching the time for shops to close and their owners to bank the days takings.

We sat down and spent a few minutes chatting, which we rarely got to do when we went out together. Using the comms we could still patrol the length of the roof top, without breaking our conversation.

Around eleven, things started to kick off. We could hear shouting and generally rowdy behaviour, which was expected from young adults leaving the bars having had one or more too many! Kick-Ass identified a group of men, keeping to the shadows, who looked to be waiting to ambush an unsuspecting shop owner. Strategic street lighting had been smashed.

"Hit Girl, I think they need some more light down there!" Kick-Ass suggested.

"I can do that!" I replied and notched an arrow. "Let there be light!"

I released the arrow and watched as it streaked downwards, before it hit the sidewalk and sputtered to life; the flare illuminated the area in brilliant, incandescent light. The group of men ran, like cockroaches seeking darkness. We watched as a couple of late night stores closed and their owner's headed for the nearest bank, protected by the glare of the flare.

"That worked well!" Kick-Ass commented. "You make a good little Archer Girl!"

"*Little!*" I responded, with mock anger.

"You know what I mean, purple menace!" Kick-Ass replied, laughing.

We stayed on the roof and watched till after midnight, ensuring there was a peaceful night. I retrieved my arrow, once the flare had burnt out. All in all, I was very happy with the compound bow and the arrows. Chloe was an excellent teacher and had helped me master this complex weapon. Even Kim and Josh, were doing well. We now kept two

compound bows and a large selection of arrows, in Lucille, just in case! I also added similar items to the other safehouses.

One thing that I did need to work on was my upper body muscles. The compound bow relied on muscles that were not usually used in this way, so I just added some new moves to my daily training rituals.

***Chapter 93*: Four Wheels Good**

Three days later
Saturday

The Ford Focus completed a reasonable handbrake turn, at the end of the parking lot, before it powered back towards the centre of the open area and executed a perfect, if not exactly straight, emergency stop. The vehicle then accelerated backwards at speed before it flicked around in a good attempt at a J-turn. The car drove around the edge of the parking lot, clockwise and returned to the entrance, where the SUV was parked and pulled up sharply.

"Fucking women drivers!" Dave exclaimed, as he jumped out from the passenger side, the moment the car had stopped. He was followed a few seconds later, from the driver's side, by a laughing Chloe, who grinned from ear to ear!

"Hey! Watch what you're saying, cunt!" I growled.

"I've seen your driving, gorgeous!" Dave laughed. "I speak from experience!"

"Our turn, Joshy boy!" I said and directed Josh to the driver's side. "Think you can match that!"

"Easy!" Josh said and threw a smug look at Chloe, who scowled in return.

"That was fucking awesome!" Chloe said, as I climbed into the car.

We had been at it for four hours and both Chloe and Josh were doing very well. We were using a large, currently unused, parking lot that, in southern Chicago. The plan was to give the kids some more wheel time and also to teach them some defensive and offensive driving. So far they had both learnt to perform a handbrake turn, a J-turn and also had an introduction to drifting. Right now we were letting them get in some fun driving. Chloe tended to have rather a heavy right foot, just like me! Josh liked speed, but was a bit more cautious and preferred to be in better control of the car, when driving. Chloe would get a little carried away with the gas and find herself out of control and skidding off sideways! Needless to say, I thought I would be buying some new tyres soon!

Marty would be coming by later, with Speedy, so we had a decent car with some power *and* rear-wheel drive! I made a mental note to talk with Dave about obtaining a replacement for Speedy, for Hit Girl to use of course!

Later that afternoon
Safehouse A

The training for this afternoon was to be about disarming.

I wanted to teach Chloe and Josh what to do if they were attacked by somebody armed with a blade or a firearm.

"A knife. In this case a Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife. To us, when we are wearing our combat suits, this knife has no real affect. We can grab it by the blade, using our gauntlets, without injury. We can also deflect the knife, without injury. Lastly, we can be stabbed, also without injury," I explained. "Now, don't get complacent, you might not always be in your combat suit! You know what I mean, don't you Chloe!"

"Yes, Mindy, I do; the bank!" Chloe confirmed.

"Luckily, that time, we were facing a group of dickheads, who were just completely out of their depth and Chloe despatched one *very* smoothly! Okay, that went well, but in a similar situation you may find yourselves facing competent cunts, when you have *no* armour and *no* weapons. So what do ya do?"

"Wind them up, by pretending to be a brazen little hussy?" Josh suggested, with a smug sidewise glance at Chloe.

"Yes, Chloe's unorthodox distraction did help! Unfortunately, you just don't have the legs, Josh!" I replied and we all laughed.

"Normally the knife would be used as a hand-based weapon, not thrown. Therefore, there are different methods available, including the obvious; deflecting the weapon, to point elsewhere; preventing the attacker from bringing the knife to bear and keeping you distance, then they can't stab you, or slash you. Most importantly, keep your cool, clear

your mind and focus. Ensure that you always have plenty of room to move, so don't get yourself pushed into a corner or against a wall. You can't fend off the attacker, if you get pinned. Anticipate what the attacker might do, quite often they may not be trained, so they will telegraph their actions."

"Sacrifices may have to be made. Concentrate on protecting your face, neck and vital organs. By face, I mean your eyes primarily, plus you don't want any nasty scars! One stab or slash in the wrong place on your body and you will be neutralised instantly; *game over!* If you need to defend yourselves, use your forearms. Yes they might get cut, but the cuts won't damage anything vital and you will still be able to fight."

"Dodging and weaving is always useful; the more lithe and agile the better! Keep in motion; a moving target is the more difficult to stab. Pull your body away from any strikes; stomach, head, legs etcetera. You may have to wait to disarm the attacker; an experienced attacker will make sure he is ready, before he strikes, as they will then be open to attack and being disarmed themselves. Always remember that you can back off and rethink things. If you keep your distance, you will be safe. A seasoned attacker may try to lower your defences by making half-hearted attacks, causing minor injuries and weakening your resolve."

"Try counter-attacks when possible. Block with one arm and strike with the other, preferably into the attackers face. These counter-attacks may be better than trying to disarm the attacker and failing. You understand all of that?"

"Kinda!" Chloe admitted.

"A lot of it is logic and common sense," Josh said.

"We really don't give you enough credit Josh! You are a really intelligent kid, I'm very impressed!" I replied as Josh blushed and Chloe scowled. "Josh is right. Self defence is logic and common sense; in a lot of situations people fail because they over think things, or just couldn't focus and think through the problem facing them. You rush in, you die, simple as that! Even I have made that mistake, several times, but thankfully I got out, by the skin of my teeth!"

"Another good and useful skill to learn is Krav Maga. This is all about getting away, not the fighting. Some might say that escaping is cowardly, but you must know your limitations and sometimes it is better to leave and heal, before attacking again. He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day! Krav Maga concentrates on blocking and defending *at the same time*. There are situations where you just can't escape, so you must create an exit, or buy time to be rescued. Krav Maga can do that for you by breaking the attack pattern of the attacker, then you can start to get control of the situation. Initially we will focus on single attacks, that is one-on-one. Then we can move onto multiple attackers. Those attacks are my favourite; you should be able to manage four simultaneous attacks easily. Let's start some practice, masks on, as this will be full contact!"

..._...

"Okay Jackal! Stab me!" I challenged.

Jackal held the fighting knife with the blade pointing downwards and started moving towards me. I turned squarely towards him, then he lunged forwards, almost catching me by surprise! I fended off the knife in his right hand, but the little shit, had pulled his other fighting knife and now held it to my throat, in his left hand!

"You move, you die, Hit Girl!" Jackal growled.

I threw myself backwards, moving my throat away from the blade and kicked Jackal in the chest as I finished off my back flip. Jackal fell backwards, dropping both of his knives, I dove forwards, swept up both knives and held them to his throat. I quickly whipped them away, as I got flashbacks of doing almost the same thing to Josh, a few months ago and almost killing him. I think the same thing must have happened to Josh, as he ripped off his mask and gasped for air.

"You okay, Josh?" I asked, very concerned and I could see tears in his eyes.

"Just brought back a nasty memory, that's all!" Josh admitted and smiled up at me; I could tell that the smile was forced. I was appalled with myself for not thinking before I put the blades to his throat. I could still see the small scar, from where I had cut him that last time. Chloe pulled off her mask and her eyes were blazing as she glared at me.

"I'm really sorry Josh, I didn't think, you kinda caught me off guard with your moves!"

"Honestly, I'm fine Mindy!" Josh said pointedly, then turned to face Chloe. "And don't you start either, Chloe!"

"Let's call it a day!" I suggested and pulled off my mask.

I left Josh and Chloe on the mat and went to the armoury. Just as I had hung up my combat suit, Chloe came in. She looked very angry.

"That was uncalled for Mindy, you scared the shit out of him!" Chloe exclaimed. "Just like last time!"

"I've said I'm sorry, I just reacted, okay!" I retorted.

"Just stay away from him!" Chloe said fiercely.

"No you *won't* Mindy! Chloe, I don't need protecting. Mindy *did not* do anything wrong. I'm glad this happened here, rather than out there, when some cunt has a knife to my throat!" Josh said, as he came into the armoury. "Mindy, will you help me get over this, er, problem?"

"Of course Josh. You know I would never hurt you. I'm sorry that I nearly killed you in New York, believe me, please!"

"I would have done the exact same thing! You've done *nothing* wrong, Mindy; I just have some more healing to do, that's all!" Josh said, then turned to Chloe and glared at her. "If hear about you giving Mindy a hard time over this, then we're gonna talk, you and I and you *won't* enjoy it!"

Chloe looked a little shocked, this was another side of Joshua that neither of us had seen before.

"I understand and I'm very sorry, Mindy; I overreacted," Chloe said.

"Good, all made up? Let's get back to our lives then!" Josh stated and left the armoury.

Chloe and I were left staring at each other, rather uncomfortably!

"You know that I would *never* hurt Josh, don't you?" I insisted.

"Yes, of course I do! I don't know why I said that," Chloe said and she looked upset.

"It's called *love*, Chloe and there's nothing wrong with that, nothing at all!" I said and gave Chloe a hug.

***Chapter 94*: The Vigilante Landlord**

Five days later
Thursday

It was very dark and it was cold.

The thug aimed his gun at the man, who had just climbed into his car; the man in the car was about to drive off, when he saw the gun that was pointed at his head and put his hands up. The thug started to threaten the man, but was cut short when a very sharp and very shiny blade appeared at his throat.

"Good evening!" A voice growled, almost pleasantly.

The thug slowly turned his head, to his right and followed the shiny blade, to the purple hilt that was held by the black and purple armoured gauntlet. He continued to follow the slim, armoured, arm before finding the masked face that gazed at him with sheer malice.

"This is *my* neighbourhood, cunt and *you* and your kind, are *not* welcome! It is against my better judgement, but I am going to let you live... So that you can spread the word about this neighbourhood!" The monstrous form growled vehemently.

Then far more menacingly: "*It... Is... Protected!*"

The thug dropped the gun and ran, while the man in the car nodded his thanks and rapidly drove off.

..._...

"You enjoyed that, didn't you!" I stated, with a chuckle.

"Just wanted to check that I could still instil fear!" Hit Girl replied, with a smile and walked back down the sidewalk, towards me.

There was general applause from nearby doorways and Hit Girl bowed to the crowd, as she stowed her Katana. She was lapping it all up! Marty had let us know that the neighbourhood, where his apartment was located, had been having a few problems with some rather unsavoury people. Mindy immediately jumped at the chance to perform some form of Community Service, especially as this was where *her* apartment block was located anyway!

Next, we patrolled the neighbourhood; I let Hit Girl take the lead, as she seemed to be enjoying herself and it felt good to be dealing with street-level thugs instead of the Russian Mafia! The next target was a drug dealer; Hit Girl's favourite form of scum!

I had to give the dealer credit; the moment he saw Hit Girl, he ran and left everything behind! Mindy had, somewhat reluctantly, agreed not to kill anybody tonight: as long as they all complied with her requests to leave the neighbourhood of course!

It seemed that Hit Girl's reputation as a bad-ass, had preceded her!

We continued to checkout the alleys and streets, looking for people who were up to no good and depressingly, it didn't take long!

"What the *fuck* are *you* doing?" I growled and picked up the hooded miscreant, who was trying in vain to break into a car, by the scruff of their neck.

"Oh crap!" The kid groaned and hung motionless.

I was a bit shocked at the voice and the language and almost dropped the kid. I shoved the hood back and saw that it was a young girl, a *very* young girl.

"How old are you?" I growled.

"Ten, bitch!" The girl replied, grudgingly.

I heard Kick-Ass laughing!

"Talk about deja-vu!" Kick-Ass commented.

"You can fuck right off!" I retorted angrily, as I understood what he meant. "She is *not* me!"

"Short, female, foul-mouthed... Should I go on?" Kick-Ass chuckled. "I have more, much more!"

I ignored the asshole!

"Look kid. This is *my* neighbourhood and I am *not* having *any* trouble in *my* neighbourhood!" I growled. "You got that?"

"Yeah, I damn well *got that!*" The girl replied, exaggerating the last two words.

I dropped the girl tot he sidewalk and she ran off. I turned to Kick-Ass and could almost see the dorky grin beneath his mask!

"Not one fucking word!"

Mercifully, the rest of the evening was uneventful.

It seemed that Hit Girl's message had spread like wild fire and it seemed that anybody who so much as *thought* about breaking the law, wisely came up with something else to do with their time, this evening!

I spent the walk back to the motorcycles winding up Hit Girl and at one stage was very grateful to be wearing full body armour, as I could almost see the steam rising from Hit Girl as she got angrier and angrier! Finally she just swung her armoured gauntlet into my stomach and winded me; it could have been worse, much worse!

The following morning Friday, West Ridge

There was a knock on the door.

Strange, it was only eight in the morning, I thought. I was alone in the house, as Dave had gone out to see Marty. I answered the door and got a bit of a shock!

"Josh!" I exclaimed. "You should be at school!"

Something didn't seem right, Josh looked very uncomfortable and didn't answer; he just stood there.

"Come in!" I said. "Were you looking for Dave?"

"No, I wanted to talk to you," Josh said and looked even more uncomfortable.

We both sat down in the living room.

"I'm sorry, I don't want to talk to Dave; I think I feel more comfortable talking with you," Josh explained.

Oh Shit!

This is something that I am *not* good at! Ask me to do something easy, like killing a man with a Big Mac and I wouldn't bat an eyelid; but ask me to cope with upset teenagers and I'm completely lost and haven't a fucking clue.

"I had a bad night last night. Jack and Natalie don't know and I don't want them to know, either," Josh said pointedly.

"Okay, tell me about it," I said.

"I had a very nasty nightmare, involving my father and how he died... It really shook me up..." Josh faltered and it was now my turn to feel really uncomfortable, as Josh started to cry and I mean Niagara bloody Falls! It occurred to me that Josh had probably never actually talked to *anybody* about his father's death. It also occurred to me that we must be close to the first anniversary of his father's death and also of Josh, himself, going into the coma. I knew for a fact, that the first anniversary of my Daddy's death did *not* go well! Admittedly my way of coping involved blood and lots of

it!

Sophia came in, wondering what all the commotion was and cuddled in next to Josh. For now, I just held Josh and let him cry; just like Dave did with me.

..._...

About an hour later, Josh and I were drinking coffee and talking in the kitchen. I had sent a discrete text to Dave, suggesting that he stay away from the house for now.

I had let Josh cry and talk about his Dad; I asked him questions about his Dad and Josh was happy to answer them. I learnt a lot of things that I never knew! For example, Josh's Dad was an ex-Royal Marines Commando, which meant that he had been a member of what was, arguably, one of the top fighting organisations, in the world. The Royal Marines Commando were elite troops, but Josh's Dad had passed selection for the next step *up!* The next step *up* was the Special Boat Service or SBS. These troops were *very* secretive and were often the first ashore during an amphibious assault. Those troops were seriously scary, even to me; those guys would have eaten Mother Russia as a starter, in five seconds flat!

This was where Josh had learnt most of his skills, including the preference for his Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knives. I told Josh that he could always come and talk to me, no matter what. I also told him that things *would* be difficult, as he got closer to the anniversary, but that I would do my best to help him. He apologised for going all wimpy and crying; he was a little embarrassed too! I told him that it didn't matter and that shit happens, we lead a difficult life, both mentally, physically *and* emotionally; we needed each other for support.

"You gonna head to school, then?" I asked, finally.

"I should do... Yeah, I will," Josh replied. "Thanks Mindy!"

"I'll call Jack and tell him that your're staying here tonight, okay?"

"Okay! I think breaking into your safehouse was the best thing I've ever done!" Josh replied and smiled for the first time that morning.

"I could disagree, considering I don't actually *have* that safehouse any more!" I growled and Josh grabbed his bag and left laughing.

..._...

Now I had cheered Josh up and he had gone to school, I sent a text to Dave to tell him that he could come home. I then called Jack and mentioned that Josh would be staying with us tonight, but said nothing else about what had actually happened.

It was actually good to talk with Josh; up until now I had never really had the chance for a one-on-one chat. He's actually a good lad to chat with and I felt pleased that he had felt able to talk with me about such a personal thing, as his Dad's death.

When Dave got back, I explained what had happened. I had asked Josh if it was all right for me to tell Dave and he said that it would be fine, but nobody else and definitely not Chloe. I respected Josh enough, not to go against his wishes, even if I did disagree with them.

***Chapter 95*: The Miniature Vigilante**

***That evening
Friday***

I had decided that I wanted to spend more time with Josh, or more precisely with Jackal.

Right now, we were riding side by side, towards the south east of Chicago. Dave would be following our progress from the safehouse and he said that he would be ready if we needed his help... As if!

"You doing okay?" I asked. I had ensured that our conversation this evening was *not* being recorded, for Josh's privacy.

"Yeah, it felt good to finally talk to somebody," Jackal replied and he definitely sounded happier. "Thank you."

"Why me and not Shadow... Or even Kick-Ass?"

"I knew I might cry and I didn't want to do that in front of Dave and well, you're a girl and I knew that you could relate, Shadow can't and I'm very glad that she can't!"

"That's fair. Just be warned that I'm not very good with people crying on my shoulder, I usually do that on Kick-Ass!"

"You! I can't believe Hit Girl has *those* kinds of emotions!"

"Believe me... She does! Until I met Kick-Ass, I had never cried in front of anyone, not even Daddy. Three weeks ago, Kick-Ass held me while I cried over my Dad's death and it's been five years. I'd love to tell you that it gets easier, but I won't lie to you, Jackal, not about something like that."

"Thanks for trusting me; I won't tell anybody," Jackal said.

"I know. It's trusting that makes us a team... Trust Shadow! I wouldn't recommend starting off on a relationship without letting her know *all* about you, including your, er, problems! Kick-Ass and I have *no* secrets, I know all about him and he knows nearly everything about me; the only things he doesn't know about, are the things he doesn't *want* to know about! In fact Kick-Ass knows *far* too much about me and a lot of what he knows is *really* embarrassing; Kick-Ass met me at a very difficult time in my life!"

"Such as?" Jackal asked.

"Never you mind! Lets just say that the twelve year-old Hit Girl tended to be a *little* hot headed and one hell of a bitch!" I explained.

This touchy-feely stuff was *not* easy and it was starting to get a little too close to home!

South East Chicago

I was enjoying being out with Mindy, or rather Hit Girl.

It felt good having been able to talk to Mindy earlier today and I'm really glad I went over to the house this morning. I really liked Mindy and trusted her one hundred percent. Currently, Hit Girl was down an alley; she had told me to wait here. There was something making a racket down the alley and she wanted to investigate. After a few minutes, Hit Girl reappeared and she was struggling with something. That something, was trying to bite Hit Girl's gauntlet, without much success, of course.

"Look, brat, you're only gonna break your goddamn teeth!" Hit Girl growled.

The 'brat' turned out to be a small girl!

"Let me go, bitch!"

"Aren't foul-mouthed little brats supposed to be in bed at this time of night?" Hit Girl growled and dropped the girl onto the sidewalk.

"You're not!" The girl retorted brazenly.

I could have *sworn* Hit Girl almost grinned at that!

"Come on, help me out here! I'm just thinking of your safety and your Mom will be worried!" Hit Girl tried.

"What's your name?" I asked and the girl turned to see me, for the first time.

"Who the *fuck* are you supposed to be?" The girl blurted out, looking a little scared.

"I'm Jackal! Who are you?" I asked again.

"Well my name ain't '*brat*', HG!" The girl said as she glared at Hit Girl.

Hit Girl put her face in her hands and shook her head in mock despair.

"My name is Megan, okay!"

"Can we take you home?" I asked.

"I'm *not* a lost puppy '*Jack*'!"

I had an idea, so I tried again.

"It's dark and it's cold, I can't leave you out here on your own. I'm a vigilante and we can't do that, it's against the code," I explained.

Megan cocked her head and looked up at me; I could almost see the cogs whirring in her head. Hit Girl also looked at me strangely, but I could see an approving smirk start to appear.

"Okay, just this once!" Megan acceded.

..._...

We escorted Megan across half a mile of the City and back to her apartment block. All the way, Megan was asking Hit Girl questions, very few of which Hit Girl actually answered, often due to the fact that Megan rarely left a gap for a reply in between the questions!

"How old were *you*, when you started as a vigilante?"

"Why are *you* a vigilante?"

"Why *do* you wear purple?"

"How many people have you killed?"

"Is that suit bullet proof?"

"Can I see your swords?"

Finally, just as we got her home, Megan asked the question that I had expected:

"How do *I* become a vigilante?"

This time Megan actually paused for a reply and I looked at Hit Girl, who seemed genuinely at a loss!

"Firstly, you wait until you're *at least* eighteen, then you give it a *lot* more thought!" Hit Girl finally replied, after a long pause.

"That's bull..."

"That's all you're getting!" I interrupted strongly.

Reluctantly Megan agreed.

"Night guys!" Megan called, as she went into the building.

..._...

"How did you manage that?" Hit Girl asked. "Getting her to go home, I mean."

"You're really asking me that question?" I asked, incredulously.

"Yeah!"

"Jeez, I always thought you were intelligent! She wants to be a vigilante, she wants to be *you*! Was it *that* hard to work out? You have a fan Hit Girl, whether you like it or not!" I explained.

"You're starting to sound like Kick-Ass!" Hit Girl growled. "And not in a good way, either!"

Safehouse A

"You guys have fun?" Dave asked.

"It was a good evening and Mindy got herself bitten!" I laughed.

"Oh!" Dave asked, with a worried expression and looked at Mindy, as she appeared from under her mask.

"That little bitch!" Mindy growled.

Dave suddenly grinned.

"You mean Mini-Mindy!" Dave said and laughed.

"Yeah! At one stage it was difficult telling who was who!" I teased.

"You fucking little..." Mindy started.

"Was Mindy like that, when you first met her?" I asked Dave, who ignored Mindy's warning glares.

"Kinda. Mindy was eleven when I first met her. Fucking show off, too! Almost got herself knifed in the back, when she got carried away showing me how good she thought she was!"

"*Thought she was!*" Mindy exclaimed angrily.

"I know all the right buttons to push!" Dave explained happily. "Unfortunately I haven't found the 'mute' or 'off' buttons yet!"

"Oh, two people are gonna die tonight; it's gonna be a *fucking* blood-bath!" Mindy growled ominously.

"I do know where the 'de-fuse' button is, though!" Dave said and promptly kissed Mindy, full on the lips for almost a minute.

I think I had blushed almost as much as Mindy, by the time Dave let her go! Mindy was still glaring and breathing heavily, but I could tell that she was no longer dangerous!

"Asshole!" Mindy groaned and she obviously wanted more.

"Well, I won't be pressing *that* button on Mindy, but I might try it out on Chloe!" I said.

"I'm very pleased to hear it, or I might have to break your legs!" Dave laughed.

I wasn't sure if he was joking, though!

***Chapter 96*: Premonition**

"You probably don't think I'm a very nice guy!" Ralph D'Amico growled. "Do ya!"

"Buddy, I think you're slime!" I said, in reply, from the floor where I was pinned.

D'Amico's cronies laughed.

"See I got this problem, vigilantes don't like me; so I don't like vigilantes!"

D'Amico tracked the pump-action shotgun across my body and blew off my right hand! I felt nothing, I was instantly in shock, then the pain hit full force and I couldn't breathe.

"Well give the girl a hand!" D'Amico laughed and walked off. "She's all yours!"

I managed to get back to my feet and started to hobble away, cradling my arm. The pain was beyond unbearable.

"Hey turn around!" I heard a voice say behind me.

I slowly turned to see four men.

One fired his shotgun, removing my right arm. I screamed and screamed. The other men started shooting, which overloaded my body armour and started cutting into my flesh.

"Does it hurt? Does it hurt?"

I sank to my knees, the pain was indescribable, then D'Amico came into my vision and raised a pistol, then I saw a flash...

The following weekend Saturday, West Ridge

I woke up with a violent start.

I was quite literally dripping sweat.

Fuck!

That dream was surreal and so realistic, but I knew that it wasn't; it was a scene from RoboCop!

I knew watching R-rated movies when I was young, would come back to haunt me!

Why am I having nightmares about D'Amico killing me? The last time I had them was the week before he escaped from prison. Was I getting premonitions? If so, then did that last dream mean that I am gonna be seeing that bastard again soon?

I sat up and Dave reached over.

"Sweaty Hit Girl, nice!"

"Not now Dave, go back to sleep!"

I hated nightmares and was very glad to have Dave with me, when I had them, but this wasn't really a nightmare, it was just plain weird!

That evening Southern Chicago

Kick-Ass and I were on patrol. Just the two of us; Josh was grounded for the weekend, as he had got behind on his homework. Chloe, well, she said that she had something else on.

Coming down the street I noticed somebody sitting on the ground, at the side of the building. As I got closer I was able to identify who it was.

"Shit! It's Megan!" I called. "I think she's hurt!"

I knelt down beside Megan. She was crying and had an enormous, very fresh, bruise on her left cheek. She looked up at me and tried to smile.

"What happened to you?" I growled.

"Some asshole upstairs! This place sucks, big time; it's full of druggies and other losers. I wish we could move, but my Mom works every hour she can and doesn't make much, so..."

"Come on! Show me where you live," I said and pulled Megan back to her feet, then turned to Kick-Ass. "You keep out of sight!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

I led the way and showed Hit Girl the way back to the apartment block, where my Mom and me lived.

As I came around the corner of the building that idiot was still there; the one who had hit me earlier on this evening.

"What the fuck did I say, you little shit? When I'm around, you're not! Want another fucking bruise, to match the first?"

"Fuck you, asshole!" I yelled back and felt the anger build inside of me.

"You little..."

"Why don't you pick on someone your own size, cunt!" Hit Girl snarled malevolently, as she came around the corner and stood behind me and placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. I just smiled smugly at the man.

"Hey! I want no trouble!"

"You beat up ten year-old girls! You've fuckin' *got* trouble, asshole!" Hit Girl growled, then ran forwards and let fly with her fists and floored the man. I followed up with a kick to his ribs. The other men ran off.

Hit Girl looked down at the man. "You ever hurt another living soul...", She growled.

"Never! I'm sorry, I really am!"

We ignored him and headed inside and climbed up two floors.

"Elevator's busted as usual," I explained, as we stopped outside a badly gouged and dented door. "Here we are!"

..._...

I used my key and opened the door, then pulled Hit Girl through into the kitchen.

"This is my Mom!" I said and waved vaguely. "Mom, this is Hit Girl!"

"Er... Hi... I'm Paige Wilson!" A rather startled, Mrs Wilson said. "Megan said she'd met you, but I wasn't inclined to believe her!"

"Your daughter got hit, rather hard this evening, so I took care of the idiot for her," Hit Girl explained.

"Thank you!"

Hit Girl looked around the apartment uneasily and then she knelt down in front of me.

"Take this!" Hit Girl said and pushed a card into my hand.

"Go to the address, on the back of the card; give the man there the card, he will sort you out."

I looked down at the card. It was purple (not a surprise there) with two, large, embossed letters: '**HG**'. I saw the swish

of a cape, out of the corner of my eye and when I looked up, Hit Girl was gone. I passed the card to my Mom, who took it and stared at it.

"We can trust them Mom and we will!" I insisted.

..._...

An hour later we climbed out of a cab at the address Hit Girl had provided; it was a large apartment building. A tall man was standing outside the main door; he smiled at me. I went up to him and felt more than a little apprehensive; I offered him the card.

"Come with me!" The man said. "I'm Marty!"

We followed Marty to the second floor, where he opened the door to apartment '202' and then passed the keys to my Mom.

"All yours! Any problems, give me a call on this," Marty said with a huge dorky grin and passed over a cell phone. "You will be one hundred percent safe here. The person who gave you that card protects this building, personally!"

I looked around quickly, it was a large two bedroom apartment and very clean! Nothing like the rat hole we used to live in and the elevator worked!

"We could never afford this!" Mom said to Marty.

"Pay what you can, don't pay what you can't! Take care Mrs Wilson, you too Megan!" Marty said, as he left.

My Mom sat down and cried, so I gave her a big hug.

"We're gonna be okay now, Mommy!"

"You know, you're never gonna make much of a profit out of these apartments!"

"I know, Marty, but that's what Hit Girl does, she helps people. I can't help everybody, but I'm gonna damn well do what I can!"

"Not just 'cause she's a 'Mini-Mindy'?"

"You've been talking to Dave, haven't you!"

***Chapter 97*: Dreaming**

The following day

Sunday

West Ridge

The street was full of the enemy.

Dave was beyond them and needed my help.

I drew both of my swords and ran forwards. The first attacker came at me with a wooden baseball bat, which I simply severed with one blade, then removed his head with the other. Brightly coloured blood flew into the air, as I pushed past the falling corpse.

The next attacker had a pistol and he managed to fire two rounds, before I severed the man's wrist. The man screamed just long enough for me to remove his head and I watched it bounce on the black top, beside his severed hand and the pistol. Damn this was a turn on!

I surged forwards and weaved my twin blades to the left and to the right. Two more men fell and screamed, while their intestines emptied onto the ground, closely followed by their almost dead corpses. I felt the warm blood, as it ran down my face and enjoyed the feeling immensely; it helped spur me on, as I cut through the men before me. Strange really that it is always men that I face, never women!

I felt myself knocked to the ground by several bodies that had driven into me. I pushed behind me with my elbows, which helped me push up and through the men above, at least enough to drive my elbows into some faces and make a larger gap so that I could bring me swords back into play. I heard Dave shouting, this galvanized me and the adrenalin surged to every muscle in my body. I pushed forwards, stowed my blades and pulled my Glock pistols out of their holsters.

I started shooting. Each pistol held fifteen rounds and I made good use of these with head-shot after head-shot. Blood and brains flew all around me, as the bodies fell to the black top. I felt bullets hitting my armour, but shrugged them off and pushed ever forwards. Within a minute, my pistols were locked back on empty magazines, which I dumped and swiftly inserted fresh ones.

More bodies fell, below the clouds of blood and brain matter, as 9-millimetre bullets impacted their heads. Finally the end was in sight and so was Dave.

Ahead of me were four large men and all of them were wearing obvious body armour, including full face masks. This would be a challenge! I holstered my pistols and pulled my old and faithful bō-staff from my back. Now, the one question left was how good their armour was and whether it was inferior to mine. It was obvious that the men were intending to rely on pure brawn and strength to defeat me. Each man must have weighed the same as at least four or five of me!

Two of the men started to move towards me. I back-flipped to stay ahead of them before I jumped up and onto the shoulder of one man. I drove the blade at one end of the bō-staff into the man's neck. It seemed that the back of the neck was not as heavily armoured as the rest of him! The man fell with a crash and didn't move. As the man fell I jumped clear and pulled out my blade before landing softly on the ground behind another man, who moved remarkably fast for his bulk!

My only chance, now, was to keep moving and to stay out of the men's hands. If they got a good hold of me, they would break my bones in seconds! I was getting seriously tired by this point and drew on everything that I had available. I swung the bō-staff and attempted to sever a leg, but the armoured grieve was made of solid stuff; I gouged it deeply and caused the man to stumble. I separated both sections of the bō-staff and drove them both directly upwards into the man's groin, which appeared not to be as well protected as that area probably should have been!

The man faltered and then started to scream. Blood gushed out from between his legs. Damn! Talk about a heavy period! I must have pierced something important internally, as the man started to bring up blood through his mouth and nose. The man tried to continue screaming, but was downing in his own blood. He collapsed and I left him to bleed out.

Two to go!

The remaining pair stood back and kept their distance while still circling me. I was dripping blood from all my conquests so far; I felt good, I really did. I just needed to get past these enormous oafs. It worked the first time, let's try it again. I rejoined my blades and got a good grip on the bō-staff. Then I sprang forward.

I landed on the shoulder of the first man, digging my blade in deep then sprang off, somersaulting through the air and driving the opposite end of the bō-staff into the last man, at the neck. I continued my move and landed on the ground just a few feet from Dave and his two captors. I didn't pause for even a second and after separating my blades again; I drove one blade into each of the two women holding Dave captive.

Both women sank to their knees in growing pools of blood. I grabbed a throwing knife and severed Dave's bindings then embraced him tightly. Dave clamped his lips over mine and we kissed, the deepest kiss that I had ever felt.

I had my Dave.

My life was now complete.

I awoke with a start.

"Damn! That's an enormous smile!" Dave said. "Hot, too!"

"Weird!" I exclaimed, sitting up.

"Had an interesting dream?"

"Yeah."

"Violence?"

"Lots!"

"Blood?"

"Gallons of it!"

"Outnumbered?"

"Massively!"

"You succeeded against all the odds?"

"Of course!"

"Best dream ever?"

"Hell yeah!"

"You're really strange, Hit Girl... But that's why I love you!"

That afternoon

Chloe, Josh, Dave and I went swimming.

We all enjoyed swimming and it was a good way to exercise. I just wished that I could do it more often! Chloe and I had both gone for one-piece costumes, as neither of us really wanted to show off our bodies in public! Mine was purple and Chloe's was navy blue. Dave and Josh both wore swim shorts. Chloe posed for Josh.

"You like what you see?" She teased.

"Chloe, behave!" Josh retorted and looked uncomfortable.

I smirked and tried Dave.

"You like what you see?" I asked.

"Always!" Dave replied and then the cunt pushed me in!

When I surfaced, Dave was in front of me and he always looked so hot when he has water running off of him! Josh was busy chasing Chloe across the pool; Chloe was giggling her head off! I suddenly found my self rising through the water and my feet had left the bottom of the pool. I flew through the air and screamed, then I hit the water. I surfaced again and swept my hair out of my eyes and spat out some water while I grabbed a deep breath. I saw Dave as he advanced towards me, I dove forward and under the water kicking hard towards Dave's legs and managed to sweep his legs out from under him, but the cunt was ready for me and grabbed me around my waist and lifted me out of the water and kissed me on the lips.

"Is there a girl under all that hair?" Dave asked.

"Asshole!" I growled and pulled my hair back into it's pony tail.

"You do look good in that swimsuit, but you look a lot better out of it!" Dave said smoothly and I felt my face warming up!

"Not here!" I hissed.

"Why not! The water should keep you cool!" Dave said in reply.

I heard the unmistakable sound of a hand slapping a face and turned to see Josh with his hand on his left cheek and a very angry looking Chloe!

"Don't touch, means *don't touch!*" Chloe said loudly.

"You really are hot when you're mad!" Josh responded.

"You are so damned annoying!" Chloe almost screamed.

"It's why you love me!"

"Dammit!" Chloe exclaimed. "Yes it is!"

I swam over underwater and came up under Chloe and threw her upwards. I heard her scream and she crashed back down into the water.

I surfaced and took a few seconds to get my breath back and saw Mindy; she was giggling fit to burst!

Bitch!

Josh was smirking and I could see my hand print on his cheek and felt a little bad about it, but only a little!

"That was not nice!" I growled.

"Neither's that!" Mindy said and I felt strong hands on my waist and I was thrown several feet back into the water. I screamed again.

I surfaced and caught my breath, then smirked at Mindy.

"Dave, your hands feel awesome; very strong and manly!" I said.

I watched both of them as first Mindy's mouth, then Josh's mouth dropped open, in shock. I heard Dave laugh.

"Brazen hussy!" Mindy growled, then she laughed.

"So my hands aren't manly then?" Josh asked, indignantly.

"Your hands are fine Josh, they're just not as big as Dave's; you still have some growing to do!" Chloe said tactfully.

"Well, I'll show you what my hands can do!" Josh said and dived under the water and came up behind Chloe, who seemed to melt into Josh's arms, as he wrapped them around her and his hands vanished under the surface of the water.

That evening

The evening's patrol had been boring, to say the least.

It was just me and Hawk, tonight. Hit Girl was at Safehouse A, following our progress. Kick-Ass had the night off and was at home. We had parked Beast and had been patrolling the area on foot. I enjoyed being alone with Hawk and she enjoyed my company, too! We decided to call it a night just after midnight and headed back towards Beast. We had just turned the final corner, when I came to a rapid halt and pulled Hawk back into cover.

"You have got to be kidding me!" I said to Hawk.

"What is it?" Hawk asked.

"Look at Beast!"

Hawk looked and then she laughed.

"That guy has to be the thickest criminal in Chicago!" Hawk commented.

"You guys having fun?" Hit Girl asked over the comms.

"You're not gonna believe this, Hit Girl!" I said.

"We're watching Chicago's top criminal mastermind trying to break into Beast!"

I heard Hit Girl start to laugh and she wasn't stopping!

"Er, Hit Girl, when you recover could you call Murphy and Fellowes and get them over here?" I called.

..._...

"Hey! Can we help? I think you might have the wrong vehicle!" I suggested, walking towards Beast.

The man span around and he had a slim jim in one hand and a large knife in the other.

"Mine's bigger!" Hawk said, brandishing her bō-staff.

"You do know that's *our* SUV that you've picked?" I asked.

The man looked a little dejected as he dropped the items that he had been holding.

"Since when could you slim jim an armoured Range Rover?" Hawk asked the hapless car thief, who just shrugged.

A couple of minutes later blue flashing lights heralded the arrival of Murphy and Fellowes. They stopped and got out.

"What have you got for us?" Fellowes asked. "We understand it's something good!"

"Yeah, Hit Girl couldn't stop laughing when she called us!" Murphy added.

"We seem to have caught Chicago's number one car thief!" I said.

"He was trying to steal Beast!" Hawk added.

Fellowes and Murphy both started at the dejected car thief.

"Are you stupid?" Murphy asked, with a laugh.

Fellowes grabbed the man and cuffed his hands behind his back. The man was then placed in the back of the CPD SUV.

"Thanks guys, you've made our night!" Murphy said with a chuckle. "This guy will be the source of many jokes once we get back!"

Once Murphy and Fellowes had left with the rather unfortunate car thief, Hawk and I headed back to Safehouse A.

***Chapter 98*: Halloween**

Author's Note: *Just as a reminder: 'South Cottage Grove' is the larger of the two apartment blocks that Mindy owns. This is also the location for Safehouse B and Safehouse C.*

Three days later
Wednesday

I followed on from Josh's idea and went to look at some potential sites for a dojang.

The perfect place became available just off of the Dan Ryan Expressway, in the Lower West Side of Chicago. It was previously used for martial arts training and had both the space and height required. I might even consider turning part of it into a safehouse due to its perfect position, so near to the centre of the City!

I made an offer and we now have wait to see what happens. The building would come with quite a bit of existing equipment, which would be useful. Next I would need to find some staff - people who knew how to run a public facing business!

Two days later
Early evening
Friday

It was that one night of the year when all the weird costumes came out!

It would also mean that there could be trouble; there usually was. The whole team were on alert and out on patrol. Hawk and Battle Guy were staked out in Lucille, with Eisenhower, near to Marty's apartment, so that they could keep an eye on the neighbourhood. Hit Girl, Kick-Ass, Shadow and Jackal, were to be a roving patrol. Hal was manning the Control Room at Safehouse A, along with Medic and would be in contact with Fellowes and Murphy.

We were all going to go out on two wheels this evening, which would be great fun. I warned Jackal and Shadow that there would be lots of kids all over the streets and they would be more interested in candy than traffic and it would look kinda bad if we squished any kids!

The first stop of the evening would be to a little friend.

South Cottage Grove

It really sucked when you were young and you had to go out trick-or-treating alone!

Don't get me wrong, there were a lot of other kids out, but most of them were bigger than me and it was a little bit scary as I didn't know anybody yet; having only just moved into the area!

Just then, I heard a loud noise and me and all the other kids turned to see what the noise was. Four motorcycles came up the street and one stopped beside me. The motorcycle was purple and was ridden by the most vicious vigilante out there, except she removed her helmet and smiled down at me.

"Hi Megan! How you doing?" Hit Girl asked.

I was a little overwhelmed at seeing Hit Girl again and in public.

"I'm fine, thanks, er, HG!"

"Hi champ!" A weird voice called.

I turned to see Jackal.

"Hi *Jack!*" I called back.

"This is Shadow and Kick-Ass!" Hit Girl growled.

"Hello!" I replied and the two vigilantes nodded back. Kick-Ass was huge and so was his motorcycle, which just made him more than a little intimidating! Shadow looked very cool, too!

Then Hit Girl grabbed me, lifted me up and sat me on the purple motorcycle, in front of her and we rode forwards a few feet. That was totally awesome! Other kids were now starting to crowd around the four vigilantes.

Kick-Ass then reached into one of his rear carriers and started handing out candy to all the kids. Two passing Chicago PD cops just stood and watched, but did not interfere. Shadow spoke to Kick-Ass and then climbed off her motorcycle, leaned it onto its stand and walked over to the two Officers, who started to look a little nervous.

"Candy, guys?" Shadow growled and held out her hand; both Officers accepted! I couldn't believe that Shadow had the nerve to offer candy to two cops!

After another few minutes, Hit Girl placed me back on the sidewalk, before she smiled down at me and then replaced her helmet before moving off down the street, followed by the other vigilantes.

Several of the kids came over and started asking me questions about Hit Girl and what my name was. I was suddenly very popular and everybody wanted to be my friend!

I enjoyed that!

A simple little thing, for a fan!

"Very nicely executed Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass said, approvingly.

"Yeah! Not so sure about Little Miss Brazen! Giving candy to cops, I ask you!" Jackal commented.

"Quit moaning; I was just having a little fun!" Shadow retorted.

"How you guys doing, in Lucille?" I asked.

There was quite a significant pause, before a response was received.

"We're fine!" Battle Guy replied and sounded a little out of breath.

"Testing the suspension are you?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Keep your mind out of the gutter, Kick-Ass!" Hawk replied.

Maybe we need to get Eisenhower a blindfold!" Quipped Medic.

"Poor dog; that's cruel and unusual punishment!" Hal added.

We all had a good laugh at Battle Guy and Hawk's expense, but it was now time for some cop baiting!

"Battle Guy, you have a location for our favourite cops?" I asked.

"Sending it to you now!" Battle Guy replied.

"What the fuck is that?" I exclaimed, as a route map appeared in my visor.

"Sorry, forgot to say; I've upgraded your helmets with a heads-up-display. We can now display anything you like, just like on the NVGs... How about these Kick-Ass!"

"Cool... But not the right time for topless women, Battle Guy!" Kick-Ass responded with a laugh.

"Hey!" I exclaimed. "No porn guys!"

"What about me?" Jackal asked.

"Sorry, you're under age!" Battle Guy replied.

"I watch porn on my laptop, all the time!"

"Ewww! I'm never touching *that* laptop again!" Shadow commented. "Why do you need porn? You have me!"

"This conversation is starting to wander a little off topic, *Shadow!*" Medic advised.

"I think we need improved content filters on Jackal's laptop!" I commented. "Let's focus, people!"

..._...

I followed the route, provided by Battle Guy and we pulled up on both sides of a Chicago PD SUV.

"Trick or treat!" I growled.

"Evening Hit Girl!" Murphy said.

"Having fun?" Fellowes asked.

"We always do!" I replied.

"Candy?" Shadow offered, on the other side of the SUV.

"Have you no shame?" Jackal growled.

"That is one creepy voice!" Murphy commented.

Fellowes helped himself to candy and passed some to Murphy.

"That's four cops you've corrupted this evening, Shadow!" I said.

"What's wrong with supporting the CPD?" Shadow asked, indignantly.

"Maybe she likes men in uniform!" Kick-Ass growled.

"I need to listen in to you guys more often; I'm learning a *lot* about Shadow, this evening!" Medic said.

"Watch out, Medic! You might hear something that you may not like!" Shadow quipped.

"Any excitement this evening?" I asked Murphy, getting back to the patrol.

"Nothing out of the ordinary. Couple of idiots getting drunk and harassing kids and a couple of idiots trying to steal candy," Murphy replied.

"We'll leave you guys to your candy!" I said and started my Ducati. The others followed suit.

"Thanks for the Candy, Shadow!" Fellowes called over the roar of the motorcycles.

We proceeded on our patrol and headed towards the more residential parts of town, where the kids would be trick-or-treating and assholes would try to steal their candy!

Depressingly we found just those kind of assholes.

After coming around a corner and onto a residential street, we found a group of dejected looking kids sitting on the kerb.

"What's up?" I growled as I pulled up alongside the kids.

"Wow! It's Hit Girl and Kick-Ass!" One kid exclaimed.

"Three guys, they took our candy... Everything!" Another kid explained.

"There, down the end of the street..." Another kid said, pointing down the street.

I could see three people walking away carrying sacks of candy.

"Leave this to me!" Kick-Ass said and accelerated down the street.

I watched as Kick-Ass shot down the street before braking and turning in front of the three young men.

I could only hear Kick-Ass' side of the conversation, but I could see his movements.

"Stop there!" Kick-Ass ordered.

I could see the young men stop and start to back away. I revved my engine and the men turned to look in my direction, then stopped and handed over their stolen haul to Kick-Ass.

"Time to rethink your lives!" Kick-Ass suggested, then he performed a U-turn and headed back down towards us. The three men had run off.

..._...

Kick-Ass stopped and handed back the candy to the kids, who were overjoyed. Kick-Ass also added some of his own candy to the kids' haul.

"You guys are awesome!" The kids all agreed.

Safehouse A

We arrived back at the safehouse having enjoyed a good night out.

We all got to ride our motorcycles and have a lot of fun, as well as protecting Chicago! I was also very pleased that I had been able to make Megan's evening. On the other hand I was a little concerned with Chloe's brazen behaviour, but then that's just how she was!

I went to bed happy, that night.

***Chapter 99*: Seventeen**

Author's Note: *This chapter is the lead up to the big **Chapter 100!** I thought it would be good to mark the hundredth chapter with something special, just for **Forsaken!***

Two days later
Sunday night

"What the *hell* has gotten into you?"

"I'm excited!"

"Excited! I've seen more relaxed nuclear explosions!"

"You know what tomorrow is?" Mindy asked, then sounded worried. "You do, don't you?"

I knew full well what tomorrow was!

"Why... Should I?" I teased.

"Stop being a *fucking* asshole!" Mindy growled, angrily. "You know how important tomorrow is to me!"

More important than you would ever believe, I thought to myself!

"Try to control your energy and go to sleep, Hit Girl!"

"I can't! I'm too damned excited!" Mindy whined.

Who needs sleep!

The following morning
Monday

It had finally arrived!

My seventeenth birthday and it had taken too fucking long getting here, too!

"Get up, green asshole!" I yelled, shaking Dave back to consciousness.

"Here we go again!" Dave groaned and buried his face into his pillow.

I laughed; I vividly remembered my sixteenth birthday and waking Dave up violently then, too! I also vividly remembered my sixteenth birthday, for *many* other reasons; maybe this birthday would be *just* as memorable too!

I followed Dave out of the bedroom, where he pounded on Marcus' door.

"What!" Came a tired yell.

"Marcus, the tornado's awake!" I replied. "If I'm up, then you can damn well get up too!"

"Damn teenagers!" Marcus shouted, making Mindy blush.

Marcus had arrived last night, which was a wonderful surprise; I was really pleased that he could be here for my birthday!

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A grumpy Marcus finally appeared downstairs.

"You are a major pain in the ass, Hit Girl!" Marcus moaned.

"Oh get a grip, old man!" I retorted and grinned at him.

"You think we should tell her?" Dave asked Marcus.

"Tell me what?"

"Nah, far too early!" Marcus replied.

"Tell me *now*!" I growled and glared at them both.

"Can I get a coffee, please, Dave."

The fucking assholes were doing this on purpose!

"Blood will start to flow if I am ignored!" I growled.

Marcus just fucking grinned at me! I glared at them both menacingly, but I knew that these were the only two people in the entire world that I didn't have a hold over. Sophia appeared to see what all the noise was and sat down to watch.

"Dining room!" Dave finally admitted and I ran out of the kitchen and almost skidded on the wooden floor; I could hear those two assholes as they fucking laughed at me!

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Two long boxes were on the table, wrapped in purple paper.

I looked behind me and saw Dave and Marcus, as they watched in anticipation.

I attacked the wrapping on the first box, which did *not* take long. Inside the paper was a long, glossy, black box. I had a good idea what was in both boxes and just the thought of what might be in the box, started to make my hands shake. I gently eased the lid open and started to squeal; I couldn't help it!

Inside the box was a long, thin, purple bag, made of silk. Very carefully, I opened the top of the bag and eased out the contents. My eyes went wide and I was completely stumped.

I pulled the Wakizashi from the bag and held it out in front of me with my right hand. I moved the Wakizashi very slowly, as I checked out every inch and then removed the sword from the Saya and watched the lights reflect off the highly polished blade. The sharp, mono steel, blade was made from high carbon (T10) steel, with a 1.76 Shaku, Long Hi and 0.8-centimetre Sori. The blade was finished with a straight Hamon and had been stone polished by hand. The point was a long O-Kissaski. The Habaki and Seppa were Red Copper. The blade was attached to a 24-centimetre Tsuka which was wrapped in a purple cotton Tsuka-ito with black ray-skin. The Tanto was finished off with black Fuchi, Kashira and Tsuba. The blade was housed in a matte black Saya, with purple highlights. The Koikuchi and Kirigata were wood and the Sageo was purple silk.

I carefully placed the sword and saya onto the table and attacked the second package. It was an identical Wakizashi, which I examined before removing the blade from the saya.

I gently weaved both of the swords through the air, felt their balance and watched the light glint off the highly polished blades.

They were of the same design as my Katana and Tanto blades, but were shorter than the Katana, but longer than Kick-Ass' Ko-Wakizashi. I gently inserted both blades back into their saya and placed the swords into their silk bags and back into their boxes.

I turned to Dave and Marcus and felt tears forming in my eyes. Those assholes knew full well the effect that blades, like these, had on me. But that's exactly why they gave them to me; the two people that I loved the most in the entire world, knew me and understood me!

"After the fights with the Russians, I noticed that you needed something in between the Katana and the Tanto. I knew you wouldn't be happy with just one, either, so Marcus and I chipped in together," Dave explained.

"Thanks," Was all I could think of to say, before I hugged them both, starting with Dave.

"I know how much you love those damn things!" Marcus said dryly and hugged me tightly.

The rest of the day was spent shopping, as apparently Dave wanted me to be dressed right for going to dinner, tonight!

Dave assured me that it would be formal, but nothing special; but I knew that he liked it when I got all dressed up, so I did my best to get something 'hot', including 'hot' underwear 'cause I hoped for a fun and hopefully memorable night tonight... After dinner!

I also received a phone call from Josh, Chloe and Abby, around lunchtime, when they all sang Happy Birthday to me! Dave thought that it was uproariously funny, but it was nice all the same!

Chapter 100: Diamond

Author's Note: *Well this is it! Chapter 100! I hope you all like it and have as much fun reading it, as I did writing what has become my biggest chapter, ever! Also there is smut, an awful lot of smut, so be warned!*

That evening
Monday
West Ridge

Mindy had *never* looked so beautiful and appealing.

She was wearing a long, ankle length, purple dress. There was a slit up the left side, which ran from the bottom, all the way to almost the top of her, well formed, thigh. Mindy had pulled out all the stops and she was actually wearing heels, which I knew that she detested! Only a couple of inches, but still heels, which were open and mauve in colour. Her soft, flowing hair was down and draped across her shoulders, in heaps of very desirable curls.

Damn! My being turned on by her, at that very moment, was one hell of an understatement!

If Mindy only knew what I had in store for her... If she did, she would probably shoot me and run!

I drove and we headed directly into the centre of Chicago. I pulled the SUV up, outside a hotel, a very nice four-star hotel; The Ritz-Carlton.

"What the *hell* are we doing here?" Mindy asked, a little confused.

"Dinner!" I replied simply.

"You're up to something!" Mindy growled, dangerously.

"Me?" I replied with an innocent smile and climbed out.

The valet opened Mindy's door and helped her out; which, of course, Mindy was *not* used to. I just sincerely hoped that she would behave and keep a civil tongue in her head! Surprisingly she did; maybe she was enjoying all the attention that she seemed to be getting from every male in sight!

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We were shown to our table, in a fairly private corner of the dining room and we sat down.

Mindy looked so damn captivating, it was unreal and she also seemed so normal!

We enjoyed an enormous meal. Mindy seemed to be able to eat almost anything; her father had introduced her to many different foods, from around the world. We both put away a *lot* of rich food and Mindy swore that she would need to run about sixty miles, just to get rid of the extra weight she'd gain! We declined alcohol and stuck with soft drinks only.

I didn't know why doing this felt so different, but Mindy's smile was just so damned enchanting and she kept blushing, which made her cheeks match her dress! And yes, she was getting an awful lot of attention from around the dining room; I could see a lot of both admiring *and* jealous looks! The reason behind the blushing was not just my conversation, but also the fact that Mindy knew full well that she was attracting a lot of approving looks and stares! Considering Mindy was now about as far out of her element as she could get, she was doing very well!

If the other diners only knew what this girl's career was!

We enjoyed some good conversation, which was of course limited, due to our being out in a very public place! However, it was good to be able to talk about normal-ish things; even if we did spend about twenty minutes talking about motorcycles!

..._...

I had to admit that I was doing my best to drag out the meal; I was nervous and I hoped that Mindy hadn't noticed. Finally, just as our coffee arrived, I took a deep breath and stood up.

Damn! Facing down Frank D'Amico, with a bazooka, had been way easier than this!

Mindy gave me a strange look and then scowled! I momentarily re-considered my actions, but only for a few milliseconds; I was committed and I had been rehearsing this for weeks, but it had felt like months.

"Mindy," I said, going down on one knee.

"What the *hell* are you *doing* Dave?" Mindy exclaimed, putting both hands up to her mouth in shock and I could also see that her hands were trembling.

I was focused on Mindy, but I still noticed that some the other diners had now started to look in our direction and most of the nearby conversation had ceased completely.

I pulled out a small, purple, ring box and flipped it open. The box contained a single, diamond solitaire ring, in Mindy's size - not easy to get, considering Mindy never wears rings! The band was 18-carat pure white gold, with a brilliant cut, three-quarter carat, clear diamond.

"You're smart, you're beautiful, you're funny and you're the strongest person I've ever met, you can do anything! You are *the* most important person in my life and have been for the past few years. For many, many reasons, I owe my life to you and I want to ensure that I can spend the rest of *my* life with you," I said. "I lost you once; I will never lose you again!"

Mindy was now physically shaking and looked to be in shock; I could also see tears in her eyes. She bit her lip, as she does when she is worried or unsure about something.

I grasped Mindy's left hand firmly, to stop it shaking and placed the ring onto her ring-finger. Thankfully, it was a perfect fit!

"Mindy Macready, will you marry me?" I finally asked, staring up into her enchanting and scintillating green eyes.

Our end of the dining room was now completely silent and everybody looked directly at us.

Mindy stared down at her left hand, which was still shaking. Tears were running down her cheeks and she was still biting her lip. Now, this was rare, very rare. Hit Girl was speechless and had *absolutely* no idea what to do next! Usually, this sort of situation would mean Mindy defaulting to some form of extreme violence!

This was the longest pause of my life; I knew it was only a second, but it felt like hours.

"Hell, yes!" Mindy finally replied and I stood back up.

Mindy jumped into my arms and kissed me very, very deeply and for what seemed like an age, as the dining room erupted into instantaneous applause!

Mindy's face was *very* red by the time we had separated and she looked around sheepishly before burying her face into my chest.

A couple of people shouted their congratulations.

There were also one or two shouts to me, along the lines of: 'You lucky son of a bitch!' and other similar quotes.

We both sat back down and ignored everybody but ourselves.

After finishing off our coffee, rather quickly I might add, I led Mindy out of the dining room, but away from the exit. Instead, we headed for the bank of elevators.

"Now where are you taking me?" Mindy asked quietly. I had a distinct feeling that Mindy was starting to get a little bit overwhelmed, which with Mindy could backfire spectacularly; again Hit Girl has certain defaults that kick in automatically as defensive measures, when things got out of her control.

"To bed!" I replied cheerfully and we both took the elevator up to the thirtieth floor. Mindy was looking *very* radiant, but didn't say another word; she actually seemed completely stunned! When the elevator finally stopped and the doors slid open, I had to gently guide Mindy out of the elevator and down a passageway. I found our room, suite would have been a better word and slid in the key-card that the waiter and surreptitiously passed to me earlier that evening. Once

I had closed the door, Mindy looked around the suite and then back at me.

"You've been planning this for a while!" Mindy challenged accusingly.

"I've been planning the act of proposing to you, for over a year!" I replied.

Mindy opened her mouth to reply, but couldn't. She was behaving very strangely; this was not the normal Mindy Macready or even Hit Girl! I picked Mindy up and dumped her onto the enormous bed.

"I love you, future Mrs Lizewski!" I said, giving Mindy a kiss.

"Oh no! Mr *Macready!*" Mindy replied.

"Hey, Hit Girl, news flash: Kick-Ass wears the pants in this partnership!" I replied, running my hand, gently, up and down the exposed thigh and leg. Mindy shuddered at my touch and closed her eyes, before she answered.

"I don't fucking care, as long as I have you Dave!" Mindy replied and I saw tears start to spill down her cheeks.

"Tonight was so wonderful, Dave. I never expected it and never thought that *anybody* would want to be with somebody... Somebody like *me*... For ever!"

"Okay, I'm certifiable, but I still love you and want you to be mine!" I said and pressed 'play' on my iPad.

"You trying to say something, ass?" Mindy asked, after listening to the first thirty seconds or so.

"You trying to deny that this song sounds like you?" I asked.

"I am *not* a 'wild child'! Not anymore, at least!" Mindy giggled, then she stopped and looked up at me as a thought hit her.

"What will Marcus say?"

"Nothing!" I replied nonchalantly. "He already knows!"

"WHAT!"

"I asked his permission way back in September, you know, when he came up to Chicago, the day after you gained that little bruise from those Russians," I explained.

"It was *not* a little bruise. Somebody dropped a fucking great beam on my head!"

..._...

I eased off Mindy's shoes, pulled her back to her feet and stood behind her then wrapped my arms around her warm, soft body. The dress itself felt *very* soft, as I nuzzled Mindy's neck and gently eased off the straps, from over her shoulders and let them fall down each arm. Her shoulders were soft and oh so smooth. Mindy's breathing was hitching as I ran my hands, very gently, over the amazingly soft skin of her chest above her breasts and up her throat, to her jaw and succulent lips. Mindy's eyes were closed and she had started breathing heavily; I took my time unzipping her dress and Mindy shuddered, as the soft, purple material slithered off her slim body, completely unhindered.

Under the dress, Mindy was wearing mauve underwear that revealed a *lot* more than it covered up! I gently massaged her breasts and ran my hands across her chest and firm, muscular, stomach. Mindy shuddered at every touch and still had her eyes tight shut. Her right hand was massaging the front of my trousers, which suddenly felt rather tight! She moaned, as I eased the straps of her bra, off of her shoulders, one by one and I ran my fingers inside the cups and felt the hard nipples of her breasts and then she groaned, immediately followed by an excited and very happy, squeal! Mindy's lips broke into a broad smile, as she tried to control her breathing.

I ran my hands down, all the way past her stomach and felt her silky, soft panties, which were noticeably damp and Mindy pushed her crotch into my hand with gentle and rhythmic thrusting movements of her thighs. Again, moans and the odd squeal of pure delight, as I ran my fingers between her legs, feeling the outline of what was beneath those silky soft and very sexy items of lingerie. I moved back up to her bra and with one hand, flicked off the catch at the back and let the mauve bra drop, effortlessly, to the floor of the bedroom.

I smoothly picked Mindy up and carried her through to the living room and lay her on the rug, in front of the fireplace

that of course had a fake gas flame, but the effect was still perfect! Mindy was uttering moans and I ran my hands over her compact chest, getting a soft squeal every time that my hands passed over her nipples. I ran my hands back down her sides, causing her thighs to buck, as I got close to her crotch.

I ran my fingers down the insides of her panties, to the bottom and then gently eased the panties down her legs and off. I threw the, somewhat damp, lingerie behind me; Mindy was now completely naked and she had *never* looked so gorgeous. She looked up at me and giggled, then closed her eyes while I continued to run my fingers around that most personal of places, until Mindy's eyes flew open and she glared at me!

"You are a fucking tease!"

"Do you want me?" I asked, with a smirk.

"Yes dammit!"

"Then what are you waiting for, hot stuff!" I teased and knelt down beside Mindy.

She sat up and removed my jacket, then threw it onto the couch.

I ran my lips over his and gently undid his tie, before draping it around my neck. Dave's blue eyes watched every move and by the object that was threatening to burst out of his trousers, he was enjoying himself!

I ran my hands down his chest and undid each button of his shirt; damn, I didn't know if I could bear the wait! Once all the buttons were undone, I eased my hands in to his chest and ran them over the superb abdominal muscles that always turned me on with just a look and had done ever since I had first seen them, over a year ago, at the safehouse, but a feel... I shoved Dave backwards and to the side, so he fell onto his back, kinda gently! He laughed and I removed his shoes and socks, before placing a knee either side of his own and started working on his belt. I whipped it off and it joined the jacket, on the couch.

This was where I had been making for! I undid Dave's trousers and eased them down and off, chucking them towards the hallway. Now only *one* layer of cotton separated me, from my target! I ran my hands up his muscular thighs and then over the bulge and heard Dave catch his breath, as my hands passed over the pulsing, warm bulge, in his shorts. Then I gently pulled the shorts down and I couldn't resist smiling in glee at the sight. Dave laughed! I pulled the shorts completely off and they went in the same general direction as his trousers.

I grabbed *my* favourite part of Dave and gently rubbed my hand up and down, enjoying the sounds being emitted by Dave, both voluntarily and involuntarily! I continued to run my hand up and down while I gently caressed the sensitive tip of his penis, with my lips. I eased him into my mouth. He always says I have a big mouth, but my mouth is definitely *not* big enough for this! I alternated between running my tongue around the tip of his penis and almost shoving him down my throat. Every time my tongue touched a certain point, Dave started breathing heavily and his hips would move around; I hoped that he was enjoying this as much as I was!

I teased him with my teeth, glancing up regularly to see his expression and saw him mouth 'evil bitch!' I grinned, then squealed and almost bit down, as Dave's left hand wormed it's way between my legs and a finger explored my pubic hair, before entering inside me. Damn! I couldn't take any more of this; I'm very flexible, but my body was trying to buck in several different directions at once, not to mention that I was trying to administer to Dave!

I finally gave up, rolled on top of Dave and started kissing him for all I was worth; it felt so good, feeling Dave's warm skin against my own and I was able to look into those incredible blue eyes. It was actually a strange feeling, both of us naked and on the floor in front of a roaring fire, but it was an awesomely good feeling, too!

Suddenly, Dave flipped me over and he was now on top, smiling down at me, as he shrugged off his shirt. He gave me a soft kiss, on my nose, which made me giggle. then he started moving down my body, before clamping his lips onto my left nipple, which made me breathe in and then squeal with delight. I felt his right hand moving down my stomach and that nervous feeling started again in earnest, as his fingers entered my, now very moist, pubic hair and dived straight in. Dave was unbelievable with his fingers, he knew exactly which parts to touch and which to concentrate on. I dug my nails into Dave's back, I had to; I had the feeling that this was going to be the orgasm from hell!

..._...

Several minutes later, I was *not* to be disappointed!

I hope I didn't disturb anybody else in the hotel, because I screamed loudly, before I clamped a hand over my own mouth and continued to scream through my hand! Damn, this was worse, or better, than anything I had ever encountered to this point in my life! Hell, I had only been having sex for a year! I summoned every ounce of Hit Girl from within me, to help battle the sensations that roared from between my thighs, through my breasts and into my brain! Dave had rolled off to one side, which had allowed me to bring my legs up to my chest and I gripped them tightly with my arms. My eyes were tight shut, as I battled through the intense pleasure that coursed throughout my body and threatened to tear my body apart!

Finally, it was all over and I could start to breathe normally. I released my legs and looked up at Dave, as he smiled down at me. I could see his love and the desire that he had for me.

Damn! Could this night get *any* better?

"How was that for you?" Dave asked, with a chuckle.

"Words cannot describe what I have just experienced! If these things increase every time I get a year older, I'll be dead before I reach twenty-one!" I replied and giggled.

"You definitely tasted *and* felt good!" Dave responded.

"I want to remember how *you* taste now!"

I pounced and started on Dave with my lips and my hand; I caressed and encouraged him. Dave started to thrust and I had to be careful he didn't choke me, but it all added to the sheer excitement that I felt inside me! I could hear Dave as he groaned and felt his hands as they massaged my back, using quite a bit of his strength, which made it a little sore, but it was nothing that I couldn't handle!

Now we approached the part where things would get interesting, some might call it gross, but I just had a major fascination (just don't ask me why as I don't know) with what was about to come (yeah, pun intended)! Dave *never* disappointed and he didn't this time when he groaned loudly and dug his fingers, rather painfully, into my back and suddenly I almost choked on the thick, creamy substance that impacted the back of my throat. I instantly swallowed and savoured the remainder on my tongue, before I pulled back and allowed the rest of the warm fluid to spurt over my chest and hand.

Dave panted, out of breath and I was over the fucking moon! Only one thing could beat this and that was having Dave inside of me!

I was having serious difficulty getting my breath back!

Mindy always manages to ignite the damn fuse and then bang, it almost rips me apart! I turned to Mindy and pulled her into a hug, I felt the remnants of my semen on her chest, but ignored the gooey feeling and started kissing my fiancée.

Fiancée! Now that was a lovely word, for a lovely young woman! We kissed and it was a kiss that went on forever, or at least until we ran out of air! I started to ravish my woman, damn I really couldn't control myself, as I massaged her breasts, none too gently, but then Hit Girl has always liked it rough! Then we continued kissing and being kissed.

"You fancy a break, Hit Girl," I asked finally, as I gazed into Mindy's hypnotic green eyes.

"End of round one?" Mindy asked, seductively.

"Don't see why not!"

I pulled Mindy up and we each pulled on a soft, fluffy, hotel robe.

"I'll leave you to order from Room Service," I said and headed towards the bathroom.

By the time I returned from the bathroom, Mindy had ordered and we waited for the arrival of something to rebuild our energy levels.

Turned out that Mindy was desperate for chocolate and Red Bull! We also both got a *very* interesting look from the guy who delivered the food, too, when he saw our clothes scattered all over the place!

..._...

I will admit, the chocolate desserts (yes, plural) tasted good and Mindy seemed to enjoy hers too; I also knew that after several cans of Red Bull, Mindy would be buzzing and she would then start going loopy! Not that I was complaining; round two was coming up!

Once we had finished our food and a couple of cans of Red Bull, Mindy dumped her robe and walked, completely naked, through to the bedroom, before she turned and beckoned to me, very seductively, with her finger. Mindy had a very captivating look on her face, so I rapidly dumped my robe and followed.

As I entered the bedroom I grabbed Mindy around the waist and threw her bodily onto the bed; she screamed, then giggled as she bounced around. I then dived after her and went back to enjoying my new fiancée. I started with licking her lips, as she still had some chocolate lingering!

Chocolate Mindy tasted good, very good!

I ran my fingers around the outer edges of Mindy's breasts and gently breathed on the nipples, getting a soft, alluring moan in return. I purposely avoided touching the nipples and gently kissed the surrounding breasts and I could tell that Mindy was getting impatient, but then so was I; but all good things come to those who wait! Mindy's breasts were warm and very, very soft and her breathing was starting to get heavier, not to mention the moaning, as I gently caressed them and she was *definitely* getting aroused! Just as I thought Mindy might explode with my teasing, I moved my fingers up and gently teased her nipples, getting an immediate reaction from Mindy. Her breathing increased and she kept moving around the bed, restlessly.

Up until now, her eyes had been shut, as she enjoyed the moment. Suddenly they flicked open and she looked directly into my eyes, with her own, bewitchingly green, eyes.

"Dave, fuck me already!"

"Clear and concise as always, Hit Girl!"

"Quit with the talking and start with the fucking, asshole..."

I clamped my lips over Mindy's own, before she could say another word and she seemed to melt under me as she spread her legs and I eased myself into her. Mindy gasped, but smiled her pleasure and I started gently thrusting.

"Come on, you're fucking Hit Girl for God's sake, I won't bloody break! Put your damn back into it Ass-Kick!"

I laughed, then steadily increased my thrusting and 'put my back into it', as requested! Mindy started to moan and dug her fingers into my back, then wrapped her legs around me. Her breathing was getting heavier as I fucked her harder and faster. Finally Mindy screamed and she almost squeezed me to death, then I exploded into her and we both split apart, breathing heavily as we lay side by side on the bed. Mindy's hand found mine and gripped me tightly. Neither of us had the energy left to talk. I turned to face her and gazed into her eyes and her into mine.

I had never loved my Mindy so much.

"Thank you Dave, I couldn't be happier!" Mindy said, as we both fell asleep.

The following morning

Tuesday

The Ritz-Carlton

I awoke to find the bed empty and felt a momentary feeling of panic.

Where was my Dave?

I felt sore and grimaced as I sat up and put my feet on the floor. Why was I naked and what was this stuff on my chest?

Suddenly it all came back to me in a huge tsunami of images. I was engaged, to the best man possible and he had treated me like the woman he loved, *all* last night! I checked out my left hand and it was still there: that ring with the beautiful and enormous, diamond. I had received many things throughout my life, but this was the most special to me and outshone everything else, even my Balisongs; sorry Daddy!

I heard the shower running and grinned. Time for some fun!

I headed over to the bathroom and gently pushed open the door. There was my Dave. His body had never looked so good; the well-defined torso and strong muscles that rippled throughout his arms, stomach and thighs. A far cry from the early Kick-Ass of over a year ago, when I first started to train him! Just as I crept towards the shower...

"Not so ninja this morning, eh Hit Girl!"

Mindy blushed as I turned to look at her.

I reached out and pulled her into the enormous shower. I watched as the water ran over and down her curvaceous body. I gave my fiancée a kiss and ran my hands down her body and around her backside. I picked her up and she wrapped her legs around me. We continued kissing, as the water cascaded over our bodies.

"You happy, this morning, gorgeous?" I asked, during a break in the kissing.

"I am the happiest girl alive, right now!" Mindy replied, with an enormous grin and unwrapped her legs. "Gonna help me wash?"

What blood was left in my brain, drained in an instant and headed south!

..._...

After the extended shower, I helped dry Mindy off, which kinda started round three! But we were interrupted by a knock on the door; it was breakfast and we were very hungry, so put round three on hold! I had ordered breakfast, before getting into the shower and I had decided to eat in our room, as I had the feeling that neither of us would be bothered about getting dressed!

It was a different guy who delivered the breakfast, but he left with a *very* jealous look on his face!

Understandably we both had large appetites this morning, so got stuck in.

..._...

After breakfast we, reluctantly, went to get dressed.

Mindy was studying the rather creased and crumpled dress from last night, not to mention the abandoned underwear that she obviously wasn't too keen on putting back on again!

"Try these," I suggested and passed over a small case of clothes.

Mindy smirked.

"You planned this well, didn't you? How did this case get here, with *my* clothes in it?" Mindy asked accusingly.

"I packed the case and Marty delivered it here yesterday afternoon!" I replied.

"So, basically, I was the only person *not* to know about all of this!" Mindy groused.

"Not quite. Only Marcus, Marty and Kim knew. They helped me plan all of this, for you, gorgeous!" I explained.

Mindy just sat down on the bed and started to cry; I sat down beside her and hugged her to me.

I knew they were tears of happiness.

Not for the first time, in the past twenty-four hours, Hit Girl was at a complete loss for what to say or do!

We left the hotel at around ten, that morning.

Despite being dressed in trousers, a jumper and boots, Mindy still got some very approving looks, which caused her to blush a little. Secretly though, I'm certain Mindy was enjoying all the attention!

Mindy didn't want to go straight home, so we drove around for a bit and enjoyed each other's company. This was the

first day of the rest of our lives together.

Together.

We both loved the word!

***That afternoon
West Ridge***

"Okay! Tell us everything, but stop before you get to the suite, I *don't* want to hear about *that* part!" Marcus said, as we got back home, around lunchtime.

"That's the part I *do* want to hear about!" Marty quipped, before getting an, almost playful, slap from Kim.

"Thanks, all of you! That was the best evening *and night*, of my entire life!" I exclaimed and felt tears spilling down my face. I was *so* happy seeing and being with my friends and family, people who meant *everything* to me and people who had gone out of their way to do something *so* special and *so* personal for me.

"Damn! Hit Girl's at a complete loss for words!" Marty said, smirking. "Now that's a first!"

"Right now, Marty, I'm just plain old Mindy Macready and I'm really glad to be too!" I said and hugged Marcus tightly. "Thank you for giving Dave your permission."

"Who the hell else would want you? Should give me a peaceful life!" Marcus quipped and made me blush. "You're his problem now!"

..._...

I detailed Dave's proposal, from the moment we had arrived at the restaurant, to the moment that we headed upstairs. This annoyed Marty, as he wanted to hear all about the night's action, too! I couldn't help crying, when I got to the part about Dave getting up, with the ring and Kim started crying too! I showed everybody the ring, which, I was very pleased to see, nobody else had seen till now.

Marcus apparently noticed my fragile state and suggested that we all went out to walk Sophia. This would give me time to get my feelings in order as, so far, I kept bursting into tears! Damn! Is this me learning more about being *normal*? Marcus for one, seemed to be happier than I had ever seen him before; maybe he was pleased that I was finally doing something so normal, like getting engaged.

Even *I* felt normal, for a change and a long way away from Hit Girl; was that good?

Author's Note: *Well, did you enjoy that? Please let me know!*

***Chapter 101*: Back to Earth**

That afternoon
Tuesday
West Ridge

I felt different.

Why?

I couldn't figure it out, but something *definitely* felt different. I wasn't worried, it was a good feeling, a good different!

Was it the ring that now sat on my left hand? It had to be, as that was the only thing that had changed! Why should something like a ring change me? I am Hit Girl and that is always who I intend to be. But, I am now older and you'd hope, wiser! I may only be seventeen, but I have had a whole lifetime's worth of experiences tucked under my belt. Yes, most of those experiences were R-rated, or worse, at the very least. But since I had met Dave, I had been experiencing other things; friendship, sex and now *bonding*. Is that the right word? I thought so, but what worried me then, was the next step - marriage and then... Getting pregnant! Did I want a family? Yes! Did I want a *normal* family? Yes! Would I let my kids do what I did? No! But why not?

The past year or so had seen a lot of changes within me. I had gained a true partner, last summer and now he was my partner in more ways than one! Although in reality Dave had been my partner since I was eleven. I have always known that Dave cared about me and I knew that Dave loved me; he proved that to me on my sixteenth birthday and he has stuck by me through a lot of shit; a lot of which I had dished out to him! That ring he gave me; that ring showed me that he was *not* bluffing and he intended to stay with me, by my side, no matter what!

Damn! Every time I think about Dave's sacrifices for me, the sacrifices he had made to give me that ring, I start to fucking cry! Dammit, I'm Hit Girl; Hit Girl *does not* cry! But as well as being Hit Girl, I am also a woman, a young woman, but still a woman and despite many of my seemingly inhuman acts, I am also a human being and as such I have feelings. Normally those feelings are buried deep down and suppressed, but Dave was able to constantly bring the good feelings to the surface, as did Chloe and Josh, in their constant battle to bring out my more human side, as their friend. What would I be without them? I dread to think about what I might be like now, if Dave hadn't found me, or even if my Daddy was still alive. He would not have allowed me friends, or a boy-friend and marriage? Never!

Daddy I wish you could be here, but you taught me to be obedient, so I would have always done as you wished, even if it went against what I really wanted.

Yesterday and especially last night was amazing; the best day and night of my short life, so far, but now it was time to come back to earth and back to reality and my real life. Only, I knew that I belonged, I know that somebody *really* loved me for who I was.

We were intending to have a small party on Saturday evening to celebrate. Marcus was staying in town; he said he was attending some weird cop seminar thing. What did worry me, though, is that Marcus said that he'd be able to tell everybody some embarrassing stories about me! I had threatened him with bodily harm, but that never works, dammit!

Four days later
Saturday morning
West Ridge

"You did what!" Josh and Chloe both exclaimed.

Dr Bennett had just arrived with the two kids and I had told them about what had occurred on Monday night, but I left out some of the more personal activities! Even Dr Bennett was shocked.

"Show me the ring, dammit!" Chloe demanded. She was so excited I thought she might piss herself!

I held out my left hand. Chloe and Dr Bennett gasped and were both speechless.

"That is awesome!" Josh admitted and gave me a brief hug. "Congratulations Mindy and you too Dave; you've made one hell of a catch, a dangerous catch, but still one hell of a catch!"

"Yeah, congratulations, both of you!" Dr Bennett said and hugged us both.

"You all coming to the party tonight?" Dave asked.

"Try and stop us!" Dr Bennett replied enthusiastically.

That evening West Ridge

The house was packed!

Just about everybody who knew about Fusion was here, including Jack and Natalie.

"Damon would have been proud! He may not have gone along with it willingly, not at first, but I'm convinced that he would have given in, eventually!" Jack said. "Congratulations, both of you!"

"Thanks Jack," I said.

Most people had dressed up for the occasion and everybody wanted to see the ring again and again! Chloe had actually decided to wear a dress, which Josh liked a lot and his eyes were always on either her legs, or her chest! Kim was permanently wrapped around Marty and they spent most of the evening on the couch together!

..._...

As I had both expected and dreaded, Marcus started to tell stories, which initially were cop ones, which was fine.

"Give us a good story about Mindy, Marcus!" Dave suggested.

"Don't you dare!" I warned, but Marcus completely ignored me, as usual.

"Let me see... Oh, yes! This would be a few years back and well... I heard shouting coming from her room... So I went upstairs, I was a little concerned! Now, remember this was a pre-teen Hit Girl and well, back then it didn't take much to make her blow a fuse! I knocked on her door and all went silent. I asked her if anything was wrong, but she replied that everything was fine, in her usual polite manner! Then as I started to walk away, she started turning the air blue again, then finally the shouting stopped and Mindy opened the bedroom door. She was wearing her Bratz pyjama bottoms and her new bra. She was red in the face with all her shouting and exertions. I asked her what was wrong and... I'm really sorry Mindy, but it was just hilarious... She growled at me, in that way she does and her face was getting redder and redder, then she finally blurted it out: 'I can't undo this damn bra'... I just lost it and burst out laughing and I swear the look on Mindy's face was pure malevolence, but I unclipped it for her and suggested that she get some practice!" Marcus explained.

"Evil fucking cunt!" Mindy breathed, as she blushed a nice shade of red and we all had a good laugh.

"I remember that time! Mindy wouldn't stop itching and fiddling with her new bra at school! She wasn't wearing it the next day and she said she was never wearing the damn thing again, ever! I suggested that it might, in fact, be a good idea if she continued wearing it!" I added. "She was starting to, er, show!"

Mindy glared at me, but stayed silent.

"Chloe was the exact same!" Dr Bennett said. "She refused to wear her bra after the first day, took me three weeks to get her to wear it again."

Josh burst out laughing.

"Mom!" Chloe yelled, indignantly and blushed bright red.

"Damn thing itched like fuck and there really wasn't much there to be supported anyway! But I gave in after a couple of days and started wearing it again," Mindy admitted grumpily.

"Now, about a month later, I was awoken from a very sound sleep by my cell ringing! I looked at the phone and saw that it was Mindy... Actually back then instead of it displaying 'Mindy', it just displayed the word 'Trouble'! I checked the time; three in the fucking morning! So I answered and Mindy was screaming down the phone; I couldn't make

head nor tail of it, so I just yelled back until she shut up! Then I asked her what was wrong. 'Dave, I'm soaked in blood', she replied and actually sounded scared! I'd never heard a scared Mindy before, so I asked if she was hurt or injured and she replied 'no, I'm in bed'; then it clicked! I asked her if she had started her periods yet and she started to say no, but then just said 'thanks Dave' and put the phone down." I explained. "She refused to look at me for about a week after that!"

"When I saw the bed in the morning; there was so much blood that I thought Mindy had brought some of her work home with her! She threatened me with everything she could think of, if I ever dared to tell anybody!" Marcus laughed.

We all had a really good laugh over that, except of course for Mindy.

"That week was totally mortifying for a twelve year-old, who was on her first period! I'm generally fine with blood coming from other people, but from myself? Especially when it was completely unexpected...! Also, at the time, Dave was the absolutely *last* person that I wanted to know about it, too!" Mindy moaned. "Okay, I had a few problems growing up. Nobody's perfect!"

"A few problems?" Marcus quipped. "Oh there were many, many more!"

I was forced to endure several more anecdotes about my life, before Marcus decided to take pity on me! Thankfully the attention was then put on Dave, as Marty proceeded to tell everybody, in detail, about Dave's 'gay period'! It was so good to have everybody here and enjoying themselves. Even better, they were all here for me and Dave!

When it was time for Dr Bennett to go home, she had to prise Josh and her daughter apart.

"Time to take a breath! You two staying here?"

"I have a choice?" Chloe asked, a little surprised.

"You get pregnant and I'll kill you both!" Dr Bennett replied and it was difficult to tell if she was joking or not!

"Love you Mom!"

***Chapter 102*: Memories**

Author's Note: *This chapter breaks through the two hundred thousand word mark, for 'Forsaken'. Thank you to everybody who has stayed the course and read each and every word!*

***Two days later
Monday evening
West Ridge***

Josh would be spending the night with us, due to the anniversary that was arriving tomorrow.

Dave and I sat down with Josh, so that he could take us through the events leading up to that day and the day itself, a year ago. Rather strangely Chloe said she couldn't be here, or spend the night, as she was busy doing something else; she wouldn't say what!

It turned out to be quite a coincidence that Dave and I had been in New York, that very same day, stripping Safehouse C, before we had then driven home the following night!

***One year previously
Monday, November 11th, 2013
New York City***

I got up at my normal time and went into the kitchen for breakfast.

Dad looked very uneasy that morning, worse than he had been over the past few weeks. It seemed that he had been up most of the night and there was evidence that he had been cleaning his weapons, at the kitchen table. Normally, my Dad only did that when he was trying to get his mind off of something serious. I knew that things had been going bad for Dad, ever since he had decided to get away from that sadistic bastard, Ralph D'Amico.

..._...

That D'Amico actually scared the hell out of me! At least, at the weekends, I was able to forget about all of that shit and concentrate on having fun with my friends. I spent hours down at Atomic Comics with Chloe, Jake and Danny. They were my best friends from school and Chloe was also my girl-friend! I actually had a chance to be a normal kid, when I was around them. When I was at home, though, things were different. It wasn't just getting used to being in a foreign country, it was also the fact that Dad was constantly making me check my surroundings and watch out for trouble. Dad also checked to ensure that my skills were up to scratch, when it came to using a pistol and my knives! Not a very normal childhood, I would admit, but it never had been normal.

Ever since my mum had died of cancer, when I was nine, things had really gone to shit for us both. My Dad had left the SBS, to look after me full time. By the time I was ten, I had worked out that my Dad really missed his colleagues in the Royal Marines and the SBS and desperately wanted to get back into action.

Finally, my Dad had got involved with organised crime, in London and then he got involved with another guy who advised him of some well paid work in New York! My Dad decided we could both do with a fresh start. So, in June, we ended up in New York City, in the United States of America! At the time, we weren't aware of Ralph D'Amico and how particularly vicious he was.

I started to hear stories about Super Heroes; not the comic ones, real ones! My Dad brought back stories and rumours about a pair called Hit Girl and Kick-Ass and I passed these stories onto my new friends, including Chloe. Chloe then fancied herself as a Hit Girl wannabe! During August, I started to hear about some new Super Villain called The Mother Fucker and I understood from Dad that Ralph D'Amico was not amused, to put it mildly!

The next thing I knew, The Mother Fucker was dead! This seemed to encourage Ralph D'Amico to start spreading his 'good will' and Dad was soon starting to make plans to get away from Ralph D'Amico.

..._...

"Morning Joshua!" Dad said.

"Morning Dad!" I replied.

"I need you to stay with me, today. I'm concerned about that fucking bastard D'Amico; I think he's wise to me wanting to leave! I need to meet with Billy tonight and then we can hopefully get the hell out of here. Probably head west."

"Okay!" I replied and helped myself to some cereal. Missing school that day and possibly never going back would be no big deal, but I would miss Chloe!

..._...

That evening, we had left the apartment after dark and caught a cab, east. I had noticed that Dad had brought along his Glock 17 pistol. He only did that when he was on a job, or was concerned for his or my safety; he didn't have a permit for *any* of our weapons!

We got out of the cab, several blocks from our destination. Dad was constantly looking all around us; he told me he wanted to be absolutely sure that nobody was tailing us and I could tell that he was very nervous. My Dad told me to stay close as we walked the last two blocks and then my Dad pulled me down a dark alley and told me to wait. He also told me that if he wasn't back by ten o'clock that night, then I should run and keep running.

I didn't know it then, but that would be the last time that I would ever talk to my Dad!

..._...

It was fucking freezing.

I was huddled in the alley, down between two dumpsters. It was nine-thirty and I was starting to get very worried. Dad had been gone for over an hour and I was now very concerned for his safety. What would I do without Dad? Where would I run to? How would I survive? I knew where money was stashed, but that wouldn't last long.

I was deep in thought about my potential predicament when suddenly, I heard gunshots, several gunshots followed by shouting. Then Dad appeared at the end of the alley. It would be the last time that I would ever see my Dad alive.

"Joshua, run!" And that was the last time that I ever heard his voice. The last words that he ever said to me. He started to run towards me, but that was when the whole bloody world came apart.

There was a huge explosion and the building started to come down. Brickwork hit the dumpsters and I saw Dad get buried, then nothing...

The present day
West Ridge

"...Next thing I knew, I was waking up in hospital, months later!" Josh finished.

The boy had tears running down his cheeks and he was gripping my arm, tightly. I really felt for the kid; it was the first time that Josh had told anybody about that day, a year ago and apparently I wasn't the only one to have seen their Dad killed right in front of them!

I just did the only thing that I could do, I hugged Josh tightly, as he cried.

The following day
Tuesday
West Ridge

Josh got up later than usual.

His eyes were very red and swollen; it was obvious that he had been crying. Dave had cooked him some breakfast. I had considered cooking, but Dave suggested that the day would be bad enough for Josh, without him having to try to eat my cooking!

Later that morning
Safehouse A

Dave and I took Josh down to Safehouse A.

We had something special in store for him. I took the, rather confused, Josh into the briefing room. On the far wall hung the, admittedly rather dorky, photo of my Daddy. Next to it was a photo of Dave's Dad. Dave and I had decided that it was time to update these two photos and add some more, as a reminder of what we were fighting for.

I removed both photos and Dave stood ready with a hammer and some picture hooks.

First up went a copy of the photo that I had seen at The Farm; it had both my Daddy and my Mom in it and had obviously been taken before little me had actually been born and also in much happier times!

Below this photo went the one of Big Daddy and Hit Girl that Dave thought was really cute! I used to be able to scare the shit out of Dave in that costume, but somehow I seem to have gone from being able to scare the shit out of Dave to *cute*; how the mighty have fallen! Josh actually thought I looked quite menacing, but also kinda hot and he actually blushed and so did I! Josh had never seen me in my original Hit Girl costume and now I thought about it, nobody else had, in this sort of detail, except for Dave! The online videos were not all that detailed back then. That was also the first time that Josh had actually seen a picture of Big Daddy and one of me when I was younger and as Josh commented, a lot shorter!

To the right of the first photo, went a picture of Dave's Mom and Dad, on their wedding day. Dave added another hook below the other pictures and we hung a photo that showed the original Justice Forever team that Marty had provided. We all took a moment and Dave named each person and explained them to Josh, including how the Colonel and Night Bitch had died. I saw that this was hard on Dave, but I was glad that we had taken the time to put the picture up. Josh actually laughed when he saw Battle Guy!

Dave hammered in one final nail, then I turned to Josh.

"That last hook is yours, Josh," I said and passed him a package.

Josh looked at me curiously and then carefully opened the package before I saw tears start to run down his face. Marty had done some digging and had found a photo of Josh's Dad, in his full Royal Marines Commando dress uniform, with Josh's Mom, on their wedding day. Josh looked at me dumbfounded and I helped him hang the picture. Even I was crying, as I looked at the pictures of my Daddy.

"See Josh. I may be the cold hearted bitch, Hit Girl, but I still cry and feel emotions," I said as I hugged Josh and Dave.

"Thank you, both of you. You don't know what that picture means to me."

"Yes, we do Josh," Dave replied.

We actually spent quote a few minutes just standing and looking at the pictures.

I was over the moon to see the picture of my Dad and my Mum; especially today. I was also glad that they could both be a part of my new life, here, in Chicago as Jackal. I really had no words to describe my feelings, to Dave and Mindy, but they had managed to help me in a way that nobody else could have done.

I finally let go of Mindy.

"Sorry for all the cuddling Mindy; I know you don't like me invading your personal space," I said with a smile.

"I'm getting used to it! It kinda feels good and makes me feel more human," Mindy replied, drying her tears.

It had been a bit of a shock to see Mindy crying; I had never seen her do anything like that before.

"You are only the second person to ever see me cry, Josh; Dave was the first, last year!" Mindy said.

"Not so much," Dave said. "I first saw you cry, back when you were twelve. You didn't know that I could see you and I never let on."

"Marty was right, you can be soft and cuddly!" I replied.

"Just don't go spreading it around; I have a reputation to uphold!"

I had to laugh and it was infectious, as Dave and Mindy laughed, too.

"Come on, let's go get something to eat!" Dave suggested.

***Chapter 103*: Shadow Taken**

Two days later
Thursday night
Western Chicago

I could hear voices.

They seemed far away, but that might just have been my mind which was feeling groggy and my head hurt.

"What the bloody hell do we do with her?"

"Bugged if I know!"

The first voice was a girl's voice, the second a boy's.

"She's got some cutting-edge armour; she's the real deal!"

"You fucking plonker, you clobbered a damn Hero!"

Everything went black again, after that.

The following day
Friday afternoon
Western Chicago

I awoke again.

My head was really hurting now.

Where was I?

I thought back... I remembered seeing two people acting strangely. I closed on them... They separated... Then nothing.

I reached up to my head and felt my hair... Oh fuck!

Sudden realisation struck me; my mask and comms were missing! I rapidly ran my hands over my body; my utility belt and weapons were missing, but I was still wearing the rest of my combat suit. The left side of my face was *very* painful; it was bruised and swelling. Only now did I realise that I was bound at my wrists, with plastic ties. I moved my feet and found them to be bound too, but at least I was still wearing my armoured boots.

I looked around me. I was lying on the floor of what looked like a derelict apartment and it was daylight outside.

That was *not* good.

I was *not* supposed to be here and *nobody* even knew that I was out; I should have been home hours ago!

Oh fuck!

I was starting to panic now; I'd fucked up *big* time!

If I didn't die, Hit Girl would fucking kill me herself!

Calm the fuck down, idiot and *think*!

First, get a good look around.

I flexed the muscles in my arms and brought my elbows down either side of me, fast and hard and with my gauntlets protecting my wrists, the plastic ties snapped. I reached behind me with my right hand, under my rear armour and pulled out a black double-edged knife with a four and a half inch blade.

I cut the plastic ties holding my ankles together and stood up. I looked out of the window, the sun was high and from the south, but angled to the west, so it must have been past midday and I also discovered that I was on the fifth floor. I couldn't work out where I was located in Chicago, though, the view was blocked. The door to the room was wood; I slowly turned the handle and eased the door open. I was a little surprised that the door hadn't been locked or bolted.

..._...

Outside the door was a corridor and from the far end I heard the same voices that I had heard earlier.

I listened.

"Maybe we should ask her for help," The girl's voice said

"After you bloody cracked her with a damn pole!" The boy replied, angrily. "She might turn on us!"

"She's a vigilante, part of the famous Fusion. I think she *might* be Shadow; there's not much information on these guys. A lot of the websites that purport to have information, on Fusion, are corrupted! They *are* the good guys, Cam!" The girl again.

"When she wakes up, she may still kill us, Nats! You've heard how violent they can get and look at the impressive weapons she was carrying! I have a feeling that she can cause shit, *without* those weapons, too! *You* removed her bloody mask; we can recognise her! I *told* you not to remove the bloody mask!" The boy said.

"Yes, but what was that you said, when I *did* remove the mask? '*Fuck she's hot!*'" The girl retorted.

I felt myself blushing!

"So what if she is *hot*?" The boy replied.

"Can't you control your damn hormones for two bloody minutes?"

I couldn't believe that I was listening to two people discussing me, like that!

Then it suddenly hit me!

These two were just kids, not much older than me and they were as British as Josh; the accents were the same. These were the two that Mindy had told us about a few weeks ago; the two British vigilantes!

..._...

What the fuck do I do? The boy was right, they'd seen me without my mask.

Okay, build up information; information is power.

I know their names; Cam and Nats, apparently. That's more than I knew earlier and they both seem scared of me; they also sounded like they regretted having attacked and seized me.

I spent a couple of minutes arranging my thoughts.

Do I attack?

Do I offer help?

Would they trust me?

They knew that I'd be very pissed about them removing my mask; and I was!

What would Mindy do? Answer: She'd never have get herself into this fucking position in the first damn place!

I pulled the door open slowly and slid out, knife in hand and headed toward the voices.

Earlier that day
West Ridge

My cell rang.

"Chloe went out, straight from school last night and she hasn't come home!" Dr Bennett said, sounding worried. "Has she been with you?"

"No, but I'll check with Mindy," I said. "Mindy, when did you last hear from Chloe?"

"Couple of days ago," Mindy replied.

I went back to the cell.

"Mindy's not heard from her either. You called Josh?" I asked.

"Yeah and he's not heard from her and she's not at school, either!"

"Leave it with us, Doc! I'll call you the moment we find out anything!" I said and killed the call.

"Mindy, Chloe's missing! I'm heading down to the safehouse!" I called.

"I'm coming too!" Mindy answered.

Western Chicago

I followed the sound of the voices, along the corridor and came to another doorway which lead to a large living room.

There was one voice, the boy's, but I couldn't hear the girl.

A chill suddenly ran up my back, I'd made a mistake, a big mistake! I span around to find the girl creeping up behind me. She held a large chunk of wood, which she swung at my head. I tried to dodge, but the wood caught me and I fell to the floor, my vision blurred for a short time, then I felt myself being dragged into the living room. I then felt my hands being bound, roughly, behind my back, with rope.

My vision finally cleared and I found myself leaning against a mouldy looking couch. In front of me was a wooden table, on which I could see my mask, comms and utility belt, with my pistol. Leaning against the table, was my bō-staff. The two Brits were looking down at me. I glared back, as strongly and malevolently, as I could. They were both similar in looks; the boy was a little taller than Mindy, while the girl was slightly taller than the boy. I thought that the girl was the natural leader, but that was just my assumption. Both of them were of an average build, like Josh and neither were fat. They both wore black combat gear, with light combat boots. Their expressions were of confusion. I would need to somehow guide them, as they seemed way, way out of their comfort zone! The girl had long brown hair, tied up in a ponytail. The boy also had brown hair, which was short, like Josh's.

"Do you have to keep hitting me with that damn thing?" I growled.

"You're dangerous!" The girl replied.

"To criminals, yes, but not to you," I growled back.

"How do we know that?" The boy asked.

"You don't! But Fusion is about doing the right thing and hurting you, would *not* be the right thing."

"No it wouldn't!" The girl agreed.

"You have names?" I asked.

The two looked at each other, then the boy answered.

"I'm Cameron and this is my sister, Natasha."

"Hi Cameron, Natasha," I said. "I'm a very pissed off Shadow!"

"Told you!" Natasha said to her brother, with a smug grin.

"Care to untie me?" I tried.

"Not yet, er, Shadow!" Cameron said. "We need to go out and well, we don't trust you!"

"Great!" I growled in frustration.

Safehouse A

"Her armour and weapons are missing! I checked the CCTV and she left about eight, last night, all kitted up!" Dave said.

"Fuck! I'm gonna skin that little bitch, alive!" I yelled. I was livid; what the fuck did that girl think she was doing, going out on her own?

"I've told Marty and Kim and they are on their way to us, now," Dave advised.

"Let's get kitted up and see if we can locate her cell and comms," I suggested.

..._...

By the time Dave and I had got into our combat suits, minus the masks, Marty and Kim had arrived. Marty dived straight in and started to track down Chloe, while Kim went to get into *her* combat suit.

"Okay! I have her radio, GPS doesn't have a good lock; she must be inside a solid building. Downloading her previous track, now. Her cell is turned off, so nothing from that," Marty informed us.

"Thanks Marty. Can you turn on VOX, so we can hear her?" I asked.

"Can do!"

Western Chicago

"Shadow, this is Hit Girl! You're on VOX, over!"

"What was that?" Cameron asked.

I tried not to look at the radio headset, not three feet away from me that was buzzing. I was sure it was Mindy's voice. Thank God! Cameron picked up the headset and held it to his ear, then dropped it.

"It's Hit Girl, calling for *her*!" Cameron yelled and he sounded scared.

"What?" Natasha shouted.

"They know where we are; we need to get out of here!" Cameron replied, calming down.

I started to hear voices, elsewhere in the building.

"You have anybody else in the building? I hear voices!" I growled.

"Nobody! Oh God, it's your lot, Shadow!" Natasha said and it was her turn to sound scared.

"No! We use radios, we don't shout when we attack!" I growled back. "Let me go and I can protect you!"

"We can't..."

Then my blood ran cold.

I heard a voice, *that* voice.

"Keep going! Those little bastards are up here somewhere!"

Safehouse A

We had heard everything that was being said; somebody else was in that building, but then my blood ran cold when I

heard what Shadow said next!

"It's Ralph D'Amico!"

***Chapter 104*: Double Trouble**

***Friday afternoon
Western Chicago
Fifth Floor***

"*Let me go! You've got to let me go!* That man is the nastiest man alive! He shot me twice, in my shoulder, with my own pistol! Not to mention him almost killing my partner!" I all but pleaded. "*I must get my mask back on, or many people will die!*"

Cameron looked across at Natasha, then he grabbed up my knife and cut the ropes binding my hands. I leapt up and grabbed my utility belt, securing it in place. Next came the comms; I strapped on the throat mike and inserted my ear piece. Lastly I pulled on my mask and wrapped around my ninja mask. I pulled out my pistol, checked it was all correct, then chambered a round and re-holstered it. I noticed Cameron and Natasha watching everything I did; they had both pulled on their ski masks. I grabbed my bō-staff, twisting it through the air, in a menacing fashion.

"Fusion, this is Shadow!" I called.

"Thank God, Shadow! Are you safe?" Hit Girl responded, almost immediately.

"I'm fine! I'm in shit and need help! I'm so sorry..."

"We're on it Shadow! Mission first, recriminations later! Battle Guy has your approximate position; turn your cell on and try to avoid contact. Keep your comms on VOX. We're on the way to you!"

"How...?"

"Shadow you have the skills you need; *use them!* You can do it, I know you can! Get to it Shadow!" Hit girl ordered.

I turned to the two frightened teenagers.

"We need to get off this floor! Natasha, Cameron, snap to it! Another exit, come on!" I growled.

"Kitchen... There's a hole in the floor... It goes down to the next apartment," Cameron said, haltingly.

"Go! Both of you! I'll cover..."

Two men kicked in the front door to the apartment. I fired three rapid shots, dropping both men. I turned to Cameron and Natasha, who had both frozen.

"Go!" I yelled.

Both kids dropped through the gaping hole, into the kitchen of the apartment below. I followed and ran towards the main door for that apartment.

"Stay behind me, always behind me!" I ordered and got nods in return. I ran out of the door and checked up and down the stairs. I could hear footsteps coming down. I gestured to Natasha and Cameron to get down and back into the apartment. I readied my bō-staff and waited.

Safehouse A

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Chloe's in trouble and I'm here to help! Just try and fucking stop me Hit Girl!"

I laughed. "That's my Jackal!"

"Besides I want to kick her fucking arse!"

"You'll have to take a ticket on that one, Josh! Once I'm through with her, if she has any *arse* left, then you can have a go!"

Josh vanished into the armoury, to get his combat suit on.

"You ready!" Kick-Ass growled, in a deeper than usual voice.

"Do you *have* to use that thing in here?" I asked; Kick-Ass was now using a voice modulator, to hide his true voice.

Western Chicago Third Floor

The first man came down the stairs quickly and just as he got level with me I swung my bō-staff and severed both his lower legs, just below the knees. Blood shot out and covered the floor, closely followed by the screaming man and his lower legs.

I ran forwards and down the next set of stairs, beckoning Natasha and Cameron to follow.

I heard a yell from upstairs, *his* voice again: "You incompetent bastards! Get them!"

I hesitated as I heard footsteps, below us; they were coming up.

Damn, we were trapped!

Outside

We arrived at the position provided by Shadow's cell. It was an abandoned apartment block, less than three miles from the safehouse.

My head whipped around as I heard the sharp crack of a pistol.

My brain automatically told me it was an FN Five-seveN. It was coming from above us.

"In there!" I called to Kick-Ass and he smashed through a boarded up doorway and into the building. Hawk and Jackal were to stay outside and watch out for any reinforcements for D'Amico.

"Shadow, which floor?" I called.

"Third floor!" Shadow replied. "Help!"

"We're coming, Shadow!"

I took the stairs two at a time. Kick-Ass managed three or four at a time.

Second Floor

As we came up the stairs, we encountered men, several of them. They obviously weren't expecting us, as their full attention was on the stairs that went up to the third floor and we were just in time to see a bloodied body come flying down the stairs.

It wasn't Shadow, but she seemed to be kicking ass up there!

Now was no time for finesse, so Kick-Ass and I blasted away with our pistols.

Third Floor

I could hear shooting from the floor below us.

The men trying to come *up* the stairs seemed to stop and go back down. The men coming *down* the stairs from above took advantage of the lull and laid down heavy fire from automatic weapons, several rounds of which impacted my armour and the girl, Natasha, screamed. Not the brazen vigilantes that they had made themselves out to be!

I returned fire, with my FN and wished that I had my P90 or my compound bow. The slide of my pistol locked back on an empty magazine and I rapidly dumped the empty magazine and loaded a full one, then released the slide.

Gunfire was now coming up the stairs from the floor below, but it was aimed at the men coming down from the floor above. Then men on the stairs opted to dive towards me for safety, so I pushed the two kids into the empty apartment, behind us and ran after them, firing several shots at the pursuing men and dropped at least one, maybe two.

Kick-Ass and I surged up the stairs to the third floor.

I now faced a crap decision.

Did I go up and get D'Amico, or stay on this floor to save Shadow.

By rights, Shadow had made the decision and she would now have to live with it, but I was *not* that Hit Girl any more! I started shooting at the men, who were attacking the apartment on the third floor and Kick-Ass followed.

I pushed Cameron and Natasha back, towards the rear of the apartment.

A fire escape! It ran down outside the window; I never fucking noticed and obviously neither had these two halfwits!

"Go! Use the fire escape!"

Natasha pushed herself out of the window and started to climb down, then she screamed as an arm wrapped around her waist and pulled her down the fire escape. Someone else had seen the fire escape and was now using it. I saw the grinning face and felt the anger surge up inside of me.

D'Amico!

At that moment Kick-Ass and Hit Girl burst through into the apartment, gunning down the final opposition.

"He has my sister, please, you've got to help!" Cameron begged.

"Jackal, Hawk! D'Amico is on his way down the fire escape with a hostage!" Hit Girl called.

I went over to Shadow and pulled her into a hug.

"Thank God, you're safe!" I said and smiled. Then I let Shadow go and glared at her. "When we get back to the safehouse, you're gonna wish you were never fucking born!"

I ran over to the window and looked down. I saw two SUVs heading for the base of the apartment block, not far from where we had parked Beast.

"Let's go! Bring the boy!" I growled.

We rapidly descended the stairs and found Hawk and Jackal engaging armed men, from the two SUVs that I had seen arriving. I could see that D'Amico was behind one of the vehicles and he had the girl.

Outside

Shadow grabbed a P90 from Beast and I grabbed a G36C and extra magazines, before moving towards the SUVs. Kick-Ass ran in the opposite direction, in an attempt to out flank D'Amico and rescue the girl.

Jackal's P90 rounds seemed to have incapacitated at least one SUV, but we prevented them from getting into the other SUV. The SUVs that D'Amico and his men had arrived in previously were over the other side of the apartment block and we were able to prevent D'Amico from moving towards them.

D'Amico looked up in anger and ordered his men to cease fire. We did the same.

"You!" D'Amico yelled.

"Yeah and you have something of mine, you bastard!" Shadow spat and looked at the pistol that D'Amico held in his

right hand.

"Come and fucking get it!" D'Amico yelled.

"You D'Amicos are fucking scum and *you* are the last of that line of evil villainy!" I yelled back.

D'Amico broke clear and ran for the apartment block, while his men provided covering fire.

Three of his men followed him.

I came around the back of the SUVs and heard Hit Girl yelling at D'Amico.

Then, "Kick-Ass, D'Amico has run back towards the apartment block, with three of his men!"

While D'Amico's men were distracted shooting at Fusion, I grabbed the girl, who shrank back in fright at the sight of me.

"Come with me, if you want to live!" I snarled.

The girl nodded and I led her away and around the SUVs back towards Beast. I pushed her inside and told her to keep down. I saw Hit Girl and Shadow run towards the apartment block while Hawk and Jackal mopped up the men near the SUVs.

I grabbed a G36C and ran after Shadow and Hit Girl.

"Shadow stop!" I called.

"No, I'm gonna get that bastard!" Shadow replied angrily, but didn't stop.

"Wait for me, you can't take him alone!"

"Fuck you, Hit Girl! He shot me and almost killed *him*... I want the bastard!"

"Shadow..." I called again, only this time she didn't respond. "Shadow..."

Shadow was passing the third floor, I was on the second. There were four men waiting for her, up there, she couldn't fight them all! I heard gunshots above us, not Shadow's FN or P90.

I heard a scream; Shadow!

I rushed up the last of the stairs and kicked open the door to the roof. Shadow was pinned down, her P90 was beside her and the magazine was empty. D'Amico's men were using large calibre pistols. I brought up my G36C and started to shoot. I winged one man, drawing fire in my direction. Shadow came up with her pistol and dropped another man. I aimed and shot the man that I had winged, killing him. D'Amico was now down to one man.

Oh crap!

I could hear a helicopter approaching; it was now or never. D'Amico had come up here to escape!

..._...

Shadow suddenly bolted forwards and ran towards D'Amico; she was shot twice by his bodyguard, but Shadow's momentum pushed her through the rounds. I provided covering fire, but then I came under fire from the helicopter. I returned fire and scored some hits on the fuselage of the helicopter. The helicopter dipped down and out of sight, so I ran towards Shadow and watched her, as she brought the bō-staff around and down, in a swift sweeping movement, which resulted in a spray of blood, as Ralph D'Amico's right arm was severed just below the elbow. The limb fell to the floor and D'Amico screamed out, in agony.

At that point the helicopter returned and heavy fire poured down onto the roof. I grabbed Shadow and pulled her back behind cover. Shadow struggled against my hold, but I refused to let her go. I watched as D'Amico was dragged bodily towards the helicopter, but I could do nothing.

"You run, you gutless bastard!" I yelled after D'Amico. "I'll finish you, piece by piece, if I fucking have to!"

The helicopter took off and headed south-east, a small trail of smoke marking it's flight path. I released Shadow and she ran forwards.

"That's mine!" Shadow growled and yanked her FN Five-seveN pistol, from the severed limb of Ralph D'Amico.

***Western Chicago
On the ground***

I turned to Kick-Ass.

"What the fuck do we do with these two? They've seen that little bitch's face!"

"You can't kill them, they're just kids!" Kick-Ass cautioned.

"Fuck! That little bitch really knows how to screw with me!"

I was *really* pissed off; Chloe had fucked things up badly. By rights, I should kill those two kids and according to my Daddy's book, I should kill Chloe, too! But, as I had said before, I was not *that* Hit Girl, not any more! At the very least, Chloe's out of Fusion, that's for damn sure! She's really put me on the fucking spot! Dave's right though, I can't kill them, but they've seen Chloe's face... I can't let them go... Can I?

I went over to the girl; she was crying! She looked up at me, with fear in her eyes and I made my decision.

"Kick-Ass! Bind them and blindfold them; they'll be coming with us!" I growled, then looked directly at the girl. "Make a sound, you die!"

***Chapter 105*: Big Trouble**

That evening
Friday
Safehouse A

The boy and his sister were now being guarded by Hawk, Jackal and Kick-Ass. Hawk and Jackal had cleared out their *apartment* and were now holding them in one of D'Amicos SUVs, until I was ready for them. I had driven Beast back to the safehouse, with the soon to be ex-Shadow.

"Chloe, get into the armoury and strip out of that armour, then come back here," I said quietly.

I think I was unnerving Chloe, as I hadn't said a single word to her on the way back to the safehouse in Beast. I had completely ignored everything that she had tried to say to me, including her attempts at excuses. I had noticed the scared look on her face as she disappeared into the armoury. While she got out of the combat suit, I called Dr Bennett.

"Chloe is safe," I said calmly. "I have her at Safehouse A."

"Thank God! Thank you Mindy! Is she okay?"

"She's okay... For the moment," I replied darkly. "She went out on her own; that I cannot forgive!"

"Oh! I see," Dr Bennett said, as she caught on.

"Her days as a vigilante may be well and truly over," I said.

..._...

Chloe reappeared from the armoury; she wore just t-shirt and shorts.

"You let me down, Chloe! You let us all down!" I said quietly. "I have no tolerance for somebody who puts their entire team at risk and doesn't think, before going into action. I no longer want you here; it's a shame because you had a lot of potential!"

Chloe didn't reply or even cry, as I had expected her to. I was expecting her to beg for forgiveness, but she just looked at me, with eyes that begged for forgiveness.

"It's over Chloe... However, those two have seen your face! I may have need of you, later. Go get some proper clothes on and wait upstairs," I said coldly and felt very sad.

I was still really pissed off!

Something in the back of my mind told me that I had been too hard on Chloe, but my Hit Girl side said that I hadn't been hard enough! Dave was, understandably, annoyed when he got back and found out that I had kicked Chloe out, but he had decided not to argue about it, at least not right now. That just meant I would get an ear full tonight!

Hawk, Jackal and Kick-Ass deposited the two kids on the mat. They sat cross-legged and neither offered any resistance; I could sense their fear.

"Can you two hear me?" I growled, ominously.

"Yes!" Both replied.

"Names!"

"Cameron King."

"Natasha King."

"Okay! Why did you take Shadow hostage?"

"We didn't know it was her; she scared us. She was black as the night, we thought... We were scared. My sister smacked her with a large piece of metal," Cameron explained fearfully. The British accent. These two were so out of their depth!

"We're really sorry..." Natasha started.

"I don't give a fucking crap about how sorry you are!" I growled loudly and both kids screamed.

I looked at Kick-Ass and he shook his head slowly. We've already got one British nut; why not two more! I went behind Natasha and untied her blindfold, then released her hands and helped her to her feet. I nodded at Kick-Ass to do the same for the boy. Natasha looked up at me, gratefully and smiled. Fuck! I'm starting to feel fucking guilty now!

"I won't hurt you, I promise," I said. "Unless, of course, you tell *anybody* anything about Shadow or us!"

The boy blinked in the bright lights and nodded acceptance, as did the girl.

"You two hungry?" I asked and smiled. I had noticed the meagre attempts at food, the two had had at their apartment.

"Yeah! We had money, but our ATM cards stopped working some weeks ago. We ran out of cash," Cameron explained dejectedly, as I led them both upstairs to the kitchen. I microwaved a couple of crappy frozen meals, but the two kids wolfed them down.

"Tell us about yourselves," I suggested. "You're obviously British!"

Natasha explained that they were brother and sister, which we *had* kinda worked out, but also fraternal twins and that they had grown up in London, England. They were now orphans and had remained in the United States, as wards of the state. Their father had died of natural causes while they were in the US. There were no remaining relatives in the UK, so they had been allowed to remain until something was arranged for them at home. That had been almost five months ago, they seemed to have been almost forgotten. They had absconded from foster care, while in Seattle and made their way east, towards home in the UK. Their father had left them plenty of money, unfortunately their funds had been frozen, after they had been on the run for less than a week. They were both only sixteen.

I had a feeling that there was more to the story, but didn't push.

"So you want to get back to the UK?" Kick-Ass asked.

"We did, but ultimately we can't now; we have no money and our passports will be blocked! If we hand ourselves in, we get ourselves stuck back into foster care!" Cameron replied.

"You two trustworthy?" I asked.

"We try!" Natasha replied, with a guilty smile. A genuinely honest answer and the same that I would have given!

"You know the drill; you speak to anyone, we kill you! But I want to trust you. Can I?" I asked seriously.

"Yes you can, Hit Girl!" Cameron replied and Natasha nodded.

"Look, I can put you both up in an apartment, for now. But you must stay there and not go out, you understand? I need time to think about what to do with you," I said. "Plus you both really need a shower!"

The two kids looked excited and a little embarrassed.

That evening ***South Cottage Grove***

We waited till well after dark and then I took the two kids, with Kick-Ass, to the safehouse at South Cottage Grove and stuck them in apartment 301.

"Now, behave! No wild parties! No trashing the place! I'll send somebody around later with some food and your kit, okay! Don't open the door to anybody. Our guy will have a key and will say he's from Fusion," I said and left the two kids to settle in.

..._...

An hour later I returned to apartment 301, but this time with Chloe.

When I had gone upstairs, at the safehouse, I had found Chloe sitting on her bed and it was obvious that she had been crying. Dave had warned me to be hard, but not *too* hard, on her. We all owed her our lives, in one way or another and especially me. But for now, I needed Chloe to drop some items off, to Cameron and Natasha.

Apartment 301

I used a key to enter the apartment and was met by two scared faces.

"It's okay!" I said and smiled. The two kids promptly relaxed, as soon as they recognised me and I dumped their packs and some bags onto the kitchen table.

"Food in those two bags, plus your own stuff from that shit apartment!" I explained.

Both kids had taken showers and were now wrapped in towels. Cameron looked quite muscular; I looked away quickly!

"Get something to eat and get some sleep and we'll probably see you both in a day or two. Anything else you need?" I asked.

"No. Thank you very much and thank Hit Girl and Kick-Ass for us," Natasha said and she looked very grateful. "We're really sorry we hurt you!"

"Don't sweat it!" I replied. "Night!"

***Chapter 106*: Forgiveness**

The following evening
Saturday
Morton Grove

I was grounded till I was at least seventy-five!

But that was not all that sucked!

Josh wasn't talking to me and neither was Mindy, which *really* fucking hurt! Mom is pretending that I don't exist, except at meal times! I had spent the past day feeling really small and very, very guilty!

Why did I do it?

I loved the way that I felt when I was out as Shadow. The surge of adrenalin, the surge of excitement when hunting criminals and yes, I enjoyed making use of my weapons, especially my compound bow, but that was now gone!

Mindy was arguably my best friend in the entire world. I would do *anything* for her... But I had thrown it all away in a selfish attempt at experiencing the thrill of being Shadow! The one thing that *really* scared me? Mindy didn't shout or kick me about, as I had fully expected her to. No, she spoke calmly, which just made it worse. I suppose in hindsight, I should be pleased! It was the cold, collected Hit Girl that was telling me to get out, not Mindy Macready.

I suppose my little problem had given me time to look at me life.

Who was I? Or should that have been: What was I?

I was a girl.

I was fourteen years-old.

I killed people!

So, what did that make me?

A murderess?

A vigilante?

Was there a difference?

I suppose that would depend on your point of view.

I took law enforcement into my own hands and I acted as a judge, jury and executioner, where required. Did that make me a bad person?

It should have done! But why did I sleep at night? I'd killed... Now I thought about it, how many people had I killed? I didn't really know; I honestly didn't know! Was that bad? Everybody I had killed, to that point, had deserved it and in most cases it was while defending myself or others from harm.

My life officially sucked!

That evening
West Ridge

Mindy was one hell of a grumpy bitch!

I *knew* that she was pissed with Chloe, but Mindy needed Chloe. I could tell that she was distraught over her decision. She had ignored all of Chloe's texts and phone calls. I hated seeing Mindy like this; she was even yelling at *me* now!

I'd had enough!

While Mindy was ranting and raging on the mat downstairs, I got on my cell.

..._...

Fifty minutes later, there was a knock on the door.

I opened it to find Dr Bennett and a very unhappy looking Chloe.

"Hi!" I said to Dr Bennett and then grabbed hold of Chloe and physically dragged her downstairs.

"Mindy!" I yelled.

Mindy stopped kicking the bag and turned towards me. She stared at Chloe and then she glared at me.

"What the fuck is *she* doing here?"

Chloe was looking down at the mat and not at Mindy.

"Look, I know you're pissed with the little bitch; we all fucking are, but get off your fucking high horse and have make up sex, or whatever, but fucking sort things out between yourselves!" I yelled and headed back upstairs to where Dr Bennett smirked at me.

"You enjoyed that!" She stated.

"I did, too!"

That *fucking* asshole!

That was *exactly* why I'd been avoiding Chloe! Dave knew full well that I would forgive her, if I spoke to her!

We both avoided each other's eyes for a few minutes.

"Okay! I hate to disappoint you, but I am *not* having make up sex with you! I know you're sorry and I know you won't do it again! Friends?" I asked.

"Always!" Chloe replied and hugged me tight.

"You might need make up sex for Josh, though! I gather he's really pissed at you!" I quipped then got serious. "This won't be the end of it, either!"

Chloe blushed and said nothing!

We both went upstairs to find Dr Bennett and Dave waiting. They both smirked at us.

"Quickest sex ever!" Dave commented.

I felt my cheeks warming up and Chloe blushed too!

"Shadow's still grounded, though!" Dr Bennett warned and Chloe groaned.

"Being a teenager sucks!"

"Tell me about it!" I agreed.

**South Cottage Grove
Apartment 301**

"Okay! Your idea would have probably worked! We should have just asked for their help," Cameron admitted.

"They really are the good guys! Look at what they've done for us; first good night's sleep we've had in days!" Natasha agreed.

"We owe these guys; you know that don't you!"

"What do we do then?"

"We ask to stay; we can't get at our money, we can't leave the country, so what else *can* we do?"

Apartment 202

I knocked on the apartment door.

The door was opened by Mrs Wilson.

"Hi, I'm Mindy; your Landlord. May I come in?" I asked.

"Of course!" Mrs Wilson replied waving me in.

"You settling in okay, Mrs Wilson?" I asked and saw Megan, coming through from the living room. Megan was looking at me strangely; her eyes were narrowed and she looked deep in thought.

"We're wonderful, thank you Mindy and please call me Paige."

Megan was still staring at me strangely, but I ignored her as I went on.

"I'm starting a new business, over on South Morgan Street and I need an Office Manager. I thought I'd offer you the job; you have any experience in that?" I asked.

I knew full well that she did, as Marty had pulled up a lot of information about the Wilson family.

Up until about six months ago, the family had been doing well; Mr Wilson was a successful IT Manager and Mrs Wilson worked as an Office Manager. Between them both, they earned a decent wage and were doing okay, but then Mr Wilson was killed by a hit and run driver. Paige Wilson was left to raise Megan, alone; but her job fell through and she was then forced to move to that crappy apartment that I had found them in and Paige was finding things *really* difficult financially.

Now, this was kinda getting too close to home, so I decided that I wanted to help out as much as possible.

"This isn't charity; it will be hard work! You would be running the place, doing the books and other administration type stuff. What do ya think?" I asked.

"I'd love to!" Paige replied, with a broad smile. "Anything to get back to work and get our lives back on track!"

"I'll come by and pick you up on Monday?"

"That would be fine! Little madam will be at school," Paige replied.

I looked down at Megan, whose expression had finally changed from intense thought, to intense surprise. Her eyes then went wide as saucers and her mouth dropped open! I knew exactly what she had worked out; damn that kid was intelligent! I raised a finger to my lips and bent down to her ear.

"Our - little - secret!" I whispered.

When I stood up, Megan's expression was one of extreme happiness!

West Ridge

Even though Chloe was well and truly grounded, I had asked that she be allowed to check in on the two Brits.

I was still very unsure what to do about them. Okay, Hit Girl seemed to gone a *bit* soft when dealing with innocent British kids, who were way out of their depth! I knew nothing about these two kids, but I couldn't just kick them out onto the streets. That was where we had found them and they hadn't been doing too well!

For now they could stay in that apartment and Chloe would check in on them, periodically. I sent over a cell phone today, so at the very least I would be able to speak with them, when required.

I did not want them seeing any more faces, at least not yet!

***Chapter 107*: D-JAK**

The following weekend

Saturday

D-JAK Dojang

Without the help of Paige Wilson, I could *never* have got things sorted out so quickly; she was a genuine expert at her job!

She had arranged adverts, insurance, signage and the dozens of other things that were required to get the ball rolling. Most of these things I did not have a clue about! I had even given her a large advance on her salary, to help her and Megan out. Paige had full authority for the security and finances of 'D-JAK', as we had called the place. After a lot of thought, we had named the place after our parents: Damon, James, Alice and Kathleen!

Megan had appeared during some of the late evenings that Paige had spent getting things setup and, with Paige's permission, I had used her for some of our publicity material.

Marty was a genius with a camera, so I had asked him to take some staged photos of Megan in a white v-neck gi, in a number of different stances. Megan actually seemed to enjoy herself greatly! Turned out that the kid loved to have her photo taken and wanted to learn some martial arts skills!

I had ensured that either Dave or myself were with Paige and Megan for security each evening, as the nights were dark and cold. It occurred to me that maybe she should have a car that would help improve her security for getting to and from work; I would need to look into that!

I was getting a little concerned about D-JAK, as I would be getting a lot more exposure to what Dave called 'normal people'! He would constantly remind me that I would need to be courteous and also that I would need to tone down my language, *quite a bit!* The fucker actually threatened me with that damn swear jar!

What was it going to be like dealing with 'normal' people? I had tried that, over a year ago and look what happened! I had also started to gather together everything that I would need to teach the different levels of students. There was no reason for me to be nervous, but I was. Dave assured me that he would be there with me, every step of the way.

I was so damn lucky to have Dave!

On another note, I had Chloe and the British twins to sort out!

Chloe was grounded, till the middle of December and was not enjoying it so far; she was suffering through four weeks of no Fusion and no Josh, except at school! This was not as good as it sounded, because Josh had refused to talk to her for the first week, unless absolutely necessary. Chloe was still in the bad books with Josh and so far I could not get him to budge, but I didn't exactly put that much effort into it; Chloe would have to suffer the consequences of her actions; but I suppose I'll have to fix that, too! Yes, I was pleased that Dave had manipulated me into forgiving Chloe, but I was also kinda mad with Dave for doing that. But, ultimately, I knew that Dave had done the right thing, as usual!

The British twins... A conundrum!

Should I trust them and maybe bring them into Fusion?

Unlike Justice Forever, we didn't wander around the safehouse with our masks on and I was still uncertain about letting the twins see anymore faces!

That night

West Ridge

While laying in bed, with Dave, he asked me a question.

"Are you gonna go overboard with Christmas, this year?"

I laughed and cuddled into him.

"Maybe!" I replied; I loved Christmas!

"I assume you want a tree?"

"Of course!" You couldn't have Christmas without a tree!

"Can I dress you up as an elf?"

I thought about that one.

"Not me! I might look for some sexy Christmas underwear, though!"

"I could live with that, I suppose! Mistletoe?"

"Definitely!"

"Party?"

"Could do... I need to find out if the old man will be with us for Christmas."

"Marcus is not old!"

"To a seventeen year-old, anybody over thirty is old!"

"You really have led a sheltered life!"

The next day
Sunday
West Ridge

I had a visitor: Josh.

Josh was bored and needed somebody to talk to, about 'Fusion stuff'. He still wasn't talking to Chloe, so he had decided to come and see me, instead.

"You really need to start talking to Chloe; I've forgiven the little bitch!" I said.

"I know I should, but I can't... She obviously thought only of herself; I thought she cared about me!"

"What? Of course she cares about you, Josh!"

"She risked her life and could have been killed... Chloe is all that I have left, from my past life. She almost fucking threw that away!" Josh responded, almost shouting the last sentence. He was getting really worked up over this and I could see the emotion spreading across his face; he meant every word.

"It wasn't entirely her fault. She got herself all wrapped up in the whole 'Shadow' thing. It happens, believe me, I know! There are times when I feel that I just have to be Hit Girl; I need that release. Josh, don't let this come between you both; I promise you, you will regret it! You need Chloe and she needs you. She became a damn vigilante after what happened to you, last year and she almost lost you a second time, back in New York. I know you love her and she really loves you. Go talk to her. Go make up with her... Make out if that's what it'll take!"

Josh actually blushed.

"I'm being really stupid, aren't I?" Josh asked finally.

"Not really. Chloe hurt you, doing what she did. We all make mistakes Josh; I have made many whoppers in my short life and so has Dave. Chloe is young and so are you. You will make some big mistakes, too, before you're much older that will really piss *her* off! You've made one or two already that have pissed *me* off! A certain safehouse in New York comes to mind!"

"That wasn't entirely my fault!" Josh argued.

"I forgave you though, didn't I? I also forgave you for the motorbike incident!"

"You're not gonna let those things lie, are you? Point taken; I'll go see Chloe! Thanks Mindy," Josh said and got up to leave.

"Enjoy yourselves!" I said with a smirk.

***Later that afternoon
Morton Grove***

I got out of the cab and walked up to the front door; I was a bag of nerves.

The door opened, before I could knock. Dr Bennett was standing there, looking down at me. That woman always scared me for some reason!

"Hello Joshua, come in."

I felt a little confused.

"Mindy called and explained the situation. Chloe is still grounded, but I don't want her stupid mistake to come between you two; as far as friendship is concerned, anyway!" Dr Bennett announced. "Chloe is sulking upstairs... Just try not to wake the neighbours!"

I felt my face warming up, rapidly, so I bolted for the stairs, leaving Dr Bennett smirking.

..._...

I barged straight into Chloe's room and shut the door behind me.

"What the..." Chloe started, but I didn't let her finish.

I dived onto the bed, pushed her down and kissed her, full on the lips. I saw her eyes almost double in size and she moaned... I felt something else that was doubling in size, too!

..._...

"Damn it to hell!" I announced, pulling my clothes back on.

"You yanks really have a way with words!" Josh replied, as he pulled up his trousers, but was still staring at my bare chest.

"You Brits have a hell of a way of forgiving somebody, without using *any* words at all!" I responded.

We had had one hell of a time, together. My legs were still tingling and thanks to Josh, I also needed a shower! I was really pleased that Josh had come over and more than a little surprised that Mom had let him in! It also concerned me that I hadn't all that quiet, during the... Er... Activities!

"Mindy suggested that making out might help to break the ice between us!" Josh responded, with a smug grin.

"I really am sorry, Josh. I didn't mean to put other people in danger," I started.

"Chloe! Let's just leave things as they are, okay?" Josh said and gave me a kiss.

..._...

Josh flew past my Mom and out the door as fast as possible.

I just stood there, at the bottom of the stairs, feeling intensely embarrassed.

"You two sounded like you were having fun!" Mom commented, with a knowing smile. "So he forgave you?"

"Yeah! Things got a bit messy, but he eventually forgave me!" I replied, blushed and then bolted back up to my bedroom and started giggling uncontrollably!

West Ridge

My cell rang.

It was Dr Bennett.

"Hi, Doc!"

"Mission accomplished!" Dr Bennett said and I could hear the laughter in her voice.

"Did they..." I prompted.

"I heard noises that I definitely never expected, or wanted, to ever hear from my daughter!"

"They do get a bit noisy!" I admitted.

"Tell me about it!"

Morton Grove

A text arrived.

It was from Mindy: *'I could HEAR you two from here!'*

My mouth dropped open!

Then another text came in; Mindy again: *'Semen comes off easier when it's FRESH!'*

I felt mortified!

The Farm

A text arrived.

It was from Mindy: *'By the SOUNDS of it, you hit the spot!'*

My mouth dropped open!

Then another text came in; Mindy again: *'I heard forgiveness EXPLODED everywhere!'*

I felt mortified!

West Ridge

When I got home, Mindy was giggling on the couch.

"What's up!" I asked.

Mindy passed me her cell and I looked through her recently sent texts.

"You have a dirty mind, Mindy Macready!" I said, laughing. "So they made up or should I say 'made out'?"

"From what Dr Bennett says, they were loud!" Mindy said and started laughing.

The following morning

Monday

West Ridge

The weather was getting colder and we had a tiny bit of snow!

I know it's only November 25th, but I'm still starting to get excited about Christmas. Dave says I'm just a big kid! Even better news; Marcus will be with us for Christmas. He said that he needed to be in Chicago anyway, so would look forward to Christmas with us and maybe even the New Year!

I told Dave the good news.

"God, he's being brave!" Dave commented.

"And what's *that* supposed to mean?" I asked, indignantly, knowing exactly what he meant.

"Well, he'll have to put up with Little Miss Christmas and her giddy behaviour!"

"It's not *my* fault I enjoy Christmas and get a little overexcited!" I retorted.

"You do excite easily, I'll agree to that!"

"Asshole!" I growled, then laughed.

That afternoon

I was in a good mood and apparently an evil one, too!

My cell rang, soon after lunch.

"Hello Chloe!" I said cheerfully!

"You - are - an - evil - bitch!"

"What?" I asked innocently.

"Don't play innocent, with me, Mindy Macready!"

Oops!

"I will *not* have people sending texts about what people may, or may not, be spraying over my naked body!" Chloe stormed.

I then heard a voice, from Chloe's end of the call.

"*Who* is spraying *what* over your naked body?" A boys voice asked.

"Fuck dammit!" Chloe yelled and the connection was cut.

Oops!

Lake View High School

I was going to fucking kill Mindy!

I span around to find Josh's best pal: Mike Taylor.

"As to *who*, that is my business. As to *what*, well you'll find out once you reach puberty!" I retorted angrily. It had to be a damn boy, who overheard my outburst! Mind you, Mike was okay, it could have been much worse!

"If you dare..." I started, pushing Mike up against the wall.

"Chloe, leave Mike alone!" Josh said, running up, followed by my best friend, Avery.

"Oh, I might have known! It was you who was..." Mike started, grinning.

"Shut up, if you know what's good for you!" I interrupted.

"What is going on?" Josh asked.

"Mike overheard a conversation I was having with that evil bitch, about you and me, last night!"

"Oh!" Josh said, blushing.

"If either of you two breath a damn word, I'll cut your fucking testicles off!"

Avery gasped at my language.

"Avery, get a grip!"

"You need defusing!" Josh stated and before I could reply he had grabbed me and then kissed me. I went all limp, before he stood me back up.

I started to shout at him, but couldn't.

"Damn you, Joshua!" I said and felt slightly damp in places that I wasn't about to mention! "I need the bathroom!"

"Wow Josh, please kiss *me* like that!" Avery said, hopefully.

"He does, he'll die a hideous death!" I called back down the corridor.

West Ridge

A text appeared: *'I hate you SO much right now!'*

Lake View High School

Mindy replied to my text: *'You're the one with a BIG mouth!'*

She was a real bitch!

Mindy sent another text almost immediately: *'Maybe you should stick SOMEBODY in it!'*

I wanted to throw the damn phone down the corridor. Damn, my face was getting hot! Take a deep breath Chloe, she's just trying to wind you up... She's succeeding too!

West Ridge

"Oh, you are so evil!" Dave commented, looking over my shoulder at my cell.

***Chapter 108*: Curtis**

One week later
Saturday
Chicago

Chloe's life had been turned upside down. Not just her life, though, but also Commander and Dr Bennett's lives, too!

Why?

Curtis.

But not for the reasons that you would normally associate with Curtis!

This was most definitely *not* Curtis' fault; Chloe had actually broken down when she tried to tell me what had happened and Dr Bennett had had to take the phone off of her. Dr Bennett had explained that Curtis' parents had both been killed that morning; it had been a car accident, nothing more. The worst thing though was that Curtis didn't know yet; he was staying with friends and wasn't due home till tomorrow.

To say that I was speechless was an understatement! I offered, or rather stammered, my condolences, as Curtis's Dad was Commander Bennett's brother. I understood that Commander Bennett had been granted emergency leave and he was on his way home from Norfolk Naval Base, Virginia.

Dr Bennett said that she intended to drive to Washington DC and break the news to Curtis and then bring him back to Chicago. I suggested that I could go with her, to help with the driving; it was a seven hundred mile drive that would take around twelve hours. Dr Bennett said that she could manage, but I refused to back down. Finally I won the argument and I picked up Dr Bennett and Chloe in the SUV and we started the long drive to Washington DC around one that afternoon.

Five hours later
Cleveland

We stopped just south of Cleveland, for a short break and to let Dr Bennett take over the driving.

The drive had *not* been fun; Dr Bennett was still beside herself with worry and Chloe had cried for a solid hour, before she finally fell asleep. The family had been hit very hard by this double loss.

Dave and I had intended to do everything that we could possibly do to help.

After many long, boring and very depressing hours, we finally arrived in Washington DC.

It was after midnight, so we stopped at a pre-booked hotel and grabbed some much needed sleep.

Early the following morning
Sunday
Washington DC

We awoke around eight and grabbed showers and breakfast.

I did not envy Dr Bennett one bit; she had to break the news to Curtis!

After breakfast I drove the SUV to where Curtis had been staying with his friend; Jimmy. I went to the door with Dr Bennett while Chloe stayed in the SUV, by her own choice.

Naturally, Curtis was very confused and more than a little worried to find Dr Bennett, looking for him. Indeed, he was very surprised to see me! I took Jimmy's mother off to one side and explained the situation; she was shocked, to say the least, just like I had been. While I was with the parent, I heard Curtis, in the other room: "No!" he screamed.

With Jimmy's help I had gathered Curtis' gear and helped Curtis into the SUV, where he promptly cuddled into Chloe and cried his eyes out. The next destination was Curtis' home to pack some essential items. Despite my usual

detached emotions that I used when I killed people, I felt that I was close to losing it. Dr Bennett was family to me, as was her daughter. I had never met Curtis' parents, but I was feeling their loss and I knew how Curtis' was feeling; I had been there, although my experience was not *quite* the same!

..._...

We loaded several bags and cases into the back of the SUV, that were loaded with Curtis' clothes and personal possessions. Dr Bennett also gathered up important paperwork and documentation that Curtis would require, such as his passport and birth certificate. I did what I could, to help Curtis gather together his possessions. He had moved on to a state of auto-pilot. The tears had stopped and he went around his room, picking things up and packing them. He talked to me, as he went around and explained what he was doing and why; I let him talk and made suggestions of things that he might need. I had already packed all the clothes that I could find. I also grabbed his duvet and pillow, from his bed, so he would at least have something of home.

I had also found his Taekwondo gi and his white belt, with yellow tag. He was doing well! I packed these carefully, as I was sure that he'd want to use them.

By the time we were ready to head back to Chicago, it was mid-afternoon. I drove the first stretch and we stopped around six and checked into a hotel. Dr Bennett had a room to herself, while I shared a room with Chloe and Curtis.

Curtis had barely said a word, since we left Washington DC and this was worrying, as normally he wouldn't *stop* talking! Chloe tucked him up on the couch, in the room, while we had a bed each.

It wasn't easy trying to get to sleep, with both Curtis and Chloe crying.

The next morning Monday

I awoke the following morning, with a body in bed with me.

I thought it might have been Chloe, but it turned out to be Curtis! He felt me move and turned to look up at me and he tried a rather forced half smile.

"Hi kid," I said.

"Hi Mindy. I'm sorry, I couldn't sleep on my own and Chloe pushed me out of her bed!"

"Don't worry, I've been stuck with Chloe in my bed more than once!"

"Thanks for helping me, Mindy. You and Chloe are some of the closest people I have left..."

Curtis then started sobbing. I couldn't think of anything else to do but hug him. The poor kid; yes, I'd lost both of my parents, but they were almost twelve years apart and I had never even known my mother.

Curtis stopped sobbing several minutes later and I suggested that he go get a shower, which he did. Chloe then awoke and moaned about having to wait for Curtis to get out of the bathroom. Chloe always moaned about Curtis, but I knew that she loved him dearly and they had both got a lot closer over the summer.

Early afternoon Chicago West Ridge

We finally arrived back in Chicago and I dropped Dr Bennett, Chloe and Curtis off, before heading back home.

"That fucking sucked!" I exclaimed, as I sank onto the couch beside Dave.

"I won't ask how it went; I can see that you struggled!" Dave responded.

"I tried every trick I knew to suppress my emotions, but dammit, I'm not a fucking Cyberman; I need you Dave!" I said, as I grabbed Dave and hugged him tight.

Later that week
Saturday
D-JAK Dojang

Curtis had been coming down to the dojang for the past couple of days.

He had got fed up with sitting around at his new home. Commander Bennett was home and was understandably upset. This Curtis did not want to see, so he started coming down to the dojang.

The kid had apparently been attending Taekwondo classes, while in Washington DC and was reasonably proficient; he had acquired his 9th Kup white belt with yellow tag. He had also changed a little, physically and had built up some muscle and lost some excess body fat. He seemed to be very serious about his training and spent hours pounding a bag, or practicing his Taekwondo form. I was there to keep an eye on him, as most of us were worried about his emotional state. He had not really talked to anybody, since moving in with the Bennetts, a week ago.

I called Megan over and pointed out Curtis to her, then suggested that she go over to make friends. I also advised her that Curtis had just lost both his parents and to go easy on him!

..._...

"Hi, I'm Megan!"

"And I'm busy!" Curtis replied, curtly.

"Hey! I'm trying to be nice here, ass!" Megan retorted, with a little of her usual attitude.

Curtis paused, looked at me and then turned to Megan.

"Sorry, that was unfair; I'm Curtis!"

"I lost my Dad a few months ago; I'll listen if you want to talk," Megan said.

Curtis looked at Megan, then looked over at me and I was sure that I saw a little of the normal cheeky Curtis, as he smiled, just a little, but still he smiled. I nodded encouragingly and Curtis went over to a corner and sat down, Megan followed and sat down across from him and they both started to talk.

"That was a good idea, Mindy," Paige said, coming over.

"The poor kid hasn't any friends here, just us, until he starts school on Monday. I just hope he can make a friend and he is the same age as Megan and they do, unfortunately have a few things in common!" I replied.

Actually more than Paige really knew!

Megan knew that I was Hit Girl and so did Curtis, but so far Megan didn't know that Curtis knew and Curtis didn't know that Megan knew! Also Curtis knew who everybody in Fusion was and about Safehouse A, whereas Megan only knew about me so far, but probably had ideas about the others, as she had met Dave, Chloe and Josh. There was absolutely no way that she would match Josh with Jackal and she had not really met Shadow yet, nor had she properly met Kick-Ass, either. For now that's how I was keeping it.

Talking of Paige, she was a godsend! I had gone ahead and bought her a Jeep Grand Cherokee SUV, to use for transport, which also served as a mobile advertisement for the dojang, too! D-JAK was building up a steady list of users for both the gym side and the martial arts training. I was intending to start classes in the new year, two to three times a week. I was also giving discounts to members of the CPD.

..._...

After Curtis and Megan had chatted for about forty minutes, I saw them both laughing together, which was a very good start. It was the first time that I had seen Curtis laugh, since he had arrived in Chicago.

"You two okay?" I asked, walking over.

"Yeah, Curtis is a bit strange, but I can work with that!" Megan replied.

"Megan is totally nuts, but I've been around worse!" Curtis added and threw me a smug grin.

"Curtis, why don't you show Megan some of what you have learned to get your yellow tab," I suggested. "Megan, that yellow tab will be your first target!"

"Okay! Come on Megan; let's see what you're made of!"

That afternoon
D-JAK dojang

The question that I had been dreading finally came.

"Mindy, can we talk... Privately!" Curtis asked.

"Okay!"

We went upstairs and sat down in the part of the building that I was intending on converting into a safehouse.

"I know what you're gonna ask, Curtis!" I said. "We've been here before and the answer is still *no!*"

Curtis looked angry.

"*Why not?*" He asked angrily.

"You're three months past your tenth birthday; *that's why!*" I replied.

"That isn't fair. I have nothing else left in my life; I need something and Fusion is it!" Curtis retorted.

"Curtis... I... You're putting me into a *really* difficult position and I *don't* like it!" I replied and was starting to get angry myself. Curtis saw my anger building, but refused to back down.

"I don't care, you're gonna...," Curtis started to shout, but then calmed down. "Look... Please... I need your help Mindy... I know Aunt Cathy would say no and Chloe would probably slap me for asking, but I know *you* won't. Would you at least help me train, show me how to fight, how to use weapons? I need something to focus my mind on, something that isn't my dead parents!"

I just stared at Curtis for a while, sorting out my thoughts.

"I'm not saying yes, but I'm not saying no, either. Please let me think about it and I *will*, I promise you."

"Thank you Mindy," Curtis said and gave me a hug!

That evening
West Ridge

"Dave, why do people gravitate towards me to talk or to cry on my shoulder?"

"Good question! Normally, I would not see you as the type!" Dave replied with a smirk.

"I'm serious, Dave!"

"Well, when you aren't chopping people into tiny little pieces, you can be a very kind and loving young woman. That is one of the many, many, many reasons why I want to spend the rest of my life with you!" Dave replied, honestly, before continuing. "You've helped Josh, you've helped Chloe and you've helped Curtis. They all respect you and know that you won't lie to them, not to mention that you also tend to speak your mind! You may be, the hard as nails, Hit Girl, but you are also a woman and a big sister to them all and that's what they see you as."

I honestly had no response to that.

***Chapter 109*: Training**

***The following weekend
Saturday morning
Safehouse A***

"Come on! Fight! I'm a girl dammit; I should be a push over! Bet Megan fights better, too!"

"I am fighting, bitch!"

"A bit of attitude! Now that's a distinct improvement; not sure about the language though!"

"Eat dick, cunt!"

I laughed and couldn't stop!

"You're winding me up; that's not fucking fair!" Curtis whined as I fell down onto the mat, still laughing.

"You've developed *quite* the vocabulary, there!" I commented.

"Just 'cause I *don't* use it, doesn't mean that I *can't*!" Curtis replied. "Anyway, Chloe can be very foul-mouthed when her Mom isn't around and she thinks I'm not listening!"

"It's just not what you'd normally hear coming out of a ten year-old's mouth!" I responded.

"And you only started swearing last year, huh?"

"Okay, I've been swearing like a trooper, since I was six and a half!" I admitted. "Doesn't mean it's right, though!"

I had spent an hour putting the kid through his paces and I was impressed! In the three months since I had last seen him, he had learnt a lot and he could flip a balisong, almost as well as I could; I warned him *not* to let his Aunt Cathy see!

"Okay, clever dick!" I said and sat him down in the armoury, then passed him a Glock 17 pistol. "Take it down!"

I watched as Curtis ejected the magazine, a little clumsily as the Glock 17 was a full sized pistol and Curtis' hands were small; I was being a bitch on purpose, but what's new! He placed the magazine onto the table and then locked back the slide and visually checked that there was no round in the chamber, then released the slide and pulled the trigger after having pointed the gun, safely, at the floor. So far, so good!

Next he struggled a bit, again due to his small hands, but managed to remove the slide and take out the recoil spring and barrel, which he placed on the table, beside the magazine. He placed the frame of the pistol down on the table, too, then he smiled up at me smugly!

"Okay, smart ass! I'm impressed!"

"Thank you!" Curtis replied, again smugly.

Morton Grove

I took Curtis home and followed him in.

"Hi, Chloe!" I said.

"Hi, Mindy! Curtis! You need a shower, brat!" Chloe commented, wrinkling her nose.

"I'm going!" Curtis moaned and ran upstairs.

"Dr Bennett, could I have a word, please," I asked politely, then looked towards Chloe. "In private."

Dr Bennett raised her eyebrows at my unusually polite tone.

"Okay!"

I followed Dr Bennett out to the garden and she turned to face me.

"Curtis wants you to train him. Am I right?" Dr Bennett asked, straight out.

This was not a surprise; not much got past Dr Bennett!

"Yes... He asked me last weekend. I said no, but he kept pushing and eventually I said that I would think about it. I ran him through some stuff today and I have to admit that he is very good, for a ten year-old!"

"Firstly, please start calling me Cathy, Mindy; we've known each other long enough! Secondly, my nephew, my godson; it's difficult, my only daughter already risks her life with you and also out on her own, as past events have shown! He's only ten, but I am also aware that he is as strong willed as Chloe and he might go and try to be a vigilante on his own, like Chloe has done *twice* and completely fucked things up *twice* and almost died *twice*! I trust you Mindy and I know you will do absolutely everything possible to keep my daughter safe. I suppose that I'm going to have to entrust my nephew to you, too. Please look after him, just like you do with Chloe."

"I will, er, Cathy, but he won't be going anywhere for a long time; he has a long way to go before that!" I replied. "Can I tell him?"

"Yes!"

..._...

We went back inside and Curtis was just coming down the stairs, in clean clothes and having had a shower.

"Curtis!" I called.

"That's me!" A grinning Curtis replied.

"All right you little shit, I'm gonna train you, but you 'aint going anywhere till you're done and I say that you're done, even if that takes ten fucking years!" I told him.

"What?" Chloe asked, incredulously.

Curtis' face broke into a huge grin and he ran over and hugged me, then let go and hugged Dr Bennett, who tried to smile but couldn't.

The following morning
Sunday
Safehouse A

"Let's have some fun!"

"Cool!" Chloe said.

"You won't be!"

I think sudden realisation must have dawned.

"No... Please!"

I ignored her pleas and continued.

"It is time to tear Shadow apart, piece by shadowy piece! Lessons need to be learnt and what a *great* real-life example!"

..._...

We were all sitting in the briefing room.

I was on one couch, with Dave. On the other couch were Chloe, Josh and Curtis. Abby was over at the other end of the room, pounding on the computer.

"Awesome!" Curtis said.

"I'm gonna kill you, boy!" Chloe growled.

"Remember Curtis, Chloe is perfectly capable of carrying through with that threat!" I cautioned.

"Sorry!" Curtis mumbled.

"Now, Chloe... You sitting comfortably?" I asked, in an evil tone. "Then I shall begin!"

..._...

"Rule number one! The inviolable rule number one and the first catastrophic mistake that Shadow made!" I began. "Why should we never go out alone... Curtis?"

"Something *really* bad might happen that is beyond your control," Curtis said.

"Bullseye!" I said and Curtis blushed with happiness. "Now, who is good enough to go out on their own?"

"You?" Curtis asked.

Little creep!

"No!"

"Dave?" Curtis tried again.

"Dave! You saying Dave is better than *me*, fuckwit?"

"Probably not!" Curtis replied quietly.

"I should damn well think so! Dave better than me; I fucking ask you!"

"Thanks for the compliment kid!" Dave said to Curtis, who smiled happily.

"Okay, we *never* go out alone! Even *I* am not good enough. I am good, I am very good; but we all need to know our limitations. I learnt by bitter experience..."

"The hard way as usual!" Dave interrupted, to general laughter.

"Yes, the hard way! But I want to use *my* hard won experience to allow you guys to learn the easy way, okay?"

"Yes," Curtis, Abby and Josh said.

"Yes, Mindy," Chloe said and started to look very miserable..

"You sure you got that, Miss Bennett?" I asked again, very seriously.

"Yes, I've got it!" Chloe responded firmly and I think I had got the message through.

"Shall we take a short break, before we continue?" I suggested, seeing how miserable Chloe was getting.

..._...

After a hot drink, we all sat back down again.

"Next comes what I saw as the most unforgivable of Shadow's mistakes. She ignored me completely, she ran headlong into a situation that she had no awareness of and she ignored my advice! I've been doing this shit for over ten years; Little Miss Shadow, here, has not even been doing this for ten fucking months! When I say 'no', it's for a damn good reason and I don't give a fucking shit if you disagree with my decision and the same applies to advice from Kick-Ass. He's been around the block, on and off for nearly six years. I am fucking serious about this, okay?"

"Yes," Curtis, Abby and Josh answered.

"Yes, Mindy, it won't happen again!" Chloe said and sounded somewhat subdued.

"The last of Shadow's mistakes and one which I will hold my hand up to and admit to having made myself... Before that green asshole reminds me of it! She ran out of ammunition; it never occurred to her to take extra! Last time that happened to me, *I almost died*, but my backup saved me!" I said and leaned across to Dave and kissed him on the cheek.

"Yuck!" Curtis commented.

"Ammunition is heavy, so we can't carry unlimited amounts; unless you're muscle bound like Dave!" I said and smirked up at Dave, while Curtis rolled his eyes. "I recommend at least ninety to one hundred rounds as a minimum, if you are using an assault rifle or personal defence weapon. Luckily Shadow had her pistol and extra magazines, but it all could have ended very badly for her!" I finished.

There was silence.

"Now, I hope that you have *all* learned something from this!" I said.

"Yes, Mindy," Curtis, Abby, Chloe and Josh said.

"Lunchtime!" Dave said and Curtis, Abby and Josh ran out and upstairs.

Dave and I sat down either side of a very subdued and miserable Chloe.

"Do you understand why I put you through all of that?" I asked.

"I deserved it, I know that," Chloe admitted and she looked really gutted.

"I had to make sure that you really understood your mistakes. I was impressed though, that day, at least in the middle! You had the presence of mind to protect your identity and call for help and above all and most importantly, you admitted to me that you *knew* you had made a mistake," I said and gave Chloe a hug.

"You did okay, girl," Dave commented.

"You have to admit though that your humiliation was a lot less than mine! When I ran out of ammunition, I had to be rescued by Kick-Ass! Not once, but twice! Now that *was* humiliating!" I admitted.

"Not funny!" Dave retorted.

..._...

I had a nasty feeling that Marty and Kim were getting closer.

It had been Kim's birthday on Monday, although she had refused to admit how old she was!

"How old are you, now?" I had asked.

"A lady never gives out her age," Kim had replied.

"I give out my age," I had responded. "Kinda!"

"Well, we all know that Hit Girl isn't exactly a lady!" Kim had said.

I was annoyed at that! I could be a lady, just not all the time!

I also had a feeling that Marty and Kim would be the next couple within Fusion! Dave agreed and was expecting Marty to propose by Christmas.

***Chapter 110*: The Russians Strike Back**

One week later
Friday
Safehouse A

I geared up, along with the rest of the team.

The two kids and I would be out, together, ensuring that the last weekend before Christmas, was a peaceful one for the City of Chicago!

For the first time, Medic would be joining Kick-Ass, Battle Guy and Hawk for a patrol. They would be acting as backup for us, but would not be patrolling with us. This was also the first time that Josh, Chloe and myself had seen Medic ready for action. Chloe thought she looked kinda cool! I had obtained some new combat gear for her, very similar to that worn by Battle Guy. This new gear would protect her much better than the kit she had worn previously. Personally, I thought it was kinda weird seeing Cathy packing a Beretta!

Shadow, Jackal and I, took off on our motorcycles. Battle Guy, Hawk and Medic took Beast, while Kick-Ass was on his Fat Boy. The control centre was manned by Hal, Eisenhower and Trojan...

Now, you may ask: who the hell was Trojan?

Well the little shit needed a codename. Not a Super Hero name, mind you; not yet. Just a codename for use over the comms and when in we were in costume. Cathy didn't like leaving him all alone at home, so had to bring him with her! He would at least be able to keep Hal busy and if he misbehaved then Eisenhower could eat him; at least that's what I had told him! Chloe had, of course, suggested a few codenames of her own; none of which were even remotely suitable!

Hit Girl, Shadow and Jackal

I couldn't believe that I was out on patrol with my Mom!

That thought was kinda awesome and actually gave me a warm feeling inside. I also had to remember to think about what I said over the comms, as Medic *would* be listening. I had got into a little bit of trouble about some of the things that I had said on Halloween and had no desire to repeat that experience!

I thought that Mom wanting to come out with us, was a bit of a distraction from the shock of two weeks ago. Dad had gone back to his ship, last week and was now at sea, in the Atlantic somewhere on a six month deployment that included NATO exercises in the United Kingdom. I missed my Dad, a lot, especially as we were now a lot closer.

It also felt good having Jackal beside me too and we had two whole weeks, together, before we had to be back at school.

Kick-Ass, Battle Guy, Hawk and Medic

I followed Beast, as we cruised around Chicago, in a very high visibility manner.

We received a lot of happy waves, from both the public and Cops! We stopped for something to eat, after the first hour and listened to some of Battle Guy's dirty jokes, which ended up with Hawk, Medic and Shadow giggling, fit to burst! I was certain that I also caught a brief giggle from Hit Girl, too!

Chicago's criminal population seemed to be behaving, this evening. While this was good, it also made for a rather boring patrol!

This rapidly changed, when I received a rather disturbing call from Voight.

One of his informants had told him about the current Russian Mafia situation and that they were building themselves up again and most disturbingly, they wanted revenge! In this case Voight was convinced that it would be revenge against Fusion and more specifically, Hit Girl. I had thanked Voight and told him that we owed him one.

I checked my heads-up-display, which was constantly updated with Hit Girl's current position, by Hal. Hit Girl, Shadow and Jackal were currently stationary.

"Hit Girl, Kick-Ass!"

"Hi! What's up?"

"Voight called. The Russians are on the move and want revenge; most probably on a certain purple vigilante!"

"Crap!"

"We're heading towards you now. You'd better keep put of sight, till we get there."

"I'm on it!"

I explained the phone call in more detail to Battle Guy, Hawk and Medic. They were all rather shocked. Battle Guy immediately turned Beast towards Hit Girl's current position and put his foot down.

I followed, on the Fat Boy.

Hit Girl, Shadow and Jackal

I was very worried about what Kick-Ass had told me.

The Russians would be mad, very mad. Normally, when I pissed people off, I killed them, which stopped them coming after me! Things were gonna get very bad, very quickly. I had immediately told Jackal and Shadow to close up on me and be vigilant, as the Russians could attack any time and any where. I was just thankful that we had some advance warning.

If the Russians attacked tonight, we three would need to hold out until Kick-Ass arrived with the heavy weaponry, in Beast. We were currently on foot a distance away from our motorcycles. I could sense the fear that emanated from Shadow and Jackal. I was doing my best to be calm, but I knew the danger, as well as, if not better than the others.

I was very keen to get back to our motorcycles and get back to the safety of the safehouse.

We turned the last corner, literally a few dozen feet from the motorcycles, then a voice called out...

"Посмотрите, что мы здесь!" [*Look what we have here!*]

I span around and saw a group of armed men behind us. We had no choice but to continue around the corner.

"Ready yourselves!" I growled to Jackal and Shadow. "This is *not* good!"

"I have a bad feeling about this!" Jackal said.

"Kick-Ass you had better get here right the fuck now!" I called over the comms. "They're here!"

"Four minutes, Hit Girl!"

I seriously didn't think that we had *two* minutes, let alone *four*. Time to stall.

"Перейти на хуй!" I growled. [*Go Fuck yourselves!*]

The man who had called out, stepped forwards. He was obviously a senior Russian and had an enormous Krysha on each side of him.

"Это время для вас , чтобы умереть, Хит Девушка! Детишки тоже!" [*It is time for you to die, Hit Girl! The kiddies too!*]

"Перед тем, как встать на путь мести , копать две могилы!" I growled back. [*Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves!*]

"Действует настроения. Я возьму на себя риск," The man responded. [*A valid sentiment. I will take the risk.*]

Time was running out and fast!

I drew a Katana and waited while Shadow prepared her bō-staff and Jackal prepared his ninja-to. We would have to fight, we had no other choice.

I started to run forward, followed by Jackal and Shadow.

Kick-Ass, Battle Guy, Hawk and Medic

We were still a block or two away, from Hit Girl and approaching at speed.

Suddenly there was a monstrous noise and a cloud of dust and debris could be seen billowing from a street, ahead and to our right.

Inside me, I knew that that was the street where Hit Girl, Shadow and Jackal were.

Hit Girl, Shadow and Jackal

I started to come around and found myself lying face-down on the street.

My body ached. I raised my head and I could see Jackal lying on his side, a few feet away; he was not moving. Shadow was just beyond him, face-down and again, not moving. My ears were ringing and everything was eerily silent, which was strange considering a building had just blown up beside us!

As the seconds passed, I started to hear some of the surrounding noise. In front of me I could see the Russians, who had been standing, conveniently, outside the blast radius, heading towards us. From behind me I heard the throaty roar of a large motorcycle, then almost immediately a much louder noise started to assault my ears. The banging noise continued and got closer, from behind me. I tried to move but couldn't. A large pair of black and green boots stepped over me and crunched through the glass and rubble. Used shotgun shell-casings rained down around me, as the shape that I quickly recognised to be Kick-Ass, fired his new toy; the AA-12 fully-automatic shotgun. I saw the Russians being literally blasted back by Kick-Ass' onslaught.

I felt hands grabbing me and hauling me to my feet. I turned to find Medic smiling at me.

"Come on Hit Girl! Let's get you out of here," Medic shouted cheerfully, over all the noise.

"What about Jackal and Shadow?" I yelled back.

"They're fine!" Medic replied and I turned to see Hawk and Battle Guy running towards Jackal and Shadow, as Kick-Ass covered them with his monster shotgun. Damn, my own personal terminator!

Medic helped me over to Beast, as I couldn't walk straight on my own and pushed me into the passenger seat. Then she helped Hawk push Shadow into the seat behind me. Battle Guy had pushed Jackal in the other side. Both Jackal and Shadow looked concussed and uncoordinated. I was having trouble focussing and I think that I must have passed out, as they next thing I knew, we were speeding away from the scene, with Battle Guy at the wheel.

Kick-Ass, Hawk and Medic

"Beast is clear!" I heard Hawk yell.

The last of the Russians were falling to my onslaught. I turned as Murphy and Fellowes pulled up at the scene and looked in horror at the literal pile of dead and mutilated bodies, in front of them.

"That weapon really suits you Kick-Ass!" Murphy commented. "We could hear the damn thing, blocks away!"

"Can you take custody of the motorcycles?" I asked, looking at the two Honda motorcycles that belonged to Shadow and Jackal.

"No problem! They'll be safe!" Fellowes responded.

"Let's go Hawk!" I said, then turned to Medic. "You think you can handle that?"

"No problem... I think!" Medic replied, mounting Hit Girl's Ducati.

"You scratch it, she'll fucking kill you!" I warned.

Medic just laughed and started the motorcycle, before roaring off!

I just shook my head, as I braced the Fat Boy for Hawk to climb on behind me.

Safehouse A

By the time I pulled into the safehouse, Hit Girl, Shadow and Jackal had been removed from Beast and we're currently lying on the mat, while Marty, Abby and Curtis helped to remove their masks and comms. I parked the Fat Boy and Hawk climbed off. She pulled off her own mask and comms quickly and then ran over to help with the injured teenagers.

It looked like the combat suits had taken the brunt of the impacts from flying debris, but the three of them must still be badly bruised and I think concussed too. The combat suits looked a real mess, but they seemed to have done their job as all three of them were all still alive.

At that moment Medic rode in and parked the Ducati beside me. She was grinning from ear to ear.

"You enjoyed that, did you?" I asked.

"Hell yes!" Cathy replied, pulling off her mask and comms, then climbed off the motorcycle. She ran over to the mat and started checking out Mindy, first.

I pulled off my own mask and comms, then walked over and checked on Chloe. Kim and Battle Guy were helping Josh out of his combat suit. I helped Abby and Curtis with Chloe's combat suit, before going over to check on Mindy.

Mindy was coughing steadily; she must have breathed in a lot of the dust. I helped Cathy pull off Mindy's combat suit and found a lot of bruises, but I was pleased to see that nothing seemed to be broken.

Once Cathy had finished her checks of Mindy, Chloe and Josh, she tallied up the injuries.

Mindy had a badly bruised right shoulder and a concussion, plus many smaller bruises but nothing worse.

Chloe had a concussion, multiple bruises over her body and a nasty bruise on her left thigh, but again, nothing worse.

Josh, naturally had acquired the worst injury; along with a lot of bruises, he had also sprained his right wrist rather badly and Cathy had strapped it up for him.

Between us, we had got the three teenagers into bed and the rest of us got out of our combat suits and sat down with some coffee.

..._...

"Thanks, team!" I said.

"No problem Dave, we just did what we do!" Marty said.

"That was a fun first patrol!" Cathy admitted, with a smile. "I enjoyed the Ducati, though!"

"Never a dull day around here!" Kim quipped.

The following morning ***Saturday*** **Safehouse A**

I awoke to a lot of pain.

"Ow!" I whispered.

"It'll hurt, Mindy, but you're gonna be fine," Dave said.

Dave was sitting on the bed, beside me.

"Chloe, Josh?" I asked, concerned.

"They're banged up a bit, just like you, but otherwise they both survived. They're still asleep."

"How did we get back here?" I asked.

"Marty brought the three of you back in Beast. I rode back with Hawk and... Er... Medic brought your Ducati back!"

"Dr Bennett rode my bike?" I responded angrily, sitting up and ignoring the pain.

"Calm the fuck down! She got back safely!" Dave replied. "Didn't know she could ride though!"

"That woman keeps surprising the fuck out of me! Now I know where Chloe gets her damned brazenness from!"

"You're so cute when you're mad!" Dave said, smirking.

"Asshole!"

..._...

I inspected my body, in the shower. It was a fucking mess; bruises everywhere and my right shoulder hurt like hell. The hot water helped soothe things just a bit, enough to take the edge off at least! I got dressed and went to check on the kids.

I checked on Josh first; he was just getting out of bed and he looked a fucking mess, with bruises everywhere. He smiled at me weakly.

"It looks worse than it really is, I think!" Josh said. "I'm gonna get a shower, ease my aching bones!"

I laughed and it hurt!

Next, I checked on Chloe. She had just got back from the shower and again, I hoped that she actually looked a lot worse than she actually was!

"You okay, Chloe?"

"I've been better; everything hurts!" Chloe replied and I could see tears in her eyes, from the pain. "Could you help me get dressed?"

..._...

Once Chloe was dressed, I went to get Josh and then we headed for the kitchen, which sounded quite noisy!

Once we got there we found that the kitchen was very full. Dave, Marty, Kim, Abby, Curtis and of course, Cathy were there, drinking coffee and finishing off some bacon and eggs. We were all ushered into seats and had food placed down in front of us. Curtis insisted on helping Chloe!

"Once you've eaten I'll check each of you over, okay!" Cathy advised. "Make sure that you all drink and eat."

While I was stuffing bacon and eggs into my mouth, I suddenly had a thought.

"Cathy! When did you learn to ride a motorcycle?" I asked, accusingly.

"Ah!" Cathy scowled at Dave. "Dave told you, did he?"

"What? Mom can't ride a bike!" Chloe stated.

"Oh yes she can!" Dave corrected Chloe. "She rode back on Hit Girl's Ducati, last night!"

"She did what?" Chloe exclaimed.

"There was no room in Beast and Kim rode back with Dave, so I brought the Ducati back. I used to ride dirt bikes; started when I was fifteen. Your father had a motorcycle, years ago and I often rode on the back, not to mention borrowing it from time to time. I know more about riding motorcycles than Mindy does!" Cathy elaborated.

"Yeah, right!" I responded.

"Maybe I'll get a motorcycle; I'd forgotten how much fun it was!" Cathy said, smirking.

"Thanks for bringing my motorcycle back. What about the other two motorcycles?" I asked.

"Fellows took them; I'll pick them up later," Dave replied and I saw relieved looks on Josh's and Chloe's faces.

***Chapter 111*: Gravity**

Saturday Safehouse A

Dr Bennett had finally proclaimed us all well enough, to go home.

I still felt very sore and so did Josh and Chloe, but that was an unfortunate side effect of being a vigilante. The explosion had been on all the news networks and was in most of the newspapers. For now the explosion was down to a 'gas main issue', as the City didn't want to cause any undue alarm for the general public. But of course, we knew better!

Josh and Chloe had come back home with us, while Cathy had taken Curtis back home.

Early afternoon West Ridge

Dave had been behaving very strangely, since we had got back home.

The reason for this strange behaviour knocked on the door, soon after lunch. Dave had gone to answer the door.

"G! Come on in my man!" Dave said and brought a strangely familiar man into the living room. Even stranger was the fact that Sophia jumped up, with her tail wagging madly!

"Damn! You are a lot hotter now, than the last time I saw you!" The man said to me and I felt myself blushing. Who was this man?

"Dave!" I said, in worried confusion.

"You probably wouldn't recognise him out of costume and the last time that you saw him without his costume... Well things kinda got a little busy... It was at the funeral!" Dave explained.

"Oh, right; sorry, things were a bit busy that day!" I replied, still confused.

"This is Isaac Swanson," Dave announced. "Otherwise known as Dr Gravity!"

Wow! This was one of the founding members of Justice Forever; he was in the picture, at the safehouse. He had fought alongside me.

"It is really good to see you again; I owe you a debt!" I said, happily, shaking his hand.

"No problem! Always knew that you two would get together!" Isaac replied. "Congratulations on the engagement, Hit Girl!"

"Thanks! You knew who I was, at the funeral?" I asked.

"I had a faint idea when I saw you at the funeral, yes."

"How come you're here?" I asked.

Just as Isaac was about to respond Josh appeared from upstairs, where he had been with Chloe since we had got back.

..._...

"What is Mr Swanson doing here? Whatever it was, I didn't do it!" Josh announced, looking and sounding guilty.

Now, I was confused and so, apparently, was Dave.

"You *know* Mr Swanson?" Dave asked.

"Of course! He teaches me and Chloe Physics, at school," Josh explained.

Isaac laughed.

"Oh, this explains so much!" He said.

"Please explain?" I asked, curiously.

"Well, young Mr Williams here, has a habit of making things go bang! No matter what it is, he somehow manages to make it explode; I have to follow him around with a damn fire extinguisher!" Isaac explained, dryly.

"Isaac, meet Jackal!" I said with a laugh.

"So, my British Physics pupil, who likes to blow things up, is a vigilante that runs with Hit Girl!"

..._...

"What's going on?" Chloe asked, appearing in the living room and looking worried.

"Ah! The redoubtable and intrepid Miss Bennett; Mr Williams' partner in crime!" Isaac announced. "More questions answered!"

Chloe looked even more confused and looked more worried.

"Isaac, *this* is Shadow! Josh, Chloe; please say hello to Dr Gravity!" Dave said.

"Our Physics teacher was a vigilante!" Josh and Chloe exclaimed together.

"You'd better believe it!" I announced, grinning. "Dr Gravity fought against Chris D'Amico, side by side with Hit Girl and Kick-Ass!"

"And I thought you were just a normal, boring teacher!" Josh said.

"My teaching bores you?" Isaac asked, with a smirk.

"That was *not* what I meant!" Josh said, quickly.

"I'm really pleased to see Sophia, too!" Isaac said, stroking the big dog.

We all sat down, on the couches and got back to the original conversation.

"I've managed to stay in touch with the other original members of Justice Forever. Admittedly, though, some are no longer around. The Colonel, obviously. Night Bitch was murdered last year," Isaac said and looked at Dave.

"I know. I read about it, in a paper."

"Insect-man; he was murdered around Easter, but I don't know the details."

"What! That's horrible!" Dave responded, sounding really hurt.

"At one stage I thought somebody was hunting us again!" Isaac said. "Well, Shannon called me and let me know about that wonderful thing you all did!"

I saw Dave and the kids, start to look uncomfortable and I felt it too.

"You did good, finding Tommy... that *was* awesome!"

"Shannon gave me Dave's number and that's how I got in contact. I moved to Chicago over the summer and started teaching these *delightful* children, Physics!"

"Well, by 'delightful', you're obviously excluding these two!" I said, with a smug grin.

Chloe scowled, while Josh just ignored me.

"Chloe and Josh are among my better students...", Isaac said and I got smug looks from both kids.

"... When they can both keep their hands and eyes off of each other!" Isaac added, dryly and both kids hid their faces behind their hands!

Dave and I laughed.

"How *are* Tony and Shannon?" I asked.

"Not good. They blew everything they had on finding their son; their business has collapsed and... I don't know."

I looked at Dave and he nodded.

"We need to help them. I owe them; they both stood beside me at that warehouse and fought alongside us," I said, firmly.

"I agree!" Dave added.

"Let's get them up to Chicago. I can put them up, for now, in one of my apartments; we still have a couple empty," I decided.

..._...

We chatted for a bit longer and then it was time for Isaac to leave.

"Remember, anything you need, I'll help. But, for now, I'd like to keep out of harm's way!" Isaac said, as he got up to leave.

Dave looked at Josh and Chloe.

"Remember you two: Mr Swanson is your teacher and for now, neither of you know him personally. Understand!" Dave said.

"Yes Dave!" Both kids acknowledged.

"Does this mean that we'll automatically get an 'A' in Physics!" Chloe asked, hopefully.

"It certainly does not, young lady!" Isaac replied, with a chuckle. "Look after yourselves, guys!"

"That was a bit surreal!" Josh said.

"Yeah, never thought teachers actually had a life, outside of school!" Chloe admitted. "But, we have the coolest Physics teacher ever!"

"You two can go back to your fucking now!" I said, with an evil smirk.

Chloe glared and Dave laughed.

"We were *not* fucking... We're not there yet!" Chloe responded and both kids blushed, then bolted for the stairs.

I looked at Dave.

"Well that answers one question; cherry not yet popped!" I quipped.

***Chapter 112*: Fulfilling a Debt**

Two days later
Monday

Firstly, Kick-Ass had picked up Shadow's and Jackal's motorcycles, then returned them, safely, to Safehouse A.

Chloe and Josh had been very worried about their motorcycles, which was quite amusing. But apparently *they* saw nothing amusing about potentially losing their Fusion motorcycles!

Yeah! I was a bitch; get over it!

West Ridge

Winter vacation had begun and I could spend time all my time with Josh!

We were both naked and together; nothing exactly new there! Only this time, I was gonna do it! To be completely honest, I didn't know what to expect! I had heard all sorts of things being talked about it at school, but I had absolutely no idea what was real and what was just total bullshit. This was going to be Joshua's Christmas present, well part of it at least!

I hesitated for a minute and just stared at it.

Just get on with it Chloe! You might enjoy it... But then you might not! Well, you'll never know until you try! All sorts of shit was going through my mind, but damn if I wasn't turned on; Josh's foreplay was *very* good!

I took him into my mouth... Josh tasted okay and I suppose normal. What the hell was I expecting; a special flavour? It felt good, though, warm and smooth and very hard! As I ran my tongue over the tip of his dick, Josh started to catch his breath and I quickly identified certain tongue movements that had extra effect on Josh and his breathing; it felt good being in control and I was enjoying myself immensely! I'd heard some girls say that this act was subservient and demeaning to the opposite sex and should not be tolerated. But Josh wasn't forcing me to do anything; I was in full control of my actions and was never, ever, going to be forced to do *anything* against my will!

I continued to excite Josh and was really enjoying myself, but then in all the excitement I had forgotten something else; I had forgotten what this act would lead to, but Josh reminded me when he called out my name.

"Chloe, I'm..."

I missed the rest as my mouth was suddenly filled with a hot, silky liquid. I pulled back quickly, swallowed what was in my mouth and then promptly received a blast directly in my face; luckily none went in my eyes, as I had been told that semen stings! As it was, I now had a gooey substance sliding down my face and then down over my tits and chest. My right hand which was still holding Josh was covered. This wasn't the first time that I had been covered in semen, but the first time that I had tasted it or had it all over my face!

Josh was looking at me and he laughed!

"It's not funny, cunt!" I growled, but I still laughed and grabbed a towel. Once I had wiped my face off, I lay down on top of Josh, squishing the semen on my chest between us. I kissed him again and again.

"I love you Joshua!"

"I love you Chloe!"

My wrist was still very sore, but Chloe had taken care of things for me!

She still looked beautiful, despite all the bruises that were still visible on her slim frame. I wasn't a great deal better, but Chloe didn't seem to notice and in our excitement we had ignored any pain, from our injuries of the weekend.

I was actually quite surprised that she went ahead with that! She had always seemed a bit squeamish about that sexual act, but... Wow... What an experience!

Central Chicago

I had gone to do some final Christmas shopping, in the SUV.

The trip back seemed quite uneventful, until a smart new, iceberg white, Ducati motorcycle pulled up beside me, at a stop light. The rider, clad all in black, but with a red stripe on the helmet, looked towards me and nodded, before revving up the motorcycle and rocketing off the very moment that the lights turned green. To be honest, I turned green too - with envy! I wasn't ready to ride any of my motorcycles yet, thanks to my still healing injuries.

I paid no further attention to it, but then I started to get concerned, when a few miles down the road, I had pulled up at a stop light and the same Ducati Multistrada motorcycle pulled up beside me. Again, the black-clad rider revved the twelve-hundred cubic-centimetre, one hundred and sixty horse-power engine.

Okay, I know the specification of every Ducati - call me a fucking geek, I don't care! But the motorcycle sounded so cool and I was damn jealous. I felt pangs for my purple Ducat. I could tell that it was a woman riding the motorcycle, too!

The lights went green and the motorcycle accelerated away, smoothly working up the six-speed gearbox, as it went. It was not a superbike, like mine, but still awesome nonetheless. It also looked really cool, with the twin side panniers. The back of my mind reminded me that seeing the motorcycle twice, like this, was more than a coincidence; this was danger!

I didn't see the motorcycle again, until I was turning into West Columbia Avenue, just yards from home. I pulled up beside the house, by the side door and watched as the white motorcycle pulled up behind me.

Now I was very worried!

The motorcyclist had not shown any hint of hostility, nor was there any sign of them being armed. I casually climbed out of the SUV and turned towards the unknown rider. Just as I was advancing and starting to show hostile intent myself, the motorcycle rider reached up and removed her helmet.

To say that I was shocked, would have been a fucking understatement!

"Fucking hell, Cathy!" I exclaimed and glared at her.

"Sorry Mindy... Hope I didn't scare you!" Cathy said, with an evil smirk.

"What's this then? Mid-life crisis?" I asked, indicating the brand-new 2015 Ducati Multistrada 1200 S motorcycle.

"Well, after riding your Panigale, I decided that I wanted a piece of the action! This machine beats that Jeep, any day! Just picked it up this morning - saw you and thought I'd have a bit of fun!" Cathy explained, with absolutely no hint of shame, whatsoever!

"I am actually very jealous!" I responded with laugh. "You know Cathy, you can be such an evil bitch!"

"Takes one to know one!" Cathy replied with a laugh.

The following day

Tuesday

Safehouse A

Dave and Marty were bringing in some very special guests, directly to the safehouse, in Lucille.

Right on time, Lucille pulled in and stopped beside Beast. A smirking Marty climbed out of the driver's seat and slide open the rear door. Out climbed Kick-Ass and three people; one of whom was a young boy.

Dave and Marty walked the three people over to the mat, where Kim, Chloe, Josh and I waited. None of us were in costume for this.

"Tony, Shannon, Tommy please meet the other Fusion operators: Hit Girl, Hawk, Shadow and Jackal. Otherwise known as Mindy, Kim, Chloe and Josh," Dave said, pointing out each person as he said their name.

"It is so good to meet you all," The lady, Shannon Morgan said. "Thanks to you, Tommy came back to us."

"Thank you, all of you," The man, Tony Morgan said smiling at us all.

The boy, who was several inches shorter than Josh, stepped forward. He looked a hell of a lot better than when we had last seen him, two months ago. Then he had been very thin and covered in bruises. Now, though, he looked like a healthy young boy, close to his eleventh birthday.

"Hi, it's great to see you guys again. I never really got the chance to say thank you, for rescuing me," Tommy Morgan said, with a cheeky smile.

"It was our pleasure Tommy! I'm sure that I speak for the whole of Fusion, by saying that I'm glad that you are back together, as a family," I said and got affirmative comments all round.

"Fancy a tour, Tommy?" Dave asked.

"Cool!" Tommy replied excitedly.

We showed Tommy and his parents the armoury; which Tommy thought was really cool and he recognised our combat suits. Next we went into the briefing room, where he immediately saw the pictures, on the wall.

"That's Mom and Dad?" He asked.

"That's them," Dave confirmed and named each of the other members of Justice Forever.

Later that afternoon
West Ridge

After the tour, we went out to get something to eat and then found our way back home.

While Dave kept Tommy occupied, I took Shannon and Tony into the kitchen.

"Come to Chicago, permanently... I understand that New York is not going too well for you, right now. Tommy needs a fresh start; he was only in Chicago for a couple of months, before we found him. I will find you work and a place to live, if you want."

Shannon looked at her husband for a minute, before turning back to me.

"But, why?" Shannon asked.

"We are fulfilling a debt that Kick-Ass and I owe you guys..."

"You did that by finding our boy..."

"You don't want to fight me on this one, Shannon!" I laughed, meaningfully.

..._...

The Morgan family went back to New York that evening, for Christmas. Shannon promised that they would contact us after Christmas, with a decision.

I could tell by her eyes that she was going to seriously think about my offer.

Two days later
Wednesday

I had a surprise for my little pal!

Megan was sitting beside me in the SUV and she was wearing a blindfold. I had told Paige that I was picking up some stock, which I was, but I was actually giving Megan an early Christmas present.

I parked the SUV and removed her blindfold. Megan blinked in the bright lights. I climbed out and met her around the front of the SUV.

"Welcome to Safehouse A!"

Megan was speechless and just kept looking around, absorbing everything. She stared at the four motorcycles, neatly lined up and then at Beast. Eventually she took in the mat and the main building.

"Thought you'd appreciate an early Christmas present, Megan!" I said.

"Wow!" Megan exclaimed. I think she was completely overloaded! I couldn't help laughing at her.

"Come on!" I said and showed her the armoury, with the combat suits.

"Awesome, I love it!" Megan said, examining each and every blade and firearm.

Next came the briefing room.

Megan ran over to examine the pictures.

"Fucking awesome!" Megan exclaimed, staring at the picture of Big Daddy and Hit Girl. "How old were you?"

"I was almost eleven, when that photo was taken. That was my Daddy," I replied.

Megan looked up at me.

"I'm sorry."

"Thanks."

"You look really cool in that costume, Mindy!"

"I loved that costume, especially the pink utility belt!" I said, reminiscing.

I showed Megan around upstairs and then returned to the mat.

"Thank you Mindy, for showing me this," Megan said.

"I trust you Megan and know that you'll keep my secret," I said, giving her a big hug. "Merry Christmas!"

We got back into the SUV and I blindfolded her again and we headed towards Megan's home.

"Megan, we've given you a codename: Wildcat! Remember it, in case you ever need it, okay? We never use our real names, when we're in costume. Nor do we use our Hero or codenames, when we are not in costume."

"Wildcat... Cool! Thanks, Mindy!"

Later that evening

It was hard to believe that we had been in this house one whole year!

I had been settled and happy for an entire year and the best bit... I had been settled with Dave!

..._...

We were not to be alone this Christmas Day.

Along with Dave and I, we would be joined by Marcus, Cathy, Chloe, Josh and Curtis. Marty had gone to spend Christmas with his family and taken Kim with him! Josh would be with us, as Jack and Natalie had gone to see family and Josh wanted to stay in Chicago. Cathy, Chloe and Curtis didn't want to be alone for Christmas. We would have a very full house!

..._...

"I can't sleep!"

"Here we go again! You're gonna get me up at six again tomorrow, aren't you?" Dave groaned.

"No... I'm gonna let you have a lie in!"

"Yeah, right!"

I felt Dave's hands start to move across my body and couldn't help smirking!

***Chapter 113*: Festive Fusion**

Author's Note: *A Merry Christmas to everybody!*

The following morning

Thursday

West Ridge

It was very cold outside, but it wasn't snowing.

Of course, it was toasty warm inside, though.

I felt happy, really happy; I loved Christmas!

I turned from the window and looked at Dave; he was still sleeping soundly.

Now, we couldn't have that, could we? But hold on: I did promise him a lie in, though and Hit Girl never lies!

I fucking knew it!

I opened my eyes and found the expected girl with soft amber hair, jumping up and down on the bed shouting, "It's Christmas!"

I looked at the clock... For fucks sake, Mindy!

"It may be Christmas Day, Hit Girl, but you promised me a fucking lie in!" I growled.

"I did and you got one!" Mindy responded, with a laugh.

I looked at the clock again.

"Eight minutes! I suppose that's better than fucking nothing!" I growled back.

"Come on, Dave!" Mindy begged.

I heard an annoyed growl from Sophia, across the room.

"See, even Sophia doesn't like being woken up this early!" I offered.

She's seventeen years-old and can kill a grown man, any one of a hundred ways and without the tiniest of hesitation. But when it comes to Christmas, she's like a normal fucking teenager. Well, I should be used to it by now!

God, Mindy.

I threw back the duvet and sat up. Mindy was wearing nothing... absolutely nothing! I grabbed her around the waist and pulled her down onto the bed. She screamed and then giggled.

"Happy Christmas, my gorgeous fiancée," I said, then kissed her deeply, running my hands over her perfect body.

I loved my Dave.

He put up with me being a big kid, every birthday and every Christmas. I knew that he complained about being woken up early, but I also knew he loved me and always would! What the fuck, it was only two days a fucking year!

After a little bit of Christmas fun, it was time to get up. It was also time to wake Joshua... He had confided in me that he was dreading today; his first Christmas without his father.

..._...

"Morning, Joshua!" I called, as I looked into his bedroom.

He was awake and was finishing off getting dressed, pulling on a t-shirt.

"Merry Christmas, Mindy!" Josh said, with his usual cheeky grin.

"Merry Christmas to you too, Josh," I replied and gave him a Christmas kiss, on the cheek. He blushed!

"How sweet!" I teased, then more seriously. "You sleep okay?"

"I think so, I just feel a little bit sad that's all," Josh replied.

"Come on!" I said and headed downstairs, closely followed by Sophia.

..._...

Dave was just putting on the coffee, when I got to the kitchen.

"Merry Christmas, trouble!" Dave said.

"Me?" Josh asked.

"Both of you, actually! Mindy and Christmas are trouble!"

"Am not!" I growled indignantly, but laughed anyway.

"Merry Christmas, Dave," Josh said.

I knew the peace wouldn't last!

"Dave, I love you!" Mindy said, behaving like a fire-cracker that was about to explode. She was holding a very large present that she had 'found' in the dining room.

"Tell me you love me, *after* you've opened it!" I said, laughing. Mindy ran back through to the dining room and I heard the ripping of paper, in a very violent fashion.

Josh appeared and he looked a little overwhelmed. In each hand was an FN Five-seveN pistol, each one brand new. The pistol was black, with a silver-coloured inlay on the grip and mottled-tan slide. The barrel was also threaded, to allow a suppressor to be attached. The boy was genuinely lost for words!

"You okay, Josh?" I asked, knowing that he wasn't.

"I don't know what to say..."

"Chloe has a custom pistol, so we thought it was time for you to have the same!" I said. I could see tears in Josh's eyes.

"Thanks, Dave... I'll thank Mindy when she's calmed down!"

Right on cue we could both hear squealing coming from the dining room.

Mindy then appeared with a dangerous looking blade, in each hand and with the most enormous smile imaginable!

"I think she likes them Dave!" Josh quipped, heading back into the dining room to put his pistols away.

"Dave, they are fucking perfect!" Mindy blurted out, while I kept my distance.

Mindy was holding two battle-ready swords. One was a Katana and the other a Wakizashi. They were both identical in design, except for their length. These were intended to be displayed on a black sword stand, which I had also bought. The fact that they were battle-ready meant that they could also be used for defence or attack. The set together formed a Daisho.

Mindy vanished back into the dining room.

..._...

When Mindy returned, she gave me an enormous and rather painful hug and kiss. Then she took a large, green-wrapped present that Josh had been holding and gave it to me. It was rather heavy!

I placed the present down on the kitchen side and started to unwrap the green paper, with yellow ribbon. I decided to use more decorum than Mindy, when she had unwrapped her present! Unfortunately my slow pace seemed to annoy Mindy, who was hopping from one foot to another and she looked like she needed the bathroom rather badly!

Once I had removed the wrapping, I found a large black, canvas bag that was approximately three feet in length. I unzipped the bag and opened it out, flat. Inside was a custom Heckler & Koch G36K assault rifle in black and dark green. The 'K', I knew, stood for '*kurz*' or 'short'; as in the G36K was the short version of the G36 assault rifle. The G36K was almost five and a half inches shorter than its larger cousin and just over five and a half inches longer than the G36C that we usually carried, as well as being half a kilo heavier, too! The weapon was generally similar, except for the longer barrel.

This was not a standard G36K rifle. It was fitted with a combination laser designator and light, which was mounted above the barrel. Below the barrel was a mean looking AG36 40-millimetre grenade launcher. On top of the weapon was a combination iron and telescopic sight. The stock was foldable and on the end of the barrel was a Rotex-III compact silencer.

Mindy was looking at me expectantly and she looked like she was about to explode, with anxiety!

"It's fucking awesome, Mindy; I love it!"

Mindy must have been holding her breath, because she let it out all in one go.

We had a lot of work to do, this morning.

Christmas dinner would not cook itself!

At about eight, there was a surprise knock on the door, just as I was staring at the enormous turkey and trying to figure out what to do with it! Dave answered the door and I heard a chorus of 'Happy Christmas' welcomes. I recognised Chloe's voice as well as Curtis' and Cathy's.

"You guys are kinda early!" I called from the kitchen.

Cathy came over.

"Considering your cooking skills don't go beyond the microwave... I thought that maybe I should take over!" Cathy said, with an evil smirk.

I scowled and Josh started laughing.

"As I have said before: you are evil, Cathy!" I responded, stabbing the turkey and leaving the kitchen!

Dinner was left in the hands of Cathy and Dave, with Chloe's assistance!

..._...

Marcus arrived, mid-morning.

He looked into the kitchen and found Cathy.

"Thank God!" Marcus said, sounding very relieved. "I was worried that Mindy might be cooking!"

"I heard that!" I yelled and everybody laughed; assholes!

..._...

"Chloe!"

"Yeah, Mindy!"

"Can Josh spare you for a few minutes, or is he like your life support?"

I blushed and nodded that I was coming.

"Now I wasn't sure what to get you... Maybe a Lo-Jack for the next time you wander off alone?"

"Funny!" I replied, with a scowl.

"I then considered a big box of condoms..."

"You are so not funny today, Mindy!"

"Then I considered this..."

Mindy handed me a large, long package that was quite heavy and my hands started to shake. I pulled off the dark blue wrapping paper and found a black, plastic case. It could only be one thing... I opened the case very slowly.

Inside was just what I was expecting to find... Almost! It was an FN P90 Personal Defence Weapon, similar to the normal weapon that I had down at Safehouse A. The difference was that the weapon I now held in my hands, was slate grey, with a navy-blue horizontal stripe down each side of the weapon. On the end of the barrel there was the normal attachment for a suppressor, which I noticed was also in the black case. On the front right of the weapon was a combined flashlight and laser sight. Mounted on top of the weapon was a wicked looking optical sight. I inspected the weapon from end to end. It was totally awesome.

Finally, I placed the weapon back in the case and then turned around and grabbed Mindy tightly. After a minute I heard Dave talking.

"You think they're gonna make out next?" He asked.

I looked up to see a rather bemused Mindy, then let her go.

"Sorry! I love it Mindy, thank you!" I said, then felt my face get very warm, very quickly.

"Thought you'd like it!" Mindy laughed.

"Cool!" Josh said. "You can see mine, if I can see yours!"

..._...

The rest of the morning and early afternoon was spent enjoying ourselves, while dinner was cooking.

Finally, we all sat down to dinner and almost immediately, I embarrassed myself!

It was a tight squeeze, around our table, for seven people, but we managed it and then for some reason or other, I started crying! Tears were pouring down my face; I felt intense emotions within me, but at that moment I couldn't explain them!

"Mindy, what's wrong?" Dave asked first, which directed everybody else's attention towards me.

I saw concern on everybody's face, especially Marcus' and Dave's.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me!" I tried and I was getting a little worried now.

It was Cathy that finally figured it out.

"Are you feeling happy or sad?" She asked.

"Happy... I think," I replied, still crying and starting to feel a little panicky.

Cathy looked at Marcus.

"Would this be the first time that Mindy has had a big Christmas, like this?"

"Yes, it would!" Marcus admitted, after a moment's thought.

I looked at Cathy, hopefully.

"Mindy, you're feeling an emotion that you obviously haven't felt very often before, at least not in public, like this. You're feeling overwhelmed, but in a good way; you feel happy about being in such a close setting as this, where you are surrounded by your friends and family. I also know that you have an acute love for Christmas, which you always see as a special time. It's all perfectly normal, what you are feeling!" Cathy explained, with a kind smile.

"Thank you, Cathy... I'm sorry everybody... I guess most of you aren't used to seeing me cry."

"It's not your fault that you are starting to feel real emotions that are not usually related to Hit Girl's normal activities!" Cathy continued. "It just shows that you're human and nobody here is gonna hold that against you, girl."

"Hit Girl is human?" Dave asked. "I suppose anything's possible!"

"Ass!" I replied and laughed.

..._...

We enjoyed a very good meal; Cathy's cooking was good, very good!

At the end of the meal Marcus stood to make a speech.

"It has definitely been an interesting year! My, increasingly wayward, daughter is now engaged to the boy that I once warned her to stay away from... Since when did Mindy ever follow my advice? But the swear jar did pay off my mortgage!" Everybody had a laugh at my expense; what's new! "I am actually very, very pleased that Mindy chose to completely ignore me and continued to see Dave; I owe Dave for finding my daughter and keeping her safe. Over the past year, Mindy has acquired several new vigilantes for her '*Fucked Up Super Hero Club*!' Conveniently, both Chloe and Joshua are complete nut-cases, which it seems is an important criteria for joining Fusion!" This got some more laughter and Chloe and Josh sank down in their chairs. "Now, let's raise our glasses to family and friends; especially those family and friends who are absent today and for ever. They stay in our hearts and our minds, we see them in our memories and they will always be remembered..."

Everybody took a couple of minutes to think about those they had lost. I noticed Curtis with tears running down his face, being hugged by Cathy. Josh was being hugged by Chloe as tears ran across his cheeks.

..._...

After dinner we all sat down in the living room, together.

"Mom, can I ask you a very personal question?" Chloe asked.

"You can, but you might not get an answer!" Cathy replied, with a smile.

Chloe hesitated.

"You mentioned... Several months ago, when you found out about me becoming Shadow and once or twice since... You, alluded to something that happened to you and Dad, when you were young..." Chloe said, before tailing off into an awkward silence, when she saw Cathy's pained expression.

"Alluded'... That's an interesting word, Chloe. Well we have found out new things about Mindy, so I suppose it's time for this story to be told. You sure that you want to hear it, Chloe. It is *not* a happy story and I'm a bit wary about Curtis hearing it, but..."

Chloe hesitated, then nodded.

Cathy started to talk:

He was the first person that I had ever killed, or for that matter, seen killed.

Since then, excluding Fusion activities, I've killed several people in my life, but all with a pistol, or a rifle and in each of those cases I was in combat. Also they had all been at a distance.

This man, he had died by my own hand, but with his own knife. I had rammed it upwards and into his ribcage and twisted it, until he had died. He had fought me, but I had discovered superhuman strength that allowed me to continue killing that man. He had tried to lift himself up off of the knife; he was almost standing on his toes, but every time that

he tried, I had pushed the knife ever deeper into his abdomen. Blood was everywhere; I must have severed several major organs.

It had been self-defence, one hundred percent.

He, along with his brother, had tried to rape me; Ryan killed him, with that man's gun. Ryan and I were only a little older than Mindy is now, but those two bastards were twenty-three. They had coaxed me away from my friends, that night. Lucky for me, Ryan had seen them pushing me into their truck and he had come after me, on his dirt bike. His dirt bike had no lights, so they never knew that he was following us.

The man who tried to rape me, his eyes had seemed black and there had been no emotion in his eyes or face. There was no sign that he was enjoying what he was doing, he never actually said a word to me. He just pulled me out of the truck and threw me to the ground. I was almost paralysed with fear and the knowledge of what he was about to do. I was no virgin, but so far Ryan had been my first and only partner, but by consent.

The man had started to pull down my pants, ignoring my attempts at punching him. I didn't seem to hurt him, no matter what I did, which started to infuriate me. Then I saw it... The knife. It was on the man's belt, I reached for it and grabbed the hilt, reversed it, then drove it upwards into the man's stomach. He screamed and screamed, but I didn't, I couldn't ease the pressure that I had on the knife. I felt the thick, hot blood run over my hands and my body. I stood up, still pushing the blade in, then put both hands on the knife's hilt and drove it deeper into the bastard.

I was momentarily out of control and never heard the yell, from the man's brother, as he ran at me. These two brothers were not the sharpest tools in the woodshed. In this case, the second brother had left his rifle beside the truck, when he had started to run towards me after seeing his brother stabbed. I was finally brought back to reality by a rifle shot and the second brother fell to the ground and I saw Ryan standing there, with the hunting rifle to his right shoulder.

Finally, I let go of the knife and my attacker dropped soundlessly to the ground, dead. I collapsed beside him and the last thing I remembered, was Ryan grabbing me and carrying me to the truck.

..._...

I awoke the following morning, in hospital. I was clean and there was no sign of any blood, but the attack was still there in my memory.

Ryan was beside me, as were my parents. The Police had been and they had got a statement from Ryan, who had witnessed everything. The brothers' bodies had been found and had been taken to the morgue. My attacker had been found with his pants around his ankles, which backed up my story, not to mention the fact that the brothers had been bragging about wanting to rape somebody!

I was quite desirable back then, believe it or not!

Despite my being the victim and Ryan my saviour, we lived in a small community, with some that would not forgive or forget. It was politely, but forcefully, suggested that we both should be sent away, for our own good and preferably separately.

I hate to say it, but I enjoyed killing that man; he deserved it and Ryan said he was fine with killing the other brother, as he knew that the brother was probably gonna kill me! I'm not especially proud of the fact that I killed the man, nor that I seemed to enjoy it, but it had to be done. They were both bullies and enjoyed hurting people. If they hadn't died there, then they'd have probably been shot by Police or ended up in a gas chamber or electric chair!

We all just stared at Cathy, when she finished talking.

Chloe was in tears and even I was shocked.

"Well there you are; that is Catherine Bennett!" Cathy said.

"I'm sorry, Mom," Chloe said. "I should never have asked."

"Don't be silly Chloe. I think my story is very tame, compared to some others. If I hadn't wanted to tell the story, then I wouldn't have," Cathy said, giving her daughter a hug.

..._...

Something had just occurred to me.

"Marcus!" I said accusingly.

"What?" Marcus replied, with a smooth tone and an evil grin. "Took you long enough!"

"You never gave me a present!" I growled.

"I really only expected to be in the door thirty seconds, before I was strip searched!" Marcus commented, then got up and vanished.

Marcus reappeared a few minutes later carrying something very long!

"An extreme gift, for an extreme girl!" Marcus said, handing it to me.

It took me only seconds to remove the wrapping from the object and then I almost dropped it; I was shocked. It was a sword, but no ordinary sword - this fucker was longer than I was tall! It was well over five and a half feet long and quite heavy.

"It's taller than me!" I exclaimed.

"So is your Tanto!" Dave quipped.

I ignored Dave, completely!

"I've heard of these, but never seen one. It's called an Odachi, I think," I said.

"Yes, it is!" Marcus confirmed. "I was shocked when I saw that thing, but thought it was just so Mindy!"

Everybody laughed, but everybody was also very impressed and in awe of the massive sword.

"I *cannot* believe that somebody actually went into battle with one of these damn things!" I commented.

***Chapter 114*: Goodbye 2014**

***A week later
Wednesday
West Ridge***

It was New Year's Eve and 2015 was *just* around the corner!

We were all at the house, for the New Year; Marcus, Cathy, Chloe, Josh, Curtis and us two.

Things were not going well, at least not for Chloe; she had just had her ass handed to her... By Curtis!

That morning

Chloe had goaded Curtis into showing her what he could do!

Curtis had risen to Chloe's goad and had agreed to a fight, though we all knew the obvious outcome; or we thought that we did!

The pair of them had stripped down to t-shirt and jogging pants. Chloe eyed Curtis, like a crocodile would its prey. Curtis did not seem to be worried at all; in fact he had asked me for a favour and as somebody who liked to cause shit, I had been a little surprised at his request, but I had agreed!

Everybody was downstairs to watch, including Cathy, who was backing Curtis, and Josh who, naturally, was backing Chloe!

The fight started with Chloe throwing a punch at Curtis, followed by a kick, neither of which connected, surprisingly. Curtis seemed to be very quick with his movements and had obviously learnt to use his agility and mobility, to overcome his lack of stature and strength. Don't get me wrong, the kid was strong and very fit, but then so was Chloe. She had built up a lot of muscle, in her arms and legs, since we had first found her, almost a year ago and she had started some proper training, and Josh would periodically comment on her firm stomach!

Chloe was a bit slow in the recovery, from her attack, because Curtis flew in with a side thrusting kick and caught Chloe in the back, low on her right hand side and she screamed in pain and shock.

"You little rat!" She yelled and span around, catching Curtis with a roundhouse kick to his left shoulder.

Curtis absorbed the energy of the kick and caught himself before he hit the mat. I was a little worried that Chloe would forget that she was fighting a ten year-old boy and not a Russian Krysha! A few minutes later Chloe seemed to be getting the upper hand, using her experience and increased size and strength over Curtis; so I decided that it was time to even the odds... Curtis had asked me to throw in a Jō-staff, if things were going bad for him. I had no reason to say no, so I had agreed... So now I threw the staff towards Curtis and he swept it up and took up the correct stance, facing a rather shocked Chloe.

"Hey, not fucking fair!" Chloe complained.

"Who ever said fighting was fair! Vigilantes must learn to *adapt*; you never know when things might go to crap, eh, Shadow!" I retorted with an evil smirk in her direction. Chloe mouthed a rather foul obscenity at me, along with a scowl and went back to the fight. Curtis seemed to know how to use the Jō-staff, too! Where the hell had he learnt to do that?

Chloe needed all her wits about her now, as that staff would hurt, if it contacted her. To add insult to any injury, the Jō-staff was actually Shadow's own; yeah, I had a vicious streak! Curtis was looking for an opening, but Chloe was fast and kept on the move, while doing her best to keep an eye on the staff, as Curtis wielded it, very competently. Then Curtis managed to strike home and Chloe fell to the mat, rather hard and I saw Cathy wince, as Chloe screamed in pain; however the pain seemed to just make her madder and she jumped up and threw herself towards Curtis, who managed to sweep Chloe's right leg from under her and then strike her in the centre of her chest with the other end of the staff, before following through and landing on top of Chloe, as she fell onto her front.

Curtis had Chloe pinned to the mat, with a knee in her lower back and the Jō-staff across the back of her neck.

"Do you yield, Shadow?" Curtis growled.

Chloe tried to move and push Curtis off, but she was pinned and there was nothing that she could do. I approached and could hear a stream of whispered obscenities coming from the fallen Shadow! I was doing my best not to laugh at her humiliation, but Dave and Cathy added to her discomfort by applauding Curtis!

"Oh dear, Shadow... That did *not* go well..." I commented.

"Do yer think?" Chloe growled angrily and got up off the mat, as soon as Curtis had released her.

I turned to Curtis, as soon as I was back on my feet.

I felt mad, I really did. As I glared at Curtis he looked worried, not scared just worried. Curtis had surprised the hell out of me; he was really good! If I hadn't have been pissing about, then I could have put him down earlier, but I was giving him a chance - big mistake!

I smiled at my cousin.

"You did really well, Curtis... Well done! Normally the only person that puts Shadow down, is Shadow... Or Hit Girl!" I said, smirking at Mindy.

Curtis was actually blushing!

"Where the hell did you learn to use a Jō-staff, anyway?" I asked Curtis and then turned to the smirking Mindy. "And... Where the hell do *you* get off, giving *my* Jō to other people to use against *me*?"

Curtis answered first.

"I wanted to be you, Chloe; that's why I started to learn Taekwondo and Aiki-Jō. But then I saw sense and decided to just be myself!" Curtis explained, with a smug grin.

Cheeky little shit!

"Funny!" I replied and then I then growled at Curtis. "This isn't over!"

"Any time, bitch!" Curtis growled back, which got a laugh from everybody, as I felt my face getting hot.

Late that night West Ridge

"Are you absolutely sure that you want to do this?" I asked.

Chloe just looked back up at me and smiled. Her smile was intoxicating and it made me love her even more. She was looking lovelier, now that she had let her hair grow and it was spread across the pillow, framing her face.

"Yes damn it! I'm not lying here, stark naked and with my legs apart, just for my fucking health, Jackal!"

"Damn, you get tetchy at times, but it just makes me love you even more!" I replied, kneeling beside her. I was completely naked, just like Chloe and holding a small, square package in my hand.

"Just open the damn thing and do whatever you need to do with it!" Chloe growled.

I ripped open the package and pulled out the blue condom; it felt weird and it was my first condom. I worked out which way up it went and put it on; it felt strange! I moved over and knelt between Chloe's legs; I was very, very nervous, this was one hell of a step to take, for both of us! I was also worried, as I had done my homework and knew that this could hurt Chloe a lot more than it could hurt me.

Chloe was still smiling as I gently lay down on top of her and eased myself inside of her, slowly. I watched Chloe's face, searching for any sign of discomfort or pain. We had spent the past half an hour 'making out' and Chloe was very wet down below. I hoped that I wasn't going to make a mess of this, but everybody had to try things for the first time, at one stage or another!

***Dave and Mindy's Bedroom
West Ridge***

"Fucking Hell! God Dammit! That was fucking amazing!"

Chloe had yelled so loudly that we had heard her through several walls!

I looked at Mindy, who had blushed at the outburst!

"Josh must be good!" I commented with a straight face.

"Oh yeah! Pop goes the fucking cherry!" Mindy replied, before she buried her face in the pillow and started a fit of the giggles.

Author's Note: *My last chapter for 2014! A Happy New Year to you all and Good Luck for 2015!*

***Chapter 115*: A Happy New Year**

Author's Note: *A Happy New Year to everybody and welcome to 2015! I must say a big thank you to all who have supported me throughout the last six months, or so, of 2014!*

Forsaken will be continuing and so far the story does not have much of a planned anything, let alone an ending! As long as people continue to read, I will continue to write! If people have ideas or suggestions, please do not hesitate to drop a PM or a review. On the other hand, if my ideas start to drift and get weird and/or stupid; please let me know!

Over the coming months you should expect to see: new characters, new adversaries, new weapons and new equipment. There will also be excessive and gratuitous violence, worthy of Hit Girl, with a lot of blood being spilled. I also intend that there will be some decent levels of smut, too! Hopefully, something for everybody!

This will be the very first of, hopefully, many chapters for 2015.

The following morning

Thursday

West Ridge

Dave and I awoke that morning, feeling very refreshed and after a surprisingly good night's sleep, despite the night's loud interruptions!

By the time we had showered after our activities last night, Marcus and Cathy were up and in the kitchen. Dave and I grabbed a coffee each and also a plate of bacon and eggs that Cathy had cooked.

"This bacon is much better than yours, Dave!" I teased.

"You're a creep Mindy!" Cathy commented, but smiled at the compliment anyway.

"Much better than Mindy's!" Marcus said. "I'd actually rather eat the bacon raw!"

"That isn't fair!" I growled.

Curtis appeared next, looking a little bit tired. He was closely followed by a shy looking Chloe and a smirking Josh.

"Morning, kids! Happy New Year!" I announced and got muted responses from each of them. They both seemed a little bit tired!

"What do you guys want for breakfast? Bacon and eggs?" Cathy asked innocently, then she smirked and looked directly at Chloe and Josh, who seemed to shrink away. "Fruit juice? No *cherry* anymore, though!"

Chloe just stood completely still, with her mouth open and she went very, very red! Josh just grinned, sheepishly. I started to laugh and so did Dave and Marcus. Curtis, did not seem to have a clue about what was going on!

"You are so evil, Cathy!" I commented. "Well done!"

Chloe glared at me.

"Yeah! What was all that shouting about last night, Chloe?" Curtis asked. "What was so amazing?"

Chloe ignored Curtis.

"Well?" I asked Chloe. "Curtis needs an explanation!"

Chloe was still unable to move and her mouth was flapping like a grounded fish! Finally she got her voice back.

"Well he's *not* getting an explanation from *me* and *not* before he's thirteen!" Chloe said, trying desperately to avoid everybody's eyes and grinning faces, before turning on Josh. "Joshua, help me!"

"I got nothing!" Josh admitted after a short pause.

"Boys are so fucking useless!" Chloe growled and then blushed a bit more. "Sorry!"

"Josh didn't seem so useless, last night!" Cathy said and she seemed to be enjoying her daughter's intense discomfort.

"I think Curtis still wants an answer!" I pushed.

"Well the little shit can stick his answer... Dammit! Okay Curtis... Sex... That's was what was so amazing! Happy now?"

Chloe looked very embarrassed.

"Okay!" Curtis said, simply. "It must have been good; the whole damn zip code heard you two!"

I was no longer a virgin.

Nobody was complaining about that fact, but instead they were all making outrageous jokes at my and Josh's expense! Okay, I admit that I *may* have been a little bit noisy, last night! But it *was* the best feeling ever; I had *never* felt anything like it! Should we have waited? Probably, but we would both be fifteen in another six or seven months, but... I thought it was worth it and apparently so did Josh.

Well, the main thing, was that Mindy wouldn't be able to tease me about having sex with Josh; or so I thought!

Mindy could be so fucking evil!

..._..._...

At dinner that night I was rather pleased that nobody had anything further to say about Josh and me! While that was a surprise, it was also a pleasant one. Although I had only just embarked on my sex life, I had absolutely no desire for it to be part of general conversation and discussion, neither did I want it to get out at school! The other big surprise was Mom; I didn't know how she would feel about me being 'de-flowered', but the fact that so far, she had only joked about it, seemed a good start and I didn't even want to contemplate what Dad would say!

It had been good to be together with Mindy and Dave, over Christmas and New Year. They were both more than friends and fellow vigilantes to me; they were family. Dave was a big brother and Mindy a big sister. This meant that I could talk to either of them about things that I couldn't talk to Mom or Dad about; like sex.

I must have been daydreaming, because Mindy's voice brought me back to reality.

"You actually going to eat? Or are you dreaming about that super-hot sex, last night!"

"Err... No... I was just... Never mind!" I stammered, feeling everybody's eyes on me.

"Or were you dreaming about your future kids?" Mindy added.

"You evil fucker..." I exclaimed, as Josh just burst out laughing.

"And fuck you too!" I finished.

"That's all it takes!" Mom said.

After dinner that evening I was standing outside, on the deck.

It was very cold, but I wanted to be alone; I was worried, very worried. I felt that something was brewing.

Just then I felt an arm wrap itself around my waist and it wasn't Dave; the arm was too small. I looked down to my left and found Curtis looking up at me; he wasn't smiling.

"You okay?" I asked. I knew that Curtis had had a rough couple of days, what with this being his first New Year without his parents.

"I'll be fine; life continues. I'm worried about you... You look unhappy."

I smiled down at Curtis, before answering.

"I can feel trouble approaching. There are storm clouds gathering over Chicago and I have a city to protect," I replied, taking Curtis into my confidence. "I have a feeling that two thousand and fifteen, is gonna be full of trouble!"

There was silence for a couple of minutes, before Curtis responded.

"You're not alone Mindy. We are all standing alongside you and we're all ready to fight with you. You'll guide us through the storm, like you normally do; I believe in you and I know the others do too."

Quite a speech from a ten year-old! I came down to his level and looked into his hazel eyes.

"You are wise beyond your years, Curtis. Thanks."

Curtis smiled back at me.

"Thanks Mindy, you're the greatest!"

***Chapter 116*: And It Begins**

The three dark forms stood, side by side, on the street.

It was after midnight, the area was dark and very white.

The dark forms were masked and hooded, with cloaks; their entire outfit was black and dark grey with a silver trim. The only visible skin was around the eyes. Each bore a sword on their backs that was angled with the grip to their left shoulder and two of them had quivers of arrows on their backs and a large, black and silver compound bow in their left hands.

The drug dealers just stared at the three apparitions, as they emerged from the swirling snow, and then looked at each other, before running for it. They didn't get far as the two apparitions with the bows, raised their weapons and then each notched and released an arrow. Seconds later, the two dealers fell face down into the snow. A single arrow shaft extended vertically from the back of each body.

Both men were very dead.

The dark forms proceeded to gather up all of the money and drugs, before vanishing back into the dark night and swirling snow.

Later that day

Friday

West Ridge

"Go!" I growled, into my cell.

"Hit Girl! It's Voight. Happy New Year! You guys been using your bows, recently?"

"No, just bullets!" I responded. "And a Happy New Year to you guys, too!"

"Well, we have two dead bodies from last night: two drug dealers, with arrows in their backs. Not overly bothered about the dealers, but I might need to do you for littering!"

"Funny! Not us, this time, Voight. Let us know if you find out anything; we may have some competition in town!" I replied.

"Will do!" Voight said and dropped the connection.

"What was that about?" Dave asked.

I passed on the gist of the call.

"Another archer?"

"I hope not!" I responded, unconsciously rubbing my left arm, where The Archer had hit me. "But, we take shields when we go out!"

"Better safe than sorry!" Dave agreed.

Two days later

Sunday

Safehouse A

"Okay, be safe! You both got your shields?"

"Yes, Hit Girl!" Shadow and Jackal replied.

"Then let's hit the road!" Kick-Ass said.

Due to the reports of these mysterious archers, I had decided to forgo the motorcycles for Jackal and Shadow, but I retained my Ducati and kept myself mobile by weaving around Beast and trying not to stay in one place too long. I vividly remembered what had happened the last time that we had met an archer while I was on a motorcycle!

This was to be a routine patrol to try and find some more information about these people. We had decided to err on the side of caution and walk away from any fight; at least until we knew what we were up against.

We headed towards the centre of Chicago and drove around the dark, but currently busy streets. After a couple of hours, we started to get a little restless, with no action. We had not even seen *any* criminal activity, which in its self, was a little strange for a start!

..._...

"Fucking hell!" Kick-Ass shouted, as he stood on the brakes.

I did the same, coming to a smoky halt on the Ducati.

Directly in front of us, about twenty yards away was... Well I didn't quite know what, exactly. For some reason, two words came to my mind: Skyrim and Nightingale! It was definitely a woman, though and she wore a sword on her back and held a compound bow in her left hand. She stared at us for a moment, then nodded and ran down an alleyway.

The alleyway was narrow and partially blocked so Beast could not follow.

"Battle Guy, where does that alley lead?" I asked. It was obviously a trap, so I wanted to be prepared.

"Checking... Okay, it leads behind the block and to a parking lot, which should be empty at this time of night," Battle Guy advised.

..._...

We drove around to the parking lot and found three similarly equipped Nightingale's waiting for us. The one that I had seen previously had taken up position to my left of the other two. The one in the centre had a sword, but no bow or quiver and seemed to be the leader. We left Beast and the Ducati and approached. Battle Guy was watching, using a camera mounted in Beast. We stopped when we were approximately fifty feet away; Kick-Ass was to my right, with Shadow to my left and Jackal to the right of Kick-Ass. Shadow had her compound bow in her hand and an arrow notched. Jackal was similarly prepared and so was I.

"We are the Sisters of Trinity," The three woman chanted, together.

"We are Dusk," The woman on the left started.

"We are Shade," The woman on the right continued.

"We are Night," The woman in the centre finished.

"Nice!" I growled sarcastically. "Why are you in Chicago? I protect this City!"

"I don't think so, Hit Girl!" The woman called Night said. "Your reign is over!"

All three women were using voice modulators, just like those that Jackal and Kick-Ass used. In unison, the outer pair of women raised their bows, while the other drew her sword.

..._...

"You are finished!" I growled in response, as I raised my bow and released an arrow, then rapidly seized another arrow and notched it to the string.

My first arrow, which was aimed at the woman in the centre, called Night, was deflected by the armour on her left arm!

"Damn!" I growled and released my next arrow and then another and another, in rapid succession, all at Night.

She moved fast flipping to the left behind Shade, who loosed off an arrow at Shadow, who in turn responded with her own arrow before raising a shield in front of her face and deflecting the arrow fired by Shade. Jackal released *his*

arrow at Dusk, just as she released hers at him. He repeated Shadow's movement and raised his shield, deflecting the incoming arrow.

All of my arrows had missed Night, while one had hit Dusk, but failed to embed itself in her armour.

"They have body armour!" I called over the Comms. "Probably at least Type IIA."

We advanced on 'The Nightingales', as I had decided to call them, at least for now. The archers slung their bows and unsheathed their swords. The swords looked to be hefty, but fully functional and battle-ready. They were of a single handed design with a broad two-edged blade and a sharp point. These swords required a method of fighting, which was very different from my Katana swords. They also had a much longer reach than Jackal's ninja-to or Shadow's bō-staff.

"Shadow, Jackal, you will both need to keep moving and watch out for those swords, they have a longer reach than anything you have. Use your speed and agility!" I advised over the Comms. "You take care Kick-Ass!"

"Understood!" Jackal replied.

"I can do that!" Shadow responded.

..._...

I laid the compound bow down and unsheathed both of my Katana swords, before I advanced on Night, while Kick-Ass prepared his Ko-Wakizashi swords.

My twin blades clashed with her single blade. Night had strength and a couple of inches of height on me, plus more body mass. This could be an even fight; I wasn't complacent enough to assume that I could win every fight and definitely not against somebody completely new and unknown.

My first concern was that my Katana blades may not be able to stand up to the attacks, from the much heavier blade. So far, though, my blades were standing up very well. The main problem was that Night's sword was physically heavy, by design; unlike my twin swords. This extra weight could be used to help drive back an adversary, such as myself.

Beside me, Kick-Ass was using his own weight to overcome his light and short blades, he managed to drive his armoured fist and the hilt of the sword that it held, into the face of Shade.

Shade screamed and fell backwards. At that, Night yelled out in anger and Dusk struck out at Shadow, catching her across her mouth and Shadow fell backwards to the ground. Night called a single command, which I was unable to make out; they must have been using Comms. The three Nightingales jumped onto three, identical looking, black motorcycles that were fitted with dual purpose tyres. I instantly noticed that these were very powerful machines.

I ran for my Ducati, while Jackal helped Shadow up and then they and Kick-Ass ran for Beast.

"They're Yamaha Super Tenere World Crosser motorcycles. You guys don't have the acceleration, or the manoeuvrability. Hang back and track me!" I ordered.

"Hit Girl, I'll monitor traffic and send warnings to your visor!" Battle Guy reported.

The Nightingales accelerated away, out of the parking lot and headed south. I followed on the Ducati. We turned and crossed South Ashland Avenue and accelerated in an easterly direction, along West 71st Street. We weaved between the traffic, approaching sixty miles per hour. I had a vague idea where they might be heading.

My suspicions were confirmed as they slowed and made a hard left turn after crossing the Dan Ryan Expressway and took the on-ramp heading north. I followed, after negotiating the busy junction and accelerating down the on-ramp.

Dan Ryan Expressway

The three 'sisters' sped onto the Dan Ryan Expressway, northbound and rapidly accelerated to over eighty miles per hour, the three motorcycles weaved in and out of the, thankfully light, traffic. I kept my focus on the leader, whose motorcycle was more of a very dark grey, rather than black of the other two. None of the motorcycles bore a registration plate, or any obvious signs of external identification. I weaved in and out of the traffic about twenty yards behind. Battle Guy was constantly feeding me traffic information, concerning what was up ahead. So far there were

no issues, so it was still relatively safe to ride at high speed. This was one of the main things, in life that I loved: speed! My machine and my skills were perfectly matched for this chase, which was, admittedly, my first. The adrenalin was pumping through my veins, just as the gas was pumping through the engine of my Ducati.

All four motorcycles were receiving angry horn blasts from concerned motorists; it wouldn't be long before CPD joined the pursuit.

"Pass me a doughnut."

"What type...? Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn!" Fellowes exclaimed. "Four motorcycles going hell for leather and guess who was trailing in fourth?"

"Evil Knievel?" Murphy replied facetiously.

"Better: Hit Girl!"

"Cool; we saw nothing... Pass those doughnuts and quit pinching the best ones!"

Within minutes things started to get more dangerous, as motorists had a nasty habit of changing lanes without any form of signalling or other warning and this required split second responses and decision making. I had to make use of all the available lanes, including the shoulder, to avoid other vehicles and still keep the escaping Sisters of Trinity in sight. We touched one hundred and twelve miles per hour, but only for a minute, before we dropped back below the hundred.

I had no idea where the sisters were heading. They knew I was there, chasing them and I had plenty of gas, so I could chase them for a while. Kick-Ass and the others would be following me at a much safer pace, but what would I do if I did catch up to them? I was alone against three very formidable opponents. Yes they were running, but not because they were scared, but because they were calculating and knew when to call it a day!

For a short moment I lost sight of the three motorcycles and just when I had expected to regain contact... They were gone! I searched every lane ahead of me, but saw no motorcycles – not one!

"Fusion! I've lost them!" I called, dejectedly, decelerating to a much safer and much less conspicuous speed.

"How?" Kick-Ass replied.

"I lost sight of them for a few seconds and they never reappeared!" I replied angrily.

Later that evening Safehouse A

I almost threw my helmet across the Safehouse, but quickly reminded myself that it cost almost a thousand bucks!

I placed the helmet in the rack and went to check on Chloe who was removing her helmet and mask. She had a livid bruise on her left jaw.

"That looks sore!" I commented and received a weak grin from Chloe.

"Just hurts when I move my mouth," Chloe said, slowly.

"That should give our ears a rest!" Marty commented.

"Yeah, and Josh will only be able to rely on your hand rather than your mouth!" Kim quipped.

Josh and Dave burst out laughing. I tried to restrain myself, as the look on Chloe's face was priceless, but in the end I gave in and even Chloe laughed, despite the pain.

***Chapter 117*: A Force To Be Reckoned With**

The next day
Monday

Josh had some new competition at school, but then so did Chloe!

There were a pair of new kids at the high school and guess what? They were both British! Also, from what I had heard, Chloe and Josh's first day back on Monday, had not gone well!

Now, I was not one to gossip, but it was still a funny story.

Lake View High School

Chloe and I had been chatting at lunch.

Kyle was sitting next to Chloe, while Avery and Riley were either side of me. Mike was on the other side of Chloe and sitting next to Ethan. We had all been discussing our Christmas and New Year activities. Currently the subject was Hit Girl and the new vigilantes that had appeared just before the previous weekend. Chloe and I were doing our best to join in, but also to keep our faces straight and not leak any unnecessary information. Avery insisted on going on about her 'hero': Jackal! Mike seemed to fancy Shadow, which was kinda complicated, considering that he was unknowingly sitting right next to her!

Apparently, Kyle thought that Shadow was very hot, too and that she had some very nice curves to her body! I really couldn't work Kyle out... On the one hand I was certain that he knew about Chloe and me, but on the other hand he had never said anything... Or even hinted, for that matter. Then two new faces had halted the conversation, when they came and sat down at the table.

"Hi, I'm Dean!" A boy said, sitting down beside Kyle. The boy seemed to be a bit older than us, maybe in the year above.

He immediately got my attention, because he 'talked like me', as Chloe said to refer to anybody with a British accent.

"Hello!" I replied. "I'm Josh."

"Ah! So you're the other civilised person around here! Somebody mentioned that there was another Brit in the year. Good to meet you Josh! This is my sister, Juno," Dean said, pointing to the girl who had sat down beside him.

"Hello Josh," Juno said, checking me out. She was about Chloe's height and build, but with long, dark brown hair. She smiled at me and it was the sort of smile that would enrage Chloe, if she saw it...

Too late, Chloe had seen it and her eyes narrowed. Kyle saw this too and dived in quickly to defuse the potentially explosive situation.

"Dean, Juno; I'm Kyle. This is Avery, Riley, Mike, Ethan and Josh's girlfriend, Chloe," Kyle announced, pointing out each of us in turn.

Luckily, before things got any more awkward, lunch was over. As I was walking away, I overheard Kyle talking to Juno.

"Stay away from Josh... If you know what's good for you!"

North Park Elementary School

I was a little concerned, well, worried might have been a better word, about starting at a new school, but pleased to be with my best friend.

At lunchtime I sat with Curtis and was joined by *his* best friends. It wasn't so bad, because Curtis, himself, had only started at this school in the last weeks of last year.

"Guys, this is Megan!" Curtis said and introduced me to Zach, Jake and Nikki.

"Hi Megan, good to meet you. I assume you're just as nuts as Curtis!" Jake said, smiling.

"Not *quite* as bad!" I advised them.

"You'll do then!" Nikki admitted.

These guys seemed nice, but my mind kept drifting back to my visit to the Safehouse with Mindy. Her life seemed so exciting, but I was stuck here in school. But on the plus side, I knew about Hit Girl, which Curtis did not!

West Ridge

Back to my own troubles!

Those new nutcases, from last night. They were female, which was a change, I supposed. They were well protected, despite the appalling choice in costume. They also had a warped sense of humour for their characters, although I got the idea that they were not entirely serious. Maybe they were just nuts!

That was another potential problem! If they were nuts, then they would be particularly dangerous to everybody. What were they doing here? Why were they here? They were obviously challenging us, or more specifically *me*! But that just brings me back to the other questions.

I was also very mad about losing these so-called Nightingales last night – nobody outrides Hit Girl on a motorcycle!

I kept replaying the chase in my mind, trying to find how they could have literally vanished from almost directly in front of me. Marty was examining video, from the chase, which while quite cool and a little like a roller-coaster ride, yielded nothing.

That really pissed me off!

The next night Tuesday

The fight had been joined.

I wasn't exactly sure if we had found the three Nightingales, or if they had found *us*.

Dusk attacked me with some reasonably advanced martial-arts skills. She was about six to eight inches taller than me and was strong, as well as skilled. So far everything that I had come up with was being defeated. Don't get me wrong, I had landed some good hits, but she had also landed some good ones on me too and those hits had damn well hurt! I could see Kick-Ass fighting Shade, while Hawk fought Night.

Our fight seemed to be at a stalemate, so Dusk drew her sword and we pushed each other back, as we struck forward with our blades. I would definitely need to get hold of a broad-sword, if I was going to be fighting these nutcases.

I had also noticed that the pair of us were steadily moving away from the others, as we fought, which was not good. Dusk then fell backwards and dropped her sword, but I moved swiftly forward so that she had no time to pick the blade back up. Instead she drew a concealed pistol, which I had not seen before. It was a standard issue FN Five-seveN, which was capable of penetrating my body armour. I needed to be careful, very careful!

I stowed my blades and drew my pistols, as I threw myself behind a car to avoid the bullets fired at me by Dusk. I fired back and at least two of my shots hit Dusk, but had no effect, apart from throwing her off balance! I moved out from cover and dove across the street to better cover. But as I did, I felt a bullet impact my back, but low down. I put a hand behind me and found a hole in my utility belt, right where my Comms equipment was mounted. I also realised that my Comms had gone silent.

"Kick-Ass, Battle Guy! I've lost Hit Girl's Comms and GPS. I last had her heading west from your position!"

I took a chance and looked around me, while I was fighting Shade. There was no sign of Hit Girl, nor of the third

Nightingale. Shade took my momentary lapse in attention as a chance to push forward her attack. I returned the thought and drove Shade back. Hawk was still fighting Night and they seemed fairly evenly matched, from what I could make out.

I was worried about Hit Girl, but knew that she was more than capable of looking after herself.

I was in the worst possible situation.

I was alone and without any form of communications! I had lost sight of Kick-Ass and Hawk; I really could not believe that I had done something so stupid! Then the situation had just got worse...

I felt two bullets impact my left side, lower down and the pain was excruciating. I struggled to my feet and fired back almost a dozen rounds. I hit Dusk and she cried out in pain, before she turned and ran away from me.

I intended to pursue, but started to feel really strange. I went down on one knee, for a minute and then I realised that the chase was over and that I needed to get to safety as soon as possible, before I collapsed. I looked around me, to get my bearings. I was close to Safehouse C; less than a mile away, to the east. If I could climb a fire escape, then I could cut across the roofs to the Safehouse.

Night and Dusk had suddenly broken off the fight and run.

I had the impression that they had just received a message from their colleague, but I had no idea if it were good news or bad news, for them or us.

Hawk and I clambered into Beast, parked half a mile away and we started searching to the west for Hit Girl.

***Chapter 118*: Wildcat and Lynx**

Later that night
Tuesday
South Cottage Grove

I was bored.

School nights were kinda boring, so I tended to wander around our apartment building and generally be a nosy bitch!

Despite living on the second floor, I regularly wandered around the first and the fourth floors. Why? Because I was very curious about two apartments: 101 and 401. These two apartments had concealed keypads and the doors, although they looked almost normal, were not; they appeared much more solid than our apartment door and no lock or handle was actually visible on the outside of the doors.

Right now I was on the fourth floor, 'patrolling', when I heard a noise at the end of the corridor, a few yards beyond apartment 401. There was a door there that led to some stairs and then the roof of the apartment block.

I fell down the stairs that led from the hatch in the roof and hit the door at the bottom. I pushed it open and crawled along the floor.

The pain and the blood loss, from the bullet wounds were causing me to pass out, but I had to fight it; I had to get to safety. I managed to get to the Safehouse door and then I tried in vain to reach for the keypad. Damn, I should really install a keypad on the floor! I kept trying to reach the keypad, but then I sensed somebody standing close by.

"What's the code?"

I looked up and saw the shape of somebody looking down at me.

"What's the damn code?"

I looked closer; it was Megan! Thank God!

"Six – eight – four – seven – five – two – zero - nine." Just saying the numbers was exhausting.

Megan had punched the numbers into the keypad, as I had said them and the door to the Safehouse had clicked open. Megan pushed open the heavy, armoured door and then she had tried to drag me; but I was way too heavy for her. I used the last of my energy and dragged myself through the door, but then I must have passed out.

Safehouse C

I pushed the heavy door shut and stared down at Hit Girl.

Her eyes were still closed and she wasn't moving. I knelt down and shook her, hard, but she didn't respond. I stood up and flicked on the light switches that were beside the door. As the lights came on, I looked around the room and saw racks of weapons and sharp swords; the room was very much like the armoury at the other Safehouse that I had seen before Christmas. There were two computers and a large TV screen, on the far wall by a window that looked out onto a brick wall. I looked in vain for a phone, but only found what looked like a radio. It was large, heavy and green. I turned it on and pressed the talk button.

West of I-94

We were getting precisely nowhere!

There was no sign of Hit Girl anywhere, but we had found her Ducati by its encrypted LoJack system. I was more than a little concerned to find the Ducati seemingly abandoned! While Hawk continued her search, I took the Ducati back to Safehouse A.

I had just left the Safehouse, on the Fat Boy, when my headset burst into life.

"Fusion... This is... Wildcat... Hit Girl is hurt... I need help... Please!"

Safehouse C

I let go of the button.

Seconds passed, then...

"Wildcat, this is Kick-Ass! Where are you?"

I pressed the button again.

"I'm in a room full of weapons... In my block, on the top floor. Hit Girl is hurt bad and she needs help!" I let go of the button again. I felt tears running down my face; I was scared and worried, my hands were trembling. The radio came to life again...

"This is Battle Guy, VOX is now enabled for Wildcat... Wildcat you don't need to press the button to talk; we will be able to hear everything!"

"Wildcat, I'm on the way to you," Kick-Ass advised. "You are at Safehouse C, but I'm gonna need fifteen minutes or more... Help is on the way!"

The radio went silent, then two minutes later it jumped back to life...

"Wildcat, this is Medic! Can you move Hit Girl?"

"No, she's too heavy for me!"

Silence again...

"Wildcat," It was Kick-Ass again. "Get Lynx... You know who I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, I do!" I replied, jumping up.

I ran out of the Safehouse and down the two flights of stairs that took me from the fourth to the second floor.

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Once on the second floor, I ran along the corridor and then I literally burst through my front door.

"Megan! What are you doing...? What is that on your hands...? Is that blood?" Paige Wilson asked aghast, getting worried.

"No time Mom, I need you to come with me!"

I dragged my Mom up to the fourth floor and punched in the code to the Safehouse again.

"You know the code to this apartment?" Mom queried.

"No time, Mom!" I replied and pushed the heavy door open.

"Oh - my God!" Paige Wilson almost screamed at the sight in front of her and she brought her hands up to her mouth. She looked around the room taking in all of the weapons and then the still form of Hit Girl... Plus the blood on the floor.

I pushed the door closed.

"Medic... I'm back with Lynx!" I called out.

"Huh!" Mom asked, confused.

"Mom, you're Lynx!" I whispered to Mom.

"Lynx, this is Medic! I need you to help me with Hit Girl... Help is on the way, but still about ten to fifteen minutes out.

Can you help us?"

..._...

Paige Wilson was shocked, but sorted herself out remarkably quickly.

"Yes! Tell me what to do!"

"Okay, we need to examine Hit Girl... Is she breathing?"

"Yes!"

"Now, take off her mask... You will recognise her, but do *not* say her name. Understood!"

"Yes, I understand!"

I watched as my Mom gently eased the mask off of the unconscious Hit Girl. Once Mindy's face was revealed, Mom took a sharp intake of breath, when she recognised her boss. I was expecting an outburst, but Mom just said one word...

"Figures!" She said, resignedly and rolled her eyes.

"Yeah... Tell me about it!" Medic replied. "Now, check her face and head; any marks, cuts, blood?"

"Just some bruising around her jaw."

"Now her neck."

"No visible injuries or bumps."

"Next, you need to remove the top of her combat suit; ease it off carefully, over her head."

I helped my Mom to remove the top of Mindy's combat suit. Underneath she wore a thin t-shirt and a sports bra. Mom pulled down the bottom half of Mindy's combat suit, so we could see Mindy's stomach.

"Done... Oh my God! There's blood, lots of blood... Mostly on her left side, but I'm not sure..."

"Look around the Safehouse; you should see a large black case..."

"Found it!" I said and dragged it over; it was heavy!

I watched as my Mom laid the case down and opened it; it was full of medical equipment.

"Okay, put on some rubber gloves and then check the top of the case. Pull out two of the large square packets and open them; you will find sterile gauze pads. Use one to clean around the wounds and another to cover them. Secure it in place with the tape that you will also find in the top of the case."

I passed over some rubber gloves and Mom put them on. She used some special scissors from the case, to cut away the blood-soaked t-shirt. Then I passed over the square packets, which Mom ripped open and she wiped away most of the blood, revealing two circular wounds. Mindy had been shot, twice! Mom then taped gauze over the two wounds.

"Check underneath her, see if the bullets went all the way through," Medic instructed, once Mom had reported the wounds dressed.

"There are no exit wounds, just the two on top."

"No problem... I should be with you in about five minutes."

The heavy door to the Safehouse suddenly flew open and Kick-Ass ran in, followed by Hawk, who closed the door behind her.

Both pulled off their masks, revealing Dave and Kim.

"You know, this answers so many questions!" Mom commented, looking at Dave and Kim.

"Sorry!" Dave said with an apologetic smile and knelt down beside Mindy.

"She's been shot twice and lost a lot of blood," Mom explained to Dave.

A few minutes later Dr Bennett appeared at the door and Dave let her in.

"I need to get those bullets out!" Dr Bennett said immediately.

Five minutes later, Dr Bennett had Mindy lying on a table in just her underwear and had started to operate on her wounds. Kim took me and my Mom into another room, while Dave stayed with Mindy. We sat down in the kitchen and tried not to listen to the sounds coming from the other room.

..._...

Twenty minutes later, Dr Bennett appeared in the kitchen, pulled off her blood-covered gloves and washed her hands.

"Is Mindy going to be okay?" I asked, unable to hide the concern in my voice.

"She'll be fine Megan; Mindy has had much worse. She's resting in bed now and Dave's with her."

"Thank God!" Mom said. "This is all a bit of a shock to me!"

"I can believe that! Thank you for your help, both of you," Dr Bennett said. "You did really well Megan and you too, Paige."

"Megan, you knew about Mindy before tonight, didn't you?" Kim enquired.

"Yes... I did. I figured it out some time ago. Dave, Chloe and Josh, too!"

"You did?" Mom asked, surprised.

"I promised to keep it a secret."

"Well done!" Dr Bennett commented, approvingly.

"Good on you, kid!" Kim said and I started to feel my cheeks getting very hot.

"I always thought that you were trustworthy!" Dave added, coming into the kitchen.

"How's Mindy?" I asked.

"She's sleeping for now. I've tucked her into bed; she'll stay here till some time tomorrow," Dave replied. "Thanks, all of you and especially you, Wildcat!"

I now felt myself blushing wildly!

"I'm really proud of you!" My Mom said to me.

The following morning
Wednesday
Safehouse C

I opened my eyes to find a face staring down at me.

"Morning Hit Girl!"

It was Megan and she looked really, really happy for some reason or another!

"Hello Megan... What are you doing here?" I asked, looking around the room. I recognised it immediately, as Safehouse C and had just realised that Megan should not have been in here and then it suddenly occurred to me that I shouldn't be in here either!

"You were shot, *twice*, last night. I helped you into the Safehouse," Megan explained, proudly, on seeing my confused expression.

I started to remember things. I looked under the duvet and found that I was wearing nothing but my underwear. I also saw a large dressing on my left side. I tried to move and pain shot up my side and I screamed. Megan looked horror struck.

"It's okay Megan! It just hurts a bit!" I said and I felt a little weak. "Where's err, Kick-Ass?"

"You mean *Dave*?" Megan asked. "I met the other side of Hawk, too, last night and I'd already worked out Chloe and Josh; not exactly hard!"

"You've figured it all out then?"

"You think I'm *that* stupid?"

"No, definitely not!" I replied with a laugh, which caused me more pain.

"Dave just popped out and left me to keep an eye on you. He said that you tend to misbehave when you've been injured... It's almost lunchtime and you've been asleep for over twelve hours!"

"That explains why I feel like shit!" I said resignedly. "Now you know about everybody; I suppose I can tell you that Curtis knows all about us all, too!"

"*Curtis*? He hid that well!" Megan commented sourly. "Asshole!"

"Don't blame him!" I laughed. "He's known about us all, since last summer. He also knows that if he told anybody, even you, then I would chop him up into tiny little pieces!"

Megan started to look a little worried.

"Does that apply to me, then?"

"I trust you Megan. Do I *need* to warn you?"

"No, you don't... Oh, by the way, my Mom knows, too!"

That was a concern; I hadn't planned on Paige finding out!

"How did she find out?" Mindy asked.

"You were far too heavy for me, so Dave told me to fetch my Mom. Dr Bennett talked my Mom through finding your wounds and treating you, until she arrived. We used our codenames all the time! Mom likes Lynx, by the way and she thinks Wildcat is *cute*, too!" I explained with a grimace. Wildcat was *not* supposed to be *cute*!

There was a knock on the Safehouse door.

"But I didn't give her the code, though!" I added, as I looked at the monitor that showed the passageway outside. It was my Mom. I pressed the button to release the door and my Mom pushed it open, then closed it behind her.

"She's awake!" I said, simply and followed Mom into the bedroom.

"Hi Boss!" Paige said cheerfully, as she came into the bedroom.

"Hi Paige. Thanks for helping me out last night; I owe you a big bonus! I fully expect you to be mad at me for hiding all this from you..."

"Mindy! Stop before you embarrass yourself!" Paige insisted. "I always thought there was something strange about you guys, but I also kinda knew that you guys were for good and not up to anything bad. Illegal maybe, but *not* bad!"

"Thanks Paige... You're still getting a bonus, though!" I insisted.

"How's the wound?" Paige asked.

"Hurts like hell!"

"Well that's what happens when you gallivant around Chicago fighting crime!" Paige said in a motherly way.

"You sound like Marcus!" I groaned.

***Chapter 119*: Marcus Again**

Three days later
Saturday evening
West Ridge

Everybody was over for a little Fusion 'get together'.

Unfortunately, some there that night had taken that description a little *too* literally! Kim and Marty were permanently glued together, on one couch, while Josh and Chloe were enthusiastically groping each other, on the other couch!

"Not very much different than when they're in class!" Isaac had commented, dryly, as he had walked past them.

But something else was *much* more disturbing than all that kissing and fondling... Marcus!

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I had just come back from the dining room, where we had setup a small buffet, for people to help themselves from. Cathy was currently in there with Curtis and Abby. Megan had spent most of the evening following me around and in this case she had followed me into the kitchen and we had both stopped suddenly and shouted out in disgust, at the same time!

"Mom!"

"Marcus!"

"What!" Marcus responded, sounding annoyed, once he had removed his lips from Paige's.

"I'm in enough fucking pain!" I growled angrily and walked out of the kitchen, dragging an appalled Megan with me.

I thought that I was more embarrassed than angry!

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I shoved Chloe, roughly, off of the couch, but she just sat herself back on Josh's knee and they continued with their kissing and fondling!

I ignored them both and sat down with the rather disgusted looking Megan.

"How long have they been at it?" I asked.

"I have no idea!" Megan replied. "I did see them together, once or twice, over Christmas."

"What the hell next? You and Curtis?"

"That *would* be disgusting!"

"I thought you had a thing for him!" I teased.

Megan blushed and mumbled something.

"She does?"

I looked behind me to find Curtis, with a sly grin on his face. I then looked at Megan, who looked like she wanted to die!

"Oh, you mean it was a secret?" I asked Megan facetiously, who gave me one of her glares.

"Sorry!" I said and made room for Curtis to sit down beside Megan.

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Dave appeared.

"Everybody seems to be eating each other, instead of the food!"

"Tell me about it! I just found Paige and Marcus 'kissing and petting!'"

"Oh, I thought I saw something along those lines at Christmas," Dave remembered.

"So everybody knew about Marcus and Paige except for me?"

"Looks like it!" Cathy commented, as she came up behind me.

"Great! I'm not just in physical pain, but I'm now in mental pain... You know, this sort of thing could make somebody go completely fucking nuts and - and..."

"...Become a vigilante?" Dave offered and I glared at him.

"Cool! Can I become one then?" Megan asked excitedly.

"NO!" Dave, Cathy and I responded loudly.

Megan looked really put out!

"Don't worry! They said the same thing to me, too, when I asked!" Curtis admitted, putting his arm around Megan.

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The asshole was now doing it quite openly!

He also very well knew that I was *not* happy about it; but what could I do? I wanted Marcus to be happy, but... I shuddered at the thought of what else might be happening!

Anyway, there was something more important about to happen. I called everybody together so that I could make a short speech.

"We have had a difficult week, ever since those damned nutcase Nightingales appeared and yes, I managed to get myself shot, *again!*" I announced and got a brief laugh in response.

"Now, I owe my life, *again*, to two people, both of whom are new to the world of Fusion. Err... Marcus, if you could let go of Paige for a *few* minutes... Megan..."

Megan and Paige came up and stood beside me.

"Firstly I have to thank a certain young lady, who was able to help me in my time of need. Megan... Or should I say Wildcat, showed immense courage, *way* beyond her years, in helping me to safety in Safehouse C and then she had the presence of mind to call for help, from the right people. She had not been trained on our equipment, but she still knew how to call for help. I have listened to the entire radio conversation of that night and I was amazed by how calm and collected Wildcat was and I am backed up by Dave, who was also very impressed."

Dave nodded his agreement.

"Yes, Megan had correctly worked out my biggest secret, some months ago, but Paige was still in the dark. Dave had no choice but to call on the help of an adult, as I was too heavy for Megan to move. I was also very impressed with the courage of Lynx, too and I wouldn't have blamed her, if she had taken one look at me, bleeding all over a room full of weapons and run for it!"

"Again, after listening to the recording and hearing how Paige skilfully followed the instructions of the dreaded Dr Bennett; I was incredibly impressed. Although what Paige meant by '*figures*', when she first saw who was under Hit Girl's mask, I am not exactly sure! For now, I have to thank our newest members: Wildcat and Lynx!"

Everybody showed their appreciation for Paige and Megan, with applause. Megan looked like she was about to burst into tears! Paige, though, seemed to enjoy all the attention.

"Thank you, everybody!" Paige said, once the applause had died down. "I always thought something was a bit odd about some of the people at D-JAK. Mindy, though she seemed to be a bit of a nutcase, she was always a great boss. I guessed that you guys were up to something, but always believed that whatever it was, was for good, illegal, but good. I know that Marcus thinks Mindy is a bit of a nutcase, too and has never been happy with what she does,

however, I believe in what Mindy has built."

"This evening I have heard a lot about Dave and Mindy, including how they came to be here today, doing what they do. I will always be thankful for that day, when Hit Girl turned up at my front door with Megan and then later, when she offered us a new start in life. Thank you Mindy... Thank you Fusion!"

Paige turned and gave me a hug. Damn! I'm fucking crying in front of everyone, again!

"Damn! There is a human side to the girl, after all!" Marcus said, coming over.

"It's good to have you on the team, Wildcat!" Curtis said to Megan.

"Thanks, Trojan!" Megan responded.

..._...

"I've been meaning to ask: how did the first classes go, at D-JAK, just before New Year?" Marcus asked.

On the Tuesday, just before New Year, I had had the first introductory classes at D-JAK, just to meet my new students and give them a small taster of what was to be on offer.

"The younger kids, the under tens, well they think Mindy is awesome and are all looking forward to starting properly next week. She will have a class of about eight to twelve younger kids to start with," Paige explained. "The under thirteens were a mixed lot, but they seemed to listen to Mindy and I think we should have up to a dozen of them, including Curtis and Megan."

"I almost had a damn heart attack when I recognised Sam Fellowes come into D-JAK! He was out of uniform, but he had his son with him; he was bringing his son, Cameron, to the class," I explained. "Sam gave me some strange looks and I'm certain that he knows, or at least suspects, who I am!"

"That could prove interesting!" Marcus commented.

"The next group; the teenagers... Well they seemed to enjoy seeing how flexible Mindy was!" Paige continued, with a grin that soon changed to an evil smirk. "Plus, I think Mindy seemed to *enjoy* showing off *exactly* how flexible she was!"

I felt myself blushing.

"I ... I do not... I did not!" I stammered unconvincingly.

Marcus looked at me with an evil grin.

"Does Dave know?" He asked, facetiously.

"You two are so fucking evil!"

"And the most important thing, of course, is that Mindy hasn't killed or maimed anybody yet!" Paige finished. "The insurance is high enough as it is!"

The next day
Sunday
West Ridge

I had a problem, well, more of a dilemma really.

Paige was easy; I just gave her a huge cash bonus. Megan though... I didn't know what to get a ten year-old girl – period, let alone something that would truly show how thankful I was for her actions! I had already decided that Megan could join Curtis and be trained, defensively only – as long as Paige agreed. Neither of them would handle firearms, apart from basic target practice and knowing how to clean them. They wouldn't use anything bigger than a .22-calibre, either. They were far too young and too small for a proper combat suit, but I would see about getting them some custom body armour for their upper bodies. I might be able to use the two of them for reconnaissance and even providing diversionary tactics. But neither of them would ever be put in harm's way, not a damn chance!

Well, last night had gone well, I suppose; ignoring Marcus and his new relationship! I had disturbing images in the back of my mind, every time that I thought of what Marcus and Paige might be getting up to! Then it occurred to me that I wouldn't need to worry, as long distance relationships rarely worked out.

That was when Marcus decided to knock me for six!

"Hey, kid! Could I have a word?" Marcus had asked.

That had somehow sounded ominous! I followed Marcus through to the living room and sat down on a couch, while Marcus sat down across from me.

"You telling me Paige is pregnant now?" I asked and got a nasty glare in response!

"Just kidding, jeez!"

"Let's be serious for a minute, can we?" Marcus asked.

"Should I be worried?"

"Not really... We don't get to see very much of each other, do we?"

"Not as much as I'd like, no."

I meant it too, I really *did* miss Marcus!

"How would you like to be able to see me as often as you'd like?"

"I'm not moving back to New York, if that's what you're asking," I replied, without thinking.

"You've got the wrong end of the stick, there, Hit Girl!"

I thought about that and came to one conclusion...

"You mean... Chicago... You're moving to Chicago?"

"You don't want me here, just say so..."

"You complete ass, Marcus! I would *never, ever*, say that!" I responded angrily, then I realised, belatedly, that he was joking. "Sorry!"

"You can be very predictable, Mindy. Remember, I've known you a long, long time."

"You move to Chicago; would you still be a cop?" I asked.

"Yeah. I've been talking with Jack and he'd take me under his wing for a while, at District Twelve, so that I could get used to Chicago, learn the ropes, then maybe move to a team like Voight's."

"That would be cool!" I admitted, grinning.

It really would be great to have Marcus around! Then I had another thought and scowled at Marcus.

"I assume this is just about me and *not* about Paige?" I asked.

"Of course it is; I want to be with *you*. I've been thinking about this for months, long before I met Paige. I was getting a bit lonely in New York; now you're not there it's kinda quiet and peaceful. I think I missed the severed limbs and dead bodies everywhere!" Marcus dead-panned.

I had to laugh.

"Are you jealous, Mindy?"

"What? You mean about you and Paige?"

"Yeah."

"No... I just reacted... It was a bit of a shock; kids don't like to see their parents... Well, you know!" I tried to explain, but failed miserably and felt myself blushing.

"You know, you are a lot softer than people give you credit for!" Marcus laughed.

"Just don't go spreading it around, or I might just have to kill ya!"

Marcus laughed again.

"Okay, I'll dial back the romance a bit – at least in public! Happy?"

"Yeah, I think so. Just... There are some things I'd rather *not* know about... If you know what I mean..."

"Now you know how I used to feel about you and *that boy!*" Marcus responded, with a chuckle.

"Okay! But remember, '*that boy*', is now my fiancée!"

"Anyway, I thought you liked Paige and as for Wildcat, well she's just a..."

"Don't you *dare* say it Marcus!" I interrupted.

"... Mini-Mindy!"

***Chapter 120*: Safehouse D**

The next morning

Monday

West Ridge

The problem of what to do with the British twins had suddenly got a little bit easier.

Not quite in the way that I had anticipated though...

I was relaxing and recuperating at home, trying to get over the incredibly embarrassing stories about my younger years that had come out the night before! I was on the couch having a one-sided conversation with Sophia; I've done stranger things!

There was a knock on the front door. We never had many visitors and right know I was kinda anxious about visitors, as I was still healing and currently Dave was out, so I was alone. Since the Russians had come back on the scene, I had uprated some of my ready use weaponry. In this case, I grabbed a hidden Micro-UZI and headed over to the door and stood on my toes to look through the spy hole.

I immediately jumped back! Oh fuck! I was shocked!

I had seen two people, outside. Cameron and Natasha King! How the fuck had they turned up here?

Okay Mindy, get a fucking grip!

"We know you're in there! Open up, we're not leaving!" Cameron called, then more quietly. "We know what you are!"

I checked the Micro-UZI was ready and that the suppressor was secure, then pulled open the door.

"Come in, please!" I said, cheerfully.

Once the kids were in the door I slammed it shut and kicked Cameron's legs out from under him. He went down hard and while Natasha was reaching for him, I pushed her down to the floor.

"Neither of you fuckers move, or I'll cut you both in half!" I growled, aiming the Micro-UZI.

I saw the same fear that I had seen before. The confident, cocky expressions that I had just seen were gone.

"Please... Don't shoot... I told you this was a stupid idea, Nats!" Cameron said.

"Get the fuck up off the floor and sit on the damn couch! You're making the place look messy!" I growled, lowering the Micro-UZI. "Sophia, stay!"

I sat down and faced the twins.

"So you found me!"

I saw Cameron looking around.

"Where did the gun go?" he asked.

"I must keep some secrets!" I growled.

"Look, we saw the commotion at the apartment block, the other night. I saw you climbing the fire escape and crossing the rooftop. You looked wounded. Then we kept watch and saw more of your team arriving. We then saw you leave the other morning, we followed you... Here," Natasha explained.

"We only got the nerve up to come here, this morning," Cameron admitted.

"You guys are clever and resourceful!" I growled. "Why are you British teenagers so damn smug?"

Two days later
Wednesday
Safehouse A

While Megan was at school, Mindy and I took Paige to see Safehouse A.

Paige took one look at the armoury and then turned to me with a smile.

"It's like the Bat Cave meets Vigilantes R Us!" She said. "You guys got a bat signal?"

I saw Mindy smirk and open her mouth...

"No!" I yelled.

Paige looked a little shocked.

"Believe me, you don't want to hear that story!" I said.

That afternoon we got the bad news.

Intelligence arrived, via Voight. The, so called, Sisters of Trinity, had attacked the Russian Mafia! Of all the stupid fucking things to do! What the fuck possessed them to embark on war with the Russian Mafia? Yeah, I know, I did the same, but it was just us and them; now we had a three way war!

It was Fusion v Russians v Trinity, which would only end badly!

We also had some good news, for a change!

Marcus was now a Detective Lieutenant with the Chicago PD!

He was staying in an apartment at South Cottage Grove. He had thought it better to give me my space! I rather thought it was more because he was only feet away from Paige! He hoped to be able to move all his stuff from New York towards the end of January. Marcus had found a house and was just waiting for the sale to go through. I wasn't exactly over the moon about *where* Marcus had bought a house, but there wasn't exactly anything that I could do about it, either!

The following evening
Thursday
Fusion Warehouse

"What are we doing back here?" Josh asked.

Chloe's expression mirrored the same question.

"Even you two should have noticed that it's been snowing a bit!" Dave commented.

There was a few inches outside and it was still snowing.

"For some stupid reason, I seem to think that you two should have the best equipment! Sometimes, though, I'm not convinced that you deserve any of it!" I said.

"Something's different!" Josh said, looking around.

On the previous visit to the warehouse, the place had been completely open plan. This time though there was now a building towards the rear. It was built of brick and had a steel sliding door.

"Oh, mister observant has noticed the new building! Very good, Josh! That is a secure building for storing weapons and equipment. It is brick, with steel reinforced walls! Welcome to Safehouse D, kids!"

I led Josh and Chloe over to the new building. It had only been finished, just before Christmas and I was very pleased with it. I entered the code into the hidden keypad and the steel door slid open, with barely a sound. The lights inside

clicked on. There were no windows anywhere on the building, which was set six feet from the nearest exterior walls of the warehouse. Inside the building was an open space that had weapons, in locked racks, on three sides. To the right was a small kitchen, with a table and four chairs. Against the wall were two steel bunk beds. The floor was bare concrete, except for some thin carpet near the beds. The place screamed functionality over comfort.

"Home from home!" Josh commented.

"It is not intended for comfort, Josh!" I laughed.

"Hope not!" Chloe said.

"What's under the tarpaulin?" Josh asked curiously.

In the middle of the room, beside the racks of weapons, was a large tarpaulin covering something.

"Show them Dave!" I said.

Dave pulled off the tarpaulin and both kids gasped in shock.

"Bloody hell!" Josh finally exclaimed.

"Fuck me!" Chloe added.

Under the tarpaulin were three motorcycles, all three were Ducati Multistrada 1200 S multibike. One was in navy blue, with the registration '**SHADOW**', the next was purple with the registration '**HIT N RUN**' and the final motorcycle was tan, with the registration '**JACKAL**'.

"After my hair raising pursuit down the Dan Ryan, I decided that I would need a motorcycle that could cope with the winter weather. The Panigale is nice, but not designed for snow and ice. Yes, Cathy's motorcycle was cool and gave me the idea! I ordered these and they have been equipped with proper multi-purpose tyres, the same as Dave and I have on our BMW motorcycles."

On closer inspection the three motorcycles had non-standard chunky tyres fitted, front and rear. They were Continental TKC-80 Twinduro tyres and were designed to cope with extreme road conditions, including mud and snow.

"Okay, kiddies. Time to learn your new motorcycles, read the manual and then you can ride around the warehouse to get used to them. Remember these are more than four times the capacity of your Hondas, not to mention the extra weight and size... Chloe: Calm the fuck down before you piss yourself!"

"What about our..." Josh started, then stopped as Dave came in with a helmet under each arm, plus two sets of motorcycle leathers.

After twenty minutes reading the manuals and examining the controls, Chloe and Josh pulled on their leathers and helmets and then wheeled their motorcycles out to the warehouse. I followed and watched as they mounted the large machines and started the one hundred and sixty horsepower engines.

I followed suit and the warehouse throbbed with the roar of three motorcycle engines revving. I then led the other two around the warehouse, with Dave monitoring and advising me of any problems.

All three motorcycles were fitted with side panniers and a tank bag. The motorcycles were an extra fifty kilogrammes or so heavier and were about twenty centimetres wider and longer. The gear ratios were also very different and it was better to learn these inside, on concrete, than out there on the snow!

They coped pretty well with the new machines and I was kinda surprised that the two of them were so quick to get used to what were very different motorcycles! Maybe it was because I was such a good teacher - yeah, it was all me - you know, my ego worries me sometimes!

"You guys have impressed me!" I said, once Josh and Chloe had pulled up and removed their helmets.

Both of them seemed a little embarrassed, but also proud and I was proud of them in return.

***Chapter 121*: The Nightingale**

Two days later
Saturday morning
Safehouse A

"A handgun bullet travels at more than seven hundred miles per hour," I said, as I inserted a magazine into the butt of the SIG Sauer pistol, then racked back the slide to chamber a round.

"Is it gonna hurt bad?" Megan asked, from the other end of the mat.

"Only for a second, kid," I laughed. "It's gonna take you off your feet for sure, but it's really no more painful than a punch in the chest."

"I *hate* getting punched in the chest!" Megan responded with a scowl.

This was so surreal; I could remember this moment like it was yesterday and *not* around five and half years ago! Another ten year-old girl, in another City... Megan just reminded me of a mini-... Oh fuck! The bastards have me doing it now!

"Now cut the whining and get ready, Wildcat!" I cautioned, getting back to the present.

Megan winced.

"And no wincing!"

Megan rolled her eyes and I fired. Megan flew backwards and onto the mat, with a loud 'fuuuck', as the air was forced from her lungs!

"How was that? Not so bad. Kinda fun, huh?" Curtis said, reaching down to help Megan back to her feet.

Dave and I just laughed!

"Now you won't be scared when some junkie asshole pulls a Glock!" I said, once I had stopped laughing.

"Welcome to the club, Megan!" Dave said, helping Megan remove the armour. "Think yourself lucky that it was just a .38 and not *something bigger!*"

I noticed Dave glaring at me, when he mentioned 'something bigger' and I blushed a little.

..._...

"Mindy?" Megan asked me later.

"Yeah."

"Dave said you used to rig your attendance at school; could you do that for me?"

I glared at Dave.

"No I cannot! Dave, stop telling people about things that I did when I was younger!"

"Younger? You mean just over a year or so ago!" Dave reminded me.

"You know, I think I need a hot fudge sundae. Anybody else?"

"Hi Megan, had a good day?" Mom asked, once I had got back home.

"It was cool; Mindy shot me in the chest!" I said smugly and watched as the appalled look formed on Mom's face.

That night

Safehouse D

It was dark, cold and snowy.

The time had come to road test our new motorcycles. Kick-Ass, Battle Guy and Hawk, were in Beast, while Hal and Trojan were at Safehouse A monitoring our activities.

Jackal, Shadow and I would be on our new Ducati Multistrada motorcycles. Just as we had started our motorcycles, Shadow turned and threw a black, plastic box at me. I caught it and examined the item; it was a Ducati Multistrada Engine Control Unit or ECU.

"You didn't think that you could get away with that, did you?" Shadow enquired.

I glared at Kick-Ass.

"Did you tell her that I'd de-rated the Multistrada?" I accused.

"She asked me; so I told her!"

"Why?"

"She threatened to hurt me!" Kick-Ass responded.

"She's a fourteen year-old girl for fuck's sake!"

"She's scary!" Kick-Ass replied, with a chuckle.

I didn't respond. All I had wanted to do was prevent her from breaking her little neck and obviously she had found the original, unrestricted ECU! Jackal said nothing, but just shook his head, so I assumed that he was still using the restricted ECU: clever kid!

"Let's roll!" Kick-Ass ordered.

Kick-Ass led the way, with Beast and we followed one after the other, with Shadow at the rear and myself leading. It was very dark and cold out, but the conditions were perfect for the night's ride. I had advised Shadow and Jackal, but especially Shadow, to take it gently, at least until they were experienced at riding on snow.

"Remember, no stupid manoeuvres, or you'll end up ass over tit!" I cautioned.

"Bet these'll go faster than that old Panigale!" Shadow teased.

"In your fucking dreams, Shadow!" I retorted, furious with myself for rising to her bait.

"In snow, I'm way faster!" Shadow continued.

"Look, these are a different class of motorcycle – you can't compare them, but I can still do one eighty, while you could never do much more than just over one forty!"

"Children!" Hawk cautioned.

It had been a little under two weeks since I had been shot, but I was healing well and I had promised Dave, Cathy and myself that I would behave and take things gently! I was still sore, but I would survive.

We kept the speed down and stayed in formation, with Beast on point. The snow was light and the streets clear of traffic, so the ride was pleasant and I defied any criminal cunt to disturb our enjoyment!

We had our usual meeting with Murphy and Fellowes; they thought the new motorcycles were particularly hot, but missed the Panigale!

As did I! The beefed up tyres were extremely good on the snow and allowed for brilliant control, considering the conditions. The new tyres also helped Jackal and Shadow to stay vertical and I was impressed that they hadn't had a spill yet! I missed the Panigale, though, but it was no good in this weather.

I knew that it would happen eventually.

The way was blocked by three large motorcycles and their riders.

"The bitches are back!" Kick-Ass announced.

"We have visual here!" Hal announced, monitoring our progress using the cameras in Beast.

We had a plan rehearsed for this and we all put the plan smoothly into action.

Beast blocked the road.

Then we stopped the motorcycles behind Beast, for cover. Then Shadow and Jackal reached for their compound bows and arrows.

Shadow and Jackal both released their first pair of arrows, together, before scooping up another pair of arrows and releasing them into the air.

The first pair of arrows impacted at the feet of Night and both exploded instantly and Night fell back with the concussion of the flashbangs. The next pair of arrows landed at the feet of Shade and Dusk and both exploded into a cloud of purple smoke, obscuring Night from them. Kick-Ass and Hawk ran forward and seized Night, before they bundled the unconscious, and now bound, Night into Beast and then jumped in themselves, before Battle Guy accelerated away.

I waited until Shadow and Jackal had remounted their motorcycles and were on their way back to Safehouse A, before following Beast.

CPD Warehouse

We dragged the Nightingale, known as 'Night', out of Beast.

Hawk and Battle Guy secured her to a steel pillar. She had regained consciousness on the ride over. Strangely she did not seem very concerned by her predicament; her eyes were smiling, even if we couldn't see her mouth.

I pulled back her hood and then removed her mask; all of a sudden people were talking at once.

Kick-Ass: "Damn!"

Battle Guy: "Double damn!"

Night: "Hi Dave! Been a while!"

Chapter 122: Rescue

Saturday Night *CPD Warehouse*

"I've missed you Dave," she continued, calmly before turning to look directly at Hit Girl.

"You are one lucky bitch, Hit Girl! I remember like it was yesterday - having Dave inside of me - fuck it felt like nothing on this earth..."

Hit Girl lashed out with her left gauntlet and Night/Miranda Swedlow/Night Bitch slid to the floor, unconscious.

"Sorry to cut off her commentary on your sexual skills, Kick-Ass!"

"Err, right!" I replied, still in shock.

"Isn't she supposed to be dead?" Hawk enquired.

"Yeah! Kick-Ass...?" Hit Girl asked and turned to glare at me.

"You saw the damn newspaper! She died over a year ago... Or at least I thought so!" I responded.

Talk about conflicting emotions!

I couldn't believe that Miranda was alive! I was overjoyed!

I also couldn't believe that she was fighting *against* us! This – well I couldn't describe the emotion that this thought generated.

"Green is more for Kick-Ass, Hit Girl; it doesn't suit you *at all!*" Battle Guy cautioned, in a concerned tone.

"I am *not* jealous or envious!" I growled angrily. But I was, both of 'em!

Kick-Ass removed the part of his mask that covered his mouth and took a large step towards me.

I was expecting to be yelled at, but no... Kick-Ass grabbed me and leant me backwards and covered my lips with his own and... Oh - my - God! His tongue... My legs were starting to go weak and I positively melted into his arms. The damp feeling that I felt between my legs was *not* sweat! Finally Kick-Ass let me go and helped me back to my feet; I still felt weak though, dammit!

"That was positively awesome!" Battle Guy commented. "I could have made millions if I'd recorded that! Hit Girl and Kick-Ass kissing, damn hot!"

I felt my face burning, like I'd stuck it into a fire!

"What was that for?" I asked, rather stupidly.

"I thought that you needed a reminder of *who* I love and *who* is my fiancée!" Kick-Ass said, with a smirk.

"I hadn't forgotten... I'm sorry and thanks... That was awesome!" I replied... then I giggled.

"Did Hit Girl just *giggle*?" Hawk asked, looking a little horrified.

"Unfortunately!" I admitted, feeling both embarrassed and furious with myself.

My mind was still reeling.

Miranda was alive! But she had apparently gone over to the 'dark side'!

"You're literally half the man that you used to be... Batman!"

I span around to find that Miranda was back with us and looking at a glaring Battle Guy.

"Kinda hot, too!"

Miranda passed out again, as Hawk clipped her chin with a boot.

"She really *cannot* be getting any!" Hawk commented.

An hour later
Sunday

Jackal and Shadow were safely back at Safehouse A.

I didn't want them present during our interrogation, especially not now that we knew who she really was under the mask! This would be complicated, especially as Dave was personally involved. But the big question on my mind was: why was she fighting *against* us? She fought *beside* us, against Chris D'Amico, for fuck's sake!

It was soon after midnight, so we all had a coffee and discussed the events so far.

Much later
Sunday
Safehouse A

I was feeling hungry, so I headed for the kitchen.

"Morning!" Josh said, as he fried some bacon.

"Hi! Where's Curtis?"

"Downstairs... Training!"

"Oh!"

I headed downstairs to see what Curtis was up to. Abby had gone home, as soon as we had returned, last night.

..._...

When I got downstairs, I found Curtis attacking a Tatami Mat target, with a sword that I recognised as coming from the armoury. It was a two-foot long Saracen sword, with a wickedly curved blade.

"What the hell are you doing with that?" I demanded.

I could tell that Curtis had been at it for a while; he was dripping with sweat. The kid had been much focussed on his personal development, both physically and mentally, ever since his parents had been killed. I was impressed by his perseverance, but from a personal stand point, I thought that he was going too far, too soon! Yeah, I knew that I probably wasn't the best person to be lecturing him about taking things slowly, but I cared for him enough to at least try.

"I'm training!"

"Does Mindy know that you're using that sword?"

"No, and you're not gonna tell her, either!"

"I don't keep secrets from Mindy!"

"No, you don't... You just run off on your own and almost get yourself killed!"

"That was a mistake! I've learnt from my mistakes!" I growled. "Now, *you* are making a big mistake and Mindy will go bananas!"

"Remember, Shadow, it is kinda your fault that I am here today, training to become a vigilante."

"Don't I know it? Look Curtis you're moving way too fast... You're getting really good, kid, but - you're pushing yourself, way too much."

"What, you care about me now?"

"That's not fucking fair... I've always cared about you! Okay, I know that I never used to show it, but I've *always* cared about you – deep down."

"I'm sorry, Chloe. That was uncalled for," Curtis apologised.

"Don't worry; you've been through a lot, but there's no need to pile more on yourself... I've been there, with Josh... You're still only ten, please take it slower."

"Okay, I'll try... But - will you keep my secret? I don't think Mindy would approve of me training with this sword, although I will admit that it is really cool!"

"That it is!"

CPD Warehouse

"Why are you doing this?" I asked. "You – we, were for good!"

"I changed, Dave! This is the real fucking world, good people get nothing and the rest get everything!" Miranda replied.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"Whatever you want it to mean, I suppose."

"You're talking in fucking riddles!"

"Did Chris D'Amico ever tell you about who betrayed your father?" Miranda asked, changing the subject.

"Should be have done?" I responded.

"So you *don't know*?"

"Know *what*, you sick bitch?" I was getting mad.

"You never knew that your father was betrayed by your *best* friend?"

"What?"

"I believe you knew him as 'Ass-Kicker', back then!"

"You..."

The back wall of the warehouse suddenly exploded inwards.

We all dived for cover behind Beast as masonry crashed down all around us and our combat suits were pelted by small brick projectiles. Once the dust had started to clear, we emerged and examined the scene.

"She's gone!" Hit Girl growled, angrily.

***Chapter 123*: Todd**

Two days later
Tuesday
Safehouse A

"Is it working?" I asked Marty.

"It just came online a few minutes ago!" Marty replied.

The tracker that we had inserted into Miranda's suit, while she had been unconscious, had just activated itself after the required delay.

I hadn't anticipated that we would be attacked at the CPD warehouse and I had had to apologise to Voight, for destroying part of his warehouse. He had just laughed and told me not to worry, a wall could be rebuilt, whereas people could not.

Four days later
Thursday
West Ridge

"She's gonna have to die, Dave."

"I know."

"Could you do it...? Considering..."

"Yes, I could! She is *not* my Miranda... My Miranda died, a year ago..."

"Dave, I'm really sorry that you've been put in this position, it really fucking sucks!"

That afternoon
West Ridge

"Hi!"

This was gonna be awkward; especially considering recent revelations! I could see that Dave was in an emotionless state, but I knew that Dave could snap his friend in half, in an instant! Personally, I felt like doing that, but it wasn't my fight; it had been Dave's Dad and he was Dave's friend. Yes, I felt kinda responsible for his Dad's death, but right now, I knew better than to rekindle *that* argument!

Marty was standing beside Todd, who understandably looked a little apprehensive. Marty had met him at the train station and on the way back had told Todd that Dave and he had recently found out about his past duplicity.

"Hi Todd, I..." Dave started.

"Look Dave, I've been wanting to say that I'm sorry for so damn long. That's why I've been avoiding you guys, since that night at the warehouse. I know that I was responsible for your Dad's death, Dave. I never realised how fucking whacked out Chris D'Amico really was, until that night..." Todd tried to explain.

"Don't Todd, you – you were taken in, just like many others - by that bastard: Chris D'Amico – we didn't exactly help either – we kinda pushed you away and we're sorry for that!" Dave said. "But you came through and helped us in the end and that's what matters. Over the past year, I've learnt that allies are few, but enemies are many and we all make mistakes. If I had never put on that damn wetsuit, Dad would never have got involved – I can't blame anybody else. Just as I feel responsible for the death of Mindy's father, but she doesn't hold me responsible; we've moved past that."

"Thanks, Dave."

"I had a chance to save Dave's Dad, but I refused to help Dave, in his time of need. This was despite the fact that he had selflessly helped *me*, in my time of need, years ago. We make decisions and have to live with them. Chris

D'Amico was evil, just like his father and he was skilled at spreading his evil. We all need to look forward, never backward and learn from our mistakes." Mindy said, looking at Dave sadly.

"I'm moving on Todd; you comin' with me?" I asked with a grin.

"Hell yeah!"

That evening

D-JAK

I had finally found the place.

I was still getting used to driving around Chicago and learning the streets. My parents had persuaded me to learn some self-defence, as part of the deal for allowing me to go to university in Chicago. I should have started university way back in August, but things happened and I was now starting in January. It also kinda sucked that I knew nobody in Chicago.

I looked up at the sign, above the door. This place seemed to have a good rep, despite only having been open a few weeks, but more importantly they offered discounts to University of Chicago students. I pushed open the door and walked in, it was quite busy inside. I could see a class with young kids, most with white belts, underway to one side. They were currently watching a pair of older kids, a boy and a girl, demonstrate some Taekwondo movements – both kids had blue belts. I noticed that the lady at the reception desk was busy with somebody else, so I watched the class while I waited.

"Megan, leave Curtis alone! I won't tell you again, pay attention!" A female voice called and it was a voice that I vaguely recognised.

There was something familiar about the two instructors too, but just then a boy came up to me.

"Can I help, I'm Kyle!"

He was dressed in a white Taekwondo-gi, with a yellow belt.

"You normally help walk-ins?" I asked.

"When they are as hot as you, yeah!"

I tried not to react to the compliment, but felt myself blushing anyway!

"What are you, fourteen?"

"Nearly fifteen!"

"Bit young for me!" I said.

"Worth a try! Anyway here's Paige; she'll help you!" Kyle said, then walked off with a smile.

The lady from the reception desk had appeared while I had been 'chatting' with Kyle.

"Hi, I'm Paige, how can I help?"

"I'm looking to join, I think," I replied.

"No problem... Hold on! Curtis, hands off my daughter! Cameron, Tommy – pay attention to the class! Sorry... Those four can be trouble! Come over to the desk and I'll get you enrolled."

"Thanks!" I replied.

"Mindy, over there, is our senior instructor and usually takes the self-protection classes for the women," Paige explained.

Something clicked in my mind.

"Mindy Macready?" I asked.

"Yeah, you know her?" Paige asked and I saw a guarded look in her eyes.

"We were at the same high school, in New York. That must mean that the other guy is Dave Lizewski! Damn; I always knew those two were right for each other!" I said. "My name's..."

"Erika? Erika Cho?" I turned to find myself face to face, with Dave.

"Yeah - wow Dave, you look really good – put on a bit of muscle, too!" I said without thinking – he did look kind of hot.

"You look very good, too, Erika!"

"And I'm his fiancée! And yes, we are fucking!" Mindy said, appearing behind Dave and scowling at Erika.

"Tension, people, let's ease that tension!" Paige advised.

"Sorry, just staking my claim!" Mindy said and held out her hand to me and I shook it.

"Erika. We never really met, but I know I said some things that I now regret!" I said.

"I did get to hear what happened in the corridor that day and in Dave's defence, he wasn't fucking a ninth-grader - at least not then!" Mindy said, with a smirk.

"So, you all know each other?" Paige asked.

"I've known Erika, since before I met Mindy. She used to be Marty's chew toy!" Dave explained with a grin.

"Oh, that should prove interesting!" Mindy commented.

"Why?" I asked.

"Marty lives in Chicago, too! He attends the University of Chicago," Dave explained.

"Oh, cool! Me, too. I thought that I wouldn't know anybody in Chicago!"

"He's all but engaged to an ex-Chicago Cop!" Mindy added.

"Oh, I see! We were only together for just over a year. You guys seemed to all but vanish around the time that Motherfucker shit blew up in New York!" I said and saw a few exchanged glances and smirks, between Dave and Mindy.

"It'll be good having you here, Erika. We'll have to get you over one evening, for a meal. I'll get Marty over, would be a nice surprise for him – and Kim!" Mindy said, with an evil smirk.

***Chapter 124*: Regina**

Two days later
Saturday

Did you know that Chicago had its own assassin?

Well it did and it wasn't me!

There had been a string of deaths in the past few months that had been baffling the Chicago PD. Again, *those deaths*, had nothing to do with me! Normally I would be happy to accept credit for dead bodies; *but these weren't mine*. So, why was I now involved? 'Cause two Chicago PD officers had been shot, when they had stumbled onto an assassination.

I had my hands full with Miranda and her damn Nightingales, but I *would not* stand by while Chicago Police Officers were shot in the course of their duties. That was one of things that would really get me riled up and it made me so fucking pissed off!

All we knew about this mysterious assassin, was that it was a *she* and that *she* had over twenty-seven kills to her name that could be tracked back over the past three years. There had never been any *living* witnesses to the assassinations and, as far as we knew, no mistakes had been made... Apart from now; the two officers in question were alive, except that they were in comas and under Police protection in Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Marcus had been assigned the case; something to 'prove his metal' - at least that's what Jack had said!

The assassin had a name: Regina. The name meant 'the reigning queen', which I kind of took personally; as far as female assassins went, *I* was 'the reigning queen'!

I also had another problem and that involved Chloe, again!

Safehouse A

"Typical, she's only had the damn thing a week and then she fucks it!" I growled angrily.

"It was an accident! The post kinda jumped out in front of me!" Chloe moaned, trying to look innocent.

"My fucking ass!"

"Well you're lucky that Fusion now has a full time mechanic - and here he is now!" Dave announced, as a pick-up truck pulled into the Safehouse.

Chloe appeared to be a little shocked to see who climbed out of the cab.

..._...

"You know Tony and Tommy!" I said with a grin.

"Of course! Hi guys! What...?" Chloe said, looking at me and sounded confused.

"Tony is our full time Fusion mechanic, which will be kinda useful considering how much equipment we have now that needs servicing, *and repairing*," Mindy said and looked at Chloe with a glare that made her flinch. "Not to mention a few items that you don't know about, yet!"

"Like what?" Chloe demanded.

"Need to know, Chloe!"

"You can't just dangle something like that in front of me and then pull it away!" Chloe whined.

"I can and I did! Don't crash my damn motorcycles, in future, young lady!"

"Let's have a look at the damage!" Tony suggested. "Lead the way, wrecker!"

Chloe scowled, but led Tony over to her Multistrada. The right hand headlight was smashed and the front end dented and scratched. The right hand, front suspension mount was also badly scratched, with at least one gouge.

"Have it good as new, in a day or two!" Tony advised, with a grin.

"Chloe, if Tony reports any abuse to my machines, you won't be using them – be warned! One more post jumps out on you and you'll be riding the Honda one hundred!"

"That is really low; you wouldn't!"

"Fucking, try me!"

"It's not road legal!" Chloe said smugly.

"That'll take less than an hour to correct," Tony advised. Chloe scowled and threw her hands up in defeat.

..._...

"I spent over twenty years in the U.S. Navy, if it has a piston, I can fix it! For that matter, if it fires a bullet, I can fix it, too!" Tony explained to Chloe, over a coffee.

"I'd better not break my P90 then!" Chloe quipped and received a steady stare from Tony in return. "Just kidding!"

"I'll be watching you!" Tony said, with a chuckle. "Mindy's told me all about you and Joshua... Every sordid detail!"

"How have things been, since you moved up here?" Chloe asked quickly, blushing and changing the subject away from her and Josh.

"Very good, thanks! We have a nice house over towards the south of Chicago and Mindy has got Shannon setup with running a small shop. Tommy thinks it's great and is enjoying the time he spends at D-JAK with Curtis, Megan and that other boy, err, Cameron Fellowes."

"He's doing well with his Taekwondo. He should have his yellow tag in no time," Chloe confirmed.

That Evening West Ridge

"Hi Marty, Kim! Come on in!" I said, with a smirk.

"What are you up to, Dave?" Marty asked.

"Nothing!"

"Bullshit!" Marty responded. "I know you!"

I led them both through to the living room, where Marty's eyes almost popped out from behind his glasses!

"Erika!" Marty exclaimed, then he looked at Dave. "You and me are gonna talk, pal!"

"How are Marty? This wasn't my idea... See Mindy!" Erika said, getting up from the couch and giving Marty a polite kiss on the cheek.

I watched as Kim scowled at Erika, Marty saw this and turned to Kim.

"We dated for eighteen months, when I was fifteen!"

"Hello, Erika! Marty seems to pick some beautiful women!" Kim said, with a smile.

"He definitely does; looks like he's hit the jackpot with you, Kim."

"We need to exchange notes!" Kim suggested and Marty looked horror struck.

"I'm gonna kill you, Hit Girl!" Marty whispered to a grinning, and apparently unrepentant, Mindy.

..._...

We sat down and enjoyed a good meal together.

Dave and Erika had fun bringing up some of Marty's more embarrassing moments which Kim enjoyed hugely. However at one point Erika raised an interesting question.

"Katie and I ceased to be friends, fairly soon after she split up from Dave, but after that little skirmish in the corridor, well Katie had some weird things to say about Dave, which at the time I thought were obviously not true! However, since then and since seeing you guys at D-JAK... Well, Katie had this notion that Dave was Kick-Ass!" Erika said.

The entire room went silent as a tomb and everybody froze with food partway to their mouths, all except Erika!

"So it's true!" Erika said, looking amazed.

Everybody finished off their current mouthfuls and then looked at Mindy.

"What are you all looking at me for?" Mindy demanded, then she smiled at Erika.

"Can you be trusted, Erika?" Mindy asked.

"Absolutely!" Erika replied, looking excited.

"Then please meet: Battle Guy, Hawk and Kick-Ass!" Mindy said, pointing at each person, in turn. "I am, of course, the one and only Hit Girl and that, fast asleep over there, is Eisenhower!"

"That is totally awesome – you know, if it wasn't for Dave and Kick-Ass, I would never have got together with Marty. Dave spent so much time fuc-, sorry, with Katie, I had no choice but to hang around with this geek, reading comics!"

"He's a special kind of geek, though!" Kim said, with a smile at Erika.

"That means, *you* were that little girl that rescued Dave!" Erika said, looking at Mindy who nodded.

"Yes, that was the much younger me and a pretty useless Kick-Ass!"

"I wasn't *totally* useless! I saved your sorry ass, *twice*!" Dave retorted, indignantly.

"Okay, I'll admit that!" Mindy acquiesced.

"Wow! Kick-Ass rescued the amazing Hit Girl!" Erika exclaimed.

***Chapter 125*: G**

The next morning ***Sunday*** ***Safehouse A***

"Thought that you two would like to see it: The G-Suit!"

"Fucking wow!" Josh exclaimed and received a frown from Isaac.

Beside the other combat suits, in the armoury, there was now another suit. This one was red, with white stripes and the symbol for an atom on the chest. Beside it was what, at first glance, looked to be a metal base-ball bat, but on closer inspection was modified and had three rings of vicious looking metal spikes around the circumference of the bat.

"That is totally awesome!" Chloe added.

"It was a good time, back then – I have a huge respect for what you guys do; I've been there!" Isaac said.

"Thanks Mr Swanson!" Chloe and Josh said together.

"You gonna wear it again?" Chloe asked.

"Not expecting to," Isaac said.

That afternoon ***West Ridge***

"Ah! Joshua, Chloe!"

I was instantly on guard! When Mindy used my full name it usually meant that I was in trouble. Actually I had not done anything wrong recently; it was Chloe that had got into Mindy's bad books! Crashing her Ducati; rather her than me! I did warn her not to be stupid, but Chloe doesn't always listen to advice: *a post jumped out*, I ask you!

We went into the living room and found Dave, Mindy, Marty, Kim and another woman. I had seen her at D-JAK the other day, talking with Dave, Mindy and Paige. Kyle had also commented on a certain hot chick, which must have been this woman.

"Hi!" I said, waving a hand. Chloe said nothing, just smiled.

"This is Erika!" Marty said, introducing the very nice looking young woman. "Erika, these are Josh and Chloe!"

"Hi, guys, good to meet you," Erika said.

"Hi!" Chloe said.

"Normally you can't shut them up!" Dave commented dryly.

"Well Chloe is in my bad books for crashing her Multistrada!" Mindy said, surprising both me and I could see, Chloe too.

Mindy just talked about a Fusion motorcycle, in front of a stranger! I looked questioningly at Mindy, who just smirked at us.

"Erika, standing in front of you are Shadow and Jackal!" Mindy said, pointing at us in turn. I was really shocked now and it seemed, so was Erika.

"These two kids are vigilantes?" Erika asked incredulously.

"They are. Chloe's been with us for almost a year and Josh since late, last summer," Mindy explained.

"But they're only about thirteen, or twelve!" Erika said, looking at Chloe and then *me*.

"Believe it or not, they are both fourteen," Marty said.

"They are a bit like you and Marty were!" Dave said with a smirk and Kim glared at him.

From Chloe's expression she didn't seem to like the newcomer. Yes, she was stunning to look at but I didn't like the way she reacted to Chloe and I being vigilantes. Obviously she knew the others, apparently from way back, but this was still a hell of a surprise!

"We're going upstairs!" Chloe said and she dragged me out of the room and towards the stairs.

"I don't think that they're my biggest fans!" Erika said.

"Ignore them. They can be a bit wary of newcomers. They don't mean anything by it. They're both good kids, when you get to know them and they can fight. They have done, too! Saved my life at least once!" I said.

"People seem to save you quite regularly, it seems!" Erika commented.

"It does happen!" I admitted.

"I don't like her!" Chloe stated.

"I did! She looks, err, nice," I said.

"Boys! A pretty girl comes along and they all drool like dogs!"

"I've seen you drooling over *boys* before!"

"Would you rather I drooled over *girls*?" Chloe asked facetiously.

"Didn't know you were into that kind of action, Chloe!"

Chloe just grinned in response.

Two days later
Tuesday
Lake View High School

"I am warning you, just this once: Joshua - is - mine; so stay away from him, you fucking bitch!" I growled angrily.

Juno just smirked at me, from less than six inches away where I had her pinned against the wall of the corridor.

"Or what, Bennett?"

"You touch him, I'll break your fucking fingers, or worse!"

I was about to give Juno a physical reminder of what might happen to her, when I heard a shout.

"Bennett! What the *hell* do you think you're doing?"

It was Mr Swanson.

"Both of you, get to class!"

"I'm sorry, Mr Swanson." And I genuinely was; I respected Mr Swanson and felt ashamed that he had caught me.

"So you should be, young lady!"

Well I wasn't going to let that bitch upset me, so I put the incident behind me and forgot about it.

Two days later
Thursday evening

West Ridge

I had obtained armour, masks and equipment for Wildcat and Trojan.

This was primarily to protect their most guarded possession; their identity. They would be working with Fusion, but only behind the scenes. However there may be occasions that required them to be out in a public area.

Each kid had a basic under suit in a Type IIA composite material and lightweight desert boots. The masks were of the same material and covered all but their noses and mouths. They each also had a pair of lightly armoured gauntlets. I had had to keep the suit light, as they were both still small and would not be able to carry a large load. Both had a basic utility belt to carry communications and self-defence equipment. They also each had a strap-on armoured jacket, which would protect their torsos from bullet and penetration injuries.

These were *not* combat suits and were only intended as passive protection.

Wildcat's suit used three different browns to create a mottled effect that worked quite well and her mask had 'ears', similar to those of a real wildcat. Paige actually thought that she looked really cute, before the armour was added! Wildcat was *not* amused and glared viciously!

Trojan's suit, though, was a combination of navy blue, with a Dartmouth and olive green trim. Again Paige thought that he looked cute before the armour was added! This just made Wildcat laugh, until Trojan punched her, rather hard!

For now the suits would be kept here, at the house. They would grow rapidly over the next few years, so I had kept the suits basic and cheap!

..._...

Lynx also had a combat suit, of sorts.

We used armoured combat suits that could not be used without the armour, Lynx's combat suit could however shed parts of the armour.

The under suit was a mottled collection of browns and was made of the same Type IIA composite material that the other combat suits used. There was a black utility belt that clipped to the under suit and had attachments for the usual Fusion communications and other accessories. So far Lynx was refusing to carry a weapon, but was allowing me to train her in the use of a Glock handgun. The mask was of the same composite material and covered her entire head, except for her nose and mouth. The top of the mask was formed into cat like ears that came to a point, similar to the ears of a lynx and the mask was the same colour as the under suit. On her feet, Lynx would wear lightweight desert combat boots, in a fallow brown colour. Armoured gauntlets were also included and were of the same fallow brown colour, too.

The additional armour was in the form of grieves, thigh guards and upper-arm armour. There were also contoured Type III panels for her chest and back, plus a lightly armoured cover for her head.

I was not expecting the armour to be needed, but it was better to be safe than sorry. We expected that Paige would be acting as chaperone, if we ever used the two kids in action. Again, her identity would be protected, but so would her body. I did manage to persuade her to carry a Taser, so I said that I would obtain a similar one to that which Kick-Ass carried.

"Mom, you look awesome!" Wildcat said, once she had stopped attacking Trojan.

Paige could be seen blushing under her mask.

"Thank you Megan! It actually feels really good. Better without the armour, but..."

"Glad you like it!" I said.

The final problem was getting the two kids to get out of their new suits, which was *not* easy!

***Chapter 126*: Kyle**

The next night Friday

I said goodbye to Avery and Riley, and went to find a cab.

The three of us had been to see a very girly movie, with a lot of giggling and some crying; Joshua had refused to come, as he didn't want to put up with giggling, crying, little girls! Altogether it had been a good evening, but then the evening went to crap as I sensed somebody behind me, but my mind had been elsewhere and I didn't react as fast as I should have done. I was turning around, when my arms were seized and I was pulled down the side of the building and into a darker area, near some dumpsters.

I was pushed, none too gently, against a wall where my head banged against the concrete and it hurt. In front of me was that bitch, Juno! Either side of me were two other girls that seemed to regularly hang about with Juno; they had my arms pinned securely either side of me and they also had control of my legs, too, so that I couldn't kick out. It was fairly common knowledge at school that I was skilled at the Martial Arts, which was also why most people didn't pick a fight with me or any of my friends!

"Nobody threatens me!" Juno breathed into my face.

"Well you'd better get used to it, bitch!" I replied, glaring at Juno.

"You need to learn some manners, Yank!"

"Go fuck yourself; nobody else will ever want to!" I replied, rather lamely, I thought.

Juno then landed a punch, in my stomach and I instinctively tried to double over, but was held up, by her minions. That punch hurt and I could feel tears of pain, in my eyes. Next Juno punched me across the jaw from my left and I yelled out in pain; Juno was very strong!

Next I received a punch into my left side. The pain surging through my body was almost unbearable, but I had suffered worse! Just as I was wondering how long this was going to go on for and if I would last the course, through my blurred vision I saw a sneaker fly through the air and catch Juno in the side of the head. Juno span off to my left and fell to the ground. Next her two Minions were attacked and found themselves sprawled on the ground, beside their leader.

Now that I was no longer supported, I fell forward to the ground myself. I felt strong hands seize my upper arms and haul me to my feet and I found myself looking into the grim face of Kyle.

"Come on Chloe, let's get you out of here, before *they* get up!" Kyle advised and I could see Juno starting to get up.

"This isn't finished, you worthless piece of shit!" Juno called after us.

"Thanks, Kyle...", I breathed and stumbled out of the alley, supported by my friend.

Kyle helped me get a good distance away from Juno and not in too much public view. Then he flagged down a cab.

"Where should I take you?" Kyle asked.

"Thirty-one twenty-nine, West Columbia Avenue..." I said, before I passed out.

West Ridge

There was a knock at the side door.

I looked at the clock on the wall in the living room. It was after ten o'clock. Who could be calling at this time of night?

Dave stood up and walked to the door while I stayed with Sophia, but grabbed my hidden mini-UZI, just in case. I heard an exclamation from Dave, as he peered through the spy hole.

"Mindy, clear the couch!" Dave called and I heard voices and the door closing, then Dave dumped an unconscious

Chloe onto the couch. Behind him stood Kyle.

"What the fuck?" I asked, checking Chloe over and seeing the bruises on her face.

"She got beaten up," Kyle said angrily and he looked mad. "That British bitch from school, Juno."

I knelt down beside Chloe and started to check her over. Dave took Kyle into the kitchen and he started to explain about what he had seen and done. I found some vicious bruises on her abdomen, which matched those on her jaw. I felt the anger boil up inside of me, seeing Chloe hurt. I grabbed my cell and called Cathy.

..._...

Forty minutes later Cathy and Curtis walked in the door.

Chloe was awake, but in a lot of pain. Kyle was sitting next to Chloe and holding her hand, as she grimaced with the pain. Tears of pain were running down her face. We left Cathy to check Chloe over in private and we all sat in the kitchen, where Kyle explained to Curtis what had happened.

"That fucking bitch!" Curtis exclaimed.

"My sentiments exactly!" Dave commented.

Ten minutes later Cathy appeared in the kitchen.

"Will Chloe be okay?" Kyle asked.

"Yes, Kyle. She'll be fine, but she'll be in a lot of pain for a day or two!" Cathy said, with a smile. "And thank you for rescuing my daughter and bringing her to where she could get help."

"No problem, Dr Bennett!" A slightly embarrassed Kyle replied.

..._...

I looked over at Kyle, sitting on the other couch.

I smiled weakly.

"Thanks, Kyle."

"No problem! I'd do anything to help Shadow!" Kyle said.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, or rather spluttered; that had been the last thing that I had expected Kyle to say!

"Tell him!" Mindy advised, rolling her eyes. "He's not stupid, so don't treat him like he is."

"How long have you known?" I asked.

"Ever since Josh appeared. It was confirmed when Jackal started appearing on the streets," Kyle said.

"Are you mad at me?" I asked tentatively.

"Why would I be?" Kyle asked, a little taken aback. "I got to be Shadow's boyfriend; now you can't beat that!"

I felt my face warming up!

"Can Shadow reward you with a kiss?" I teased.

"You can, but I've moved on from Shadow - I've traded up. I'd rather receive a kiss from Hit Girl!" Kyle announced, looking directly at Mindy, who blushed and averted her eyes behind her hand.

I laughed, or tried to; it hurt!

"Only if Kick-Ass will allow it!" Kyle said, looking at Dave.

"Just don't get in the habit of it, Kyle!" Dave cautioned, with a smirk.

Mindy got up and walked over to Kyle, then planted her lips on his right cheek! Kyle blushed bright red and Mindy giggled!

"So, you wanting to join our vigilante fraternity, then?" Mindy asked.

"Not really. However, if you need anything, then I'll help. Just not combat," Kyle said.

"Thanks!" I said.

***Chapter 127*: Goodbye New York, Hello Chicago**

Author's Note: *'West Columbia' refers to the new home of Marcus Williams, in Chicago.*

The following morning

Saturday

West Ridge

When Josh found out, he flipped.

I was with Mindy downstairs, watching her do her morning exercises. I would have normally joined in, but I was still very sore from the attack last night. I had not told Josh about the attack, as I knew that he might do something stupid.

As it turned out, I was right!

"Morning, girls! How..." Josh broke off when he saw my face. "Did Mindy...?"

"No she fucking well did not!" I said quickly, then more slowly. "It was that Juno!"

Josh just seemed to freeze, then I saw anger building in his face.

"I'm gonna fucking kill her!"

"Don't be stupid, Josh," I cautioned and saw Mindy pause to watch the proceedings.

"I mean it, it's not just an idle threat – she's going to die!"

"Shut the fuck up Joshua; you're talking shit!" Mindy cut in.

"She is going to pay for what she did to Chloe, nobody does that to my girl and survives; not when I have the power to do something about it!" Josh retorted, glaring at Mindy.

I didn't mind being referred to as 'his girl', but the rest was just bullshit, although I liked the sentiment!

"Josh!" I warned, seeing Mindy's expression change.

"I'm going to do it and nobody is going to stop me!"

It was too late; I saw Mindy's eyes flash and then seconds later Josh was on his front and pinned to the mat. Mindy held his head down with her left arm.

"Now you listen to me, you little fuck, and you'd better listen good!" Mindy hissed. "Marcus gave you a second chance, he sees you as a son; how do you think he'd feel having to arrest your sorry ass?"

Josh never said a word.

"I gave you a second chance! Don't fuck things up, Joshua; 'cause if you do, you're back out on the streets again and last time I saw, you weren't doing so good!" Mindy finished.

Mindy released Josh and headed towards the stairs, passing me as she went.

"Sort your fucking boyfriend out!"

..._...

I was fuming.

Josh was gonna throw everything away and I knew that Chloe would not thank him for it! I was sitting in the living room when Josh edged into the room, cautiously and sat on the opposite couch.

I almost grinned at his attempts to give me a wide berth, but instead I glared at him.

"Mindy... I'm sorry, I was being really stupid and I didn't think..." Josh started.

"It's okay Joshua; we all make mistakes from time to time; I've made quite a few! I didn't mean to hurt you, or yell at you, but I wasn't about to let you throw your life away and Chloe wouldn't have thanked you for doing that, either!" I said.

"I know, I was just mad - when I saw the bruises..."

"That was why Chloe never told you about the attack last night."

"She's a very shrewd girl!" Josh commented.

"You killed Joshua yet?" Chloe asked, sitting down next to Josh and putting her arm around him.

"Thought about it, but the floor's clean and blood is such a cunt to get out of stuff!"

A week later Saturday

Marcus moved into his new house today.

It was just down the street from our house and was also very similar to our property, but slightly smaller. Marcus had packed up his house, in New York and had had everything shipped to Chicago. It had all arrived on Thursday and we had all helped him to get things sorted out.

More disturbingly, I think Paige and Megan are moving in with him! Now, I don't have a problem with that and the house would be a much better environment for Megan, than the apartment; the house actually had a garden, kind of.

West Columbia

"What is *that* for?" I growled, casting a wary eye over the jar on the kitchen side.

"It's for *me*!" Megan said, scowling.

"Well, you *do* kinda need it!" I admitted, with an evil smirk. "I like the pink, too!"

"You can fucking talk, bitch!" Megan exclaimed, angrily.

"For fuck's sake, Megan!" I admonished her.

"Mindy, it's a dollar each time... For Megan... But five bucks for you!" Marcus said, with a grin.

"What!" I exclaimed.

"You are old enough to know better, my girl!" Marcus admonished.

I just glared at Marcus.

"I had to install a swear jar at D-JAK; it got full rather quickly! One afternoon, Mindy was so annoyed that she just stuck a twenty dollar bill in the jar and went through to the back and turned the air blue!" Paige admitted with a chuckle.

"You know, I can actually believe that!" Marcus said laughing.

Megan and I both scowled.

That evening

Mindy and I were sitting down with Marcus and Paige, at Marcus' new house. Megan was 'busy' upstairs.

"Marcus, err, with Mindy's permission, could you tell me about Damon... I mean, before Mindy came along and also before Frank D'Amico came along..." I asked.

Marcus looked and Mindy, looked apprehensive, but curious, and she nodded.

"I'd like to hear this too," Mindy admitted.

"No problem. I also know that Mindy would never ask about what life was like before things went to shit..." Marcus said.

I was surprised. Apparently Mindy had never asked about her Dad's life before everything fell apart.

"Damon was kind and caring... You look surprised Dave!"

"Sorry! Three words that I normally don't hear in the same sentence: Damon, kind and caring!" I commented dryly.

Mindy glared, but then her expression softened.

"He always cared for me and was always kind, but I wish I could have known him before..." Mindy said and I could see tears in her eyes and she cuddled into me.

Marcus continued.

"Damon was the best partner that a man could have. He taught me everything that I needed to know to stay safe on the streets of New York. Damon had the respect of Cops, civilians and criminals alike. In return, he treated everybody with respect. He was one hell of a ladies man, too! Everybody was jealous of him and if he was at the same bar or party as you, you always knew that he would get the hottest woman there!"

Mindy was starting to look a little uncomfortable and Marcus had noticed.

"Okay, Mindy! I'll keep your Dad's sexual exploits to a minimum!" Marcus grinned.

"At one party, as usual, he attracted the attention of the hottest woman there, in fact it was me that introduced them! They got on like a house on fire and started going out a couple of weeks later. Once or twice I had to pick Damon up from her apartment on the way to a morning shift! Damon loved Kathleen like none other and the feeling was mutual. We all knew that Kathleen was off limits to the rest of us!"

At that point I realised that we were talking about Mindy's mother.

"Their wedding was fabulous and Damon was the happiest man alive. The only time that I ever saw him happier, was the day that he walked into the squad room and declared to everybody that Kathleen was pregnant - with you Mindy..."

Mindy was gripping me tightly now and staring at Marcus, absorbing everything that he said.

"... It was only a few months later that Frank D'Amico started his shit and then came the bullshit arrest and show trial. There was almost a fucking riot at the station, when the result was known. Not a single Cop believed the charge, not a one! Unfortunately D'Amico's pockets were deep and he had blackmailed or paid off anybody and everybody to get the conviction to stick and then he recruited that other bastard, Gigante!"

"The respect that the criminals and Damon had had between them, helped keep him alive for those five long years in prison. Many of the criminals actually supported Damon and some must have helped train him and give him the extra skills that he needed for when he was released. When he came out, he was a changed man; he was the Damon that you knew, Dave. I never saw Mindy again, after handing her over to Damon. The two of them just vanished, completely. I missed both of you, Mindy, so badly it hurt. I missed the little girl that I had brought up and I missed my partner, the best man that I had ever known..."

***Chapter 128*: Safehouse Down**

The following day
Sunday
Safehouse A

I was awoken by the alarm sounding, in our bedroom.

"Who set the fucking alarm?" I growled. "It's a goddamn Sunday morning!"

Then I realised, with a sharp jolt, what the alarm was. It was *not* the alarm clock: it was the perimeter alarm; somebody was trying to break into the Safehouse. I was instantly awake and punched Dave, who was about to complain, when he himself registered the alarm and shot out of bed and grabbed his clothes and boots, before punching a code into the gun cabinet beside the bed. I grabbed some clothes and my shoes, then ran along to ensure that Chloe was awake. It had just been the three of us in the Safehouse that night. I dragged her out of bed and clamped a hand over her mouth.

"Get dressed fast! We're under attack!" I growled and a confused Chloe pulled herself away from me and started getting dressed.

I returned to the bedroom to find that Dave was dressed and strapping on body armour. He threw me a set and I strapped it on, once I had finished getting dressed. I was inserting a magazine into a G36C, when Chloe appeared and grabbed another set of body armour and a P90. Dave already had a G36C ready to go.

"What's going on?" Chloe asked, strapping on her armour.

"I don't know! The perimeter alarm went off and that's all I fucking know!" I replied.

..._...

It had only been about five minutes since the alarm had been triggered.

What was happening downstairs? We were secure up here, but we needed to escape and preferably with our combat suits and weapons. Hopefully it was just some idiot trying to force an exterior door downstairs! This was the first time that the Safehouse had even been threatened.

Dave went first and I followed, while Chloe stayed upstairs. We all had basic comms headsets and NVGs. All lights were off, both upstairs and down. Dave and I emerged into the main Safehouse; nothing was visible on the NVGs. Beast and the two motorcycles were as they had been, when we had gone to bed the night before.

We checked that the briefing room and the armoury were still secure. I then punched up the CCTV footage and found that there were men outside the side door, one of whom was fiddling with the lock on the door. I hoped that he was having fun; it was *not* a conventional lock! We should have almost ten minutes, unless they moved to unconventional means, such as explosives.

Who were they and why were they here? Did they know they were attacking a Fusion Safehouse? By the heavy weapons that were in evidence, the answer seemed to be: yes! How could they have found out the location of the Safehouse? That, and many other questions, would be for later...

Right now, I needed to work out a plan. Should we gear up, leave and avoid a fight, or stay and risk injury, or worse? If they attacked and captured us, then our identities would be forfeit.

"Let's get Beast loaded; we have only minutes!" I had opted for the safe option; the Safehouse was expendable, we were not!

Chloe thundered down the stairs and we grabbed the combat suits and costumes from the armoury, while Dave reversed Beast up to the armoury door. We each pulled on our masks, to protect our identities from the attackers. The outer door to the Safehouse flew open and the men entered the small area between the inner and outer doors. This inner door was stronger and had multiple locking mechanisms, but was *not* infallible.

"Chloe, you drive Beast and we'll take the motorcycles," I said and Chloe nodded.

Thankfully, the three new Multistrada motorcycles were still at Safehouse D.

We loaded as many weapons and as much ammunition as possible, into Beast, before I armed the various Thermate demolition charges that were scattered throughout the Safehouse and slaved them to a remote trigger that I then clipped to my vest. The entire Safehouse would be destroyed, actually annihilated would be a better word, to protect our secrets. Nothing would remain that could betray us.

..._...

The final door exploded inwards and the attackers poured through.

Dave was ready and opened fire with his newest toy, the AA-12 automatic shotgun, dropping the attackers. Chloe and I were behind Beast and fired from cover. Dave's vest was hit by several rounds, but he continued firing, before backing towards us.

I saw no evidence of any identification on the men's equipment, so they were not Cops, but they were definitely professional and highly organised. I pushed Chloe into Beast and she climbed over to the driver's seat and started the engine. I covered Dave, while he started the Fat Boy and edged forward. Dave then covered me, while I mounted and started the Ducati. I hit the remote for the main door and accelerated out, followed by Dave. Chloe went last, covering our exposed backs with Beast's bulk.

Once clear of the main mesh gate, I pressed the remote detonator...

..._...

Safehouse A came apart... In a carefully planned sequence.

The armoury and all of its remaining equipment was destroyed, as the room imploded and everything inside was incinerated. Marty's computer systems were melted by a dedicated Thermate demolition charge, safeguarding all of our computer data; a copy of which was held elsewhere, so nothing would be permanently lost.

I had attached additional demolition charges to anything that I deemed a security risk and these went next, before the upper floor collapsed into the briefing room and armoury, adding to the conflagration. Several of the attackers were enveloped in searing flames from the Thermate charges that burned at over two thousand degrees.

..._...

As I accelerated away, I took a final look behind me and was just in time to see the roof of Safehouse A collapse inwards and the flames roaring into the sky. I felt intense emotions at losing yet another Safehouse; not just *another* Safehouse, but another *Safehouse A, burnt to the fucking ground!*

"You doing okay, Chloe!" I called.

"Never better!" Chloe replied nervously; this was her first time driving Beast and she was doing quite well.

Now another question: where were we going? And another: were the other Safehouses still safe?

I checked the time: three-forty in the morning.

I called Marty.

Lawndale

My cell rang.

It was Mindy and it was three-forty in the morning; this had better be something major!

"Mindy, this had better be good!" I said in greeting.

"No time, Marty! I need to know if the other Safehouses are secure... Safehouse A is fucking *gone!*" Mindy replied.

"When? By whom?" I asked.

"Just fucking now, by fucking me... We were attacked... Dave and I escaped, with Chloe and Beast, we're both on

two wheels and we need a secure location and fast!"

"Okay, I'm checking... Call you back in five minutes!"

I jumped out of bed and dived for my computers.

Western Chicago

We all stopped in a dark alley, several miles west of Safehouse A and awaited Marty's call. I wanted to head for Safehouse D; at least that was off the grid and we could hide Beast and the motorcycles. Marty came back as promised.

"Mindy, all the other Safehouses are okay and there is no evidence of surveillance or watchers."

"We're heading for D and then home," I advised. "Call Josh and let him know what's happened."

Safehouse D

We pulled up inside the Safehouse and checked the perimeter for any problems.

We found none.

"Damn it to fuck!" Mindy shouted, as she pulled off her mask and comms.

I saw Chloe climb down from Beast, remove her mask and start to say something.

"Don't bother, Chloe... Just let her blow off a little steam. I've seen her pissed like this before and we may have a few nuclear explosions before she's done, but it's safest to stay well away!" I cautioned.

We left Mindy turning the air blue and generally ranting and raving.

"How did you like driving Beast?" I asked, as I was putting the coffee on.

"It's a big... Beast!" Chloe replied. "It was fun, but under the circumstances..."

"Yeah, I know!"

Two hours later Safehouse D

Mindy had calmed down, slightly, and was resting in a bunk, muttering foul obscenities under her breath.

That was when Marcus called.

"Hi Dave!"

"Hi Marcus! How are you doing this fine Sunday morning?" I asked.

"I'm roasting marshmallows down at a certain Safehouse! What the fuck happened?" Marcus asked with a very concerned tone.

"We were attacked... Professionals... We escaped with our lives, just!" I explained. "Anything left?"

"Not a thing! Mindy likes her Thermate, doesn't she?" Marcus commented dryly. "Is she pissed?"

"Oh we've had a tantrum, or two!" I replied, with a chuckle.

A steaming Mindy appeared at my shoulder.

"Give me the fucking phone, cunt!"

"Morning Marcus!" Mindy said, without any warmth.

"You seem a little bit grumpy this morning!" Marcus chuckled.

"So would you be, if you just blew up your own fucking Safehouse, asshole!" I growled and then instantly regretted it. "Sorry."

"Just winding you up, girl! Look, I'm sorry about the Safehouse; I know what they mean to you. Okay, we have bodies: some blown apart, some shot and some, well, melted! Now melted is a first, for me, but then you are kinda creative sometimes!"

I felt myself blushing.

"Thermate was going cheap a few months ago; vigilantes just love a sale!" I quipped in a poor attempt at humour.

"I can only imagine!" Marcus replied dryly. "We're trying to identify this stir fry and once we have, I'll let you know. You destroyed things so well that nobody but me knows that this place is linked to you guys."

"Thanks Marcus. We'll be home in an hour or two."

..._...

"You've calmed down a bit," Chloe commented, coming over.

"Sorry about that guys - I was just pissed."

"We had kinda noticed!" Chloe laughed.

"Come on, let's get Beast unloaded and then we can go home."

Dave went to reverse Beast nearer the armoury.

"Hey, short-ass!" He called, as he opened the driver's door.

Chloe and I both turned to Dave.

"*Shadow!* When you drive Beast, could you move the goddamn seat back, once you've finished! We're not *all* four foot tall!" Dave said.

"I am not four fucking feet tall, asshole!" Chloe retorted.

Later that morning West Ridge

We caught a cab home, but got out a couple of blocks short and walked the rest of the way.

When I opened the door, I was first met by Sophia and then I was very surprised to see Cathy, Curtis and Josh.

"You all okay?" Cathy asked, concern in her face, as Josh went to hug Chloe.

"We're all fine," I replied. "I'm just pissed off about yet *another* destroyed Safehouse.

"Hey! This one was *not* my fault!" Josh said defensively. "I was nowhere near the damn place!"

"I know!" I laughed weakly.

"Marty is keeping a close eye on the other Safehouses, with Abby's help," Cathy said.

"Do you know who was behind the attack?" Josh asked.

"No, but when I do..." I replied dangerously and let it hang.

..._...

"You guys okay? Marcus just told us what happened," Paige exclaimed, as she came into the kitchen.

"We're okay, Paige!" I said. "We just had a couple of problems!"

"That's not quite how Marcus put it!" Paige replied. "Thermate!"

"Mom! I told you they'd be okay; she's Hit Girl for fuck's sake!" Megan exclaimed. "Jeez!"

I had to laugh at Megan; she always had the ultimate faith in my abilities!

Chapter 129: Safehouse F

One week later
Saturday

We entered the seemingly dilapidated commercial structure and walked towards the rear of the building, stepping around discarded crap, some of which looked to be of military origin. The place was obviously abandoned and hadn't been occupied for quite some time!

At the rear of the dilapidated building, Mindy pressed the down button, on an equally dilapidated looking elevator, but nothing happened except that a small keypad had appeared beside the button. Mindy punched in an eight-digit code and the elevator doors slid open surprisingly noiselessly. In contrast to the exterior of the elevator, the inside was spotless and looked very modern. Dave pushed us both forwards and into the elevator, following Mindy. Then Dave, smirking, hit the 'F' button.

That in itself was strange, as the elevator only *had* two buttons; both letters: 'X' at the top, with 'F' at the bottom! The elevator dropped and I mean *dropped!* It went down fast, but stopped smoothly after about twenty seconds. Nothing happened until Mindy had placed her hand on a flat, glass panel that was only revealed when the elevator had stopped. The panel appeared beside the elevator door opposite to that which we had entered by.

Beyond the elevator doors was darkness. As we stepped out of the elevator, lights started to snap on, illuminating a short 'L' shaped corridor that angled to the left and led to another door, which was obviously heavily armoured. Mindy placed her hand onto another panel, beside the door and we entered a small room. More lights clicked on and we found ourselves in a box of steel and armoured glass; it was a kill zone. Mindy pressed a button and the armoured door behind us closed and Dave placed his hand on the biometric palm scanner which was located by another armoured door which then slid open.

We could hear a humming noise that sounded like it was coming from computers and air-conditioning. Suddenly, the lights came on, in banks, starting above us and continuing almost one hundred and forty feet. The ceiling was twenty feet or so above our heads. We entered the enormous room; although cavern might have been a better word!

..._...

"Cool, it's a Hit..." Josh started.

"I know what you're about to say and if you say it, I'll slap you stupid!" Mindy interrupted, grinning.

"Don't slap me... You know I can't help myself... It's a Hit-Cave!" Josh said quickly, then laughed and ducked away from Mindy, as she swung for him.

"It is not, *will* not and won't ever *be*, called a *Hit-Cave!*" Mindy growled, as Josh laughed, still avoiding her fist.

I gazed around us.

At the far end of the cavern, by a large vehicle-sized steel door were Beast, the Fat Boy and the Ducati Panigale. They were parked behind an eight-foot tall armoured glass shield that ran across the available width of the forty-foot wide cavern and had a large six-foot tall figure '1' on it. The top of the shield was angled over at forty-five degrees, to prevent anybody climbing the structure from the far side. The floor of the 'cavern' was ribbed steel and concrete.

Immediately to the right was a glass enclosed room that housed computer equipment and large flat screens. It was obviously Marty's new Command Centre and had a biometric palm scanner, similar to those that we had already seen Dave and Mindy use, beside the door. Immediately beside the Command Centre was an external steel staircase.

The staircase provided access to a walkway which ran around the central section of the cavern and provided access to a number of rooms on the second level. There was another steel staircase that came down on the left from the same walkway, at the far end of the facility. The walkway was about ten feet off the ground and ringed with a steel and glass barrier that rose to a level of three and a half feet and the walkway itself was made of steel, but had a foam rubber covering. There were various doors, visible, that led off the walkway into rooms, with unknown purposes. The ceiling and some of the walls had foam rubber sections that reduced the echo in the cavernous room.

..._...

To the left was a passageway that led to what looked like bathrooms. Further along from the passageway was an armoured door, with another biometric palm scanner that led into...

"Damn, a fucking firing range!" I exclaimed.

"Four sound-proofed, lanes, with electronic target retrieval!" Mindy announced happily.

Opposite the range was another door, this one was lightly armoured, but still secure. I looked at the biometric palm scanner and then at Mindy, who nodded. I placed my hand on the scanner and the door slid open and bright lights snapped on. It was the armoury, which Mindy had obviously already filled! There were obvious reserved spaces for our combat suits and other equipment that was still at the other Safehouse.

..._...

Next, Mindy took us past an enormous training mat and up the steel staircase on the left side of the cavern at the top of which was a large six-foot tall figure '2' on the wall and showed us a small, but well-equipped, restaurant quality kitchen with a seating area for about twelve people. Next to the kitchen was a large store room and then came a large open area with comfortable couches and a large screen television which would double as a briefing room. The ceiling of this room was the bare stone, which was actually quite cool! We followed the walkway around and found two bedrooms either side of a shared bathroom. The bedrooms each had a pair of sturdy bunk beds, to sleep four people in each room. The third bedroom seemed to have lost its bunk beds and instead had a large king-size bed and was obviously for Mindy and Dave, as the room had been painted purple! That room also had an en-suite bathroom that had a large bath and a shower big enough for two!

"How come *you* get a bed to share? What about me and Josh?" I asked indignantly.

"Fusion is about protecting Chicago, not getting vigilantes pregnant!" Mindy replied, with an evil smirk.

Back downstairs and after walking across the mat that was beside Marty's Command Centre we found a couple more store rooms, one of which was only accessible from the vehicle area. The vehicle area was accessed via a secure armoured glass door.

"What's down there?" Josh asked tentatively.

There was another steel staircase going down, near the staircase that went up beside the kitchen. Mindy waved Josh towards the staircase and we followed. It was another level, in this case level zero according to the large six-foot tall '0' on the wall. To the left of the staircase seemed to be just empty store rooms, although one store room seemed to hold enough dried food, water and other survival equipment to allow us to stay self-contained for years! A large store room, near the back of the level contained an enormous electrical generator and electrics panel.

"Currently we are connected to the City for electricity, but can be self-contained if necessary," Mindy explained.

Opposite the store rooms was a large, glass fronted, exercise room that was equipped with weights and running machines plus a lot of other training equipment.

Finally there was accommodation for another four people and a rather forbidding room that had a simple sign on the door: 'Holding'. Inside was a jail cell, with two bunks and a segregated area that would be used for interrogation.

Finally, we all went back upstairs to the briefing room and sat down and I looked questioningly at Mindy.

Mindy laughed.

"This place used to belong to the government. It was originally built as a Command Post for the Navy in case of a nuclear war. It was maintained and upgraded till about 2010 and then abandoned. It would have originally housed about twenty personnel. Your Dad, Chloe, arranged it for us. He came across the facility in some paperwork and found that it was available for purchase at a rock-bottom price. So, Commander Bennett pulled quite a few strings and I kinda got the keys last September. I had it updated a bit, but the elevator and biometric security are original, but upgraded and changed the locks, so to speak and Marty did his bit, too," Mindy explained.

"There are four different personnel entrances, one of which you have just seen. Another comes out in the Fusion warehouse, Safehouse D, which was why Mindy leased it in the first place. It had been covered up, but we uncovered it, hence the new building at the warehouse! There are two vehicle entrances which meet beyond that large steel door. We'll show you that later, when we get the motorcycles. This place is totally secure; it does not appear on any maps, as the Navy kept it black," Dave finished.

"It was only finished a couple of weeks ago. I was gonna unveil it in another week or two, but we need it now. This is a Safehouse in every sense of the word. Daddy once dreamed about having a place like this and often fantasised about it having a hidden entrance that was accessed using a bust of Shakespeare and poles down to a cave! Anyway, Daddy was a little nuts, but the cave idea seemed like a good idea," Mindy finished.

"Fucking awesome!" A very excited Josh, exclaimed.

"How far down are we?" I asked.

"You mean: will anybody hear you two fucking?" Mindy growled, with an evil smirk. "Our nearest neighbours are over sixty feet away, through solid rock! Not to mention that most of the Safehouse is under the railway."

***Chapter 130*: Fort Fusion**

The following night
Sunday
Safehouse D

We were geared up and on our Multistrada motorcycles.

It was just before midnight. Kick-Ass was driving Beast and would be acting as escort, with Hawk beside him. Battle Guy was covering our movements from his new Command Centre at Safehouse F. We left the warehouse and travelled in convoy, with Hit Girl out in front on her Multistrada and Beast behind Jackal and myself. We had to follow Hit Girl, as we had absolutely no idea where the vehicle entrance to Safehouse F was!

We had only travelled a mile or so, when I realised that we were travelling in a circle! I wasn't concerned, as Hit Girl had warned us that she would weave us about a bit to remove any tails or surveillance. Finally, we made a left turn off the road and drove through a wire mesh gate and onto some wasteland, just off of South Albany Avenue, before driving into a dilapidated looking warehouse, via a steel shutter that closed automatically behind Beast and we weaved around piles of 'stuff'; I had absolutely no idea what was in the piles. What concerned me more was that we headed towards the far wall and kept going!

A ramp suddenly appeared in front of Hit Girl and we headed downwards before curving around to the right and we started going down and still turned to the right. The ramp closed automatically, behind Beast. It was very dark, but our headlights illuminated enough of the ramp that I could see that we were descending in a tight circle. The walls were concrete and I could make out light fittings, but they were all off.

After what seemed like ages, the ramp levelled off and bright lights came on that illuminated a large steel door. Hit Girl stopped and waved at the door. I heard what I assumed to be latches being released and the door descended, quite quickly and smoothly, into the ground and we rode into the Safehouse and pulled up beside the Fat Boy and the Ducati Panigale. Beast stopped on the other side of the Fat Boy and we all cut our engines and removed our helmets and masks. Behind us the enormous door was rising up, again quite quickly and quietly, before I heard the latches re-engaging. Amber lights that had illuminated, on either side of the door, went out.

Safehouse F

"Welcome to Fort Fusion!" Marty announced, walking over followed by an excited Sophia.

"Fort Fusion?" Josh asked.

"Thought it would be a good name," Mindy said.

"Not bad, Hit Girl!" I agreed.

"This place is definitely awesome!" Josh added.

Mindy placed her hand on a biometric scanner, near Beast and a part of the glass shield opened and we walked to the armoury and removed our combat suits, stowing them away along with our weapons. Just as we were heading upstairs for a coffee, before heading home, an alarm sounded.

..._...

"Come and watch this," Mindy said, with a mischievous grin and led Josh and I into the Command Centre.

Marty brought up a CCTV image of the area in front of the elevator, in the building on the surface. A man was standing there and we recognised the man as Marcus. We could also hear him, too!

"If that girl is gonna jerk me about at this time of night, I'll damn well..."

Marty pressed a button and the elevator door slid open and Marcus looked at the elevator suspiciously.

"I know I'm gonna regret this!" Marcus said and stepped into the elevator.

Twenty seconds later the elevator stopped and the doors opened. Marcus had not had to do anything.

"We can control the elevator from here and lock it down if necessary. When the elevator leaves the surface a steel cover drops over the doors preventing access to the lift shaft," Marty explained.

We watched as Marcus left the elevator and moved down the short corridor and into the 'Kill Zone' and Marty then opened the inner door, once the outer door had closed. We went out to meet Marcus.

"Well I'll be damned! That girl has really gone over the top now!" Marcus said, gazing around the cavern.

..._...

"Well?" Mindy asked, looking a little over excited.

"It's just – err, *so you* Mindy..." Marcus said, seemingly speechless and Mindy jumped forward and gave him a hug.

"I'm glad that you approve!" Mindy said, smiling enormously.

"I really thought that I was gonna be mugged up there!" Marcus said dryly.

We all headed upstairs for a coffee.

..._...

"This place really is awesome!" Marcus said for about the fourth time.

"It is that!" Dave admitted, with a sideways smirk at Mindy.

"Well, I'm glad to see that you guys are gonna be safe and I really mean that!" Marcus said. "I was really worried when I saw Mindy's melted Safehouse!"

***Two days later
Tuesday night
Somewhere in Chicago***

"You know who I am?"

"Oh, yeah!" The man looked and sounded scared.

"Do you fear me?"

"Fuck, yeah!"

"Good! Now, you are going to work for me!"

"Anything!"

"You will obtain information for me... I may give you tasks... You will obey, without question..."

"No problem!" The man responded, but his face said it was anything but!

"You give me bad information, you die! You fail me, you die! You inform on me, you die... You get my drift?"

"Yes ma'am!"

"That applies to any member of my team, even the fucking dog!"

"Not a problem!"

"I am not *totally* heartless!" The man's expression screamed that he thought otherwise. "You will be under *my* protection! Anybody fucks with you; they fuck with me!"

"Thank you, thank you!"

But the man was talking to the darkness.

The following morning
Wednesday
Safehouse F

Mindy was pounding the bag on the lower level of the Safehouse.

She seemed to have a lot of rage to get out of her system. It was surprising how much rage Mindy managed to pack into quite a compact package! I came up behind her and wrapped my hands around her waist. Mindy stopped punching the bag and lent into me. Her head bent backwards and she grinned up at me.

"Hi, lover!"

"Hi, babe!" I replied and bent down to give her a kiss and span her around.

Mindy was so incredibly sexy when she was dripping with sweat; it turned me on like almost nothing else! We had the Safehouse to ourselves today; nobody else was here.

"I need you Dave!" Mindy said, between kisses. "Let's christen this Safehouse properly!"

Okay, I should have been at school, but I needed some time alone.

I placed my hand on the biometric sensor and the final door slid open. I entered Mindy's latest toy - Safehouse F. It was kinda weird being here on my own, but I knew that I would be able to put my angry energies to better use. I headed straight downstairs to the exercise room, not really looking at anything.

I entered the glass-enclosed room and immediately saw a white t-shirt on the floor, plus some punching gloves. This could not be good! I wandered back towards the stairs and pulled something off of the handrail and looked at it – then dropped it quickly – it was a sports bra, a damp sports bra! I continued upstairs to the main level and found a sports shoe and then a few feet further on another shoe.

I was getting a really bad feeling about this!

I headed towards the stairs that led up to the next level and listened. My eyes went wide at what I was hearing! Oh – my – God! I really wished that what I had just heard could be unheard, as I could now see images that my mind had formed to match the sounds! Mindy was a screamer and she had a damned good set of lungs! I ran...

Maybe school would be better after all!

Lake View High School

"What's up Josh?"

"Nothing, Chloe, I – err..." Josh replied, looking very uncomfortable.

"I couldn't find you earlier, where were you?"

"I, err – I was late."

Josh was actually blushing and getting redder.

"What has happened? Did you see something?" I persisted.

"No thank God; I saw nothing!"

Josh moved off, in a bit of a confused state. He could be so strange sometimes!

Author's Note: *Hey 250,000 words!*

***Chapter 131*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part I**

Three days later

Saturday

'The Farm'

4:30 A.M.

They came at dawn...

I awoke with a jolt as Jack shook me awake. He explained that the perimeter alarm had been triggered and that he could see trouble advancing on the house, via the CCTV cameras. I noticed that he had his Glock 17, in his right hand. I rapidly jumped out of the bed and pulled on some warm clothes and boots, then I reached under the bed and pulled out a hidden FN Five-seveN Mk 2 pistol and a spare magazine.

"How long has *that* been there?" Jack asked, with a concerned tone.

"Since we started fighting the Russians, last year; I asked Mindy for it," I replied. "Sorry!"

"Don't be! That was an astute decision; I always saw you as smart!" Jack said with a smile.

I checked the magazine in the pistol and then racked back the slide to chamber a round. Jack led the way out and down the stairs. Natalie was already half way down the stairs and, I was rather surprised to see, armed with an over and under shotgun! As we got to the ground floor (I had issues with calling it the 'first floor'), I could make out the shadows of armed men through the glass on the front door. We headed for the kitchen and the back door, but when we got there, we found shadows beyond that door, too.

..._...

"The basement... We can get out that way... Tunnel to the barn," Jack announced.

"What tunnel?" I asked.

"Did I never tell you?" Jack replied with a chuckle. "I need to keep some secrets, Joshua!"

Just then the men outside assaulted the house. Both doors were smashed open and the men poured in. Natalie opened fire with the shotgun, emptying both barrels, before pushing her way through the door to the basement. Jack and I emptied our pistol magazines at the men, dropping three or four. The men obviously weren't expecting to find us all up and armed; this threw them a bit and they were suddenly disorganised, which gave us time to dive for the basement.

At the bottom of the stairs, we passed Marty's backup command centre installation, which was secured behind a locked, but unarmoured door. I wanted to go and get a Fusion radio, but there was no time. I inserted my only spare magazine, as did Jack. Natalie swiftly reloaded the shotgun with another pair of shells. Jack opened a small door that was easily missed, but which actually led to a tunnel, about five feet high and three feet wide. I urged Jack and Natalie to move, while I opened up a hidden Fusion gun cabinet and pulled out a set of upper-body armour, preloaded with P90 and FN Five-seveN magazines, plus a pair of Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knives. I quickly strapped this on and heard men coming down the stairs into the basement. I only had time to shove my pistol into my trousers and grab a P90, before I slammed the gun-safe door closed, thus locking it and pulled back on the P90's cocking lever. The first man appeared at the bottom of the stairs and I fired off a dozen rounds, dropping that man and the man behind, and giving the rest cause to slow their advance; there was no way that they could have expected automatic weapons! I had to give Jack and Natalie time to reach the barn.

"Come on, Josh!" I heard Jack shout.

I fired off a couple more short bursts and then dove for the tunnel, pulling the door shut behind me. I hoped that they might not find it, in the dark. Minutes later, I found a wooden ladder and climbed up to and through a trapdoor that came out in one corner of the dark barn. Jack and Natalie helped me out of the trapdoor, before Jack dropped it closed and we pushed a heavy box on top of it.

I moved towards the locked barn doors and peered out. I could see a pair of SUVs out by the road and several armed men, all equipped with body armour, moving around the exterior of the house. They seemed very organised and

competent.

"What now?" I asked Jack. It had suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't picked up my fucking mobile!

"It won't take them long to come and search in here," Jack replied. "We have only seconds."

"I only have two more shells left," Natalie announced. "We need to get you out of here, Joshua!"

"I need to stay to protect you!" I growled back.

"No Josh, we're not all getting out of this. Take your motorcycle and head south..." Jack started, but he was cut off as bullets started to pierce the wood of the barn and Natalie went down with a scream, followed by Jack. I felt two rounds hit my chest armour and I dove for the ground.

"Go, Joshua, go..." Jack said, then his eyes closed and he lay still.

West Ridge

5:00 A.M.

I awoke with a jolt, as my cell rang.

The screen told me that it was Murphy and I also saw the time!

"This had better be fucking good Murphy; it's five o'clock in the fucking morning!"

"CPD's being hit and hit bad... Jack Bay was attacked half an hour ago..." Murphy explained, in a subdued tone.

I sat bolt upright in bed and came fully awake.

"What! When?" I blurted out.

Oh my God, Josh!

"Black clad men attacked four CPD Commanders, at their homes. Commanders of District 8 and District 4 are both dead. Commander District 10 was away, but his family was hit hard. Jack and his wife were taken to hospital with serious injuries. I'm at the scene now; there was a major fire fight and we have almost a dozen dead attackers. I know the Commander had a boy living with him, but there's no sign of the kid..."

I felt like shit inside...

"... Lieutenant Williams will be here in minutes to take over the scene. I'm sorry Hit Girl, I know that you and the Commander were close. We have men out searching the area for the boy. As soon as I know more, I'll contact you." Murphy finished.

"Thanks, Murphy!"

..._...

Several minutes later my cell rang, just as I was getting dressed and so was Dave. It was Marcus.

"Have you heard?" Marcus asked, without any preamble.

"Yes, Murphy called. Where are you?" I asked.

"I've just arrived at the Farm; it's a damn mess. I can see six dead bodies from here... There are more bodies in the house. I've checked the barn; Josh's motorcycle is gone and there are tracks heading south. Mindy, the tracks are not just motorcycle tracks; he was pursued by what look to be a set of SUV tyres, too..." Marcus explained, before trailing off.

I knew how much Marcus cared for Josh; it was almost as much as he cared for me.

"Marcus, check the gun-safe, in the basement - you know the code..."

I heard Marcus heading into the house and down some stairs. Then the electronic beep of a code being entered and the buzz of the lock.

"Is there a P90 on the left hand side?" I asked, tentatively.

"No."

"Then he's armed. He'll have taken his armour, too!"

"That would account for the dead men in the basement!" Marcus commented, dryly.

"Oh God!" I said.

"Mindy, you trained him well. He's a bright kid, we'll find him!" Marcus said. "I... Hold on..."

I heard chatter in the back ground, then Marcus came back on the phone. He sounded like he was running.

"Neighbours have reported gun fire a couple miles from here, about ten minutes ago. I'm on my there now."

Two miles south of The Farm

4:50 A.M.

I was in a lot of pain.

When Jack and Natalie had been shot, I had unlocked the motorcycles with my keys, which were in my trouser pockets, thank goodness! I grabbed my helmet from a rack and pulled it on, then I climbed on to the motorcycle, started the engine and waited a few seconds as I heard the barn doors rattling and then the doors being opened. I loosed a burst of rounds, then clipped the P90 to my armour and accelerated out the door. My burst of gunfire had caused the armed men to dive for cover. I saw a total of about six men on the ground as I roared off, heading south towards the track where Mindy had taken us for off-road training. I couldn't see very much and had no lights, so I took extra care and tried to avoid being too reckless. I was scared, very scared and I wished Mindy was with me, to guide me. I hadn't a clue what to do, except to run. But where was I going to run to? I had no communications, but at least I could protect myself. I took a quick glance behind me and saw an SUV, headlights blazing, coming after me.

Oh, shit!

I just needed to hold out until help arrived.

I first headed south-east for about five hundred yards, then turned south for another five hundred yards, before I came to a fence. To the east was an open, ploughed field which was no good as it would then leave me exposed to the pursuing SUV and the men inside, instead I stopped the motorcycle behind some dense bushes and I turned off the engine.

I saw the lights of not one, but two SUVs, heading towards me. I checked the P90 and ensured that I had a fully loaded magazine fitted. I had one more magazine left, plus three spare magazines for the Five-seven.

Unfortunately for me these guys were also well equipped. The first SUV stopped twenty yards away, with the second moving about twenty yards to my left of the first SUV, before stopping. Two men climbed out of the first SUV and started to scan the area. There was something not right about the silhouettes and then it hit me, the men were equipped with Night Vision Goggles!

I wondered if they were image intensifying or infra-red...

I got my answer, as automatic gunfire ripped through the bushes near the motorbike with the hot engine. I had to move and fast... I jumped back on the motorcycle and fired off a dozen rounds as I kick started the motorcycle. Thankfully it started on the first kick and I accelerated away from the bushes, heading west for about a hundred yards, where I found the river then turned south again.

I kept going for another three hundred and sixty yards before I came off the bike and fell into a ditch; I must have skidded on a muddy patch of ground. The SUVs had closed and instead of getting back on the bike, I dumped my helmet and crawled deeper into the ditch, which was where I was now. I had a big bruise on my right hip, where I had landed on a rock and I also noticed a stinging sensation in my lower left back. When I reached behind me, my hand

came back wet, with blood.

***Chapter 132*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part II**

The same morning
Saturday
I-90, heading north

We were driving towards The Farm, as fast as was reasonable.

Dave and I were in the SUV and I was driving. I had scrambled Cathy, in case Josh was wounded; Chloe and Cathy were a few miles ahead of us, also heading for The Farm. Unfortunately it would take us a good twenty minutes or so to get there, by which time it could all be over!

Marcus, though, was less than two minutes away...

County Forest Preserve
5:15 A.M.

I skidded to a halt in the parking lot.

Two hundred yards to the west, I could hear gunfire and saw muzzle flashes, plus the headlights of a pair of vehicles. Two CPD vehicles came to a halt, as I grabbed an AR-15 from the truck. Sergeants Murphy and Fellowes appeared beside me, both armed with AR-15s, too.

Other Officers secured the exit to the main road.

West of County Forest Preserve
5:00 A.M.

I set the P90 to single shot and aimed using the laser sight.

I controlled my breathing and squeezed the trigger. A man fell, as his head almost exploded. The body fell back against one of the SUVs. That was one of the two men with the NVGs, the other man turned towards me, started shooting, and I dived down and crawled along the ditch for about five yards, then popped back up and aimed. I shot out three of the four headlights and killed another man. I poured rounds into the engine bay of one SUV before I heard a bang and smoke and steam poured from the engine compartment.

I inserted my last P90 magazine and popped up again. I could not see the last two men, at all. I took a chance and crawled back to the motorcycle and hauled it out of the ditch. I had no time to find my helmet, so I kicked the motorcycle to life and headed south west, away from the river. My thigh and lower back were hurting me badly, the pain was bad, but I had no choice, I had to keep moving. I could hear shouts over the motorcycle engine as the remaining men, shot at me before getting into the remaining, one eyed, SUV, which then started to follow me.

I must have gone about two-thirds of a mile. I couldn't go any further, I was beside a small lake. I dropped the motorcycle and hid down beside the water. I could hear the SUV and it was approaching fast, down the trail that I had just followed. I aimed the P90 and the moment that the SUV had appeared, I emptied the entire magazine into it. The SUV skidded to a halt with steam pouring from its engine compartment. Two men fell out of the SUV and scurried into cover. I dropped the now useless P90 and pulled out my pistol and started to fire off rounds at the men, keeping their heads down and buying myself time. I could hear Police sirens in the distance and I hoped that they were coming towards me.

Minutes later, I was inserting my last magazine, when I heard vehicles skidding to a halt somewhere across the water and I heard shouts. I kept firing rounds at the two men, who seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of ammunition. A voice barked out over the gunfire, just as the slide of my pistol locked back on an empty magazine.

"Chicago PD! Put the weapons down and your hands up!"

The most wonderful emotions swept over me, as I recognised Marcus' voice; I was safe. The Police started to engage the two men with what had to be AR-15s.

County Forest Preserve
5:20 A.M.

The armed men were returning fire, with automatic weapons.

Fellowes, Murphy and I kept firing. As we came around the lake I thought I could see where Josh could be, down by the water. It was then that I heard one of the men shouting.

"He's run out of ammunition, get him, then we can get the fuck outta here!"

Silhouetted by the remaining headlight, I saw a man move towards the water and just as I aimed my rifle, two slim objects seemed to grow out of the man's chest. I instantly recognised them as the hilts of two knives. The man dropped at almost the same time as the other man was killed by Murphy and Fellowes.

"Josh!" I yelled. "Joshua!"

There was no response.

I ran down to the water's edge and could see a dark form partially in the water. I rolled the dark form onto its back; it was Josh. I checked for a pulse; he was alive but unconscious and I could see blood on the side of his head. He must have been grazed by a bullet, at some stage during his escape. Beside the boy was a discarded P90 and a Five-seveN pistol with the slide locked back. Scattered around him were three empty pistol magazines and hundreds of empty bullet cases.

Just then Murphy and Fellowes appeared.

"The SUV is clear, Lieutenant!" Fellowes reported.

"Damn!" Murphy exclaimed, taking in the scene before him. "This must be Jackal!"

"What!" I said.

"Come off it, Lieutenant!" Murphy said. "We've known about Fusion for a long time; I owe them my life, *twice!* We know what Shadow looks like, without her mask; we saw her after that bank thing, last year and we have a fair idea who she really is, too - the same with Hit Girl! Have no fear Lieutenant; Fusion's secrets are safe with us."

"That's one brave kid!" Fellowes exclaimed.

I picked Josh up and carried him back to my truck. Fellowes and Murphy followed with my AR-15 and Josh's weapons.

I-90, heading north

My cell rang and Dave answered it.

All I heard was Dave's side of the conversation.

"Hi Marcus... Yeah... Thank God... We'll be there soon!"

Dave turned to me and I felt tears in my eyes and then on my cheeks. Dave was smiling.

"That was Marcus, he has Josh. He's wounded, but alive..."

I didn't hear the rest; the tears of relief just spilled down my cheeks.

Dave immediately rang Chloe and Cathy, and told them the good news. They were just behind us, as we raced up I-90 and we were less than ten minutes away from Marcus and Josh.

County Forest Preserve

I laid Josh in the back of my truck and unclipped his body armour, which I noticed had received several hits! As I removed the armour, my hand came away from his back wet and when I checked it under the light, my hand was red. Oh shit! I pulled up his top and checked his back. There was a small wound, which looked to be a through and

through, but the wound was bleeding quite a bit. I grabbed my first aid kit and cleaned the wound as best I could and covered it with a dressing. Josh had started to regain consciousness and had screamed out when I had touched the wound.

"It is okay, Josh... It's me, Marcus! I'm just checking your wound," I said, as calmly as possible.

"It hurts!" Josh said, through clenched teeth and tears were streaming down his face.

"It will! I know; I've been shot before!" I said, trying to sound encouraging, but failing.

Josh suddenly stopped grimacing and stared directly at me.

"Jack and Natasha..." He said.

"They are both alive and currently in surgery."

"Oh God!" Josh said then passed out.

..._...

Minutes later two SUVs pulled up and Murphy went to wave them through the Police road block. I saw Mindy, Dave, Chloe and most importantly Cathy, running towards me. Chloe was crying and Mindy looked as though she had been too.

"How..." Mindy and Chloe said together.

"Hold on, girls! Josh is okay; I've dressed his wounds, but he needs proper medical care!" I said, waving Cathy towards Josh and holding Mindy and Chloe back.

"Let me go!" Chloe almost screamed. "Let me see Josh!"

"Give Josh some space, Chloe!" I said forcefully. "Dave!"

Dave grabbed Chloe and took her off to one side, to give her time to calm down. I explained to Mindy what had happened, while Cathy started to check Josh out. Murphy came over with Fellowes to find out how Josh was.

"He'll be okay," Cathy called over. "I just need to make sure that he's fit to travel and then we can get him out of here."

"That would be a good idea - before anybody arrives who isn't friendly to Fusion!" Murphy pointed out. "I think it would be best to keep the boy out of the news."

"Thanks, Murphy!" Mindy said, with understanding and a nod from Marcus.

"We owe you guys a lot; I hope he recovers," Fellowes said, genuinely concerned.

"Marcus, I assume you're staying here?" Cathy asked.

"Yes, I need to stay," Marcus confirmed.

"I've given Josh something for the pain. Dave, get Josh into your SUV and get him home, then into bed. I'll stitch him up there," Cathy ordered. "Curtis picked a good night to stay with friends!"

"Take it carefully, Miss Speedy!" Murphy said to Mindy.

"I don't speed; it was just that one time!"

"Yeah, right! You fairly tore up the Dan Ryan, the other week! What did you *hit*, one-ten, one-twenty?" Fellowes asked.

I watched Mindy and saw her smirk.

"One-twelve!"

Later that morning
West Ridge

Cathy came out of the bedroom.

Chloe had been pacing backwards and forwards, almost enough to wear a strip in the carpet!

"How is he?"

"For God's sake, Chloe, calm down! Your boy is going to be fine; nothing important was damaged!"

Chloe glared at her mother.

"Go on - just don't *overexcite him*, he needs rest!" Cathy said, then smirked as Chloe ran into the bedroom and started fawning over Josh.

"She's been really worried – can't really blame her really, considering that she has been through this before with Josh!" I said.

"As before, you'll be there to help her, Mindy," Cathy said with a smile. "I need a coffee."

"I'll join you. Josh seems to be in good hands!"

That afternoon
Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Marcus and I stood beside Jack.

He was in a bad way, but was conscious; at least for now.

"Did he get away?" Jack asked.

"Yes, he did – he killed almost every last one of them! He's hurt, but nothing serious," Marcus replied.

"Thank God!"

"I am going to do everything possible to find who did this, Jack! Vengeance *will* be swift, but or so violent!" I said, felling the anger coursing through me. "No one has yet seen exactly *what* I am capable of!"

"You're scaring *me* now!" Marcus said, half seriously, wrapping his arm around my shoulders.

"I know you will, Mindy. Please stay safe; I would not want anything to happen to you, or any member of your team, for my sake," Jack said. "It was your training that helped Josh today, without it – we would all be dead, right now."

I felt myself blushing.

Natalie was still unconscious, in the bed next to Jack. I felt so helpless, but I felt pride in what Josh had been able to pull off - alone.

Later that afternoon
West Ridge

"The gloves are off! Hit Girl has gone soft and *that* is going to change. Criminals will learn what the consequences are for hurting people dear to me. They will fear me, they will fear my name and they will be too damned scared to venture out..."

"Mindy, calm the fuck down!" I said. "I know you're mad; we all are. But you know what happens when you rush into things..."

"I know, dammit!" Mindy yelled back. "I almost lost three *very* important people today, Dave. I don't have that many people *in* my damned life and I almost lost *three*, all at once..."

Mindy fell down onto the couch beside me and started sobbing. I pulled her into me and held her tight.

That evening
West Ridge

"Hi guys, come on in!" I said. "Mindy, we have visitors!"

"Murphy, Fellowes!" Mindy said. "Good to see you!"

"Please, Paul and Sam, at least when we're out of uniform!" Paul Murphy said and pulled a large bouquet of purple tulips from a bag.

"For the lady!" Paul said, with a smile.

Mindy seemed to wilt at the sight of the flowers.

"They're lovely!" Mindy said, with an enormous smile.

"The florist said that purple flowers send a message of pride, dignity and admiration," Sam Fellowes said.

"Thank you," Mindy said, almost at a loss for words!

"You guys hitting on my fiancée?" I asked, with some pretend menace.

"Nah! But if we were; we're more scared of her, than you!" Murphy laughed.

"You guys having fun?" Marcus asked, coming in the door.

"Lieutenant," Sam and Paul said.

"Just letting the lady know that we admire her."

"*She* is no lady!"

"*Thanks!*" Mindy said sarcastically, but grinned.

"How's the kid?" Sam asked.

"Believe it or not, he's been through a lot worse!" Marcus said with a grimace.

"You can say hello, if you want. First on the left, at the top of the stairs. Better knock, Chloe's in there and well..." Mindy said mischievously.

"Hi, kid!"

I looked up from Chloe, who was laid on the bed beside me, to see two men that I instantly recognised. It was Murphy and Fellowes, but out of uniform.

"Almost didn't recognise you guys without your stripes!" I said.

"You look better than twelve hours ago!" Fellowes said.

"I *feel* better than twelve hours ago!" I replied and I really did.

"What you did, it took real guts, Josh. We're both extremely impressed and we both know what you're going through; we've both been there. But I understand that you've been through worse, so this should be a walk in the park for a veteran like you!" Murphy said.

"I've had more peaceful walks in the park!"

"You okay, Chloe? You seem to look after Josh very well; every good man, needs a good woman!" Fellowes said with a smile.

"That's sexist!" Chloe retorted, with a scowl.

"Okay, I know better than to piss you off; I saw what happened to the last guy!" Fellowes quipped.

"Funny!"

"I wish I could have done more, then Jack and Natalie wouldn't be in hospital. I should have stayed and..." Josh started.

"Joshua," Murphy said sternly and Josh looked up at him. "You did the only thing that you could have done; which just happened to be the right thing. We've spent all day up there, at The Farm; you did everything right. You used your training that Mindy gave you and used it to lethal effect. Nobody at The Farm today can think of anything else that you could have done. So cut that crap out right now! I want to see you better and out on those streets, doing what you do best. Even if it is winding up poor defenceless Police Officers!"

Josh laughed.

"Doughnuts are on you guys then!" Josh said with a laugh before turning serious. "Thanks that meant a lot."

***Chapter 133*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part III**

***The following morning
Soon after midnight
Sunday***

The man was slammed against the wall.

He was shaking from head to toe, with fear. This fear was probably very understandable, considering *who* was standing in front of him.

"Hit Girl! I know what you're after, but I don't know anything; believe me I'm not *that* brave!"

"You know the consequences of lying to me, worm!" She growled, inches from the man's face.

"I'll do what I can - I have contacts..."

"You do that... When I return you had better have something for me... Or...."

The man closed his eyes and then fell to the floor of the dark alley.

When he opened his eyes again, he was alone.

***The following night
Western Chicago Bratva***

"Boss, we have a problem and by problem, I mean *problem!*"

"He's not kidding, Boss; Hit Girl is on the fucking warpath! She is determined to get to those who killed the cops and I don't think she cares if she treads on us all to get to them. She is totally inhuman, that girl – none of us stands a fucking chance!"

"Kick-Ass holds her leash, he controls her."

"Nah! Kick-Ass is pissed, too! He's like a fucking battle tank; nothing gets through his armour!"

"Their little pal, Shadow; she's just as inhuman as Hit Girl and just as pissed. She attacked one of Georgi's men and shot him, in both fucking knee caps!"

"The only solution is to find who killed the Cops... What the fuck!"

An arrow had just embedded itself into the conference table. The men looked upwards, but not before the arrow had exploded in a dazzling white light and an enormously loud bang. Once the men around the table, had picked themselves up they looked at where the arrow had been, but instead found their worst nightmares.

"Oh fuck!"

"You don't mind if we drop in?" Hit Girl growled.

Behind Hit Girl was the large armoured form of Kick-Ass. Beside Hit Girl was her protégé: Shadow. You could see the vicious snarl on Hit Girl's face, but what was somewhat more unnerving, was not being able to see the faces of Kick-Ass or Shadow at all.

"That skylight was new!"

"Bill me!" Hit Girl growled.

"Yeah, send it to: hitgirl !" Shadow added.

I ignored the cocky vigilante!

"I know why you are here, Hit Girl; but we cannot help you. I wish we could..."

"I need to be sure..."

"We do not kill Cops; well, not like that – we have rules and you know that."

"Yes, I do," Hit Girl replied, somewhat reluctantly.

"We pledge our assistance to you and your team, during this time," I said.

"Я уважаю Братва, пока они не неуважение меня!" Hit Girl replied. [*I respect the Bratva, until they disrespect me!*]

"Ваше здоровье!" [*Your health!*]

"Sorry about the mess!" Kick-Ass growled as the three of them left, the same way that they had come.

..._...

"You just allied us with Hit Girl and Fusion!"

"Better than being her enemy!" I replied and received several enthusiastic nods.

Two days later
Wednesday night
Safehouse F

I had noticed earlier in the evening that Shadow had been struggling.

She was very tired, as were all of us. We had been operating for over eight hours every night for the past three nights, but Shadow was tired to the point of being dangerous to herself and others. I had tried to get this across to her earlier that afternoon, but had failed miserably, so I tried again.

"Chloe, you are tired and need a rest..."

"Like fuck I do!" Chloe responded, just as I had expected her to.

"Right now, Chloe, you are knackered. You would be a danger to others and yourself if you went out..."

"Try and fucking stop me, bitch!"

Suddenly, I saw Chloe grabbed by the scruff of her neck and hauled backwards, then dropped rather unceremoniously onto the mat.

"I'm calling a *fucking* end to this!" Dave announced, anger in his eyes. "Don't you *dare* speak to Mindy like that, EVER, and definitely not when it's *you* that is in the wrong!"

Chloe looked mad and her eyes flared.

"I need to find the people who attacked Josh and Jack and Natalie!" Chloe yelled back.

"Chloe, calm down, please..." I tried.

"I will *not* calm down!"

"Calm down, or I will put you down and get Mommy to sedate you!"

Chloe just sat there breathing heavily and then after a minute she started to sob. I sat down beside her and wrapped my arm around her shoulders.

"We'll get the people who did this – but not at the expense of anybody and definitely not you. You all mean a hell of a lot to me and I don't want to lose a single one – not when it can be avoided," I said quietly.

"Come on, let's get outta here. Marty and Abby are fine on their own – let's go home," Dave said and helped Chloe up off the mat.

"Thanks Dave!" Chloe said and gave him a tight hug.

"Not a problem, Chloe – we stick by each other, it's the only way we all get through tough times like this."

"Don't tell Josh or Mom – they'll just yell at me!" Chloe pleaded.

"Our secret, kid!" I said.

The following morning
Thursday
West Ridge

We all awoke late that morning, not far short of lunchtime! We must all have been very tired.

I found Megan and Paige in the kitchen, when I got downstairs.

"Hi guys!"

"Hi Chloe, you look a little worse for wear this morning!" Paige observed.

"You look like shit!" Megan added and received a disapproving frown from Paige.

"That will cost you a dollar, you foul-mouthed little varmint!" Mindy said as she came into the kitchen, still in her pyjamas.

"Does the word 'hypocrite' mean anything to you?" Megan retorted.

"It's too early for word games, Megan!" Mindy growled. "What are you guys doing here, anyways?"

"Marcus asked us to check on you lot, as you did get back late," Paige explained.

"The old man does worry!" Mindy replied.

"He cares, that's all!" Dave said, giving Mindy a cuddle and a kiss.

"I think you guys should take a day off and get some rest – please!" Paige insisted.

"A good idea, my love!" Dave said.

"Yeah, we won't accomplish anything tired and yeah, I feel like shit!" I said, smirking at Megan who scowled back.

"Would you both take Sophia for a walk?" Dave asked Paige.

"No problem!"

"Cool!" Megan added.

After lunch we just lazed around the house. Dave was busy upstairs chatting with Josh, while Chloe and I lay on the couch together and watched TV.

At about two, there came a knock on the side door. I pushed Chloe out of the way and headed over to the door to see who it was. It was Erika and...

"Did you arrive on that?" I demanded, as I threw open the door.

"Yeah, why?" Erika asked, somewhat confused.

"It's a fucking Ducati 1299 Panigale S!" I growled.

"Bang on! I wanted a Multistrada, but Daddy helped me get this – long story, but I bet it would look better in purple!" Erika said, whispering the last part.

"Get in here!" I growled, pulling her in and closing the door.

..._...

"Why do you look like somebody just stole your Ducati?" Chloe asked.

"This bitch, here, has a goddamn Ducati 1299 Panigale S!"

"Oh that would explain everything!" Chloe chuckled.

"Okay, joke over! I want to help – I know that you guys are in the middle of something big, something to do with those Cops getting killed!" Erika said, sitting down.

"We *are* short on people, right now. Josh is upstairs recovering from a bullet wound!" I said.

"What? When? Oh my God!"

"Saturday morning!" Chloe said.

"How is he?"

"Sore from a bullet just above his backside, but he managed to fight off a lot of men and save himself. He's a really brave kid," I explained and saw Chloe smiling at my praise.

"You must really love him, Chloe," Erika said quietly.

"What! Yes, I do! Thanks, Erika."

"I'm sorry if I insulted you and Josh before - I just saw you both as young kids who couldn't do very much. I just wanted to say that..."

"Not necessary Erika, but thanks anyway," Chloe said with a smile. "Let's go see the little shit!"

"Oh good - girls!" Josh said with a stupid grin.

"Don't get any ideas, idiot – you're supposed to be resting!" Chloe said.

"You did all the work last time!" Josh teased with a dirty smirk.

Chloe blushed slightly.

"How are you Josh?" Erika asked.

"I suppose it could have been worse!" Josh grimaced in response.

"True!"

"I'll leave you three together," Dave said, getting up off the bed. "Now, girls, Josh isn't up to a threesome, so go easy!"

Erika and Josh both glared at Dave as we both went downstairs.

"He seems in good spirits!" Mindy commented.

"He is in pain, though, and he tries to hide it – hence all the bravado and attempted flirting!" I replied. "I'm gonna speak with Cathy, as I'm a little worried about him."

"Good idea! Erika wants to help and I think we should let her – we are a bit short handed!"

"I'll leave that up to you, beautiful!" I replied.

My cell beeped with a text message. I checked it and looked back at Dave.

"So much for a restful day!"

"A snout?"

"Yeah – a slimy one!"

"Just us?"

"Yeah – Chloe needs her rest; I'm not kidding about that."

That evening
Safehouse F

"You guys ready?" Marty called over the comms.

"As ever!" I responded.

"Let's roll!" Kick-Ass replied and we both accelerated up the ramp.

Once out in the open we headed towards my snout, cruising through the dark streets.

..._...

"You have information for me?" I growled, inches from the man's face.

"Yes, yes, I do, Hit Girl!"

"Well!"

"I know who killed those Cops – now, what is that worth to you – what will you do for me?"

"I'll let you live!" I growled back, menacingly.

The man thought fast: "That sounds fair!"

"I'm getting bored!"

"Montfort – Richard Montfort, he stays in Milwaukee – he's working with some gangster – that's all I know, Hit Girl – I promise!"

"You've done well – assuming the information is correct! Now, where did you get this information?"

..._...

Fifteen minutes later, I was satisfied the information that the little worm had provided, was genuine and had come from an acceptable source, meaning this probably wasn't a trap!

Kick-Ass was keeping an eye on the surrounding area, in case of any nasty surprises. Which proved to have been a very shrewd move.

I was just climbing onto my motorcycle, when I heard a gunshot and saw my snout being gunned down, which in itself seemed to tell me that the information he had provided was pure gold! I pulled a pistol and fired half a dozen rounds down the alley, dropping one man while another ran off.

"Hit Girl, Kick-Ass – I'm under attack!"

I holstered the pistol and started the Multistrada before accelerating towards Kick-Ass who was a block over.

"Battle Guy, we need backup!" I called.

"Battle Guy and Hawk are scrambling!" Hal called. "ETA four minutes!"

The display in my visor changed to show my location, Kick-Ass' location close by and another dot over to my left, with an arrow and some numbers showing it heading towards me at sixty-two miles per hour – Battle Guy was not holding back with Beast! I was only fifty yards from the end of the block when the world came apart.

"Oh fuck!" I heard Kick-Ass shout and then I heard a thud over the comms.

Ahead of me I saw a burst of orange flame and then heard the explosion and saw sections of what had once been a Harley Davidson Fat Boy, fly across the street.

"Oh my God!"

***Chapter 134*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part IV**

***Thursday evening
Chicago***

I skidded to a halt and jumped off the Multistrada.

I feared the worst and felt immense emotions charging through me, as the worst possible outcomes swept through my mind. I could hear gunfire and then my headset came to life.

"Stay in cover Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass called.

"Thank God! Are you okay?"

"Still in one piece. I have heavy incoming fire..."

I could hear a siren approaching and span around. A Chicago Police car was coming down the street perpendicular to mine and just as it got to the junction, I saw an orange streak appear from the direction of Kick-Ass and the Police Car exploded in front of me.

"Holy fuck! A damn Cop Car just got zapped by a fucking rocket!" I announced. "Kick-Ass report!"

"I'm fine, Hit Girl! Just a little busy!"

I grabbed a G36C from my Ducati and edged to the corner of the block where I peered around the corner and I could see Kick-Ass about thirty yards down the street on one knee and shooting with a Glock pistol in each hand. I could see incoming bullets hitting his torso, but Kick-Ass barely moved. I took aim and started sending short bursts down the street.

"Beast is ninety seconds out!" Hal announced in my ear.

I continued firing.

"Sixty seconds!"

"Hit Girl, I have you in sight, coming in on your six!" Battle Guy called.

I still had my helmet on, so I had been able to follow Beast's progress as it closed on my position. Hawk jumped out and provided additional support while Battle Guy kept Beast ready for a quick departure.

"Kick-Ass move it! Move now!" I called and watched as Kick-Ass moved backwards seeking cover, as Hawk and I kept sending bursts down the street.

..._...

"Oh God! Are you injured?" Hit Girl demanded, once Battle Guy had floored the accelerator.

"It was like sex with you!" I replied.

"What!?"

"Sex with you gives me the same feeling – like I've just been in an explosion!"

Hit Girl just looked at me and then she hit me!

"You fucking bastard! I was fucking worried about you and you just want to joke about me fucking you!" Hit Girl exploded.

"Just defusing the situation, beautiful!" I tried.

"That was *not* fucking funny! But... I loved your description of me when we *do* fuck! Don't scare me like that again, green asshole!"

"Ah guys! You're both on VOX!" Hal announced. "Ewww!"

Safehouse F

"What the fuck happened out there?" I demanded.

It had taken us forty minutes to get back. I had insisted on various anti-surveillance manoeuvres before we reached the Safehouse.

"There are some serious people at work here!" Marty said.

"I almost fucking lost Dave tonight! This needs to fucking end and soon! Who is this fucking Richard Montfort?"

"We're still looking into that. He's a big shot, that's all we know so far!" Marty said.

"We also need to investigate Milwaukee, of all places!" I said. "Thanks Marty – I need to see how Dave is."

I left the command centre, dumping my mask on a table and headed up to the briefing room where I found Dave, Cathy and Curtis. Dave's combat suit had absorbed a lot of the impact, when he had jumped from his motorcycle, but there were some major bruises and he had a bang on the head and a bruised shoulder.

"He'll live!" Cathy announced, as she checked the last of Dave's bruises.

"Thanks, Doc!" Dave said, grimacing with the pain.

I knew that if Dave was grimacing, it must have been bad – considering he only felt about twenty percent of the pain!

The following evening

Friday

South Cottage Grove

"Hey! Stop changing the damn channel, brat!"

"It's my turn tonight, Nats!"

"I want..."

A phone started ringing.

"Cool! It's the Hit Phone!"

"She'll kill you if she hears you call it that, Cam!"

"Nah! Hello..." Cam said, as he answered the phone.

"Time to earn your keep, arseholes!"

Forty minutes later

36th Place and Albany

It was very dark and the whole place looked dodgy!

She had told us to 'catch a cab' to this location and await further instructions. The mobile rang again – it was Mindy.

"Turn around and go to the door behind you..."

Was she watching us? As we approached the door, it clicked and Natasha pushed it open. We went inside and the door closed and locked behind us. The room was dark and smelt of damp and neglect.

"You know, Cam, this is exactly where she would bring us to kill us!" Natasha commented.

"I can still hear you, you know!" Mindy said.

"She heard you!" I advised Natasha.

"Big ears!" Natasha breathed.

"Go to the elevator at the back of the building room and get in," Mindy said.

I was starting to feel really worried and a little bit scared! Natasha too seemed worried too. We stepped into the lift and the doors closed behind us, then I felt myself rise as the lift dropped, fast! Then it stopped smoothly and the door in front of us slide open with barely a sound.

"Follow the passageway. See you in a minute!" The call was dropped.

I shoved the mobile into my pocket and we followed the corridor, which turned ninety-degrees to the left and ended at a door, which clicked open and we passed through a glass enclosure and into...

..._...

"Fuck me! It's the Hit Cave!"

"Told you!" A voice said and I was surprised to recognise another British accent.

"It *is not* called that, Joshua!" Mindy said as she approached us with a grimace. "Sorry about the cloak and dagger and him! I don't have big ears, either, Natasha!"

Natasha smiled a shy apology.

"Welcome to Fort Fusion, fellow Brits! I'm Josh!"

"Cameron; although I think you already know that!"

"Yes, we know who you are Cameron and you Natasha – I'm Dave!"

"I recognise a certain stunning, beautiful girl!" Cameron said, looking at Chloe who blushed and giggled!

"Hey – she's taken!" Josh growled.

"Come on upstairs," Mindy said, laughing.

..._...

I was amazed at what I saw – I couldn't take it all in, it was cool, just cool! Natasha and I followed Mindy up some steel stairs and then left towards a large sitting area and we all sat down. There were some more people here. Mindy began the introductions...

"Natasha, Cameron. Please meet: Cathy, Paige, Marcus, Curtis and little Megan..."

"Less of the goddamn 'little', Hit Pussy!" Megan growled.

"Err – right! Downstairs in the Command Centre are Marty and Abby. Making repairs to Beast is Tony and his son Tommy," Mindy finished.

"We've called you here because we need your help..."

Dave went on to explain all that had been happening over the past week, from the shooting of the Police Officers and Josh's injury to the activity the other night – we had heard all about the Police Car blowing up! When Dave had finished we both just sat there, in shock.

"Josh is out of action – he pretends he's fine, but he's full of crap – like most Brits!" Mindy said with a grin. "Dave is injured and the rest of us are tiring fast. We need to perform some intensive reconnaissance in Milwaukee and you two are new faces that nobody has seen, plus you will easily pass as tourists thanks to your accents!"

"We owe you – we'll help as best we can, Mindy."

"Thanks guys and I really mean that."

The next morning
Saturday
Safehouse F

Things were coming together.

The twins had gone back to their apartment and were ready and waiting for our call – on the Hit Phone, damn stupid name!

"Mindy, you got a moment?" It was Paige and Cathy.

"Should I be worried, guys?" I asked jokingly.

"Oh yeah!" Cathy replied with a smirk.

"Take Curtis and Megan with you to Milwaukee – you need feet on the ground and they could help," Paige said.

"They're too young and I won't risk them."

"They would be useful, besides they have armour – we trust you Mindy. Besides they want to go and both Cathy and I agree."

"Do I have a choice?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"No, you don't!"

"Does Hit Girl get no respect anymore?" I asked.

"We *do* respect you Mindy and that is why we trust you with our kids," Cathy said, with a friendly smile.

A week later
Friday
Safehouse T, Milwaukee

This would be our temporary Safehouse, while we operated in Milwaukee.

Marty had been able to rent a house on the outskirts of the City. Having two young kids with us did give us an anonymous and innocent outlook to anybody observing our activities. The team in Milwaukee consisted of myself, Marty, Chloe, Cameron, Natasha, Curtis and little Megan. The others remained in Chicago, in case anything happened there. Marty had driven up with Lucille, while I had driven up in our SUV. The drive had taken almost two hours for the eighty-five mile journey.

The Safehouse that Marty had obtained had four bedrooms. Marty and Cameron would share a bedroom, while Chloe, Natasha and I would share another and Curtis and Megan would share the third. The fourth bedroom would be used for equipment and planning. We had rented two vehicles for the stay – both Jeep SUVs, so our own SUV could remain hidden, in the garage. Lucille would be our mobile Command Post, operated by Marty.

Chloe, Marty and I had our combat suits with us, while Curtis and Megan had their protective suits and armour. I had provided SWAT type gear for Natasha and Cameron with masks. Talking of the Brits, they now had codenames: Cameron was Drift and Natasha was Crimson. We all had concealed comms, while Chloe, Marty and I would be armed at all times.

The following day
Milwaukee
Saturday

"Remember, last time I let you and Chloe go away she came back with holes in her shoulder and a weird boyfriend!" Dave said over the phone.

"I learnt a lot that time and many mistakes will not be repeated. This trip is purely for reconnaissance – what could happen?"

"Yeah, exactly!"

"We'll be fine, Dave – you just get yourself back to your normal, indestructible self. I love you!"

"Look after yourself, gorgeous!"

Marty had located the penthouse that Richard Montfort used as his home in Milwaukee.

It was a thirty minute drive from the Safehouse and was not far from the water. The building was on a leafy street and our target lived on the fifth floor. Marty had also identified a suitable observation position approximately six-hundred yards away that could also double as a sniper position – just in case!

Natasha and Cameron took Megan and wandered around the penthouse neighbourhood for a few hours taking photos, with each of them talking with a British accent, which it turned out Megan could pull off quite accurately – she had a tendency to mimic Josh and wind him up, especially at D-JAK! The three of them looked quite innocent wandering around and pretending to be tourists.

Marty and Curtis drove around the streets in Lucille recording high-definition video images of routes and anything else that might be useful. We also managed to get our first view of the target – Richard Montfort. It would have been nice to kill him now, but we needed him to lead us to his partner in crime first!

That evening Safehouse T

"My feet are fucking killing me!" Megan announced at dinner that evening.

"Oh, Marcus insisted that I bring this!" I said and placed a certain pink jar on the table.

"A goddamn interstate swear jar!" Megan moaned, giving everybody a laugh.

We all enjoyed sharing a few buckets from KFC, as none of us were much good at cooking! We discussed what we had seen today. Apparently the penthouse was secure, as most were and we hadn't been able to get anybody anywhere near it, which was a pain, but Marty had been able to obtain the original plans, so we had a floor layout, which would be useful. We knew exactly what the target looked like and also what its security arrangements were.

These security arrangements were, as expected, quite impressive. We never saw the man with less than six armed men and he always travelled with a lead and a chase car and favoured armoured SUVs. The first day had been successful – we had acquired some important information and nobody had been hurt!

It wasn't easy getting Curtis and Megan to bed, they had got hyper during the day with all the excitement, but they were both very tired.

"Thanks guys!" I said, once they were both in bed. "Megan, Curtis, you did really well on your first Fusion operation and I'm very proud of both of you. Get some sleep, so you're ready for tomorrow. Night guys!"

I was really proud of them and I had made sure that Curtis had called Cathy and Megan had called Paige, once we were back at the Safehouse for the night to let them know that their kids were safe.

***Chapter 135*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part V**

Two days later
Monday
Milwaukee
Safehouse T

"Come on, you two!" I called to Megan and Curtis.

"I'm tired!" Megan moaned.

"We all are; but that's part of the price of being a vigilante!"

"Fucking heartless bitch!" Curtis muttered.

"That's why you love me!" I laughed.

..._...

After breakfast, the kids had woken up and they were ready to get to work! The plan for the day was to continue surveillance, as we had been doing since Saturday. We had identified another property that seemed to be tied to Montfort; so we intended to go have a look.

The building had a large sign over the door: 'Montfort Industries'. The main section of the facility was a large warehouse, with smaller blocks for offices attached on one side. We drove past it a few times on all sides to get some good photos and video. Again, Natasha, Cameron, Curtis and Megan wandered around the area pretending to be tourists. They tried to gain access to the building, looking for a bathroom, but were turned away by men that seemed to be armed and definitely knew their business.

The building backed onto a residential area and seemed very innocent. However, we knew that Montfort had a darker side to his organisation and was linked to other shady characters. We were going to identify all of his dirty secrets and expose him and then most probably kill him!

..._...

"Well done guys!" I said when the 'tourists' finally returned to Safehouse T.

We spent the rest of the afternoon going through the information obtained, so that we could plan our in depth covert reconnaissance planned for tonight. I sent Megan and Curtis to get some sleep, ready for further work tonight. Megan and Curtis would be crucial – we would use them for distraction purposes, while Chloe and I checked the building out. The twins would be assisting Marty with the overwatch in Lucille.

That night
Safehouse T

I awoke the two kids and we all geared up.

Once Megan and Curtis were kitted out in their costumes and body armour, Chloe and I double checked each kid to ensure that they were correctly dressed and equipped.

"Look at me, both of you!" I said and sat down across from them. "We are going into harm's way – primarily Shadow and myself. Now: you – will – not – take – any – goddamn – risks; playtime is over, kids!"

"We understand, Hit Girl!" Trojan replied.

"We'll do our best!" Wildcat said.

"That's all I ask!"

Montfort Industries

We parked up the Jeep SUV behind a nearby commercial unit.

"You two stay here and chat, or do whatever you guys do when you're on your own!" I said.

"We do *not* get up to any of that disgusting crap Shadow and Jackal get up to!" Megan growled back.

I laughed and Shadow's posture showed she was annoyed!

"Battle Guy, Shadow and Hit Girl are checking out the area before moving in!" I called.

"Copy that!" Battle Guy answered.

..._...

Shadow and I kept to the shadows, which was relatively easy due to the relatively poor street lighting and a rail track that ran beside the street. The vehicle entrance to the building was a four-foot tall barrier that would slide open as required and was currently closed. I headed round the street corner and looked towards the office entrance – the street was clear.

Wildcat was stationed, with Trojan, in bushes and deep in shadow across from where the building's security team operated in the main office block. If required, they would provide distractions or other help as required. Battle Guy and the twins were in Lucille a couple of blocks over. We had various wireless cameras providing surveillance of the surrounding streets and alleyways. Hopefully, we wouldn't be surprised by anybody new arriving! Our entry would be stealthy and over the roof. Battle Guy had identified an AC vent on the roof, which would allow us access into the warehouse portion of the facility.

I dropped through the AC vent first and Hit Girl followed.

We slid down a support beam and then down a column. We were in a large open area with various computer-controlled metal-working machines and some curtained off sections. The lights were off, so we lowered our NVGs into place and started searching the warehouse, moving towards the office spaces and a raised office near the end of the warehouse.

..._...

We had been there fifteen minutes, without finding anything useful, but we had found the building's IT network and plugged in a special box that Battle Guy had provided, so while we were searching inside the building – Battle Guy would be reading their computer data!

..._...

Next came the raised office – Hit Girl went up the wooden stairs first, while I covered her with my silenced FN Five-seveN. At the top of the stairs was a locked wooden door, which Hit Girl proceeded to open with her lock picks – a skill that I had yet to learn!

Inside was a large desk with three very large computer monitors on it. We also had a very good view of the entire warehouse. This seemed to be the main security centre for the facility – but was obviously not used at night. The monitors showed images of cameras all over the facility, but strangely there were no cameras covering the interior of the warehouse. Something went on in this warehouse that required a visual security check, but was dodgy enough to not require a digital record of what went on.

It was time to move on.

"Battle Guy, Hit Girl and Shadow are moving into the main offices."

"Copy!"

"Trojan, report!" Hit Girl called.

"Trojan is go!"

"Wildcat, report!"

"Wildcat is go!"

At least the two kids were still safe and I was pleased that Hit Girl still had them on her mind. The next area would be more difficult, as that was where the security was.

..._...

Forty minutes later, the job was done and still no alarm had been raised. No 'smoking gun' had been found, but then we hadn't really expected anything, as these people were usually careful. We hoped that Marty may have found something in the computer data, though.

Now it was time to get out of here! Although, there was now a problem with that little idea. As we moved to go back into the warehouse, it seemed that four of the security men had wandered into the warehouse, cutting off our escape in that direction. There were also another four men at the main entrance, which stopped us exiting that way.

Hit Girl and I finally found ourselves in an inside office, with two security men in the corridor outside!

Shadow and I were stuck and we couldn't move until the damn security men moved on.

"Fusion, Shadow and Hit Girl are stuck!"

"Acknowledged!" Battle Guy reported.

There was a pause then a response from an unexpected source.

"Hit Girl – this is Trojan – we, err, we can run interference!"

I looked at Shadow and she nodded.

"Affirmative! Stay safe, guys – no risks!" I responded, feeling uneasy – but we had no choice. "Standby to move, Shadow."

Wildcat and I shot out of cover and ran over towards the building.

There were two large SUVs parked beside where the security men were located. As Wildcat kept watch, I pulled a knife, with a six-inch blade, off of my belt and then I started stabbing the tyres of the SUVs. Next I took a deep breath, before calling Hit Girl.

"Hit Girl, Trojan – standby to move!"

I reversed the knife and started smashing the SUV windows and car alarms started sounding. This caused a door to fly open and about half a dozen men appeared and I hid behind some bushes beside a mini electricity sub-station.

"Fucking kids – look: tyres and windows..." One of the men said.

"Hit Girl, Shadow – move your fucking asses, now!" Wildcat called.

"Are you guys fucking stupid?" Another man said, coming out of the building. "It's a fucking distraction, you idle idiots!"

"There!" A man called, as he aimed a pistol at Wildcat, who had just run back across the street and deeper into shadow.

"Hey!" I called and bolted out of cover and down the street. This attracted attention away from Wildcat and I felt bullets whizzing past me as I ran.

"After them!" The man in charge yelled.

I had heard the shooting and had heard Trojan over the open comms.

"Shadow, we need to move!"

"I'm on it!" Shadow responded, as we ran down the warehouse and climbed up to the roof. The shooting was louder, once we were out and I ran towards the end of the warehouse. I was just in time to see Wildcat running towards the rail tracks, when I saw a man appear and aim his pistol. Wildcat turned to check behind her, just as the man fired.

The bullet hit Wildcat and I saw the girl fly backwards, she twisted in the air and landed a few feet away, on her side. The bullet had impacted almost dead centre, but just a little towards Wildcat's left hand side. I fired three rounds from the Glock 30 that I had selected for this trip and the .45 calibre rounds lifted the man off of his feet and he flew backwards and onto the street and didn't get up. I jumped down from the roof and rolled on to the grass strip beside the warehouse, coming up and dropping the next two men coming down the street.

Shadow dropped and rolled just behind me and dropped the next two men, sending the rest scurrying back into the building. So much for covert! I saw Trojan run over to Wildcat and go down on his knees beside her. I ran towards them, while Shadow covered us.

"You all right?" I heard Trojan ask Wildcat, in a worried voice.

"Of course I fucking am; I'm not a fucking pussy like you!" Wildcat responded as Trojan pulled her back to her feet.

I had to laugh.

"Sorry – I just care about you is all!"

"Not the time for making out, you two!" I cautioned.

"Yuck!" Trojan commented.

"Hey! I am kissable, you know!" Wildcat retorted.

"Both of you, get to the damn SUV!" I ordered.

Safehouse T

Megan eased off her vest, with a little help from Curtis and she rubbed her chest with a grimace.

"You're lucky you don't have any tits!" Chloe announced. "Bullets and tits don't go together!"

Megan looked appalled at that comment and Curtis actually blushed slightly. Chloe and I checked Megan over for any other injuries, but thankfully there were nothing more than a few bruises.

"I can help rub it better if you want!" Curtis suggested hopefully, with a grin.

"You can keep your fucking hands to yourself, *if* you want to keep them intact!" Megan answered.

"You have a lot to learn about girls, kid!" Chloe commented with a laugh and patted Curtis on the back.

"Thanks Curtis! That was a damn good idea of yours to distract the security guards – otherwise we might have had to fight our way out of there!" I said – feeling guilty about Megan.

..._...

Milwaukee had been a success – just! But we were on borrowed time and the enemy knew we were in the City, so at eight o'clock the following morning we packed up and drove back to Chicago.

Later that morning

Chicago

Safehouse F

"I am so sorry Paige; I never meant for Megan to be in danger, I -"

"Mindy, shut up!" Paige said.

"I shouldn't have had them -"

The sound of a painful slap echoed around the Safehouse.

Damn - Paige had just slapped Mindy! Mindy just stood there with a hand against her rather pink cheek and she looked shocked. Then after a few seconds she finally spoke.

"What the fuck did you do that for?" Mindy asked angrily.

"To bring a silly girl to her senses!" Paige replied, with a smile.

"What? I'm confused..."

"Mindy - Megan is fine; I let her go out there – not you. It was thanks to you, though, that she survived, uninjured," Paige explained.

"I only got a sore tit!" Megan added.

"You haven't got any tits!" Curtis said and received a punch on his arm from Megan, which had him holding his arm tight and grimacing with the pain.

"That vest stopped the bullet, simple as that!" Paige continued, looking at Mindy. "Now shut up, Hit Girl, if you know what's good for you, or you'll get another slap!"

"Okay!" Mindy accepted. "I know when to quit!"

"Bullshit!" Dave quipped, with a chuckle.

"Oh, ha fucking ha!" Mindy growled, massaging her bruised cheek and ego.

The following day

Wednesday

West Ridge

Marty had spent all yesterday afternoon and into the evening going through the computer data that we had obtained. Abby had helped him as much as possible and between them they were making good progress towards finding 'the other guy'.

Megan had come over this morning and I still felt guilty for her getting shot. Yes, Cathy had checked every inch of Megan's body and not found anything more than a few bruises – no broken bones, nothing. But I still felt guilty, despite what Paige had said – I had allowed a ten year-old girl to get shot! Megan had given me a big hug and thanked me for protecting her and I was at a genuine loss for words as I had put her into danger in the first place!

"For fuck's sake Mindy – it was not your fucking fault – snap out of it! Or do I have to slap it outta ya?" Megan growled.

I couldn't stop myself laughing!

"Thanks Megan – I'm fine! Let's go see if Marty's found anything!"

Safehouse F

"Hi!"

"Hi Dave!" Megan called.

"You okay, Hit Girl?" Dave asked, with a grin.

"I am now, thanks to my little Megan!"

"I've told you before: less of the fucking 'little'!"

It was just then that I heard a shout from the Command Centre; so Dave, Megan and I went in to find a very excited pair of geeks!

..._...

"Found the other bastard!" Marty said.

"Montfort has a brother-in-law and he seems to be in the same criminal business!" Abby added.

"Well, do I have to wait for it?" I demanded.

"William Tait – he spends most of his time here, in Chicago and he's in the City now!" Marty finished.

"Well done!" I said.

"Worth getting shot for!" Megan added.

The asshole that we were after lived on a boat – when he was in Chicago.

In this case he had a multi-million dollar palace, which was currently moored at Burnham Harbor and she was called the '*Trinidad*'.

I was going to end this – before anybody else was injured or killed.

..._...

That evening, Dave and I drove up to Burnham Harbor. We parked in the main car park and took an innocent walk along the waterfront. There in front of us was the target – I had to admit that she was beautiful.

The '*Trinidad*' was over one-hundred and twenty feet in length and displaced two-hundred tonnes. Marty had obtained the specifications from Feretti, the Italian builder of the giant vessel. The vessel had over four decks and would be a nightmare to assault. But that was what Hit Girl did; she overcame and overpowered.

I had noticed that there was good armed security around the vessel. None of it was overt and only a skilled eye would notice the armed guards and automatic weapons. One problem, was the other vessels moored around the giant yacht. I could not allow collateral damage and I was certain that the men guarding the yacht would not give a toss about who else was in their line of fire. Also the vessel was moored down near the end of a long, narrow jetty, which would make a stealthy advance all but impossible; they would see us coming and cut us down!

..._...

"He thinks that he's fucking safe, but he's *not*... At least *not* from me!"

"You want to use the '*Vigilante*'?" Dave asked, but he didn't mean it as a question.

"Why the hell not!"

***Chapter 136*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part VI**

*Two days later
Friday night
South Chicago*

8:00 P.M.

"What the *hell* are we doing here?" Shadow asked.

"Where exactly *is* here, anyway?" Jackal asked.

"Wait and see?" I replied, enjoying teasing them.

I punched in the access code and the steel door clicked open.

"Welcome to Safehouse W!" Kick-Ass announced.

"You knew about this place?" Jackal asked.

"Hit Girl and I have no secrets!" Kick-Ass replied seriously.

"You know Kick-Ass knows everything about me – especially all the embarrassing things!" I added.

"Why 'W'?" Shadow asked.

"The 'W' stands for 'water!'" I announced.

"Yeah, I suppose that would be logical, as we are beside the Calumet River," Shadow commented.

Hit Girl switched on the overhead lights.

"Now *that* is cool!" Jackal announced.

Safehouse W

The building had a large portion of space given over to a water-filled dock and floating alongside the dock was the '*Vigilante*'.

The '*Vigilante*' was a Sunseeker Predator 53, custom built in the United Kingdom. The performance motor-yacht was just over sixty feet in length overall, with a forty-four and a half foot waterline. The twenty-seven tonne craft had a top speed of around thirty-two knots. The hull was black, while the upper works were purple, which actually appeared almost black in the dark. Mounted on the top of the yacht were a radar antenna and twin domes that housed satellite communications and navigation equipment. There were also two large whip antennae for non-satellite communications.

"That is one of the most beautiful sights that I have ever seen!" Shadow exclaimed.

"She's nice, ain't she?" Hit Girl said, grinning from ear to ear.

..._...

"Right, first things first: safety!" Kick-Ass announced and handed a lifejacket to each of us, before taking one for himself.

"This is an assault troop lifejacket, as used by Royal Marines Commandos. It is designed to support extra weight, such as our armour and weapons, but still be compact enough to not get in the way during an assault. It also has a quick release, so it can be ditched quickly, if necessary. You put it on like this..."

Kick-Ass demonstrated on Jackal, showing how the lifejacket was secured, before checking it was fitted correctly on Hit Girl and Shadow, then Hit Girl checked Kick-Ass.

"The red toggle should be pulled if, and only if, you go in the water. Hopefully that won't happen as it *will* be cold!" Kick-Ass finished.

The 'Vigilante'

Twenty minutes later, after a brief tour of the '*Vigilante*', we were cruising at 8 knots up the Calumet River, towards the sea with Hit Girl at the helm. One of the important features of this craft was that she could be controlled from a totally enclosed position behind tinted glazing. The roof above the control station could slide open, turning the control station into an open air control station! For now, though, this made things a little more comfortable than standing out in the driving rain and kept us anonymous. It would take about an hour to transit the river, before we would get to Lake Michigan. We would then have a stormy cruise up to Burnham Park Harbour – a distance of about nine nautical miles. That part of the cruise should take us about an hour, depending on the weather, which was *not* too good!

..._...

An hour later

The ride was somewhat lively and both Shadow and Jackal seemed to have iron stomachs! Jackal had been allowed to come on the operation as he was healing nicely and he was starting to get really restless and bored. Battle Guy, Hawk and our newest member: Mist, were currently parked up near the harbour, in Lucille and were waiting for us to get closer and begin our assault. They also had Eisenhower, who hadn't had the chance to munch on anything exciting for quite a while!

..._...

Eighty minutes later

Kick-Ass was looking ahead, using night-vision binoculars and he could see the '*Trinidad*', which was lit up from stern to stern. She was moored with the bow pointing towards the land, so we would come alongside near the yacht's stern. The crew did not seem to be concerned about an attack. It was after ten at night and it was very dark and the rain was pounding down.

We would all be using Heckler & Koch MP5SD6, silenced, sub-machine guns with collapsible stocks. This would allow us to kill without alerting the entire crew and would be easier to handle within the confines of the '*Trinidad*' than the G36C assault rifles. Another added benefit was that the low-velocity nine-millimetre rounds would not penetrate too much of the vessel or targets and potentially wound an innocent, or ourselves – which would have been kind of embarrassing!

We approached slowly and I hoped that the rain would cover the noise of the engines pounding beneath us.

Burnham Harbor

We had a problem – a problem that we really didn't need right now.

"Err, guys! It's the bitches on bikes!" Mist announced, pointing at a video screen.

"Fucking hell!" Battle Guy responded. "We *can't* afford this distraction!"

"Mist, let's go!" Hawk said, grabbing a G36C and passing over another.

"I'm on it!" Mist announced. As she did not currently have her own combat suit, she was wearing enhanced SWAT body armour and a mask.

Both girls dived out into the driving rain and moved to attack the Nightingales and prevent them from interfering in Hit Girl's activities.

"Hit Girl! Be advised that the Nightingales just turned up! Hawk and Mist are engaging!"

The 'Vigilante'

"Fucking brilliant!" I responded to Battle Guy's warning.

We were just a few dozen feet away from the '*Trinidad*' and we had not yet been spotted. Jackal and Shadow were on the bow ready to engage, while Kick-Ass was at the stern. We would board from the stern of the '*Vigilante*' and jump across to the low stern of the '*Trinidad*'. As far as we could make out, the guard force were all watching the land and the pier. I cut the engines and we drifted alongside. Jackal had already kicked over several fenders to protect our hull and reduce the noise of the two vessels coming together.

I ran aft to join Kick-Ass and secured us alongside with a loop over a bollard on the '*Trinidad*' – Jackal would be doing the same at our bow. I rechecked my MP5 and jumped across to the '*Trinidad*'. At that moment I started to hear gunfire from the direction of the land and then shouts from people on the '*Trinidad*'.

"Let's use the distraction, Fusion!" I called and as agreed we started our attack.

..._...

We had boarded via the stern on the port side, which was to the water. The opposite, starboard, side was against the jetty and that was where the armed guards were, guarding what was to them the obvious line of attack and now that there was gunfire on shore that would also attract their attention.

We had a decision to make; go inside and chase down our primary target, or remove the threat of the armed guards. I opted for the latter and while Jackal kept watch on the deck that ran up the port side, all the way to the bow, Shadow kept an eye on the sliding glass doors to the main salon. This left Kick-Ass and myself spare, to clear the upper decks on the starboard side.

Burnham Harbor

The damn Nightingales were *not* welcome right now!

"Mist, keep with me – we need to make sure that they stay away from Lucille and the water!"

"I'll do my best, Hawk!"

"If you can do it – kill the fucking bitches!"

We both opened fire at the Nightingales, who it seemed only had their pistols – tough luck!

The 'Trinidad'

I went first, with my MP5 raised while Kick-Ass followed behind, as he was taller and he could fire over my shoulder. As on the other side of the yacht, this deck ran all the way to the bow, but also had the gangway that angled down to the dock. The gangway was only a few yards along that deck and we could see four large men, all looking down the jetty towards the gunfire. Now, I have a thing about shooting people in the back (except of course for Dave) – not cool!

"Hey, motherfuckers..."

As each man turned, Kick-Ass and I dropped them before they could utter a sound by mouth or by the firearms that they carried. I noticed two more men on the jetty, who were dropped in the same way. Nobody further away than a few feet would have heard anything other than the bodies dropping to the deck or the jetty!

Next, Shadow kept watch over the starboard deck, while Kick-Ass and I headed for the exterior stairs, on the starboard side that took us up to the main sun deck. In front of us was a Jacuzzi, which understandably was empty and covered over. We moved forward, past an enormous wooden table and into the upper salon. Here we found a gigantic, 'U'-shaped, couch that could seat almost a dozen people! A head appeared at the top of the stairs to the lower deck – I saw a pistol and the man received a bullet in the brain for his trouble, without ever knowing where it had come from. Beyond the stairs was the control station – naturally unmanned, while alongside.

"Jackal, Shadow – we're coming down, amidships! Clear the main salon!" Kick-Ass said.

I waved Jackal forwards and he slid open the glass doors, while I provided cover as he moved. Once the doors were open, I followed Jackal through and entered a long room with comfortable right-angled couches, an enormous TV and a massive dining table, plus a bar. There was also a pistol pointing at us!

Several rounds came at us, shattering the glass behind us – Jackal shoved me to one side and fired several rounds into the man, through the far couch. The man jerked and a pool of blood appeared and spread across the deck.

"Thanks – Jackal!" I said, feeling both annoyed and turned on? Get your mind into the game, Shadow!

We saw no-one else until we approached the door at the end, where there was a dead body that had fallen down the stairs.

"Coming through!" Jackal called, to prevent getting himself shot by Hit Girl or Kick-Ass.

..._...

We found the pair of them in a well laid out galley. Three crew members were secured with plastic ties and seated on a corner bench around a table. Hit Girl led the way forward, while Jackal and I provided cover against attack from the rear.

I entered an office, with large cupboards of clothes off to the left, then came the master suite.

"Damn! It's bigger than our own fucking bedroom!" I complained.

The room was empty, but we could see that somebody had been in the bed recently. Further forward was a monster bathroom, which was empty. We re-joined Shadow and Jackal before heading down to the lower deck. Kick-Ass remained in the salon to watch out for trouble.

At the bottom of the stairs to the lower deck I paused and Shadow went aft to check one of the two large cabins on this deck, while Jackal checked the other large cabin. I kept watch on the other cabins further forward.

I pushed open the door of the cabin on the port side.

The first thing that I saw was a bed, then a flash as a bullet was fired in my direction; it had come from the bathroom, beyond the bed. The man was hiding to the right of the doorway. I pulled out my FN Five-seven and sent half a dozen rounds *through* the bathroom wall and the man fell down and through the doorway, very dead!

"Clear, I called!"

I turned and headed back out of the cabin – Jackal had come up empty with the starboard cabin.

..._...

Hit Girl went forward. To the left and to the right were two, smaller, twin cabins – just as Hit Girl looked into the starboard side cabin, a man dived out of the port side doorway – but nobody blindsides Hit Girl!

Hit Girl lashed out with her left hand, which held her Tanto and the man came to a sudden halt as the blade entered his chest and cut his heart in half. Hit Girl let the body slide off of her blade and sink to the deck, blood pooling around it.

We rapidly finished clearing the lower deck, which as well as the two larger cabins and two smaller twin cabins, also contained the crew spaces. We secured the crew with plastic ties before heading back up to the salon.

Kick-Ass went with Shadow to check the engine room and the boat garage; both were clear. We had searched the entire vessel, but we had *not* found the man that we had come for - I was seething! He must be hidden somewhere aboard. Then I suddenly had an idea – should have thought of it straight away!

"Battle Guy – I need Eisenhower!"

"I'll send her out – we're a little bit busy here!" Battle Guy responded.

Burnham Harbor

"Hawk, Mist – cover Eisenhower!" Battle Guy called.

"Will do!" I called.

I turned away from the Nightingales and saw the big dog jump out of Lucille and head towards the '*Trinidad*'. Eisenhower looked kinda awesome *and* cool in her body armour! I watched her run – very fast and ensured that the remaining Nightingales' attention was on us and *not* on Eisenhower.

The 'Trinidad'

I waited at the gangway and watched as Eisenhower come racing down the jetty and then powered up the gangway. She looked immensely pleased with herself and had obviously enjoyed the run!

"Come on girl! I need you to find this bastard!"

Eisenhower barked once and I led her into the yacht.

I started in the main salon, then went up to the sun deck – nothing. I then moved back to the main salon and it wasn't until we got to the master suite that Eisenhower started to growl menacingly and she ran around the suite and over the bed before finally stopping outside a large walk-in cupboard that we had checked earlier – but Eisenhower obviously thought that we should check it again!

"Somebody in there, girl?" I asked and Eisenhower barked, then growled at the cupboard.

I pushed the clothes in the cupboard to one side and I pulled out my Tanto and stabbed the panel at the back of the cupboard. I heard a loud, verbal, exclamation!

"Oh my God!" A man's voice.

I withdrew my Tanto.

"You have five seconds to show yourself!" I ordered.

Nothing happened.

"Five – Four..."

I heard a noise, then a panel slid sideways and a man appeared - it was him – Richard Montfort.

"Eisenhower, Schwanz!" I growled.

The dog shot forward and grabbed the man, pushing him backwards and down onto the floor.

"Fucking Christ!" The man exclaimed.

"Yeah! There's a fucking dog on your balls – what about it?" I growled as Eisenhower got a better grip.

"You fucking, inhuman, bitch!" Montfort snarled.

"That's me – I thought we hadn't met!" I growled in response, with a smirk.

"Now – before Eisenhower has her dinner – where is the stash?" I asked, as Eisenhower tugged excitedly at her mouthful.

"It – *oh my God* – it's behind the panelling, on the right, in the large starboard cabin, beside the bed..."

That explained the armed man in that cabin that Shadow had shot.

"On it!" Shadow announced and vanished at a run.

I quickly reached the cabin that the cunt had suggested; the dead man was still there in the bathroom. I started attacking the panels, to the right of the doorway, beside the bed with my Balisong. The panel was thin, but thick enough not to be easily detected. The back of the panel had a thin aluminium sheet and I quickly found the hidden panel release and pulled the whole panel away.

"Damn! Hit Girl – I have hundreds of packets of drugs, not to mention cash!" I called. "A whole shitload of cash!"

"How much?" I asked the fallen capitalist.

"Three-hundred and eighty kilos of cocaine. There – is – *oh my God* – thirty-three million in Dollars US, eighteen million in Pounds Sterling, eight million in Euros – *please...*"

"Beg all you fucking want, asshole!"

"Please... I – "

"Jackal, Shadow – start packing – it's time to wind this up!" I ordered and readied my Tanto.

"You made mistakes – you killed Cops in your attempt to take control of Chicago, but even worse you hurt people that mean a lot to me and that is unforgiveable..."

"No – *please* – I can... I didn't know..."

I turned away from the remains of the dead man and headed aft, pausing in the office just long enough to seize the dead man's laptop. I made it to the main salon and could see Jackal and Shadow passing up packages of cash.

"Petty cash?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Hey, rounds are expensive and running that gas-guzzler out there ain't fucking cheap!" I growled.

"Just an observation!" Kick-Ass laughed.

"Battle Guy, '*Trinidad*' is all clear and the target has been neutralised!" I called.

"Great news, Hit Girl – we have one dead Nightingale and the others are trying to escape!" Battle Guy reported.

"Let them go – we need to finish up and leave!" I responded.

..._...

Then, as if the night wasn't busy enough – *she* arrived!

The young woman was tall and well formed. She wore tight pants, a dark leather jacket and solid boots. Her hair was long and dark, with subtle curls. In her right hand was a silenced Heckler & Koch P30 pistol.

"Regina, I assume?" I growled at the woman standing on the jet-black speedboat, on the other side of the jetty.

"He was mine, Hit Girl! My mark!" Regina announced angrily.

"To the victor go the spoils!"

"So, *you* are my competition!" Regina announced with derision.

"There *is* no competition," I growled in response. "I *am* the number one assassin - period!"

"Oh for fuck's sake! They'll be seeing who can pee the furthest next!" Kick-Ass quipped and got a glare from both me and Regina.

"Hit Girl is a 'has been'; I can hit harder and with way more accuracy!"

"Okay, you've both got balls of steel... Let's move on!" Kick-Ass suggested.

He was rewarded by a hail of gunfire from Regina and a blast of engine exhaust, as she vanished into the darkness. I fired back at the receding muzzle flashes, but knew that I wasn't hitting anything.

..._...

"Hit Girl – Lucille is rolling, with Hawk and the sharp-shooting, Mist!" Battle Guy called.

"Copy that – we're just loading up the '*Vigilante*'!" I replied, then shouted into the main salon. "Eisenhower, stop munching and get up here, we're leaving!"

The 'Vigilante'

"You get your gas money?" I asked Jackal, with a grin.

"A few Dollars..." Jackal said.

"...Plus a few Pounds and Euros!" Shadow finished, dropping into the seat to my left at the control station.

I pushed the twin throttles forward with my right hand and aimed the bow into the storm-lashed waves and set the auto-pilot.

***Chapter 137*: The Wrath of Hit Girl - Part VII**

Author's Note: *I just watched the new 'Kingsman: The Secret Service' movie this morning. It was incredibly awesome – if you enjoyed the first Kick-Ass movie then this will be right up your street. You may, or may not, have read the graphic novel, but the movie is perfect and the best I've seen of Mark Millar's work, since that first Kick-Ass movie! Will not say anymore, as I know that the other side of the Atlantic has to wait another two weeks – it will be worth the wait! I hope that this may lead to a third Kick-Ass movie – you never know – from Matthew Vaughan and Mark Millar!*

The next morning
Saturday

Safehouse W, the 'Vigilante'

I woke up feeling very sore.

We had got back to the Safehouse in the early hours of the morning, as it had been a rather rough, and therefore slow, trip back. We were all exhausted and neither Dave, nor I, wanted to drive anywhere last night.

Dave and I were cuddled up in the amidships cabin of the 'Vigilante' and Sophia was curled up on the couch. Josh and Chloe were as expected, cuddled up in the bow cabin. The twin cabin on the starboard side accommodated several million in US Dollars, Pounds Sterling and Euros. Now, how could I spend all that cash? It would come in useful; Safehouse F had bitten deeply into my cash reserves. Not to mention having to replace items of equipment that I was forced to destroy at Safehouse A! I nudged Dave.

"What?"

"Time to move – we need to get our petty cash to Safehouse F, plus I have to meet somebody later."

"Okay!"

That afternoon

Safehouse F

Having arrived in Beast the previous evening, we had to wait for Marty to arrive with the SUV, along with Kim in Speedy. We had loaded up the cash and our equipment before heading back to Safehouse F. Marcus had arranged for us to be shadowed by Fellowes and Murphy for most of the drive, just in case.

"Welcome back guys!" Kim announced.

"This place fucking rocks, Mindy!" Erika announced.

"Thanks Erika!" I replied.

The cash was unloaded and stashed away on the lower level of the Safehouse. Tony Morgan would head down to Safehouse W later today, to service 'Vigilante' for her next mission.

Erika and I were in the armory.

"You did really well, last night, from what Kim says – I'm very impressed!" I commented.

Erika was blushing a little from the praise.

"Thanks, Mindy – I grew up around guns; my Grandfather was a bit of a nutcase and he always had to have dozens of guns!" Erika replied.

"Nothing wrong with a few guns!" I commented. "Okay Erika - we need to get you kitted out. On the table here are some examples of weapons that I think may suit your capabilities."

"Cool!" Erika announced, examining the items that I had laid out.

There were pistols, martial arts weaponry, swords and various other equally lethal objects. I did not want to force Erika into anything and she had showed great promise, at both D-JAK and when she had helped us out at Burnham Harbor the night before. She appeared to be very familiar with firearms, especially rifles and pistols, with the occasional shotgun.

I had let Erika show me how well she could shoot on the range at the Safehouse and she had done remarkably well!

This place was kinda nuts!

The Safehouse was out of this world – but I had heard about what had happened to Safehouse A and what had happened with Red Mist, so I could see why Mindy stopped at nothing when it came to security.

In front of me was one hell of an array of equipment. It had been a little over two weeks since I had offered to help Mindy and she had even measured me up for a combat suit a few days after that! I really liked my hero name too – 'Mist' – it was awesome!

I selected a pistol that I had already fired on the range; it felt comfortable and I enjoyed shooting with it. I also selected a pair of vicious looking dagger like items and one other lethal looking weapon.

"Nice choices, Erika. You think you can handle a pair of those pistols?" I asked.

"I'll give it a try!"

"Okay – start practicing with the weapons that you have selected and I want you back here at ten on Monday morning!"

***Two days later
Monday morning***

Safehouse F

The place was deserted.

"Thought you'd like some privacy, Erika!" Mindy suggested.

"Should I be worried?" I asked feeling worried.

Mindy thought about it before responding.

"Nah! You'll be fine, Mist!"

I had ordered a combat suit for Erika.

This suit was an evolutionary extension of that which I had provided for Lynx. The basic under suit was a mix of light blue, azure blue and slate grey. On top of this was Type III-A composite armour protection that covered the chest in a contoured plate that had flexible panels, allowing the upper body to twist and bend with very limited restriction. This plate was azure blue and trimmed with slate grey. The upper and lower back were protected with another Type-III-A composite armour plate in three sections that again flexed like the front and was contoured to the users back. The two plates joined under the arm with almost no gap. The back plate was coloured the same as the front plate.

Armoured pads around the shoulder, which extended with thinner plates down the upper arm to the elbow where another armoured pad protected the joint, protected the arms. Armoured gauntlets extended up to the elbow pads and there was additional armour on the rear of the gauntlets. The gauntlets themselves had lightly armoured palms that were stab proof and could grasp double-edged blades without injury.

The thighs were protected with wrap-around flexible armour up to Type III-A. These thigh plates connected to the utility belt, which in turn connected to the front and back armour. Composite armour pads provided protection around the knees and connected with the lower leg armour and shin guards. Both the thigh and leg armour was azure blue with slate grey highlights. The lightly armoured boots were dark blue.

The mask was of the same colour scheme as the under suit and provided composite armour protection around the back, top and sides of the head. These sections were azure blue with slate grey highlights. The mask covered Mist's face down to and including the nose and cheekbones.

The dark blue utility belt held the communications, spare magazines and other equipment that a vigilante would require, including a pair of Walther P99C pistols in cross-draw holsters that were chambered for nine-millimetre Parabellum and each pistol was fitted with twelve-round extended magazines. Mist also carried a pair of black steel Sais, one on each thigh. Each Sai was a little over nineteen inches in length, thirteen inches of which was a sharp pointed blade. The leather wrapped handles were octagonal in shape. Mounted on the right side of her utility belt was a pouch that held a four-foot long, seven-section chain whip with switchable tips, like the trick arrows employed by the others.

"Wow!" I commented.

"Fucking Wow!" Erika added examining herself carefully in a full-length mirror. "Hit Girl – I love it!"

"Wow!" Marty exclaimed.

"Damn Wow!" I added.

"Fucking hell, Dave – she has some damn nice curves!"

"Marty! If Kim heard you say that, she'd gut you alive!" I cautioned.

We had just come down the elevator and walked into the Safehouse. In front of us was an interesting scene. Two armoured individuals, in strange combat suits that I did not recognize, were fighting it out on the mat. I recognized one of them as being my fiancée – the purple one! I assumed that the blue suited one was Mist and therefore Erika. Both girls were in similar combat suits of a somewhat different design than usual. Mindy had wanted to replace her own combat suit, as it had accumulated a lot of damage, recently.

The girls were also using unusual weapons. They were fighting using what I recognized to be Sais – it rather reminded me of the fight in *The Mummy Returns* between Nefertiri and Anck-Su-Namun. Both girls were spinning around the mat and you could hear the noise of the Sais coming together as they fought.

"God, watching two girls fight is such a turn on!" Marty commented.

Hit Girl managed to flip her Sai backwards and rammed the handle or Tsuka into the side of Mists armoured mask. The impact sent Mist flying backwards and onto the mat. Mist screamed as she landed and I ran forward.

"Hi Dave!" Mist said as she looked up at me.

"You okay?" I asked, glaring at Hit Girl who shrugged innocence.

"Not too bad! It was fun – thanks Hit Girl!" Mist announced as she got back to her feet.

"Love the new combat suits!" I said, examining Hit Girl's new curves.

"I'm up here, Dave!" Hit Girl hinted, pointing to her face.

"The view down here looks quite good, too!" I replied and Hit Girl chuckled.

"Not bad!" Marty agreed.

"Eyes off my backside or I'll tell Kim!" Mindy warned, pulling off her mask.

"You can stare at mine all you want, boys!" Erika said, with a laugh and pulled off her own mask.

That afternoon

Safehouse F

Okay – Richard Montfort had found his way onto that yacht – it should have been his brother-in-law, William Tait.

From what we had been able to ascertain from Montfort's laptop, he had come to Chicago to meet with his brother-in-law. Now, William Tait had been away during our attack – we had had no idea that they were both there – shit happens! Once the attack had commenced, Tait had run to Milwaukee, thinking that he would be safe from attack!

"He's locked himself in that Penthouse, in Milwaukee!" Marty advised.

"Shouldn't be a problem!" I replied.

"Dave, it's a damned penthouse!"

"Oh, did nobody tell you...?" Mindy said with a smirk, before she looked at Dave.

"... Penthouses are our speciality!" Dave finished, with an insane grin on his face.

"No - I don't think they are gonna fly again!" Mindy said to Dave, cryptically.

"But they were fun!" Dave replied, looking a little forlorn.

"Maybe I'll just have to do my elevator thing!"

"What are you two talking about?" Marty asked.

"Dave wants to use his Gatling guns again!" Mindy explained.

"And Mindy has a thing about elevators!"

***Three days later
Thursday
Milwaukee***

Safehouse T

7:10 P.M.

The pieces were finally in place and this had been quite a challenge, but we had managed it. William Tait had been positively confirmed as being still in the penthouse.

At that moment, Battle Guy, along with Drift and Crimson, were in our second and newest mobile Command Centre: Mia. Mia was an extended-wheelbase Mercedes Sprinter Van in Navy Blue. It was equipped in a similar way to Lucille, but with quite a few enhancements. Marty had been working on her for a few months and she was now ready for deployment. There was the possibility that Lucille had suffered compromise on our last visit to Milwaukee, not to mention that she had a few bullet holes from those damn Nightingales at Burnham Harbor! Mia was located at the junction of East Juneau Avenue and North Cass Street keeping an eye on the Penthouse.

Hawk was guarding a large rented panel van on North Marshall Street, on the other side of the block from Mia. Kick-Ass and Jackal were nowhere near the Penthouse, but they were still ready to engage and provide assistance as required.

I was located with Shadow and Mist on the adjacent building, which was higher than the building of our target. The three of us wore NVGs, as it was very dark. There were four men on the roof of the target building and they would have to be taken out first.

"Overwatch, Hit Girl! Fire when ready!"

Five hundred and twenty-five yards to the southeast

"Overwatch is engaging!" I replied and steadied myself.

"Kick-Ass you are clear!" Jackal said quietly from beside me.

Jackal and I were lying on the roof of a tall building four blocks to the west and one block south. In my hands was a Dragunov OTs-03 SVU sniper rifle. Yes, one of the pair that Hit Girl had seized from the Russian Mafia way back in

September of last year. I had spent the past months learning how to use the thing and I enjoyed using it, too! Jackal was my spotter and he would tell me where I needed to shoot.

I looked through the scope and settled on my first target; he was closest to Hit Girl and was about to die. I controlled my breathing and steadied the weapon, then squeezed the trigger.

The roof of the Penthouse

I heard a sound, some ways off and then a clatter on the roof.

"What was that?" I called.

"I have no..." A shape started to reply before his head exploded.

I turned to the other man who was standing just a few feet away from me, just in time to see his head disintegrate.

The final man turned for the stairs, but he only made it a few feet before his own head mushroomed into a cloud and he dropped to the roof.

"Roof top clear!" Jackal called over the comms.

"Copy, overwatch!" I replied, and then looked at Shadow. "You ready to do this again?"

"Why the hell not!" Shadow replied.

"I'm not sure I can do this!" Mist groaned, looking down and across the gap, between the two buildings.

"I thought the same thing in New York – believe me it's over before you have a chance to be scared!" Shadow said.

We had already set up the equipment.

The distance for the line was thirty-eight metres, with a ten to twelve metre drop, though the actual slide would be a just over a quarter of that. Hit Girl had double-checked the faked ropes and the Plumett NS50 silent grapnel launcher.

"Overwatch confirms roof is clear!"

Hit Girl raised, aimed and fired the launcher.

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The grapnel had flown straight and true. It had impacted the elevator shaft and the splines dug deep into the brick structure. Hit Girl tugged on the line, before securing it to the pre-fitted anchor points, fitted to that buildings lift shaft and hauled the line taught. She then fitted three zip line trolleys and double-checked our harnesses, before clipping us onto the trolleys, with both a primary and a secondary strop.

"Remember, *one* at a time!" Hit Girl cautioned and then looked directly at me. "And *no* fucking screaming Shadow!"

Five hundred and twenty-five yards to the southeast

I watched as the three girls slid safely across to the target building.

I was very pleased that they had all arrived safely. I was ready for more men appearing on the roof while the girls were at their most vulnerable. I returned to scanning the Penthouse windows while Jackal kept watch on the distant rooftop.

The girls vanished into the stairwell.

Distraction time.

The Penthouse

William Tait looked out of the armoured panoramic windows.

He did not feel safe – not one damn bit!

"Boss, we've lost contact with the men on the roof!" Carl, his bodyguard said.

William Tait felt himself shaking, involuntarily. The attack on the yacht at Chicago had been a nasty shock and he knew that his brother-in-law was most likely dead. He had thought this place safe – oh fuck!

It was supposed to have been an operation to take control of the criminal elements in Chicago, but no, somehow the wrong people had been angered and these people were very powerful and wide reaching. Nobody had much of an idea of who 'they' were, except that they may be vigilantes of some sort. Since when were vigilantes this fucking organized, he had thought!

Suddenly there was the sound of thud's and cracking noises as bullets started to strike the panoramic windows, leaving major cracks and deep impacts. After ten impacts, there was a short pause and then they started again. Finally, one pane gave way in an explosion of glass shards. Almost immediately, the front door was blasted open by an explosive charge, shredding one man.

Three forms burst in firing from short assault rifles, cutting down members of his security force. Anybody near the shattered pane of glass received a large caliber bullet for his trouble from the unseen sniper. Somebody then hit the lights and plunged the penthouse into darkness – whom this actually helped was unknown!

The lights went out, so I dropped the NVGs back into place over my eyes and focused on the different image before me.

I raised my suppressed Heckler & Koch G36C and dropped the first target that came into my vision. Mist was immediately behind me with the same weapon. Shadow was following behind and watching our backs with her suppressed FN P90. I could hear Kick-Ass in my ear.

"No target! No target!"

There was a lot of noise in the penthouse – screaming men, wounded and otherwise. There seemed to be a lot of panic, and then I found myself knocked down when a large person ploughed into me. I did not think it was on purpose, but I fell against what felt like a couch and then I was stampeded by some more feet and I heard some gunshots followed by a scream from Mist, then more gunshots, and a yell from Shadow.

I pushed myself up and yelled out an order.

"Fusion report!"

"Kick-Ass is go!"

"Jackal is go!"

"Hawk is go!"

"Battle Guy is go!"

"Drift is go!"

"Crimson is go!"

There was a pause then: "Shadow is go! Target has left the penthouse!"

Another pause: "Mist is go!"

Fuck! It was coming apart – but we were prepared.

"Fusion – Pursuit Plan! We're coming out!" I called and the team went into action.

Minutes later the three of us were on the ground and running to the other side of the block where we found Hawk ready and waiting.

"Hit Girl! Target is in a red Jeep Grand Cherokee and heading east – tracker is in place!" Battle Guy reported.

"Copy that!" I replied as we got our breath back.

"You guys ready!" Hawk asked.

Arrayed in front of Hawk were three motorcycles.

Hit Girl's purple Ducati Multistrada, Shadow's navy blue Ducati Multistrada and another black motorcycle with light blue highlights. That motorcycle belonged to Mist: her Ducati Streetfighter 848 motorcycle. The Streetfighter was fitted with the same chunky TKC-80 tyres as the other machines.

We seized our helmets and mounted our motorcycles. Once we had our helmets in place, we could see the heads-up display and our relative location compared to our target: William Tait. Battle Guy would feed us navigational information as we rode. We took off with myself leading and Shadow trailing after Mist. Hawk would head west to pick up Kick-Ass and Jackal.

***Chapter 138*: Saying Goodbye**

**Thursday
Milwaukee**

7:35 P.M.

The pursuit was on!

We hurtled down the darkened streets following Battle Guy's directions. I was very impressed with the way that Mist rode her Ducati – she definitely knew what she was doing!

"Kick-Ass! Tait is heading for your location!" Battle Guy called.

"Copy that – we're on the ground and watching for him – what direction?"

"He's heading west, along East State Street – Three SUVs!"

"Jackal, stand to – we have incoming!"

Seconds later, I could see three SUVs hurtling towards us. I raised the sniper rifle, aimed for the front SUVs engine, and fired five rounds. All five bullets hit the engine compartment and the engine tore itself apart as oil leaked out and coolant splashed onto the street. The SUV came to a rapid halt blocking part of the street and the SUV behind it rammed into the side. I shortly found the engine grill of the rear SUV in my sight and sent five bullets in that direction.

The exploding engine told me that I had been successful and I watched as the rear SUV smashed into the second one, pinning it in place. Jackal was attacking the armed men in the first SUV, so I dropped the sniper rifle and sized my G36K and started engaging the armed men in the rear SUV. There did not seem to be any fire coming from the second SUV.

We had raced down East State Street at speed before reaching North Broadway. We found a scene of carnage. We had seen explosions and gunfire flashing in the darkness as we had come down the street.

Tait's escape route had evidently taken him towards and past the building that Kick-Ass and Jackal had been using as a sniper nest. Battle Guy had been able to forewarn them and Tait's convoy had come under attack from Kick-Ass' sniper rifle and Jackal's P90. The heavy rounds from the sniper rifle had destroyed the engines of the lead and chase vehicles leaving the target vehicle trapped and the escort vehicles under sustained fire from Kick-Ass' G36K as well as the P90.

As we came to a halt the target Jeep Grand Cherokee was moving backwards and forwards, ramming the vehicles in front and behind. Finally, the driver made a big enough gap to escape and accelerated away down North Broadway. We manoeuvred past the wrecked vehicles and continued the pursuit waved on by Kick-Ass and Jackal.

After half a mile, we crossed under the I-794 and continued south. The first Police vehicles were now in evidence and we could see red and blue flashing lights as emergency vehicles raced towards the penthouse and the scene of the wrecked vehicles at North Broadway. Unfortunately, two Police cars did swift one-eighties and started pursuing us.

"Battle Guy, we've got the attention of the Milwaukee PD!" I called.

"Copy that!"

The Jeep Cherokee took a hard right at the end of North Broadway onto East Menomonee Street and then onto East Erie Street. One Police car took the turn too fast and crashed into a pair of parked cars, but the other Police car kept up the pursuit.

..._...

We crossed the river at South Water Street and then raced along South 1st Street. We lost the remaining Police car somewhere along the route – not sure how! Shadow and I went alongside the Jeep, Shadow to the right and myself

on the left. Mist stayed behind us watching for problems. I pulled out a Glock 30 pistol and sent half a dozen .45-calibre rounds into the driver's window, which was armoured but could only take so much abuse at close range. Shadow used the distraction of my actions and fired her Five-seveN into the front passenger seat. Her armour piercing rounds made short work of the glass and she killed the man in that seat and also managed to wound the driver who lost control and the Jeep swerved to the left and skidded before flipping over onto waste ground and coming to a halt upside down amid the screech of tearing metal and screaming men.

We all skidded to a stop a few feet from the wrecked SUV. We had minutes only and maybe even seconds before Police descended on the area. We were on borrowed time, well and truly!

..._...

I pulled out my Wakizashi and headed for the SUV. I was followed by Mist, while Shadow kept overwatch.

"Fusion – evacuate the City *now!*" I ordered.

Everybody had instructions on how to leave the City and escape. On this order, they would follow these instructions to the letter. We would all meet up at Safehouse F.

A man crawled out of the wreckage. It was the man – William Tait, the final piece of the puzzle.

"Who *are* you?" He demanded, rolling onto his back.

"My name is inconsequential, but I am Hit Girl and you challenged me. I do not lose and I never pass up the opportunity to avenge those that I care for! You crossed the line, along with Montfort – so you must pay for your deeds. Chicago is under my protection – nobody who crosses me is safe. Wherever they hide, I *will* find them!"

"Please..."

William Tait got no further, as his head was severed from his body and it rolled in the gently settling dust.

"It is done!" I growled. "Time to go!"

The following afternoon Friday

Safehouse F, Chicago

It was finally over.

Everybody was gathered in the briefing room. Dave, Marty, Kim, Erika, Josh, Chloe, Cathy, Cameron, Natasha, Curtis, Megan, Marcus, Paige, Abby, Tony, Shannon, Tommy and Sophia.

We were all very tired, but there was one thing left to do.

"A big Thank you to everybody. We could not have done this without *all* of you – everybody played their part – even Sophia. Together, we accomplished what initially looked impossible and thankfully, nobody was killed or seriously hurt. Even our newest members, in action for the first time, showed great bravery – thank you."

I paused, doing my utmost to keep my emotions in check.

"It is with..." I could not go on; I felt tears running down my face.

Marcus stepped forward and put his arm around my shoulders and he continued for me.

"This morning we received the news that Natalie Bay died as a direct result of complications, due to her injuries sustained almost a month ago. Jack is okay and still recovering, but Natalie never regained consciousness after the attack," Marcus said and his words sent a ripple of shock and surprise through the assembled people.

Chloe was holding Josh very tightly and tears began streaming down their faces. This was replicated around the room in the pained expressions and tears.

***The next day
Saturday***

West Ridge

Cameron and Natasha were looking a little worried.

"Don't worry – you're gonna enjoy this!" I smirked and handed each of them a small burgundy coloured item. "You're goin' home!"

The two kids stared down at the brand new British Passports in surprise and then looked back up at me.

"Marcus contacted some friends, who had other friends. Basically, to cut a long story very short, you two are in the clear and can now go home," I said, throwing each twin an envelope. "First class tickets on British Airways, plus some spending money! You leave in the morning."

Natasha jumped up and gave me a big hug.

"Thank you, Mindy!"

"I owe you two for keeping my secret and helping me in Milwaukee. Now go home and don't get yourselves into any more trouble!"

Soon after we had returned from Milwaukee, I had sat down with Chloe and Erika to debrief them.

"So, what happened in the penthouse?" I asked gently.

"I'm sorry Mindy, I..."

"Erika stop – before you say anything, know this: I am not mad at you or anybody. We were all in a difficult situation and Chloe can tell you that no matter how well you plan, things still manage to go to shit! Now, I heard both of you scream and yell – you both get shot?"

"Yes, I did – in the chest – twice!" Erika admitted.

"Are you okay? Have you seen Cathy?" I asked with concern.

"Yes, I did – just some bruises. Chloe was right: bullets and tits don't go together well!" Erika said with a grimace, as she rubbed her chest.

I looked at Chloe.

"Yes, I got shot again and yes, my chest hurts and yes, I saw Mom!" Cathy admitted, rubbing her own chest.

"I hesitated, when I should have shot the guy!" Erika said. "I don't know why – I managed to shoot at those Nightingales!"

"It happens, don't worry. I heard you got that Nightingale in the forehead – damn good shot, girl!" I said encouragingly.

I was not looking forward to going to another funeral – the last one that I attended did not quite go according to plan and I had ended up fighting for both Dave's life, on top of a damn panel van and my own!

I had to go, to support Joshua. He was really broken up about Natalie dying. He was up in his room now and he was spending a lot of time there with Chloe. I was glad of Chloe; she had spent the night with Josh and was trying her best to help him. I still had no idea how to cope with grief in the normal way; my way of coping was killing!

I had avenged the dead Cops and Natalie, but that was not enough. I had lost a part of my life – somebody who had known both my Mom and my Dad.

That Evening

Dammit!

I went upstairs and pushed open the door to Josh's room. Josh was lying on his bed and Chloe was cuddling him.

"Joshua!" I called.

"Yes!" Josh said looking over toward me. His eyes were red.

"We're going out – just you and me!"

"Mindy, I can't..."

"Get up off your fucking arse, boy!" I yelled. "You're not the only person who's lost somebody!"

"Now hold on Mindy!" Chloe started.

"Stay out of this Chloe!" I responded and I saw that Chloe understood from my tone that she should back off.

"Fucking bitch!" Josh growled and climbed off the bed and pulled on his shoes.

Twenty minutes later, we were weaving in and out of traffic at fifty miles per hour on my BMW.

"What's this all about, Mindy?" Josh asked from behind me.

I said nothing and just kept on going.

Safehouse F

An hour later, it was dark and we were both in our combat suits and ready to depart the Safehouse.

Marty and Erika would be in the Command Centre and would monitor us.

"You sure about this?" Marty tried.

"We both have things to work out – just watch our backs!" I replied.

"We'll do that!" Marty replied with a smile.

I finished checking Jackal out to ensure that he had not missed anything and then Jackal checked me out for any missing equipment. I had him focussed, so that he could not think about anything else, at least not yet.

Ten minutes later, we both roared up the concrete ramp.

Two miles away, I finally answered Jackal's question.

"You and I have something in common – we don't cope well with grief. We both have things to work out of our systems. I go out alone, I'll do something stupid. I have a feeling that you've been contemplating going out on your own, too."

"Yes, I have – Shadow's been good but, I need to work things out for myself," Jackal replied.

"Well, why don't we go and have some fun – work off our grief..."

..._...

"Where...?"

"... Are we going?" I finished. "I had a chat with a certain Cop and there's some people who deserve to... Disappear!"

"Now that's what we need!" Jackal replied.

"It'll be tough – you up to it, Jackal!" I asked.

"I won't let you down, Hit Girl!"

We pulled into a street, in southeast Chicago.

Jackal and I were now in mortal danger. This area belonged to a well-known and vicious criminal gang that was usually able to evade arrest and prison thanks to blackmail and well paid lawyers. Voight was fed up with letting these bastards go and recently they had managed to get away with murder. They now deserved the ultimate sanction. We secured the motorcycles and moved towards the next street over and into the heart of the area.

"Well, well, well!" A voice yelled out of the darkness.

I drew my twin Katana swords and Jackal drew his Ninja-To as four men moved out of the shadows.

"We don't like vigilantes – they don't belong down 'ere!" Strangely, this guy had a British accent.

"Bring it on, motherfuckers!" I growled, sizing the men up.

A shadow moved to my left and I saw the glint of metal and then the shape of a pistol being raised.

A shot rang out as a body fell to the ground at my feet. I replaced my pistol and growled at the men.

"Let's keep it polite, gentlemen!"

"What the fuck is that voice?" A man asked.

"The last thing that you're ever gonna hear!" I growled.

Hit Girl hissed into her comms.

"Move!"

She then shot forward and attacked the men. I swung my Ninja-To, severed the left hand of the nearest man, and saw the blood spray over my combat suit. Hit Girl took off one man's head, followed by another man's arm. That flooded the street with blood and the fourth man fell to my blade in his chest.

I now understood why Hit Girl told me to move. We needed to remove these men fast, because almost immediately we were surrounded by eight more men, all armed with guns, knives and machetes. The adrenaline surge from the first group of men had allowed me to focus and I used my emotions, I used the loss of Natalie and I wanted more – I needed to channel my emotions into killing these men.

The men started to shoot, but our armour deflected the shots and Hit Girl and I waded into the men, our blades slashing from side to side. I seized a machete from one man and started wielding it in my left hand, while my Ninja-To was in my right. Limbs and weapons were scattered across the street, blood poured into the gutters and down the drains. I saw a man advancing on Hit Girl, but her attention was with the three men in front of her. I was too far away, so I dropped the machete, seized a fighting knife, and threw it hard at the attacker, who dropped to the street behind Hit Girl, just as she reduced her three men to one, who then turned and fled.

Hit Girl stowed her blades, drew a pistol and dropped the man with a single shot. I looked around. Thirteen men were dead – most of them in pieces. Hit Girl was covered in blood and I could see blood on my combat suit. I smiled to myself under my mask and I could see another smile on Hit Girl's lips.

"That felt good!" I growled.

"Hell yeah!" Hit Girl replied.

It really was time to leave!

We ran back to our motorcycles and left the area at high speed. Hoped that we had not just poked a hornet's nest, but I saw the night's activities as part of the healing process. I needed a distraction, a way of leaving Hit Girl behind for a time and enjoying being with my family and friends. I had just had a good idea: I enjoyed using the '*Vigilante*', so why not get a boat that could be used as Mindy Macready! The '*Vigilante*' would never see the light of day and only

go out at night.

I liked the idea of that – buy a boat and we could all have fun out on the lake – maybe even go further afield! Yeah, I think I would definitely look into a boat, just a little one...

... On the other hand, maybe a slightly larger one!

***Chapter 139*: A New Life**

**Four days later
Wednesday**

Safehouse F

It was time to move on.

Okay, we had lost a life – a life that had touched a lot of people. Nevertheless, there was now a new life due to arrive. Somebody was pregnant! It was quite a surprise to find out that she was pregnant – yes, it is a she that is pregnant – obviously, for fuck's sake! I mean, they are very different people, but they are in love so I couldn't complain. Well, I went to speak with the mother to be... That was when Dave suddenly blundered into the bedroom and I lost my train of thought, completely!

"Mindy! Chloe just injured herself – bring the first aid kit!"

What has the damn girl done now? I grabbed the first aid kit and headed downstairs to find Chloe sitting on the mat with a large cut on her upper arm and another smaller one on her shoulder. Curtis was standing a couple of feet away holding a large curved sword in his right hand that had blood on the blade.

'What the fuck?' I thought.

"Okay, Curtis – I know that Chloe has been a real bitch to you for many years," I said. "But if you're gonna kill her, do it properly – a good thrust through the stomach, with a twist, would have worked!"

Chloe's mouth dropped open in shock. "You fucking bitch, Mindy!" Chloe growled. "Don't tell Curtis how to kill me!"

"If I wanted to you wouldn't be squawking right now!" Curtis said, but I could tell that he was a little shocked.

"What are you doing with that blade, Curtis?" I asked, seriously while Dave cleaned Chloe's wounds. "Your answer had better be good, or I'll run you through!"

"Chloe challenged me – she said I couldn't touch her!" Curtis explained, looking wretched.

I looked up at Chloe and saw that Curtis was telling the truth.

"Are you totally fucking stupid?" I exploded and made Chloe scream as I was none too gentle while I applied a dressing to her arm.

Chloe laughed, but I was not even smiling. I finished off the dressing and then stood up before turning to Chloe.

"You should know better! Stay out of my way today, or you'll need more serious medical treatment!" I growled and headed for the stairs heading down, but stopped and turned back to the mat. "Oh, Curtis – get the blade cleaned off and come downstairs – I'll show you how to use it properly."

Josh was laughing.

"Oh, Shadow's fucked things up again!" He chortled and received a nasty glare from Chloe.

You knew when Mindy was *really* pissed because she didn't use any swear words; she was so annoyed that she would forget to swear! I could see that Chloe had noticed this, so she chose to grab her gear and head home, which was a wise decision, as Mindy was most definitely not kidding about further bodily harm.

I watched as Curtis carefully cleaned the extremely lethal blade and inserted it into its cover and then he headed downstairs to see Mindy. It wasn't his fault as Chloe knew how to manipulate him, it was entirely Chloe's fault and could have ended in disaster. I wish that girl would use her brain a little more than she did. Chloe seemed to be getting more and more distracted recently – usually 'girly things', like boys – just a phase that she was going through!

"You angry with me Mindy?" I asked, carefully.

"Not really – sometimes the temptation to attack Chloe with a sharp blade gets too much!"

I laughed, but I still felt bad about hurting Chloe – what would Aunt Cathy say?

"So you like that sword, do you?" Mindy asked.

"It is pretty cool!" I replied.

"It's a fabulous blade – sharp and well balanced, but extremely lethal," Mindy said with a smile.

Mindy was always good at putting me at ease!

"It's the sword that I want to use, when I become a vigilante – like Kick-Ass!"

"You've still got a ways to go – like almost two feet up and a foot across!" Mindy laughed and I scowled.

"Good things come in small packages!" I challenged.

"Yes, they do – like me for instance," Mindy agreed.

Without thinking I blurted out my reply. "You *are* a perfect package, Mindy!" I felt myself blushing and wished I hadn't said it.

"Why thank you, Curtis! You're a bit young for me, though!" Mindy said with a mischievous grin.

"That wasn't what I meant!"

"Oh, you mean I'm *not* perfectly formed?" Mindy teased.

This was going a bit far! "Are you just gonna talk like a bitch, or are we gonna fight!" I challenged, unsheathing the curved blade in my hand.

"Oh – a hard man!" Mindy commented and seized a composite, carbon fibre Jo. "This Jō is impervious to that blade – come for me, Trojan!"

'Well this should be short lived!' I thought, as I moved towards Mindy.

"I'll make you a deal. You touch me with that blade and I'll take you out one night – just Trojan and Hit Girl!" Mindy said with a smile.

"Really?" I asked, incredulously.

"Really!"

Damn!

This kid had been practicing – when had he been able to practice? He knew how to wield that damn Spartan sword, so maybe my challenge was not so clever. He came at me fast and I found that I had forgotten how fast and lithe he had become. I actually laughed – he was like me, when I was young; he was using his speed and manoeuvrability to replace his lack of strength.

I really had to be careful now! I had expected the boy to be a novice and that I would be able to easily over-power him, but no. Well done Mindy, you opened your damn mouth once too often! Curtis was serious and he could easily chop my damned arm off, if I wasn't more careful.

I span around the mat and flicked the Jō to block Curtis' onslaught. He was good – I had to give him that and it was time to call an end to this before Hit Girl was cut to pieces!

"Time out!" I yelled and Curtis stopped.

Sweat was dripping off him and he was breathing heavily. The sword was heavy, despite the extra muscle that Curtis had put on over the past few months.

"Well done – you win!" I said and watched Curtis' face explode into happiness.

"I'm goin' out with Hit Girl!" Curtis yelled happily.

Three days later
Saturday night

Safehouse F

"You've got a bit mouth, Mindy!" Dave said, as he helped me gear up.

"I know! It needs to be to cope with what you put into it!" I teased – goddammit, Mindy.

"Not just big, but foul too!" Dave added.

"I didn't know that the kid had been practicing for fucking months! Chloe knew, but had been keeping it a secret!"

"Thanks Chloe!"

"Well, can't have you hurt on your first proper trip with Hit Girl!"

"It's gonna be scary, isn't it?" I asked.

"Knowing Mindy – yeah! She will try to scare you on purpose, but remember she will not put you in any danger. Stay alert and stay with Hit Girl, but follow every command without question or hesitation. I learnt that the fucking hard way!" Chloe grimaced.

Chloe was helping me gear up and she made sure that I was equipped correctly. I was a little scared, but this trip out should be nothing compared with Milwaukee!

"You know – you really aren't that bad a cousin!"

"Gee, thanks, runt!" Chloe laughed.

"You ready, Trojan?"

"Yes, Hit Girl!" I said.

I was on the back of Hit Girl's Multistrada, with my arms around her waist.

"Hit Girl and Trojan are rolling!"

"Copy that!" Battle Guy replied and we accelerated out of the Safehouse and up the curved concrete ramp.

At the top of the ramp, Hit Girl weaved around the piles of junk and shot out of the warehouse and over the rough waste ground. The ride was exhilarating and we had barely even started! We hurtled through the gate, Hit Girl turned left, and we raced up the street. This was my first time on a motorcycle and wow it was a rush of adrenalin!

"Am I going too fast for you, Trojan?" Hit Girl asked over the comms.

"Hell no – stop dawdling and put your damn foot down!"

I looked at the map on the large display and saw that they were already doing sixty miles per hour. The speed rapidly increased to eighty miles per hour, before dropping back to forty-five as they took a sweeping turn.

"She really scares me!"

"She knows what she's doing Cathy!" Marty said, but that was not putting my mind at rest.

Curtis didn't know that I would be watching everything. He thought that I was safely at home! However, I wanted to be here to watch on his special night out.

"We're out of here!" Kick-Ass called over the comms and I watched as Kick-Ass and my daughter both rode out of the

Safehouse.

It was time to put my new wheels to the test!

I was riding my brand new motorcycle – the Ducati Diavel Carbon in black, but with green and yellow highlights. On each side at the rear were black panniers. I had replaced my helmet with a very similar design. My combat suit – well I was working on a replacement, but the damage wasn't too bad.

This would be my first night out on the new motorcycle – even Hit Girl didn't know that it was ready for use. This would be a surprise for both Trojan and Hit Girl! In my visor, I could see a purple arrow that indicated the direction to Hit Girl as well as a navigational pointer to show a recommended route. Shadow was cruising beside me as we headed northeast.

This was pleasant.

A nice evening ride with my little pal. The night was dark and cold, but pleasant. My first port of call was the donut-eating cops! As we approached them, I noticed that they were moving. I eased up behind them and then opened up the throttle and rocketed past with a blast on the horn.

"Bloody menace!" I said, grinning at Murphy.

"Who's the little guy on back?" Murphy asked.

"Beats me! These goddamn vigilantes keep getting younger!" I replied.

Damn! I could see two headlights coming up fast behind. I was about to react and then it suddenly occurred to me – where there is Hit Girl there is usually...

I was right – Kick-Ass and Shadow blew past at speed, with a wave from Kick-Ass.

"Cool wheels!"

What the fuck!

I had noticed a pair of arrows appear in my visor – a green one and a blue one.

Kick-Ass and Shadow!

They were not supposed to be out. Okay – evasion time!

"What's up?" Trojan asked as I accelerated and took a hard right and then a hard left.

"We're being followed – Kick-Ass and guess who?"

"Shadow!" Trojan replied. "Step on it!"

"I knew this would happen – I warned him, but who listens to Battle Guy?"

I watched as the purple symbol accelerated and started weaving through the streets. The blue and purple symbols increased speed as well and moved east, before turning north again.

"The chase is on!" Kim announced.

"You should be resting!" I warned.

"Plenty of time for that, doc!"

***Chapter 140*: A Call For Help**

Author's Note: *Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that could be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a dubious, unseemly or suggestive nature.*

Chicago Saturday night

A place to hide and plan an ambush – that was what we needed – I wanted to surprise the fuck out of Kick-Ass and his bitchy sidekick!

I knew we could not kill the GPS signals for our communications equipment, but I could still make things difficult for them!

"Hit Girl! I've put you and Trojan on a discrete comms channel," Battle Guy announced.

That meant that Trojan and I could communicate without Kick-Ass and Shadow hearing us. The fact that I had not heard Kick-Ass or Shadow told me that they were on a discrete channel, too! So Battle Guy was keeping neutral, good for him.

"Trojan, we can talk freely without those two assholes hearing!" I advised.

"That sounds like a useful idea," Trojan replied.

"Now we have some planning to do," I started and checked where Kick-Ass and Shadow were in my visor. "We haven't got long..."

I noticed that Hit Girl had stopped.

We were less than a half mile away from her. I pulled over and stopped, with Shadow beside me. I had a bad feeling about this!

"I've got a bad feeling about this!" Shadow said and I laughed.

"Me, too! She knows we're after her and she's gone to ground – it's gonna be a fucking ambush!"

"Oh yeah!" Shadow replied. "At least we only need to worry about *her* and not Trojan!"

"Don't sell the kid short," I warned. "He'll surprise you one of these days!"

"Yeah, right!" Shadow scoffed.

..._...

We hid the motorcycles and approached the street where Hit Girl was located, on foot. I drew my batons and Shadow twisted the Jō in her hand. I sensed Shadow's apprehension – which mirrored my own. We both knew exactly what Hit Girl was capable of and she knew that we knew, so I had a feeling that she would arrange something devious – and I was right – sneaky bitch!

Kick-Ass headed into an alley, after we had heard some breaking glass.

I thought it was a distraction and so did Kick-Ass, but he had reasoned that Hit Girl would try a double bluff. I stayed at the entrance of the alley, watching Kick-Ass' back. That turned out to be a mistake!

I saw a blur out the corner of my eye and started to call out to Kick-Ass, but a pair of boots hit me in the right shoulder and I fell to the ground, dropping the Jō and I then rolled into the street. I looked up to find a boot coming down across my throat and a very sharp blade just an inch from my stomach – I didn't dare move!

The blade was attached to one-half of Hit Girl's bō-staff, except that it wasn't Hit Girl holding the handle – it was that fucking brat, Trojan!

"Game over, Shadow!" He growled, with a smug look on his face.

"Shadow, it's a fucking amb..." I heard Kick-Ass shout before he was cut off and I heard his breath rush from his lungs.

"You fucking little cunt!" I growled back, and then smiled. "Well done brat! You gonna let me up?"

"Not a fucking chance, bitch!"

I just laid back and waited for it all to be over.

I was wrestling with something vicious and purple that had appeared out of nowhere and kicked me down to the alley floor. Hit Girl had wrestled one baton out of my hand and she now held it to my throat, pushing down hard.

I pushed back with all my strength, managed to free my other baton, and cracked Hit Girl hard on her ass. She stopped and stared at me open mouthed – then I saw I eyes scowl and she drove the armour of her left fist into my abdomen. Thank God, I only felt a fifth of the pain – which was enough thank you very much!

Hit Girl flipped herself off to the side and waited for me to stand.

"You yield, Ass-Kick?" She growled, with an evil grin.

"Hell no!" I hissed back.

A purple blur then followed in which I was punched and kicked several times, and then she stopped and glared at me.

..._...

"Move a muscle and I sever your fucking head, Kick-Ass!" A young voice growled from a foot or so below me.

To me left, I saw the glint of light off a razor sharp bō-staff blade that was just a millimetre from my throat. I slowly looked down to find Trojan, with an enormous smile on his face.

"You yield, asshole?" Trojan added.

"Hell yeah!" I laughed. "Where's Shadow?"

"I had to shut her up!" Trojan said passing the bō-staff to Hit Girl.

We walked back down the alley and we found a wriggling and very pissed off Shadow. Her wrists and ankles were bound with duct tape and a piece of tape had been placed over her mouth.

"An improvement!" Kick-Ass laughed and received a vicious glare from Shadow, plus some muttered obscenities.

Kick-Ass ripped off the tape from her mouth, which made Shadow scream with the pain! He then cut the tape around her wrists and ankles.

"You are an evil little brat, Trojan!" Shadow growled.

"I warned you not to underestimate him!" Kick-Ass said then looked at Hit Girl. "You enjoyed yourself, didn't you?"

"Kicking Kick-Ass is the best thing ever!" Hit Girl replied with a big grin.

Later that night

Safehouse F

"That was totally awesome, Aunt Cathy!" Curtis blurted out as he pulled off his mask and ran over to his Aunt.

"It sounded like you had fun!" She replied with a big smile.

"I beat Shadow and taped her up!" He boasted.

"Only because I was being nice!" Chloe replied, looking annoyed.

"Maybe Josh can tape *you* up – might add some fun to the bedroom!" I suggested.

Chloe glared at me.

"You bitch, Mindy!"

"And proud of it!" I replied laughing at Chloe's blushes.

..._...

"So, was that fun?" I asked, once Curtis had stopped talking – which actually took quite a while.

"Thank you, thank you, and thank you! It was so awesome – I love you Mindy, you are the best!" Curtis blurted out. "It was unreal – can we do it again?"

"I don't think Shadow would stand for another night's humiliation!" Dave said with a smirk.

Chloe walked over to Curtis.

"I'm impressed Curtis, that was very well done. I am very pleased to know that my cousin is going to be a real vigilante, one day. Keep it up and try not to fuck up like I do – learn from my mistakes!" Chloe said magnanimously.

"That was well said Chloe!" Cathy said approvingly as Curtis gave Chloe a huge hug.

Five days later
Thursday

West Ridge

It was a call for help, from across the Atlantic Ocean.

"Mindy – we need your help, something is happening that is out of our control," Natasha said over the phone line.

"We'll be there!" I replied. "I'll let you know when and where – I have a few things to sort out first!"

"Thank you, Mindy. I really mean that."

"Stay safe, guys!"

..._...

I explained the short phone call to the others.

"Well, you've gotta go!" Marcus said.

"But..."

"We'll be fine without Hit Girl for a few days!" Marty said.

"But..."

"Mindy – take Dave, Chloe and Josh – I'm sure he'd love to go 'home!'" Marcus insisted.

"You trying to get rid of us – or just me!" I growled.

"Don't tempt me!" Marcus grinned.

Four days later
Monday

West Ridge

"Happy anniversary, Mindy!"

"Is it that time already?" Mindy asked.

"Fuck yeah!" I replied.

"So what is it now?"

"Would you believe that it's been six years since I first saw that scrawny little purple maniac at Rasul's apartment?"

"It's been that long?"

"And worth every minute!" I said. "Well, most of them!"

"Ass!" Mindy replied with a laugh and we sank down into the deepest kiss, which then led to something else...

"Dave! It's the middle of the afternoon!"

"I don't give a shit!" Dave murmured, as he ran his lips over my neck and I quivered.

Oh God! I kicked off my shoes, pushed myself back into Dave, and felt the heat from his body merge with my own. His hands started to wander down my back and then up my shirt. As his fingers gently caressed my backbone, I felt chills and started to giggle. Dave then lifted my shirt off and ran his lips over my left shoulder, while his right hand caressed my breast over the bra. Tremors started to shoot through my body and I felt certain feelings above my crotch and a moist feeling further down. I felt the clip of my bra release and I allowed the garment to fall to the bed.

I moaned, loudly and did not care who heard me – oh God I needed this!

Mindy was melting into me as I ran my hands over the soft skin of her shoulders and then down to her chest.

I could feel her quivering under my touch and the moans coming from her mouth – oh God!

My left hand ran over her nipple, Mindy squealed with delight, and her right hand moved down between her legs. Damn – if I didn't remove my trousers I was going to snap something! I let go of Mindy and she moaned, letting me know of her displeasure at my releasing her.

I ripped off my shirt and trousers and felt relief – those jeans were tight! I seized Mindy and started kissing her like never before, I felt her tongue running around inside my mouth, and I returned the favour. Her hands moved south and into my shorts and my breath caught – damn I was sensitive, but then so was Mindy.

"What's going on in there?" Megan asked, looking at the door to Dave and Mindy's room.

"You don't want to know – believe me!" I advised.

"They exercising or something, Josh? Mindy keeps moaning!"

"Yeah, they're exercising! Now get back downstairs!" I suggested and could feel myself blushing at the noise coming from the other side of the door.

I undid Mindy's jeans and carefully ran my hand down into her pubic hair, which by this stage was very moist and as soft as ever and the heat that was being generated was something else.

"Dave... Oh my God!" Mindy screamed as my fingers explored that area between her legs and I grabbed hold of a breast and massaged the hardened nipple. I felt the quivers shoot through her body and she moved her hips rhythmically against my hand and fingers.

She was really moaning now as I eased her jeans down, followed by a pair of, by now, very damp knickers. Mindy was really starting to move about the bed, as I massaged her down below and up top simultaneously, then she started to hold her breath and her eyes screwed up. Both hands clasped my back and nails dug into my skin sending pain shooting across my back. The pain just heightened my senses as I enjoyed my fiancée and treated her like the

woman she was.

I knew what was about to happen, but it still caught me unawares as Mindy suddenly braced and then ripped herself from my hands and pulled her knees up to her chest and she stopped breathing for what seemed like hours, but was barely a minute. Then...

"Oh for fuck's sake!" Paige exclaimed, blushing furiously at the loud drawn out scream from above their heads.

"She has some lungs that girl!" Marcus commented, looking very uncomfortable.

"We need ear plugs!" I commented feeling very embarrassed.

"Good idea, Josh!" Paige commented.

"Some soundproofing wouldn't go amiss!" Marcus added dryly.

Mindy finally started breathing again.

I laid down beside her, she started to control her breathing, and I could see her legs twitching.

"Good orgasm!" I asked, grinning.

"It felt like a damn grenade going off inside my fucking cunt!" Mindy replied and then giggled. "Your turn!"

God, I loved this man!

He almost ripped me apart, but hell that feeling was to fucking die for! I pushed Dave to one side, so he fell onto the bed and I yanked down his shorts to reach my favourite part. I took him into my mouth and ran my tongue around and around and felt Dave's breath catching each time – I loved being in control!

I continued kissing and caressing, causing Dave to move around the bed and groan and groan. The moving turned to thrashing and I almost bit down as his fists landed on my back and started pulling at me. Damn he was strong!

Then just as the pounding on my back got too much, the pounding stopped and I knew that the best bit was about to come! Pun intended...

Dave exploded directly into my face and I savoured every hot, slippery, slimy drop. I licked what I could reach and then I giggled – I was one strange bitch! I gave Dave a minute to catch his breath, while I grabbed a towel and wiped the excess from my face, ignoring that which dripped down my chest. I jumped on top of Dave and kissed him, as if I was about to die and he kissed me back.

Electric shocks started surging through me again and I needed him – I needed him inside of me – and soon!

"Fuck me, dammit!"

I saw Marcus close his eyes and bury his face in his hands. Paige started to laugh uncontrollably, but trying in vain to restrain herself. I had to admit, Marcus and Paige had picked one hell of a day to get the interior of their house painted! Mindy had said that they could spend the day here, but never said that there would be entertainment!

I felt Dave slip inside me and the feeling of fulfilment was complete.

He had never felt so good - never! Every thrust of his bulging muscles sent electric shocks and quivers throughout my body, not to mention he feelings from his hands that massaged my nipples. This was almost unbearable – I had stamina – more than most, but fuck!

Then it came and so did Dave! We both yelled out together and Dave shook as he came, before he fell off me to the side and he tried in vain to control his breathing. I was being ripped apart from my crotch upwards – the pain, but the feeling... Oh, fuck, fuck!

I just lay there for what felt like an hour.

After a long shower, together of course, Dave and I got dressed and went downstairs.

We found Marcus, Paige and Josh in the living room.

"Hi guys, what's happening?" I asked not sensing the uncomfortable feeling in the room.

"Nothing – boring afternoon!" Marcus said staring straight ahead and avoiding my face.

"Peaceful!" Paige admitted, looking a bit pink in the face and biting her lip.

Josh kept his mouth shut and refused to look at me.

"You two finished your exercise then?" Megan asked, innocently, as she came into the living room and I felt myself blushing as Paige exploded and burst out laughing. "You two make one hell of a racket!"

Two days later

Wednesday

Safehouse F

I forget this goddamn day, every fucking year!

Unfortunately, for me, Dave does not!

Last year it was paint exploding in the bathroom, but this year he went easy on me!

He had painstakingly replaced two magazines of nine-millimetre rounds with rounds that contained no gunpowder. I had then spent half an hour stripping down my pistols and reassembling them, looking for what was causing the misfires, before I realised that Dave, Marty and Marcus were watching me and trying desperately not to laugh! Then I found that all the milk in the kitchen had been dyed purple – which kind of put me off getting a drink that I had actually been looking forward to; I like *being* purple, but I don't want to drink it!

I still hadn't worked out the date, until I then found my beautiful Panigale motorcycle shrink-wrapped in Day-Glo orange plastic - I hate orange! The three assholes were all watching me and then they just burst out laughing.

"April fool!"

I was speechless and wanted to be mad with them, but it was kinda funny and surprisingly harmless, considering!

Then I heard a loud shout from upstairs.

" A!"

"You called, err, bellowed!" I replied, innocently and braced myself for the imminent explosion, as Chloe emerged out of the bathroom, very naked and very, very – blue!

"I – am – going – to – break – every – bone – in – your – body!"

"April fool!" I tried.

"And that will just be for starters, you British prick!"

"You don't like blueberry?"

Chloe actually laughed!

"You are a grade A asshole, you know that don't you?"

"I learnt from the best!"

"Who, Mindy?"

"No, Shadow!"

"I'll give you that one – now give me a kiss!"

"Mmmm, you taste good!"

Authors Note: At this point, you are strongly advised to read the story: **Hit Girl Hits Britain**, for the next events in the **Forsaken** timeline. You can ignore the story, but events in **Hit Girl Hits Britain** will be referred to from time to time. Chapter 141 of **Forsaken** continues almost two weeks after the end of this chapter (Chapter 140). For those who have already read **Hit Girl Hits Britain**, changes and updates have been made to that story to bring it into line with **Forsaken**.

***Chapter 141*: Home In The Windy City**

Author's Note: *This chapter (Chapter 141) of **Forsaken** picks up almost two weeks after Chapter 140. The events in between these two chapters are covered by another one of my stories: **Hit Girl Hits Britain** and you are advised to read this story before starting this chapter.*

Sunday morning
United States of America
Chicago

West Ridge

We were glad to be back in our own country – this applied to all of us, except of course for Joshua!

"That was fun while it lasted!" Josh commented, sadly, as we got out of the cab at home.

"What could be better than the United States of America?" I commented.

"Where do you want me to start?" Josh replied sardonically.

"Hey! It's the UK's most wanted!" Marcus said, as he opened the door.

"Funny!" I growled and gave Marcus a big hug.

"Missed you, kid!" Marcus whispered into my ear.

"I missed you, too!" I whispered back and I meant it.

Next, I turned my attention to Curtis and Megan. Their faces had an interesting collection of bruises!

"Whoa! What doors did you two walk into?"

"The bitch has had us training and sparring, dawn till dusk for two fucking weeks!" Megan growled.

'The Bitch' came forward.

"Hi, Kim! How've they been?" I asked.

"We've worked them both very hard. Two hours, twice a week at D-JAK and then four hours each day at the weekend, including the range," Kim explained happily. "It was fun!"

"She's cruel!" Curtis moaned.

"I asked her to keep you two training, while I was gone," I admitted.

"You fucking bitch!" Megan exploded. "You mean it's your fault that Curtis has been smacking me about?"

"You seem to have got in a few good hits, too!" I commented, as Curtis showed me the bruises on his body.

"That's not the fucking point!"

"So, they any good now?" I asked Kim.

"Not bad, not bad at all!"

"You want to know the best bit?" Cathy interjected.

"They've been so tired after all the training that they've been falling asleep almost immediately, each night! It gave me and Marcus more quality time together!" Paige finished with a sly grin.

"No, no, no!" I groaned, hiding my face with my hands. "Nasty images... I do not want them in my mind!"

"Well, dear girl – we did have to suffer through *your* performance, didn't we!" Marcus said with a grin.

I felt myself blushing enormously.

"Assholes!"

The following evening
Monday

Today had been our first day back at school after spring vacation, so we had arranged to go see a movie that evening.

We had just stepped out of the cinema, when something started to feel wrong.

"Megan, we're in trouble... Something's happening..."

"What are you talking about? I don't... Oh I see what you mean – this is *not* good!" Megan replied, catching on.

"What are you guys talking about?" Cameron 'Cam' Fellowes asked.

"Something very bad is about to kick off, Cam," Megan replied with caution in her voice.

"You sure?" Brad Murphy asked dubiously.

"I am!" I replied seriously and looked at Brad and Cam. "Whatever you do, both of you, stay behind Megan and me – stay close to us."

Cam and Brad looked at us both a little strangely.

"I mean it guys – I'm *not* fucking about!"

Just then, the people that I had seen on the other side of the parking lot started heading towards us, and as they passed under the light poles, I could see that the people were masked and had weapons – baseball bats, machetes, knives.

We needed help!

"Megan, I'm hitting the panic button!"

Safehouse F

I was on my third magazine of the evening when a red light started flashing in the range.

The red light meant that an alarm had been triggered. I cleared the weapon, left it on the stand and ran out towards the Command Centre and I could hear an alarm sounding throughout the Safehouse. I entered the Command Centre and immediately saw that a panic alarm had been triggered from a Fusion cell phone. I silenced the alarm and punched some keys on the main computer terminal. Seconds later, a blue dot appeared on the screen, several miles south of me, along with some writing that told me whose cell it was. My heart sank as I saw the name beside the dot: *Trojan*.

I ran back to the armoury to grab my gear. Curtis would only hit the panic button if his life or anybody else near him were in danger. It was *not* possible to trigger the alarm by accident. I called Curtis' cell – there was no answer. I tried Megan's – knowing that she was with him that evening – but again, no answer.

Most of my combat suit was on and I had just turned on my comms, when I heard a voice.

"This is Battle Guy, Fusion check in!"

"Battle Guy, Hit Girl is on comms and gearing up at Safehouse F," I responded.

"I have you Hit Girl. It looks like Trojan is in trouble."

"I know; I can't get him or Wildcat to answer their cells."

"Hold on – I'll turn on the microphone for Trojan's cell."

I heard a click in my ear and then my heart sank even further. I could hear screaming, I could hear fighting and the occasional gunshot. Then my heart rose quite a bit.

"This is crap!" Trojan announced.

"Over to your left!" Wildcat called.

"I've got him!" Trojan again. "Cam stay behind me!"

I heard a scuffle and then a crashing noise. I could not listen to anymore.

"Battle Guy – keep listening, I'm taking Beast – send the route to the satnav." I said, as I pulled on my mask and ran for the armoured Range Rover.

With a squeal of tyres, I shot out of the Safehouse and up the ramp. I had a really bad feeling about all this. All sorts of nasty images flashed through my mind as I drove through darkened Chicago.

Would I get there in time?

This was *out of control*.

There were dozens of masked people about and they were attacking people, cars, and property, anything seemingly without any sort of purpose. They just seemed to be out to cause trouble and as much damage as possible. There was a lot of screaming. I was scared and I could tell that Megan was too. Nevertheless, we had a job to do and that was to protect Cam and Brad, as well as we could until help arrived.

Cam had already been hit by a flying bottle, but he was okay and staying surprisingly calm. Brad was a year older than the rest of us and was doing his best to help. So far Megan and I had put down a couple of the attackers, while Brad and Cam had tried to use their limited Taekwondo knowledge to keep themselves safe.

I arrived at the cinema parking lot after a frantic fifteen-minute drive.

There was a fucking riot underway. I could see fighting everywhere, including bodies on the ground being trampled. The screams were deafening. Police had arrived at the site, but they were pounced on almost immediately by masked hooligans. I left Beast and drew both of my Katana blades.

I immediately came under attack, by masked men with baseball bats and machetes. I fought back, severing limbs and driving my blades into chests. I was searching, looking for Curtis and Megan. I pushed towards the cinema, through the maelstrom of fighting. Dave and the others were heading for the Safehouse now; I just hoped that I would be returning with the living and not the dead.

"There!" Cam called excitedly, pointing into the crowd.

I followed Cam's gaze and was overjoyed to see flashes of purple.

"Megan – she's here!" I called and pointed.

"Of course, she's here – what did you expect?" Megan retorted.

To Megan, Hit Girl was a true Superhero and invincible, but I knew otherwise.

Suddenly a man, armed with a machete, lunged towards us and Megan screamed. However, the man froze as a sharp blade appeared out of his upper chest. The blade was pulled back and the man fell to the ground, revealing Hit Girl, a blood-soaked sword in each hand. She was smiling and the smile grew when she saw Megan and me. I grinned back.

Three men had seen Hit Girl and now lunged towards her and us. As Hit Girl turned to face the approaching attackers, another man came and threw himself at Hit Girl's back. Hit Girl was shoved to the ground, but before she could get up a gun was pointed at us all – it was an Ingram MAC-10 compact machine pistol and when fired, it would kill us all. I seized one of Hit Girl's Glock 19 pistols from its holster and fired three rapid shots into the man's face, which exploded and almost immediately I felt the wetness of the man's brains hit my face and slide down my front.

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Hit Girl sprang up and drove the blade of one Katana into an attacker's chest, simultaneously flipping into the air and driving her other blade into the next attacker, from above and down into his heart. As she landed, she drew her Tanto and thrust the blade into the third attacker. Another man came at her and received a throwing knife in his forehead. Hit Girl then calmly retrieved her weapons, cleaned her Tanto and stowed it back into its sheath.

"Time to go home!" She growled and hauled the dead man off me and I handed back her pistol.

Hit Girl took the pistol and gave me a grave and saddened look, but then she smiled and started hacking her way through the dwindling fight to safety, pulling us with her.

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By the time we reached Beast, we were all covered in blood and had many cuts and bruises. Once in the safety of the armoured Range Rover, Hit Girl stayed for the remaining minutes of the fight, before the majority of the masked men had gone, or been killed by the masses of Police that had descended on the area.

Finally, Hit Girl climbed into Beast and looked at the four of us.

"You guys okay?" She growled.

"Just cuts and bruises!" Megan announced.

"Let's get the fuck outta here!" I growled, floored the accelerator and headed back towards the Safehouse. "Battle Guy! I am en-route to the Safehouse with Trojan, Wildcat and the two boys."

"Trojan?" Cam asked, looking at Curtis.

"Wildcat?" Brad enquired, looking at Megan.

"Answers later – can you two be trusted?" I demanded.

"Definitely, Hit Girl!" Both boys answered eagerly.

Safehouse F

When I pulled into the Safehouse, I saw Dave, Chloe, Cathy and Paige waiting on the other side of the armoured glass.

The drive back had not been fun. My mind had been reeling with the evening's happenings. First, the masked fanatics, then Curtis killing for the first time *and* face to face. I also had two Cops kids that had now been exposed to Fusion. Well, their Dad's knew who we were and I trusted the two boys – they had both been running around at D-JAK for a while now.

I climbed out of Beast, along with the kids and ushered them through the gate. Both Cam and Brad were gazing around the place, amazed. You wouldn't think that less than half an hour ago they were within inches of being killed!

"Cool huh!" Megan commented.

"Way cool!" Brad admitted.

"This answers a few questions!" Cam commented, looking at Dave.

"Hi Cam!" he said.

"Kick-Ass, right?" Cam enquired.

"You're a smart kid, Cam!" I said, pulling off my mask.

"Mindy!" Brad exclaimed. "I knew it!"

"Q & A comes later – let's get you four checked out," Cathy said. Then she and Paige grabbed the four kids and took

them upstairs.

..._...

"What the fuck was that, all over Curtis!" Chloe asked.

I looked at Dave, who in return looked concerned – he read me like a book!

"Curtis was forced to shoot a guy three times, in the face," I explained unhappily. "Curtis was covered in the man's brains."

"Oh fuck!" Chloe said simply.

Forty minutes later, the four kids had been cleaned up and had their cuts and bruises treated.

None of the kids' cuts was even remotely serious and they were now sitting down and having something to eat in the galley. I had explained to Cathy what had happened and she had taken it in her stride, as she did with everything.

"It had to happen one day," Cathy said matter-of-factly. "We went through it with Chloe, so we do it again with Curtis."

"I know; but Chloe was thirteen, not ten," I replied.

"I believe that you'll get him through it – just like you did with Chloe," Cathy said with a comforting smile.

I had also called Fellowes and Murphy to let them know that their kids were safe. They were very grateful – they had known that their kids had been at the scene of the riot, but they had been caught up in the chaos.

I promised to look after them and suggested that they call when they got off shift.

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I went up to the galley to see how the kids were. Dave was in the Command Centre talking with Marty, who had arrived a few minutes ago. They were going to try to piece together this disaster. Paige and Chloe were with the kids.

"Hi, guys!"

"Hi Mindy," Curtis said, smiling broadly.

"This place is awesome, Mindy!" Brad exclaimed.

"That it is. Your Dad's know that you are here and yes, they both know who we are," I replied.

Cam looked put out by that comment.

"My Dad knows all about Fusion?" Cam asked.

"He worked out who we were a while ago and so did your Dad, Brad. For two doughnut munching Cops, they're quite clever!" I teased. "But they've never seen any of our Safehouses!"

"Cool!" Cam said. "Will they be coming to get us?"

"When they get off shift, yes – then we can have a little fun," I smirked.

Later that night

"I trust her, I do – but there are times when I feel she would just love to fuck us about!" Murphy moaned.

The two Cops were negotiating a steel staircase that vanished into the earth. I had given them both instructions on how to find the second pedestrian entrance to Safehouse F, which was a short distance away and started in the basement of a small commercial unit. We were monitoring their every move and I was enjoying both their caution and their anxiety. Cam and Brad were watching their fathers' progress and thought it great fun.

"It could be worse, I suppose," Fellowes added.

"How?"

"With that crazy bitch, anything's possible!"

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"Be nice or the 'crazy bitch' may lead you into oblivion!" I called over a speaker mounted in the staircase.

"Oh great!" Fellowes moaned. "Told you she's winding us up!"

"Get a move on Dad!" Cam called into the microphone.

"Cam?"

"Could this get any worse?" Murphy groaned as they approached the bottom of the staircase.

"Go through that door and follow the passageway!" Brad directed.

"Great, my own son is sending me to oblivion!"

Murphy and Fellowes finally made in into the Safehouse.

"Bloody hell!" Murphy exclaimed.

"She's got her own damn bunker!" Fellowes added.

"Dad!" Both boys ran out to hug their fathers.

After a few minutes, I went to say hello.

"Boys, can I speak with your fathers for a few minutes – in private?"

Cam and Brad let go of their fathers and ran upstairs to find Megan and Curtis, who were in the briefing room.

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I took Murphy and Fellowes up to the galley, so we could get a coffee. It was late – after ten, but we needed the caffeine.

"You both have brave boys there, guys!" I commented.

"Thanks, Mindy," Murphy replied.

"But, they both went through hell this evening. That mob of masked men that attacked that parking lot, they were just your average hooligans. I'm just thankful that Curtis and Megan were able to identify the threat early on and had the sense to call for help. I was here, so I was able to gear up and get there fast. It was nasty and I hate to say it, but your boys are gonna have nightmares."

"During the fighting, after I got there, I was attacked by four men and Curtis was forced to grab one of my pistols and he shot a man, in the face and blew his head apart. I have to deal with him making his first kill – at ten years-old. All four of them ended up with brains on them, but Curtis got most of the brains, plus the body on him!"

Fellowes and Murphy looked at each other.

"We've both been there and we don't envy the kid – we both made our first fatal shootings when we were rookies; it fucking sucked!" Murphy stated, looking grim.

"But thanks for telling us; we can keep an eye on the boys just in case. I'm just glad that Curtis and Megan were on the ball and were able to call you. You trained them well, Mindy. Dave and Marty saved our families lives, last year – now Curtis, Megan and you have saved our son's lives this evening. We owe Fusion a hell of a lot and we're damn glad that you're here in Chicago," Fellowes stated.

I felt myself blushing.

"Thanks, guys... I – I'm just glad I could help," I replied.

Fellowes and Murphy then thanked Cathy and Paige for looking after their sons, before taking them off home.

We all decided to spend the night here at the Safehouse, rather than driving all the way home, at this time of night. Cathy and Paige took one room, while Chloe, Megan and Curtis took the other one. Marty went to sleep in the room downstairs on Level Zero. Dave and I went to our own room, but I had trouble sleeping.

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"You're worried about Curtis, aren't you?" Dave asked me.

"Hell yeah! He is much too damn young for this – it's gonna be hell for him *and* for Megan. Curtis fired the shot, but Megan saw the man's head explode too – mind you so did the boys!"

"We'll see how they both get through tonight."

I awoke to a scream.

Megan was sat bolt upright in bed and screaming. I jumped up to calm her down, just as Paige ran in.

"It begins!" I said and Paige nodded with a pained expression on her face.

Surprisingly Curtis had slept through Megan's screaming, but that did not last long. I was awoken about an hour later by a warm body wriggling in beside me.

It was Curtis and he was crying his heart out.

***Chapter 142*: First Kill**

The following morning
Tuesday

Safehouse F

When I got to the galley, I found Cathy, Paige, Marty and Dave all drinking coffee.

"I heard the screams," I said simply.

"Chloe is still asleep – she spent quite a while calming Curtis down last night. He's still asleep too," Paige explained. "Megan's on a couch in the briefing room, asleep."

"I wish I could have done more last night and prevented Curtis from shooting that man – but if he hadn't, then all four of them would have been dead. It was a MAC-10; my armour would have protected me – but it would have cut them all to ribbons."

"So, the two kids aren't the only ones who are suffering – Dave told us that you barely slept a wink last night," Cathy said.

I glared at Dave.

"Don't get mad at him!" Marty cautioned. "We don't hide shit in Fusion – remember, Mindy!"

"Fuck! I hate it when people use my own fucking words against me," I growled, but grinned at Dave. "Sorry."

I then went over and gave Dave an enormous kiss.

"Oh for fuck's sake; I always walk in when they're kissing!" Josh moaned, as he came into the galley with Erika.

"We came to help," Erika said. "How are the kids?"

"Could be better," Cathy, said dryly.

"Right Mindy – get a coffee and then get to the mat," Erika announced. "We have work to do!"

"But I only just got up!" Mindy whined.

"Then I have a chance of kicking your fucking ass!" Erika said with a chuckle.

"I get no fucking respect around this place!" Mindy growled and grabbed the coffee that a smirking Paige held out to her and followed Erika.

"What can I do?" Josh asked enthusiastically.

"Be ready to take over from Chloe when Curtis wakes up. We need to keep him distracted so he doesn't think about last night," Cathy suggested.

"I can do that," Josh confirmed.

Not long afterwards a tired Chloe appeared, with Curtis and Megan in tow.

"Ready for breakfast guys!" Josh chirped up.

"What are you so fucking cheerful about, *Jack*?" Megan growled.

"Smile or it won't be your mouth that sees the fucking pancakes!" Josh retorted with a grin.

Megan forced a smile and sat down next to her Mom.

"You can start smiling too asshole!" Josh added.

"Me?" Curtis asked.

"Both of you!"

"What!" Chloe demanded.

"Just think of something amusing!" Josh suggested.

"You naked?" Chloe replied and Josh chuckled.

"More like you naked *and* blue!" Josh countered.

Chloe blushed a little, but laughed and so did Curtis and Megan.

"Keep it going kid, you're doing well!" I said as I walked out of the galley with Marty.

"Thanks Dave," Josh replied. "You want more shit – then I'm full of it!"

After Erika had kicked the shit out of me, I got myself cleaned up and made some calls to see how Cam and Brad had been overnight.

It seemed they had been much the same as Curtis and Megan, unfortunately. I suggested that the boys come down to the Safehouse, to be with Curtis and Megan and I hoped that they could all get through this together. Both Sam and Paul thought this a good idea, so Sam agreed to bring the boys down later in the day.

I told Dave and Marty that we would be expecting visitors, so nobody would be worried when three people descended the stairs. The elevator entrance was kept secret for now, as was the vehicle entrance.

So far, Erika had stopped me from being morose about the previous night, and Josh was doing very well at keeping Curtis and Megan entertained. Chloe had managed a little more sleep and she was now her usual, happy self. Kim had appeared to take over from Cathy, as she had to go to work.

On the good side, we had received news that Jack Bay was out of hospital and now recuperating at The Farm, which had been repaired and cleaned up after the assault and subsequent crime scene investigation.

I knew what they were doing, but I went along with it.

Every time I had closed my eyes that night, I had seen that man's head exploding in ever-increasing detail. Part of me was shocked and appalled that I had killed a man, but another part of me knew that I had done it to save my friends. It had been kill, or be killed – simple as that.

I had not hesitated – I had picked up the pistol, aimed and fired – all in one swift movement, just as I had been trained. Mindy's training had saved us all. For both Megan and me, the training had taken over automatically and we had known instantly what to do, and most importantly, what *not* to do.

Chloe had explained all this to me, while she was trying to calm me down during the night. I did not want to be alone and subconsciously I stayed with somebody all day. I had talked with Megan for a few minutes and she felt the same way. Megan, being Megan, had her own way of getting through this and her response had been typically Megan, but I think it was mostly bravado.

"So I saw some fucker's head get blown apart and received his dumb ass brains all over me – who gives a fuck – he deserved every fucking round!"

Paige had laughed herself silly at that comment and so had I, now I came to think about it. Megan was special to me and I wanted to help her as much as I knew that she wanted to help me.

I was very pleased around lunchtime when Cam and Brad had arrived with Sergeant Fellowes. I immediately dragged them off to find Megan and we had only managed to get as far as the Briefing Room when we were intercepted by Mindy.

"You four – go get changed; time for some training!" She called.

"They'll be fine, Sam – we'll keep them busy," I said, as I headed for the mat.

"I know you will – thanks again, Mindy."

I watched as Sam headed out of the Safehouse. I was not a parent, so I had no idea of what Sam and Paul, with their wives, were going through – I could only guess and it could not have been fun. It made me stop and think about Marcus and what he went through every time that I went out as Hit Girl.

I had also put a lot of thought into what to do about Megan and Curtis. Should I stop them being involved with Fusion – at least until they were older? Now that they had witnessed something like that, should I make them full members and turn them into vigilantes? Fuck, they were not even eleven yet! I would look at Megan and think back to myself at that age. At that point, in my life, I had not even met Dave, but I had been a fully-fledged, and blooded, vigilante with a decent number of kills under my belt.

Did I want Curtis and Megan to go through all that shit, at their age? Curtis, well he was pushing himself and if I said no to him being a vigilante, then he might try to do it himself, much as Chloe tried when we had first met her. Megan – she was complex and not so easy to read, but she was catching up with Curtis when it came to skills and training.

I had asked Kim to have them sparring against each other, while we were in the UK. I did not want to fight them, in case I hurt them – as Daddy had with me a few times and I knew that he had felt terrible every time that he had caused me injury.

I faced off with the four kids.

Now was an opportunity to show them some alternative moves that I would not *dare* to demonstrate at D-JAK!

"Okay you, err, little shits – let's see you what you can do now!" I growled. "Hit me!"

Cam and Brad hesitated, but Curtis and Megan did not – they came at me from two different directions with everything that they had. Then, Cam and Brad dug in, too. I managed to out manoeuvre Megan and Curtis, but trying to avoid four fast little fuckers, *without* hurting them was *not* easy! Then that little shit, Brad, caught me with his foot on my cheek and I flipped over and landed very hard on my face!

"My God, I'm sorry!" Brad exclaimed in shock, as I turned over, rubbed my cheek, and glared at the kid, which I thought must have scared him.

"That was a good kick, Brad!" I said with a smile.

Megan was grinning fit to burst.

"Kick the shit outta the fucking bitch!" She said gleefully.

"Such elegant use of the English language as always, Megan!" I groaned, getting up.

"Foul mouthed, little cow!" Josh called down from the walkway with a laugh.

"Bite me, *Jack!*" Megan yelled back, raising her right hand and sticking up her middle finger.

"Megan!" Cam exclaimed, but he did not look as shocked as I thought he should have been at Megan's behaviour.

I was surprised to see Megan blush a little, though. Paige had agreed to give Megan a free pass with the swear jar for a few days as she worked things out of her system! I also thought that Megan was enjoying the company and attention of so many boys.

"Do that again and you'll be losing a finger, young lady!" Paige called down and I saw Megan scowl. "Anybody want something to eat?"

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"Thanks Paige!" I said as I got to the galley. "I needed the break."

"Looks like you're gonna get a nice bruise," Paige advised.

"I took down Hit Girl in her own Hit Cave!" I heard Brad announce proudly.

"It is *not* the 'Hit Cave', never has been and never damn well will!" I growled at the kids, who just laughed.

"They seem to be having fun," Kim commented.

"At my expense!" I growled.

"Hit Girl getting thin skinned?" Kim teased.

"See, I get no goddamned respect!"

"Bite me, Hit Girl!" Kim quipped, with a grin.

After a bite of pizza, I headed down to the Command Centre.

"So what have you two got?" I asked Dave and Marty.

"It looks like those idiots last night were hired to cause trouble," Marty said.

"By whom?" I asked.

"That is the question we have yet to answer. The Police know as little as we do. I've spoken with Voight, and his team are working on this disturbing turn of events as a priority," Marty replied.

"What worries me is that we have absolutely no idea when, or if, those masked idiots are going to show up next," Dave added.

"My thoughts, exactly. What are the chances of us arranging regular evening patrols? At least in pairs, but I would be happier with threes as a minimum. Titan should be with us by the weekend, too."

"It'll come in handy, I think!" Dave commented then noticed my cheek. "By the way, who did that?"

"Brad kicked me!"

"Not bad – good kid!" Dave teased.

"No fucking respect!" I growled as I went back out to the mat.

I must have dozed off because I woke up to find Megan sitting on my stomach, as I lay on the mat.

"Hiya, Hit Girl!" She growled with an enormous grin.

Behind her was Curtis, with Brad and Cam either side of him.

"What do you lot want?"

"To kick your ass!" Megan replied.

"As if!" I growled and pushed Megan roughly off me and onto the mat.

I stood up and looked at the four smiling faces. This seemed to be going well so far, I stepped forward and grabbed hold of Megan's gi, lifting her off the mat.

"You need to learn some manners, young lady!" I growled at the smirking Megan, before I threw her across the mat. She screamed, but Dave caught her just before she landed.

"Awesome!" Curtis said, laughing, along with a snigger or two from Cam and Brad.

"*Not* funny!" Megan growled angrily, as Dave put her back on her feet. She then turned, angrily, to the boys. "Quit laughing assholes, if you want to keep your fucking balls intact!"

Somebody really needed to talk to Megan about her language! Even I thought that she was pushing it a little far – and that was *me*, Mindy Macready!

***Chapter 143*: Decisions**

That evening
Tuesday

Safehouse F

I was on our bedroom when there was a knock on the door.

"Yeah!"

I looked up to see Chloe come in, followed by Curtis and Megan.

"Should I be worried?" I asked with a grin.

"These two wanted to talk about first kills – I suggested that you would probably be the best person to talk to," Chloe explained. "After all, you helped me through mine."

"Come in and sit down, guys. Ask your questions."

I assumed my story-telling pose – which Chloe always saw as my 'gay pose' and it made her laugh! Curtis went first.

"When did you first see anybody killed, violently?" Curtis asked, tentatively.

"The night at Rasul's. When Little Miss Psycho, sliced and diced, showing off to me!" I replied, thinking back six years. "That really shook me the fuck up! I was ready to give up being Kick-Ass, right there and then. I was in waaaaay over my head and it didn't exactly help when I was visited by two fucking nut cases!"

"Huh?" Megan asked.

"Hit Girl and Big Daddy! They scared the shit outta me, I can tell you!"

"When did you first kill?" Megan's question, this time.

"That night when I rescued Hit Girl, with the Jet Pack and Gatling guns. I shot three of D'Amico's men, from a distance, but it still scared the fucking crap outta me! Then, of course, I blew Frank D'Amico himself out of the window, with a bazooka. There, I was closer and I was able to look into his eyes, as he saw his own end. I felt no emotion, at that point, but later on, it hit me full force. Admittedly, killing with Gatling guns or a bazooka, is not very personal, but both times I did it to save somebody, somebody I owed. At that stage, I felt one hundred percent responsible for Big Daddy's death. I felt that I had to act, to back her up and in the process of that, saved her life... Twice!" I elaborated.

"It took me a while to start to come to terms with what I had done. I never have got over it, really. I always hate having to kill. However, in this line of work, it is necessary. Kill or be killed! Some choices suck, big time. Killing eats away at you, but I have Mindy to talk to and she knows what I am going through. I do not even want to think about how many people have died, at Hit Girl's hands and I have never asked, but I do believe that Mindy remembers every single person that she has killed. However, after more than ten years of killing, she is able to bury those emotions. She can be a real hard bitch, as you know, but that is just her way of dealing with things."

"Now, Curtis. You and your cousin have something in common," I said, indicating Chloe. "Chloe's, or rather Shadow's, first kill was actually a double kill in defence of Hit Girl while they were both rescuing me. She was scared shitless, but she used her training and dispatched those two men with four rounds expended."

"You had no choice, your training took over – for both of you I assume?" I asked and both kids nodded. "That is why Mindy hammers all this shit into us, literally! The training kicks in, as it did for Shadow and now for you, Trojan and for you Wildcat. Between the two of you, you were both able to keep Bradley and Cameron alive until help arrived, which incidentally you had the good sense to call for. Never be scared to call for help – ever!"

Two days later
Thursday

Safehouse F

It had been another bad night, but not just for Curtis and Megan.

I had been having shocking nightmares that all revolved around Curtis, Megan or both of them being killed in ever more spectacular ways. I was a nervous fucking wreck by three in the morning and Dave was doing his best. I think I must have hurt him too; I was gripping him so tightly.

A lot of this was due to the decision that I had not made yet – should I let the two kids become full vigilantes?

I decided to talk to Cathy and Paige, who were both still staying here at night. That *did not* go well – I ended up in full flood! I felt so embarrassed, despite both of them saying there was nothing wrong with it. In the end, Cathy and Paige sat down with Curtis and Megan, both on their own and together. They asked them if they wanted to become full members of Fusion and therefore vigilantes, not to mention going through the potential downsides of being a vigilante!

I surprised myself by actually being nervous when I saw Curtis and Megan coming towards me while I was sitting in the Command Centre.

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"Hi guys," I said quietly.

Megan glared at me.

"Will ya stop feeling fucking sorry for yourself?" Megan grumbled. "Jeez! Why do I always have to sort you out?"

I laughed. Megan just had this way of phrasing things.

"If you want us, Mindy – we're here to help. Aunt Cathy and Paige explained everything to us. We know the risks – we know what could happen to us, but we have both been part of the way there. Hell, mouthy bitch, here, has already been shot!" Curtis said.

"Hey! Watch who you are calling a bitch, ass!" Megan retorted.

"Anyway!" Curtis continued, ignoring Megan. "I've crossed the line – I've shot a guy – I might as well go the whole way."

I saw something that I did not like in Curtis's eyes. I could see darkness there – killing a man had taken something from him, something that he could never get back – part of his soul. I had also noticed that Curtis had used the word 'shot' instead of 'killed' – might seem a little like semantics, but one *sounds* much worse than the other.

"Sit – both of you."

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Once they were both seated, I looked at both of them for a minute before responding.

"Now – I want both of you to promise me something. You will do exactly what I say. You will both follow *all* commands and directions that come from *anybody* in Fusion – even Chloe, Curtis – or Josh, Megan. Do *not* take unnecessary risks. Do not *ever* go out on your own, *or* as just the pair of you – for now, you will only go out when a senior operator is with you. Senior operator means, Dave, Chloe or myself – understood?"

"Yes," Megan said, nodding.

"Yes, Mindy," Curtis confirmed.

"You get hurt, when you're out – you tell someone, even if it's just a fucking scratch. You break the rules and I'll fucking break you!" I was starting to raise my voice now and I saw Dave and Marty looking at me; Dave looked a little concerned. "I am *not* fucking around – I am fucking serious. I do not want to lose, either one of you."

I stopped; I felt myself losing control. Megan and Curtis had actually started to flinch away from me and Dave looked even more concerned. It was Curtis, who spoke up first.

"I know that you feel responsible for me having to kill somebody. It was not your fault. You are Hit Girl, but you can't

be everywhere and despite what *some* might think – you are only human."

"Thank you, Curtis," I said with a smile. "I didn't mean to scare you both."

"We really should be used to your strange behavior by now!" Megan added.

"Me, strange? Looked in the mirror lately!" I quipped, looking at Megan.

"I am strange – so fucking what?" Megan replied.

"Come with me," I said cryptically and led the two kids out and down to Level Zero.

An hour, or so later Trojan and Wildcat were ready.

I had ordered additional armour panels for their protective suits at the same time that I had obtained the suits, just in case. The additional panels converted the protective suits into full combat suits.

The additional armour was in the form of grieves, thigh guards and upper arm armour. There were also slim, and therefore light, Type III armour panels for their chests and backs. They both had new, different masks that were based on their original masks, but were both full face and incorporated voice-changing technology, as well as light armour protection for the head. The armour was in the same colourings as their suits.

As they would be going offensive, I decided that they should carry a firearm and both kids had trained with them, so that would not be a problem. I offered Wildcat one of my purple gripped SIG Sauer P232 .380 calibre pistols, which she happily accepted. Trojan, I gave a different pistol – a Walther PK380. Both weapons were small framed, light and had reduced recoil. Trojan also benefited from his pistol having a built in laser designator below the barrel.

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"You will both look after these weapons. I spot a speck of gunpowder in the barrel and you will fucking know about it! I will also have you both cleaning guns for a week – ask Josh about that. You lose your pistols and well... Let's not go there, shall we..."

In addition to their pistols, I had provided other defensive weapons.

For Trojan, there were a pair of Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knives, as used by Jackal. He had shown an aptitude with the knives, so I would give him a chance with them. These knives went on his right thigh; the pistol holster was mounted on his left thigh, allowing the pistol to be drawn across his body.

For Wildcat, who seemed to enjoy close quarters work, I provided a pair of panther claws, which she would hold as if they were knuckle-dusters, but had three seven-inch blades extending out from her fist. These were more than lethal! When not in use they would be stowed in a pouch on Wildcat's right thigh. Wildcat's pistol holster was mounted on her left thigh, just like Trojan's, allowing the pistol to be drawn across her body.

Finally, I provided each of them with a custom bō-staff in blue for Trojan and in brown for Wildcat. These were short versions, very similar in size to the one that I used when I first met Dave, but just as lethal.

I took them both back upstairs and set them sparring together – without the bō-staffs, so that they could get used to the extra weight of equipment – armour is heavy!

Both kids drew quite a crowd as they twisted around the mat, fighting each other. The crowd included Dave, Marty, Kim, Cathy, Paige, Marcus, Chloe, Josh, Sam Fellowes, Cam and Brad. I was acting as a referee, to ensure that they did not injure themselves. The clash of carbon-fibre armour could be heard echoing around the Safehouse.

Then Wildcat performed an amazing, and advanced, move. She performed an almost perfect back flip and as she came back down, she kicked Trojan hard in his left side and he went down hard. Wildcat landed softly, before driving in for another attack, which Trojan responded to by catching the girl's left foot and twisting her over. She hit the mat face down, forcing the air out of her lungs.

Wildcat was having none of it; she immediately jumped up and performed a very good flying roundhouse kick that floored Trojan. I decided to call time and the crowd came over to congratulate the new vigilantes.

"That was way cool!" Brad said to Wildcat.

"Thanks Brad," Wildcat replied in a strange, but intimidating, electronic voice.

"That's, err, weird though!" Cam commented.

"Neat, huh!" Trojan said with his own electronic voice.

"Enough with the voices – masks off!" I called.

The kids needed to cool off after their energetic bout of fighting. Both of them were sweating heavily, as they removed their masks and Paige handed them both a cold energy drink each.

"Megan that was some advanced, err, stuff!" I said. "I'm very impressed."

"She's been saving that to show you – we spent many hours on those moves," Kim said, smiling. Megan looked immensely proud of herself.

"That was impressive – well done, girl!" I said, making Megan blush with pride.

"We start shift at six tonight," Sam Fellowes advised.

"Kick-Ass, Mist and I will be out on our motorcycles tonight. Battle Guy will be looking after the Command Centre with Hawk. Medic, along with Shadow and Jackal will be in reserve here, in case they are needed."

"Not bad, Hit Girl – you've built one hell of an organization!" Sam noted.

"That she has!" Marcus agreed. "SWAT is on alert. If those assholes show up, they're gonna be hit and hit hard!"

"Now *that* I am looking forward to!" I said with a smirk.

That evening

"Stay between us – okay?" Kick-Ass said to a nervous Mist.

"I'll be fine – thanks for worrying about me!" Mist replied as she started her Streetfighter.

"Battle Guy – we're rolling!" I announced and the three of us accelerated up the ramp.

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Once in the open air, we concentrated our patrol to the west of the main part of the City, this had seemed the best place, with quick access to various parts of the City, if called upon. I sincerely hoped that nothing would happen!

***Chapter 144*: The Next Attack**

Thursday night

Southern Chicago

I had a lot on my mind, as the three of us rode through the dark City.

The attack, the other night. Who was behind it? It couldn't have been that bastard, D'Amico. I know that he was pissed when we saw each other last week, but this was way too soon for him to arrange. Could he have prepared this ages ago? Had he just been waiting for the right moment to unleash his terror on Chicago?

So many questions, but so few answers!

"You still brooding?" Kick-Ass asked.

"You know me too well!" I replied.

"You worry too much, girl – we've weathered worse. I know you are worried about that asshole; but we've defeated him before – twice!" Kick-Ass went on.

"I know – but..."

"Sometimes you over think things – you worry about shit that will never happen. I know that's how Hit Girl was trained to work; but the worrying is gonna tear you apart."

"He does have a point!" Mist chimed in.

"He usually does!" I groused, knowing that Mist was right.

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We rode in silence for a while, watching out for anything untoward.

An hour later it happened.

"Fusion, we have an attack brewing. Masked people gathering at 47th Street and Hoyne! I'm sending the position to your helmets!" Battle Guy called.

"We have it! ETA six minutes!" I responded and increased speed.

"SWAT is rolling, ETA ten minutes!"

We were two minutes away when Battle Guy called again.

"Shadow, Jackal and Medic are heading your way with Beast! ETA nine minutes! Reports indicate crowd of masked cunts is swelling to forty plus!"

More good news! I seriously hoped that somebody had miscounted, but that hope was dashed as we arrived at the scene. Forty would have been a nice low number compared to what I saw in front of me. Mist summed it up.

"Oh shit! We're fucked!"

"That would be about right!" I commented and saw Kick-Ass nodding.

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We were parked up beside a Pizza Hut. Across the illuminated parking lot of the small mall, I saw a crowd of people. I took a close look at the crowd.

These people were different to those I had fought, the other night. These seemed more prepared for violence. Some wore body armour of varying quality and coverage. I saw a huge array of weaponry: Machetes of varying sizes,

Katana swords, knives, baseball bats, chain whips and guns. Many guns.

The guns were interesting – they looked brand new. New pistols, new shotguns, new hunting rifles. Either these people had just turned over a gun store, or somebody was equipping them. Now this seemed like Ralph D'Amico!

The masked cunts were not aware of our arrival; we had been stealthy. I was pleased to see that SWAT were being stealthy too – no sirens, no flashing blue lights – as they pulled up.

I shook hands with the SWAT Team Leader, Matthews.

"Glad you're here, Hit Girl – these guys look serious!" He said.

"These are different from those of the other night. These cunts are better equipped – the weapons are all brand new!" I explained.

Matthews looked around at the masked cunts.

"They don't get much newer than that!" He agreed. "D'Amico?"

"As good a person to blame as any!" I replied.

SWAT had twelve men ready in body armour. We brought the number to fifteen. Shadow and Jackal would bring the figure to seventeen. Seventeen against what looked like fifty or so masked cunts.

Medic would stay with Beast and await friendly casualties, which at this point seemed inevitable.

The first shots of the night would be from SWAT.

They sent over a dozen teargas grenades into the crowd. There was very little wind that night, so the teargas would linger for a few minutes. We waited for the teargas to take effect. There was a lot of shouting and confusion. Nobody seemed to be in control of the masked cunts, which was good news. I noticed a few cunts leave the fight and head off, choking on the gas. They were seized by hidden Chicago PD Officers who had surrounded the area silently. Nobody was getting away from this, dead or alive!

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At that point, Beast pulled up, driven by Medic.

Out jumped Shadow and Jackal. Kick-Ass went to the rear of Beast and drew out heavy weapons, including his AA-12. This time though the magazine was loaded with beanbag rounds. At this point we did not know who these cunts were, or if they deserved to die.

Of course, if they chose to fight us, then we would use lethal force. However, initially we would use non-lethal force wherever possible. On this line, Jackal was holding a Remington Model 870 pump-action shotgun that was loaded with seven rounds of XREP ammunition. The XREP looked like a high-tech shotgun shell. That was so it could be fired from a standard 12-gauge shotgun. But instead of firing pellets or a slug, these shells fired a small, self-contained Taser device that was capable of delivering the same debilitating effect as a handheld Taser gun – in this case for twenty seconds.

The advantage over a normal Taser was that several targets could be engaged by a single person and from a safe distance. Shadow would cover Jackal while he took down masked cunts. The more we put down with non-lethal force the less we would need to fight. The initial plan was for incapacitated cunts to be dragged out of the fight and passed to Officers who would secure them and send them for processing and interrogation.

Our good friend, Voight, would be undertaking the interrogations and I knew that he would get answers, one way or another!

Once the teargas had dissipated, we moved in with teams of two.

Naturally, I was with Kick-Ass. Mist would help a SWAT member with retrieving downed cunts.

Kick-Ass started firing his AA-12, sending beanbags into the crowd and the unsuspecting cunts were not amused.

They fell to the ground nursing their bruised bodies. Jackal was starting further over and he had already incapacitated four men, who were even now being dragged off by SWAT. I covered Kick-Ass with my bō-staff. I used the staff itself rather than the blades, but some cunts were not amused at being attacked. They wanted to move through the City and cause trouble, but we were not going to let that happen without the cunts suffering a lot of blood and pain.

The cunts started to move away from us, but the crowd also started to split into two. This revealed the real fighters. In front of Kick-Ass and I were six large men, who seemed impervious to the beanbag rounds. I flexed my muscles and my bō-staff, before running forwards.

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These men were out to kill; I could read their eyes. Kick-Ass was running behind me having passed off his AA-12 to a SWAT member. He had drawn his Ko-Wakizashi blades. He was now ready to support me in my attack.

The first man received both blades of my bō-staff in his gut. He went down slower than I had expected, but down he went, screaming and clasp his stomach. This only seemed to enrage the next man who drove his fist into my chest, pushing me backwards and I rolled to the side before regaining my feet and swiped the bō-staff around, severing the man's feet at the ankles. He crashed to the ground with a scream, but he still tried to grab for me, until I drove a bō-staff blade into his brain.

I drove my blade into the chest of the attacker.

The man grunted with the pain, but smirked at me, before attempting a punch, which I was able to fend off with my gauntlet. I felt a fist strike my back armour and stumbled forwards, releasing my Ko-Wakizashi and turning around to drive my other blade into the stomach of the other attacker and slashing him open, so yards of intestine spilled out onto the ground. The man fell, crushing his own guts and sending blood in an ever-increasing pool.

I retrieved my other blade and turned towards Hit Girl, who was fighting the remaining two men. I ran over to her, drove a blade into one man's side, below the rib cage, brought the sword forward. I opened up his belly, again spilling intestines across the ground.

With my distraction, Hit Girl was able to sever both arms of the last attacker before killing him with a stab into his heart.

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At the sight of the six men being taken down, many of the watching crowd decided that they preferred to be elsewhere and started to move away, but were intercepted by the waiting Police.

It was obvious that the remaining cunts, about a dozen, were the serious fighters. These men were now facing five armed vigilantes. The odds were better than even – from our point of view!

Mist let fly with her chain whip and pierced the neck of one cunt, while the rest of us charged in and let fly with our melee weapons.

I was fighting a man who wielded a Katana with some skill, which rather surprised me and the man gave me no chance to seize my own swords, so I was stuck fighting with the bō-staff. Kick-Ass was deflecting machete blows from two men with his own blades and bearing up well. Jackal was fighting a man armed with a Katana, too. His Ninja-To was a lot shorter, but Jackal moved faster than the man, which gave him an advantage.

Shadow was fighting a man more than twice her size. The man was armed with a vicious looking club thing. She was holding up, though, with her bō-staff and, like Jackal, was using her speed and manoeuvrability to outwit her adversary.

The man was fucking huge.

He was swinging what was probably a baseball bat, but also might have been a piece of scaffolding. Either way, it was large and lethal! I ducked from side to side as I avoided the powerful swings from the club thing. He was good, too. Each time I tried to get a blade into him, he was able to block my thrust.

Now, they say that size is not everything – look at Hit Girl!

However, his weapon was longer than mine was which gave him an obvious advantage. However, I had speed and I was able to outstep my adversary. My combat suit absorbed a pair of strikes, although I expected to find vicious bruises under the suit!

I finally managed to dive under one of the man's attacks and I drove my Ninja-To up, vertically into the man's groin. The man stopped dead and blood poured down my gauntlets and onto the parking lot. I pulled my blade out and allowed the man to fall to the ground.

I saw Jackal's man go down, as one of my attackers struck at me with his machete. I caught the blade with both of my own blades and pushed backwards just as my other attacker struck at me. I kicked out, but missed. The machete came down towards me, but just when I thought it was too late, a blade appeared and deflected the strike. It was Jackal, with his Ninja-To.

"Thanks!" I called and threw my weight onto the first attacker, pushing him back and driving a blade into his stomach and another into his chest.

I then swung around, removing my blades and driving one into the other man's chest at the same time as Jackal drove his blade into the man's stomach. Both men fell to the ground.

I adored this chain whip.

One flick and it flew straight and pierced the man's neck. As the man fell, I pulled the chain tight, the end left the man's neck, and I turned to face the next attacker. He was too close for the whip, so I replaced it into its pouch and drew my Sais.

This man sported a large Jō-like weapon. As he struck at me, I used the Sais to deflect the strike and used my mobility to avoid the heavy weapon. The attacker managed to get one good hit on me, but I was able to do worse in return.

I hooked away the end of the Jō with my left Sais and drove my right Sais into the man's left temple. Blood shot from the wound as the body fell to the ground. I span around seeking my next target and ran towards Hit Girl, who seemed to be attracting more than her fair share of cunts!

I was now fighting three men.

One had a Katana, another a baseball bat and the third, a whirling chain. Why they were all ganging up on me – I did not know! I was using all my skills to battle the three men. The man with the Katana was good while the other two were just thugs.

One of the thugs, though, suddenly froze with his chain dangling in the air. Then he sank to the ground and I saw a smiling Mist standing behind him, a blood soaked Sai in each hand. Not bad for the new girl!

I turned my attentions to the remaining pair, who had been distracted by the death of the other thug. I whirled around to stab the guy with the baseball bat in the chest, then span and drove the other blade into the neck of the Katana guy. They both crumpled to the ground.

I looked around and saw Jackal driving his Ninja-To into a cunt lying on the ground. He looked exhausted and I he seemed to be favouring his left arm. Kick-Ass was breathing heavily, but seemed unharmed. Mist was smiling and she seemed pleased with herself. Shadow though, was down on one knee. She was holding the right side of her face and I could see her mouth grimacing with pain.

Later that night Safehouse F

The evening had been a success.

The CPD had arrested almost twenty cunts. Many cunts had died. Nine cops were in hospital with only minor injuries.

We had all returned safely to the Safehouse.

Chloe and Josh were both being seen to by Cathy. Josh had hurt his left arm, nothing major but he had a large bruise, which made the arm sore. He also had a couple of major bruises on his chest from two Katana strikes. Chloe had a few cuts and a bruise on her jaw and a sore left shoulder.

"A sore jaw should give us all some peace and quiet!" Dave quipped and received a nasty glare from Chloe. Josh laughed, and received a punch in the arm for his trouble.

"Well done, Erika – I was really impressed," I said and Erika blushed at the praise.

Two days later
Saturday

Safehouse D

Dave and I were at the Safehouse, along with Curtis and Megan. Chloe was out with Josh and probably doing things that I really did not need to know about! Seriously, though, they had gone to see Jack Bay at The Farm.

In front of us were my latest, very expensive, acquisitions. I was pleased, very pleased!

"Mindy stop grinning – you'll hurt yourself!" Dave commented.

"Fuck me! They are fucking awesome!" Megan exclaimed walking around them.

"I love that one!" Curtis said, pointing at the larger of the two vehicles.

"So – you like *Titan*, eh?" I asked with a laugh.

"Hell, yeah!" Curtis replied.

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Curtis had taken a liking to the monster vehicle parked beside Safehouse H. It had started life as a Ford F-550 truck, but had gone through a major transformation. The vehicle weighed in at seven and a half thousand kilogrammes and was armoured to A9/B6 standard – this meant that the vehicle could survive bullets from all assault rifles and anything up to 7.62x51 rounds from a Winchester .308 rifle. The vehicle was over six metres long and two and a half metres wide.

The enormous truck had enormous twenty-inch off-road tyres, with run-flat capability, and four-wheel drive. Power came from a six point seven-litre V8 Turbo Diesel engine that produced four hundred horsepower. Ten people could be carried in air-conditioned safety, if not comfort. There were also a pair of heavy-duty winches mounted front and rear.

We called this armoured mammoth, *Titan*!

The other vehicle that Megan was now examining was a lot more mundane than *Titan* was, but still huge.

This was intended as additional support for *Beast*. We had many people that required transportation now, as well as equipment and things were getting more dangerous for Fusion. The black, armoured pickup truck was based on the GMC Sierra 3500HD. It was fitted with a crew cab, which could seat five people in relative comfort, as well as armoured safety, as well as a long load bed. The four-tonne vehicle was powered by a six point six-litre V8 diesel engine that provided over four hundred horsepower to the front and dual rear wheels. The vehicle was armoured to the same level as *Titan*, but would suffer damage much more easily. On the streets, the GMC would attract relatively low attention, just like *Beast*. The added bonus of this truck was its ability to carry two motorcycles in its load bed.

We called this monster truck, *Iron Hide*!

Okay, yes - the truck was named after a Transformer!

We had allowed people to suggest names, anonymously, for the new truck. Turned out that there were many

Transformer fans in Fusion – who knew. Although, I would love to know who suggested 'Bumble Bee' and 'Daisy'. I had a distinct feeling that the last name was suggested by Marcus. He did not seem to approve of my naming decisions for some reason – I could not think why!

Due to its immense size and weight, *Titan* would live here, at Safehouse D. *Iron Hide* would fit, just, down the ramp to Safehouse F, but due to lack of parking space the truck would spend most of its time at Safehouse D, too.

Megan and Curtis had been nagging me now to take them out. Megan especially, as I had already taken Curtis out. Nevertheless, I still had serious misgivings about those two becoming operators. I suggested that I would take them out, once things calmed down.

That suggestion did not go down so well, but I told them that I wasn't shifting.

***Chapter 145*: Escalation**

Three days later
Tuesday night

8:15 P.M.

As the bullet entered the head, it seemed to swell, before it started to come apart. The back of the head split, releasing brain matter, blood and bone. This brain matter, blood and bone formed a cloud where the head used to be and expanded outwards, in all directions.

Admittedly, it was dark, so it was not as spectacular as it would have been in daylight, but the sight of the cloud of body matter settling to the ground, followed by the headless corpse was still very impressive, in the illumination from the street lighting.

"Fuckin' A!" Jackal commented in his electronically disguised voice, as he lowered his pistol and turned towards the next target.

I threw the man over my back and onto the ground, followed by a single round from my Glock 19 into the man's head and moved onto the next target. I fired another single round, blowing another head apart as a man came towards me with a raised baseball bat. I threw myself to my right and past the bat, as it swung for my body. Another gunshot, this time the sharper report of a five-point-seven-millimetre round from Shadow's FN Five-seveN pistol. The man with the baseball bat fell with a single hole in his forehead.

A man, six feet away was about to be shot by a masked cunt. I raised my pistol again and put the cunt down with two rapid shots.

"Спасибо, Хит Girl!" The man said, looking over briefly, before returning to engaging the masked attackers with his AKS-74U. [*Thank you, Hit Girl!*]

Now, you may ask – why was I fighting alongside a Russian?

You would probably be a little more surprised to know that he was Russian Mafia, from the Bratva that I had upset some weeks before, when I had dropped into their conference room!

Well – two words – Ralph D'Amico! He was wreaking havoc in the City. He was targeting anybody who could stand against him, including the Russian Mafia. It seemed that he no longer wanted to collaborate with them, unlike the last time.

The Russians had contacted me, through one of my informants and I had met with Vladimir. He asked for *my help*, would you believe that! I agreed to join forces – but only until D'Amico was dead. The Russians had agreed, surprisingly, to my terms.

So there we were, fighting side by side at South Independence Boulevard and South Ridgeway Avenue.

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We had been alternating the Fusion patrols to give people time to rest.

That night, Kick-Ass and I had been staying at the Safehouse on standby, while Jackal, Shadow, Mist and Medic had gone out, together. To give them extra protection, I had insisted on them taking Beast, instead of their motorcycles and Medic was driving. Shadow was not amused about not being allowed to drive Beast; she seemed to have enjoyed driving Beast, the last time!

They had just swung by Marty's neighbourhood in Lawndale when they had witnessed the masked cunts gathering. Unfortunately, the cunts had also seen Beast!

Beast had then come under sustained fire from multiple automatic weapons.

Earlier on Tuesday evening

7:35 P.M.

We turned left onto South Central Park Avenue and after a couple of minutes drove past Marty's apartment. I glanced at Josh and smirked – Marty and Kim were up there, right now!

"She's pregnant, they won't be having sex!" Jackal said, reading my mind.

"Why not!" Medic commented. "Being pregnant with little madam never stopped me!"

"Ewww!" I exclaimed and thrust my masked face into my gauntlets. Jackal, being a complete asshole, just laughed at my discomfort. Mist just blushed.

We made another left onto West Douglas Boulevard.

"Cunts!" Jackal blurted out and pointed through the windshield.

The cunts had seen us, too! The windshield was peppered with dozens of bullets from automatic weapons. Medic floored the five-litre supercharged V8 engine and Beast zigzagged left onto the grass median and then right into South Millard Avenue.

"Fusion, Beast is taking automatic fire. Support required!" I called over the comms as I seized my P90. I dove out of Beast as soon as we stopped, along with Jackal and Mist.

The three of us ran to the corner of the two streets and returned fire with our P90s. Medic stayed with Beast, an MP5K in her hands.

Iron Hide

As soon as the alert had come through, Kick-Ass and I had made our way, via the hidden tunnel, to Safehouse D.

We had left the warehouse in Iron Hide for the high-speed, two and a half mile drive, up South Kedzie Avenue and then left up West Douglas Boulevard.

"Fuck me!" I exclaimed at the sight before me.

It was a pitched firefight. I could see Jackal and Shadow engaging multiple cunts, all of whom seemed to have automatic weapons. I could not see Mist, but I knew she was there somewhere. Several bullets struck Iron Hide as we pulled up on the grass median.

I leapt out angrily and yelled at the cunts.

"Hey, bastards – this truck is fucking new and it was fucking expensive!"

I then followed this up with automatic fire from my G36C. Kick-Ass engaged with his G36K and sent several flashbang grenades, from his underslung AG36 grenade launcher, into the crowd. When these grenades landed, they exploded with a loud *bang* and bright flash; which was blinding in the darkness. This caused disorientation in the cunts and they started to move back, further up the Boulevard.

"Good to see you guys!" Shadow called over the comms.

"Just thought we'd come by to see how Medic was doing," Kick-Ass replied.

"I'm fine, Kick-Ass!" Medic called.

"Funny arse!" Jackal moaned.

"Time you two turned up!" Mist commented, from over on the grass. She was taking aimed shots at the cunts.

"Hit Girl, Hal – The Bratva is pulling up now!"

I turned to see a pair of black, armoured Cadillac Escalades pulling up. Out stepped Vladimir, followed by eight, very large Kryshas. Each Krysha was armed with an AKS-74U assault rifle and they did not hesitate to move into cover

and start to engage the masked cunts. I nodded to Vladimir, who smiled back, but remained behind the armoured SUVs.

That was when my cell rang.

"Is that you starting world war three in Lawndale?" Marcus asked.

"I didn't start it – D'Amico did!" I retorted.

"Okay – SWAT is on their way," Marcus advised.

"Advise them that Fusion is engaged and we have back up from Vladimir," I said.

"You sure about involving the Mafia?"

"To be honest, no!"

"Just great!" Marcus commented dryly, hanging up.

Kick-Ass and Jackal moved up the grass median, while Shadow and I headed up the street, using vehicles as cover. The masked cunts were starting to sort themselves out – somebody was in command and issuing commands – that was different to the other night.

The cunts were now taking cover behind a large fountain on the grass median at the corner of South Independence Boulevard and West Douglas Boulevard. The random automatic gunfire was now better controlled and there was now short bursts and single shots.

The five of us moved up the grass median using trees for cover. So far, none of us was injured. A few shots had struck our armour, but we could still fight. Medic was currently treating a wounded Krysha, while another lay dead. Despite this, there were almost a dozen dead cunts on the street and median. As we got closer to the fountain, I could make out more detail about what was going on.

I could see mean with binoculars and radios. They were coordinated – that would be trouble. To my left I heard the deep roar of the CPD SWAT trucks, which pulled out of a side street at speed with blue lights strobing. I could see rifles engaging out of the left side gun ports. Then something bad occurred.

The cunts engaged the armoured vehicles with a pair of M60 machine guns. The chattering sound was unmistakable and the 7.62-millimetre bullets carved into the SWAT trucks. The Trucks served away from the gunfire and turned towards us and then the first truck smashed through a wooden fence between two buildings, one of which was abandoned. The other truck followed suit, reversing in. Kick-Ass ran back to Beast with Jackal. I ran over to SWAT.

"Anybody hurt?" I called over the noise. The M60 was still taking pot shots at the abandoned building, sending masonry flying around.

"No – just shocked and pissed off!" Matthews announced as he climbed out of the battered front truck. "Those rounds were borderline for our armour – we were lucky!"

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Kick-Ass and Jackal returned minutes later.

"Fuck me – just what we need!" Matthews announced and other SWAT members agreed.

Kick-Ass was sporting his Heckler & Koch 121 machine gun and Jackal was lugging spare two-hundred-round packs of belted ammunition. He took up position with the 121 mounted on its bipod, on the bonnet of the second SWAT truck. The bulk of the truck would protect Kick-Ass. Mist and Shadow maintained short bursts of fire. Jackal vanished back to Beast to bring up more ammunition for the P90s and two SWAT team members set to reloading P90 magazines. Other members provided direct cover with AR-12s.

With a roar, Kick-Ass engaged the cunts, with a SWAT member acting as spotter with night glasses. It was critical that we silence the M60 machine guns. We had the advantage of a higher rate of fire and most probably better accuracy from a newer weapon with a less worn barrel.

The cunts were *not* amused! I saw the men, who seemed to be in command yelling into their radios.

"Shadow, take out the bastards in charge!" I commanded.

I watched as Shadow moved her weapon onto the men with binoculars. She pressed the button for her laser and squinted through the telescopic sight. I saw her control her breathing, before squeezing the trigger once, then moving the weapon slightly to the left and dropping the second man. Both targets eliminated – two rounds expended!

"On target, girl!" I praised.

"Always the tone of surprise!" Shadow chuckled in reply.

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On losing their commanders, there seemed to be trouble within the remaining cunts. Kick-Ass had knocked out one of the M60s and was working on the other one. Many of them were dead – they should be getting the hint my now!

I could see arguing between some of the masked cunts, but then they seemed to sort themselves out and as Kick-Ass silenced the second M60 and ran out of ammunition himself, the masked cunts started to fan towards us, firing their weapons on automatic. We had between twenty and thirty attackers bearing down on us. As they emptied their magazines, they dropped their weapons, but came on with baseball bats and melee weapons.

I fired repeated shots from my G36C and saw my bullets hit home. Two men fell backwards, dead, and then the attackers came close enough for hand-to-hand fighting, which I excelled at, of course! I lost track of Mist and Shadow in the maelstrom of fighting.

SWAT, Mafia and vigilante were now fighting for their lives. Kick-Ass was laying into anybody within reach with his Ko-Wakizashi. SWAT were relying on riot batons and pistols. It was chaos. I saw a SWAT member attacked with a baseball bat, his left arm was smashed before I was able to blow apart the man's head.

We had been fighting for forty minutes, it was now quarter past eight in the evening and the fighting was still going on. Some of the masked attackers had hung back and some of the Kryshas were attacking these. Other Krysha were lending their literal weight to the fight, knocking down masked cunts with their fists and clubs.

I heard a scream in my headset, which I recognised as Shadow. I could not see her in the crowd of fighting bodies.

"Shadow, Hit Girl – status check!" I called. There was no response. "Anybody have a location on Shadow?"

"Negative!" Kick-Ass responded.

"Negative!" Medic responded.

"Negative!" Mist responded.

"Negative!" Jackal responded.

Fuck! Where was she?

I was in pain.

A lot of pain.

My mind was drifting in and out of consciousness as I lay on the grass. The fighting was just a distant sound around me. I felt myself being kicked and trodden on.

My mind started to drift and it drifted back to the previous weekend at Safehouse F.

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Three days previously
Saturday

Safehouse F

"Hey, Sophia!"

The big dog came pounding along to the Briefing Room and stopped in front of Dave and Mindy. I was with Josh and we were sitting a few seats over and watching curiously.

"Sophia has been with us for a year now and she has had a very busy year, too!" Mindy commented.

"You're celebrating Sophia being here a year?" I demanded.

"Yes, why?" Dave answered.

"You never celebrated, or even remembered, me being with you guys for a year!" I felt slightly miffed.

Dave laughed before he replied.

"We only try to remember happy moments!"

"That hurts!" I growled.

"I didn't mean it like that – I just didn't want to remember the first meeting of a hormonal, foul mouthed young girl, who thought that she was a vigilante! Brought back way too many bad memories!"

"Hey, cunt! You mean that I'm a bad memory!" Mindy demanded, catching on.

"I still get nightmares about the younger Mindy!" Dave said with a grimace.

"That didn't stop you a few weeks back!" Mindy said seductively. "When we celebrated meeting at Rasul's!"

"I heard about that one – Josh still gets nightmares about the screaming!" I quipped with a laugh.

My mind drifted back to the present and the fighting.

..._...

Tuesday evening
South Lawndale Avenue

I could hear voices in my ear and Hit Girl calling out for me.

The grass felt comfortable beneath me, I was feeling tired. Something warm was trickling down my body, inside my combat suit.

I felt something hit my cheek and then everything went quiet and very black.

***Chapter 146*: Another Death**

The following morning Wednesday

I awoke.

I had no idea where I was.

I looked around me and was shocked to see a face that I recognised.

"Hi, Chloe!" Kyle said with a smile.

"What are *you* doing here – by the way, where is here?"

"You are in Josh's bed at Mindy's house."

"Oh yeah," I replied, looking around properly.

"You took quite a knock, last night, Shadow. I hate to say it but you don't look all that hot, right now!"

"Thanks!" I replied. "Back to my first question; why are you here?"

"Dave called me and asked if I could help while they are fighting D'Amico," Kyle replied.

I ran my hands over my body, feeling for wounds. I suddenly froze.

"I'm naked!"

"Yes, I know," Kyle, replied, blushing slightly.

"You peeked?" I accused.

"No, I didn't!"

"Sorry, Kyle. I trust you. What are my wounds?" I asked.

"You, young lady, have a bruised cheek; a large calibre gunshot wound to your left side and significant bruising to your stomach and left thigh – so no sex for a while!" Mom reeled off, with an evil smirk as she came into the room.

I felt myself blushing and saw Kyle smirking, too! It was no secret that Josh and I were having sex. Several people at school knew about it – including Kyle.

"So I'll survive, then?" I asked.

"Of course! Now, I need to get to work – do *not* annoy Kyle and stay in bed. Mindy said that she would visit this afternoon."

With that, Mom vanished out the door.

"Just you and me, Kyle!" I said with a smile.

"It was worth a day off school, just to look after my favourite girl!" Kyle quipped making me blush again.

Safehouse F

Chloe getting hurt had me moping about the Safehouse that morning.

I knew that she was okay and that she was at home being watched over by Kyle. Good kid, Kyle – he had jumped at the chance to help. Josh had volunteered but he was far too tired and was currently asleep upstairs.

Finding Shadow, prone and with blood spilling from her armour had really scared me. She had been hit by what looked like a bullet from an AKS-74U. I had seen a masked cunt seize one from a fallen Krysha. Shadow's armour

stood no chance at that range, from such a large round. She had also been trampled. Somebody had kicked her in the face and had left a large footprint on her cheek.

Dave had picked her up and rushed her to her mother. The fight was over, so we had all driven back to Safehouse F. Cathy and Erika had seen to Chloe and been able to get her cleaned up. They then took her to West Ridge.

Cathy had just called to let me know that Chloe was awake and in Kyle's gentle hands! Dave was with Tony, checking out the damage to Beast. The windshield was a mess and there were also holes in the bodywork, but the armour had done its job, which was all, that mattered. Iron Hide was currently here too and had four holes in the bodywork, which annoyed me somewhat!

Erika had gone to see Marty and Kim. Marty wanted to know what had happened; he had heard the gunfire and other noises from the mini battle of the previous evening not too far away. Kim had commented that she thought the noise was actually Marty's ministrations!

That afternoon
West Ridge

"Oh crap!"

"What's wrong?" Kyle asked.

"I need to use the damn bathroom," I replied.

"I won't look!" Kyle quipped with a hopeful grin.

"Nothing doing, asshole!" I replied. "Bottom drawer, over there. You'll find a mega size t-shirt."

..._...

Once I had struggled, rather painfully, into the large t-shirt, Kyle had helped me out of the bed. That was another struggle in its self; both moving and maintaining what dignity that I had left. My legs were weak and the bruise on my thigh made walking painful and difficult. However, this was not the first time that Kyle had had his hands on my body, which was something, so I didn't mind his hands on me. Nevertheless, if he touched anything he should not, then he knew full well, that I would slap him – and so would Josh, if he found out.

..._...

When I returned from the bathroom, I heard laughter coming from Josh's room. I recognised Mindy's laugh. I pushed open the door to find Kyle and Mindy sitting on the bed talking and laughing.

"If you two are laughing at me; I'll slap you both."

"Chloe, right now a caterpillar could put you down, and keep you down!" Mindy quipped and Kyle laughed.

"Such a funny bitch!" I growled as Mindy helped me into bed.

"Just rest your mouth for a few minutes, Shadow! You need time to heal. That was a hefty sized bullet that went through your side," Mindy said and could tell by her tone that she felt responsible.

"I'll heal – I have before."

"We'll get a move on, so we can get back to killing that fucker, D'Amico."

"I will!"

Two days later
Friday

There had been no sign of the masked cunts, since the other night. I assumed that they needed to build up their numbers again! Only a dozen seemed to have survived the fight and escaped.

While Beast was down for repairs, I was out with Mist in Iron Hide. This was the first time that it had just been the two of us out on patrol. I was very impressed with Mist – she was good, very good, with her weapons and had fought well that other night. She was also proving to be a crack shot with the P90, too – almost as good as Shadow.

We were driving to the south of Chicago and we were near the water when Mist suddenly called out.

"Over there – that guy, he's covered in blood!" Mist exclaimed.

I drove over to where Mist had indicated and stopped. Beneath a streetlight there was a guy, lying prone, he must have been about Dave and Marty's age. I jumped out of Iron Hide, ran over, and was shocked to see who it was under all the blood.

..._...

"Todd!" I exclaimed. "What the hell?"

Todd looked up at me in a dazed state. He had obvious bullet wounds, in his stomach. He must have been bleeding internally. He grasped my hand with an iron grip.

"Hit Girl, Mindy – D'Amico – boat. I found him for you – told him that I had fought alongside his nephew – Chris D'Amico – he let me join him. Shot trying to escape..."

The words spilled from Todd's mouth, disjointed and difficult to understand. I leant close to his lips where blood was bubbling up from his punctured lungs.

"You'll be fine, Todd – an ambulance is on the way!" I said.

Mist had called into the Command Centre and an ambulance was on its way, although I doubted that it would arrive in time. I felt completely helpless – the bleeding was internal. There was absolutely nothing, I could do to stop the bleeding.

"Tell Dave – I'm... I'm sorry about his Dad..."

"You can tell him yourself, Todd..." I felt tears stinging my eyes; this was heart breaking.

"Tell me his injuries!" Medic called over the comms and I welcomed the interruption as I described the location and type of wounds and Medic pause before replying.

"Keep him comfortable, Hit Girl. Give him morphine from your belt."

I did as instructed. At least I could ease Todd's pain, if nothing else. He was starting to fade from consciousness, but between Mist and I, we tried to keep him talking – to keep him fighting for life.

..._...

However, just as the ambulance could be heard screaming down the street towards us, I felt Todd's grip on my hand falter and I turned to see his eyes close for the very last time. I almost lost it at the moment. Not since I had watched Daddy die in that warehouse, all those years ago, had I had somebody die like this.

The paramedics did everything that they could, but it was all in vain. They were unable to restart Todd's heart and he was pronounced dead, at the scene – there had been far too much blood loss and internal trauma. Mist and I left as soon as we could, before we attracted too much attention.

Before he had died, Todd had passed me a bloodied piece of paper and a USB memory stick. I clutched these in my hand as I got back into Iron Hide. I pushed my emotions down deep inside me, but started planning a special, extra violent, death for Ralph D'Amico.

Todd would be avenged, I swore to that.

Safehouse F

I watched Hit Girl pull Iron Hide into the Safehouse.

What I had heard over the comms had hit me hard. Todd was dead. Todd who I had known for years. Todd was dead. It took time for me to grasp it. Marty and Kim had been at the Safehouse, too. He was shocked at what he had heard over the comms, too. It had all been recorded; all of Todd's dying words, every breath and every scream of pain.

I saw Mindy and Erika climb out of Iron Hide and they both looked dejected, as they pulled off their masks. I saw the blood on their hands. Todd's blood. Marty went to comfort Erika, without any complaint from Kim.

..._...

After a few minutes mourning, it was time to get back to work. We could mourn properly once D'Amico was dead and gone.

Dave, Marty, Kim, Abby, Erika, Josh and I, stood around the large table, with a touch screen interface, that sat in the middle of the Command Centre. I passed over the bloodied paper and USB memory key, without a word.

Marty connected the USB memory key and started examining its contents. The piece of paper was a portion of a map that looked to be a section of Chicago. The blood obscured too much of the detail to be more accurate, but Marty said he should be able to get through the blood.

Todd had hinted at a boat. Was D'Amico hiding on a boat on Lake Michigan? There had been no sign of him in Chicago, but he definitely had had a hand in those masked cunts.

The following afternoon Saturday

Megan flew across the room, landing hard.

She sat up and glared at me. The girl seemed both annoyed and surprised at the way she was being treated.

She could even be seen to mutter 'bitch', under her breath!

"Don't look at me like that, Megan! You want to be a vigilante – then you need to learn what you're gonna be up against," I said, without pity.

Megan got up and came over to stand ready for the next attack.

"Remember, Megan – you are only a ten year-old girl."

"So were you, once!" She retorted.

"Megan – I... Yes, I was your age once and I killed people. But when I was only a few months older than you are now, I had the shit literally kicked out of me."

Megan's faced showed a mixed expression of surprise and disbelief.

"Frank D'Amico threw me down onto his desk, so damn hard that I couldn't breathe or move for what felt like hours. He then proceeded to ram his fucking fist into my face, *twice*. My vision swam; I could not focus on anything. Then when I *could* finally focus, I saw the muzzle of a pistol inches from my face. I was fairly certain that my time on Earth was over – the end of Mindy Macready and the end of Hit Girl."

I looked around and saw that I now had a small crowd of eager listeners. Nobody, except of course Dave, knew about this event.

"Then my Knight in shining armour arrived, well actually a dick in a wetsuit with a conveniently available bazooka!" I grinned apologetically at Dave, who waved it off. "What I am getting at Megan, is that I was only eleven, but I had the body of an eleven year-old girl. Even now, I am seventeen, but I am still susceptible to being fucking snapped in half. Only, Dave, who is built like a fucking battle tank can take tons of abuse and I have to admit that sometimes I envy the asshole for his lack of nerve endings; especially when I am suffering from intense pain during a fight!"

"I'm sorry, Mindy – I didn't mean..." Megan started.

"I know you see me as invincible, Megan – but I am not. I have never told that story to anybody – it was a part of my

early life, which I prefer to keep private. However, if it helps you become a better vigilante, then I'm happy to tell you my mistakes, so that you can avoid them – and that includes you too, dipshit!" I finished, looking at Curtis.

"Did you call moi a dipshit?" Curtis replied casually, with a smirk.

I rolled my eyes.

"Curtis, you are too young for that movie!" I commented.

"Oh yeah! How many R-rated movies had *you* seen by the time you were ten?" Curtis challenged.

I saw Dave smirking at me. I scowled back.

"Where were we?" I said, getting back to the mat and changing the subject.

***Chapter 147*: Boarders Away**

Two days later
Monday evening

We met up with Ralphs's cunts again.

We met up with somebody else, too!

The masked cunts were smaller in number, this time. However, Fusion was also. With Shadow laid up, we were shorthanded; so it was just Jackal and me this evening. I didn't mind; Jackal was good company and we enjoyed winding each other up!

We were both on our Multistrada motorcycles this evening. The idea for the evening, was to try to track down where the cunts were coming from. We needed to find their headquarters and until we did, they would keep appearing – D'Amico seemed to have a seemingly endless supply of them.

Marty and Abby were working on the data that Todd had recovered, but so far, nothing concerning the headquarters, nor the 'boat' that seemed to be involved somehow, had been identified.

..._...

We had come across the cunts, purely by accident. They had been busy attacking property and vehicles, on the west side of Chicago. There were innocent civilians running around in a panic, trying to avoid the attacks. Jackal and I had pulled up and parked our motorcycles, then headed towards the trouble.

There were cheers from the civilians as we moved towards the cunts. I drew my Katanas, while Jackal drew his Ninja-To and we prepared to fight. The cunts were armed with melee weapons that evening; there seemed to be no firearms in evidence. Obviously, they had not expected to meet up with Fusion, but we gave them no choice, but to fight.

..._...

Soon after the fight had begun and I was wading through the cunts, I heard the distinctive sound of a high-powered motorcycle arriving at speed. I turned for a moment, to see a graphite black, Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade pull up beside our own motorcycles. The motorcycle itself was cool, despite being a Honda, but what intrigued me more was what was riding the motorcycle. The rider dismounted and headed towards the fight without a moment's hesitation.

The new arrival wore a suit that was form fitting, with armour and padding in essential locations. Overall, the suit was a blue-grey colour with light steel-blue highlights. The boots were conformal to the feet and were black to the ankle. The calves were blue-grey to the knees, where the kneepads were light steel-blue. The thighs had contoured armour in blue-grey, which connected to a utility belt that was worn around the waist and was white in colour. Supporting the utility belt was conformal armour for the chest and back, which came together under the arms.

The suit went up the neck to the jaw line. The shoulders were protected with pads, in light steel-blue. The lower arms had additional armour that ran from the padded elbow, down to the wrist. Compact black gauntlets protected the wearer's hands. The head was covered in a combined mask that hid all facial features and rendered the wearer unrecognizable. The mask was blue grey on the face, while the rest was a light steel blue. The eyes were oval and had tinted lenses. On the utility belt were holsters for a pair of Beretta Px4 Storm Compact pistols. There were also various pouches for additional equipment, including magazines. Mounted on the back armour were attachments for a pair of Tactical Katana Swords.

As the new arrival came towards the fight, she smoothly drew the twin Katana swords and moved towards me. It was obviously a 'she', as the armoured combat suit accentuated the hips, breasts and other curves of her body, very well. As she approached, she started hacking her way through the cunts – so she was obviously *not* on the cunts' side! Once she was closer, she called out to me, in a strange electronically enhanced voice, similar to that which Jackal and Kick-Ass used.

"Relax; we're on the same team – I'm Petra!"

"Hit Girl!" I replied.

"And he's Jackal – I know!" Petra called back, over the noise – with a nod towards Jackal.

Questions would have to wait for now; we had work to do. I would tolerate the interloper for now. With three of us fighting, things moved quickly and cunts fell left and right.

"Fusion, be advised we have a new vigilante on the scene, by the name of Petra!" I called over the comms as I fought.

"She has some *nice* curves, too!" Jackal commented.

"Focus, Jackal!" I cautioned.

The blood flew as we fought through the cunts.

It was proving to be a good work out, too. I missed being out with Shadow, but she needed time to heal and that could not be rushed. I concentrated on swinging my Ninja-To through the air and driving the cunts back and away from the civilians and their property.

I kept glancing over at the new arrival. She was of a similar height to Hit Girl, but with a bigger chest! The armour looked to be as good as our own – so she was somebody with access to money. Due to the combat suit covering the girl completely, I had no way to judge her age. However, she moved lithely and knew how to use the Katana swords that she wielded in each hand. The girl, or rather Petra, had no concern about killing, either and fought with the same gusto as Hit Girl.

It was not long before the fight was over and we were applauded by the watching civilians and some CPD Officers who had arrived on the scene. I was annoyed to see one dead and several injured civilians, but it could have been much worse, if we had not arrived to help.

..._...

The three of us stowed our blades and walked back to the parked motorcycles. When we got there, Hit Girl turned to face Petra.

"Who are you?" Hit Girl demanded.

"I am Petra."

"Why are you here?"

"I am a vigilante – just like Fusion."

"You may wear body armour and you may fight as a vigilante, but you are *not* like us!" Hit Girl responded. "I would suggest that you stay out of our way."

I was a little surprised at Hit Girl's attitude. I knew that Petra was an unknown and I was also, very aware of what Hit Girl thought about unknown intruders. Petra seemed to be the real thing, a real vigilante out to fight crime in Chicago. We were the major force in Chicago, but we did not have the monopoly on fighting crime.

I watched as Petra shrugged her shoulders and she nodded at me as she climbed back onto her motorcycle and started the engine. I waved and she pulled away. I actually laughed when I saw the licence plate: **'BITE ME'**. So, Petra had a sense of humour!

"Problem, Hit Girl?" I queried.

"Maybe," Hit Girl replied, cryptically.

Four days later Wednesday night

The '*Vigilante*' skimmed across the waves at over twenty knots.

It was completely dark out and all that could be seen beyond the control station windows was the bright lights of the

Chicago waterfront and skyscrapers; a beautiful sight it was, too. The '*Vigilante*' had a large crew, on this trip. Besides myself, at the helm, I had Jackal seated to my left and behind his seat, stood Kick-Ass. Seated in the main salon were Mist, Trojan and Wildcat. Battle Guy and Hawk were watching over us from the Command Centre at Safehouse F.

Constant updates for weather were being sent by Battle Guy, direct to the large screens in front of me. We were travelling completely blacked out, in violation of international navigation rules. However, we were visible to radar, which should prevent a collision. We had left the Calumet River forty minutes previously and were heading on a course of zero-one-five degrees.

Fifteen minutes later, we slowed to five knots when we were eleven nautical miles, due east of Montrose Harbor. Just five nautical miles away, was the '*Nebuchadnezzar*'. The one hundred-foot luxury yacht was moving at ten knots on a reciprocal course and would pass close aboard in approximately twenty minutes, if we both held our current courses. I hoped that we would look just like another innocent pleasure craft on their radar. As we closed I turned on our own navigation lights, so as not to look suspicious.

"Twenty minutes, people!" I called.

..._...

We had had a busy few days.

Marty and Abby had been able to identify the '*Nebuchadnezzar*', as the boat where Ralph D'Amico had been hiding himself. They were also close to finding where, in Chicago, D'Amico had his headquarters. On top of the D'Amico problem, I also had to consider this new vigilante – Petra. We had not seen her since that other night. I had to admit she *had* helped us, but we had no idea how to contact her, so there was nothing I could do about it. I wanted to talk and find out more about her. I also had concerns about where she had got her armoured combat suit from – I would need to talk to The Armourer about who he sold combat suits to!

Eighteen minutes later

We could all easily see the approaching vessel.

She was lit up and we could see the green and red navigation lights, with a white light above. The '*Vigilante*' and the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' were now closing at a rate of fifteen knots. The International Rules of the Road dictated that both vessels turn to starboard (right) to avoid a collision. Except, a collision, well a minor tap, was just what I wanted!

Five rapid blasts from a horn were heard, from the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' as her Captain indicated his displeasure at us passing so close. I sent back a single blast on the '*Vigilante*'s' horn, indicating that I would be turning to starboard – except I had absolutely no intention of altering course!

..._...

Suddenly the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' turned sharply to starboard and continued her turn for a full one hundred degrees, before taking up a new course and increasing speed rapidly to thirty knots. I turned to port, in pursuit, and pushed both throttles forward and setup a pursuit course. Within minutes, we were zipping over the, thankfully smooth, waves at almost thirty-six knots.

"Jam their radios!"

"Consider them jammed!" Kick-Ass replied as he flipped a switch, connected to an illegal radio signal jammer, on a control panel. The '*Nebuchadnezzar*' would now be unable to call for help by radio.

There was no way that the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' could outrun us.

The pursuit was underway and we easily kept up with the '*Nebuchadnezzar*'. Thirty minutes later, we had closed to eighty yards when somebody on the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' opened fire on us. It was only sub-machine-gun fire and I decided that they were only trying to scare us away. We continued to close the yacht.

We also had our target confirmed!

I had seen him on the flying bridge of the yacht. The '*Vigilante*' had a gyro-stabilised camera system that had allowed us to zoom in on the '*Nebuchadnezzar*'. Ralph D'Amico himself, was confirmed as being aboard, so the attack was

launched.

We came alongside the port quarter of the '*Nebuchadnezzar*', matching her speed.

Kick-Ass was firing rounds from his Heckler & Koch 121 machine gun, at the armed men on the stern. Jackal was at the helm, holding us alongside the '*Nebuchadnezzar*'. Mist and I jumped across once the stern was clear, landing on the boat platform and jumped up the port and starboard steps to the aft cockpit of the yacht. We ignored the dead bodies, as we made our entry into the main salon. We were rapidly joined by Wildcat and Trojan, each armed with a pistol in their hands.

With Kick-Ass, keeping watch, the four of us proceeded into the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' through the curved glass doors. We came under fire almost immediately. Mist and I returned fire with our Heckler & Koch MP5KA4 sub-machine guns. Gunfire was coming from the forward end of the main salon. Wildcat kept watch on the curved stairs that led up to the flying bridge, while Trojan watched out over the aft deck.

The attack was coming from behind the bar. Our bullets destroyed a bulkhead-mounted television and sent it crashing down onto the shooters. Using the distraction, I ran forward and shot two men, who were behind the bar, dead. I then moved forward to the control station and pulled back on the throttles, stopping the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' dead in the water. I turned and yelled out to Mist and Wildcat, as I saw feet appear on the curved stairs from the flying bridge.

..._...

Wildcat fired several rounds upwards and the feet vanished rapidly. Leaving Mist and Wildcat to guard the salon and after deck, Trojan and I went up towards the flying bridge.

"Kick-Ass! Clear the flying bridge!" I called.

"On the way!"

I heard a brief burst of gunfire from the '*Vigilante*' and a scream from above.

"Hit Girl, you are clear!" Kick-Ass reported.

I crept up the steps slowly and peered over the top step onto the flying bridge. Apart from a dead body, spewing blood onto the teak decking a foot from me, all seemed clear. I stayed low and felt Trojan behind me, his left hand on my back. Apart from another two dead bodies, the flying bridge was clear.

"Trojan, stay here and watch the foredeck," I ordered.

Once Trojan had acknowledged, I headed back down below to the main salon. I then took Wildcat and we climbed over the dead men and went down the staircase to the lower deck, which was to starboard and beside the control station, forward of the bar. We had studied plans of the Italian built, yacht, so we knew our way around – kind of.

Aft of the lobby where we stood, was the main stateroom. To port, and to starboard were twin cabins and forward was the second stateroom. We searched the forward stateroom first; I went in while Wildcat kept watch in the lobby. The yacht seemed eerily quiet, now that the majority of the resistance had been eradicated and the engines had been set to idle. I found nothing and nobody, the port and starboard cabins were the same. That just left the main stateroom and I was certain that this would be where D'Amico would have slept. He was still aboard somewhere.

The stateroom door was shut, so while Wildcat covered me, I kicked the door in. I heard somebody moving and as I entered the stateroom, I was struck by the butt of an assault rifle. I fell to my left, onto the deck and tried to bring my MP5K around.

I saw Hit Girl fall to the side.

I raised my pistol and fired two rounds, before the slide locked back on the empty magazine.

Crap!

As I ejected the magazine and attempted to insert another, I felt myself kicked backwards. I dropped the pistol and the magazine. Rather than fumble for them, I seized my panther claws and within seconds had them ready for use and as I sensed somebody close to me, I swung my right hand out and heard a man yell out in pain.

I jumped to my feet and found myself face to face with Ralph D'Amico!

***Chapter 148*: Abduction**

Wednesday night
Lake Michigan

The 'Nebuchadnezzar'

My claw had ripped three, vertical, parallel grooves down his face, from his forehead and down his right cheek. Blood ran freely down his face. I lashed out with my other claw and ripped into his chest and I saw blood on the claw, when it came free. Then I heard two gunshots, from the main stateroom, behind D'Amico and I was momentarily distracted. D'Amico thrust me to the deck with his left hand and rushed up the stairs to the main salon above us.

"D'Amico is coming up!" I yelled into the comms as Hit Girl came out of the stateroom, a pistol in her hand.

"You okay, Wildcat?" Hit Girl demanded, her voice full of concern.

"I'm fucking fine!" I growled back and instantly regretted my tone of voice, as Hit Girl did not look happy.

I grabbed up my pistol, rammed the magazine in and holstered the weapon. I followed Hit Girl up the stairs; I could hear shooting from above and then the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' was rocked by an explosion from aft.

As I got to the top of the steps, I saw black and white smoke billowing from the stern of the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' and I could see that the '*Vigilante*' was more than a dozen yards away, to port. I was feeling scared now – my meeting D'Amico had almost made me shit myself, but now my fear was of drowning, if the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' sank with me inside.

I was slightly annoyed with Wildcat, but it could wait till later.

Once back in the main salon, I looked around for that bastard. Looking aft, I could see that the stern boat garage was open. I had a distinct feeling that the bastard had managed to get away again.

"He came up the stairs, dived past the bar and down the stairs to the galley and crew quarters," Mist said and she sounded dismayed with her actions. "I shot at him and I think I got him..."

"It's okay, Mist – we'll get him!" I replied. "Kick-Ass, D'Amico is making a run for it!"

"We saw him! He's in the tender and racing for shore. We've lost sight of him – he has no lights and is not visible on radar," Kick-Ass advised. "He used a smoke grenade to cover his escape, plus an HE grenade after he left. The '*Nebuchadnezzar*' looks to be taking on water and sinking by the stern."

I took a moment to examine the warning lights on the control station. It did not look good for the '*Nebuchadnezzar*'!

"Let's move – she's going down!" I ordered.

..._...

Jackal brought the '*Vigilante*' back alongside and I watched as Mist, Trojan and Wildcat jumped aboard. I took a moment to dive back down to D'Amico's stateroom, looking for information. I saw two laptops, so I seized them and then just as I was leaving, I caught sight of something reflecting in a mirror. I looked under his bed and saw an LED display.

01:42... 01:41... 01:40...

I ran out of the stateroom, still clutching the laptops. I could still see the timer counting down in my head.

01:33... 01:32... 01:31...

I scrambled up the stairs and into the main salon.

01:24... 01:23... 01:22...

I ran aft and then threw myself over the gunwale towards the '*Vigilante*' and into the waiting arms of Kick-Ass.

01:08... 01:07... 01:06...

"Fucking move – bomb – less than a minute – GO!" I yelled as Kick-Ass lowered me to my feet and I lost my footing as Jackal pushed both throttles to their stops and the '*Vigilante*' surged forwards and away from the '*Nebuchadnezzar*'.

Everything was quiet, except for the ear-shattering roar of the twin diesels at flank speed, as Jackal put as much distance between the two boats as possible, before...

The sky lit up for miles around, as the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' came apart. The fireball was enormous; then the sound hit us, followed by the shockwave. Thankfully we were far enough away for little damage to be caused. It was still an awesome light show, though.

Jackal made a large sweeping turn, well away from the burning wreck and set a course, due south for the Calumet River.

Three hours later
Thursday

Safehouse F

2 A.M.

It had been very late when we had finally moored the '*Vigilante*' in Safehouse W.

The trip back had been rough, plus we had had to avoid the US Coastguard who seemed to be zipping about like angry bees! I was pissed that we had lost D'Amico again, but pleased that we had fucked up his plans yet again! We had driven back to Safehouse F; Mist and myself on motorcycles and the rest in Iron Hide.

..._...

"Welcome back, team!" Marty announced, as we pulled off our masks on the way to the armoury.

"Hi, Marty! Hi, Kim! You guys okay?" I asked.

"Oh yeah! The video from the '*Vigilante*' was fucking awesome!" Marty exclaimed excitedly. "When the '*Nebuchadnezzar*' blew – fucking wow – HD and all!"

I laughed.

"It was cool! Here – take these – they were D'Amico's," I said, handing over the two laptops.

The laptops were housed in a special box that would block all electronic signals. Marty would examine them in a special room on Level Zero.

"Cool, thanks!" Marty said and seized the box.

I left him to it – I knew that he would enjoy himself! Kim came with me to help us all get out of our suits.

3 A.M.

"I'm *not* fucking tired!"

"Oh yes you fucking are!" I replied. "Get to bed."

Megan looked like she wanted to fight; but right now, she was more of a danger to herself than she was to anybody else!

I sighed and rolled my eyes.

"Megan, come with me," I said and led her upstairs to my bedroom. I pointed to my bed. "Sit!"

Megan looked a little confused, and possibly apprehensive, too. Dave appeared at the door with a quizzical

expression.

"Give us a few minutes, Dave," I said, looking meaningfully at Megan, and Dave closed the door. I then looked at Megan. "Spit it out!"

"You're mad at me – I fucked up!"

"Yes, you did! However, I'm not going to hold that against you, Megan."

Megan looked up at me, in surprise.

"You fired off five rounds, at the man coming down from the flying bridge – then what should you have done?" I asked.

"I should have changed out my magazine, as I only had two rounds left," Megan said, looking sad.

"You should always keep track of how many rounds you have fired. Always keep a full magazine in the pistol, whenever possible. It is a *lot* easier to change out a magazine when you are not under pressure," I said and saw Megan flinch back, away from me. "That leads us to the next issue."

Megan looked at the floor.

"I fumbled my pistol and dropped it, along with the magazine," Megan almost whispered and I saw tears start to fall. That was rare – Megan almost never cried and never in front of anybody, either. "I let you down – big time!"

"No you didn't – that was your first time, in that kind of situation, Megan – shit happens!" I explained. "However, you made a snap decision; the right one, by the way and made use of your other weapons. You also came face to face with that bastard, D'Amico and you hurt him. That was *very* brave, Megan and I'm damn proud of you."

Megan looked up at me and smiled weakly and I smiled back.

"You made mistakes, but you're new to this shit, Megan. You also called in D'Amico's escape, which was a very wise move. You are exactly the type of person we want as a vigilante, in Fusion!"

Megan had stopped crying and she smiled with pride.

"Remember; you don't need to be a bad-ass to be a super hero, you just have to be brave!" I said with a smile. "I once said that to somebody very dear to me..."

"Dave," Megan stated.

I nodded. And remembered the kiss.

"Can I stay with you for a few minutes?" Megan asked.

"No problem."

I went back up to the bedroom and pushed open the door.

Both girls were fast asleep on the bed. I scooped up Megan and carried her through to her own bed, in the bunk above Erika, who smiled when I came in and she pulled the duvet down so that I could slide Megan in.

"Night Dave," Erika said.

"Night Erika, and thanks for your work tonight."

..._...

When I returned to the bedroom, Mindy was awake.

"Sorry, I fell asleep!"

"No problem, gorgeous – you were both very tired," I said, waving it off.

Mindy had that look on her face – the one that she used when she felt ashamed about something. I lay down on the bed, beside my fiancée and faced Mindy.

"Spit it out!"

Mindy bit her lip, before speaking.

"I almost fucked up in D'Amico's stateroom. As I went in, a man swung the butt of an assault rifle at me. He must have been out of ammunition, as there was no magazine in the weapon. He caught me on my shoulder and I fell down. I saw D'Amico rush out of the stateroom and towards Wildcat; I drew my pistol and fired two shots, killing the man that attacked me."

"So – what's wrong with that?"

"I should have been ready for an attack; I could have then killed D'Amico and Wildcat would not have been put at risk!"

Dave just stared at me.

Then he looked at me like he would a cute little puppy!

"What?"

"My dear Mindy, if you didn't want to put the girl at risk, then you would never have damn well taken her!" Dave said in a patronising manner.

I glared at him, but softened my expression as I realised that he was bang on, as fucking usual! I had been horrified at the thought of what could have happened to little Megan.

"You trained her well, Mindy; she used her training and acted without hesitation – I listened at the door!" Dave admitted with a grin. "Plus, I spoke with Erika, earlier."

"I thought you might and I'm glad you did," I replied. I had no secrets from Dave – I needed him to know what I knew.

Dave was my sanity check.

Later that morning Thursday

It was early afternoon by the time all of us, had woken up.

We were all tired and we met up in the galley for brunch. I smiled at the girls, as Megan and Mindy came in, followed by Erika and Josh. Curtis and I had been up for an hour, talking with Marty. Megan looked a little embarrassed – she knew that she had fallen asleep in our room, but had woken up in her own bed!

After some food and some time to debrief, we all went home to rest. We could do nothing more until Marty and Abby had found us the headquarters for D'Amico.

That was most probably, where he was at that moment – we were closing in on him.

Two days later Saturday

Safehouse F

There was trouble brewing!

"You are *not* coming, Chloe!" I said forcefully.

"You gonna stop me? Eh, Hit Bitch?" Chloe retorted getting angry.

"I'll stop you!" Josh tried.

"You'll do *what* exactly, wanker?" Chloe demanded with a murderous look.

"I could tie you up!" Josh replied, without really thinking.

Chloe opened her mouth, closed it and then blushed. I looked at Dave and grinned.

"Joshua – I never knew! Chloe – is this the '*next level*'?" I asked innocently.

"We have *never* done anything like that!" Chloe insisted, glaring at Josh.

"Yeah, right – I've heard you two '*at it*'!" Dave commented, laughing.

Chloe looked *very* annoyed and glared dangerously at us all.

Marty and Abby had come up trumps!

We had the location of what we *hoped* was D'Amico's headquarters. No matter, headquarters or not, it was going to be destroyed. Mindy had finally given in to Chloe. It had been two weeks, after all, since she had been shot. Nevertheless, Mindy had left it up to Cathy to make the final go, no go, decision. Cathy had ultimately given her daughter a full physical and declared her ready for combat.

Naturally, Shadow was very pleased!

That evening

Southwest Chicago

I looked over at Hit Girl, Shadow, Mist and Jackal. They all had their bows raised with explosive arrows fitted.

"Okay, girls – ready to fire?" I asked.

"Hey, green *arsehole* – I am *not* a girl!" Jackal complained.

"Could have fooled me!" Hit Girl laughed.

"He is most *definitely* not a girl; his equipment is perfect in every way – I can vouch for that!" Shadow announced with a grin.

"Jeez, can we not get through one damn day without you two talking about each other's, whatever's?" Hit Girl moaned. "Ever since they discovered sex, it's been non *fucking* stop!"

Kick-Ass coughed pointedly.

"What!" Hit Girl demanded.

"How is *their* behaviour, any different to the way that *you* behave, eh Hit Girl?" Kick-Ass asked with a chuckle.

"Fuck!"

"Let's shoot, people!" Kick-Ass suggested and four arrows were released into the air.

All four arrows fell true and on target.

As the arrows landed, they exploded and destroyed not just the wooden doorway, but the explosion also flattened the two, armed guards who never knew what had hit them.

The five of us ran forwards, heading for the doorway. We were engaged almost immediately by several guards armed with sub-machine guns. We took cover, on each side of the destroyed doorway and returned fire. The lights were out, due to the explosion and the emergency lighting must have been damaged as well. We were wearing our NVGs, to assist our targeting in the darkness. The guards had no such advantage; so we were able to cut them down without

any risk to ourselves.

We proceed further into the facility and came across small groups of guards, whom we attacked, before we moved on. The groups only exchanged fire for a few minutes before melting away into the darkness of the facility.

After the fourth such 'hit and run' strike, we paused in a large open room.

"Something is *not* right here!" Kick-Ass said, cautiously.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," I replied.

Something *did not* feel right. Indeed, this felt like a trap!

I looked around, carefully checking every inch of wall, floor and ceiling for trouble. That was when I saw something move and it was not a man with a gun! The wall bulged outwards and then exploded, throwing us all across the warehouse.

"Fusion, this is Battle Guy, report!"

"Fusion, this is Battle Guy, report!"

We must have all been knocked out for a few seconds, but as the dust settled, I was able to focus and I heard the radio call.

"Fusion, this is Battle Guy, report!"

"Battle Guy, Hit Girl – there was an explosion – we... Hold one!"

I looked around, checking the team. I saw Kick-Ass and Jackal pulling themselves out of the rubble. I also saw Mist, coughing a few yards away as she shook off the dust. There was no sign of anybody else.

"Shadow!"

I feverishly started to dig through the rubble, followed by the others. Kick-Ass found Shadow's P90 and Mist, her NVGs, but nothing else.

Shadow had vanished.

The warehouse

When I came to, I found that I had been seized by a very large man.

His enormous hand was over my mouth and preventing me from calling out. I had to admit that I felt a little shocked at waking up like that. Nevertheless, I sorted myself out fast and I shoved my head back hard, and heard an exclamation, as I broke the nose of the man holding me. His grip loosened for only a moment; but I was ready and I broke out of the man's grip. I followed through and rammed an elbow into the man's stomach followed by a reinforced heel into his groin.

The man doubled over and I kned him in the face, flipping him over backwards. I then drove my heel into the man's throat, crushing his windpipe and he was left gagging for breath, his face turning purple – Mindy would have liked that, I thought for a second!

..._...

I looked around me. I was in a long corridor and, it seemed, on the wrong side of a locked, heavy steel door – I could only move forwards. I pulled out my pistol; I was low on ammunition, but would have to make do – I had also managed to lose my P90; Hit Girl was gonna kill me for that!

I wandered down around for a while, constantly calling on my comms for help. I was getting no response – just static, but I was sure there was some snatches of voice getting through. Marty said that our comms were un-jammable – he used the phrase: 'frequency hopping spread spectrum'. Something though was blocking the signal – I would need to talk to Marty about that when I got back!

..._...

Finally, I found windows, but they were mounted high up. Then I turned a corner and I saw men running towards me – two men, both of whom were very large – just like the last one. I started shooting at them, but after only a few rounds, the slide locked back on an empty magazine. As I had done many times before, I ejected the empty magazine and inserted a new one. I pushed the magazine home and released the slide, which sprang forward under the pressure of the spring. The men were getting closer and a third man had joined them – it was Ralph D'Amico, himself!

I had my chance; I raised my pistol, sighted on D'Amico and squeezed the trigger.

***Chapter 149*: Finding Shadow**

Author's Note: *This chapter breaks through the three-hundred thousand, word mark, for **Forsaken**. Thank you to everybody who has stayed the course and read each, and every word!*

Nothing happened – just a click.

I pulled back and released the slide, but a round was not being pulled from the magazine into the chamber. I ejected and reinserted the magazine. I racked back the slide several times, but to no avail. The two larger men were almost on me. I holstered the pistol and pulled my bō-staff from my back. I attacked, but I could not fight both men together – I had fucked up again; I was alone.

"Hit Girl – I need help..." I called over the comms – still no response.

The two men had large machetes, which they were using to deflect my blades and they worked as a team to beat me down. I could hear snatches of Hit Girl in my headset, trying to find me; she sounded beside herself with worry. I was forced down to one knee trying to fend off the attacks, and finally I lost hold of the bō-staff, fell backwards and froze as a sharp machete rested on my chest.

"Don't move – bitch!" One man snarled.

"Fuck you, bastard!" I retorted.

"Fire – now that is good – we're gonna have fun with you, little girl!" The other man grinned, almost drooling. "I like my girls to be feisty and that mask is a fucking turn on!"

I felt horrified at the thought of what might be about to happen to me – I had seen enough of Mindy's warped DVD collection, to know what he was talking about. I started to struggle in vain, as the men seized my arms. I started to kick out, but Ralph D'Amico himself slapped me hard enough to make me lose consciousness.

Two hours later

The warehouse

Shadow was gone.

We had been able to search the entire facility. We had seized all of D'Amico's men that were still alive. They were currently lined up, in front of us. Kick-Ass stood in front of the first man.

"Where is Shadow?" Kick-Ass growled in his electronically enhanced voice, staring through sightless eyes at the man.

The man glared back and said nothing. Despite the fact that I could not see the faces of Kick-Ass and Jackal, I knew enough about them that I could read their body language to gauge their moods. As they could with me! Kick-Ass was pissed, majorly pissed and very concerned for Shadow's welfare. Jackal? He was beside himself with worry and pissed off as hell! I had seen Jackal vanish back to Iron Hide and return with something hidden behind his back.

"Nothing to say?" Kick-Ass roared. "Bad fucking choice!"

Jackal came from behind Kick-Ass and lowered the weapon that he had been hiding and the man's left knee vaporised, as the AA-12 barked once. The man collapsed, and then started to scream. Blood ran across the floor from the wound, as the man rolled around the floor in agony. Kick-Ass stepped forward with a Glock 17 in his hand. He fired a single shot into the man's head, ending his pain. He then turned to the other men, who were still lined up and who looked horrified.

"Now, Jackal is very keen on knowing where Shadow is – anybody?" Kick-Ass demanded.

After a two minute wait, the AA-12 barked twice more and the head of a man, further down the line exploded, showering the other men with blood and brains.

"Time is *not* on your side, bastards!" Kick-Ass continued.

The remaining four men all started shouting at once!

Early the following morning Sunday

It was a little after one in the morning.

We had our location and we sincerely hoped that we would find Shadow there. We also hoped that she was still alive...

Titan thundered through the dark streets of Chicago. SWAT was mobilising and we had got word out to Vladimir, and his Bratva. Kick-Ass was at the wheel. I was in the passenger seat and behind me, on the benches were most of Fusion. Jackal, Battle Guy, Trojan, Wildcat and Eisenhower. Mist, Medic and Lynx were following us, in Iron Hide. Hal and Hawk were in the Command Centre.

It had been very hard telling Cathy that I had lost her daughter. I had almost broken down into tears, but Cathy had told me that recriminations could wait. Cathy went on to say that we all had work to do, before the night was out.

The warehouse

I felt *really* groggy as I regained consciousness.

My head hurt. I tried to focus my eyes, but could only see shadows. Then I felt agony shoot through my body. Somebody had punched me in my left side, just below the level of my breast. I screamed with the pain. The man had hit my wound and although it was healing well, the pain was excruciating.

"Just wanted to get your attention!"

I braced up – I recognised that sneering tone of voice.

"Fuck you Ralph!"

"Still full of fire, I see – good, good!"

Outside the warehouse

We had arrived at the same time as SWAT and between Titan and the single SWAT truck; we smashed down the perimeter fence.

Iron Hide stayed outside the perimeter, with Lynx and Medic. Mist had transferred to Titan. We would have to fight our way to the warehouse. This was definitely somewhere important; there were two sited machine guns – M60s as before. We were pinned down and taking cover behind Titan, whose armour was greater than the SWAT truck's armour. We managed to put one M60 out of action using explosive arrows, but they were the last we had with us, but the Bratva came to the rescue!

There was a bright flash, a bang, then something streaked towards the remaining M60 machine gun, and there was a large explosion, which included the M60 flying into the air, surrounded by various body parts. I span around to see a Krysha throwing down the fibreglass casing of a used RPG-22 rocket launcher.

"здравствуйте!" I called and received several nods in return. [*Hello!*]

"Sorry, we are late – Hit Girl!" A Krysha said.

"Better late than never!" I replied.

I spent a couple of minutes talking with the Russians and SWAT – D'Amico's men had moved back, towards the building – but they were still ready and in large, heavily armed, numbers. I felt uneasy, about what we might find, once we gained entry to the building. Anything that involved D'Amico – always went to shit!

I could hear the explosions from outside the building.

At least I was no longer alone. Hit Girl would come for me. I knew she would.

"Have no fear, Shadow – one of two things is going to happen. Either your pals will be outgunned and killed, or they will get here, just in time to see my finale!" D'Amico laughed.

"Keep dreaming, asshole – you will *not* survive this night!" I prophesised.

"We will see!" D'Amico replied, pragmatically.

I revved up Titan's engine and accelerated for the main vehicular access door on one side of the building.

The reinforced front bumper, followed by eight tonnes of armoured truck, struck the steel roller-shutter at speed. The door bent and screeched loudly, as it gave way. Then it was physically ripped from its track. Titan burst through into the warehouse, riding over two guards and skidding to a halt. We all poured from the vehicle and I smirked at the blood-streaked tyres.

D'Amico's goons were being rapidly reorganised, which was a bit of a surprise. I had expected them to be disorganised, so we could mow through them and put an end to this fighting. However, the men had radio communications and I could see plenty of CCTV cameras. Somebody was controlling the gunmen and very efficiently, too!

We came to an office that extended down one side of the building, before coming to a staircase up to the floor above.

Hit Girl ran forward, a pistol in each hand. As she leapt and flipped from chair to desk, to windowsill, she sent a bullet into every gunman within sight. She neatly dodged almost every bullet that was fired towards her. Any bullet that *did* catch her failed to penetrate the armoured combat suit and accomplished nothing more than temporarily pushing her off her next leap. However, Hit Girl was lithe and nimble; she was able to react like a cat and adjust her movements to take account of any change. Such as a bullet hitting her armour.

Trojan and Wildcat were working together as a team. Trojan would flip Wildcat into the air, past flying bullets and over the heads of the gunmen. As she flew past the men, she would drive a panther claw into their neck before nimbly landing on the nearest item of furniture or a part of the building that was suitable.

Trojan in turn would shoot at anybody that dared come close to Wildcat. He covered her back so that she could concentrate on what was going on in front of her. Indeed, one gunman was stabbed in the throat as he himself tried to stab Wildcat. Without hesitation, Trojan retrieved his fighting knife and cleaned it off before stowing it and moving on to the next fight.

I followed Hit Girl through the office, covering *her* back and shooting anybody that dared to put her at risk. I also kept an eye open for the younger members of Fusion as they fought. Anybody that missed a bullet from my pistols, met Mist and the vicious point of her chain whip, which flew towards their neck.

Eisenhower meanwhile was *literally* ripping into the gunmen. She had received a number of strikes on her armour from bullets and knives; none of which had penetrated, allowing the animal to continue to strike fear into the gunmen as she lunged, growling and snarling, at anybody that moved. One man lost his manhood in an epic struggle that lasted mere minutes. It did not take long for the gunmen to avoid Eisenhower, altogether, and concentrate on the human vigilantes! The sight of the large dog with blood dripping from her fangs was more than the seasoned gunmen could handle!

I could see no sign of Jackal or Battle Guy, which was weird.

We had made it to the stairs and were now on the second floor.

We could see that the Russians had fought their way up another staircase and were visible over the other side of the building. The Krysha, were proving very accurate with their shooting and were dropping D'Amico's armed guards, but there seemed to be an almost constant stream of the gunmen to replace the dead and wounded. D'Amico had done well recruiting ex-Army and ex-Special Forces types for his personal guard.

SWAT were covering the exterior of the facility to ensure that nobody escaped and were still exchanging sporadic fire with gunmen in the upper windows of the building. Wounded, were brought out for Medic and Lynx – irrelevant of whether they were friend or foe.

I got a shock while I was fighting with a man, who seemed to be ex-Special Forces, possibly Delta. The man was highly skilled, and he knew to use his weight and strength against me. Suddenly he stopped and fell backwards as a large hole appeared in his forehead. I span around to see a man, wearing body armour standing with his .45-calibre Glock 21 pistol aimed at the falling man.

"Thank you, Marcus!" I called and sent him a warm smile.

What, the hell Marcus was doing here, I had absolutely no idea! I could ask that question later, but he had helped save my life. However, I could have won that fight! I watched as Marcus vanished down a corridor, with Fellowes and another cop that I did not recognise. All around the building, I could hear gunfire, shouts and screams.

..._...

I passed through to another room and saw different fights underway. Immediately in front of me, was Mist and she was facing off with three men, all armed with knives. They were attempting to dodge past Mist's chain whip. I could see another man, on the floor behind Mist, with a Sai embedded in his chest - he was very dead!

Across the room, I could see the large form of Kick-Ass as he threw a gunman, bodily against the wall. The man hit the wall hard and left a red smear as he slid to the floor. I grinned - Kick-Ass did like to use his strength, whenever possible! Another man was trying in vain to stab Kick-Ass, but his protective armour ensured that Kick-Ass remained uninjured. Kick-Ass instead, swung around and drove his fist into the man's face, breaking his nose and sending a spray of blood across the room.

Further over to the right, was one hell of a sight. That fight seemed to involve five people - two of whom were quite a bit shorter than those they were fighting! The two kids were brandishing their bō-staffs and the much larger men, armed with what seemed to be older model M16 assault rifles were dodging the razor sharp blades. The men tried to bring the rifles to bear, but had to use them to deflect the bō-staff strikes.

As I watched, the first man fell as Trojan severed his left hand. The man dropped the rifle and screamed in agony, before rolling around the floor. Then as Trojan moved to attack the next man, he was struck on the back of the head by a rifle butt that sent the boy flying. Wildcat took the opportunity to drive her bō-staff into that man's chest, then reversed the blade, and plunged the opposite blade into the back of the third man as he went to shoot the fallen Trojan. I was impressed by what I had seen, as I ran over to check on Trojan.

"I'm fine – I think!" Trojan confirmed. "I'll be fine!"

"Well done, you two – but it is not over!" I said and led my junior operatives towards Kick-Ass.

"You guys okay?" Kick-Ass asked Hit Girl, Trojan and me.

"Awesome, Kick-Ass!" I answered for them, almost skipping with excitement.

The adrenalin was surging through me and I felt so alive – this was awesome. I had killed six men in the past hour, all personally by claw or by blade. However, I felt nothing for those men – I had a job to do and I intended to do it and make Hit Girl proud. Trojan and I made one hell of a team and I was grateful to have him as my partner.

My head hurt from being struck by that rifle butt.

I would survive though – I would not let down Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. I enjoyed fighting alongside that wild child, Wildcat. She was awesome and we worked well together as a team.

The experience of fighting alongside the real vigilantes was fucking awesome!

A door suddenly exploded outwards and a man fell through, followed by a blue clad Battle Guy. His shield covered in splattered blood and his Gladius embedded in the man's stomach.

"Hey, Jackal – I've found them!" Battle Guy yelled through the doorway.

"Thank fuck for that!" Jackal announced as he appeared. His Ninja-To, was dripping blood.

"Where have you two been?" Hit Girl demanded.

"Long story – took a wrong turn. We did find their control room, though! They're going to need a few new flat screens, too!" Jackal explained.

"Good – that means they've lost their guidance; good, well done, ass!" Hit Girl said.

We continued down a corridor that led towards the far end of the building.

Suddenly I felt a chill up my backbone. I could hear D'Amico's voice. I reached the end of the corridor and found a door. The door led to a walkway. Beside the door was a window and I watched in horror, at what was going on beyond.

"I have plans for you, young lady. Have no fear; your identity *will* remain secret. Your *mask* will not be removed, but something else will. You took my arm, so I think it only fair for me to take yours – don't you think so, *Shadow*?" D'Amico asked, his face a picture of joy and happiness.

"You fucking bastard – I die, then so will you. Your fucking life is over, no matter what!" Shadow yelled back.

"Oh – you are *not* going to die – I am going to make you suffer; just like you did for me. An arm for an arm!" D'Amico responded, his smile getting bigger as he indicated for his man to start the saw.

The saw started to cut into Shadow's armour, just below her elbow and Shadow screamed and screamed.

***Chapter 150*: The Final D'Amico**

The D'Amico warehouse

The saw started to cut into Shadow's armoured suit. Shadow screamed and screamed as she struggled against the iron grip of the men holding her down.

I kicked open the door and ran down the walkway. I had just seconds to do something. The roar of the spinning blade, cutting into the carbon-fibre armour was cutting into my senses. Jackal stopped, withdrew his two fighting knives and threw them hard towards the large electrical box that was mounted on the wall immediately behind the industrial disc saw.

The knives penetrated the thin aluminium door and caused havoc in the intricate electrical systems inside. There was a spark, followed by a loud bang and a flash. Then copious amounts of black smoke poured from the electrical box. But above all the shrieking of the spinning saw blade, as it carved into the reinforced carbon-fibre armour of the combat suit, eased and was replaced by the screaming of Shadow.

I leapt from the walkway and reached for a suspended light fitting. Behind me, Mist and Jackal did the same thing. The three of us swung from the light fittings and dropped onto machinery below. I immediately jumped off the machine that I had landed on and spun through the air, firing bullets into the men that surrounded D'Amico. I landed on the saw, itself and was immensely glad not to see a large pool of blood. In fact I could see very little blood, which was something good at least.

Mist appeared and dragged Shadow off the saw table, with the help of Jackal. Shadow seemed unable to stand unaided and seized hold of Jackal and Mist for support.

During this distraction, D'Amico had been surrounded by a dozen of his minions who were doing their best to push him towards an exit and relative safety.

But, it seemed, Ralph was having none of it and he was trying to push forward; back towards me.

"You have failed this City, indeed this country, for the last time, Ralph D'Amico. It is time for your wretched family to be reunited in hell!" I growled, feeling the anger of what he had tried to do to Chloe, build up inside me. "I am sure that that bastard brother of yours, Frank, will be waiting for you, not mention your nephew Chris!"

"You have not seen the last of me Hit Girl. I will return, as I have before – I *will* avenge my brother and my nephew. You and your freaks, will die!" D'Amico shouted back.

"Not if we have anything to do with it!" A loud electronic voice said from behind D'Amico.

He and his men spun around. Arrayed behind them were Kick-Ass, with Battle Guy to his left and Trojan to his right. Further over were Wildcat and a growling Eisenhower, who both stood beside Marcus and Sergeant Matthews of the CPD SWAT.

Wildcat shouted a single word and all hell broke loose.

"Schwanz!"

Eisenhower bolted forward and ran unerringly for Ralph D'Amico. Ralph screamed and fell back as Eisenhower but deeply into her most prized part of the male anatomy.

I saw Marcus and Sergeant Matthews wince, but they both dived into the final fight. D'Amico was going nowhere, but we all wanted our time with that bastard – we just needed to remove the excess minions.

Wildcat was a surging miniature tornado as she ran and drove her panther claws into thighs and stomachs – whatever she could reach. The floor was getting red with blood, but after several minutes all the minions were either dead or lying on the concrete floor, injured.

Marcus was smiling at me. I couldn't help but smile back. We had won and we had won, big time. There being guarded by Eisenhower was the best prize ever; Ralph fucking D'Amico. There was no way that he was getting away from us, this time.

..._...

Shadow came over, being supported by Jackal; she was favouring her right arm and I could see where the saw had badly damaged her suit.

She walked over to D'Amico and kicked him hard in the side, raising a scream of agony. I walked over to her and looked pointedly into the eyes that I could not see, under her mask.

"You do it – for me, Hit Girl – please," Shadow said weakly.

D'Amico was covered in blood. There was a very large amount around his crotch. I hauled the fallen mob boss to his knees and glared into his dark eyes. I looked for some sign that he knew he was about to die, but I saw nothing but darkness. This man was pure evil – there was nothing else inside him but evil.

I raised a single Katana sword, stowing its twin on my back. Everybody took several steps backwards, as I steadied myself and focussed on D'Amico's neck.

The blade flew through the air in an elegant arc, from above Hit Girl's right shoulder and then passing cleanly through the neck, before being brought to a halt.

Ralph D'Amico's head was separated from his body and both the head and the body fell to the ground. Blood spilled across the floor and ran towards the nearest drain where it gurgled away to join the other shit in the drains – very apt, I thought!

There was silence for several minutes as everybody just stared at the corpse, with the head lying a few feet away. That corpse signified the end of a reign of terror that had begun decades before. No more would the D'Amico family reign in Chicago. The family was decimated, wiped out – they were no more. Ralph, Frank, Chris; all were very, very dead.

I looked over at Hit Girl – I had killed the first D'Amico, Hit Girl had killed Chris and she had now dispatched Ralph. She smiled at me, before turning her back on the corpse, for that was all it was now. Ralph D'Amico was gone.

Shadow continued to stare at the severed head for an entire minute before she walked over to Jackal and held her hand out.

"Pistol!" She demanded and Jackal complied without hesitation and passed over his FN Five-seven.

Everybody watched as Shadow checked that the pistol was loaded and that there was a chambered round. She then walked over to the severed head and raised the pistol and fired off eight rounds, directly into the severed head. The head was initially sent spinning, before it finally exploded after the eighth round. Shadow returned the pistol to a stunned Jackal before she turned to me. She was breathing heavily and was still shaking from her ordeal.

"I had to make sure the bastard was dead – permanently!" Shadow explained, rubbing her right arm.

I put my arm around the young vigilante and pulled her close.

"You'll get no complaint from me, missy!" I whispered back.

We all gathered outside, near the vehicles.

CPD were taking over the scene and there were many happy grins, a lot of them aimed at us. There were a lot of bodies to be scooped up and quite a few injured gunmen to be sorted out, too.

As soon as I came out of the building I took Shadow over to her mother. They both climbed into Titan, for a private reunion. Once inside I pulled the rear door closed and stayed to ensure nobody else came in. Mother and daughter appeared from under their masks. Chloe with tears spilling down her cheeks, then hugged her mother tightly.

I had to admit, to myself that things had been very tight in there and Chloe might not be hugging her mother right now, or at least, not with both arms. Damn, this was getting too close. I would never have forgiven myself if Ralph D'Amico had got his way and maimed that girl. Right now I was glad that my face was hidden behind my mask. I felt guilt like I had never felt before.

Cathy forced Chloe to remove her right gauntlet and to let her check out the damage to her arm. Thankfully, there was just some grazes and cuts; the suit had absorbed the majority of the damage. Cathy cleaned up the wounds and wrapped a bandage around the injured area. Chloe was still much shaken from her ordeal, so I suggested that Cathy take Chloe back to the Safehouse, in Iron Hide, along with Paige and Mist.

Once Iron Hide had departed, I gathered together the team and they all climbed into Titan.

Hit Girl was very quiet. Much more quiet than I would have expected, considering our successes that night. I had a good idea what was wrong, though – but it would have to wait until we were alone.

For now, though, Hit Girl was talking with Vladimir.

"Thank you, Vladimir – you and your men fought magnificently," I said.

"So, will you give us a few minutes head start, before you slaughter us?" Vladimir asked jovially.

"Vladimir, I will give you a lifetime's head start... If you can keep your nose clean..." I replied.

Vladimir looked apprehensive.

"... However, we cross paths as we have before and you will *feel my steel* and the full force that Fusion can bring to bear!" I finished, crossing my blades in front of me.

I looked into Vladimir's eyes and saw a host of emotions: surprise, shock, fear, respect.

"You are truly a foe to be respected, Hit Girl and you define 'old school', as the saying goes," Vladimir said and held out his hand; I took it and shook it.

"We will continue our current truce; if my men come to your attention – then they deserve to die; however I would advise Fusion to steer clear of *our* neighbourhoods, and we will steer clear of yours. До свидания, вы были достойным противником, Хит Девушка!" Vladimir finished and he and his men left the area. [*Goodbye, you have been a worthy adversary, Hit Girl!*]

I watched them go, and then headed for Kick-Ass and Titan.

Later that night

Safehouse F

Chloe looked a lot better now that she had showered, but my eyes were drawn to the fresh white bandage on her lower arm, just below her right elbow.

Chloe noticed.

"Mindy! Don't start with the fucking guilt trip – or help me God, I'll slap you one!"

"Chloe – I almost lost you, tonight. You were almost..." I couldn't go on.

Chloe grabbed my hand and dragged me into the range. Then she looked directly into my eyes as she spoke.

"You know what kept me going, while that bastard had me?" She asked. "You! I knew that you'd come for me – I knew I would be rescued."

"Chloe, I..."

"Mind you – you cut it fucking close!" Chloe quipped with a grin, which faltered as I felt tears on my cheeks. "Mindy, please – don't feel guilt because of me. You're Hit Girl for fuck's sake – I became Shadow because of what you represented. I have never regretted a single day, since I met you and Dave. That night I woke up on your couch at West Ridge, was the start of a new life for me. Without you, I would never have found Joshua and he might have died 'again', without me ever knowing that he had been alive. I owe you and Dave everything that I am, today."

"Yes, but..."

"Without your training and the equipment that you provide to protect us, I would be dead – probably months ago during one of my many fuck ups! Please, Mindy – don't feel guilty, because of me."

We both hugged each other for several minutes, until both our tears ceased.

"It's good to know that you care, Mindy – it really is."

As soon as we were all back at the Safehouse, I ensured that everybody was okay.

We all got ourselves cleaned up, had something to eat and then went to bed. I was immensely grateful that apart from bruises, nobody had been hurt. Psychologically though, there were wounds. Principally, Chloe and Mindy; both had been traumatised at that warehouse. In our chosen line of work, we all saw and did a lot of things that gave us emotions, feelings and memories that we had to bury and bury deep. We had all done unspeakable things in the name of fighting serious crime.

I had plenty of memories that haunted my dreams, including many that featured a certain purple menace at various ages! I knew that Mindy must have some whopping great things buried deep in her sub-conscious, from the many years of active vigilantism before we had met that night at Rasul's. Then it had just been her and Damon. Now though, she was running a team of Vigilante's. She was running Fusion – Marcus' *'fucked up super hero club'*!

I could tell that she was feeling immense guilt about Chloe being seized and then almost maimed for life. This would be difficult, but we would get through it together, like we always did.

"So, how did your chat with Chloe go?" I asked as I entered our bedroom and closed the door.

Mindy was in bed, looking very sad.

I can't keep anything a secret from Dave!

"Yes, Chloe had a fucking go at me – happy?"

"Yes, actually!" Dave replied, climbing into bed.

I knew that I should not be feeling guilt, but I did. It was a part of me being human, as Dave would put it. Hit Girl was not supposed to have a human side – she was a killing machine. I was trained to bury emotion deep and lock it away, permanently.

But Chloe was different, she was a sister to me and my best friend after Dave. I felt able to discuss anything with Chloe, especially girl type stuff. She always made me feel comfortable, being with her. I could discuss almost anything with Dave, but where I couldn't; I could speak with Chloe. Besides Dave did not want to discuss certain girl type problems!

I wrapped my arms around Dave and hugged him tightly.

***Chapter 151*: Celebration**

Monday evening

Morton Grove

I had gone with Josh and Mindy to see Chloe at home. There we had taken Chloe through everything that had happened while she had been with D'Amico. Chloe had seemed overwhelmed by how much effort had gone into her rescue. Josh was holding her hand as she added her own parts to the story.

Finally, we explained the last attack, as the disc saw had been started. When I had mentioned Josh and his fighting knives, Chloe had spun around and launched herself on top of a very stunned Joshua. She had started hugging and kissing the kid, oblivious to Mindy, Cathy and I sitting only feet away. Finally, Josh managed to shove Chloe away for a minute. Chloe then looked around and blushed badly at her audience.

"Nice, Chloe – you definitely have some moves!" Cathy commented with a laugh at her daughter and the still stunned Joshua.

"Sorry," An embarrassed Chloe mumbled. "Joshua saved my arm – without him..."

"Okay, Chloe – we understand, but still – I'm sure your Mom doesn't want a live porno on her couch!" Mindy said with an evil smirk

Chloe had looked totally mortified!

"Wouldn't be the first time!" Cathy said with a sly grin.

With D'Amico gone, everybody had gone back to his or her 'normal' life.

All the kids were back at school and those with jobs were back at work. Everybody needed time to rest and recover from the past weeks activities. I had received a couple of phone calls from Cathy letting me know how Chloe was doing. Chloe had been having some vicious nightmares because of what she had experienced at the weekend. She had not been alone – Mindy had had her fair share of nightmares as well. Chloe had also been extremely nice to Josh since the weekend.

Chloe had eventually suggested a party, to let everybody unwind and I had persuaded Mindy – not that that had been hard!

Five days later

Saturday night

Safehouse F

Cathy, Paige and Kim had outdone themselves putting together a huge buffet.

As before, everybody that knew of Fusion had been invited, although this time there were some newcomers.

As before, Chloe and Josh were occupying a couch, this time in the briefing room and they both seemed to be permanently joined at the lips – that seemed to be *their* version of partying! Curtis, Cam Fellowes, Brad Murphy, Tommy Morgan and Megan were nearby and watched Chloe and Josh as they ran their hands over each other. Curtis winked at Megan, suggestively.

"Don't even think about it, asshole!" Megan cautioned with a scowl, before stalking off to find some food.

"Hard luck, Curtis – maybe next time!" Tommy commiserated.

"She's a tough nut to crack!" Cameron added with a laugh.

"Give me time," Curtis said and followed Megan.

"He's gonna get himself slapped or worse!" Brad prophesied.

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Paul Murphy and Sam Fellowes, along with their wives, were chatting with Marcus and Paige; Sharon and Rachel were very pleased to meet Dave and Marty and to thank them personally for saving all their lives, the previous year. They were also pleased to be able to thank Curtis and Megan for looking after their sons the month before.

Sophia insisted on following Tommy around, as he kept offering her items from the buffet. Jack Bay was chatting with Marty and Kim. Kim was now fourteen weeks pregnant and starting to show visible signs; she was now attracting the attention of the other adult females, including Rachel Murphy and Sharon Fellowes.

Tony and Shannon Morgan were chatting with Erika and Mindy. I was concentrating on keeping an eye on the youngsters and ensuring that they were not causing any trouble!

In the corner of the galley, I found Abby and Kyle caressing each other, totally oblivious to everybody else in the room!

"So, what do you think about the new vigilante?" I asked Josh, once he had been able to tear himself away from Chloe.

Josh looked a little uncomfortable.

"Well, Joshua – Mindy asked you a question?" Chloe asked with an evil smirk, enjoying her boyfriend's intense discomfort.

"Do I *have* to answer?" Josh asked, knowing the answer he would get.

"Yes you do," Chloe pushed.

"She has some nice curves," Josh started, blushing slightly. He then saw Chloe's scowl. "And looks *almost* as hot as Chloe!"

"Good save, kid!" Dave said with a chuckle.

"You damn pussy, Josh!" Erika said, with a wink at Chloe.

"Seriously though, who is she?" Dave asked.

"She must have some serious money," I commented. "That armoured suit she has looks to be almost as good as ours. Also, that motorcycle of hers is *not* cheap!"

There was general agreement at my comment.

"Maybe she is as good as you, Mindy," Erika suggested.

"Ooh – you can't say that!" Kim said with a glance towards me.

"It is possible," I acceded.

"Nobody is better than you, Hit Girl!" Megan said, as she cut into the discussion.

"Megan – we've been through this!" I said seriously.

"Can't you stop being such a fucking serious bitch for just one damn minute?" Megan demanded. "You were out there, in New York City, fighting crime, before Curtis and I were even fucking born!"

Mindy blushed furiously at Megan's comment.

"About time somebody said that!" Cathy commented.

"Could have been a little less foul, though – eh, Megan?" Marcus added and Megan blushed.

"Okay – I'll take the goddamn hint!" Mindy growled.

I laughed at Mindy's discomfort. Then Marcus spoke up and started to make Mindy even more uncomfortable.

"If I could have everybody's attention, please!" Marcus said loudly and silence descended on the Safehouse, as Marty muted the music and all conversation ceased. "As some of you know, Paige and I have been spending a lot of time together and indeed we now live together."

I noticed Mindy cover her face with her hands and shake her head.

"Paige and I have a lot in common – not to mention each of us having a very wayward daughter!" Marcus continued.

There was a lot of laughter at that comment and both Mindy and Megan scowled. Their expressions were almost identical.

"Paige and I have decided to take things to the next level and as such..." Marcus began.

"... Last night, Marcus proposed and I accepted!" Paige finished, grinning fit to burst.

There was a silent pause, before Megan spoke.

"Bloody hell!" Megan exclaimed.

"Fuck me!" Mindy added.

Both girls looked shocked and everybody laughed and began to offer their congratulations to the couple.

"Damn – Hit Girl will be my sister!" Megan said, with a big grin.

Mindy looked at Megan.

"Well, I could have worse for a kid sister!" She said with a smirk.

Then Megan asked a question, aimed at her mother.

"Does this mean you two are having sex?"

Mindy's eyes almost popped out.

"Megan, dear – *that*, is none of your business!" Paige said sweetly, smirking at Marcus.

An hour later

Something was missing.

Actually it was more like five short people, were missing. I stood on the walkway and gazed around the Safehouse. The briefing room and galley were occupied by just teenagers and adults – all of the pre-teens, were nowhere in sight!

"Sophia!" I called and the large dog appeared from the galley.

The Alsatian had been extra happy since having had the opportunity to chomp on Ralph D'Amico.

"Sophia – the little brats are missing, can you find them for me?" I asked.

Sophia gave a muted woof, before sniffing the air and heading down to the main level.

"What's up?" Mindy asked, coming up beside me.

"The brats are missing!" I said. "Time for some fun!"

"I'll warn everyone that you want to play!" Mindy said laughing and turning towards the briefing room.

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I followed Sophia down to the main level, but one there I took a detour into the armoury. I reappeared with several

small items in my hand. Sophia was sniffing in the direction of Iron Hide and Beast. I heard some muted conversation from between the two armoured vehicles.

I whistled quietly and Sophia ran back to me, looking pleased with herself. The kids were still hidden and continuing with their conversation, believing themselves undiscovered.

"Sophia – go to Mindy!" I ordered and the dog ran up the stairs.

I noticed that a small audience had gathered on the walkway. I raised five fingers indicating five seconds and moved over towards the glass shield. I rapidly pulled the pins from four FBG Mk II Flash Bang Trainers and threw them over the shield and they fell to the ground and rolled under Iron Hide before they all exploded.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

There were screams and yells of pain, and then five shocked kids rapidly appeared from between Iron hide and Beast. They ran onto the mat, covering their ears. There was laughter and jeering from the adults and teenagers on the walkway.

The five kids looked up at their audience, a little embarrassed and Megan scowled.

"Fucking funny, asshole!" Megan exclaimed, glaring at the grinning Dave.

"You guys have been warned about playing around the vehicles!" Mindy called down.

"I never, play, bitch!" Megan retorted and Mindy scowled back.

"I assume that it was your idea, Megan?" Mindy asked.

"Why am I always assumed to be the guilty one?" Megan demanded, looking hurt.

"Well, 'cause you, young lady, usually *are* the guilty one!" Paige cut in with a laugh.

"Okay, brats," Mindy called. "Get back up here – now!"

"That was awesome!" A laughing Brad said, on his way up the steps.

"Yeah, very funny, dickhead!" Megan growled.

"It was *your* idea," Tommy said, grinning.

"Only because I've got bigger balls than you lot put together!" Megan retorted, with a smirk.

"You've picked a damn firestorm there, Curtis!" Cam said.

"Don't I bloody know it?" Curtis replied with a grimace.

That girl was trouble.

She also seemed to have the boys under her control, which was a concern!

All of the kids had been warned about messing about near the vehicles. I had set rules, now that we had kids in the Safehouse. When not operational, like now – they were to stay away from the vehicles, armoury and any weapons. I had warned them all, especially the kids who were *not* operators.

The Safehouse, while protecting those inside, also contained some very dangerous items of equipment and weaponry. The last thing that I wanted was somebody to get hurt, or worse, while they were somewhere that they should not be.

Maybe, Megan needed a talking to or something stronger!

Later, just before midnight

The lights had been dimmed in the briefing room and couples were chatting, with some dancing – or just kissing.

Chloe and Josh were enjoying each other on a couch. The other end of the couch was occupied by Kyle and Abby, equally active. Another couch supported Marty and Kim, with Megan, fast asleep on Sophia with Curtis beside her. Tommy, Cam and Brad were trying to ignore their parents who were dancing and kissing, which they found somewhat embarrassing. Marcus and Paige were gently kissing, while dancing too.

A different song came over the speakers in the Safehouse.

'We are young! We are strong! We're not lookin' for where we belong. We're not cool! We are free! And we're runnin' with blood on our knees!'

I looked down at Mindy and I felt like the happiest man alive. Mindy smiled up at me, and then we kissed and continued kissing.

***Chapter 152*: Back On The Streets**

***The following morning
Sunday***

Safehouse F

I awoke to the smell of bacon cooking.

The Safehouse was a lot emptier this morning. Most of the couples had gone home, taking their kids with them; which was a blessing! I had to admit that I envied Megan and the others – they were enjoying their childhoods. Me, I had never been able to play and have fun, like them.

When I got to the galley, I found that Cathy and Paige were cooking breakfast. Megan was sitting with Kyle and Abby, while Dave was chatting with Marcus and Marty. There was no sign of Josh or Chloe, nor Kim or Curtis. Sophia was chomping her way through an enormous bowl of biscuits and some other disgusting looking shit that she liked.

"Hey, gorgeous!" Dave called, passing me a coffee in my 'World's Greatest Bitch!' mug.

"Morning everybody!" I groaned and sat down, burying my head in my arms.

"Is she alive?" I heard Josh ask and felt myself being poked in the ribs.

"Do you like your fingers intact?" I growled.

"Not quite Dave, but they'll have to do!" Chloe said, placing a plate of sausages, eggs and bacon down in front of me.

"Fuck!" I growled and then smiled at Chloe. "I am hungry, thanks!"

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Just then, Curtis came into the galley. He seemed a little apprehensive, but looked directly towards Megan and strode between the tables directly towards her.

"Morning, Curtis..." Megan said, but she was interrupted as Curtis grabbed her face and kissed her on the lips.

Just a quick kiss, nothing more. Megan's eyes bulged out and as expected, she slapped Curtis before he drew away. Curtis just smirked and he seemed to ignore the red, hand-shaped mark on his left cheek.

"It was worth it!" He said, before heading to get some food.

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I stared at Megan.

After slapping Curtis, she just sat there. Then she slowly licked her lips and a sly smile appeared. She looked to be trying to process what had just happened to her. I knew that look; I had seen it on my own face, often enough. Then I saw Megan blush as realisation hit her. I was not sure whether the blush was because she was embarrassed or because she had realised *why* Curtis had kissed her. They meant a lot to each other, those two. Curtis came back over, with his breakfast, and sat down opposite Megan. He smirked at her, as he started on his bacon.

"Why?" Megan asked simply, biting her lip.

"Just to prove that I do have *some* balls!" Curtis replied.

"I know you have balls, Curtis – I've seen them," Megan said, then blushed even deeper, before stammering on. "I mean... I've seen you fighting, err, proving you have balls!"

"Wow!" Paige commented, looking down at her mortified daughter. "You learn something new every day!"

Later that day

West Ridge

"Mindy!"

I turned to see who was hissing at me. It was Chloe.

"What?"

"I need to talk to you – now!"

"Go ahead!"

"In private!" Chloe hissed.

"Okay!" I replied, smiling at Dave.

I followed Chloe outside and onto the deck.

"What?" I asked.

Chloe looked very uncomfortable and somewhat upset.

"I'm late!"

"For what?"

"Come on, doofus – do I have to spell it out!"

"I guess!"

"I should have started by now!"

"Started what?" I asked. "Started making sense?"

"Mindy you can be such a..." Chloe growled, getting mad. "You're supposed to be clever, for fuck's sake!"

I had absolutely no idea what she was raving on about; she was nuts! Chloe's shoulders slumped and she held her head in her hands.

"I've not had my fucking period, you stupid bitch!" Chloe growled angrily.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, feeling rather stupid!

"Jeez, thick bitch!" Chloe breathed.

"Sorry, I was having a blonde moment!"

"You're not blonde anymore!" Chloe stated.

"It's part of me!" I replied with a grin, before turning serious. "Have you been at it with Josh recently?"

"Yeah, we've had sex – a few times – recently," Chloe, admitted blushing a little.

"I assume you used protection?"

"Always!"

"You absolutely certain?" I persisted.

"Yes! I'm on the damn pill, too!"

"Shit happens!" I quipped.

"Not fucking funny, Mindy!"

"Go piss on a pregnancy thingy," I suggested.

"Will you drive me to the store?"

Forty minutes later

"Oh thank fuck for that!"

"I take it the scare is over?" I asked.

"Not pregnant and my period just started!"

"Dodged a bullet there, young lady!"

"Tell me about it! Yes, I want kids and yes, I think I want kids with Josh – just not right now!"

"Good to hear," I said.

"Our secret?" Chloe asked with a hopeful grin.

"Our secret, Chloe."

What the hell, would I do in that position?

I mean, what if one of those little wriggly things got past all the protection? Wham! I would be pregnant and no more Hit Girl. I was *not* going to give up sex, no fucking way; it was arguably better than killing!

I was six months away from turning eighteen. Maybe I should consider taking some time off, maybe in my early twenties and have kids. I would not be young forever and besides, something may happen to me, or worse, something may happen to Dave!

Deep, heavy thoughts. They could wait for another month.

Anyway, I had the streets to patrol, along with Kick-Ass!

Two days later

Wednesday

West Ridge

"How you doing hunk?"

I looked over to the smiling light of my life.

"Feeling old!" I quipped.

"Happy Birthday!"

Mindy was naked and cuddling into me. Another year of my life was beginning, another year with Mindy Macready. Mindy was the one person I loved more than anyone, in the whole world.

I ran my right hand over her compact, but soft, chest and as I touched the nipples, Mindy tensed up and her breath caught. As usual, she was having a stiffening effect on me and she knew it. I started to kiss her neck as I ran my hand down across her strong, flat stomach and into the soft, but damp region between her legs. Mindy was squirming and she started to moan as my fingers explored the warm moist...

Damn him!

He knew exactly which buttons to press and which ones to caress. He knew me perfectly, every square inch, inside – and out. It helped that I was fit and healthy, as Dave had me panting like a dog on heat! The orgasm that I knew was coming would rip me apart from the inside out and take all my energies to absorb.

Minutes later, I was panting, as all my muscles and limbs shook with the sensations building inside them until I could

take it no more. I screamed. Dave was laughing as I folded up to ride out the sensations that surged from between my legs to my brain, via my breasts.

When I could breathe again, I turned to Dave, who planted a kiss on my lips.

"You are gonna be the fucking death of me, asshole!"

"So you didn't enjoy it?" Dave asked, pretending to be hurt.

"You know what I meant, Ass-Kick!"

An hour later

After a long shower – together of course, where I thanked Dave for his wonderful fingers, we headed down for a late breakfast.

We found a scowling Josh in the kitchen.

"I am going to buy some bloody ear plugs! Noisy bastards, the both of you!" Josh moaned. "Oh, Happy Birthday, Dave!"

"Thanks, Joshua!"

That night

It felt good to be back out on the streets, just Kick-Ass and Hit Girl.

I was able to ride my Panigale, which made me immensely happy – it felt good to ride side by side with Kick-Ass on his Diavel motorcycle. It was even better that the City was back to its normal, relatively safe, state.

We cruised the streets and enjoyed the view, not to mention the waves and smiles from the public and the CPD. We also had a visit from Petra!

As we cruised up Route 50, Kick-Ass motioned to his rear and I saw a third motorcycle catch up and pull alongside Kick-Ass. It was the same Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade, which we had seen Petra with previously. She turned her head and nodded at us both. I nodded back, along with Kick-Ass. I revved my engine and Petra revved back. Kick-Ass looked at me and shook his head before dropping back. I nodded at Petra and she accelerated, pulling a wheelie and speeding away.

"Be careful!" Kick-Ass cautioned.

"Hey, it's me!" I replied, laughing as I accelerated after the vanishing Fireblade.

"That is exactly what I am afraid of!" Kick-Ass said.

"Battle Guy – you following that speed junkie?"

"Every turn!" Battle Guy replied.

I followed from a distance as the two rival vigilantes passed through Midway International Airport. I could tell that there was rivalry building up between Hit Girl and this Petra. There was no way that Hit Girl was going to allow herself to be outridden by anybody! They finally slowed, as they turned right onto South Archer Avenue. Battle Guy was giving me directions to their location. I finally caught up, just as Petra waved to Hit Girl and turned away.

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"You enjoy that?" I asked as I pulled alongside.

"You know I love speed!" Hit Girl replied.

"I do!" I agreed. "Can we get back to what we came out here to do?"

"If you insist!"

I knew that Hit Girl enjoyed racing around at speed on the Panigale. I also knew that one day it would not end happily for her! At least we knew that Petra was still around and I was pleased to see that Hit Girl was not intending to kill her.

At least not yet.

Nothing particularly exciting occurred as we rode around the City.

The important thing was that we were being seen, which raised our image and let those to whom we were a danger know that we were about and would respond where necessary.

The CPD had reported that crime levels were lower. Many criminals had been killed or put away by the time Ralph D'Amico had died. Plenty had been ratted out since, too! As usual, just the threat of us was enough to keep the small-time criminals at bay.

Chicago PD
District 21

It had taken almost ten months, but the rebuilt District 21 was now open for business.

"Not bad!" Marcus commented to Voight as he was shown the new office space for Intelligence.

"A step up from the previous, I'll admit that!" Voight replied.

The new premises was all glass and aluminium, and very, very smart. Voight had a glass-enclosed office, on the third floor, at the end of a larger, open area that had space for ten desks. Voight's team were hard at work and seemed to be enjoying the new facilities.

"I understand that you will soon be working across the corridor," Voight commented, indicating an almost identical, but empty area across the corridor from Intelligence.

"It's still under discussion, but yes it looks like the new 'Organised Crime Taskforce' will be stood up soon," Marcus replied.

"Congratulations, Lieutenant – I'm looking forward to working with you."

"As am I, with you and your team, Sergeant."

***Chapter 153*: Cold War**

The following afternoon
Thursday

West Ridge

I received a very disturbing phone call that evening.

"Help me, please!"

"Vladimir?" I growled in surprise.

"Anatoly, he has taken over the Bratva... He is coming for me. It is just me and Vasily. Please, I must get out of the City – I need your help, Hit Girl."

"We can do that, Vladimir," I confirmed.

"Avoid the Bratva – all past deals are off!" Vladimir warned.

"Trouble?" Dave asked as I dropped the call.

"You could say that!"

That night

Kick-Ass was driving Beast, with Jackal beside him.

I led on my purple superbike. Shadow was annoyed that she was unable to come, but her new combat suit was not yet ready. Shadow was with Battle Guy, in the Command Centre, providing support.

We had arranged to meet Vladimir and Vasily in a secluded part of the City. We would then escort them out of the City – from there, they would be on their own. As we approached the place, I could hear gunfire.

"Battle Guy, we have contact ahead!" I called over the comms.

Kick-Ass immediately overtook me, placing the armoured Beast between the gunfire and my motorcycle. As we approached, my cell rang.

"Hit Girl! We are under attack – it's the Bratva – they've found us!" Vladimir called.

I could hear the shooting in the background. Automatic gunfire as well as the sharper sound of pistol fire. As we turned the final corner, I saw three SUVs. Two were black and were stopped in the middle of the street facing us. Between them and us was another SUV, this one red and it was riddled with bullet holes. Behind this SUV, I could see two men, one of whom was returning fire with an AKS-74U assault rifle.

The two black SUVs had six men, all armed and engaging the red SUV. I could see two bodies on the street. Vasily seemed to be doing well! Kick-Ass stopped Beast near to the Red SUV and jumped out with Jackal. I stopped behind Beast and dismounted. Kick-Ass had his G36K up and he was engaging the black SUVs. Jackal was doing the same with his P90. I ran forward, cradling a G36C and knelt down beside Vladimir.

"Thank God!" Vladimir called over the noise.

The gunfire from the Bratva reduced and then ceased.

"Hit Girl! Our fight is not with you – we just want the traitor, Vladimir!"

"Nyet!" I yelled.

"Not clever!" The same voice called back. "This is not your fight!"

"He's right, you know!" Shadow said from the Safehouse.

"Vladimir is an important ally, Shadow!" I replied.

"Worth a war?" Battle Guy asked.

I paused to think this through. I owed Vladimir – he had helped us, more than once. Hit Girl had a reputation to uphold. I could not go back on my word – it would get out – it always did!

"Vladimir – get to Beast, now!" I ordered. "Vasily – you too!"

As Vladimir moved, the gunfire started again. He made it to Beast, along with Vasily. Kick-Ass fired a smoke grenade from his rifle before jumping into Beast and accelerating away.

I kept pace, on the protected side of Beast and we headed for safety, to the west.

The next day

Friday

We had been able to get Vladimir and Vasily to safety, outside of Chicago.

The Bratva had chosen not to pursue us through the City, which had been a blessing. Neither of the Russians had been injured, which was also good. Nevertheless, the success had its consequences. There now existed a state of 'cold war' between Fusion and the Bratva. We could be attacked at any time – or nothing might happen; we had no way of knowing!

This all just added another layer of danger to what we did for this City. We would need to be on the lookout, constantly; which was no different from normal. Constant vigilance was the rule for us and would continue to be.

At least things could not get any worse!

Three and a half thousand miles to the east

Palermo, Sicily

Vito Genovese was an 'old-school' Mafioso bastard. If you went to Vito and told him about some person who was doing wrong, he would have that person killed and then he would have you killed for telling on that person. At least that was how the story went; he was ruthless and as a result, he had few adversaries.

Vito stared angrily across the desk, at his brother-in-law Joseph.

Joseph Valachi was as bad as, if not worse than Vito. Vito and Joseph were originally from two opposing families, but then Vito had married Joseph's sister, Anna Valachi and created a monster crime family that controlled Sicily and had done so for many decades. Both families were old and went back hundreds of years, with a trail of potentially thousands of murders.

In front of Vito was the cause of his anger.

The newspaper *La Sicilia* had the headline: '*D'Amico decapitato da vigilantes a Chicago*'.

"We cannot be seen to do nothing about this..." Vito spat. "This insult to our family!"

"I know that you were never happy letting your daughter marry that Frank D'Amico, but it was more convenience than anything else," Joseph said.

Joseph ran the day-to-day operations of the organisation. He was also the chief enforcer and he enforced with an iron hand, both in the name of his own family and that of Vito Genovese. Nobody dared to say no to Joseph Valachi and those that did...

"How could a jumped up group of vigilantes cause such damage over a period of less than six years! First Frank, then Angie and then their son Chris and now Ralph – what the hell is going on in those damn Cities!" Vito said, his temper flaring and his voice getting louder with each word.

Joseph paused, deep in thought for a minute, before replying.

"We could send in Anthony, from Detroit. We send him some men and start laying down the law – *our law!*" Joseph stated, his own temper flaring.

"Let me put some thought into this. Now back to our side of the world, back to Europe..." Vito went on.

A Mafioso storm of immense proportions was heading for New York and Chicago. Only no storm warning had gone out...

North Park Elementary School

Chicago, USA

This week had been hell on earth!

Being back at school, while fun, was torture. Every time that I glanced at Curtis, he was smirking! I was even getting strange looks his friends, Jake and Zack. Had Curtis told them about his kissing me? Yes, I had told Nikki and she had demanded to know what it felt like and how I had felt. She had also said that the kiss had explained the bruise on Curtis' cheek! I had felt really embarrassed about hitting Curtis; not that he had minded, apparently; he seemed to wear the bruise as a badge of honour.

My mind had also been reeling from the events of the weekend. I had killed half a dozen men and I had enjoyed it. I had felt alive; I had felt the adrenalin flowing through me. I had also slept well, in addition, which was more than a bit worrying! I had been expecting nightmares – the worst nightmares, but nothing. Was there something wrong with me?

"I'm a psychotic maniac!"

"No you're not," Curtis said, sitting down beside me.

I had not realised that I had spoken aloud. I needed to be careful. Talking like that in the school at lunchtime was not a very good idea.

"You two gonna start kissing?" Zach asked, sitting down across from me.

"Maybe I will!" I smirked.

"Bring it on, wild one!" Jake commented as he joined Zach.

"You gonna embarrass yourself again?" Nikki said as she sat down.

"I never embarrass myself!" I growled back.

The expression Nikki threw back at me said that she thought otherwise! I took a bite out of my sandwich and ignored them all.

That evening

I was also getting concerned with how Marcus would see me know that he knew I had killed – that I was to all intents and purposes, a mass murderer.

"Marcus, I know that you and Mindy often had fallings out, in her pre-teen years. I know that you have always detested her alter ego..." I started.

Marcus looked directly at me as he replied.

"You want to know what I think about having another daughter that kills people!"

"Kind of..."

"Megan, I love you as much as I love Mindy. I may not be entirely happy with the life that you have chosen and I was not happy with the life that Mindy had chosen for her," Marcus explained. "Okay, I did my best to dissuade Mindy, but she, like you, was too strong willed!"

I actually felt myself blushing.

"As I also tell Mindy – stay safe and remember that in most cases *'I don't want to know!'*" Marcus finished.

I smiled and gave Marcus a hug.

The following night Saturday

The fuckers ambushed us!

Wrong time, wrong place! The first bullets had pounded on Jackal and his motorcycle. He had skidded and crashed. I had skidded to a stop and dived for cover. The gunfire was intense. I returned fire with my G36C, giving time for Jackal to get into cover.

"Battle Guy, we've been ambushed!" I called. "Jackal check in!"

"I'm fine – except for some bruises and a bruised ego!" Jackal responded. "Got a feeling I'll be worse once Hit Girl sees what I've done to my Ducati!"

"Funny cunt!" I responded.

"Mist and Medic are five minutes out in Iron Hide!" Battle Guy responded.

"Have them go for Jackal first!" I ordered. "Jackal, set the self-destruct on your Ducati!"

..._...

The gunfire was getting heavy and my ammunition was getting low. Medic and Mist had been patrolling in another part of the City. Medic had complained about her daughter getting all the fun and had insisted on a night out. Shadow had been a little annoyed: "It's not all fun, mother!" I had good cover, Jackal had not; he was keeping down, behind his crashed motorcycle, and was returning limited fire from his P90. I was doing my best to stop anybody from getting near him.

"Ten seconds!" Mist called.

I heard Iron Hide before I saw it. Nevertheless, as it came around the corner, I was filled with awe at the sight of the huge truck as it sped down the street and the large reinforced bumper clipped the rear end of a Bratva SUV, flipping it around and crushing several gunmen as it slammed sideways into a building.

"Women drivers!" Jackal quipped.

Medic headed the truck directly towards Jackal and pulled up; shielding him, so he could jump up and yank open a rear door and climb in the back. I saw two Krysha moving to the rear of an SUV and removing something; I recognised the shape instantly.

"Medic! Get outta here – they have rockets!"

I heard the engine of Iron Hide roar as Medic floored the accelerator, sending the truck down the street and then turning right into cover. The Krysha looked mad at losing their prey, but instead aimed the rocket in my direction!

Not exactly, the first time that I had faced a rocket pointed directly at me!

I dived to my right, just as the rocket was fired.

It hit a small building behind me, dumping rubble into the street at the intersection and blocking my escape towards Iron Hide. I was cut off from the others and I was cut off from my Panigale. Last time, this fucking happened, I was shot!

Just as the Krysha started to move towards me, I heard the familiar sound of a high performance motorcycle engine.

***Chapter 154*: Petra**

Saturday Night

I turned to see that damn Petra, racing towards me. Her left arm was stretched out to the side; she was intending to scoop me onto her Honda as she rode past.

I had no choice but to accept. The only alternative was injury, death or worse!

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"Thanks!" I called as I swung up behind Petra and she accelerated away from the scene as bullets whizzed past. I also heard a large explosion as the explosive charges on Jackal's motorcycle exploded.

Petra kept up a high speed as she zigged and zagged around any traffic, in the thankfully almost clear streets of the, mostly sleeping, City.

I lost track of where we were heading and just had to trust Petra.

Finally, we stopped in some woods, near a river to the west of the City.

"Where the hell am I?" I whispered into my comms.

"White Eagle Woods South, Hit Girl!" Battle Guy responded.

"You get *carried away*, my love?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Just come and get me, asshole!" I growled into my comms.

The asshole was laughing; I would never live this down!

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We stood facing each other for what felt like hours, but was only minutes.

Finally, Petra broke the silence.

"I wish I could have arrived sooner, to help you."

"I had no need for your help, Petra!"

"Temper, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass said in my ear.

Asshole!

To tell you the truth I felt uncomfortable, us standing here not talking. It even felt ridiculous. Here we were, two vigilantes, in armoured combat suits, standing in a wood, in the dark, beside a powerful motorcycle!

"You fought well," Petra said.

"I always do," I replied.

I gazed at the Honda Fireblade.

"Mine's faster!" I commented.

"Speed isn't everything!" Petra replied.

Another long pause.

"What do you carry?" I asked, trying to make conversation.

"Beretta Px4 Storm Compact in nine-millimetre," Petra said, drawing on of her two identical pistols.

The bitch seemed to know her weapons.

"Glock 26 in .40-calibre," I said with a smirk as I drew one of my own.

"Size isn't everything!" Petra replied.

Jeez!

If they had been men, they would have been seeing who could pee the furthest! I pulled up, in Beast, and stopped alongside the Fireblade. I climbed down and walked over to the two girls.

"Enjoying yourself, ladies?" I asked.

"Petra, meet my sarcastic partner, Kick-Ass!" I growled, glaring at Kick-Ass.

"My lady!" Kick-Ass said, with a nod to Petra.

"Kick-Ass!" Petra replied, in her electronically enhanced voice that was eerily similar to that which Kick-Ass used.

The three of us stood there, no conversation for several minutes.

"So – you think you're a vigilante, do you?" Hit Girl asked.

"So, you want to fight?" Petra asked, without hesitation.

"Yeah, let's see what you can do!" Hit Girl responded enthusiastically.

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This should be good, I thought! I always enjoyed watching two girls fighting – it could be one hell of a turn on! Josh would be very annoyed to miss this. Then I had another thought.

"Battle Guy, you recording this?" I asked over a discrete channel.

"Hell yeah – in full HD!"

The two vigilantes were standing in front of Beast, which meant that Battle Guy could use the onboard High Definition cameras to record the ensuing fight. They started circling each other. Neither had a weapon out, but I knew that Hit Girl did not need weapons - she was a weapon! I had a distinct feeling that Petra could hold her own, too. I had seen her in action before, but not in a full-blown fight like this promised to be.

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Petra got in the first hit; on Hit Girl's left thigh with her right leg. Hit Girl absorbed the kick and dealt one of her own back, catching Petra on the left shoulder. Neither girl was making much effort at avoiding the other, neither were they hurting each other. They were just warming up and testing each other. I could hear crunching over the comms.

"You got fucking popcorn, asshole?" I asked Battle Guy.

"Hal just finished making some – this should be one hell of a show! Want some?"

"Funny!" I retorted with a chuckle.

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The strikes were now getting harder and faster. The girls were now actively trying to avoid each other's strikes. Things were speeding up as the girls span around the grassy ground. They seemed evenly matched, which was a surprise considering Hit Girl's obvious decade or more of experience as a vigilante.

The sound of carbon-fibre armour clashing against carbon-fibre armour, punctuated the fight. I hoped that Hit Girl was not going to take this 'friendly' fight too far! I knew how that girl hated to be beaten. Petra was a friend; not an enemy and I hoped that Hit Girl would remember that!

Oh, fuck!

Hit Girl just put Petra down hard on the ground. I saw my fiancée smile across at me, before she was toppled to the ground as her legs were swept out from under her.

Hey, cat fight!

Both girls were now rolling around the ground, each trying to get the better of the other.

"Fucking turn on or what?" Battle Guy asked.

"Disgusting twat!" Hal cut in. "Awesome though..."

I chuckled.

..._...

Currently, Hit Girl was pinned, but then I saw her right leg snake upwards and around the front of Petra's neck and Petra was thrown backwards. Then Hit Girl was on top and pinning the new vigilante to the ground. Damn, I never thought seeing Hit Girl fight could be so fucking hot! Petra was desperately trying to free herself, but Hit Girl obviously thought that she had her pinned completely – well almost...

Petra managed to get purchase on the ground and forced her body to one side; she was then able to throw Hit Girl off and onto the ground. Hit Girl's body language told me that she was really pissed and I sensed trouble.

Oh, crap!

Hit Girl drew her Katana swords, in one smooth motion, and her movement was mirrored a split second later by Petra. Hit Girl's upper lip curled and she flew forwards. The blades clashed as they fended off each other's advances.

This really was monumental!

I was also starting to get a little concerned that this could end up with one of them getting hurt – or worse!

The blades clashed and the vigilantes whirled around as they fought. I was pleased that the two of them had different colours to their armoured suits – it made it easier to follow who was who with the high speed movements. I was not sure, but I thought that both girls were not striking as hard as they were capable of striking. I knew that Hit Girl could fight harder than this – but it was good; it meant that neither was trying to kill the other!

Finally, the spinning vigilantes started to slow down – they must have been exhausted. Then two minutes later, they both stopped. Both were breathing heavily and I saw Hit Girl smirk.

"Now that was one hell of a work out!" Hit Girl exclaimed.

"Hell, yeah!" Petra replied.

"May I?" Hit Girl asked, looking at Petra's swords.

"Of course – may I?"

The two vigilantes exchanged swords and examined each other's blades. I watched as Hit Girl moved Petra's blades through the air, examining their movement and balance. Petra was doing the same with Hit Girl's blades. I had never seen Hit Girl let anybody touch her blades before, ever!

"Err, Hit Girl – should I wait for you two to make out, or..."

Two heads whipped around and I felt two pairs of eyes boring into me.

"Just kidding!"

Hit Girl turned back to Petra and they returned each other's swords, which were stowed on their backs.

"I look forward to working with you again!" Hit Girl said, holding out her gauntleted hand.

"Me too, Hit Girl," Petra replied taking the outstretched hand and shaking it, then she mounted her motorcycle, started the engine and accelerated away.

Safehouse F

When we got back to the Safehouse, we heard cheering from the Command Centre. I laughed when I saw what was displayed on the fifty-inch wall-mounted screen. It was 'the fight'. Josh and Chloe were cheering - Chloe for Hit Girl and Josh for Petra!

I saw Mindy start to blush.

"You recorded this?" Mindy asked turning to me.

"Seemed a good idea..." I saw Mindy's expression. "At the time... damn you were fucking hot!"

Mindy opened her mouth to respond, but then shut it again.

"I do look good, don't I?" Mindy conceded.

I had to admit that I had been very impressed by Petra that night.

Yeah, I could have flattened her! No doubt about it, but it would have been a challenge; she was good! The main question in my mind was: where did she learn her skills? I also had other questions, but that was the main one. I would tolerate her for now – admittedly I had no choice as she just seemed to turn up, without warning!

That night

West Ridge

I was in my pyjamas and ready for bed when I heard a gentle knock on the door.

I looked up at the small screen that showed an image of the area in front of the front door. What the hell? I opened the door.

"What are you doing here?"

"I need to talk to you," Megan said, coming in.

I shut the door and followed Megan into the living room, where she sat down. I sensed that something was wrong. Dave appeared, saw Megan and frowned. I just shook my head and Dave took the hint and headed upstairs with a curious Sophia.

..._...

"You have my attention!"

"I spoke with Marcus, last night..."

"Oh – I see. You are worried about what he thinks about you, now that you have 'notches' on your belt?" I asked.

Megan scowled.

"I've been there, Megan," I said and sat down beside Megan and put my arm around the girl's shoulders. "Marcus hates what I do, he always has. Now his new daughter wants to follow the same path and has already killed people!"

"Will he hate me – he says he won't, but..."

"No, Marcus would never hate you Megan. Marcus loves me and I know that he loves you, too. He may not like what we do, but that will never change the way that he feels about either one of us."

Megan thought about this for a minute before responding.

"Am I an abomination?"

"Where the hell did you get that word from?"

"Heard it – looked it up... Am I damaged? Am I psychotic? What is wrong with me?"

"Wow there, girl! Where the hell did all that come from?" I asked. I was a little shocked by what was coming out of Megan's mouth – which was a fairly normal state of affairs, but this was different.

"Last weekend... The killing in the warehouse... *I enjoyed it!*" Megan said, looking horrified. "Tell me *that's* normal, for fuck's sake!"

"For *us* – it's normal. For other people – not so much!" I replied. "You are special young girl, Megan. Shit things happened to your Mom and you; but you didn't let it dictate your life – you just got on with it. Admittedly vandalising cars might not have been the best choice, but you could have made a worse decision."

"True," Megan acknowledged.

"You have a few crap years ahead of you; I'm not going to lie to you about that."

"Whatya mean?"

"Puberty sucks big time, all on its own – especially for a girl. Not to mention trying to be a vigilante at the same time! Puberty hit me later than most; I was almost thirteen. It also made me more of a bitch than I already was! Ask Dave; I actually bit him once!" I said, chuckling. "I think he still has a scar on his arm."

Megan looked a little shocked at my mention of biting Dave.

"Puberty does crap things with your mind. I had Dave to help me, as Marcus was beyond useless! You have your Mom, me, Chloe and even Curtis!"

Megan glared when I mentioned Curtis, but she also went a little pink at the sound of his name.

"So I'm normal for who I am?" Megan asked.

"Yeah... That just about sums it up. Now, tell me about Curtis!"

Megan said nothing, but just went a nice shade of pink.

"I see – it's like that is it!"

"No!"

"He kissed you again, yet?"

"No!"

"You want him to kiss you again?"

"N – Yes!" Megan admitted, blushing red now.

"Try kissing him back, instead of slapping him," I suggested with an evil smirk.

"Funny bitch!"

..._...

My cell rang – it was Marcus.

"You got mini-Mindy over there?" Marcus asked with a chuckle.

"You are so not funny, old man!" I growled. "Yes, *Megan* is here – she needed to talk with her big sister!"

"You keeping her for the night then, big sister?"

"You staying here, tonight?" I asked Megan, who nodded enthusiastically.

"Looks like it!"

"Okay! Night Mindy!"

"Night Marcus!"

***Chapter 155*: Erika**

The following morning Sunday

West Ridge

Dave had still been awake by the time I had been able to persuade Megan to get to bed in the spare room. I had explained how she felt and what I had told her.

"She's lucky to have somebody like you to talk to," Dave had commented.

"Yeah – kind of surprises me, sometimes; I'm supposed to be 'Hit Girl' not 'Agony Aunt Girl!'"

Dave and I were in the kitchen when Josh came downstairs, with Chloe behind him.

"Why did I just see Megan coming out of the bathroom?" Josh asked.

"She stayed here, last night – she needed to talk to Mindy about something," Dave said with a meaningful expression.

"Oh – I see!" Josh replied, catching on quickly.

A few minutes later a smiling Megan appeared.

"Morning world!"

"Morning Megan," Josh said politely.

"Morning runt!" Chloe said with a smirk.

"Chloe – be nice!" I suggested.

"Megan can take it – she's a hardened bitch," Chloe replied with an evil grin. "Unless Curtis kisses her; then she melts!"

"Megan! Put that knife down!" I called. "Chloe has enough wounds for now."

"Another fun day at 'The West Ridge Home for Nut Jobs!'" Dave quipped with a grin.

That afternoon

Erika came over and we met two of her friends, Hailee and Toni.

Hailee was a stunning brunette about the same height as Mindy. Her eyes were an attractive hazel colour, which went well with her long hair. She was slim and seemed, well, a little shy. While Toni was, quite literally, all over Erika and could not stop talking! In contrast, Hailee was very quiet and seemed to keep to herself. She also, apparently, hated talk about motorcycles, which Toni and Erika enjoyed immensely. Toni rode a powerful Kawasaki motorcycle and enjoyed telling stories about her and Erika on their motorcycles.

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During the conversation, Josh jokingly suggested that Toni enjoyed cuddling up with Erika. Josh had expected his comment to generate a sarcastic response, but instead he was rather shocked by Erika's reply.

"She's my girlfriend," Erika said brazenly.

Josh looked confused, then his eyes went wide and he coloured slightly.

"You mean..." Josh started.

"Yes, Joshua; we are in a relationship," Erika expanded, reading his expression.

"You mean you are the, um, L-word?" Josh asked, blushing slightly.

"I assume you mean: 'lesbian', Josh?" Toni enquired with a laugh.

Josh was really blushing now!

"I'm actually bi – but currently I'm with Toni," Erika explained.

"Josh, close your mouth!" Mindy suggested.

"Wouldn't mind a bit of *that* action!" Josh commented, before yelling out as Chloe hit him hard. "I just meant that I wanted to see what two girls would, err, well, do together..."

"Time to leave, Joshua, before your face sets fire to something!" Chloe grinned and dragged Josh upstairs.

It was actually quite funny; Mindy seemed a little uncomfortable with the revelation, too and she actually glowered at me for smirking!

Two Days Later
Wednesday

Lake View High School

"Ah, Miss Bennett; how is your arm?"

"Very good, thank you, Mr Swanson."

"Good, good. Sorry I couldn't make the party last week. I was out of town, but I heard it was entertaining!"

"It was good, very good."

"Chloe!" A voice called – it was Avery, with Riley coming along behind.

"Be good, Miss Bennett!"

"I always am!"

Mr Swanson walked off, with a sarcastic laugh!

That Weekend
Saturday

Safehouse D

"What the hell have you done to the place?"

"Just preparing it for your next training session, young Wildcat!"

"I don't like the look of this!" Curtis moaned.

The warehouse was no longer clear, like it usually was. The small building inside the warehouse, that housed the armoury and bunks, was surrounded with piles of what could only be described as 'junk' that stretched almost to the walls of the warehouse! Titan was parked over by the main door, alongside Iron Hide. In front of me, I had Curtis, Megan, Chloe, Joshua and Erika. Standing beside me, was Dave and sniffing around the warehouse, was Sophia. We were all in our combat suits, but holding our masks.

Chloe had on her brand new combat suit, which was to the same design, but had heavier armour without an increase in weight.

"Thank you, guys – you've done well!" I said to Tony Morgan, Jack Bay and Isaac Swanson.

"It was fun!" Jack said, smiling, while Tony and Isaac nodded.

"Well, let's see what these boys and girls think of your little mess!" I grinned back.

"Now – you guys and girls know how to fight with knives, swords and guns," Dave started.

They all nodded.

"So, what do you do when you have no weapons – or when those that you have, are damaged or otherwise unusable?" Dave continued. "After Shadow's little escapade with Ralph D'Amico, she went through an intensive debrief with Mindy and I. Shadow did *not* enjoy herself!"

I glanced at Chloe, who looked a little unhappy. Yes, we had taken her through every second of her movements, from arrival, to being captured.

"Shadow lost the use of her pistol, through no fault of her own. The top of her spare magazine had been dented, which meant that the top round could not be stripped and moved into the chamber. That is an extreme, but you will all learn to fight with what you find around you. Hence, all this shit that you see stacked around the Safehouse," Dave finished.

"Now – you may find some surprises, as you wander around. Some of our friends are here to help today and they will try to interfere – *do not hurt them!* Now – all of you, remove all your weapons and place them in the armoury," I directed. "Then get your masks on."

"What!" Chloe exclaimed.

"Pistols, knives – armoury – now!"

Chloe was *not* happy; but she complied anyway, as did the others. Once Dave and I had checked each of them for weapons, we pulled on our masks.

"Okay, you cunts, let's see what you can do now!" I growled.

"You love that phrase, don't you?" Kick-Ass laughed.

"Hell, yeah!" I acknowledged as I killed the main lights, leaving only small lights that were scattered around the warehouse.

Safehouse D: Trojan

I did not like the look of this.

I also knew what Mindy was capable of when it came to training; Mindy's idea of training was only marginally safer than actual combat! I also knew that Mindy would do her best to keep us safe, although she generally saw small wounds as a joke.

It was dark with small patches of light. I could hear movement, scuffling. I had no weapons, except for my suit and my hands. I searched around me for anything that I could use as a weapon. The piles of rubbish and junk had all sorts of miscellaneous items sticking out. I saw a metal clothes pole and seized it. It was about three feet long and could prove useful.

What the hell?

I saw something move and then a shape came towards me. The shape had a baton, which was now moving towards my head. I intercepted the baton with my clothes pole, pushed back, and heard a familiar laugh.

"Brad?" I asked the shape. Then I felt a sharp pain as the baton struck my left arm.

"Don't lower your guard, Trojan!" Brad advised as he raised the baton to strike me again.

Instead, I blocked and then twisted the baton out of Brad's hands. I swiftly put my friend down and hog-tied him with some rope I found close by me. Ignoring the words obviously learnt from Megan, which poured out of his mouth, I moved on.

Safehouse D: Wildcat

I was *not* scared – I could overcome anything Hit Girl could throw at me!

First thing – I needed a weapon. I started rooting through the crap scattered around me, looking for something useful. There was nothing visible, so I moved through the semi-darkness, hunting.

Suddenly, I heard a crack and I felt something hit my chest; I was pushed backwards by the impact. Fuck it hurt! Then again a few inches from the previous impact! I looked around, almost in a panic and saw a – fuck me, a Fusion shield. I seized it up and heard the impacts of two objects on the shield.

It had to be Hit Girl – only she would fire on me without warning!

Safehouse F

"You got her, good!" I announced.

"Thanks, Battle Guy – I enjoyed that!" Lynx announced with a laugh.

"I can't believe that you would shoot your own daughter!"

"It's only a rubber bullet and her suit's armoured – she's been a bitch lately!"

"My turn!" Medic announced from Safehouse D.

"This should be good!" Hawk announced from beside me.

Safehouse D

I saw my daughter edging through the darkness.

She seemed to be armed, with a sword shaped piece of steel. Shadow was being very careful with her movements and moving like her name. I lay in ambush, armed with a five-foot wooden bō-staff – without blades. Chloe had no idea that I was familiar with that weapon. I had not even let on to Mindy.

Time to see what my new combat suit could do.

Safehouse D: Shadow

Something was up.

This smelt like an ambush. I had been in enough of the fuckers – I had learnt to sniff them out. I came to what passed as a T-junction. The bad feeling was getting worse. At least I was armed; it was only a three-foot long flat piece of steel, but it would do. I hefted it in my right hand, ready for an attack.

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The attack came from nowhere, as I expected. Whoever it was, they were skilled and wore an armoured suit. The wooden bō-staff swept down and I was barely fast enough to block it before it hit me. I rolled and brought my makeshift sword around and swiped at the attacker's legs.

The attacker jumped up and drove one end of the bō-staff into my chest, shoving me backwards. I felt all my breath knocked out of me and gasped for air.

"Shadow!"

It was Jackal appearing from my left. He helped me to my feet and then stood beside me facing the unknown, masked attacker.

Safehouse D: Hit Girl

Fuck me!

The old girl could move and since when, could she use a goddamn bō-staff; that family was full of fucking surprises! She was doing well, so far. She had flattened her daughter and was now facing off against both Shadow and Jackal.

I was standing on a pile of scrap, a few yards away, hidden in the darkness. I stayed there watching the drama unfolding in front of me. Cathy was spinning the bō-staff as if she was born to it. Jackal had a pair of metal poles and Shadow a sword shaped piece of metal. Both were struggling to get past the woman in her early forties, who fought back hard and had laid each kid out at least twice!

I actually winced, each time either Shadow or Jackal received a crack from the bō-Staff. It was a hard hit – maybe Cathy was getting her own back for something!

Safehouse F

"That woman has a serious attitude – remind me never to get on the wrong side of Dr Bennett!" Battle Guy announced.

"Tell me about it – kind of explains where Shadow gets it from!" Hawk admitted.

"Oh! That must have hurt!"

Safehouse D: Kick-Ass

Shadow and Jackal both crashed to the ground – again!

This time, though, they stayed there, grimacing with pain. Medic was a serious badass with that bō-staff! Cam and I had shot rubber bullets at Wildcat, which had just seemed to piss her off. Now, I was looking for Mist.

Others were going after Wildcat!

Safehouse D: Wildcat

I was ambushed!

Fuckers!

I am gonna damn well kill 'em all!

I had been kicked to the ground by what looked like a black-clad ninja. I had never seen the outfit before, so I had absolutely no idea who it was that had attacked me. They were good though. I struck out with the shield, catching the attacker in the stomach; I then followed this up with a kick between the legs. It was a boy!

The boy was not happy and proceeded to attack me with a pair of what looked to be two-foot Escrima sticks. I used the shield to defend myself. One stick caught me on the right upper arm and it stung. Another stick caught me on my left thigh. I managed to kick out and cause the boy to cry out as I hit his right thigh hard, but he responded by using both Escrima sticks together to flip me backwards by levering both sticks under my left thigh.

I landed hard enough to knock the breath out of my lungs. My attacker rapidly vanished into the darkness, leaving me alone.

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"Get up little girl – it's my turn!" Growled a familiar voice, as I saw a non-bladed bō-staff slide across the floor and stop three feet away. "Do you feel lucky, little girl? Do you think you can reach your weapon, before I put you down – permanently?"

Fucking bitch – I'll damn well put *her* down permanently! I had to make this movement work, or I was dead. That jumped up purple bitch, she needed to be put in her place!

I saw Hit Girl smirk, as I made my move.

Safehouse F

I had zoomed in on Wildcat and I had noticed something – I sat up straight and turned to Hawk.

"The little bitch found one!" I said. "Hit Girl is *not* going to be happy!"

"Damn! This is going to be awesome – I've not seen Hit Girl go ballistic since she kicked the shit out of *me*!" Hawk admitted.

Safehouse D: Kick-Ass

Ow!

My ear was hurting.

Hit Girl was using every foul word that she could muster. Apparently, Wildcat had just turned the tables on her. Anyway, I was still searching for the illusive Mist.

I ignored Hit Girl's foul-mouthed rant and headed deeper into the darkened warehouse.

Safehouse D: Hit Girl

I was raging!

That conniving little bitch had the nerve to fucking shoot me; with my own rubber fucking bullets! Okay, I had placed some real weapons in the scrap piles of junk that were scattered around the warehouse. Wildcat had obviously found the Glock 26 and stuck the pistol into her otherwise empty holster, earlier. I had not noticed the pistol sticking out of her holster.

Rather than just diving for the bō-staff, she had drawn the pistol and fired half a dozen rounds into my chest armour. Only then, did she dive forward, grab up the bō-staff and then sweep my feet out from under me!

I was going to kill the scrawny little fucker!

Then I heard Kick-Ass swear, almost as foul as I just had.

Safehouse D: Mist

Kick-Ass was flat on his back and I had his batons, in my left hand and his Glock 17 in my right hand and aimed at his head.

He was not carrying his Ko-Wakizashi swords today, so now he was unarmed. I had been able to come up beside him and kick him down before he had had a chance to react. I was certain that if this had been real, I would be flat on my back, but I enjoyed it while it lasted.

Kick-Ass moved, so I prodded him with his batons to remind him who was boss!

Safehouse D

The lights came on in the Safehouse.

"Okay, assholes! Debrief in three hours – Fort Fusion!"

***Chapter 156*: Splinter**

Three hours later
Saturday

Safehouse F

The three hours had given us all time to get out of our combat suits and grab a shower.

On the dot, we all gathered in the briefing room. I could see from some of the expressions that some people were not happy with the afternoon's results. Abby, Kim and Cathy passed around some food and drinks for everybody, before we began.

"Okay – that was a first," I commented glaring at Megan, who sat with Curtis, Brad, Cam and Tommy. She smirked back. "Now I know that some of you have questions and yes, I played a few dirty tricks – but hey, that's combat!"

…_…

"Let's start with Trojan!" Dave said, pointing to a screen that showed Trojan being attacked by Brad.

Brad was older and bigger than Curtis was, but he did well. Curtis, however was better trained and soon got the better of his attacker.

"Why did you tie Brad up?" Dave asked Curtis.

"Or has Megan got something to look forward to?" Chloe grinned, ignoring the not so friendly looks her comment had prompted from Curtis and Megan.

"So the asshole couldn't ambush me later on," Curtis said reasonably.

"Good plan – it hurt though!" Brad acknowledged, with a smirk at Curtis.

"We'll skip over the little bitch and move on to Shadow and her partner, Jackal!" I said, sending a scowl towards Megan who was smirking at me.

"You did well, Chloe," Dave said, as we watched her progress, right up to the point where she was struck in the chest. I watched Chloe absentmindedly rub her chest, which I understood was more than a little bruised! "To that point!"

"Yeah, who was that person with the goddamn bō-staff? I've never seen that combat suit before, nor do I know anybody who can wield a bō-staff like that," Chloe exclaimed, then looked at me. "Except for you, of course – oh mighty leader!"

I laughed.

"Thank you Chloe for that vote of confidence. Now, I *know* who was wearing that combat suit, but I have to admit that I was just as surprised as you, Chloe!" I admitted. "Care to explain yourself – Medic!"

Every head turned to stare at Doctor Cathy Bennett, sitting near the back of the room. I was pleased to see that Cathy actually blushed.

"That was *Mom* in that combat suit!" Chloe exclaimed incredulously.

"Awesome, Aunt Cathy!" Curtis cut in.

"When I ordered your replacement suit, Chloe, your mother asked for one and I've learnt *not* to argue with Doctor Cathy Bennett!"

"Mindy, Chloe – I used the Martial Arts to keep fit at Annapolis and while there, I learnt to use several different weapons; which included the bō-staff," Cathy admitted, still blushing slightly. "Besides, it was fun wiping the floor with Shadow and Jackal!"

"Great fun!" Josh said sardonically.

"You were awesome, Mom!" Chloe admitted.

"High praise from Shadow," Cathy said, smiling at her daughter.

"You were good, very good, Cathy – well done!" I said and received a nod from Cathy as thanks. "Now, Dave – want to mention Mist?"

"Funny bitch!" Dave growled. "Okay, Mist, you did very well, letting me come to you and then putting me down and seizing my weapons. Well done, Erika!"

Erika blushed wildly, as she sat next to Paige, Kim and Cathy.

"There is always an advantage to being able to choose your own field of battle. That can give you every advantage; however waiting can allow the enemy to build their forces or to get themselves acclimatized. Always a difficult decision to make," Dave explained before turning to me. "Now what about the youngest person here, eh, Mindy?"

I glowered at Dave, before staring at Megan.

..._...

"Wildcat!"

"Yes!" Megan replied defiantly.

"You had a varied afternoon. You found one of the hidden pistols – well done! I will have to return the privilege of you shooting me – *six fucking times!*" I growled and Megan grinned while everybody else laughed. "

"Paige would you like to let your wayward daughter into a little secret?" Dave prompted.

"Why not!" Paige said and laughed at Megan's curious expression. "It was I, dear daughter that shot you the first couple of times – after that it was Dave and Cameron."

"You'd shoot your own daughter?" Megan asked sounding very put out.

"Well, you have been more of a bitch than usual, the past week!" Paige chuckled and Megan looked a little shocked as everybody had a good laugh.

"I have a question!" Megan asked, as the laughter died down.

"Yes, little sister!" I growled.

"Who attacked me?" Megan demanded.

I could not help laughing.

"Would the mystery black ninja please show themselves," Dave asked, ignoring me.

Everybody looked around the room in expectation. Then young Tommy Morgan stood up, blushing shyly.

"You!" Megan exclaimed standing up astonished. Her expression was mirrored by many in the room.

"I – I learnt some things while I was in captivity. The third group of people I was with; they made me fight against other boys – for entertainment – I had no choice but to learn to fight. Mindy has been helping me build on those skills – in secret. Sorry Megan, you fought well!" Tommy said, lapsing into an embarrassed silence.

"I'm sorry for squishing your balls!" Megan announced, slightly embarrassed.

"They're fine – I checked!" Tommy replied, grinning.

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Tommy Morgan had approached me a few months previously, at the end of January.

I had been alone at what was then Safehouse A.

Safehouse A
January 29th

At that moment, I had no idea that within a few days, I would be burning the place to the ground.

I was in the armoury when I heard a tone chime, as the side door opened. Being alone, I grabbed a pistol and a magazine, before heading out of the armoury.

"Morning, Mindy!"

"Tommy – what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at school?"

"Yes – I should be at school, but I needed to talk to you."

The boy looked uncomfortable.

"Briefing Room," I suggested.

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Once we were sitting down, Tommy started to talk.

"I owe you everything, Mindy –"

"No you don't," I interrupted.

"If you had not found me and rescued me – then I hate to think about what I would be doing right now. They used to make me fight, you know – I still have the wounds..."

"Why are you telling me this, Tommy?" I asked with concern.

"I want to help, but I know my parents would never let me. I'm also way too young, but I learnt to look after myself, during my years of captivity and like I said – I owe you and your team, Mindy. I want you to train me – I want you to help me put my past life behind me."

I shook my head.

"I don't like the idea of hiding things from your parents, Tommy. I will only train you, if your parents know. I'm happy to keep the training secret from everybody else, though – except for Dave, of course."

Tommy thought about that for a minute before replying.

"Thank you, Mindy."

Safehouse F

Dave and I had trained the boy – not that he had needed very much training.

He had picked up many good skills; he had also learnt to fight dirty, which I had found out to my cost during sparring. Tommy was strong for his age and had kept himself healthy during his captivity. I had also seen his wounds, which on an eleven-year-old boy were quite shocking. However, Tommy seemed proud of his wounds, which varied from small burns to badly healed welts on his chest, stomach and back. I had recognised the stab and slash wounds, having inflicted many myself on the enemy. He also proved to be very intelligent.

At the same time as I had obtained the new combat suits for Shadow and Medic, I had obtained a suit for Tommy.

The suit was black from head to toe and was made from a synthetic carbon-fibre material that was ultra-flexible, but provided padding and stab/slash protection. The feet were clad in custom boots with soft and flexible protected soles. The hands were enclosed in gloves that were slim and followed the contours of the hand, perfectly. His chest and back were protected with Type II armour, which was removable.

The mask was full face and covered the entire head. Voice altering technology was embedded into the mask as well. Around the waist was a utility belt that held some of the boy's weapons and equipment. In this case, a Walther P99C pistol on his right hip, spare magazines, his communications and four black titanium, throwing knives. On his back, he

carried a pair of black, tactical machetes with eighteen-inch blades.

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Returning to the present day.

"I suppose now is as good a time as any, to introduce our new vigilante. Fusion, please welcome: Splinter!" I announced to the room.

"Fucking cool!" Megan said, banging Tommy on the back.

There was a round of applause and calls of congratulations to Tommy. Overall, it had been a good day.

The following day Sunday

West Ridge

Things changed in quite a major way that morning.

Josh and Chloe had gone to a movie and Dave was out with Sophia. I was on the mat with Tommy. Now his training was out in the open, it made life a lot easier! For the past few months, I had had to schedule Tommy's training to when the house was empty. No more secrecy was required, thankfully.

"Hey – not damn well fair!" Tommy complained as I dropped him onto the mat.

"You're not the only one who knows how to fight dirty, kid! I was fighting dirty before you learnt to walk!"

"I fight to win, otherwise what's the point?"

"Not bad, kid!"

I pulled Tommy back up and allowed him to start another attack. I had challenged the kid to come up with something new, each week. So far, he had not tricked me, as I had seen an awful lot in my decade or more as Hit Girl. Some of his moves would out fox Chloe and Josh, but probably not Dave.

Tommy had learnt to use the human body; he had learnt the hard way where the pressure points were in the body. When possible he would target these points and relatively easily incapacitate a larger opponent. As Megan had done with him, Tommy was not afraid to target the more delicate parts of the human body – anything that gave him the edge. Men hated certain parts being kicked and women had parts that they hated to be kicked, too.

Both Tommy and I had learnt to fight where anything went – there had been no rules! I felt sorry for him, being forced into that kind of life – needing to fight to survive. I had personal experience of being forced to fight for my life and I had not enjoyed it in my early years. Finally, after another hour of fighting off the brat from hell, I decided I needed food.

"Hungry?" I asked.

"Yeah!"

We got ourselves cleaned up and headed out in the SUV.

..._...

I drove down North Kedzie Avenue, chatting with Tommy. Just as we were approaching North Lincoln Avenue where we would turn left, I heard sirens – which was nothing out of the ordinary in Chicago, only I also heard gunfire. Coming up the avenue were a couple of CPD cars, which appeared to be pursuing a green, Jeep SUV, which was swerving all over the damn avenue.

"Oh fuck!" I yelled as the oncoming SUV strayed over onto our side of the avenue.

The other side of the Avenue was filled with the two CPD cars. I had nowhere else to go, then the car in front of me slammed on its damn brakes and skidded to a halt; I jerked the wheel to the right in an attempt to go around the

stopped car. Something went wrong, a tyre dug in, and I felt the three and a quarter tonne Land Rover LR4 start to flip over.

"Hold on!" I yelled, as the world turned upside down.

The roof of the LR4 hit the blacktop and the windshield cracked. It may sound stupid, but everything seemed to slow down and there was very little sound. I saw the lights of the CPD cars as we rolled in front of them. One seemed to skid in an attempt to avoid us, but then its reinforced bumper hit us hard. The LR4 performed another roll; my head hit something hard and the last thing that I remembered was the sight of the dark green water of the Chicago River through the windshield, as I sank into blackness.

***Chapter 157*: Touch and Go**

Sunday Afternoon

I heard the call over the radio.

I had only been a few miles down North Lincoln Avenue, on my way home, when I heard that gunshots had been reported. I hit the lights and siren, and then floored it. I didn't like the sound of gunfire this close to home; Mindy *had* to be involved somewhere!

I reached the scene quickly and saw a total mess on North Kedzie Avenue. There was a green SUV, buried in a parked car. I saw an ambulance cutting through the traffic and then I saw the back end of a Police Car half way down the riverbank. The bonnet and front doors were submerged, the roof-mounted lights were still flashing.

I pulled up on the bridge over the Chicago River, got out, and jogged over to the scene. For now, it looked like I would be the Senior Officer on the scene. Then my heart literally skipped a beat as I saw the backend of a Land Rover LR4, which looked suspiciously familiar, sticking out of the water. I looked more closely at the licence tag and felt sick to my stomach.

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"Sergeant!" I yelled.

"Lieutenant!" The Sergeant called, jogging over.

"That Land Rover – the driver?"

"She's down there, Lieutenant – doesn't look good. A boy pulled her out, she wasn't breathing."

"Thanks, Sergeant," I said and felt numb inside.

I could see the paramedics gathered on the riverbank, gathered around somebody. I saw legs encased in wet jogging pants. Then I saw a face. Tommy's face was wet with both the river and streams of tears.

I felt cold.

Then I felt a hand in mine. I opened my eyes and tried to focus on the shadow beside me. The shadow was tall and muscular. It had to be –

"How you feeling, baby doll?"

My sight cleared and I focused on –

"Daddy?"

"I'm here, child. I'm always here when my little girl is hurt."

Then I froze.

"Where the hell am I?" I cried out, almost panicking. "You're dead!"

"Nothing gets past you, Mindy!"

"Am – I – am I – dead?"

"No, child – it's not your time – not for a long time..."

My vision went hazy and so did my mind – then everything went black.

"I was so scared. We were upside down and we slid into the river – the water was so cold."

"You're safe now."

"The Land Rover righted itself and started to sink. We were underwater – Mindy wasn't moving, I fought with my seatbelt buckle and it felt like forever before it released. Then I struggled with Mindy's and managed to release hers too. She wasn't breathing – I thought she was dead – I pushed open her door and dragged her out. A cop helped me drag her out of the water – it was horrible."

"You did well, Tommy – you may very well have saved her life."

"Only if she survives – she has to survive!" Tommy declared.

"She will, Tommy, she's survived a hell of a lot worse!" I replied as the paramedics placed my unconscious daughter into the ambulance.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"Where is she?" Dave demanded as he rushed up the corridor.

"Room 32 – I'm sorry Dave, it is still touch and go," I said, feeling completely empty inside. Mindy was like a daughter to me.

I followed Dave down to Room 32. It was not a pretty sight. Mindy was naked, with her modesty protected only by a white sheet. Wires ran from under the sheet to electronic devices beside her bed. A tube was down her throat and connected to another plastic tube that led to another machine. Her head had a large pad taped to one side and there were arterial lines in her arm.

I saw Dave hesitate and then stop, only feet from his fiancée.

Dave had seen Mindy beaten almost to a pulp, bleeding from numerous bullet wounds and covered in bruises. He had even seen her shot by a crossbow bolt, and then crash her motorcycle! However, this – I had seen so many people visit loved ones in that room and other rooms just like it. Nevertheless, this was the first time I had known both the person in the bed *and* the person visiting.

I could not have felt any worse, if it had been Chloe in that bed.

Two hours later

I felt so damned helpless.

Seeing Mindy just lying there – it was unbearable. I had sat staring at the most important person in my life for the past two hours. Mindy's vitals had picked up about half an hour or so ago and the tube had been removed from her throat. Cathy kept appearing to check on me, but I could tell that she was struggling with it too. Cathy was a senior doctor here and she had ensured that Mindy had received the best of everything. I felt somebody sit down in the chair beside me and cuddle in to the side of me. It was Chloe.

"I'm so sorry, Dave."

Chloe had tears running down her face. Looking at Chloe, I had a thought just then and laughed. Chloe looked up at me, appalled that I could laugh at a time like this.

"Considering what else has happened to her – it's kind of funny that Mindy ends up in hospital after something as mundane as a car crash!" I explained weakly.

Chloe actually grinned a little.

"It is rather nuts!" She agreed.

Four hours later

I awoke again.

This time I was alone – or at least I thought I was. I could not hear any voices, just the sound of machines. I hoped that I was really awake this time. I looked around me – I was in a hospital bed, my mouth and throat were dry. I felt around with my hands; I was naked and there were tubes in my arm and wires on my chest. My head hurt, too.

The room was dark, but I could make out two shapes sitting beside the bed. I recognised the larger shape as Dave and then realised that the smaller shape was Chloe. They were both fast asleep, with Chloe cuddling into Dave.

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A shadow moved into the doorway.

"So, young lady, you've decided to wake up!" Cathy announced.

"Thought it was about time," I croaked. Cathy helped me to sip some water from a glass with a straw.

"Sips – no gulps!"

How long have they been here?" I asked, indicating Dave and Chloe.

"Dave, about six hours; Chloe, about four hours. Marcus was here for a couple of hours, but he had to leave. You scared us Mindy."

"What happened?" I asked. I couldn't remember anything at all after leaving the house.

..._...

"You drove the goddamn Land Rover into the goddamn river!" Another voice announced. "You really need to learn to damn well drive – people like you give women drivers a bad name!"

Cathy turned and I saw Paige and Megan. I tried not to laugh at Megan, but failed and I saw a look of panic on her face.

"I'm okay, Megan," I croaked to reassure her.

"I heard swearing. That must mean either Megan's here or Mindy's awake!" Dave said, waking up and coming over to me smiling broadly.

"Funny cunt!" Megan said for us both, with a smirk in my direction.

Chloe woke up, too and looked very pleased to see that I was awake.

"Right – too many people – Mindy needs her rest!" Dr Cathy Bennett announced, wiping away a tear.

The next day
Monday

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

The boy looked nervous.

"I think we're even now – don't you?" I suggested with a grin. "You don't owe me anything."

"I suppose so," Tommy said, blushing.

"I understand from Marcus that you gave me the 'kiss of life'," I said and the boy blushed even more.

"Somebody had to do it," Tommy said smiling.

"Remember – she's mine!" Dave quipped with a smile. "All future kissing is done by me!"

I glared at Dave.

"Oh, I brought you some fresh clothes – considering you trashed the ones you were wearing," Dave said innocently. "I brought the purple bra and knickers."

I felt *myself* blushing now and Tommy laughed to cover his own embarrassment.

Marcus had appeared earlier that morning and we had spent half an hour talking. He had explained what had occurred at the scene. Apparently, the two escaping gunmen were dead – killed when they crashed their SUV as they had tried to avoid me. I was actually pleased – saved me from having to go after the bastards. Dave had then appeared with Tommy, who was desperate to see how I was.

I grinned at Tommy. "He only brought me those, 'cause he likes to remove them rather quickly – he says they put him in the mood!" I teased and laughed at Tommy's expression of horror.

"I don't think you are ready for any *exertions*, Mindy," Cathy announced, sweeping into the room. "Definitely *not* that sort!"

"Okay – but can I at least *think* about what I am not allowed to do, even though I am not allowed to actually do it?" I asked facetiously.

"Knock yourself out – figuratively speaking of course!" Cathy replied, laughing.

Four days later
Friday

West Ridge

"You are staying in bed, my girl!" Marcus insisted as I started to complain. "At least until tomorrow."

"I'll make sure she stays in bed!" Megan announced, grinning at Mindy.

"Okay, I'll be a perfect little angel," Mindy said sweetly.

"Bullshit!" Marcus said as he headed out of the room.

Mindy was *not* a good patient.

She even managed to push Megan to her limit. I tried to explain to Megan, who was doing as much as she possibly could for Mindy that Mindy hated being stuck in one place. I also told Megan that Mindy really did appreciate her help, even if the moody bitch refused to admit it!

Just about everybody, appeared to check on Mindy during the day. Some even brought flowers! Mindy did not approve of flowers all that much – too girly she said. I reminded her with a few carefully phrased, whispered comments, which made her blush furiously, that she was in fact a girl!

"What you whispering to Mindy?" Megan asked, curiously.

"Never you mind, little one!" Mindy spluttered trying to hide her embarrassment at my comments.

Megan just scowled.

The following afternoon
Saturday

West Ridge

Thank fuck for that!

Those assholes allowed me out of bed, at long bloody last! I still had a small gauze pad, taped to the left of my forehead but otherwise I was healed – according to Dr Bennett. According to me, I had been fine for the past few days!

I was annoyed that I had totalled the LR4, but very glad that neither Tommy, nor I, had any lasting damage. In fact, I owed that kid a lot – first time I'd been kissed by an eleven year-old too! Well, he must have been a good kisser, as he did get me breathing again!

Marcus had been over to tell me about his new job. He was now the head of the new Organised Crime Taskforce. He would be based at District 21, along with Voight and he would be targeting the Russian Mafia and other organisations like them. Marcus was really looking forward to this new job and I wished him well with it.

That evening

Safehouse F

I had a fucking mutiny on my hands.

"You are *not* going out Mindy Macready!" Dave insisted. "You shouldn't even *be* here!"

"Dave – for your own safety – stay out of my way – I am getting my combat suit on!"

Next thing I knew, Dave had me in a bear hug and Chloe wrapped duct tape around my ankles and wrists. I was mad and I made Tommy blush with my comments.

"Are you going to be quiet or do I need to tape that sewer you call a mouth?" Megan asked sweetly, holding up a roll of purple duct tape.

I scowled at the little girl who never flinched. She just grinned at me and waved the roll of duct tape. Dave deposited me in the Command Centre and gave me a very nice kiss! On the way out the door, Megan patted me on the head.

"Be good, young lady."

***Chapter 158*: The Mutinous Fusion**

The same evening
Saturday

Safehouse F

Okay, I was mad at them for tying me up.

Nevertheless, in a weird way, I kinda liked it! Marty cut me loose after the team had left in Iron Hide. However, he insisted that I had better behave and pointed to the Taser on the desk beside him. I glowered at him, but laughed.

I knew why they did it and I actually felt a little humbled by it. They all cared about me; sometimes I forgot that. Still, it was absolute hell sitting on the sidelines and watching *my* team go into action without me. Nevertheless, I knew that I could still stay in contact and help them as much as I could from the Control Centre.

Megan and Curtis were sparring on the mat – tonight was not their night for going out; I was still a *little* over-protective, where those two were concerned.

"What a good girl!"

I turned to find Cathy smirking at me and I actually blushed.

"Gee, thanks Cathy!" I growled back grinning.

"I'll get you two some food," Cathy said, heading off upstairs.

"Does nobody trust me?" I growled to nobody in particular.

"We trust you, Mindy – we just know you, that's all!" Marty replied, grinning at me.

Time to change the subject.

"Hey, green asshole!" I called over the comms.

"How's my good little girl?" Kick-Ass responded.

"Looking to have the bed to herself tonight?" I retorted.

"Never gonna happen! You never did like DIY!" Kick-Ass replied, starting a chorus of laughter over the comms. I blushed and tried to hide it from Marty – I was speechless.

"Kick-Ass, Battle Guy – err – she may not be wearing purple, but her face most definitely suits her!"

The funny bastards finally got bored of winding me up and got down to what I had trained the cunts for in the first place!

I sat with Marty and Cathy, eating some pancakes and syrup – my favourite comfort food! Just as I had finished my last mouthful, the call that I had been dreading came in.

"Contact! Contact! Contact!" It was Shadow's voice, calm and in control. "Jackal flank to the left with Mist – I'll take the right with Kick-Ass."

Dave and I had decided that it was time for Chloe to start learning some leadership skills and letting her take charge – she had to learn one day!

"Battle Guy – we have six Krysha – we surprised them fucking up a store. Protection racket if ever I saw one!" Shadow reported.

"You go girl!" Kick-Ass commented.

"Enough from you Kick-Ass – get moving!"

"I think command has gone to her head," Cathy commented.

I was listening to everything that went on and doing my best not to intervene. I knew I should not second-guess Chloe – she was the one on the scene and above all, she knew how to keep a level head when everything went to shit. I still found it difficult, though.

"Jackal – on your left!" Mist's voice.

"Oh, yeah – ten rounds plus head equals stir-fry, baby!" Jackal replied.

I laughed and even Cathy grinned.

"We're not going for style points, Jackal – just kill the fuckers!" Shadow pointed out.

"I think I need to have words with Little Miss Bossy!" I whispered to Cathy who simply nodded.

"Four Krysha down – last pair taking cover behind their SUV!" Kick-Ass reported.

"Let 'em go!" Shadow announced, taking Kick-Ass' hint.

I was pleased. Shadow had done well, despite getting herself a tiny bit carried away with being in charge!

"Fusion check in!" Shadow called.

"Jackal clear!"

"Mist clear!"

"Kick-Ass clear!"

"Battle Guy, Shadow – Fusion is clear!"

"Battle Guy copies Fusion is clear. Well done, Shadow – Hit Girl wants a word..."

"Good, Shadow – very good!" I said.

"I'm glad you guys can't see my face – damn it's hot under this mask; I think I'm blushing!" Shadow replied.

I laughed and suggested she get her team back on the road.

"Hit Girl – Fusion is rolling!"

It seemed that the Russians were back to their normal tricks: in this case extortion for protection.

There was a lot of Chicago to protect and we could not protect it all. All we could do was set boundaries and then dare the Krysha to cross them. Well, we could handle the bastards; we had on several occasions before. I was pleased that Shadow was not intimidated by them and was still able to direct her operatives. I knew that Shadow thought nothing about ordering Kick-Ass around! Shadow was very like me – we both saw the opposite sex as inferior to us women and felt that we had a God given right to order them around.

I was also extremely relieved when Iron Hide rolled into the Safehouse and all dismounted without injury.

"Well done Shadow!" I said, as the girl removed her mask; she was blushing badly.

"It was good," Dave commented. "I'm used to being ordered around by over-bearing bitches with a God complex!"

That got a laugh from everybody and had *me* blushing; I just scowled at Dave in return. We then got serious and spent the next hour debriefing Chloe and going through her thoughts of the evening. Her thought processes had been spot on; I was impressed. In a little over two months, Chloe would be fifteen. She was developing into both a stunning young woman and a front-line vigilante.

***Two days later
Monday evening***

Safehouse F

There were no patrols scheduled for tonight, but I was busy getting my body back into shape.

Cathy had given me a clean bill of health – somewhat reluctantly! I was pounding the weights when Dave came in with Josh.

"A hot sweaty woman – now that's a turn on!"

"Joshua, that woman you are talking about; she just happens to be my fiancée!" Dave laughed. "But damn it, you're bang on!"

I blushed at the compliments! I was about to make a snide remark, but that was when my cell rang – it was one of our snitches, or rather it purported to be.

"Go ahead!" I growled and was very surprised by the response.

"Same place – I'll be waiting with a package for you!"

Dave studied my expression, after I hung up, for a minute before speaking.

"Trouble?" He asked.

"Kind of – it was Petra!"

Thirty minutes later, we were speeding through the darkened streets of western Chicago.

I was leading, on my freshly repaired Ducati and behind me was Jackal on his 'stolen', Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R. The motorcycle had been totally rebuilt, tuned and repainted in Tan. It also sported the licence plate: **JACKAL**. He was lucky; the motorcycle had been removed from Safehouse A only a few days before the place had been destroyed. Kick-Ass followed Jackal, on his Diavel. Between us, we sported an engine capacity of nearly two and a half litres and over five-hundred horsepower. Thankfully, Jackal was not power-mad like Shadow, so he could be trusted with such a high-performance motorcycle.

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We pulled into White Eagle Woods South, and found Petra sitting calmly on her Honda Fireblade. Petra dismounted and walked over to Jackal. She looked him up and down and checked out his wheels.

"See something you like?" Jackal growled.

"You look, um, very good close up and the wheels are fucking cool!" Petra replied.

"Would you two like some time alone?" I asked, shaking my head.

"Well –!" Jackal started to reply.

"Think very carefully before you say another word!" Shadow growled over the comms. "My knife is very sharp –"

"No thanks, Petra – I'm already spoken for!" Jackal replied.

"Your loss!"

"When you've finished trying to make out with Jackal, please let us know why we are here!" I growled impatiently.

"Oh – sorry!" Petra replied and ran over to some trees and returned a minute later dragging something.

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"Fuck me!" I growled as I recognised what Petra was dragging.

"Hit Girl, I believe you are acquainted with Regina!" Petra announced, dumping her cargo on the blacktop.

The assassin was bleeding from several wounds and seemed to have a broken left wrist, which was crudely

bandaged. The woman was grimacing in pain. I looked at Petra, but thanks to the full-face mask, I saw no emotion – was she happy that Regina was banged up? I felt nothing for Regina and felt no emotions as Regina looked up at me with a pleading look.

"I owe the bitch – she killed somebody very close to me," Petra said with a large helping of malice in her electronic voice.

"Why?" I asked simply.

Petra shrugged before replying.

"I want to prove to you that I am on your side; that I am not your enemy."

"I know that dumb-ass!" I replied.

"Just wanted to make sure..."

"So what do you want to do with her?" Kick-Ass asked, directing his question at both Petra and myself.

"Her death means more to you, than me," I offered.

Petra nodded and flexed her hands in her gloves.

"You gonna let her kill Regina?" Jackal asked me.

"Yeah."

Regina looked pathetic; she was shaking. She looked from mask to mask, but since I had changed to a full-face mask, this week, she could see no emotion to support her.

"You can't let her kill me!" Regina begged, reaching out for my boot; I took a step back.

"Get it over with, Petra – Kick-Ass always complains when I play with my prey, before killing it!"

Petra nodded, before circling the ill-fated Regina. Then she drove straight in, attacking the former assassin and kicked Regina in the face, sending her sprawling. Blood flew from Regina's smashed nose and she screamed with the pain. Regina held up a hand, begging for mercy, but Petra drew one of her swords and severed the hand. Then, as Regina held her arm in front of her, staring in shock at the severed limb, Petra swung the blade again and severed the upraised arm at the elbow.

Regina fell back, screaming and next to go were her feet, followed by her lower legs. Regina had passed out by that point and I could hear Jackal in my headset; he was appalled by what he was witnessing. The way that Kick-Ass stood and gazed at me through his mask, said the same thing. Kick-Ass had seen many violent things, indeed many perpetrated by yours truly; but I drew the line at extreme sadism – for most criminals anyway.

Finally, Petra stood back and I stepped forwards to deliver the coup de grace with my .40-calibre Glock 23 Gen 4 pistol. I fired one round through Regina's forehead and ignored the rest of the scattered body parts.

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"You happy?" I asked evenly, turning to Petra.

"Yes – her death puts many things behind me," Petra commented.

As Petra turned to go, I grabbed her arm.

"You *are* an ally, Petra – never forget that; you helped us when we needed it. I respect that." I handed Petra a cell phone. "You need us, you call us!"

"Thanks – if I need you, I'll call!" Petra said, adding. "You need me – you call, Fusion!"

With that, Petra mounted her Fireblade and burnt rubber out of the parking lot; she had not looked at the remains of Regina, once.

The next morning
Tuesday

West Ridge

"Please tell me that you weren't slicing and dicing, last night!"

"No Marcus, I *never* used a blade, last night," I replied honestly.

"She's telling the truth, Marcus," Dave added.

"So the single bullet through the head was you, then?"

"Can't a lady have any secrets?"

"When you become a lady, then yes – you can have secrets!" Marcus grinned, heading for the door before stopping short. "Oh, by the way – keep August 29th free!"

"Why?" I asked curiously.

"Wedding bells!"

***Chapter 159*: Turning Point**

Three days later
Friday

West Ridge

Things were changing in Chicago.

Not for the better, either!

I had no idea where things were going, but it was heading back to the bad old days of being a vigilante.

We had new Mayor and he had brought along people who played his tune!

Chicago Police Department
District 21

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!"

"Morning, sir!" The gathered Police Officers called out as a resounding greeting to the new Chicago Police Department Superintendent.

"Good to see you all! I am Superintendent Trevor Howards and I intend to put the Mayor's ideas into practice as far as the Chicago Police Department is concerned."

The new Superintendent prattled on for almost an hour, detailing his history and his view of crime fighting. That was before he went on about how he wanted the Chicago Police Department to be perceived by the public.

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Then he put both feet into his pet hate.

Vigilantism.

"They are *not* superheroes; they are people with personality disorders. They must be eradicated from this City."

"Hit Girl and Kick-Ass are not our enemies, Sir!" Murphy complained and received a loud murmur of assent from the other assembled Police Officers.

"Ah! You must be Sergeant Murphy and that must be your partner, Sergeant Fellowes – the, so called, 'Fusion Cops!'" The Superintendent said dryly. "Now this Hit Girl and her partner in crime, Kick-Ass, are a scourge on society. They exhibit what is bad about society. They began their criminal acts in the City of New York and then they came here to do the same – *that will not be tolerated*. They are criminals. Vigilantism is a crime!"

"But, Sir..." Murphy persisted.

"No, Murphy! While some may say that their being here is making the City safer, others know, full well, that they make things worse. Hit Girl is a mass-murderer of *immense* proportions, hell-bent on revenge. Kick-Ass, while his reasons for being may have been genuine, he ultimately became a menace to society." There was a murmur of anger, which rippled through the Police Officers at those words. "I *will* clamp down on these vigilantes! Now, why is that you two cannot be like Lieutenant Williams? This Officer is a glowing example of the calibre of Police Officer that we need in this City. He fought against these outrageous vigilantes, in New York City and came here to help us fight them in Chicago."

Marcus looked at the two Sergeants, trying to keep a straight face.

"Lieutenant Williams would *never* have anything to do with these damn vigilantes – he would never consort with them, like you do. He *hates* everything about them and everything that they stand for. He would never associate himself with the likes of Hit Girl and Kick-Ass!" The Superintendent said, finally finished.

"I suppose he wouldn't!" Fellowes commented dryly, playing the game.

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The Superintendent studied the two Police Officers as a spider might contemplate a fly caught in her web.

"Lieutenant Williams is standing up the Organised Crime Taskforce – I think that you two should get out of uniform and join him! Maybe you can learn about vigilantism; not to mention why it is *such* a menace to our City."

"Thank you, Sir – we shall look forward to that!" Fellowes announced.

West Columbia

Marcus was playing this close to his chest.

I almost pissed myself laughing when he told me about the new CPD Superintendent and his view on Hit Girl. Then Marcus wiped the smile off my face – the new Superintendent was coming to visit his star Lieutenant and I was expected to attend.

"What!" I blurted out. "Have you finally lost your fucking marbles?"

"Mindy, it is important – I couldn't exactly say no, could I?" Marcus asked reasonably.

"But he's the top man!" I growled. "And by the sounds of it – the enemy!"

"Well, you and Megan will just have to be perfect little ladies for an hour or so!" Marcus insisted.

"Like Mindy could ever be a perfect little lady!" Megan quipped.

"You enjoy breathing? You want to reach puberty?" I growled back, scowling at the smirking, little bitch.

"Girls!" Marcus said loudly to get our attention.

"Yes, Marcus!" We both responded, smiling innocently.

"Oh dear – *I'm* having second thoughts, now!" Marcus said, grimacing at Paige, who just laughed at Marcus.

The following evening Saturday

West Columbia

Marcus answered the door, when Superintendent Trevor Howards arrived.

"Welcome, Sir. This is my fiancée, Paige and her daughter, Megan, while this is my daughter, Mindy."

I smiled uncomfortably and shook hands with the senior Police Officer. We all went through to the living room and sat down – I was glad that this was only a short visit and not a meal. Dave had thought it very funny, when I had told him what was happening. He also suggested packing, as no doubt I would end up killing the Chicago Police Department's new Superintendent! I swore to Dave that I would behave, but I didn't think that he believed me.

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After the usual bullshit covering the first forty minutes, the senior Cop turned to me.

"I hear that your wealth is due to your father's acquittal, of all wrong doing, in New York. A fine example of a real Police Officer, you must be very proud of him. I assume that an upstanding Officer, like your father, would never have anything to do with these vigilantes, such as Hit Girl. He must have been a real inspiration to you, Mindy."

"Oh, he was. He taught me everything that I know," I replied, fighting desperately to keep a straight face. "I would not be the woman I am today, without him."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Megan about to explode as she tried to stop herself laughing. Marcus looked uncomfortable too.

"It is so very good to know that you and your family are so anti-vigilante. Truly a breath of fresh air!" The superintendent commented. "Marcus has told me all about how you teach self-defence to women and children at your training centre. I am impressed, especially as I hear that you give discounts to members of the CPD."

"Not a fucking word!" Marcus breathed as he closed the door.

Paige, Megan and I just all burst out laughing!

"Sam and Paul did the exact same thing when that asshole left the District!" Marcus said. "You should have heard what Voight had to say about him; he was scathing."

"I thought my sides were going to explode!" Megan said when she finally finished laughing.

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I left Marcus and walked home.

"We need to leave town?" Dave asked. "I heard no sirens, so I assume our secrets are safe!"

"Dickhead!" I breathed, pushing past the grinning asshole.

Well I had the measure of the new problem. It looked like we would need to watch our backs from the Chicago PD, now. It shouldn't be too bad, as Marcus was leading the taskforce that was hunting us! However, if Marcus did not accomplish anything – he would be replaced. I had some planning to do; I had to protect my team.

I called everybody in to the Safehouse, for the following morning.

The next morning Sunday

Safehouse F

I gazed at my team.

Kick-Ass, Shadow, Jackal, Battle Guy, Hawk, Mist, Trojan, Wildcat and Splinter. Not to mention Medic and Lynx.

"Times are changing!" I began. "The City is now against us – we are the enemy, as far as the CPD are concerned. Nevertheless, that does not mean that we hurt Cops – *we do not hurt uniforms, period!*"

For once, there was no joking; everybody was taking this change of events seriously. I was glad they were, too; the possibilities scared the crap out of me! We would be looking over both shoulders for an enemy we could kill and an annoyance that we could not.

We would come under a lot of scrutiny as we were hunted by friend and foe, alike. Our security would have to be ramped up. Everybody had to be extra careful. I had already spoken with Marty and he was increasing physical and electronic security for all the Safehouses and our homes. We would not be able to cruise around on our motorcycles, as we once could.

Since coming to Chicago, and setting up Fusion; we had moved out of the shadows and were on public view. People felt safe when they saw us. Now, we needed to return to the shadows, where I had learnt my trade. Of everybody in front of me that morning, only Dave knew about keeping to the shadows. The rest were too new to the game, except maybe for Marty – he knew about the seedier side of being a vigilante.

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"Now, you guys need to learn some counter-surveillance techniques. We will be restricting access to the Safehouses, to preserve their anonymity. This place will be stocked up, in case of siege. You will all come under scrutiny, as the CPD hunt us down. You must resist the urge to do anything which might attract attention to yourselves and thus risk your most prized possession – which is?" I asked.

Megan was jumping up and down as if she was on a pogo stick!

"Yes, Wildcat!"

"Our secret identities," Megan said seriously.

"Very good, Wildcat!"

"Your secret identity is yours and yours alone. Nobody must be able to link your vigilante identity to your secret identity. With a group like ours, just one person being identified could lead directly to others," Dave explained. "This also means that changes need to be made to our daily habits. People should never see us all together, in case people start to join the dots. Continue with your daily lives, go to school – do everything that a normal person would do."

"Think about what you do, before you do it. Speak to Dave, Marty or myself, if you are concerned about security *in any way!* There cannot be any lapses – I don't want any of you to be put away for life – or worse," I continued. "If you are chased by the Cops – evade, do not get into a fight. We cannot risk a Cop being injured – we still have friends in the CPD, but they may be forced to turn against us if we hurt Cops."

"Remember – never use your Fusion identity when out of your combat suits. Conversely, when in your combat suits, never use real names. It is a very good habit to get into; it just takes one slip... We are sorry to scare you like this, but we need to get the message across; especially to our younger and newer members."

That night

West Ridge

"Today really sucked!"

"It had to be done, Mindy."

"I know, Dave, but..."

Everything that we had built was now in danger. All because of some self-righteous asshole! We *would* survive and Fusion *would* continue. Hit Girl and Big Daddy had survived for years in the shadows. Kick-ass had also survived our early time in Chicago, with me.

"You have taught them all well, Mindy – as you taught me. We have survived a lot of shit, together. If somebody ever wrote a story about us, this event would be a long way away from the end of Kick-Ass and Hit Girl!"

"If anybody ever did write a story about us – it would have to be 'M' rated!"

"Why? Oh..." Dave tailed off as I dropped the last item of my clothing onto the floor.

"I think we could do better than an 'M' rating!" I teased, my breathing getting heavier as I saw something rising steadily, in my fiancée's shorts.

"I agree!" Dave commented, as his lips met mine and I felt a tingling sensation down being my belly button and then I gasped as a finger found its way into the very warm and very damp region, between my legs.

I gasped, louder than I had expected.

There was a banging on the door.

"Hey! Can't you two fuck quietly?" Josh growled, angrily.

"Noisy cunts!"

"You can talk 'screamer!'" Josh commented with a chuckle as he closed and locked the door.

"Let's out scream them, then!"

Josh shrugged off his shorts and crawled onto the bed before running his fingers down my stomach and between my legs. His other hand massaged my chest, as only he could. Damn, Josh knew where to put his hands and what to do

once his hands got there. The tingling turned into electric shocks – Josh said I was sensitive; maybe I was!

"Oh God!" I screamed.

Authors Note: *At this point, you are strongly advised to read the story: **Knife Edge**, for the next events in the **Forsaken** timeline. You can ignore the story, but events in **Knife Edge** will be referred to from time to time. Chapter 160 of **Forsaken** continues three weeks after the end of this chapter (Chapter 159). For those who have already read **Knife Edge**, changes and updates have been made to that story to bring it into line with **Forsaken**.*

***Chapter 160*: Into The Danger Zone**

Author's Note: *This chapter (Chapter 160) of **Forsaken** picks up three weeks after Chapter 159. The events in between these two chapters are covered by another one of my stories: **Knife Edge** and you are advised to read that story before starting this chapter.*

Monday morning

West Ridge

The intention was to set sail in a weeks' time, next Monday morning.

There was a lot to be done, not to mention keeping an eye on the City and the ongoing changes. Marcus was still refusing to use my yacht's proper name. That was getting on my nerves, but the stubborn old man would not budge! That kinda gave me an idea for a wedding present for Marcus and Paige; something that I could have some fun with.

Weddings!

With the wedding of Marcus and Paige coming up, people were talking about nothing else, which I was finding a tad annoying! One wedding also led to talk of other weddings; those same people had started dropping hints about Dave and myself.

Some of the hints, though, were *not* subtle – *at all!*

Marty: "So when are you cunts getting hitched?"

Megan: "Will I be a bridesmaid?"

Sam Fellowes: "You need to at least *try* and make an honest woman out of her, Dave!"

Cathy: "You getting married before you have kids!"

Not to mention my favourite: "That wild bitch needs you, Dave!"

Marcus could be so elegant at times!

I had hoped that the Fusion mutinous streak from a few weeks ago was gone, but no, it was still firmly out in the open and thriving, as it tried to catch me out!

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On top of all the shit that was going on, Megan was going through a 'weird' phase: despite still being wounded, she had managed to find time to dye her hair. It was no longer the cute auburn colour, which went well with her gunmetal blue eyes, but black with a red streak on the right-hand side. Paige thought Megan was trying to make a point, although what the point was, I had no idea.

Chloe had thought that Megan's new hair looked cool and therefore she had then reverted her own hair back to its original blonde colour, with a purple streak on the right-hand side as before. Chloe's hair was no longer short, as it had been when we had first found her, but her hair now fell to below her shoulders.

"So?" Dave had asked.

"So, what?"

"You going back to blonde?" Dave had enquired somewhat hopefully. I knew that he loved and preferred my blonde hair.

I had considered his question for a few minutes, before responding.

"I'm staying like this for now – maybe after our cruise; we'll see."

That night

Somewhere in Chicago

We were testing the new 'regime' as I liked to call it.

Just Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. We were out on our motorcycles and patrolling the darker Chicago neighbourhoods. I was actually pleased to see that we still received one or two discrete nods from parked Cops! However, I had received three totally separate warnings before we had gone out that evening. Jack Bay, Hank Voight and Marcus had all warned me about some fresh, new Cops that had appeared in the ranks over the past two weeks. These seemed to be under the direct control of the Superintendent and were out for blood. More specifically *vigilante* blood!

Something else was going on, too. I had no idea if it was part of the new 'anti-vigilante' thing, or something completely different. I felt like I was being followed. It was what Dave called my 'purple-sense'. I could not put my finger on anything, but I knew that I was in some form of potential danger. I was also certain that I had spotted a black SUV, more than once – it was an older model and would not normally have stuck out; but thanks to the 'anti-vigilante' problem, my senses were heightened.

Kick-Ass said that I was being paranoid, as he had *not* seen the SUV once. Kick-Ass, though, did not have the training and experience that I had – I just knew that something wasn't right. This feeling plagued me all night until I was finally distracted by something else.

Something familiar.

Later that night

I received a text.

The display in my visor advised me that it was the cell, which I had provided for Petra, almost four weeks previously. The message consisted of a single word, followed by a location.

'HELP. S WOOD AND S BLUE ISLAND.'

That address was on the Lower West Side. I called Battle Guy and asked him to check into the location while Kick-Ass and I changed direction and headed south.

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As we approached the cross-section, I could hear gunfire, and then as we got closer, I could see four Police SUVs with eight Police Officers shooting at something or somebody. I pulled over to the side of the road to assess the situation and called Petra.

"Where are you?"

"I'm being engaged by the Cops and I don't know why!"

"Long story, can you disengage?"

"I'll need a distraction."

"I'll distract them, you go with Kick-Ass," I advised before dropping the call.

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We split up, Kick-Ass keeping to the shadows and moving to the left of the CPD, while I headed directly towards their rear. As I approached, I revved my engine loudly and span my rear wheel creating noise and smoke, which attracted the attention of two of the Officers who turned around and shot at me – I was much more of a catch than Petra!

I rode fast, continuing to produce smoke as a distraction. These Cops were not the usual sort; they all wore overt upper body armour and their SUVs seemed lightly armoured too. These had to be some of the 'new' Cops that I had been warned about by Marcus and the others. They were all armed with automatic weapons, which considering who they were hunting was *not* all, that unexpected.

"Hit Girl! Petra and Kick-Ass are clear!" I heard over the comms and accelerated away followed by two of the SUVs.

The other two SUVs had gone after Kick-Ass and Petra.

I flew south, along South Ashland Avenue, heading south.

Petra easily followed my every move, as we made to evade the pursuing CPD SUVs. We were nowhere near a regular Safehouse, but the nearest Safehouse would have to do for now. I turned left, following the guidance that was displayed on my visor. Battle Guy had seen where I was and had provided me with directions to Safehouse K.

The SUVs never saw my sharp turn and continued straight while we accelerated away before the CPD noticed their mistake and doubled back. They were quick; I noticed the flashing blue lights reappear in my rear view mirrors very quickly. We raced along West 34th Street and then onto South Iron Street before I swerved to the right, up an alley between two buildings and saw a steel gate close automatically behind Petra as she followed in my tracks.

Then on the left, a dozen or so yards from the end of the building, a door opened that was just wide enough to allow our two motorcycles to pass in single file. The moment we Petra passed the door closed and a heavy steel shutter dropped, covering the doorway.

"Kick-Ass, I'm bringing the Safehouse systems online..."

Lights clicked on all around us as we sat astride our motorcycles. We were in a large room with no windows and bare concrete for the floor. Above us, the ceiling appeared to be solid concrete.

"All the comforts of home!" I commented.

"We must keep some secrets, my love!" Hit Girl commented over the comms.

"Well, we'll settle in and await the all clear!" I replied dryly sitting down beside the motorcycles.

Petra sat down opposite me.

"You hurt?" I asked.

"Some bruises from the bullets – but I'll be fine."

"The CPD has some new enforcers on a mission to remove vigilantes from the City of Chicago!" I advised my fellow vigilante.

"That sucks!" Petra replied in her electronic voice. "How long we need to wait in this, err, palace!"

"An hour maybe," I replied hopefully.

The following morning – early! Tuesday

"You took your fucking time!" I growled, three and a half hours later, as I met up with Hit Girl outside the Safehouse.

"These new Cops are not your average Cops – I'm certain they are ex-Special Forces. They are careful – too careful."

"Nice – just what we *don't* need!" I commented as we loaded my Diavel and Petra's Fireblade onto the back of Iron Hide.

Hit Girl was driving, with Shadow literally riding shotgun with my Remington Model 870 Express Tactical held in both hands. She actually looked kinda cool, as she stood guard!

We dropped Petra off, well to the west and she waved, as she rode off.

Safehouse F

"So, you and Petra get up to anything in the Safehouse?" Shadow asked with a grin, as she stowed her weapons in

the armoury.

"You get up to anything with Mindy when you shared that bath in New York?" I replied with a wink.

The look on both girl's faces was priceless as their mouths dropped open, but not exactly friendly!

***Chapter 161*: Hiding**

***Later that morning
Tuesday***

"Hey lazy tits – it's time to get the fuck up!"

"Fuck off Josh!"

Josh laughed.

"I know how to wake you up..."

"Don't even think about it, cunt!" I warned meaningfully. "Already occupied!"

"Bloody hell!" Josh said with a laugh.

"You got it in one – you're learning," I said, glaring at my boyfriend.

Late night, plus period, equalled very grumpy Chloe!

"What's up?" Dave asked later.

"Nothing," I groaned.

Mindy laughed. "He's not gonna be getting laid for the next few days!"

"I know how you feel!" Dave commented with a genuine smile.

"Assholes!" Mindy growled and made a point of violently chopping the ends off all of her sausages and then mutilating what remained.

"Anyone else and I'd laugh," Josh commented dryly before turning to Sophia. "And don't you get any ideas, either."

Sophia just sat there, licking her lips.

"You're lucky, she's already had hers!"

The events of the previous night had worried me.

I had not been able to sleep much, what with thinking about everything that had happened. I had considered putting Fusion into hiding for the duration, but that would just send a bad signal to the criminal fraternity of Chicago, not to mention elsewhere. Eventually I had gotten myself up, where I had then sat with Sophia, on the couch in the living room, and started writing ideas down and almost instantly crossing them out. The crossed out ideas included whacking all the new Cops and the new Mayor as well as the new Superintendent. I had even considered moving out of Chicago completely and finding yet another City to call home.

All were stupid ideas and most would just end up with us all in prison, or worse. I was *not* about to retreat either – Daddy would turn over in his grave! I had a responsibility to the City of Chicago and I was not about to run out on that responsibility.

***That afternoon
D-JAK***

"I need a break!"

"You turning into a pussy, or something?" Zach asked.

"You want me to kick your balls somewhere where they won't drop till you're thirty?" Megan responded.

"Megan!" Paige called over sharply, before going back to her work.

"Snarky, 'ain't she?" Nikki suggested with a grin. "Maybe, she's not so tough anymore."

"Maybe, I'll jam my foot up your snatch!" Megan said quietly, so her Mother could not overhear.

"I'll pass, if you don't mind, Megan," Nikki replied still grinning.

Megan turned to glare at Jake and Curtis who were whispering and sniggering.

"Care to share?" Megan demanded.

"Look little stormtrooper, give it a break!" I suggested strongly.

"You want a kick where it hurts, Kyle?"

"Enough is enough!" I said and dropped Megan to the mat before whispering into her ear. "Keep this up and Mindy will be pissed."

Megan glared as she tried to fight me off. I released her and she stood up, painfully. I was aware of her stab wounds, but most of the kids here, were not.

"What's wrong Megan?" Jake asked, showing some concern at Megan's grimace of pain.

"Silly bitch keeps overdoing it and taking on the bigger kids," Curtis laughed, using our cover story for Megan being a bit tender.

"You guys ready for some real work?" I asked, ignoring the glowering Megan. "Right, line up."

Lawndale

"You look a little sore, this morning, Toni," I commented.

"Bad day, Marty, I've got some bruises."

"I see – you and Erika pushing it a bit?"

"Marty!" Kim laughed.

"How you doing, Kim – that bump looks enormous!" Erika commented.

"It feels enormous – not to mention that it spends half it's time kicking me," Kim complained, running a hand over her rather large belly. "I feel hideous!"

"You look beautiful!" Marty said with a grin.

"Yeah, right!"

D-JAK

"Hi Mindy!"

"You young lady, are going to come seriously unstuck!"

"Yeah, yeah!" Megan growled.

"I mean it – Marcus will not stand for it," I warned. "I should fucking know, short ass!"

"Okay, but a girl needs to vent, that's all."

"Vent?"

"You heard me!"

I laughed and left her to it. I actually felt a little sorry for Marcus, but in hindsight not so much!

That evening

West Ridge

As if I had not heard enough both from and about Megan that day, she called about nine that night in a bit of a panic.

"Mindy, help me – something monstrous is happening over here!"

"If this is a goddamn wind up, shit head, I'm gonna kick your fucking butt," I growled in response.

"Problem?" Dave asked with a grin.

"Short ass needs help, apparently..." I laughed, heading out the door.

I wandered down the street, towards Marcus' house, on the other corner of the estate. I had a distinct feeling that this was a wind up, as Megan had been behaving strangely over the past week or two.

Nevertheless, she was soon to be my little sister, so I had to look out for her.

..._...

Megan was waiting at the open door, by the time I got there.

"Jeez, take your fucking time, why don't you?" Megan growled, shutting the door behind me.

"What's the emergency, rat?" I asked, and then I heard a *very* disturbing noise and Megan pointed at the ceiling with a grimace.

"Oh yeah, baby!"

"Keep it coming, big guy!"

I closed my eyes for a moment and groaned. "As if I wasn't emotionally scarred enough!" I whined, looking at the rather freaked out Megan.

"Tell me about it!"

"How long they been, err, at it?" I asked delicately.

"You mean, how long has Marcus been boning my Mom?" Megan asked.

"Been enlarging your vocabulary?" I asked, slightly appalled at Megan's choice of words.

"Gotta catch up with *you*, haven't I?" Megan replied. "They've been up there for almost a whole hour! What could they be doing for so long?"

"You really don't want to know!"

"I thought sex only took a couple of minutes."

"You also have a lot to learn!"

We went and sat out the back, where we could not hear all the commotion from upstairs. We talked together about general shit and eventually we ended up talking about our own lives. I had no secrets from Megan and I hoped that she didn't feel the need to have any from me. We ended up talking about our Fathers, which I found a bit depressing, but apparently, Megan had not really spoken about her own, since he died. I told her about what my Daddy was like, when he was not hell bent on the destruction of the D'Amico family. About trips to the bowling alley, but I left out trips to waste ground to get myself shot in the chest!

Finally, the obscene goings on upstairs were terminated and I headed home to what turned out to be some extremely whacked out dreams, or were they nightmares.

That night in dreamland

Safehouse B, New York

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

My back hurt like hell, my chest hurt like hell. What was I doing flat on my back on a flat roof? Why were there three holes in my costume jacket? Then it hit me like a punch to the stomach!

Daddy!

I scrambled, rather painfully, to my feet and looked upwards. There, a dozen feet above me was the window to Safehouse B. It all flowed back into my mind like a torrent: Red Mist! That fucking bastard – *he shot me, three fucking times!* The pain was almost unbearable; it was nothing like when Daddy had shot me. I pulled up my jacket and looked underneath – thank God for Kevlar!

Once back inside the building, I surveyed the Safehouse. It was obvious that the place was burned and would never be able to be used again. I had to rescue Daddy – the bastards must have taken him. On my way back into the building, I had come across the 'Mist Mobile', parked outside and seemingly abandoned. I grabbed a set of NVGs from the Safehouse, made sure that I had spare magazines and climbed into the Mustang; the keys were still in it – idiot!

I noticed that Red Mist was actually quite tall – I had to wait for what seemed like a year for the damn driver's seat to motor itself fully forward so that I could reach the pedals – yeah, I was fucking short! I also noticed that it was a stick-shift – that should be fun; I started the car and looked through the last few destinations that had been recorded on the satnav – I recognised one, it was the warehouse, which Daddy had burnt down – as good a place as any to start.

The D'Amico Warehouse, New York

Bingo!

There were several vehicles parked outside the supposedly abandoned warehouse, so I parked a block away, before I then headed back through the darkness to the warehouse and I started to work out a plan.

There was something going on inside, but exactly what, I was not sure. I crept closer and climbed upwards, to a vantage point in the roof where I could see the inside of the partially destroyed facility and once I had had a good look at what was happening below, I covered my mouth as I almost gasped out in horror.

Daddy!

He was strapped into a chair and beside him, similarly strapped in, was that green fucker, Kick-Ass. Some asshole was talking to the camera.

"This, for all you cavemen out there... Is fire... Fire..."

I felt rage building up inside me; somebody was going to fucking die – I grabbed the NVGs and turned them on before pulling them over my head. I pulled my Heckler & Koch USP Compact pistol and checked that a round was chambered and that the suppressor was securely attached.

"Fire is good... Fire is our friend... Gentlemen..."

Fuck! That bastard had a lighter and I had previously seen him pouring fuel around Daddy and that fucking twat, Kick-Ass. Note to self: kill that green asshole, once I have saved his life. Was that a weird idea, or what? I surprised myself sometimes! I swarmed down the girders to the ground.

..._...

"Time to die!" The asshole drawled to the camera and that snapped me back to the situation at hand.

"Guess it is, asshole," I breathed and fired my first round, clean through his head, followed by two further shots into the floodlights.

Darkness instantly descended on the warehouse. I liked darkness; darkness was my friend. I removed the suppressor

and concentrated on the eerie green image visible through the NVGs. I moved towards Big Daddy and stopped short of the man nearest to him. None of the men seemed to know where the attack had originated, which was just as I had intended when I used the suppressor. I could see pistols aimed in various different directions and I could hear panicked shouts.

I moved away and scanned for my next target, taking full advantage of the darkness.

..._...

"Focus, Mindy – this is a piece of cake!" I thought as I shot the next guy, some wanker with a moustache, then turned and took down the next man.

Panicked gunfire erupted all around me, muzzle flashes everywhere. Chaos reigned – I so loved being Hit Girl! I stabbed a man, who was wearing a balaclava, through the heart, with the knife in my left hand and followed up with a bullet to his face. I double tapped another man, and then followed through with a shot at a man holding a shotgun; my bullet took him in the chest. The slide locked back on an empty magazine. I switched out the magazine, released the slide, and then shot another cunt in the leg and chest, dropping him.

Some fucker *dared* to fire in *my* direction; he went down to another bullet. A gun appeared around a pillar, being fired wildly in different directions. When the man wielding the pistol came around the pillar, I dropped him with a single bullet to the head. A gunman, further over, must have seen my muzzle flash, as he got a shot off in my direction. I ducked behind the pillar and then...

Oh, fuck, fire!

I ran towards Daddy, I was not thinking. The flare of the fire was dazzling my NVGs. I pulled them down off my face so I could see.

Daddy was on fire!

"NO!" I shouted – very stupidly in hindsight, as I attracted several bullets.

"Take cover, child!" Daddy called out, as I turned and made for cover.

As I ran, I jumped and span around, firing off a few rounds to cover my retreat. Once in cover, I dumped the NVGs. I then heard Daddy's anguished bellow of assistance.

"Now switch to Kryptonite!"

I thought quickly.

"Kryptonite!"

I felt behind me, seized the flashlight for my pistol and attached it below the muzzle of the USP, and set it to rapid flash. In the disorienting light, I saw men covering their eyes and trying to see their prey – me. Two shots and they both fell.

I heard my Daddy screaming as the fire took hold, but I blocked him out; now was not the time for emotion. I kept dropping D'Amico's gunmen with impunity. I took cover and switched out another magazine. The men were using sub-machine guns now, on full automatic. The adrenalin surged through me – I could do this; I had to do this.

"... Go to Robin's Reveeenng!"

Again, I thought quickly, removed the flashlight and knocked a can out of the way on some shelves, and I placed the flashlight in its place. The flashlight was targeted by the D'Amico gunmen, but not hit. Using that flashlight as a distraction, I ran around behind the men and came at them from their rear.

I dropped the man with the MP5 and then the final man. I shot out my own flashlight and ran over to Big Daddy, sweeping the cape off my back and over his body, extinguishing the flames. I felt the anger boiling inside me and I strode directly over to the camera, raising my pistol for what I expected to be the last time.

"Shows over motherfuckers!"

I then calmly turned to face the squirming Kick-Ass and shot him in the head.

I awoke with a scream.

The real world

West Ridge

"What the hell, Mindy?"

"Hold me Dave, please, just hold me."

Mindy had just awoken me, rather forcefully which while not exactly unusual, the fact that she had tears streaming down her face, was. Mindy also looked the way that she did when she had just done something that she knew I would disapprove of.

"What did you do?" I asked with a calming smile.

"I shot you in the head!" Mindy stated, burying her face into my chest and rapidly soaking me with her warm, and very wet, tears.

Yeah, I would disapprove of that! It could only be one thing –

"Damon at the warehouse?" I asked rhetorically.

Mindy replied by sobbing even harder. She had these nightmares periodically – I did too; however, that night was the worst that I could remember.

Not to mention that she had never shot me before!

***Chapter 162*: Obsession**

That same night, back in dreamland

The D'Amico Penthouse, New York

God I looked ridiculous!

I mean: long white socks and a short fucking skirt, *with pigtails* – I ask you!

I was standing outside an enormous building, in the centre of New York – it was dark and I was attempting to con my way past the main entrance to the D'Amico Penthouse. I felt just as ridiculous as I thought I looked.

"*Nobody* could be dumb enough to fall for this shit – *nobody*," I thought.

Minutes later...

I stood corrected!

The one asshole that was that dumb still squirmed, so I put him out of his misery with a single shot as I headed for the elevator, with my case, and acquired a key card to operate the aforementioned elevator. Not bad for a few seconds light exercise!

..._...

After a brief strip, in the elevator, followed by some speedy dressing, I was ready. The elevator came to a halt and I braced myself, rope in my left hand and knife in my right.

The doors opened –

There was a man standing to my left, he turned towards me and received the knife in his neck for his trouble. I yanked back on the rope and was immediately aware of another man to my left rising from a chair, where he had been reading a newspaper; I made a slashing movement with my blade and as the man fell backwards, away from the slashing blade, I turned to my next target.

The man to my right had his pistol out, but I placed a boot onto his left thigh, jumped up to his shoulders, and drove the knife into the side of his neck – the blood was awesome! The man that had fallen backwards was now coming at me with his own pistol and I sent the knife flying through the air and into his right wrist. I then rolled the man, on whose shoulders I stood and used the momentum to slide across the floor and using the rope made the guy shoot himself through the chin – cool!

Up until that point, I had been stealthy; however, the gunshot would have been heard. I discarded the rope and knife, and then dived for a pedestal that had some weird sculpture thing on it and braced myself against it facing the elevator. Meer seconds passed before I heard movement coming down the corridor. I had no idea who it was, nor how many it was.

..._...

I drew both of my pistols and readied myself.

Fighting my way down that corridor was going to be virtual suicide; but that was what I did. Daddy had trained me to accomplish the virtual impossible and that as what I was going to do.

I had seven rounds in the SIG-Sauer P232 pistol in my left hand and ten rounds in the H&K USP Compact pistol in my right hand, plus a spare magazine for each pistol. It would have to do, else I would have to improvise; I was good at improvising! For some strange reason it occurred to me at that point, that one day somebody should make a movie about Hit Girl – this attack in particular would probably make an awesome action scene!

My senses told me that the men were close; it was time to engage. I flexed my foot, ready to push off. This was it! I moved to my right, around the pedestal and I fired the first round, from the USP in my right hand, dropping the nearest man with a bullet to the forehead. I started to engage the men as I moved up the corridor. The men were spread out on either side of the corridor – maybe it was doable! The next man fell, and then the next. I used a chair to

jump up and kicked the next man down, and slotted the next with a bullet to the head as I came back down again. The next man fell with a bullet dead centre to the forehead, blood spurting out. I hung off the right side bookshelves, which lined either side of the corridor and I blew a hole in the next cunts head. A man appeared from a doorway to the left and I dodged his bullets, but then the man that I had kicked down earlier, stood up and received a bullet in the back from the man behind – awesome!

Another man received a bullet in the head and I swapped out my magazines. The next two men fell with a bullet each in the chest. I skidded along the floor, shooting another man in the stomach and as he fell, he triggered his own shotgun, blowing the back of his head off through his jaw. A man, who seemed to be one of the last of D'Amico's goons, stood in the middle of the corridor. He fired off round after round in my direction.

Then the unthinkable happened – both of my pistols locked back on seemingly empty magazines, which was nuts as I had barely fired half of either magazine! Nevertheless, shit happened, so I dumped the pistols and flew at the goon. I seized his pistol with both hands and swung myself up and around onto the goon's shoulders, pulling the pistol out of his hands and then firing a bullet down through his head. As the body fell, I shot at the final goon and then rolled onto the floor of the corridor.

The final goon was using a long, tall table as cover. I fired three rounds, with the previous goon's pistol, before the magazine was empty, so I threw the pistol into the face of the final goon, used the table like a vaulting horse, and kicked the goon in the stomach forcing him to drop his pistol, which flew up, and into the air.

I landed on my feet and caught the pistol. This final goon was going to die where he lay on the floor of the Penthouse. I strode forwards and stopped astride his body, aiming his own pistol directly at his face and I happily pulled the trigger.

..._...

Click.

"*CLICK!*" I thought in disbelief. The pistol had jammed. Then I heard the 'ding' of the elevator at the far end of the corridor – I turned and stared down the corridor. Everything had very rapidly gone to shit – well it *could not* get any worse, could it? I was in a large dining-kitchen with windows that provided a panoramic view of the City. I saw the elevator doors open and men appear; I ran over to the large kitchen counter, executed a perfect forward roll, and dropped down behind the same counter.

I could hear voices coming up the corridor and some shouts. I was being discussed in loud whispers by some men. I was feeling the tingles of panic as I found that I had no weapons left.

"You stupid bitch, Mindy!" I thought. "You've fucked up and you won't be walking away from this!"

I looked around me and saw a block of knives ahead of me and on the opposite counter.

..._...

A few minutes after I had obtained the knives, all hell broke loose as some wanker emptied an entire, large calibre magazine in my direction. I kept moving behind the counter, scurrying backwards and forwards and covering my head with my arms. Glass from the shattered windows fell all around me and the noise was horrific. I was actually borderline scared now; this was getting out of hand. Normally at this point Big Daddy would step in and rescue me – but he was dead. I was alone. My only back up was that green asshole; only I had no idea if he was really going to come through for me, or if he was, would get here in time?

The firing stopped. I briefly stuck my head up and smiled, then sent the two largest kitchen knives down range. Bullseye! The look on that asshole's face was fucking priceless! I dropped back down behind the counter and heard the assault rifle that he had been holding drop to the floor, closely followed by his body. I heard more chatter, and then silence – but I had heard one word, quite clearly...

"Bazooka?" I said to myself – what the fuck was going to happen next...

Then more bullets and some larger shit came my way and I crouched down against the kitchen unit, cowering against the flying glass. Finally, I had had enough and I forced my way inside a cupboard. I moved some pans to one side and found a bullet hole to look through.

Oh, crap!

"Say hello to my little friend!"

My eyes went wide – this was the end of Hit Girl, unless...

I saw a flash...

The real world

West Ridge

"Again?"

Mindy had bolted upright, the tears were there, but not like before. This time she just looked at me.

"You never came..." She said simply.

"Huh?"

"I died in that kitchen – you never came..."

"It was just a dream, Mindy – I *did* come and I was your backup."

"I know, but – two nightmares; first you die and then I die."

Mindy seemed very worried.

Two days later

Thursday

We never said a word about Mindy's nightmares after that night.

I was unsure what had brought on the nightmares, but I promised Mindy that I would always be there for her and most importantly, she believed me. It worried me that her dreams involved us both dying. Yes, Mindy's dreams were normally violent and bloody and she enjoyed that! I had similar dreams, but they often involved me having the crap kicked out of me, although those dreams were gradually being replaced with the new Kick-Ass.

I had a feeling that Mindy was feeling a little dejected. Our long line of successes had now changed to a few disasters! Technically Fusion was on the run and that included our friend, Petra.

..._...

Back to the current issues. The Cops seemed to have lost the plot somehow; maybe they were trying to garner support from the citizens of Chicago, whatever it was, Marcus had dropped over a CPD 'Most Wanted' leaflet. Nothing out of the ordinary, except for the list:

#1: *Hit Girl*

#2: *Kick-Ass*

#23: Shadow

#34: Jackal

#55: Red Mist

#56: Wildcat

This list had caused some consternation within Fusion!

I was pleased to be number one and Dave felt it was cool to be number two; however, Chloe was pissed to be all the way down at number twenty-three, not to mention Josh who said it was '*not bloody fair*', to be at number thirty-four. Curtis was annoyed because he did not even feature; but Megan thought it was very cool just to make the list! Wasn't really sure where Wildcat had come from, either! Now, who spotted the fuck up at number fifty-five? What the fuck was Red fucking Mist doing on the goddamn list – he was dead for fuck's sake!

Well, if they wanted to waste their time and resources looking for Red Mist, then good luck, I thought!

As I watched, I saw the armoured truck with the flatbed, pull up and stop at the side of the road.

Out climbed Hit Girl and Shadow, from the front, followed by Jackal and another, shorter vigilante whose name I did not know, from the rear. They should not have youngsters doing that shit – I should know. Any kid under sixteen was way, way too young, to be taking lives and doing what they did. That was my view on things and that would never change. I had been way, way too young, when I had started my shit, over six years previously.

The four vigilantes left the truck and headed towards a large building. That night was the closest that I had been to them, so far. Next, I had to track down their headquarters; that would be a complex and most dangerous task, but it had to be done, if I was to complete the task for which I had come to Chicago in the first place.

***Chapter 163*: It Begins**

***That afternoon
Thursday***

D-JAK

"It has begun!" Paige confirmed that morning at D-JAK.

"What?" I asked, stupidly.

"The beginning of the end!"

"Huh?"

"Megan has officially started puberty!"

I grimaced.

"Oh great! Just what we need around here; *another* hormonal girl!" Dave complained, shaking his head.

"Gee, thanks Mom!" Megan said sarcastically, walking over. "Just let every fucker know about my fucking private life!"

"She's also getting *very* stroppy!" Paige added needlessly.

"Been there with Mindy – *not* fun!" Dave conceded.

I scowled at Dave before turning to the belligerent Megan.

"Back to the mat, hormonal terror!" I suggested, pushing Megan back in the direction of her friends.

***The following night
Friday***

West Columbia

"Megan – is that blood?"

"Yes, Mother!"

"Did Mindy hit you?" Mother asked.

"Not even close, Mother!" I replied shortly, heading upstairs.

Yes, I had been involved in a fight. Nevertheless, I really was *not* in the mood for twenty questions; however, Mom was!

"Megan Wilson, get your backside down here, *right now!*" Mom almost shouted. I paused on the stairs and considered ignoring the command. I knew I had pushed way past my bounds – I was an hour late to boot.

Anyhow, common sense quickly prevailed and I turned around and headed back downstairs, but threw Mom a filthy look, anyway. Which turned out *not* to be a good idea, apparently!

"You, young lady, need to sort your life out – I am *not* going to tolerate this behaviour from you – you are grounded!"

I snapped; who, the hell, did she think she was!

"Like hell, I am!" I retorted and turned towards the door, intending to leave the house.

"You walk out that door, young lady and you are history!"

"Try it, bitch!"

That same time

Fourteen miles south

The fireball exploded out from the side of the building.

Masonry fell all around us, as we cowered behind a large truck. I glared at Shadow – not that she could see my face!

"How the fuck, was I meant to know the dickhead had a dead man's switch!" Shadow moaned, trying to sound innocent and failing badly.

"The Lieutenant is *not* gonna like this!" Kick-Ass chuckled.

"Ya think!" I retorted angrily.

"Cool explosion, though!" Jackal cut in.

"Well, you're another dickhead; so you would think so!" Shadow countered.

"Hit Girl, this is Battle Guy – we have an alert out for Wildcat; the little bitch skipped out after turning up at home covered in blood!"

"Oh for fuck's sake!"

..._...

"She's gone – I'm worried about her," Paige said, sounding panicked. "I don't think she's thinking straight."

"I'll sort it out, Paige – hang in there."

I was fuming; Paige had been in tears, when I had called.

Something had obviously gone wrong!

However, the explosion was cool and it gave me the distraction that I needed to attach my tracker to their truck. Now I just needed to wait and follow the signal! Too simple? Maybe, but I had to try something!

I was fully aware that if I were caught, I would most likely be killed.

Western Chicago

***119 South Oakley Boulevard
Home of Sam Fellowes***

I heard a knock on the window of my bedroom.

It was after nine at night, who could be on the balcony outside my room? I pulled back the curtains and...

"Megan!"

"Let me in asshole!"

I opened the window and let the girl into my bedroom. Normally, I might have been surprised to have a hot looking girl at my bedroom window, but this was Megan and nothing really surprised me about her – not anymore at least! Once Megan had climbed in, I closed the window and turned to the girl who was now making herself comfortable on my bed.

"Hiya, Cam!" She said with a smile.

"Err, Megan – it's late, my Dad will kill us both, if he finds you here – not to mention that I'm only wearing a towel."

I had just climbed out of the shower and had not had a chance to put my shorts on yet.

"Don't mind me!" Megan replied with an evil smirk.

I vanished to the bathroom and returned with shorts and a t-shirt on. Megan was gazing up at the ceiling. Then I noticed something.

"Megan – is that blood?"

"Don't you, fucking start on me!"

"I won't," I replied defensively.

"But I will!"

I turned to find Dad standing at the bedroom door and he looked pissed. I turned back and glared at Megan, who had turned away from the door and was pointedly ignoring my Dad. I knew what was about to happen.

"Megan, it is time to go home..."

"Go fuck yourself – I'm busy!" Megan retorted, cutting Dad off.

I winced; this was *not* going to end well!

"Err, Megan, you're coming with me!" Sam Fellowes said. "You're going home."

"Oh no I'm not! I am *not* a fucking kid, anymore."

"You are coming with me – voluntarily; or in cuffs – your choice."

"You wouldn't fucking dare!"

I felt myself lifted off the bed and I twisted my head, just in time to prevent my nose hitting Cameron's bedroom wall. My arms were pinned behind me and I then felt cold steel on my wrists. The cuffs were ratcheted closed with my arms behind my back. Fellowes then dragged me downstairs and outside, where I was then thrown, unceremoniously, into the back of his unmarked Chicago Police Department SUV.

"You asshole!" I breathed.

"Shut it, before I tape that trap of yours!" Fellowes growled, getting into the driver's seat.

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Fellowes drove me home and pulled up outside the house. I was more than pleased to see that Marcus was not home yet! Fellowes hauled me out of his SUV and up to the front door. He knocked and the door flew open to reveal Mom, who looked none too pleased; in fact, she looked just a bit pissed. I was marched inside and once the door was closed, Fellowes span me around to face him.

"What's going on kid?" He asked with genuine concern.

"Get these damn things off of my fucking wrists!" I growled savagely.

"You have surprised me, Megan," Fellowes said calmly.

"You think I give a crap?"

"You are supposed to be Wildcat, somebody that I respected – but this... This is not whom you are – you are behaving just like a spoilt little girl, who cannot get things her own way," Fellowes continued. "It is time to grow up Megan!"

"You can't speak to me like that!"

"Well I just did, because I used to respect you and I *do* respect your Mother and I want to help in any way that I can."

"I am old enough to look after myself... I do not need anybody to tell me –"

Wham!

Fellowes slammed me against the wall and I almost screamed with pain as he whispered into my ear.

"What would Mindy think if she could see you now? A delinquent child in cuffs. I think she would be ashamed of your childish behaviour. She needs disciplined people – not immature, little brats. I have now lost all the respect that I had for you and what you do. You need to sort yourself out, Megan," Fellowes said, before starting to yell. "DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?"

"Yes!" I replied insolently.

"I DON'T THINK YOU DO!" Fellowes bellowed before continuing more quietly. "I am going to remove the cuffs – you misbehave and I'll put them straight back on."

Fellowes removed the cuffs and replaced them in his pocket. I turned around and looked up at the Cop.

"Sam, I –."

Fellowes cut me off.

"It's not 'Sam' anymore, Megan; it's Sergeant Fellowes to you!"

It hit me then that I had really fucked things up. What had been a small firecracker of an issue had now gone nuclear. I was fucking history and I felt ashamed, I felt tears forming. I turned to Mom, who looked beyond disappointed. That dug in, as a knife and I knew exactly what that felt like.

"Megan, please go to your room and stay there," Mom said. "Do not come out for any reason."

I did not *dare* to look at Fellowes, so I just headed straight upstairs and shut my bedroom door behind me.

I sank on to the bed and started to cry.

"I'm sorry if I went too far, Paige."

"No, Sam, you didn't go too far – it had to be done."

"You know – I was way worse than Megan at that age. I just worry about what Cameron will be like when *he* approaches puberty."

"We've all been there – I hate to say it, but my parents saw me brought home by Chicago's finest much more than I would like to admit!" Paige admitted. "Just don't tell Megan!"

"Does Marcus know?"

"Oh yeah – I had to tell him where I got my taste for handcuffs from?"

An hour later

Oh, crap!

I heard the truck pull up outside first and then the sound of the front door opening.

"Where is she?" Marcus demanded.

A minute later, Marcus entered my bedroom, after knocking. I did not think I had ever seen Marcus look this mad before, ever. He stood there and just looked at me. I felt so fucking small; it was horrible. I had tremendous respect for Marcus, so I kept my mouth firmly shut.

Ultimately, Marcus just turned and left my bedroom, closing the door behind him.

The fact that he had never said a single word felt worse than if he had yelled at me.

The following morning
Saturday

West Columbia

I knocked on Megan's bedroom door.

There was no answer, so I pushed the door open and went in. I found Megan lying on her bed, staring at the ceiling, still dressed and with dried blood on her face.

"How you doing, oh grounded one?" I asked.

"Not good!" Megan replied, still staring at the ceiling.

"I'm not here to lecture you – that isn't my place. I just want to help," I offered. "Besides I'm all lectured out having gone through Shadow like a ton of bricks after she blew up most of Chicago!"

Megan sat up and looked at me. I expected a smile, as I sat down on the end of the bed, but then she surprised me by jumping up, wrapping her arms around me and bursting into tears. Between sobs, she asked questions.

"I've fucked up badly, haven't I?"

"Will Mom forgive me?"

"Will Marcus ever speak to me again?"

"How will I regain Fellowes' respect?"

When Megan stopped crying, I smiled at her.

"In order. Hell, yeah! I should think so. Probably, and you'll earn it back," I said.

"Thanks Mindy. I *am* sorry for letting you down and I *am* sorry about running out and, well, I'm sorry about everything. I honestly don't know why I snapped."

"Hormones, huh?" I queried.

"It sucks – big time!"

"You don't know the half of it, girl! Now go get yourself showered and make yourself presentable," I suggested.

"Why?" Megan asked.

"Move it!"

..._...

Megan spent almost twenty minutes in the shower, followed by me helping her with fresh dressings for her knife wounds and yet another twenty minutes of her rushing backwards and forwards, getting herself dressed. She looked a lot better, now that she was cleaned up. I had the feeling that she had not slept much the previous night.

"Feel better?" I asked.

"Not really."

"Ready?"

"Not really."

"Come with me," I directed and took Megan's hand.

..._...

I led Megan downstairs into the living room. There sat Paige, Marcus and Sam Fellowes. Megan stopped dead and tried to backtrack. I pulled her forwards and pushed her towards Paige.

"You can do it," I whispered, before stepping back.

"Mom, I'm really, really sorry. I did not mean any of it. I will never treat you like that again – ever!"

"You hurt me, Megan, but I love you and I will never let anything get between us," Mom said, smiling.

Megan turned slowly towards Marcus, but he pointed towards Sam Fellowes and Megan moved to face him.

"Sergeant Fellowes. I am sorry for what I said and did. I never stopped to think about my actions. I *know* actions have consequences – I know because my actions have led me to be wounded and I have the wounds and eventually the scars that will remind me of that bad decision every damn day. I understand *why* you were hard on me and I deeply regret causing you to lose your respect for me. I *am* sorry for letting you down and I am sorry for letting everybody down. If it had not been for Mindy, last year, I would probably have been brought home in cuffs, *way* too many times by now. I hope that I can earn back your respect."

Fellowes nodded approvingly.

"That was a very mature and well thought out apology, Megan. You have gone a long way to regaining my respect."

Megan grinned for the first time that evening.

"Thanks, Sergeant Fellowes."

"Call me Sam, Megan!"

Finally, Megan turned to Marcus and her smile faded.

Marcus did not say a word.

"Come on, Marcus. The girl's doing her best!" I said. Marcus enjoyed his little game; I had 'played' it often enough!

"I accept your apology, Megan. As Sam said, it was very mature and I *am* proud of you, for the apology at least. Now back to your room."

"Yes, Marcus."

Two days later
Monday morning

Burnham Harbor Marina

Megan had spent all of the weekend in her room.

Marcus had told her that she was to be allowed out for the trip and that, how well she behaved, while aboard, and would affect how long she would be grounded for, on her return.

Marcus had a heart and knew how difficult it was to control a wayward daughter!

Authors Note: *At this point, you are strongly advised to read my other story: **The Voyages of The Salty Swallow**, for the next events in the **Forsaken** timeline. You can ignore the story, but events in **The Voyages of The Salty Swallow** will be referred to from time to time. Chapter 164 of **Forsaken** continues ten days, or so, after the end of this chapter (Chapter 163).*

Chapter 164: Mathilda

Author's Note: This chapter (Chapter 164) of *Forsaken* picks up a little over a week after Chapter 163. The events in between these two chapters are covered by another one of my stories: *The Voyages of The Salty Swallow* and you are advised to read that story before starting this chapter.

Friday morning

The City of Chicago

There was nothing out of the ordinary about the client.

The fucking shit deserved to die and I was being paid to *help* the fucking shit die. Nothing more complicated than that. This was not the first time that I had killed and it would not be the last – I hoped, as that was my chosen profession – I was an assassin, a *cleaner*.

That night, I moved down the darkened streets, of the south side of Chicago. I was dressed in my usual long, dark blue coat and navy blue hat that I had started to wear when I was about fifteen. The coat came down to below my knees and hid my 'equipment'. In my left hand, I carried a compact carbon-fibre workbag that contained the tools of my trade. To anybody watching, I was just a young woman heading home for the night. Innocuous was how I wanted to look and it had worked for my teacher, so it would work for me.

..._...

I stopped outside the building, where my client stayed. Once certain that I was not observed, I slipped my hand inside the workbag that I carried and pulled out a black plastic box. The box was about eight inches long by about four wide. On the longer side were three antennae. I pressed two buttons on the top of the box before replacing it, back inside my workbag, with its three green LEDs lit. The jammer would block all wireless cell and data transmissions. My target building used wireless CCTV cameras with no wired backup - stupid, but convenient for myself.

I walked in the main door and into the lobby of the building. It was marble and actually reminded me of some photos that Tony had shown me, almost five years ago. Four dead bodies, single shots, in a lobby just like the one where I stood, but that had been in New York at a time of quite a few unexplained and violent, deaths. I had followed the deaths while I was at school – it had seemed cool at the time – culminating in the death of that mob dick, Frank D'Amico – now that was one man who *deserved* to die!

..._...

One of the things that had kept me going, while at that damned school, was knowing that somebody else was keeping those who deserved to die, on their toes. I was a big fan of that Kick-Ass – he tried, but he wasn't all that good, although his heart seemed to be in the right place. Although, the strange deaths had seemed to dry up, when D'Amico was killed – rumours were he was killed with a bazooka; but I knew that was complete bullshit! Then, only a couple of years ago strange things started to occur in New York – and I mean *strange* for New York!

The name D'Amico seemed to crop up again, not to mention some weird individuals dressed like, well, weirdoes! In addition, a name – Hit Girl – that name had cropped up, all those years before, but she was very elusive – almost a ghost, or maybe a legend. Kick-Ass was back, too, only with fans! Then again, things seemed to calm down and the vigilantes just vanished for a few months.

I had been planning what to do next and I had even considered moving away from New York; a new start maybe? I had come across some news articles that hinted towards Kick-Ass and Hit Girl being active in Chicago.

That had done it for me – I had found a new destination!

..._...

To my right, was a reception desk, with a concierge; he nodded at me, barely giving me a glance, as expected. I headed directly for the staircase and made my way up – I never used elevators; what I carried, and wore, would take a lot of explaining if the elevator broke down and I had to be rescued!

I exited the staircase on the eighth floor and carefully pulled open the door into the corridor and looked towards each

end, looking for trouble.

Once happy that I was clear; I moved out and headed towards my target apartment.

Southside of Chicago

Now that was fucking cool!

The rope ascender had pulled us, individually, from the ground to the roof, in less than a minute. On the roof we found a grinning Hit Girl.

"Okay – you made it! Now, Trojan, Splinter – we have work to do," Hit Girl said as she pulled up the rope and stuffed both it and the ascender in to a black canvas bag that was then hidden in an AC vent for future retrieval.

Hit Girl and taken us both out to give us some experience. Wildcat was still grounded!

..._...

We followed Hit Girl down the fire stairs and stopped at the landing for the nineteenth floor. We listened for any sign of activity in the hallway beyond the door. There was nothing, which was expected for that time of night.

The apartment that we were heading for was number nineteen-ten and was only a few feet from the fire stairs. Hit Girl expertly picked the lock within a minute and we were in. With our pistols out, we searched every room for anybody dangerous, but found nobody home which was also expected. Hit Girl had insisted that this would be an easy night.

We then split up to search the place.

Trojan went to check the main bedroom, while I started checking the kitchen. Splinter was in the main living room. Suddenly, I heard a buzzing noise, coming from the bedroom and I went in, to find Trojan wrestling with a long, cylindrical object.

"I found it in the drawer, beside the bed. It started buzzing and vibrating and I can't turn it off!" Trojan whispered.

"Don't look at me!" I replied. "I've never used one of those damn things!"

"Twist the base," A voice behind us offered. "You two are going to poke somebody's eye out!"

Trojan did as he had been advised and the noise stopped. We both turned and looked at Splinter, incredulously.

"How the fuck, does boy, six months from his twelfth birthday, know how to operate one of these things?" I asked, just as incredulously.

"I just remember strange shit!" Splinter commented, wandering off to search the other bedroom.

I looked at Trojan and Trojan looked back at me.

"That kid is so strange!" We both said, together.

We continued searching and finally found what we were after.

Secured to the back of the fridge we had found several brick-sized packets of a white powder-like substance. These were carefully broken apart and dumped down the toilet. We had also found some 'frozen equity', in the freezer, almost eighty-thousand dollars in cash. This went into the pack that Trojan wore on his back. Just as we were finishing off the disposal of the drugs, we heard a commotion from a short distance away.

There was shouting and then a single gunshot.

..._...

Prudence dictated that we should leave as soon as possible, only I had a nasty habit of ignoring prudence! Dave would be made, but... What the hell!

"Battle Guy, we have trouble on the same floor; I am investigating!"

"What a fucking surprise!" Battle Guy called back dryly.

"Take care, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass added meaningfully. He was at Safehouse F, in case he was required.

"Hey, it's me!" I replied.

"That's what I am afraid of, gorgeous!"

I laughed and jumped through a window and swung onto the balcony of the next apartment over. Trojan and Splinter waited by the front door of the apartment and monitored the hallway. It was clear for now.

As I proceeded from balcony to balcony, the commotion got louder.

"Trojan, Splinter, the commotion is five apartments down, nineteen-fifteen!" I called.

Apartment nineteen-fifteen

So much for an easy ride!

I had made my stealthy entry into the apartment, after picking the door lock as I usually did. I had expected to find one man, my target, and maybe a couple of others guarding him. Only I was boned and I found eight men in total. I immediately dropped one with a suppressed round to the head from my Walther. As I moved down the lobby, three men chose that moment to come out of a bedroom. At first, my mind enquired as to why three men might be in a bedroom together, but I shrugged it off and shot another man before I, myself, was shot in the chest from only two yards away and the impact shoved me against the wall.

Fuck that had hurt!

The men were Mafia – probably Italian, or maybe Sicilian – whatever; they were bad news!

I was now fighting for my life. I had dropped my Walther when I had fallen back against the wall. My workbag was waiting for me at the front door, as usual, so I had to rely on the lighter weapons that I was carrying. I flicked two throwing knives out of my belt and into the throats of the two nearest men.

That was when the window in the living room disintegrated and something purple and very menacing appeared, dropping two more men with suppressed pistol shots as it rolled onto the living room floor. Almost simultaneously the front door burst open and what seemed like a hoard of men appeared.

It was pandemonium!

The menacing vigilante, clad in an awesome black and purple armoured suit, was wading through the hoard of men.

Some of the Mafiosi were physically large and muscular. At one stage I saw the vigilante, who my mind told me was the famous, or was that infamous, Hit Girl, being physically thrown across the room where she hit the wall, badly damaging the drywall. That did not seem to stop her as she launched forwards, fighting off anybody who approached and then put them down, hard. She drew a vicious looking blade and used that amazingly skilfully in the tight confines of the apartment.

I was doing my utmost to force my way towards the front door of the apartment and at the very least, relative safety. However, before I could get there a Mafiosi appeared behind me and twisted me around to face him.

..._...

Something short and black flipped into the room and drove both feet into the chest of the Mafiosi, driving him against a wall. The 'ninja' caught himself before he landed on the floor and flipped back to his feet. He held out a black clad hand towards me.

"Come with me, if you want to live!" The rather short, black-clad ninja growled, in a somewhat weird electronically augmented voice.

"Seriously!" I responded. "Kyle Reese, you fucking ain't!"

I had no choice, so I just shrugged and ran after the short ninja, aware that my back was covered by another, slightly shorter, vigilante in a blue and green armoured suit. I also saw a brief glint of purple, as Hit Girl continued to fight the Mafiosi in the apartment.

The hallway did not seem much better than the apartment!

I could see two men, dead from obvious stab wounds and I noticed that the blade which the ninja held in his right hand, was covered in blood up to the hilt.

The blue and green vigilante held a Glock 26 pistol fitted with a suppressor, in his hands and shot two Mafiosi that appeared out of the elevator. Seconds later, a pistol appeared around the edge of the elevator and I instantly recognised it as a Glock 18, which then sent a spray of bullets in our direction on full automatic.

Several bullets hit the vigilantes, who obviously wore full body armour and did their best to cover me. Nevertheless, I still felt a stinging sensation from my right thigh and fell down against the wall, leaving a bright red smear down the wall. I must have screamed out as well, but I could not remember doing that at all.

The black ninja seized hold of me and made a go at dragging me towards the fire stairs. I could hear him talking but I could not make out what he was saying.

He must have been using a radio.

I must have passed out, because all I could remember was being dragged to the fire stairs and then nothing.

Although there were strange flashes of memories since then that started to find their way into my mind. I remembered seeing a green and yellow mask gazing down at me as I was picked up and placed into the back of a large truck.

I looked around me.

I was lying on a couch, on my left side. My right thigh was on fire. A purple mask appeared in my field of vision, which then gradually cleared.

"So, what are we going to do with you?" Hit Girl growled.

"I'm not gonna beg, if that's what you're thinking," I replied, grimacing with the pain from my thigh. "Kill me if that is what you desire, Hit Girl."

..._...

Hit Girl took a step back and held up both gauntleted hands with the palms toward me.

"Hey, you've got me all wrong there, girl!" Hit Girl said somewhat defensively. "We need to get that wound looked at, before it gets infected."

Privately, I would admit that I felt a sense of relief at that!

"Who are you? Hit Girl continued.

"I'm Mathilda, but professionally I go by 'The Heir'," I stated without fanfare.

Hit Girl nodded. "I've heard of you, but you worked New York," She commented.

"Things got a bit hot there; so I decided to move."

"Me too; I know what that's like!"

"In fact I was looking for you guys; I have been, ever since I arrived in Chicago."

Hit Girl paused thoughtfully.

"Black, shitty looking SUV?" She asked.

"Yeah, how did you know?"

"Seen it around. I felt like I was being watched and know I know that I was – I thought I was going nuts!"

"Obviously my tracking skills require a little improvement!" I grimaced.

..._...

Just then more people arrived.

"Meet Shadow and Medic," Hit Girl announced.

"Medic, Shadow – meet Mathilda, professionally known as 'The Heir'," Hit Girl continued before getting back to business. "Medic, Mathilda is wounded in her right thigh."

The woman, called Medic, was dressed in an off-white suit, without armour, although I could see where armour panels could be attached to the suit as necessary. Shadow was just that, a shadow in black and navy blue. I had not seen the two other, much shorter, vigilantes since we had left the building to come here – wherever *here* was.

Medic immediately got to work and started to cut away my trousers from around the wound. She then started taking my vitals and I noticed that my coat, hat and weapons harness had already been removed. Medic pulled open my shirt and started to remove the thin armoured vest that I wore beneath.

"Wow! That's gonna be one hell of a bruise, girl!" Medic quipped and I looked down to see a large red welt where the bullet had caught me.

Hit Girl passed across the squished bullet that she had recovered from my vest.

"Souvenir!" She said.

"This is going to hurt; the bullet is still in there, but don't worry I have done this many, many times," Medic said with a sly glance at Hit Girl.

"Where are we?" I asked, then screamed as Medic jabbed me with a needle, close to the wound.

"Some local anaesthetic," Medic said conversationally, ignoring my question.

A new vigilante appeared, this one with ears that stuck up from his mask.

"Hey, eyes off my tits!" I growled at the new vigilante who was obviously checking out my bra, which was showing, and what was in them after Medic had taken my vitals and removed the vest.

"Sorry, we're not all that big on dignity, here," Hit Girl growled. "Jackal, eyes elsewhere!"

"Can't help a vigilante for peeking at something nice!" Jackal announced in his electronically enhanced voice.

My thigh was going numb, but I could still feel Medic's fingers in the wound, which felt really weird! In all my time doing this shit, I had never had a bullet wound; lots of cuts and bruises, but never a bullet wound!

These guys were actually being nice to me, rather than just killing me, but then I had not seen their faces and I had a distinct feeling that Hit Girl knew much more about me than she was letting on. I had learnt that Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, with their team, Fusion, had morals despite what some may have thought about them. They never hurt innocents and only used force where force was necessary and then only proportionate force.

I started to feel queasy with all the poking around, then my vision started to blur and I blacked out.

I came around again and I could hear voices.

"So what do we do with her?"

"Can we keep her?"

"She's not a damn dog!"

"You kept Shadow!"

I heard something being hit, followed by an exclamation.

"She needs time for her wound to heal."

"She can't stay here."

"I'm sure Jackal would *love* her to stay!"

The final voice, a young female's, was dripping sarcasm. I tried to raise my head up, but felt weak and my thigh was very sore and throbbing with the pain now that the local anaesthetic had worn off.

"The bad-ass assassin is awake!" A new, electronically distorted voice, said.

A face appeared, or rather a masked face; it was green – Kick-Ass. I recognised him as the person that had lifted me up and placed me into the truck.

"Hello, err, Kick-Ass..."

"You'll be dry, here have a drink," He said, passing me an open can of Pepsi. I drank some down. "How long was I out?"

"About two and a half hours," Hit Girl said, standing beside Kick-Ass. The diminutive Hit Girl made Kick-Ass seem huge in comparison. Which was probably the point!

"Oh, shit; I need to get home," I said and tried to sit up, felt a little dizzy and slumped back down again.

"When was the last time that you slept properly?" It was Medic's voice.

"I think I was thirteen and I had just started all this shit!" I replied, trying to smile.

"You tend to sleep with one eye open in this job!" Hit Girl confirmed.

***Chapter 165*: Hiking**

The following day
Friday

West Ridge

"Are you wearing a bra?" Curtis enquired with a smirk.

"Maybe," Megan responded, looking a little shy.

"First bra – got it yesterday!" Paige whispered to me.

"Oh!" I replied.

"She wants to wear one; says it makes her feel grown up, but she hates wearing it! She does need one though."

"I know – been there!" I grimaced.

"We all have! What fun we are going to have – I just think back to myself at that age and I know what I've got to look forward to!" Paige said unhappily.

Later that morning

The five kids looked a little unsure about what was about to happen to them.

Dave and I were driving them out to the west of Chicago in our nice, shiny new LR4 SUV.

"Right," I said as Dave pulled up at a deserted section of road. "All of you – out!"

"Okay, the weather is good and the forecast is good. Now, I want all your cell phones and any other electrical equipment that you have on you," Dave said.

"What!" Megan exclaimed.

Dave just held out a bag. First Josh, then Chloe dumped their cell phones, closely followed by Curtis and Tommy, then lastly and most reluctantly, Megan.

Each kid was wearing good, strong hiking boots on their feet and wore a t-shirt and shorts, plus a waterproof jacket. They had been purposely limited in what kit they could bring to ensure that there would be more of a challenge.

"Think yourselves lucky; Mindy considered sending you out naked!" Dave advised them. "She seemed to think that you couldn't be trusted not to cheat!"

"Would I?" Megan asked with her innocent smile.

I threw each kid a small rucksack.

"Oh yeah!" I replied as I walked away. "You need to walk on a course of zero-nine-seven and you will find somebody waiting with your lunch. In the packs are maps and compasses. You will also find adequate water – don't waste it, or you will run out."

"Be good – no diving into bushes, eh!" Dave quipped before getting back into the SUV.

We watched as the kids vanished into the wilderness.

It had been an eventful couple of days since returning to Chicago. Medic had helped Mathilda back to her SUV and then Erika had followed her home on her own motorcycle. That had been in the early hours.

We knew where Mathilda lived, which was very useful, so now I had to figure out what to do with her. Would I allow her to join us? Not yet, I would need to find out a lot more about her first and that would involve a visit to Marcus as

he might know more about what happened in New York.

"I think little madam is busted!" Dave chuckled, his eyes glued to a sniping scope.

"The fucking sneaky bitch, I knew it!" I growled. "Cell phone?"

"Yeah!" Dave answered. "Not a problem though."

"Why is it not a problem...?" I paused as Dave smirked. It was an evil smirk.

"Hidden in Megan's pack, is one of Marty's miniature signal jammers!" Dave said simply.

"Bastard cell!"

"I thought you said you would be able to get us out of this!" Chloe demanded.

"I can't get a fucking signal so get off my fucking back!"

"Told you Mindy wouldn't let you cheat!" Josh chuckled.

Megan glared at Josh, but never said a word; she just turned and stalked off in the rough direction of lunch.

"Come on, Tommy, let's go wind her up," I suggested, heading off after Megan.

Those cunts; they did something!

The cell worked perfectly, earlier. The plan had been to find out where we were and call for a taxi, if possible. The maps that we had been given told us very little about where we actually were and we had been forced to wear blindfolds in the SUV!

I hated to admit it, but Dave and Mindy planned for almost every eventuality, but I was not beaten yet.

I would prevail!

Three hours later

Seven miles away

The kids had not yet arrived!

I trusted them about as far as I could throw them; I even kept the doors of the Jeep locked. My cell rang; it was Mindy.

"Hi, Mindy!"

"They there, yet, Cathy?" Mindy asked.

"No; I think they are planning to cause trouble."

"Cathy, follow plan B and leave their lunch as agreed, then leave the area," Mindy ordered.

"She just dumped the food and left?"

"Yes, Megan, that's what I said," Curtis insisted.

"My reputation precedes me!" I laughed and ran out of the trees and down towards the food.

The intention had been to assault whoever was waiting for us and take the vehicle. It had been Dr Bennett, but she had gone within several minutes of us arriving. I heard someone shouting after me, but could not hear the words, not that I was bothered; I was hungry!

I was only feet from the food when I saw something strange, then my feet seemed to have nothing beneath them and

I fell into...

"I warned you!"

"Get me the fuck out of this mud, assholes!" Megan almost screamed.

I just laughed. Chloe and I had seen the trap, Mindy would not allow the food to be abandoned, nor would she make it easy for us to get it. Megan was up to her waist in mud and water. The food was on a plank of wood that stuck out from the other side of the bog, and had been camouflaged.

"Way to go, girl!" Curtis laughed.

Megan smiled, seeing the funny side.

Four hours later

Four miles away

I smirked.

It was evil, but I was also proud. All the kids had made it. Megan was covered in mud from above her waist downwards and Josh showed evidence of mud from having helped Megan out of the bog. They all seemed in high spirits though.

They gathered around the SUV.

"My cell isn't working!" I stated innocently.

"Mine neither," Dave replied.

I saw Megan scowling.

"Almost forgot!" Dave said. "Megan pass me your pack."

Megan did so, looking confused. I reached in and lifted the false bottom, lifting out a small black box. Megan looked livid. I flicked the switch on the side.

"You can use your cell now, Megan!"

The following morning Sunday

West Columbia

"So, to what do I owe this mass invasion?" Marcus asked with a grin as Dave and I trooped into the living room.

"New York City," I stated simply.

"Yes, I know it well, what's left of it, anyway!"

I ignored Marcus' implication and ploughed on.

"Think back about six years, before Daddy died..."

"Okay..."

"... I'm looking for a strange occurrence..."

"Okay..."

"... That did not involve me or Daddy," I clarified quickly. "An assassin maybe?"

Marcus seemed to pause for a few minutes before he answered.

"There was an incident in Brooklyn, involved SWAT. Would have been right up your street!"

"He's getting funnier as he gets older!" I groaned.

"It involved the DEA, I think they had a dirty agent and there was a standoff, in an apartment building, then a massive firefight and finally a large explosion, which seemed to kill the assassin, who was the original target and the dirty agent.

"Rumours were that it was an assassin called 'The Professional'. We were aware of him, but he lived up to his name and he was a professional, always several steps ahead of us. To some extent we liked him! He only killed the scum of the earth, much like you guys; he never once hurt a woman or a child.

"Nobody even knew what he looked like! However, after that day, we never heard of him again... Although, that is not technically true, there was a report or two from a few years back that showed somebody following his MO, in operation in the City."

"Now, it's interesting that you should bring that up, as just the other night that same MO seemed to appear at a building on the Southside, but only so far... The rest of the MO looked like Hit Girl! You know, total death and destruction, that sort of thing!"

"Definitely getting funnier as he gets older!"

"Considering all was quiet here, while you were sinking boats all over the Great Lakes, it just seemed a little suspicious that things started to go to hell within hours of you stepping ashore from your battleship!"

I really did not know where to start!

"I was not... I did not... How..." I blustered.

"She looks so cute when she gets all flustered!" Dave chuckled, stepping back out of arms reach.

"I am not flustered, Ass-Kick!" I retorted.

"Definitely not!" Marcus said sarcastically.

That evening

West Ridge

"So, to what do I owe this mass invasion?" I asked with a grin as Marcus, Paige and Megan trooped into the living room.

"New York City," Marcus stated simply.

We all sat down and Marcus passed me a file.

"You never saw that!" He said, pointedly.

"Saw what?" I replied with an innocent smile.

The file was not very thick, but was full of freshly printed documents. It appeared to be an NYPD report, which concerned the murder of an entire family, in New York, some six years or so previously, in March 2009. The family had been gunned down, during the day. It had been something to do with drugs apparently. Which would explain how the DEA got involved.

I was a little shocked by what I read. The Lando family had been all, but exterminated. The father, the mother, an older teenaged girl and a very young boy. They had all been shot dead, some in the back while trying to escape. That sent a wave of rage through me; you did not kill children at all, let alone by shooting them in the fucking back; only a coward did that!

Apparently, there had been a fifth family member, a girl of around twelve or thirteen. She had vanished; and had then

been presumed dead. What was the missing girl's name? I dug through the report.

There it was in black and white, Mathilda Lando!

..._...

I looked up at Marcus.

"Horrific reading; even for you!" Marcus stated.

"It is – that bastard who killed those kids..." I was raging.

"It was not nice, but the guy died, blown up by a grenade, or two, I understand," Marcus added.

"My family was destroyed in a vicious manner, but nothing like that..."

"Anything I need to know?" Marcus asked.

"I'll let you know, but nothing for now!"

"Hey, can I look?" Megan asked, eyeing the file.

"Above your pay grade, kid!" I chuckled.

"I don't get paid!" Megan retorted.

"But, I do; lots and lots of money!" Paige teased and started flipping through the file.

"Yeah, a large chunk is compensation for looking after you!" I laughed.

"That's low, even for you, Macready!" Megan bristled.

"Save it for the streets, Wild Kitten!"

***Chapter 166*: The Sicilians**

Four days later
Thursday

Safehouse F

The shit had not just hit the fan; it had fucking vaporised the fan!

That Mathilda had kicked up a fucking shit storm. Whomever she had been targeting was connected and whomever they were connected to had been both pissed and Sicilian. Not a good combination!

We were all gearing up – even Wildcat! I had called Petra, but so far, we had received no response from her; we needed everybody for this. According to Marcus, the Sicilian and Italian population of Chicago had recently blossomed. They seemed to have come from abroad and from neighbouring states. Both Marcus and Voight were worried; these were hardened killers and they were not in Chicago for the sights.

There had also been a growth in Mafia style hits, which were very, old school. Mutilations with power-tools, being at the top of the list.

The reason for us gearing up that evening was intelligence gathered by Voight and his team that anticipated a major breakdown in order, within the City. The alert had gone out mid-afternoon and I had called everybody in.

Battle Guy and Hal were in the Command Centre with Lynx. Kick-Ass, along with, Mist, Medic, Splinter and Eisenhower were at Safehouse D, and would go out in Titan. Jackal, Shadow, Trojan and Wildcat, were also at Safehouse D; but would go out in Iron Hide.

I would be leaving from Safehouse F, on my Ducati.

North State Street and Wacker Drive

"Olinsky!"

"It's Roman, something is happening here. Voight wanted to know about anything out of the ordinary concerning the Mafia or the Sicilians; we have it."

"What do you have, Roman."

"We have a car here, with two dead. They've been tortured, gunshots to the legs and knees, arms and shoulders."

"Fuck; it's starting as we thought," Detective Alvin Olinsky confirmed. "Keep your eyes open, Roman."

East 29th Street and South Calumet Avenue

Sergeant Trudy Platt was a minute from the District 21 building when her car was rammed from the side by a large SUV. She was initially very pissed; she was a Sergeant in the CPD and was not used to being rammed, at least not since she had last been on patrol. Being a Desk Sergeant was rather boring in comparison.

Sergeant Platt jumped out and walked around to the driver's side of the SUV.

"What the hell do you think, you are doing?" She demanded.

The driver was young, male and seemingly not bothered about having rammed a Police Officer's car. The passenger, another white male, just sat and smirked.

"Out!" Platt yelled at the driver, who did so and she pushed him to the side of the SUV and cuffed him.

Then she looked up as the passenger opened his door and came around towards the front of the SUV.

"You stay there!" Platt called over, reaching for her Smith & Wesson Model 60 pistol.

Before she could fully draw the pistol, the passenger raised an Ingram MAC-10 sub-machine gun and several gunshots rang out.

Southeast Chicago

As I cruised down West 38th Street, I saw something familiar.

It was Worm!

I pulled a fast one-eighty, and pulled up alongside Worm who positively jumped out of his skin and started to shake.

"What are you doing out?"

"Err, long story, err, Hit Girl!"

"Make it short, or your life will be shorter," I growled.

"Everybody's been paid to be out here, tonight," Worm explained. "They said, 'Go cause trouble' and gave me two grand. Who was I to say no?"

"I see you again, tonight; in fact, I see anybody out tonight, they die – you get me?" I growled meaningfully. "Go spread the word!"

The scared, rapid nodding told me that the spineless Worm had understood. He ran off as fast as he could. Criminals were being paid to cause shit. Things were getting better and better!

I pulled out my cell.

"Marcus, I just bumped into one of my informants. Apparently the cretin was paid to 'go cause trouble!'" I explained.

"Bit worrying that," Marcus replied. "However, it does kind of explain why so many petty crimes are being committed. Everybody is out responding to 9-1-1 calls and therefore not available to watch out for bigger problems... A very cunning plan!"

"Tell me about it!" I replied.

"Stay safe, kid!"

"You, too, old man."

North State Street and Wacker Drive

The car seemed to bulge, as flame built up within the steel body and then the body burst, allowing the flame to explode upwards and outwards. The force of the explosion lifted the vehicle sixteen feet into the air before it came crashing back down again.

Officer Sean Roman had just milliseconds to respond to what his eyes saw and his brain was rapidly processing, however he had barely started to turn when the explosive shockwave hit him and he was thrown twenty-feet, landing on another vehicle, shattering its windshield.

The concussion caused him to black out for a moment, before he was able to focus on the carnage before him. Strangely, everything was silent, as his hearing had not returned. He instinctively grasped his radio and sent an alert back to control, but he was unable to hear the response.

His body ached from head to toe, but he consoled himself with the fact that you had to be alive to feel pain.

South Racine Avenue

Chicago Fire, Truck 81 was speeding down the street, with Squad 3 and Engine 51 close behind.

They were on route to a building fire, north of Little Italy. Ambulance 61 had been dispatched elsewhere, but with the

intention of joining them as soon as possible.

As they turned down West Flournoy Street, they found their route blocked by a seemingly empty, Chicago Transport Authority bus that was stopped cross the road. Lieutenant Matthew Casey sounded the air horn, but to no avail, the bus did not move. As he climbed down from the cab of Truck 81, he was shot in the shoulder with several bullets from a sub-machine gun. He fell to the street as his colleagues dived for cover within the cab.

..._...

Seconds later, a strikingly slim, blue and grey clad vigilante appeared at the open door pushing the wounded Lieutenant up into the Fire Truck with one hand while she fired a P90 at the gunmen in the CTA bus. She was helped by a white-clad woman in body armour.

"Standby to move!" The white-clad woman announced before slamming the door of the truck.

There was the resounding roar of a 6.7-litre V8 turbocharged diesel as eight tonnes of armoured truck shot past and smashed into the rear end of the CTA bus, pivoting it around and clearing the route.

Truck 81 surged forwards, following in Titan's wake. Squad 3 and Engine 51 followed suit.

East 29th Street and South Calumet Avenue

Sergeant Trudy Platt braced herself for the bullets that never came.

She saw the man drop behind the SUV, the MAC-10 landing on the hood. To her left stood Lieutenant Marcus Williams and his second in command, Sergeant Vicky Richards. Both had their pistols out and smoke curled away from both barrels.

"You okay, Trudy?" Vicky asked, holstering her weapon.

"Hell, yeah!"

Marcus laughed.

"You are under arrest for everything, asshole!" Sergeant Platt announced to the man in cuffs.

"You've nothing to charge me with!"

"Apart from dangerous driving, I'll charge you with vandalism!"

I ain't vandalised anything!" The man retorted as his head was smacked down onto the hood of the SUV.

"You vandalised this SUV!"

The man continued to rant as blood flowed from his nose and the Sergeant passed him to some Officers that had appeared from the precinct.

"Tough old bird, that!" Marcus chuckled. "Let's take my truck."

Safehouse F

The City was going mad!

As I watched Fusion members move across the electronic map, I matched this with reported events occurring around the City. It was sheer mayhem.

Hal was busy hammering away at her keyboard while Lynx kept up a constant stream of coffee.

"This is going to be a night to remember!" Lynx commented.

"Tell me about it!" Battle Guy responded as he listened to the snippets of conversation between Fusion members.

Northern Chicago

Detectives Kevin Atwater and Jay Halstead drove slowly down the street.

They were in an unmarked unit and on reconnaissance. Within the space of twenty minutes and two blocks, they had witnessed countless scenes of criminal behaviour, all of it minor. All they had been able to do was call them in and hope that the camera in the car caught most of them. They had bigger fish to search for that evening.

The alert had come from Lieutenant Williams, via Sergeant Voight: Ignore the petty crimes; they were a diversion – look for the major problems. That was exactly what they were doing, looking for the major problems.

The news of an explosion and a Fire Truck being attacked had spread and neither Detective were taking any chances. While Atwater drive, Halstead had an AR-15 ready for use on his lap. Neither was sure whether they had found the trouble or the trouble had found them, either way their windshield exploded as something heavy hit it and exploded into flame.

Atwater slammed on the brakes and both Detectives dove out of the burning vehicle searching everywhere for trouble. There was little to no cover. Halstead called the situation into control and waited for assistance.

Then the bullets started to fly.

Three blocks away

"Atwater and Halstead are in trouble, let's move!" Sergeant Hank Voight called to his team.

Detective Alvin Olinsky floored the car's accelerator. They were followed by another car with Detectives Erin Lindsay and Adam Ruzek onboard. They flew up West Chicago Avenue and turned right onto North Hoyne Avenue, lights flashing and sirens wailing.

As they turned left up West Iowa Street both vehicles came under sustained fire from an alleyway to their right. A minivan blocked the street. A couple of hundred yards up the street Halstead and Atwater could be seen beside their burning vehicle.

"This is not fucking good!" Voight growled as he returned fire with his AR-15 rifle.

One block over

"Come on, fucking put your foot down!"

"Fuck off, Shadow; I go any faster and we'll crash!" Jackal retorted.

"This is so cool!" Wildcat announced from the back seat.

Trojan just rolled his eyes and said nothing, holding on for dear life.

"There!" Shadow said, pointing.

The firefight was not going well.

Voight and his team were very effectively pinned down and unable to provide support for their colleagues up the street. Suddenly, Iron Hide shot out of a side street and came to a halt, providing a bulletproof shield for the Police Officers. Four vigilantes jumped down. Voight vaguely registered that two of them were very short!

However, he valued any support and armoured vigilantes were just perfect for that moment. Obviously, the vigilantes knew who they were, as the tall one with funny ears sticking up took charge.

"Voight, Lindsay; with me! Ruzek and Olinsky, with Shadow!" Jackal announced and Voight just smiled at Olinsky who shrugged but followed orders nonetheless.

The vigilantes had paired off and with two Detectives using them as shields there were two well-armed fire teams, especially as both vigilantes in each team were equipped with a P90 PDW each.

The Sicilians soon realised that they were outmatched in firepower and skill and seemed to melt away within minutes, however they left three dead. Immediately, Voight and his team jumped into the back of Iron Hide. They were taken down towards Atwater and Halstead.

A fierce firefight erupted, but only lasted a short time before those gunmen melted away, too. Neither Halstead, nor Atwater were wounded although they did seem a little surprised to see the armoured vigilantes.

"Thanks for your support, guys!" Voight said honestly, to Jackal.

"Yeah, thanks," Olinsky added holding out his hand and shaking the hand of each of the Vigilantes.

Olinsky then laughed as the shortest Vigilante, obviously a young girl piped up.

"Come on!" Wildcat announced excitedly. "We have more cunts to kill!"

"You heard the lady; let's not stand around like village idiots!" Voight growled with a chuckle and Olinsky just shook his head.

East Pilsen

I was being pursued by several black Kawasaki motorcycles.

Each machine carried a man armed with a Spectre sub-machine gun. Each sub-machine gun had a standard magazine of fifty-rounds. My G-36C only had thirty-round magazines and was a lot harder to operate at speeds approaching sixty miles per hour.

As I careered around a corner, I heard a different pitch of gunfire, coming from behind me, and turned to see that I had a partner.

Petra nodded in greeting, as she came alongside, firing her Heckler & Koch MP7 at the Sicilians. I nodded back in response and we accelerated away east, along West 18th Street

..._...

Petra and I found our route blocked at South Michigan Avenue and we skidded to a halt in the parking lot of an apartment complex. We took cover behind parked cars, beside our motorcycles that annoyingly lay on their sides.

The incoming fire was heavy and coming from two directions, as the remaining motorcycle riders caught up and joined the fight. The majority of the Spectre weapons appeared to be of the nine-millimetre variety and were little more than bee-stings to our armour.

Unfortunately, some had the .40-calibre versions, which stung like fuck!

McKinley Park

Sergeants Fellowes and Murphy were under heavy fire.

Their unmarked Police SUV was wrecked, having been rammed by a large truck. Fellowes had a broken arm, but he was still returning fire with his pistol. Murphy was cut and bruised but alive.

"Need help?"

"Lieutenant, Sergeant!" Murphy growled as Marcus and Vicky crashed down beside them.

"Ran out of doughnuts and thought we'd see what you lazy assholes were getting up to!" Marcus chuckled. "What do I find? You're both sitting on your fucking asses!"

"Sorry, Sir!" Fellowes quipped through the pain.

A loud air horn sounded and Murphy looked past the SUV.

"The cavalry's here!" He yelled.

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Moments later the large armoured form of Kick-Ass appeared around the SUV, seemingly impervious to the bullets flying around.

"You four run out of doughnuts?" Kick-Ass quipped as Medic appeared, with Mist providing covering fire.

Medic rapidly attended to Fellowes and secured his arm in a sling with a splint until a proper cast could be fitted. She also tended to the wounds on Murphy's face where glass had dug in.

Marcus and Vicky were alongside Mist, returning fire. The Sicilian gunmen seemed to be proficient shooters and their fire was *very* accurate.

West 18th Street and South Michigan Avenue

Petra and I were effectively pinned down by the gunmen.

There was nobody close by, not to mention that everybody else had their hands full. I listened to the chatter over the comms as other Fusion members were engaged in firefights across the City. I studied our location and suddenly, I had an idea and placed a call to a friend.

"Wondered when I would be hearing from you, dear girl!" Mathilda responded.

"You at your apartment?"

"I would ask how you know about my apartment, but why waste my breath... Yes, I am. Is that you making enough noise to wake the dead?"

"Petra and I are pinned down. You should be able to see the bad guys from your place..."

"Already on it – I just wasn't sure who the bad guys were!" Mathilda replied.

There was a pause and then I heard the crack, of a high-powered sniper rifle and briefly popped my head up in time to see a head exploding as the .338-inch Lapua Magnum bullet passed explosively through before hitting the building behind.

"What the fuck was that?" Petra demanded.

"A friend!"

There were four more 'cracks'. The bullets coming in our direction, from the Sicilians, were rapidly diminishing as Mathilda cut them down.

Damn that girl could shoot!

Eleven o'clock

Everything went silent.

"What the fuck!"

That comment seemed to reverberate around the City of Chicago.

All incoming gunfire stopped and the Sicilian gunmen seemed to vanish, leaving only the bodies and the spent casings.

I had heard about coordinated cease-fires, but that was unreal!

***Chapter 167*: Chloe**

Four days later
Monday

The City had been in uproar after the lawlessness from the previous week.

Citizens wanted answers and the Mayor was *not* very popular – not that we gave a fuck about the Mayor!

I was very pleased that no member of Fusion had been injured. There were plenty of bruises, but that was part of doing business! Fellowes was resting at home, letting his arm heal. Murphy was back at work, ignoring his cuts. Cathy had received an enormous bouquet of flowers as a 'thank you' from the two Sergeants. According to Chloe, Cathy had blushed very badly when she had received the flowers!

Marcus had seemed to enjoy himself, hugely. He had also learnt that his second-in-command was an avid Vigilante fan, despite being on a taskforce intended to stamp out Vigilante activity! I had paid a personal visit to Mathilda at the weekend to say thanks for saving the hides of Petra and myself! Mathilda may have been struggling to walk, but she could still shoot and that had impressed me hugely.

Overall, Vigilante standing in Chicago had improved. We had save many lives, both civilian and otherwise.

The next task was finding out who had been behind the masterful attack.

West Ridge

We were going to have an emotional couple of weeks, to put it mildly!

We were still recovering from all that shit with the Sicilians, but now we had some anniversaries to, if not celebrate, at least commemorate.

Josh was gently rubbing his throat where there was a still a small scar visible.

"If you're trying to make me feel bad, then it's working!" Mindy said quietly.

Josh rapidly pulled his hand away from his throat.

"Sorry, Mindy, I did not mean that," Josh replied quickly. "I didn't realise I was doing it."

"Well you did almost cut his head off within five seconds of meeting him!" I growled.

"He has that effect on people!" Erika laughed.

"He does not!" I responded sharply, blushing a little.

"It was the best day of my life; I had found my Chloe..." Josh said, before blushing himself.

I felt my own cheeks getting very warm.

"For good or bad, one year ago, Josh was discovered in Safehouse A, before he managed to burn it down!" Dave said with a brief chuckle.

"Hey!" Josh responded defensively. "That was D'Amico's cunts!"

That discovery, of Josh, a year previously had been the start of a tumultuous week.

Chloe and I had discovered Joshua hiding out at Safehouse A, in New York City. Then we had spent the remainder of the week chasing down Ralph fucking D'Amico. That was the week, I had been separated from Dave by almost a thousand miles; it had been hell.

Yes, I had lost a Safehouse; but it had done its job; it had kept Joshua safe and we had gained a valuable member of Fusion.

"I don't regret a second of finding you, Josh," I said honestly. "You have paid me back many times over for that Safehouse."

"Thanks, Mindy," Josh replied, sounding a little surprised.

Five days later
Saturday

Safehouse F

It was the first day of August and it was roasting!

"You having fun?"

"Oh, yes," I replied. "The sun is so lovely."

"Never really saw you as a sunbather," Dave commented.

I was not a sunbather, but I could not resist lying on the grass, down at the park and just dozing. I was wearing shorts and a shot top. I knew I was showing a little too much skin, but what the hell! Sophia was panting beside me, having just taken a swim in the river.

"Dog, that water is cold!" I growled.

We were making progress in identifying what had really happened the previous week. Ignoring the shit caused by the normal wankers who caused trouble in the City. The hard-core of the trouble had been the Sicilians. It was also very strange that everything had stopped at the same time. They were sending a message; telling us what they could do.

Many people had died and many more had been injured. Okay, most of those killed had been the enemy, but that was not the point. However, we had proven what Fusion could do at short notice. Marcus was not having a good time however, having been yelled at for over an hour about not capturing any vigilantes!

One downside about the evening had been the damage to Iron Hide, Titan and my motorcycle. Tony had told me to get some perspective after moaning about two small scratches on my Panigale, when Titan required some twelve thousand dollars' worth of repairs.

Two days later
Monday morning

West Ridge

I had the house to myself for a change, well almost.

While almost everybody was down at the Safehouse, I was sitting in the living room, on a couch with Sophia, and we were gazing over at Chloe. She had spent the past half hour crying her eyes out. Today was not just the anniversary of the end of that appalling week; it was also the anniversary of Joshua throwing himself in front of Chloe, just as Ralph D'Amico had fired at her, almost point-blank, with her own FN Five-seveN pistol.

Sometimes my life sucked!

That evening

West Ridge

The Bennett family were over for dinner.

Chloe had even chosen to wear a dress, which was a little out of character, but Josh was not complaining. In fact, Josh was a little uncomfortable with the night ahead of him. It was in his honour, after all! At the table, were Dave, me, Ryan, Cathy, Chloe and Josh. Curtis was spending the night with Megan.

"I would like to raise a glass, to a very special young man," Ryan Bennett announced, standing up. Josh slunk down

in his chair trying to hide. "Without him, my daughter would be dead, or very badly injured."

Josh and Chloe were both looking distinctly uncomfortable. Chloe was absent-mindedly rubbing her right shoulder.

"Yes, he might be loading his torpedo into a tube that I may not approve of..."

"Ryan!" Cathy growled as Chloe blushed a mortified shade of red and Dave did his best not to laugh.

"I promised Cathy that I would behave – I may be an old bastard, but I can remember what it was like to be in love. I can also vividly remember the looks I used to get from Cathy's Dad when we started, err..."

"Dad!" Chloe growled her eyes wide and her face a deep red.

"Okay, enough humiliation for my little girl!" Ryan laughed turning to face Joshua. "Everybody, I give you our British friend, Joshua Williams, who almost gave his own life, to protect my daughter from some very serious harm."

There was cheering from all those present and the two youngsters looked like they were about to die from embarrassment.

Three days later
Thursday

Morton Grove

"I assume you gave Chloe her present last night?" Ryan chuckled, enjoying the two fifteen year-olds' discomfort.

"Daddy!" Chloe warned.

"Okay, I'm still getting used to my little girl growing up!"

"Daddy, I may be fifteen and an ass-kicking vigilante, but I will always be your little girl," Chloe said, giving her Dad a hug.

"Look after her, Joshua, although you will have your hands full!" Ryan said with a straight face.

Chloe just scowled good-naturedly at her father.

The following afternoon
Friday

D-JAK

"Well look at you!" Nikki said.

"Look at what?" Megan demanded of her friend.

"You look different," Nikki continued. "No more black hair?"

"Oh, *that!*" Megan replied with a laugh. "Wanted a change; I thought I needed to lighten up a bit!"

Megan's hair was now the natural auburn colour it had been previously and was up in a neat ponytail.

"She does look different," Jake commented then smirked. "I see two more changes, too!"

"Yeah, on her chest!" Zach added checking out Megan's top.

Megan scowled and Zach hit the mat in short order.

"Okay; no talking about her tits!" Zach groaned.

I laughed.

"You want to join him, asshole?" Megan growled at me, so I just smirked and shook my head.

..._...

"Why did Megan hit Zach?" Paige asked.

"Zach made a comment on her tits!" I replied honestly.

"That would explain it!" Paige chuckled as she went back to her work.

I had to admit, Megan looked a lot better now that the black hair had gone.

Later that afternoon

Megan screamed.

"What now?" I yelled over.

Megan looked white. She just pointed towards the cupboard at the back of the room that stored the mats. I looked over at the cupboard and saw two people sneaking out of it. Kyle and Avery!

"You two are fucking disgusting!"

"Megan, language!" Paige called over.

"Well you shouldn't have been peeking!" Avery retorted, looking a little pink in the face. Whether that pinkness was from embarrassment or from whatever she and Kyle had been getting up to, I had no idea!

"What part of Martial Arts was that then?" Megan persisted. "I've read a few books, but never saw any chapters that involved handfuls of boob and a hand down a girl's knickers, not to mention the moaning!"

Paige laughed and both Kyle and Avery really blushed.

"Can't you control your daughter, Mrs Wilson?" Avery moaned.

"I just pretend I don't know her!" Paige replied, hiding behind the computer screen; Kyle grinned.

"Kyle, you're supposed to be defending me!" Avery continued.

"Megan, when you are older, then maybe Curtis will be squeezing your boobs and have his hand down..."

"Keep me out of this!" I groaned, as Megan seemed to be getting a little bit annoyed and more than a bit embarrassed.

"I still think it's disgusting and well, people have to use those mats for other things!" Megan went on.

Avery went to say something in response, but just turned, grabbed her things and headed for the door. Just then the door opened and Chloe breezed in followed by Josh.

"You need to control your feisty little friend, Chloe!" Avery said in passing as she flew out of the door. Kyle just shrugged apologetically as he went past.

Chloe looked more than a little confused, but then she focussed on Megan.

"What have you done this time, you little shit?" Chloe demanded.

Josh rolled his eyes and went to stand out of the line of fire. Megan rounded on Chloe; I could sense a fight brewing.

"Your friends are dirty little fuckers; I came across them feeling each other up, just like you do with him!" Megan said, indicating Josh who just smirked.

"Why can't you learn to control yourself? Stay away from my friends; you always cause trouble, wherever you go, and I don't like my friends getting upset by *you*," Chloe said menacingly. "Stay out of my way, too, you scruffy little..."

Chloe was interrupted by a stiff punch to her left side, followed by a kick to the back of her legs that dropped the girl

to her knees, then a fist struck her left cheek and she fell to the mat.

I stared at Curtis as he glared down at Chloe.

"Wow, what the hell?" I exclaimed.

"Do *not* talk to my girl like that, *ever!*" Curtis growled at Chloe.

"That was awesome, Curtis!" Jake said and Zach seemed to approve, too. Nikki was frozen in shock while Paige just put her head in her hands and groaned.

Megan however, seemed rather amazed at Curtis defending her like that; flooring his own cousin! I ran forward and checked on Chloe. She was a little dazed and there was a bruise developing on her left cheek. That boy had one hell of a strong punch!

Curtis showed no remorse, however he smiled at Megan who actually blushed, but he ignored his cousin completely and went back to talking with his friends who seemed in awe at what he had just done. Megan soon drifted over to Curtis, while I picked a rather shell-shocked Chloe up off the mat.

Never a dull moment!

The following afternoon Saturday

West Ridge

Paige had been unable to contain herself the previous evening.

She had come around within seconds of coming home and had told me all about what had occurred at D-JAK, earlier that afternoon. We had both had a huge laugh about it and then I had got on the phone to Cathy. Cathy had initially been concerned when she had seen the bruise on Chloe's cheek, but when Curtis had happily informed her that he had given Chloe the bruise, Cathy had just laughed. I understood that Chloe had not retaliated towards Curtis and neither had she actually spoken to him since he had attacked her.

..._...

Megan breezed in, around noon, looking very pleased with herself.

"Heard lover boy stood up for you, yesterday," I said offhandedly and Megan stopped dead in her tracks.

She turned to me and went a little bit pink before slumping onto the couch beside me.

"He was awesome; I've never had somebody do that for me before. He said that I was his girl!" Megan said wistfully.

Dave started fiddling with his iPad and then a tune started playing.

*'Love is in the air,
Everywhere I look around
Love is in the air
Every sight and every sound'*

I started laughing, but Megan just scowled and blushed.

"Chloe is a fucking bitch and if I see her again, I am going to plant my fist squarely in her smug face!" Megan stated very convincingly.

I looked at Dave who just shrugged.

"Megan, look..."

I was interrupted by a different tune.

'I don't give a damn 'bout my reputation...'

"Hey, asshole, that's my tune!" I laughed.

That afternoon

Safehouse F

Dave had things to do, so I took Megan down to the Safehouse on my BMW.

Chloe was already there. I had seen nothing wrong with that and had not really believed a word of what Megan had said at the house. However, in hindsight, maybe I should have been prepared. I was just saying 'hi' to Josh, when Megan launched herself at Chloe and shoved her to the ground and started to punch her, just as she had said she would.

I seized hold of Megan, dragging her off Chloe who had tried to protect herself, but still had blood streaming from her nose. Wildcat was living up to her name – she was hissing and spitting, desperate to get her claws back into Chloe.

"What the fuck, Megan!" Chloe exclaimed. "You're fucking out of control!"

Curtis came pounding down the stairs followed by Cathy and Ryan.

"I love a bitch fight, just like any man, but..." Ryan began before a glance from his wife shut him up.

"Mom, look what that bitch just did to me and that shit yesterday," Chloe moaned bitterly.

I was very familiar with the expression on Cathy's face.

"Cut the waterworks, Chloe; you're fifteen, not five..." Cathy said.

Jeez, it felt like yesterday that Marcus said that to me. Chloe just stood there.

'Bet you're feeling stupid, right now!' I thought to myself.

"You're really going to stand there; a fifteen-year-old Shadow, and bleat about being beaten up by two, almost eleven-year-olds?" Cathy lectured.

Ooh, that stung!

..._...

"You two going to bury the hatchet?" I asked seriously.

"In her fucking head!" Megan retorted.

"You could never reach, you stumpy piece of shit!" Chloe countered.

"Look, either you two end this, or Dave and I will!" I said angrily.

"I'll end it if that walking disaster stays away from me and my friends!" Chloe growled.

"Fine by me; they're all disgusting little fuckers, just like you. I'll stay away just for some sanity!" Megan spat back.

"*That is enough!*" I yelled back. "Go suit the fuck up! One word from either of you and I'll Taser your fucking asses!"

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Ten minutes later the two girls were back, on the mat, in their full combat suits, but unmasked.

"You two are going to fight it out – with no outside assistance," I instructed, glaring at Josh. "Only one of you leaves that mat, still standing. Mask up, bitches!"

Both girls pulled on their masks and readied themselves.

"Oh, one more thing – anything goes!"

***Chapter 168*: They Come They Go**

Author's Note: *Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that could be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a dubious, unseemly or suggestive nature!*

Saturday afternoon

Safehouse F

The fight started slowly.

Initially, the two girls just circled each other, gauging each other's mood. They were each well aware of the other's capabilities. The fight looked uneven, considering that there was a good few inches in height difference and that Shadow had a weight advantage, too. I was hedging my bets and I was secretly rooting for Wildcat.

Josh, of course, was rooting for Shadow and Curtis was rooting for Wildcat. We all stood at the side of the mat watching and I was to be the referee for the little skirmish, just in case things got out of hand; I wanted the girls to hurt each other, but not to inflict any permanent injuries.

Shadow struck first, but it seemed half hearted as Wildcat easily avoided the kick. Then Wildcat landed a kick on Shadow's thigh, which produced an audible intake of breath from Shadow. Wildcat may have been short and slim, but she could hit hard and had very strong muscles for her age and stature.

"Fucking runt!" Shadow shouted as she kicked out with her full force, catching Wildcat in her chest and sending her flying backwards across the mat. Wildcat landed in a heap, but she did not get up.

Well, that fight did *not* last long!

..._...

"Go help her up then, you heartless bitch!" Curtis said to his cousin from the walkway above the mat, as he headed for the steps.

"Help your, yourself, dickhead!" Shadow spat back. "You're the one who likes the fucking bitch!"

I was partway across the mat when I saw Wildcat stirring. Shadow's back was to Wildcat, so I kept quiet and stepped back. Wildcat started taking deep breathes and I saw her limbs brace up. I looked at Cathy and winked; she nodded her understanding and kept quiet.

Shadow never saw what hit her as Wildcat sprang up and swept Shadow's legs out from under her, followed by sharp jabs to her chest and stomach.

..._...

Shadow screamed with pain and anger, not to mention a little humiliation at being blind-sided. Nonetheless, she jumped up and swung for Wildcat who performed her signature backflip and was quickly out of reach. I could tell by her movements that Shadow was outraged at being put down and I knew that she would not stand for it!

I was right.

Shadow was pissed and she charged at Wildcat who must have realised that she was in big trouble, so she did the unexpected, as she usually did, and charged towards Shadow. However, at the last minute Wildcat jumped up and grabbed hold of the steel walkway, above her, swinging over Shadow, but kicking her in the left shoulder as she went past. Wildcat flipped herself upwards and landed on the walkway. Shadow gazed at the short vigilante and although we could not see her face, her stance showed that she was majorly pissed off and very annoyed at missing her quarry.

..._...

Shadow bolted for the steel staircase and ran upwards; we all leapt out of the way, but moved to where we could follow the fight. Wildcat ran directly at Shadow as she appeared on the walkway and jumped sending her full weight

into Shadow's chest, with both her feet. Shadow crashed back against the wall as Wildcat under inertia then cannoned into her. Shadow seized Wildcat's arm and threw her down the walkway, towards the Briefing Room.

Wildcat hit the ground, rolling forwards to absorb the impact, but she sprang up and seized hold of a red fire extinguisher from the wall, emptying the contents in Shadow's direction. Shadow fought through the spray of water and kicked Wildcat in the chest. Wildcat dropped the fire extinguisher, fell backwards before then scrambling back to her feet and diving over the railings, and she fell the ten feet to the mat, rolling as she landed.

"You've got to do better than that, you useless bitch!" Wildcat shouted at the incensed Shadow.

..._...

"How long you going to let this go on for?" Cathy asked, sounding a little concerned.

"Until it's over..." I replied.

Not to be outdone, Shadow also dived over the railing after her target who stood waiting with her hands on her hips. Wildcat waited until Shadow was back on her feet before she moved to attack and there began a whirling maelstrom of colour as the two youngsters fought a seemingly uneven battle.

"Kind of reminds me of the battle between Yoda and Sidious!" Curtis said to Josh.

"You know, you and your girlfriend have caused a lot of trouble," Josh replied. "Can't say you did anything wrong – Chloe can be a mouthy bitch at times."

"So can Megan!"

"The two girls must be tiring by now; it's been twenty minutes and neither are letting up," Josh added, obviously worried about Chloe.

My trained eye could see that both girls were starting to tire; naturally, it was Wildcat, who was making mistakes first. She had a lot of stamina, but Shadow was older and more capable. Wildcat would be a formidable opponent in a few years if she kept it up. Both girls were really pounding on each other; their bruises would be monumental.

Shadow made a small mistake, which allowed Wildcat to kick her hard in the right thigh, which must have hurt as Shadow screamed out. Shadow responded with a swift punch from her right fist into Wildcat's left upper arm. Wildcat yelled out in pain.

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Both girls seemed to collapse at the same time.

Wildcat rested her head on Shadow's stomach. The two vigilantes could be seen breathing heavily after their exertions. Wildcat pulled off her mask first, looked up at Shadow who removed her own mask and grinned.

Chloe grinned back and started to laugh.

"Not bad for an old girl!" Megan said with a chuckle.

"Hey, I'm only fifteen..."

"That's old..."

"You'll be fifteen in a few years, Megan!"

"Jeez, they'll be making out next!" Josh grinned hopefully.

"In your fucking dreams!" Both girls retorted.

"Oh, yeah..." Josh commented dreamily.

Three days later
Tuesday

West Ridge

The door flew open and Marcus stormed in.

"You have gone too far!" He growled with added menace.

"I've done nothing!" I whined innocently.

"Not you; them!" Marcus said, glaring at Dave and Mindy.

Oh, cool!

"What?" Mindy tried, trying to look innocent, but just looking very guilty.

Marcus turned to me.

"Megan, home, now!"

"Ah, come on; everybody gets to see me getting chewed out, why can't I see you chewing them out for change?" I groaned. That was so unfair!

"Megan!"

"I'm going, jeez!" I slipped out the door, leaving one of Marty's discrete micro-camera transmitters on the couch. I hid round the side of the house, pulled out my cell and logged on to the camera.

Dave and Mindy looked a little unhappy.

"Now where do we start with you two jokers?" Marcus began. "The boss is enough of a nightmare without me having to endure a goddamn multi-hour ass chewing!"

"I thought he liked doughnuts!" Mindy quipped with a smirk.

"Oh yeah, he loved that stereotype, but did you have to colour them?" Marcus continued. "Six purple and six green?"

Dave just shrugged.

"But did you two clowns stop there? Oh, no, you left a card with the doughnuts: '*To our pal, all the best, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass!*'"

..._...

I was laughing, but doing my best not to laugh too loudly. There were times that I thought of Dave and Mindy as being far too 'straight-laced' to get up to anything like that; the top Cop must have been so pissed!

"Then we come to the source of those doughnuts," Marcus was now in full flow and Mindy was smirking, while Dave was studying the ceiling. "You know, I never knew what the Superintendent's daughter did for a living, but you two did, obviously! That was where you got the doughnuts from; she makes the damn things!"

Mindy was now starting to almost, piss herself laughing. Even Marcus was smiling and Dave was chuckling.

"She was a fan!" Mindy managed to spit out.

"Damn nutcases!" Marcus laughed. "I'm going home."

I then saw him stride towards the front door but he stopped and then I saw his face get bigger and bigger.

"You're busted!" Marcus said into the camera.

**Later that week
Friday**

New York City

That time of year sucked, for oh so many reasons.

The biggest one of which was Dave; this was the anniversary of his Dad's death. That was the first time, since that day, all those years ago, that we had stood together in that very cemetery.

We gazed down at the gravestone and I wrapped my arm around Dave's waist to comfort him. We could both remember that day, as if it was yesterday. I had felt so much guilt because maybe I could have prevented his Dad from being killed, but...

I was not going there, not at that moment, in that place. I gazed around the cemetery; it seemed so peaceful, so different. Nevertheless, I could visualise the men with guns, the moment of realisation and then my yelling at Dave to get down, then blackness as I was blasted into a statue.

I smiled as I remembered regaining consciousness amongst all the noise and smoke. I remembered seizing Marcus' pistol and running after that damn van.

"Game on cock-suckers!" I muttered to myself.

"Huh?" Dave asked, turning to me.

"Oh, sorry, didn't mean to say that out loud!"

"I still can't believe some nutcase chose to fight it out on top of a moving van!" Dave grinned.

I smirked at the memory – it was an awesome sequence of events.

"Somebody said something very profound that day and I have never forgotten it," Dave continued. "She told me: *'Dave, your father loved you... Just like my Daddy loved me, and I know it hurts. But, maybe... Maybe that's the real meaning of being a superhero; it's taking that pain and turning it into something good... Something right'.*"

I was always amazed that Dave remembered everything that I had ever said to him.

"She also said: *'Remember what you told me? This is your life, you've gotta live it'*," I said.

"The crazy bitch then said: *'Now help me find some pliers; I'm gonna make this guy eat his own dick!'*" Dave laughed.

"I'm good with words!" I grinned back.

Dave and I had taken the train to New York, early that morning.

Dave had insisted that he could go on his own; however, I had forced him to let me go. I knew that it would be hard on him and I wanted to be there to support him, not least because I felt bad about the whole thing! Not that I mentioned feeling bad to Dave as that would have started the one argument that got us both very angry with each other, so I kept my mouth shut for once!

I also wanted to take the chance to inspect my assets in New York, as it had been a year since I had last been in the City. We also kept our head down, in case anybody recognised us. The first stop was Safehouse C.

Safehouse C, New York City

The building appeared intact.

We approached carefully; we were both armed with concealed Beretta Px4 Storm SubCompact pistols. What no Glock? I fancied a change – so shoot me! We climbed the stairs, which were covered in dust; it did not look like anybody had been there. I was not taking any chances, not after finding Joshua happily installed in Safehouse A the previous year!

Dave punched in the code for the door, while I provided cover. The door clicked and Dave pulled it open so I could go in with my pistol up in front of me. All seemed just, as we had left it, albeit for a lot of dust! Weapons were still on the walls and the alarm system showed no signs of tampering or any other entry since we had left the previous year.

We checked out every room, just to be safe, but all was clear.

"Needs a damn good dusting!" I commented, holstering my pistol.

"Just a bit!" Dave added, holding up a hand with a thick layer of dust on it then smirking. "I don't mind getting a little bit dirty, if you don't..."

"You read my mind!"

Mindy threw herself at me, pushing me down onto the mat in a cloud of dust.

Surprisingly, we did not choke on the cloud of dust. Maybe that was because Mindy was kissing me passionately on the lips. I reached up under her shirt, around to her back and flicked the catch of her bra. The garment fell loose, I ran my hand around to the front of her body feeling the soft, warm skin, and then Mindy froze.

She shuddered as my fingers ran over her pert nipples. I could feel my trousers getting rather tight and wished that I had worn a pair with a little more space. Mindy seemed to have read my mind as her hand reached for my belt and wrenched it open along with the buttons on my jeans relieving the pressure.

I felt Mindy's hand dive down my shorts and I breathed in involuntarily as Mindy grabbed hold of me. Her hand felt soft and smooth as she caressed me. I pulled Mindy's shirt up and over her head, followed by the bra. I undid the button on Mindy's jeans, sliding them off along with her purple panties, which were decidedly damp.

I ran my hands across the firm but soft skin of Mindy's backside. I felt Mindy kicking off her shoes and shrugging off her jeans. I rapidly kicked off my own shoes and jeans and then allowed Mindy to slide off my shorts. I pulled off my shirt and felt Mindy's fingernails digging into my bare chest. I pulled her to me, her soft breasts resting on my chest and I kissed the woman who would very soon be my wife.

..._...

We lay there, on the mat, completely naked for what seemed like hours.

"Brings back some weird memories, being here," Mindy muttered. "Like this."

"You mean that you used to kick the fuck out of me, on this very mat, rather than me just fucking you here?"

"Something like that," Mindy commented. "Has to be the first time that we have ever had sex in this Safehouse."

"Well we weren't banging each other back then."

"Kind of wish we were."

"Marcus would never have approved."

"Marcus would never have known!"

***Chapter 169*: Trapped In New York**

Author's Note: *Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that could be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a dubious, unseemly or suggestive nature!*

One a more serious note; there are also scenes that some readers may find somewhat disturbing.

Friday afternoon Safehouse C, New York City

Reluctantly, I decided that we needed to get dressed.

We had one more destination to visit in New York before we would be catching our train back to Chicago. That destination would be a real test of my nerves and I was both, looking forward to it, as well as dreading it, both at the same time! Dave had promised that he would stay with me, to support me, just as I had with him.

We headed out, towards Queens.

Northern Queens

We moved slowly between the rows and rows of graves.

I was very apprehensive, as we got closer and closer to a certain part of the Cemetery where there were two graves, side by side; however, they both shared the same gravestone.

In Loving Memory

*Kathleen Macready
Died 3rd November 1997
Loving Wife and Mother*

*Damon Macready
Died 25th September 2009
Devoted Father*

I had avoided that place, like the damned plague. I had never wanted to see the grave of my Mother; I had always hated her for taking what I saw, as the easy way out. I bitterly missed not having had a Mother. I could never draw myself to visit the grave of my Father, either, partly because he shared it with my Mother; yeah, I could be a cast iron bitch. Daddy had tried in vain to get me to visit the grave. Marcus had tried, after Daddy had died, but I could not do it.

Now, though, I was older and I had Dave.

..._...

I had tears running down my cheek; the emotions running through me were mixed and very new to me.

"I've been a pretty awful daughter, haven't I?"

"Why?"

"It's taken me seventeen years to turn up to see my Mother and six years to see my Father..."

"You had other things on your mind, so I'm sure they would understand."

Dave always knew what to say, when I did not.

"Hi, Mom, I'd like you to meet Dave; he's my fiancé..."

"Did you feel that?" Dave suddenly asked.

"Feel what?"

"I'm sure I felt Damon turning in his grave!" Dave quipped.

"That is *not* funny, Lizewski!"

It was kind of, though. I had no idea what Daddy would think about my current predicament. Marriage was an enormous step.

"Sorry, future Mrs Lizewski!"

I grinned.

"Daddy liked you; you know that!" I retorted.

"Yeah, like a Rottweiler likes a juicy steak!"

"You're probably right," I replied.

"However, I am certain that both of them would be very proud of their daughter, right now," Dave said. "I am."

Forty minutes later, we headed back towards the City.

The intention was to retrieve some items from Safehouse C and then head directly to the train station. However, we seemed to have acquired a tail, so once close to a secluded part of the street we were in, I span around.

The unfortunate tail was rapidly pinned against the wall of a building while Dave stood overwatch. I was rather shocked to find that it was a girl, about my age, that I had pinned to the wall with my lower arm across her throat. I was even more shocked to recognise the face that tried to smile at me. I quickly released my arm from her throat.

"Err, hi, err, Mindy..."

"Brooke!"

Dave's head span around at that name.

"Brooke, as in, that complete bitch who made your life hell?" Dave asked.

"Yeah!" I replied and then my eyes went wide as I saw a shape appear behind Dave and then I felt somebody behind me, immediately followed by a sharp pain in my neck.

Then I lost consciousness.

I had felt myself being moved around.

Everything was very hazy and I could not make sense of where I was in my mind. I could hear voices, but not what was being said. I tried to move my right arm, but it would not move. I tried my other arm; it was the same, as were both of my legs.

I opened my eyes but initially only saw blackness, until my eyes focussed and I started to see shadows and then I felt something on my face; I was wearing a hood. Then it started to come back to me – Brooke!

That bitch was pure poison; last time I was involved with her, I was humiliated and then I was grounded, which in turn led to my being unable to help Dave when his Dad was arrested, which then meant his Dad had been murdered on the orders of Chris D'Amico.

Had the bitch distracted me on purpose? Was this her way of getting back at me? Where was Dave? Did Brooke know that I was more than just Mindy Macready? Was my pistol still in the holster on my back?

So far, I had kept my head down where it had been resting on my chest. To anybody looking I would still be unconscious. I kept my ears open, listening for anything and everything. I would need to know as much as possible before I dared to act.

I also had a decision to make for when I 'regained' consciousness. Would I play the frightened teenager, or the hardened Hit Girl?

So many decisions.

A short while later, I heard footsteps, then the scraping of metal as a bolt was pulled back.

Seconds later, my hood was pulled off and I squinted in the bright illumination that came from industrial light fittings mounted high above. I looked around above me and saw that I was in a warehouse of sorts. I looked to my left and was very relieved to see a rapidly blinking Dave tied to a chair beside me. Neither of us had been gagged.

"Brings back some fond memories this!" He quipped quietly and I grinned.

"First for me!" I responded.

I looked to my right and saw Brooke, but ignored her. There were five men, all wearing masks of sorts. One man stepped forward, addressing Dave.

"This girl yours?" He said, indicating me.

I left Dave to do the talking.

"Maybe," Dave responded with a neutral expression.

The man smirked.

"You fucking her?"

"Maybe."

"She good in the sack?"

"Maybe."

The man seemed to be getting annoyed, so without warning he lashed out, slapping me across the face, and I allowed a scream to leave my lips.

"You like your girl getting beaten?"

"She enjoys it," Dave commented.

..._...

Brooke was borderline hysterical and gibbering away in her chair. The slap had hurt, but I had had worse and as Dave said, I kind of enjoyed it; I was *not* a normal girl! The men laughed and all five left the room, shutting a metal door behind them and I heard a bolt shoved into place.

I studied my bindings. My wrists were bound with thick plastic cable ties, as were Dave's and Brooke's. I had to admit that Brooke looked to be the victim here, but I did not trust the girl; I had no reason to.

"Wh- what's happening?" Brooke mumbled through her tears.

"I might ask you, bitch!" I growled back and Brooke just looked at me blankly.

"Oh for fuck's sake!"

I studied Dave's ankles, as I could not see mine; cable ties, again. I could feel my pistol in the small of my back, not that it was of any fucking use right now! However...

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"This is going to hurt!" I commented and pushed myself backwards, crashing down to the concrete floor.

"You okay?" Dave asked, grinning down at me.

"I'll survive!" I grumbled lying on my back with my legs in the air. "Brooke, I need you to reach into my right boot and

grab my Balisong."

Brooke just stared at me, blankly.

"Brooke!" I hissed urgently, to get her attention.

Brooke focussed and nodded.

"Reach into my boot and pull out the knife," I instructed gently and watched as Brooke eased it out of my boot.
"Good!"

Brooke smiled.

"Now, unlock the knife by flicking off the catch at the base... Good... Carefully, flick open the handle to expose the blade... Good... Now, trying not to touch the blade, flick the handle over and then roll the knife over, bring the handles together and there we go!"

"Not bad, Brooke!" Dave commented and Brooke smiled, weakly.

"Now, without cutting my foot off, cut the tie..."

Brooke, despite her obvious faults, actually managed to slice the tie that bound my ankle and not my skin! Now that I could get a foot down, I pulled myself forwards so that my wrist was beside my Balisong.

"Okay, Brooke, I know we've had our differences, but please don't slit my fucking wrist!" I growled and Brooke produced a warped giggle.

A minute later, we were all unbound, with my arteries intact!

I flipped my Balisong closed and stowed it back in my boot. Then I drew my pistol, as did Dave.

"What the fuck are you two doing with those?" Brooke exclaimed as I racked back the slide on my pistol, chambering a round.

I checked my front pocket and found that my cell was missing. As were Dave's and Brooke's cells. It was a miracle that the idiots had not found the pistols.

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I made for the door; it was solid and did not budge an inch as I shoved it. There was no way out of the windowless room where we were being held. We had no choice but to await the return of the men. I also had a conundrum: if it were just Dave and me, things would be easy; but we had Brooke to protect and to get to safety, which would complicate things.

For now, I did not answer Brooke's comment.

Just as I was mulling things over, I heard voices and footsteps followed by the rasping of the bolt being pulled back. I nodded to Dave and pushed, or rather shoved, Brooke back against the wall and out of the potential line of fire.

The door was pulled open and a man stepped through with his back to me; he was chatting with his pals. He stopped talking and froze the moment that he caught sight of me, and the pistol that I had aimed at his head. He started to call out a warning, so I blew his head apart with a single shot. Brooke screamed, but I ignored her. Before the body had hit the floor, I had moved and engaged the remaining four men who were standing in the doorway.

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My pistol held only thirteen, nine-millimetre rounds, as did Dave's and neither of us carried a spare magazine. We had to make each round count, so I dropped the first two men with a single shot in the chest, each. Dave caught a third man in the head with another single shot. The fourth man dived off to one side and returned fire with what sounded like a .45-calibre pistol.

Brooke was still screaming and staring at the spreading pool of blood. Dave and I had not returned fire, conserving our rounds. I edged towards the door but could not see anything useful from my position and I was not about to stick

my head out and get it blown the fuck off! I turned to Brooke and slapped her hard around the face, just once. She stopped screaming and seemed to pull herself together.

"That felt good!" I muttered and Dave smiled.

..._...

"I have a confession to make," Brooke said quietly, rubbing her cheek and I saw her eyes change with understanding.

I stared at Brooke, who looked a little embarrassed.

"They are after Daddy; his company has things that people want," Brooke continued. "I – they – they will use me to get to Daddy."

"That makes sense," Dave said after a few seconds consideration.

"Yeah. So why drag us into it, wise ass?" I demanded.

"I saw you on the street and well, I wanted to talk to you. I've changed since that day – I'm not that self-centred bitch, not anymore," Brooke explained. "I now know who you two really are and well, I'm glad I have you two to protect me, despite our differences. I also know that you have changed since then, too. I've seen the news reports from Chicago; you both fight for good."

"Quite a speech, Queen Bee!" I commented grudgingly.

All gunfire had ceased, but I could still hear movement from outside the door.

We had seconds to come to a decision on our next actions, before our kidnappers sorted themselves out first and mounted a counter-attack. Dave picked up a chair and threw it through the doorway. There was an instant barrage of gunfire from the single man and I distinctly heard the final bullet zing through the doorway and then silence followed by the sound of a magazine being ejected.

I sprang up and rolled through the doorway, coming up and sending a pair of bullets dead centre into the man's forehead. I span around covering a full three-sixty-degree view; I saw nobody else.

"Clear!" I called to Dave.

West Ridge, Chicago

"Shouldn't we have heard from Dave and Mindy, by now?"

"Maybe," Chloe replied dreamily. "Maybe they're having fun, like we are!"

"You are insatiable, girl!" I laughed as Chloe ran her hands across my naked nether regions. "You're going to wear it out and have nothing left for when we're married."

Chloe took a moment to look at me.

"Why would I let a tosser like you, marry me?"

"Who the fuck else would put up with you?"

"Good point!" Chloe admitted and took me into her mouth.

New York City

We checked out our surroundings.

We were in some sort of warehouse. There were racks of all sorts of stuff in neat lines. The building was enormous and seemed to extend in all directions. I checked my watch; it was past nine at night and we had been there for hours.

Dave grabbed up a pair of pistols from the dead men. They seemed like hired muscle and only two of them had been armed. They did not seem very professional, at all. I had an idea that they had been hired to keep us busy, while the professionals sat back out of the way.

Dave proceeded two aisles over and moved parallel to Brooke and me. We had only moved about twenty metres when I heard something to my right followed by a bellow from Dave and gunshots.

"Run!"

Then all went black again.

When I regained consciousness, I could hear screaming.

That was bad, but nowhere near as bad as the fact that I could feel my jeans sliding down over my hips! That fact brought me immediately awake and I opened my eyes to see a man above me, upside down and pinning my arms above my head. My legs were pinned, too, by another man who was intent on removing my jeans.

I was *not* going to be fucking raped, no fucking chance!

I prepared myself to move. The man's face was just inches from me, so I head-butted him hard in the face, breaking his nose and I felt his warm blood on my face; this galvanised me into action. As soon as the man released my arms, I seized the man's head and twisted it sharply to the side, snapping his neck. The man collapsed behind me and the man who was pulling down my jeans stopped and looked up from staring down at my crotch. One of the last things in life he saw was my fist, driving into his face and he screamed as more blood flew, and then the man seemed to fly backwards, and he was thrown bodily against the concrete wall, leaving a vivid red smear.

..._...

I looked up and for a moment went all fan-girl as I saw Dave standing over me. He was madder than hell and his expression while turning me on, also scared me.

"You getting up or what?" He growled yanking me to my feet. God he was strong!

Focus, Mindy, focus!

There was a pistol on the ground beside me; it was mine! I grabbed it up and walked over to the man crumpled at the base of the wall; he was groaning in pain. I sent three bullets into the man's groin, followed by another into his head.

Dave had moved so fast that the man currently astride the screaming, half-naked Brooke had not actually noticed anything until I had fired the four bullets. Then he had jumped up, his trousers and shorts around his ankles. He was ready for action in every way, so he was dispatched in the same manner as his friend, the slide locking back on the empty magazine.

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Brooke screamed as the man's warm blood sprayed across her bare skin and the emasculated body collapsed on top of her. I ran over and dragged the dead body off her. Brooke was completely exposed from her neck, down to her knees and she was trembling. I helped her up from the concrete floor.

"He had his hands all over me; it was horrible..."

"Did he?" I asked, not wanting to say it.

Brooke closed her eyes and simply shook her head as I helped her to sort her clothes out and looked over at Dave.

"We need to get the fuck outta here!" I growled.

***Chapter 170*: Escape From New York**

***New York
Friday***

We moved away from the dead bodies and headed in the direction indicated by a sign that pointed towards a convenient fire exit.

I had been impressed by how well Brooke had stood up to being groped, almost raped, not to mention seeing the men killed by Dave and me. Maybe there was more to her than met the eye; she had figured Dave and me out quicker than expected; but then nobody ever said that Brooke was stupid!

After a couple of minutes, we reached the fire exit and immense relief seemed to flood over the three of us; we were safe. I shoved open the door and was about to step through when bullets pounded into the door and surrounding wall. The gunfire was suppressed and not easily heard as I dived off to one side, pulling Brooke with me and slamming the door closed.

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Bullets pinged off the steel-lined fire door as I looked at Dave.

"I think somebody wants us to stay inside..." He said calmly.

"Yeah, a potentially painful cloud of bullets does tend to be quite convincing!"

"I *cannot* believe that you two can be so goddamn calm about this fucking shit!" Brooke cried out. "I'm about to have a fucking nervous breakdown and you two are cracking jokes!"

"Look, Queen Bee, you know who we are, right?" Dave asked.

"Yeah, you're Kick-Ass and Hit Girl..."

"Could you be in better hands?" Dave continued.

"Probably not..."

"So stop ya yappin' and start thinkin'!" I growled in annoyance.

"I always did like your bitchiness!" Brooke added with a weak smile.

Twenty minutes later, we had moved to the far end of the warehouse and I was able to look through some locked double doors into what appeared to be a branch of fucking IKEA or something very similar!

"We're in a goddamn furniture type store!" I growled to Dave.

"Cool!" He replied. "A bed would be good, right about now."

I just glared.

"I'm tired!" He elaborated as he passed over his Beretta while keeping hold of his seized SIG Sauer P226 pistol.

"Wait, why do I get the girl gun?" I demanded.

"Are you kidding me?" Dave asked incredulously, passing over the SIG.

"Nah, just fuckin' with ya!" I said taking the Beretta and blowing out the bolts that held the doors closed.

Dave and I went through the doors into the darkened store. We found ourselves in the kitchen department, which was just plain weird. We saw nobody and then I saw a sign above that made me smile.

"What?" Dave asked.

I pointed upwards: '*Outdoor Sports*'.

We ran over and I felt like it was fucking Christmas!

I grabbed various items as I came across them, as did Dave. Within eight minutes, we all had on a ballistic vest and I had found Brooke some proper shoes to wear. We all wore a pair of gloves and I had loaded my vest with some throwing knives and a cool survival axe among other things. Dave had grabbed a pair of wicked tactical knives and machete.

There was no way to get at the firearms or the ammunition the store held, but we would improvise. I tried a phone on a service desk but not surprisingly, it was dead. The final act for Brooke and me was to put our hair up and out of the way. I gave Brooke instructions on keeping under cover and away from the action.

Now we waited.

I heard movement and indicated the fact silently to Dave via a hand signal.

Our intention was to use stealth and reserve our pistols for the last resort. The footsteps came closer and closer. The first thing we saw was the muzzle of a Heckler & Koch G36K assault rifle. Dave swung his arm out to where the head should be and we heard a satisfying crunch. I followed up with a tactical knife into the man's stomach as Dave lowered the man down to the ground with a hand over his mouth.

One down!

Dave pulled off the man's assault rifle, which was fitted with a suppressor. Dave also grabbed the two spare magazines from the man's body armour, sticking them into pouches on his own vest. Dave indicated further movement and we moved to the right, into the 'tools' section of the store.

We moved behind the displays.

I came up behind two more men, both facing away from me and moving slowly away.

I was about to drop them with the G36K when something caught my eye. I seized hold of a pair of two-foot long adjustable wrenches and killed both men with a swinging hit to each head. Both men went down; however, one body caught a portable floodlight stand, which I managed to intercept before it crashed to the floor.

I smirked at Mindy as she gave me a look that said, 'Dickhead!'

Two more down!

I helped himself to two more G36 Magazines and passed over, a G36C to Mindy, along with two spare magazines. The G36C was similarly equipped with a suppressor. The men were well equipped in fairly anonymous, black, combat gear. We now had extra pistols, however we could not carry too much weight, especially Mindy.

We did, however cache what weapons we had, but could not carry for possible later use.

I heard a door opening, somewhere over by 'soft furnishings'.

Dave slid to the floor and hid behind a reception counter while I did likewise, close by. The approaching team was professional, using hand signals to communicate. I saw an opportunity and drew four throwing knives.

Two men appeared around a display carousel and both went down hard with knives in their foreheads. I saw Dave move to intercept a third man; behind him was a fourth with his assault rifle raised.

I threw my remaining two knives.

"Oh, fuck!" I muttered

Oh my God!

Mindy had just thrown two knives, which had taken down two of the attackers, then she had thrown two more knives; only for one of the knives, a smallish one, to end up embedded in Dave's right thigh! He glanced down at the knife, then looked back up and glared at Mindy who just shrugged apologetically without a hint of shame; and then mouthed the word 'sorry'!

"We'll talk about this later!" Dave commented to Mindy as he hobbled past, pulling out the knife and throwing it down to the floor in disgust.

Those two made one hell of a couple. I had to admit that considering what I knew at that point, I was damned lucky to be alive. If I had known Mindy's secret then I would never have dared to do the things to her that I did. I shuddered to think about what Mindy *could* have done to me! She was a strange girl, that was an undeniable fact, but she had also kept a remarkable secret. I respected her for what she had done in her secret double life and regretted that we could not have been friends, rather than enemies. Maybe I could change that...

"You with us, Queen Bee?" Mindy called, dragging me back to the present.

There was a clatter as Dave knocked over some large cans.

"Jeez, really!" Mindy growled at Dave.

"I didn't touch a thing!" Dave growled back.

"Yes you did!" Mindy shot back.

Then, before Dave could respond to Mindy, gunfire erupted from all around us. We ran through that section of the store, with Dave and Mindy firing their submachine guns on full automatic and doing our best to avoid the bullets that flew in every direction. We dived through the open doors of an elevator and Mindy stabbed the UP button repeatedly.

The elevator ride was a little surreal considering that both Dave and Mindy stood with their submachine guns posed at their shoulders and we were listening to some typically crap, muffled, elevator music.

Mindy was getting impatient, but Dave looked calm and unconcerned.

The doors opened and it was instantly like a scene from *Apocalypse Now*!

Gunmen were emptying their magazines into the elevator as we all pinned ourselves to the sides and Brooke stabbed the DOWN button. There seemed to be dozens of the fuckers! Mindy and I had swapped out magazines during the elevator ride and we emptied thirty rounds, each into the upper floor of the store as the elevator doors slid shut.

Again, we endured the surreal elevator ride, this time downwards.

"I'm sorry about the..." Mindy began.

"I don't want to talk about it!" I interrupted.

"... Knife!" Mindy finished.

The elevator stopped and the doors opened.

Silence!

I had a pistol raised, having used up my last magazine for the G36C. I dumped the G36C in the elevator and scanning the closest dead bodies, I seized a combat shotgun that held a full seven rounds and a G36K that had a sniper scope. The lull did not last long as bullets started to head in our direction.

I shoved Brooke to one side and fired two rounds to cover our escape. I split off, leaving Dave with Brooke, while I looped around and pulled the trigger of the shotgun five times, and dropped three men. I then jumped up onto the grid that supported the store's lighting. I was small enough and light enough not to collapse the grid. I started to sight on the enemy and gently squeezed the trigger each time a head came into view.

I could see Dave, with Brooke behind his back, engaging the enemy with his G36K and a pistol. One man had a bead on Brooke, but I dropped him before he could fire, then I was targeted. Bullets hit the concrete roof above me so I

dropped the now empty assault rifle and started running carefully along the grid.

That was what I lived for, the adrenalin rush of danger.

I saw the men targeting Mindy and started picking off as many as I could see that were aiming at my partner.

Then I saw Mindy fall from the grid and I paused in horror at what I was seeing. Mindy wore no armoured combat suit, nor was there anybody close by to help her. My attention had been drawn for too long.

"Dave!" Brooke screamed as a man appeared to my right, but before I could turn, Brooke pulled a SIG from my webbing and sent three rounds into the man, dropping him dead.

"I wasn't always a cheer leader!" She yelled with a brave smile.

I smirked back. I could hear single shots from where Mindy had fallen; she was still active. I saw Mindy between some sales displays, she was on her ass and pushing herself backwards; she was hurt.

The bullets were still flying and we were getting very short of ammunition.

My side hurt where a bullet had grazed it.

I grimaced with the pain, pushed it to one side, and concentrated on the moment. I fired the last bullet from the pistol and dropped it, reaching for my axe. A man appeared ten feet away and fell with the axe embedded in his chest; I loved improvisation!

I jumped as an arm wrapped itself around my waist and heaved me up; it was Dave with Brooke beside him and I was a little surprised to see a pistol in the girl's hand! Brooke offered her arm and I took it for support. With my free arm, I swept up the G36C from the man I had killed with the axe and returned fire in short bursts. Dave was doing the same while Brooke guided us through the store.

All three of us received bullets into our ballistic vests, Brooke screamed, unused to the abuse. The enemy was fucking everywhere, above us and to the side. Then the firing seemed to die down, slowly.

..._...

"What the fuck?" Dave uttered. The men had us; we were as good as dead...

Then more people seemed to appear; only these men were wearing body armour marked up with 'NYPD' in white. We instantly dropped all of our weapons, as we were seized by two Cops who were not in SWAT gear.

"What..." I began.

"Not here!" A familiar sounding voice said.

We were escorted outside and over to an unmarked SUV that was obviously NYPD. The older man turned to me.

"Mackenzie!" He said, holding out his hand. "Marcus had a feeling that you were in trouble and might need help; he was not kidding!"

"I..."

"Not another word!" The other Cop said. "We know that you are Damon's daughter and many of us owe your old man, not to mention owing Marcus."

"Take the SUV; just leave it somewhere conspicuous!" Mackenzie said with a grin.

A commercial unit some miles away

We had abandoned the NYPD SUV, along with all weapons and equipment, except for my Balisong, of course, a couple hundred yards away. I was not about to let Brooke see anything important, but we also needed to sort ourselves out before heading home and I needed to talk with Brooke.

"Where are we?" Dave asked.

"Hopefully in the right place; only I've never been here before!" I replied as I pulled the cover off a small plastic box on the wall revealing a keypad.

..._...

I punched in an eight-digit code and the door clicked open. So far so good. I pushed open the heavily armoured door and waved Dave and Brooke inside, pushing the door shut until it locked. I fumbled along the wall and found a light switch. The resultant light found us in a small vestibule with another armoured door before us. I punched in the same code into an adjacent keypad and we passed through the door into another darkened area.

Again, I fumbled for a light switch which when turned, illuminated a large square area about thirty-six feet on a side. The central part of the room had a training mat, bars and other assorted fitness and training equipment. To the left was a small kitchen, with a table and at the back were three doorways; that went to a bathroom, a storeroom and a bedroom with two beds. One of the beds had pink bedding!

I was as wide-eyed as Dave and Brooke, well almost, as I had never been here before, ever.

"Welcome to Safehouse Delta!" I said proudly.

Brooke was studying the pictures on the wall, over a desk, to the right of the main door. The photos were of myself, at about ten years old, with my Daddy and... A picture of my Mom! There was also another photo, my favourite, showing the two of us suited up and ready to fight, Hit Girl and Big Daddy!

"You actually look quite scary!" Brooke commented.

"She was!" Dave acknowledged.

"You were a fucking wimp back then!"

An hour later, it was just after eleven, but we had all showered and treated our wounds.

I came out of the shower last and judging by Brooke's expression, Mindy had just given her the old, 'say anything and I kill you', speech! Within minutes, though, the two girls were chatting away happily as if they had always been the best of friends.

"You remember Simon?" Brooke asked.

"How could I forget?" Mindy replied and I knew that Simon was the dick who had left her in the woods, alone.

"He, err, ended up in bed with Dolce and well she had a little infection and she passed it on..."

Mindy looked incredulous and then burst out laughing, along with Brooke.

Oh, Fuck, I thought, I am in hell!

***Chapter 171*: Honda Training**

***The following afternoon
Saturday***

West Ridge, Chicago

"Can't you two go anywhere, without destroying something?"

"Marcus, it was *not* our fault!" I complained as Cathy checked over my wounds.

"When you had not called in, I got worried and called Mackenzie in New York and suggested that he look for anything violent happening!" Marcus commented.

"I'm glad you did!" Dave replied. "It got really close!"

"Goddamn vigilantes!" Marcus moaned heading out the door.

"Did Mindy really stab you?" Chloe asked Dave.

"It was a fucking accident!" I growled. "Jeez!"

"I've learnt to put up with the abuse!" Dave quipped.

"I'll show you 'abuse', cunt!"

We had managed to return Brooke home, for the early hours.

It turned out that nobody had known she was missing as her parents had received a message, fake as it turned out, that Brooke was staying with a friend. Her parents were very concerned about what had happened and said that they would send Brooke to stay with relatives. Neither Hit Girl, nor Kick-Ass, were mentioned by anybody. We had said goodbye to Brooke and told her to look us up if she ever came to Chicago.

It had been a very strange visit to New York, but we had accomplished what we had gone there for in the first place, kind of!

***The following week
Tuesday***

West Ridge

The little rat was now eleven!

Curtis was very pleased to be eleven-years-old and I was proud of my cousin for how much he had grown and improved himself since his previous birthday. Curtis' happiness was tempered slightly by the fact of his parents not being with him. To counteract this, we all tried to keep his mind on happier things and that meant birthday presents!

I had personally dragged him out of bed and Mom had driven us over to see Dave and Mindy. There was something special, lined up for him.

..._...

I pushed a box into my cousin's hands.

It was quite a large box and heavy. Curtis looked a little overwhelmed by all the attention he was receiving. Megan was sitting next to Curtis, and she prodded him into action. Curtis carefully unwrapped the box and then sat staring at the wooden box that had appeared.

"Jeez! It'll be your twelfth birthday before you open the damn thing!" Megan growled.

Curtis laughed and opened the box carefully, and then he gasped.

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Inside the box were a pair of matching Glock 19 Gen4 compact, nine-millimetre pistols. The frame of each pistol was a Dartmouth green colour, the same as that on Trojan's combat suit, while the slide was black with olive stripes, which formed a camouflage pattern. Mounted below the muzzle of each pistol on the accessory rail, was a GTL 22, combined tactical light and laser unit in the same Dartmouth green. Attached to the muzzle of each weapon was a short suppressor, in black.

"Cool, huh?" Chloe asked as she watched her cousin's face.

Curtis was slightly, speechless and he ran his hands over the perfectly finished weapons.

"They are from all of us," I said. "You've accomplished a lot and we decided that you should have some weapons of your own."

Megan actually looked a little Jealous, but her turn would come.

"Thanks, everybody, these are awesome," Curtis eventually managed to say.

..._...

"Come here, lad," Ryan said, pointing towards the garage.

Curtis placed the box containing his pistols down on the coffee table and followed Ryan with slight confusion on his face.

"Your father wanted you to have one of these when you were about thirteen, but Cathy and I decided that you needed to learn now."

Ryan led Curtis into the garage, followed by Chloe, Mindy and a curious Megan. It was Megan, who saw it first.

"Fuck me!" She gasped.

Parked in the garage where the SUV usually sat was a white and green, Honda CRF125FB motorcycle. Hanging on the handlebars was a black full-face helmet while draped over the saddle were dark grey motorcycle leathers and gauntlets and on the ground beside the machine was a pair of black, lightweight motorcycle boots.

I was certain that Curtis was very overwhelmed, so I dragged a reluctant and very jealous Megan, out of the garage, leaving Curtis alone with his uncle and cousin.

"I don't know what to say..."

"Think of it as a gift from your parents," Dad said gently.

I put my arm around Curtis' shoulders; the kid seemed close to tears.

"Thank you..."

Almost the moment that I came out of the garage, Megan dragged me outside to the deck.

"What...?" I tried.

"Don't talk..." Megan said placing a finger on my lips and pushing me up against the garage.

Her face was only inches from my own. I was not sure if the look on her face was one of shyness, or not. Megan was rarely shy about anything.

Then she kissed me.

***The next morning
Wednesday***

Safehouse F

Erika was now twenty-two-years-old.

"Damn that's old!" Megan exclaimed.

"Thanks, runt!" Erika laughed.

I was being constantly nagged by Curtis to teach him how to ride his new motorcycle. I had promised to take him riding on Saturday, just for some peace and quiet.

An hour later

I heard a yell from upstairs and when I got to the briefing room, I found Curtis on his ass, holding his hand to his rather puffed up cheek.

"What did you do?" Chloe asked accusingly coming up behind me.

Curtis looked a little unsure about his response.

"Well, err, Megan just started her second period and she said that she was trying to figure out a box of, err, thingys and well I – I asked Megan if she needed a hand with – her – err – it..."

I burst out laughing and so did Chloe, although Chloe continued to look at Curtis rather severely.

"You have so much to learn about girls, Curtis! Like: not mentioning their periods, or anything to do with them!" Chloe suggested sagely.

..._...

"In my own *personal* experience, girls become *very* dangerous when they start puberty and that goes on for many, many years and tends to get worse once they become teenagers!" Dave advised, appearing on the scene.

"By '*personal experience*', I assume you mean *me*, asshole!"

"Mindy, you were a fucking nightmare from eleven to... Well, you still are; ask Marcus if you don't believe me!"

I punched Dave hard on his arm, which did *not* seem to do very much!

"Chloe wasn't exactly a little angel either – although..."

"Not *one* word, mother!" Chloe growled.

"She was over the moon, the day that she found her first few pubic hairs!" Cathy finished, ignoring her horrified daughter completely.

"Look! Nobody discusses my pubic hair except for me and Josh – he likes it – he thinks it's soft and sometimes moist!"

Chloe glowed bright red and muttered something unintelligible, before vanishing to the lower level as we all howled with laughter.

"Must be why some men decide that it's safer being gay!" Curtis commented.

Two days later Friday

"Do I *have* to remember the shit that happened that night?"

"Yes, Mindy, you do!"

"But I almost got my ass kicked!"

"But you didn't; you won!" I replied. "And that bastard was finished – kind of!"

"True... I suppose!"

"Besides a hot, sweaty Hit Girl was one hell, of a turn on!"

"Dave!"

"It was the worst morning of my life, the next day..."

'You can't go. People need you.'

'They've got you now.'

'I'm not like you.'

I could remember it like it was yesterday and it still hurt.

"... *'You don't have to be a bad-ass to be a superhero, Dave... You just have to be brave'*," I added.

"Some of my best words!" Mindy said, blushing slightly.

"The kiss was awesome!" I admitted.

"*'That was my first kiss'*," Mindy mused, remembering.

"*'Be nice... Or I'll rip your ass out through your mouth'*, I think you said!" I laughed. "So very 'Hit Girl!'"

It was not only us remembering that fight, Marty remembered it too; it had been his first time in real action and he had not enjoyed it all that much! For me, that morning after the fight, had been the start of my searching for Mindy; the start of everything that we had now.

I could not believe that it had been two whole years, since Mindy had left New York.

The following morning Saturday

The Farm

Megan screamed!

"Really?" I demanded covering my ears.

We had travelled up to The Farm so that Curtis could learn to ride. Although, I had decided to extend the training somewhat to include some other members of Fusion. In the barn were three, almost identical, motorcycles. One motorcycle belonged to Curtis and was white and green, the next one was white and pink, with a light-purple helmet hanging on the handlebars. The third motorcycle was white and grey, with a red helmet hanging on the handlebars.

I grabbed a pack from beside the pink motorcycle and threw it at Megan. Then another, identical pack from the grey motorcycle and threw it at Tommy.

"Get changed, both of you!"

Both kids ran off with enormous grins on their faces. I thought it would be easier to train them all together, so both Megan and Tommy were getting early birthday presents! Chloe laughed at their excitement; Chloe was to be my assistant as Dave had been when she had learnt. Josh was also present to assist.

Thirty minutes later

The three kids stood uneasily in their leathers and boots, holding their gauntlets.

Mindy and I stood before them, in our own leathers. Josh slouched over to one side in his leathers.

"Okay, kiddies!" Mindy began. "Let's go over the ground rules, which apparently *did not sink in*, last time!"

Mindy glared at Josh.

"You're not going to forget that minor transgression, are you?" Josh moaned.

"None of you little midgets will ever ride these motorcycles unless you have had permission and somebody else is with you..."

"You bad boy, Joshua!" Megan said seriously.

"Megan the angel!" Josh growled back and Megan smirked smugly.

"I mean it; I let that idiot off because he was wounded and I went soft on him," Mindy explained. "No more free passes!"

The three kids nodded acceptance of the rules.

..._...

"Now, these machines are very basic, but also powerful and you can get hurt if you do not listen and follow instructions. These machines are off-road only, so don't have the usual clutter of indicators, lights and speedometer..."

"Not that Mindy knows what a speedometer actually is..." I quipped before shutting up as Mindy glared at me.

Mindy pulled out Megan's motorcycle to the grass and Josh braced it while Mindy took the kids through the basics of the machine and the controls: ignition switch, engine start button, clutch lever, front brake, throttle grip, engine stop button, rear brake pedal, gear shift lever, fuel valve and kickstarter.

Megan was told to climb onto the machine and shown how the clutch operated and the positions of the gear shift lever; horizontal for neutral, first gear, one notch down and then second to fourth gears above the neutral position.

"You're lucky with this bike, it has an electric start, so no dicking about with the kickstarter," Mindy explained, as she ensured that the gearshift lever was in neutral and then had Megan pull in the clutch lever and press the button to start the engine.

The engine jumped to life instantly and ticked over happily. Megan had an enormous smile on her face! I passed the girl her helmet and she pulled it on and strapped it securely. Mindy then had Megan kick the gearshift lever down, into first.

"Ready?" Mindy asked, smiling encouragingly.

"No – Yes..." Megan replied, sounding anything but positive!

"Let in the clutch *gently*. Remember, when you stop you *must* pull the clutch lever or you *will* stall. Ignore the front brake for now. Use the rear brake, the one down here. Twist the throttle backward, *gently*, to go faster, twist it forwards to go slower."

"Okay..."

"Don't look at the front tyre, try to look ahead and don't worry if you fall, okay?"

Megan nodded slowly, still very apprehensive.

"Apply a little gas, and then let in the clutch *gently*! Try and follow the course, keeping it *slow*!" I said, encouragingly.

We all watched as Megan twisted the throttle gently and let in the clutch... She moved and then the motorcycle stalled.

"Damn it!" We all heard over the concealed comms units that we all wore.

"Take your time, Megan!" Mindy said. "Back into neutral, clutch in, press the start button. Try again."

Megan restarted the engine, kicked the gearshift lever down into first, and then gently let in the clutch. She moved,

jerkily, but she moved and kept moving; she managed a full, but shaky, circuit, before coming to a halt beside me, pulling in the clutch.

"You enjoy that?" I asked and Megan nodded enthusiastically.

"Well keep going then. Go around a couple more times and then we'll try second gear," Mindy said. "Just keep it *slow!*"

..._...

While Megan was riding in circles, Mindy went to see the two boys and get them moving while I kept an eye on Megan. She was doing well and was on her third go around when she seemed to slither a bit and then she over corrected and the motorcycle went one way and Megan went the other.

I ran towards her as she lay on the grass. Megan was on her side and was not moving, so I lifted her visor and peered in to see her eyes flickering open.

"That fucking hurt!" She growled.

"You okay?" I enquired.

Megan flexed her arms and legs then sat up.

"I think so!" Megan replied.

I could hear the boys starting their engines and Mindy taking them through the gears and moving off.

"Get up then, ass!" I said, helping her up and back onto her motorcycle.

..._...

After twenty minutes, we had all three kids riding around the course with a dozen or dozen yards between each other. Both Curtis and Tommy came off once each and Megan came off a second time, but generally, they were doing well.

We stopped for lunch; Curtis and Tommy were very hungry as was Megan. They were all very excited by what they had achieved.

I was now back on my Honda and it was an awesome feeling.

I managed to start it and move off, *without* any help. Now I just need to pull the clutch lever and flip the gear selector up two notches for second gear.

Cool!

I was instantly going faster, but I twisted the throttle forward, slowing down... Better. I managed a circuit in second gear, as did Megan and Tommy.

"You're all doing very well! Keep going, when you each get around the next corner, shift into third, one notch, *up*, okay?" Mindy said.

"Okay!" I replied.

"Okay!" Megan replied.

"Okay!" Tommy replied.

I turned around the next corner and pulled the clutch lever and flicked up the gear change lever, one notch, then let the clutch lever out, gently.

Cool... Third gear!

An hour later

The three kids were exhausted.

All three motorcycles were securely chained up in the barn and the kids had changed out of their leathers.

"You guys enjoy yourselves?" Jack asked with a big smile.

"Hell, yeah!" Megan replied for them all.

***Chapter 172*: Petra Revealed**

Three days later
Tuesday

West Ridge

"You two are worrying me!"

"Makes a change from you worrying us!" Marcus laughed.

"Are we going to like this?" Megan asked with trepidation.

"Possibly..." Paige said with a smirk.

"For fuck's sake, just spit it out, old man!" Mindy exploded, obviously unable to take anymore suspense.

"Paige is pregnant!" Marcus explained with a smug grin.

I watched as Mindy and Megan just seemed to freeze.

"Congratulations!" I said, ignoring the rather freaked out girls.

"Thank you, Dave!" Marcus said.

"Ewww!" Megan announced.

"What she said!" Mindy added with a grimace and a nod at Megan.

Paige and Marcus laughed.

"How long," I asked, again ignoring the two idiots.

"Four weeks," Paige said happily.

"You looking for a girl or a boy?" I asked.

I saw Marcus and Paige look uneasily towards Mindy and Megan.

"A boy!" Both said together, very quickly.

That weekend
Saturday night

Western Chicago

I was unsure why I had gone along with it, but I did owe the girl for what she had done to help us.

Anyway, here I was with Petra. I followed her into the building. Petra had warned me to stay close behind her, as we rode in. I was somewhat surprised to notice that the approach was similar to that for Safehouse F. We passed miscellaneous piles of rubbish and rubble. The building had holes in the roof and sections of wall were missing.

We then passed out of the building and followed a path that was made up of crushed rubble and provided surprisingly good grip to the tyres of our motorcycles. Despite Petra riding quite fast, I was easily able to keep up with her, on my Panigale. The path was hidden by thick evergreen trees, which would also muffle the motorcycle engines.

Finally, after a few minutes, I saw a building up ahead. It looked like a decrepit workshop from the outside. However, a roller shutter opened – presumably triggered by Petra and we rode into the darkness. My headlight illuminated a workbench, but little else. We stopped and once the roller shutter had closed behind us, overhead lighting snapped on.

Wow!

We had both stopped, side by side, on a section of floor that was made up of black ribbed steel.

In front of us was a well-equipped workbench, with the expected tools and equipment. I could not see much else, beyond a steel door that was fitted with a keypad.

..._...

Petra seemed somewhat hesitant, as she dismounted from her Honda and stood in front of me, as I dismounted my Ducati.

"Hit Girl, I... I see how you guide and protect your team, singularly how you and Kick-Ass lead Fusion. I want to be a part of that – if I could – I would very much like to join Fusion," Petra said.

That was unexpected!

Petra had to trust me, as she had led me to her 'lair'. Now she wanted to place herself under Dave's leadership and my own! What the hell, should I reply? I would love to have Petra, with her skills – but we knew nothing about her...

Petra must have sensed my indecision.

"I know you have no reason to trust me. I hoped that my actions, up until now, would show you that I am out to help and to work for good, in this City," She continued. "To show you how serious I am – I am willing to not only show you my Safehouse, but I am also willing to reveal to you, my true identity, Hit Girl."

Before I could say anything – Petra reached up and pulled off her mask. I had not known what to expect, only now, I was even more confused and to say the least, more than a bit shocked.

"My name is..."

"Hailee Richards!" I blurted out and saw a very surprised expression appear on Hailee's face.

"How did you know?" Hailee asked incredulously.

Now, I decided to take a chance; I reached up and pulled off my own mask.

"Holy fuck!" Hailee exclaimed.

"So – you never figured it out?" I asked.

"No, you – err – Mindy is very different to Hit Girl!"

"Some would disagree with you there, Hailee!" I replied, grimacing.

"Did you know it was me?" Hailee asked.

"No – you played the innocent, unassuming teenager, very well!" I replied.

"As do you; to outsiders at least!"

"So – you want to join Fusion? Well, I would need to discuss it with Kick-Ass..."

"Oh my God – it has just occurred to me – if you're Hit Girl... Then Dave must be Kick-Ass and that hormonal girl, Chloe; she must be Shadow – it just stands to reason!"

"Well, when you put it like that..." I agreed with a chuckle and then I had a thought. "You fancy a little fun, Hailee..."

"Bring it on!"

The following afternoon
Sunday

D-JAK

We all stood around the edges of the main mat.

I smirked at Dave, who just rolled his eyes and nodded for me to go ahead. Beside me stood Chloe and Josh, with Erika and Hailee opposite me.

"Just thought that we could have a little fun this afternoon!" I suggested as I walked to the centre of the mat. "Chloe - front and centre!"

"Why do you always pick on me?" Chloe moaned, but stepped forwards anyway.

"Because I can!" I replied. "Hailee!"

"Who, me?" Hailee asked, feigning ignorance.

"Yeah, you – come over and stand opposite the moody cow!" I suggested.

Hailee moved forwards slowly and I could see that she was playing along and looking apprehensive. Chloe seemed a little confused, but she did not seem threatened in any way.

"Now Hailee – watch!" I said and promptly flattened the unsuspecting Chloe. "A simple move – think you can manage that?"

"I can try..." Hailee answered in her usual, timid fashion as Chloe got back to her feet and threw me a nasty glare.

I looked across at Dave and saw him shake his head and chuckle. Hailee took a good hold of Chloe's Gi, before looking at me, directly.

"Go ahead, Hailee – it's not like you can hurt her!" I suggested with a nod.

Chloe's face mirrored the thought, at least until she was halfway to the mat. Chloe struck the mat very hard and Hailee jumped back as if shocked. Chloe, too, looked more than a little shocked at her current situation. She slowly got up and glared at Hailee. She then looked at Dave who just shrugged without giving the game away.

"Hailee – could you do that again?" I asked, grinning.

"I can try," Hailee replied – again sounding timid.

"Like hell she can!" Chloe retorted. I was certain that Chloe smelt a rat.

"Try fighting back, Chloe. You're much better than Hailee!" I suggested.

Chloe and Hailee faced off against each other. It was similar to before but I could see that Hailee had adjusted her stance and was now ready for a real fight. Chloe smirked and went in for what she saw as an easy 'kill', only to find herself flying through the air and down onto the mat.

Chloe jumped up, looking mad. Then just seconds later she was back, face down on the mat. Then Chloe started to drive in hard and Hailee fought back easily, much to the surprise of Erika and Josh!

"Josh – help Chloe!" I ordered.

"Josh saves the day – as usual!" He quipped as he joined the fight.

His entry into the fight did not last long, as Hailee was perfectly capable of fighting them both.

Bang!

Josh hit the mat hard, closely followed by Chloe who landed on top of him.

"Bloody hell, Chloe – you weigh a fucking tonne!" Josh blurted out.

Josh then yelled out in pain as Chloe thumped him.

"I do *not* weigh a fucking tonne, cunt!"

Chloe turned to me.

"Mindy – I smell a fucking rat!" She growled, somewhat menacingly.

"That would probably be me!" I admitted.

Chloe scowled and then looked at Hailee.

"So – is she some new fighter that you've been training in secret?" Chloe demanded.

"I've not taught her a thing," I replied honestly.

Hailee smirked. "Tell 'em – Hit Girl!"

..._...

Everybody gasped at what Hailee had just said and they all turned to me.

"What do you want me to tell them – Petra?" I replied with an enormous grin.

Several jaws dropped and nobody said a word.

"I thought you said these guys were intelligent!" Hailee quipped.

"They were!"

"You mean that Hailee and Petra are one and the fucking same?" Chloe demanded, looked mad.

"The same as Mindy and Hit Girl, Chloe and Shadow, Josh and Jackal!" I replied. "Need I go on?"

"No!" Chloe groaned.

***Two days later
Tuesday***

Northwestern Chicago

It was the first day of September and I intended to have a peaceful week, only fate seemed to have other ideas.

It was very dark and it was just myself, and Wildcat, enjoying a night out together. I was being responsible for a change and riding carefully so that Wildcat could learn something while we were out. I would comment on what I was doing, as I did it, when I approached junctions and made turns. Wildcat would ask questions, I would show her why I made certain movements, and in some cases what would happen if I did something different.

We were having a lot of fun. Which in hindsight might have been a distraction. I should not have even been in that neighbourhood and my biggest mistake had been turning right. I slammed on the brakes as I found the road blocked.

"Oh, fuck!"

"This is *not* good!" Wildcat muttered and I felt her gripping my waist tighter.

I spun my rear tyre, pulled the motorcycle around, and accelerated out of the street. We were now being pursued, not only by bullets but also by three SUVs and a pair of motorcycles.

"Fusion, we're in shit!" I called over the radio as I accelerated past ninety.

We were heading east on West Roosevelt Road. I had not received an answer to my radio call, which worried me, as I knew that both Dave and Marty were at Safehouse F.

Safehouse F

Marty and I were chatting away, just as we always had.

The conversation was bordering on the obscene and the disgusting, however there were no kids about, or females, so there was nobody to upset!

Then the speaker on the wall jumped to life.

"Fu – re – t!"

"What the fuck?" Marty asked.

"Was that Mindy?"

"Sounded like it, pal!"

Marty started tapping away and then frowned.

"I can't connect to either of their radios; I have no GPS, no diagnostics!" Marty said unhappily.

"Where were they last?"

"Somewhere along West Roosevelt Road."

"You think they're in trouble?" I asked.

"It's Mindy and Megan!" Marty replied.

"Fuck!"

West Roosevelt Road

I anchored on at South Clark Street, taking a right.

"Fucking hell!" Wildcat growled. "Why hasn't anybody replied?"

"How the fuck am I meant to know!" I growled. We still had short range; I could communicate with Wildcat, but nothing long range enough to get to the Safehouse. We were on our own!

The SUVs and motorcycles were still there, not far behind. I had no idea who the fuck they were, but there were far too many to stop and make a stand. Maybe if backup was on its way, but right now, I had no idea if anybody had even heard my radio call!

A few yards after passing under a railroad bridge, I turned right up a dirt slope onto some waste ground. I was very pleased that I was currently riding on dual-purpose tyres and uprated suspension, but despite the improvements the heavy motorcycle, not to mention being one up would mean I would have my work cut out controlling the ride!

The SUVs were right behind us, but I was just beyond the reach of their headlights and I had killed my own, which was lethal!

"Stop!" Wildcat yelled.

"Huh?"

"Let me off, I can take some of them out with the P90!"

Megan was checked out on the P90, but it was still a large and heavy weapon for her, however she could shoot it and reasonably well. Not having her behind me would also help with my evasion. However, this was Megan and I could not just abandon her. Nevertheless, she was a Fusion Vigilante and had already proved herself.

As we passed through an extra dark piece of the waste ground, I eased back on the throttle, careful not to touch the brakes. I felt Wildcat leap off the motorcycle and instantly accelerated drawing the SUVs and motorcycles away from Wildcat.

Heading East

"Marcus?"

"Yeah, Dave?"

"Trouble!"

"Why does this all seem so normal?" Marcus groaned.

"The two girls are missing and comms are out. As you can probably imagine, wherever they are there has to be World War Three erupting!"

"I'll make some discrete enquiries; but I have my own problems here!"

Wasteland off South Clarke Street

I aimed the FN P90 and focussed on the oncoming SUVs; I settled the sight on the front SUV and triggered the IR laser. I lased the right front tyre and squeezed the trigger twice. The SUV was travelling at speed and as the bullets hit, the tyre shredded, but the SUV only slewed until its driver regained control; it had run flats!

The SUV was now very limited in its performance, off road, but it was still in the game. I moved the laser onto the windshield and sent six rapid shots downrange. The bullets went through the windscreen, but the windscreen was not as badly damaged as I had hoped it would be. It was obviously armoured, but to a low level that could not deflect the 5.7-millimetre rounds. I re-aimed, matching the swerving vehicle and sent a stream of automatic fire into the driver's side.

The SUV seemed to lose traction and skidded before it flipped over and crashed down on its side and rolled twice. The other two SUVs stopped, with the wrecked SUV between them, and where, they deemed the shooter to be.

I had to move. I could hear Hit Girl's motorcycle over by the river. I could also hear two more motorcycle engines as they pursued Hit Girl over the rough ground. There was also sporadic gunfire. As expected the waste ground was in near total darkness, having no street lighting. I was using my NVGs, which turned the dark waste ground into a green hued wilderness. I saw the men pouring out of the intact SUVs and pulling men from the wrecked SUV.

I sent single bullets in their direction to keep their heads down and to distract them from targeting Hit Girl who had other worries right at that moment.

The other riders were good.

In the darkness, I could not make out what they were riding, but they were powerful machines nonetheless. I kept ahead of them easily, but the going was tough on the sandy ground. I had to get rid of my tail, and get back to help Wildcat.

I soon moved onto a long strip of concrete and an idea formed in my mind. I increased speed before slamming on my brakes. The first of the two motorcycles came past me, applying his own brakes hard, only I jammed the muzzle of my G36C into the spokes of his front wheel.

The motorcycle flipped into the air quite spectacularly, the rider landing on the concrete, breaking his neck. I span around, firing off several rounds from my Glock into the other motorcycle rider, who came off his motorcycle, which was sent spinning away into the darkness.

I turned and headed towards Wildcat.

"Wildcat, Status!"

"Dropping bad guys, all good!" I replied and heard Hit Girl laugh.

"Just keep safe!"

"Hey, it's me!"

I was actually enjoying myself. Every time somebody came in my direction, that person died. After the first three men, they seemed to have figured that out and stayed put close to their SUVs. I hoped that the bastards would just fucking give up and go home.

It had been a little over fifteen minutes since I had started taking pot shots at the SUVs. I was rather surprised that no

Cops had arrived, but thought that they may have been busy elsewhere in the city. I was really impressed by Hit Girl; I had seen her destroy the two motorcycles and send them both spinning off into wreckage and that was cool!

I could see Hit Girl heading in a circle towards the SUVs and then I saw her being engaged by the gunmen. I started firing larger bursts from the P90 to keep their heads down as Hit Girl made her way back around, towards me.

Two minutes later, she skidded to a halt beside me.

"Get on; it's time to go!"

I leapt up and climbed aboard the Ducati, sending short bursts towards the SUVs. Hit Girl accelerated, just as I was almost dazzled as a bright light flared from the Roosevelt Road Bridge and seconds later the wrecked SUV exploded as a rocket struck it, causing the perfect distraction for our escape. Hit Girl powered back towards the ramp where we had originally entered the waste ground and turned left up South Clarke Street, increasing speed. As we made another left on West Roosevelt Road, we were joined by Kick-Ass on his own Ducati.

"You guys having fun?" He called over our short-range communications channel.

"Just us girls having a night out on the town!" I replied.

Northern Chicago
The same time

The Mafioso stared at the dead body on the sidewalk, as the handcuffs were placed on his wrists, before turning to the man who had made the killing shot.

"You are fucking dead, policeman, mark my words, you will die for this!"

***Chapter 173*: Marcus Down**

Two days later
Thursday

Chicago PD, District 21

Sergeant Hank Voight was debriefing Detective Erin Lindsay in his office, when several gunshots rang out.

Voight and Lindsay ran out of the office, hot on the heels of other members of both Voight's unit and the Organised Crime Taskforce, across the hall. Everybody ran to the back entrance and as they entered the area that Intelligence and OCT shared Lyndsay and Halstead saw several prone forms on the concrete floor, blood pooling around them.

"We got Officers down!" Halstead bellowed.

The first Officer, in plain clothes was obviously dead, with a bullet wound to his head and a spreading pool of blood.

"You see anything?" Lyndsay shouted as she reached the large vehicular access door, which was open.

"No. Nothing." Came the response from Ruzek.

"I'll go left." Lyndsay announced.

"No visual!" Ruzek called out.

"Lieutenant Williams is down!" Voight called out and checked for a pulse – it was there.

"Somebody call an ambulance!" Ruzek shouted, as he scanned the area, his pistol out in front of him.

Voight had his radio out, "Ten-One, squad! Officers shot, 21st District at the OCT compound!"

West Ridge

I was at home when an unmarked SUV slammed on the brakes outside, there were blue strobe lights flashing inside the windshield. I opened the front door to see what was happening and saw that Fellowes was driving and he was ashen.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Why aren't you answering your damn cell?" Fellowes yelled.

I grabbed the cell out of my pocket. It was off. I turned it on.

"Must have turned it off by mistake," I said. "Sorry!"

"Get in!" Fellowes said. "It's Marcus!"

I slammed the front door of the house and jumped in the front of the SUV. I had barely closed my door when Fellowes floored the accelerator and slewed the SUV around and headed out of the street. The moment he reached the main road, he hit the siren.

Oh, God, not Marcus!

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

The ride down had been fast.

Fellowes had rarely dropped below fifty, racing through red lights where it was safe to do so and we hit one-twenty on the Interstate. All Fellowes would say was that Marcus had been shot, along with some other Cops at the District.

I wished Dave was with me, but he was at the Safehouse, although Fellowes said that he was on his way to the

hospital. I wished that I could have been with Marcus when it had happened. However, what could I have accomplished?

"Mindy, he's going to be okay, the bullets went straight through," Cathy said trying to console me. I knew that there was more, Cathy's expression told me that there was more.

I was a fucking wreck; I could not control my emotions, my tears, *nothing!* Dave came into the room, concern etched into his face, and I just crumpled into his arms, sobbing. We both went to the waiting room, which was filled with Cops, some in uniform others not. Most I recognised, but only a few knew that I was Marcus' daughter and even fewer knew that I was Hit Girl.

..._...

Hank Voight came over and I could see blood on his clothes. It had to have been Marcus' blood.

"Mindy, isn't it?" Voight asked gently and I nodded.

Did Voight suspect that I was not who I appeared to be? If so, he did not let on.

"We're doing everything we can and we will hunt down the bastards behind this; you have my word."

"Thank you, Hank. Marcus always had a good word to say about you. He also said that you're like a Rottweiler with a steak when it comes to a case," I said and there was a ripple of laughter from the Cops.

"You need anything; we're here to help, all of us!" Voight said waving his hand around the room and I received nods from everybody there.

"Thank you, all of you," Dave added.

There was a tense moment when Kim arrived and saw some of her ex-colleagues, but most of them were more shocked to see how pregnant she was. The biggest surprise however was when Marcus' deputy arrived; Sergeant Vicky Richards and she was accompanied by a very shy looking Hailee.

Hailee answered my unspoken question.

"Mom, meet Mindy; Marcus' daughter. Mindy, please meet my Mom; Sergeant Vicky Richards," Hailee said.

Therefore, Hailee's Mom, the second-in-command of the OCT, which was charged with hunting down Chicago's vigilantes, was also the mother of Petra!

"Hello, Mindy. I'm sorry we didn't get to meet under better circumstances," Vicky said with a genuine smile.

***The following day
Friday***

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

The grumpy bastard was awake and ready for visitors.

"Damn bed is like a piece of lumpy concrete!" He moaned.

"Give it a rest old man!" I said.

"Don't go doing anything stupid, Mindy – I mean that!" Marcus warned.

"Would I?" I replied innocently.

"Do I even need to honour that comment with an answer?"

"Not really," I muttered.

"Look, Mindy, I'm fine; just a few new ventilation holes! "Marcus chuckled. "Nothing important was damaged, although I understand my shoulder is going to be a little sore!"

"Take it from somebody with more holes than a damn sieve; take it gently!" I warned.

"What, like you always do?" Dave laughed.

I scowled.

That night

South Chicago

Voight and Olinsky rolled their vehicles the last few metres with engines and lights off.

The team exited the vehicle quietly and without fanfare. They all wore ballistic vests and three of their number were carrying the long-guns, the AR-15 assault rifles. As they approached the building there were signs of life; a light was on in the front room.

The team split up with four heading to the rear of the property and the rest arraying around the wooden steps that led up to the porch. Just seconds before Voight gave the go signal, there were two shotgun blasts and the front door partially disintegrated as the Cops out front, dove for cover.

At the same time as the shotgun blasts, the rear team smashed open the back door. They entered the property with Detective Halstead leading and Ruzek immediately behind him. There was a man in the hallway, beyond the kitchen; he was feverishly attempting to reload a shotgun. At the sight of the armed Cops, he dropped the weapon and pulled out a pistol, firing off several rounds before Halstead and Ruzek shot him dead with their AR-15 rifles.

"Clear!" Ruzek yelled and Voight appeared through the demolished front door.

"Damn it!" Voight breathed. "We needed him alive!"

"Search the place, top to bottom!" Olinsky ordered, heading upstairs. "Every fucking mouse hole!"

The following night

Saturday

Voight and I met in a discreet coffee shop, after dark.

"I'll get straight to the point, Mindy; I know what you do at night..."

Voight must have read my expression as he continued quickly.

"... You are not going to get an argument from me about what you do. I believe in what you do one hundred and ten percent. No to mention that without your team, I would probably be long dead!"

"Okay, I trust you."

Voight nodded.

"It looks like the orders came from within Chicago, but the gunman was imported for the hit," Voight explained. "Now, we can handle the Chicago end, but I know that you will want the shooter and I wouldn't mind a piece of him, either, for that matter..."

"So, where is the gutless bastard?" I demanded.

"A seedy little backdrop that makes Chicago and Ralph D'Amico seem like a walk in the fucking park!" Voight explained. "Gotham..."

"Gotham?" I repeated.

"That City is like nothing on this earth; makes Mogadishu seem quiet and safe in comparison!"

"We can handle it..."

"I know; that is why I am giving you this information and I never let a Cop killer get away, ever!" Voight growled.

"We'll do it; just keep us informed with your end, Hank and thanks," I said.

"Good luck my purple friend."

The next afternoon
Sunday

Safehouse F

My emotions were very mixed about letting Mindy and Chloe head to Gotham alone.

However, we needed an advance party to check things out and to give us time to gather all of our equipment. We had been packing for a couple of days, just in case and we had prepared plans for just this eventuality, ever since the last time we had needed to operate outside of Chicago.

"You take care, both of you!" I said, emotions growing inside me. "Just one missed check-in and I *will* kick your fucking ass, Mindy Macready!"

"No picking up strangers in Safehouses this time!" Josh quipped and I could sense the worry in him.

"We promise to behave and not take any risks," Chloe said. "Don't we, Mindy?"

"I promise to behave; happy?" Mindy growled.

"Not really, but it will have to do!" I said, hugging Mindy tightly.

"Keep me informed about the old man and stay safe, yourself," I said and I could feel tears welling up. "We'll see you in a few days."

I started the engine and dropped the SUV into gear. We accelerated up the ramp and then Chloe and I were on our way.

Destination: Gotham.

Authors Note: *At this point, you are strongly advised to read my other story: **The Gotham Vigilantes**, for the next events in the **Forsaken** timeline. You can ignore the story, but events and characters in **The Gotham Vigilantes** will be referred to from time to time. **Forsaken** may continue in parallel with the events in **Gotham** from Chapter 174 of **Forsaken**.*

***Chapter 174*: Investigations**

*The following morning
Monday*

Chicago PD, District 21

The new building had cost over \$21 million and covered 44,000-square feet, over five levels.

The building was very impressive, which I assumed had been the idea when it was designed and built. I walked into the glass-fronted building and up to the front desk where I nodded at the desk Sergeant.

"David Lizewski to see Hank Voight."

"Come right this way!" The Sergeant said and came around the desk.

She led me through a door that had required the sergeant's fingerprint to unlock.

"Trudy Platt," The Sergeant said, introducing herself. "How is the Lieutenant?"

"Grumpy!"

"Sounds about right!" Sergeant Platt said with a brief smile. "Up the stairs to the top and then go through the door and down the corridor."

"Thanks."

..._...

Once through the door at the top of the stairs, I was in a corridor that ran between two glass-fronted areas. The one on the left had twin glass doors and a sign: 'Chicago Police Department, Intelligence'. Opposite, over to the right, were an identical set of doors and another sign: 'Chicago Police Department, Organised Crime Taskforce'. Behind the doors on each side was a small reception desk and beyond that eight desks arranged in two groups of four. Beyond these were a pair of offices for the senior officers, a small conference room, a kitchen and a locker room. It was all very smart and functional. I pushed open the doors into Intelligence.

"Dave!" Olinsky called, looking up from his desk. "Welcome! Hank's downstairs – you ready for this, kid?"

"Bring it on, pal!" I replied.

..._...

Olinsky led me downstairs, via another set of stairs and we came out into a large open area which housed the vehicles that belonged to both Intelligence and OCT. Sergeant Hank Voight was examining a large red stain on the concrete. He looked up as Olinsky and I entered.

"Detective Vincent Jackson. One of Marcus' crew, single bullet, 7.62-calibre, destroyed his heart. He died instantly."

"Sniper; we're still looking for his firing point," Olinsky added.

"Marcus was standing beside Jackson; they were talking according to the CCTV. Detective Jim Ransom was over there, by the armoury. The first shot took out Jackson, Marcus drew his pistol and ran over to the door, he looked out and the next bullet hit him in the shoulder, sending fragments of bone and bullet into his left side. The third bullet left Ransom drowning in his own blood."

I could tell that Voight was on the verge of losing it; those were not men under his command, but they were Cops none the less.

"We got lucky that afternoon; somebody found a sniper rifle in a dumpster of all places. They always wear gloves when handling the weapon and firing it, but many slip up when it comes to loading the damned magazine!" Voight explained.

"Two beautiful prints; one led us to somebody who deals in anything and everything, including guns – only he died

when we breached his house," Olinsky added with a grimace. "Nevertheless, his place was a damned treasure trove of information. That started to lead us towards the bastard who actually took the fucking shot."

"It appears that Marcus was targeted because of his role with OCT, by the Genovese family," Voight went on. "Those fuckers from Europe, now they aren't stupid, so they told the dead fucker, err; Randy White his name was, to get somebody in from out of town to dilute and spread the blame somewhere else."

"In this case they used a man from Gotham," Olinsky finished.

"Thank you for being so candid; it means a lot."

"We owe you guys a lot," Olinsky said in reply. "Marcus too."

"We all believe in protecting this City," Voight said strongly before going on.

"Nobody fucks with my City!"

Safehouse F

The place was a hive of activity as equipment was brought together and vehicles were packed.

Everybody was on hand to help, even Sophia! There were magazines to load, boxes of ammunition to pull from storage and check, weapons to be selected and inspected from stock to muzzle. On the not so popular side, Cathy was packing various trauma kits that included everything that might be needed when entering into a major battle. I severely hoped that Gotham was not going to be a major battleground, but I did not hold out much hope!

The mood was sombre, as everybody knew that we already had two of our member operating in harm's way, including our de facto leader. We all knew that Mindy and Chloe were both highly trained and were a perfectly matched team. Privately, though, Cathy and I also knew that Chloe was the perfect balance for Mindy when I was not around to keep her emotions, and most importantly her darker side, in check.

Marty and Abby were testing and re-testing every piece of electrical equipment including the radios. The radios had fucked up only the previous week, almost getting Mindy and Megan killed. Marty had been able to trace the problem to faulty SD memory cards that held the equipment's encryption algorithms. Marty had resolved to replace these every six months and every team member carried a spare card, and each member had been trained to fit the replacement card and activate it.

Even Kyle was helping, packing equipment, inventorying supplies, anything that he could do to assist. In the Warehouse, we had additional vehicles being assembled for transport to Gotham, an eight-hundred mile drive. It was Monday; the plan was to be onsite, in Gotham, on the Friday night. Mindy would send back any information she gathered as she acquired it, until then. On the Gotham side, of things Marty had been very busy assembling equipment for Mindy and Chloe to setup, ready for our arrival.

Naturally, I was worried about Mindy and Josh was almost paranoid about Chloe's well-being. We spent many sleepless nights at West Ridge worrying about our women.

Separation sucked!

The next evening Tuesday

Safehouse F

"I miss you both, you know."

"I know Dave and you Josh, thanks for caring," Mindy said over the video conferencing setup.

Sitting beside her was a tearful Chloe. Beside me, I had a jittery Joshua. I knew that Mindy was very good at hiding her emotions, but I could read her like a book and I could tell that she was sad.

"You two been sharing the bathtub again?" I asked and both girls glared at me.

Joshua turned to me, questioningly.

"Even being eight hundred miles away from those two psychos, does not make me feel safe, so not right now, Joshua."

"Good boy!" Mindy laughed.

..._...

Then the talk became serious.

"Dave, this City is more rotten than a two month old egg sandwich!" Mindy explained with a grimace.

"Sounds a little like Vigilante heaven!" I said. "Knocked any heads together yet?"

"We've been tempted, but we've been good girls, haven't we Chloe."

"I have!" Chloe smiled innocently.

I rolled my eyes and glared at Mindy.

"What has she done?" I asked.

"I have done nothing!" Mindy replied indignantly scowling at Chloe.

"Let's just say that we gift wrapped a couple of cunts for the GCPD!" Chloe explained. "For now, we have *not* exposed ourselves."

"I should hope not!" Josh quipped trying to add some humour.

"One track mind, you, and that track runs in the damn sewer!" Chloe scowled.

"Runs right beside yours, lover!" Josh replied with a big grin.

"He's right, you know," Mindy said, enjoying Chloe's annoyance.

"What's up Josh?" Chloe asked, seeing Josh's expression and turning serious.

"I miss you..."

"Joshua, I miss you too, more than you can know. Being in bed alone is *not* fun."

"Well you're not sharing mine; you move about too damn much!" Mindy growled.

"Going back to self-stimulation is just not like the real thing!" Chloe laughed.

"And on that note; I'm out of here!" Mindy laughed. "Love you Dave; stay safe!"

"You, too, I love you," I replied with a smile and then looked at Chloe. "You keep safe Chloe and watch my girl for me."

"I will Dave, I promise," Chloe replied sincerely before she turned back to Josh. "We'll be together soon Josh and then you can fuck me senseless!"

"I'll hold you to that!" Josh said shakily as I killed the connection.

Josh turned to face me and he looked scared.

"They'll be okay, Josh, they've done this before; they're a perfect team," I tried.

"This is the first time that we have been apart since I found Chloe again and it's tearing me apart. It hurts worse than any bullet wound."

I could see tears in Joshua's eyes and they were spilling over and down his cheeks. He also looked ashamed by the

tears.

"Josh, don't be ashamed about being human and having human emotions. We all have them; even those two cast-iron bitches in Gotham," I said. "When Mindy went to New York with Chloe, where they both found you? That had been the first time that Mindy and I had been apart since I had found her, here in Chicago. I am man enough to tell you that I cried that first night; it hurt so much. It is the only pain that I feel one hundred percent. It is a little worse because we both know that our girls can be more than a little hot headed at times and get themselves into impossible situations. On the positive side, we can balance that with the knowledge that they are both fully capable of getting themselves back out of those same impossible situations."

"I know. But I've never felt so much hurt inside me before," Josh replied, unable to stop the tears falling.

"It's called love, Josh. I know that you love Chloe with all your heart and I know that she loves you back, just as much."

Gotham City

It was ridiculous!

We were both sitting on the couch and crying our fucking eyes out. So much for being hardened crime-fighters! I was just glad that I had Chloe here with me and neither of us were shy about showing our emotions, or anything else for that matter, in front of the other. She had helped me the last time, in New York, when I was away from Dave. Now, though, Chloe was experiencing the pain of separation from the boy that she was madly in love with.

I was glad that Dave had cut the connection when he had, because Chloe and I had both been on the verge of losing it and I had noticed that Joshua had tears in his eyes and he was struggling to hold them back.

I had not wanted Chloe to see that, it would have just made things worse.

***Chapter 175*: Petra At Large**

*The following day
Wednesday evening*

Safehouse F

The time had come.

We were ready to depart for Gotham, with two stops on the way to refuel and rest.

Paige and Cathy, along with Tony Morgan were there to say goodbye and to 'lock-up' once we were on our way. For all, it was a very tearful goodbye, especially for the younger ones, not to mention their parents. Paige and Cathy were doing their best to steel themselves and not cry, as that would have made it worse for their charges.

Safehouse D

I eased the eighteen-wheeler, out of the warehouse and onto the streets

On our way out of the City, we were met by the temporary keeper of the peace for Chicago. Petra roared past on her motorcycle and escorted us clear of Chicago, before she waved and returned to the City that was our home.

I would miss Chicago.

Southern Chicago

It was a daunting thought.

I was protecting Chicago, on my own. I alone knew that Fusion had just left the City, for a destination unknown. I knew it was only temporary, as Dave and Mindy had explained to me. I knew the reason, though: Marcus.

My Mom was beside herself with worry over her boss. The revelations about who was who in the City had thrown me, totally. Mindy and Dave had trusted me with their secret and I was not going to let them down. I wished that I could tell Mom, but I could not do that. For now, Mom knew about me, but she had no idea that her boss was the father of Chicago's biggest vigilante and the one, which they were supposed to be hunting down.

Mindy had made me promise not to do anything stupid and not to take risks. If there was any real trouble then I had sealed orders; cool huh! Only certain people knew that I was Petra and currently none of them was in the City. I was a little concerned about Fusion, as they had taken a lot of heavy equipment with them, which indicated to me that they were obviously headed into harm's way.

It was my job to show that vigilantes were still active in the City, so I had to maintain a low profile, while still putting the cunts down.

That evening

***Chicago PD, District 21
Organised Crime Taskforce***

Being there was depressing.

I sat at my desk and looked through the glass partition, at the empty desk of Lieutenant Marcus Williams. I was temporarily in command of what was a notoriously unpopular department of the Chicago PD.

Our primary role was hunting down vigilantes. However, the Chicago PD loved vigilantes, at least unofficially! I was dreading the day that my boss would find out that I was not only harbouring a vigilante, but that the vigilante in question was my own, rather rebellious, teenaged daughter. It had been her father's idea. Paul had been a scientist and had made quite a name for himself with several inventions, not to mention some good money. Paul's parents had been killed in New York City by some bastard called The Motherfucker. That event had sent Paul on a crazed mission

of vengeance. He had taken our then fifteen-year-old daughter, who was already highly skilled at martial arts and he had proceeded to turn her into a vigilante. He provided her with equipment and weapons. I hated the idea, but Hailee loved it and I was fed up with criminals that got away, due to evidence issues and the like.

I firmly believed in what our colleague across the corridor in Intelligence was rumoured to do with the worst scum. My main reason for joining OCT had been to both gain intelligence and protect my only daughter. Hailee had told me that she had met up with Fusion and their leaders, Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. I was also aware that Hailee was desperate to join up with Hit Girl and her team. I agreed; there was only so much Hailee could do on her own before something went badly wrong and she was killed.

Leading a double life had been a struggle for Hailee and several times, I had needed to fudge an alibi for her. She struggled to keep boyfriends as they often clashed with her nocturnal activities. In a way, I was happier with her current nocturnal activities rather than those other nocturnal activities teenagers normally engaged in!

My daughter would be eighteen in a few more months and then out of my control. I was proud of her and of her upholding the legacy of my husband after he was killed in a car-crash only eight months previously.

..._...

I knew that Marcus had a daughter and that he was due to get married to a woman who had a daughter, too. I just prayed that Marcus' daughters had more sense than to prance about dressed up in armoured suits!

There was a knock on my door and business beckoned.

"Boss, that Petra has been sighted, she's put down three criminals so far and they have been picked up by uniform," Detective Jim Halsay said.

"Get the first criminal set up in interrogation and give me a call."

"Yes, sergeant!"

I would now get to see what my daughter had been getting up to, from the criminals.

District 21 Interrogation Suite B

The man looked like he had been beaten.

"What happened to you, then?" I asked, grinning.

"No self-respecting criminal can walk the streets safely anymore; it's disgusting!"

The man had a sense of humour, anyway.

"So tell me about whatever caught you..."

"Biker chick! Wore a blue/grey armoured suit, my bullets seemed to bounce off! She was vicious and she battered me senseless. When I came too, I was cuffed and in the back of a damn Cop car!"

I smirked, but also felt concern, knowing that my daughter had been shot, several times, apparently.

Indian Knoll Road

The drive home had been long, as usual and had taken almost an hour.

I hated the long drive. However, I loved the house we owned, some thirty or so miles due west of Chicago. I parked the car in the garage and rushed into the house.

"Hailee!"

"Up here, Mom!"

I ran up the stairs and found my daughter in the bathroom. She was not a shy girl and sat there topless, examining

the welts on her chest.

"I heard that some idiot shot you."

"Yeah, slight miscalculation on my part!" Hailee grimaced as she pulled on her bra.

"You're staying out longer, Hailee; what's up?"

"Nothing, Mom, just juggling my schedule is all."

"Yeah! You eaten yet?"

"No, Mom; I'm, starving!"

"Thought so."

Hailee hated cooking for herself. Given a choice, she always left it to me. Ultimately, I was very pleased that another day had gone past with my daughter still alive.

I headed to the kitchen to make dinner.

The following morning Thursday

Mom was already gone for work by the time I hauled myself out of bed.

I really needed to find a boyfriend. I was actually considering that kid who worked down at D-JAK; he was cute, very cute. Although, as I understood it I was two and a half years older than him, but who cared! We had spoken several times and I had heard from another source that he fancied me.

First things first, breakfast!

D-JAK

"Hey, Mrs Wilson!"

"Oh, hello, Hailee. How you doing, this morning?"

"Good, very good, thanks. Err, is Kyle about?"

"Storage room..."

"Thanks!"

I headed over to the storage room and found Kyle stacking some mats.

"Hi, Kyle."

"Hi, Hailee."

"You free lunchtime?" I asked brazenly.

"Hell, yeah, pizza?" Kyle replied, looking excited.

"At the Mall?"

"See you there about one?" Kyle suggested.

"It's a date!"

The Mall

The place was heaving with people, which was fine.

Crowds were anonymous and I liked anonymous. At five minutes to one, I took a seat in the pizza place. I was joined, a few minutes later, by a grinning Kyle. We ordered and then chatted until the pizza arrived. Kyle was a nice guy who did not take advantage of people and I enjoyed his conversation.

"So how did you get involved at D-JAK?" I asked.

"Long story, but I was going out with a girl called Chloe, when I met Dave and Mindy. They run the place. Mindy was training me before they started D-JAK," Kyle replied.

My heart almost skipped a beat at the mention of Chloe and then Dave and Mindy.

"Cool!" I replied. "You like Dave and Mindy, then?"

"Of course! They are the best. There is nobody kinder in the city. Mindy is a lovely person to know."

That matched.

"They seem like nice people."

The conversation then moved away to other subjects and after finishing our pizza, we wandered around the Mall, before we went to see a movie, which while entertaining was not enough to distract us from each other.

Halfway through the film, we began kissing.

Safe House Petra

That evening I geared up, ready for another night on the town.

My graphite black, Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade was my most prized possession and one of the last things that my father had bought for me. I treasured it like nothing else; I loved the adrenalin rush from the speed and acceleration. I pulled on my grey, full-face helmet over my mask and double-checked my equipment.

I checked my Beretta Px4 Storm Compact pistols, my spare ammunition, my communications and finally, my twin Tactical Katana swords. I was ready. I started the engine and felt the throb of the powerful machine course through me. I kicked the machine into gear and gently eased the throttle open and moved out into the night.

Petra was at large!

***Chapter 176*: Mathilda At large**

Thursday night

Chicago

The night was quiet.

I liked quiet, but experience had taught me that quiet was not always good. Chicago was a city. A City meant crime. Crime meant criminals. Criminals meant some form of disruption, such as noise.

I cruised the dark streets looking for anything out of the ordinary, but to no avail. I buzzed a few Cop cars, just for some fun and tormented a pair of Cops that worked for my Mom. For some reason Mindy had ordered me to wind them up whenever possible!

"Goddamn vigilantes!" Sergeant Fellowes moaned as he mopped up his spilt coffee.

"Did that bitch put you up to this?" Sergeant Murphy demanded.

"And what bitch might that be?" I asked innocently.

"Hit Girl!"

"That's for me to know and you to find out!" I replied, accelerating away at speed.

"I feel uneasy with the city unprotected."

"I know, Paul, I know, but Mindy did say that we could trust Petra, even if she is another annoying bitch who loves winding Cops up!" Sam Fellowes replied with a grimace.

"At least somebody is out there keeping the flag flying," Paul Murphy commented.

"Let's get back to work. We're supposed to be chasing after the likes of Petra and turning them into Sergeant Richards."

"Yeah! You going to see Marcus, this evening?"

"Why not!"

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"Evening, Boss!"

"Great, more damn grief!" Marcus moaned.

"Not getting it in here then?" Paul asked, ignoring the presence of Paige.

"I tried!" Marcus replied with a smirk at Paige.

"Is that all you think about?" Paige demanded with a laugh.

"A good chunk of the day, yeah," Marcus admitted.

Paige laughed.

"You've already done enough damage!" Paige said, unconsciously rubbing her belly.

"So I can't do anymore damage!" Marcus persisted.

"You are incorrigible; just like Mindy and Megan..."

Paige tailed off and went silent.

"What is it?" Marcus demanded. "How come Mindy and Megan have not visited?"

"Mindy made us swear not to tell you till they had left..." Paul began.

"What?" Marcus said loudly. "You're more scared of Mindy than *me*?"

"No offence Boss, but, yeah," Paul admitted with a smile.

"Where are they?" Marcus said after closing his eyes for a minute.

"They are pursuing the shooter. They left yesterday for Gotham," Sam said.

"Gotham! That fucking hell hole!" Marcus exploded. "Who?"

"The whole team, Marcus," Paige said.

"Megan?"

"Yes. Curtis, Tommy, Marty, Abby, Josh, Erika and Dave, too," Paige admitted. "Chloe and Mindy have been in Gotham since Monday."

"Alone!" Marcus was appalled.

"They were the advance team. They're fine; they check in every few hours."

"Okay. Just please keep me informed!"

West 18th Street and South Indiana Avenue

I sensed that something was wrong the minute I set foot outside my apartment building.

I turned east on West 18th Street towards the 18th Street Metro Station. I was just about to cross South Calumet Avenue when there were four large cracks and four cars started to burn from the inside. Next, I could hear the sharp crack of small calibre rounds. I dived for cover, along with everybody else. I was not heading for a job, so was not 'equipped' which was not to say that I was unarmed!

I pulled out my cell and dialled a number, given to me by Hit Girl, whom I understood, was not available for an unspecified amount of time. The call was answered by a voice I did not recognise.

"Good evening, Mathilda!"

Whoever it was, they knew my name!

"Who is this?"

"I am Petra and I have cunts to hunt, so speak fast!"

"18th Street Metro Station. Explosions. Gunfire."

"Cool! On my way, I'll call you when I'm close. Stay safe."

Petra was gone.

Even though I had been on the phone, I had been looking around observing and what I saw was not good. I was out of my element, by quite a bit. I was in the middle of Hit Girl shit. I killed from the shadows, not out in the open. Not to mention that while I was armed, I was not exactly carrying my usual armourey. I debated heading back home, but no, I needed to help Petra put down whatever was going on around me.

My cell rang.

"You having fun, yet?"

It was Petra.

"I assume you are watching me?"

"Take the fun out of it, why don't you!"

"Look, bitch, we have work to do..."

"Temper, temper, Mathilda. One o'clock, down the alleyway."

I turned to my one o'clock and saw the flash of a motorcycle headlamp from between two buildings. The buildings were so close together that the alley in between was in almost total darkness. I casually headed in that direction and after checking that all was clear, I casually faded into the alley darkness.

"Smooth!" Petra said approvingly in her electronically enhanced voice.

She was astride her black motorcycle, looking as menacing as ever.

"So, I assume you didn't drag me into this alley to fuck me, so what's the plan?" I demanded.

Petra looked me up and down before responding.

"It would definitely be a consideration!" Petra laughed.

I did swing that way, but not right at that moment.

"You can eat me, once the city is safe, Petra, so wind in those hormones!"

"You are no damn fun, you know that!" Petra whined before getting serious. "It's the fucking Sicilians again!"

"Is that all?"

"You're shitting yourself, just like I am, so let's keep perspective," Petra growled back. "Those explosions were set to cause maximum terror, now look at this..."

Petra produced a tablet computer from beneath her seat and showed a map of the city. "

You see these points. All have had explosions in the past half hour. So the Cops will have gone to the sites of the explosions, now look here."

Petra pointed to an area that had no point marked, it was where there should have been an explosion and if so, it would have completed a circle.

"That point will have no cops," Petra finished.

"Maybe the bomb didn't explode," I countered.

"Fucking crap choice!" Petra replied as she pointed to the map. "Go find your tools and meet me here."

"Thirty minutes!" I announced and left the alley, heading back towards my apartment.

Thirty-five minutes later I parked my old, beaten up, SUV round the back of an eight-storey apartment block. I grabbed my equipment from the trunk and ran up the external fire escape. Once I reached the roof, I scanned it before stepping out and running to the far side. It took me another six minutes to assemble my sniper file and dial Petra.

"Overwatch is ready!" I called.

"About fucking time!" Petra growled. "What do you see?"

I aimed my scope at the point where we expected to find something, exactly what we were looking for I had no idea. I scanned the roads, the intersections and then the cars and buildings. Finally, I stopped dead on a store. I recognised it immediately; it belonged to a friend of Tony's, back in New York.

"They're moving in on Nikki's store," I told Petra.

"Nikki?"

"He's a friend of a friend; an Italian. I think the Sicilians are staking their claims to this City."

"Like fuck, they are!" Petra replied. "How many?"

"Looks like twenty or so."

"Can you trim them down and cover my back?"

"Not a problem!"

I watched as Petra showed herself, down near the store. She drew her Tactical Katana Swords and I heard her challenge the cunts as I took aim on the largest man there.

I caressed the trigger and took a breath.

"You're fucking with the wrong people, motherfuckers!"

"Vigilantes cazzo!" One man growled in Italian. *{'Fucking vigilantes!'}*

"Sicilian scum!" I growled back.

Then the head of the man exploded like a melon and pandemonium descended on the street as I started slicing into the Mafioso. The blood looked so good as it flew through the air. I saw men dropping to Mathilda's bullets as she covered my back so I could continue my fight forwards. I felt a bullet hit my chest, then another. I ignored the pain and channelled it to my advantage, turning it into anger and violence.

I saw a Mafioso move into the store and head over to where I could see Nikki cowered, with his wife and two sons. I ran in and drove both blades into the man through the back, almost cutting his body in half as I withdrew the blades. I nodded to Nikki.

"You are safe!" I said, as Sergeants Fellowes and Murphy came in the rear of the store, pistols raised and dragged the family to safety out the back door

"Dio vi benedica, Petra!" Nikki called as he left. *{'God, bless you, Petra!'}*

I turned as three more men entered the store.

"I've lost you!" Mathilda called out. "You have six left!"

"I'm okay; Nikki's out. I can take them!"

I rapidly broke down my rifle and ran down the fire escape.

I heard Petra's yell as I went; the fight had begun.

"Come get me, you bastards; you sure do bleed a lot!"

I arrived at the store minutes later and found Petra lying on the floor. I could see blood on her armour, but it all seemed to have come from the dead bodies around the store. She stirred.

"I think I fell!"

"You have a bullet scrape on the side of your mask. You were knocked out."

"Did he get away?"

"No, he didn't!" I replied, holstering my pistol and looking towards the back door and the dead body. "Let's get you back to your feet."

"Not bad for a day's work, if I do say so, myself!" Petra said, looking around as she stowed her blades on her back.
"Anyway, how about that promise?"

"What promise?" I asked.

"You said I could eat you, once the city was safe!"

***Chapter 177*: Chicago**

Chicago

Almost three weeks later Wednesday night

The responsibility, to not fuck things up was overwhelming.

I had a legacy to uphold, on my own. The legacy that was Fusion. I was enjoying myself, don't get me wrong; Hit Girl had a great support network set up of tame Cops and other Fusion supporters; I was really, very pleased to be a part of it all.

I had survived three weeks of looking after Chicago. Yes, I had received help from Mathilda and two tame Cops, Sergeants Murphy and Fellowes, but I was going to be able to hand back an intact Chicago to Hit Girl.

I finished securing the hands of the two cunts and sat them down with their backs against the wall of the alley.

"You two just sit there and be nice!" I growled as I pulled out my cell. "Hey, I need you guys to put down your donuts and come get a pair of assholes, or do I just send 'em by UPS?"

"Funny bitch! Give us the address....," came the response from Murphy.

The following morning Wednesday

My routine began as soon as I awoke.

I opened the window, placed the plant on the windowsill. I poured and downed a large glass of milk, plus another. Always two, never less. One for me, and the other for Leon. Next came my morning exercises, thirty minutes worth.

After that and another glass of milk, I started cleaning my weapons. They had not been fired, but they still needed to be cleaned.

West Columbia

I was *not* happy!

Cathy had been round and she had informed Paige and me that Curtis had been shot and that Megan was hurt, but okay. I hated it when any of them got hurt, but in that case it was the youngsters and one was my daughter to be.

There was nothing, I could do. I could only worry. It was my fault that Mindy had taken her team to that Godforsaken, hellhole. I sincerely hoped it would all be over soon and we could all be together again.

I missed Mindy. She was a big part of my life, and with her gone, I was lost.

"What was she like, when you got her back from Damon?" Paige asked.

"Distant. She didn't really know me anymore. It was as if those five years that I had spent bringing her up had never happened. Yeah, she knew who I was, but she could not remember how things used to be. I was also more than a little scared of her!"

"I suppose that was understandable, considering..."

"Yeah, I had just watched her mow down a large group of armed men that hardened cops would think twice about approaching! I saw it all *LIVE* dammit!"

I welcomed Paige's touch as she sought to keep me calm.

"But I almost cried when I saw her walk up to the camera and say those words, shooting the camera out. I was so happy that my girl was alive. That had been the first time in six years that I had seen my Mindy. I knew it was Mindy,

instantly. How the hell, she managed to do what she did without injury was beyond me. I saw the damn D'Amico penthouse after Dave and Mindy trashed the place. Again, how the hell, she got out of there alive, at the time, I had no idea. It was much later that I learnt how much Dave had done to keep Mindy alive. Without that boy, Mindy would have been killed."

"Those two have a very complicated relationship," Paige admitted.

"Tell me about it! That was why I moved to Chicago, I had to be with her. I hated being so far away from her; Mindy is a part of my life and I can never let her go. She's been gone for almost four weeks and it hurts so badly."

"Well, future husband, it's good to know that you are human inside!"

"Once Mindy is back in Chicago, everything will be back to normal; no more complications."

I gently rubbed the bump that was my unborn child.

"Maybe one day Mindy will have kids – but that'll be a long ways off, I suppose!"

"As far as I am concerned, if Megan turns out half as well as Mindy, I'll be happy."

Western Chicago

"How the fuck could you screw up like that?"

The men arrayed around the desk were scared and very concerned for their wellbeing. Joseph Valachi was a nasty piece of work and the brother-in-law to Vito Genovese. Together they ruled with an iron fist and anybody who did anything that could upset that iron rule was expendable.

None of the men dared to respond.

"You were whacked by a girl and fucking young girl who thinks she's a vigilante!" Joseph roared.

Joseph was *not* happy, considering he had been forced to fly from Sicily to Chicago to try to sort out the mess that had been created.

"We knocked her down, Boss, she was shot..."

"Where's the fucking body?"

"She was gone when we checked, Boss..."

Joseph just closed his eyes to give himself a moment to compose his emotions.

"Where is Hit Girl? Where is Kick-Ass?" Joseph asked.

"They're in Gotham, Boss. They seem to be fucking over Maroni and Falcone."

"So this little girl, Petra and some other vigilantes have been fucking up *my* plans?" Joseph was incredulous. "Only in fucking America!"

Joseph stared around at the men, most of whom flinched at least a little.

"I want Petra, I want her head. There will be a bounty of \$10,000 for each vigilante that is killed. Keep that within the family for now."

The men filed out of the office, thankful that they were still breathing. They also knew that they had no more chances – next time they would die.

Indian Knoll Road

"You hear that?" Kyle asked.

"Yeah, I did. Mom's not due home for hours."

I left my bedroom where I had been with Kyle – nothing happened! As I went downstairs, I saw somebody running, a short somebody. I seized a lock-knife from my pocket, flipped it open and threw it.

There was a scream as the runner stopped dead, their right arm pinned to the wall by the sleeve of their top. I walked over and I saw the outraged look on the girl's face.

"Jesus, what's the matter with you? You could have killed me!"

"What are you doing here?" I demanded.

"Nothing, just curious, is all."

The girl pulled out the knife and studied it, then her sleeve.

"Dammit, you cut my friggin' top!"

I seized the girl by the wrist and retrieved my knife, flipping it closed and placing it back in my pocket.

"How did you get in here?"

"The door was open..."

"No it wasn't!"

"Yeah, it was!"

I dragged the girl over to the front door and checked the lock.

"Hmm, it's unlocked!" I commented after checking it.

I looked at the girl and she coloured slightly, turning away.

"So, what did you steal?"

"Nothing; what do you think I am?"

I seized the girl's other wrist and forced open her fingers. It was a necklace, which I had removed the other day and left in the kitchen.

"Please don't call the Cops. My Dad will kill me."

"In some parts of the world they just cut your hands off..."

The girl turned to run, but I moved very fast and blocked her.

"Wow! How did you do that?"

"Get out of here!" I growled.

The girl smirked and ran.

I went to the stairs and saw Kyle looking down at me; he smirked.

"That was, err, interesting, Hailee: *'in some parts of the world they just cut your hands off'*, nice!" he commented.

I felt myself blushing.

"Good throw with the knife, too!"

I had just revealed a capability from my other life.

"Learnt it from my Dad," I said, not too convincingly.

***Chapter 178*: Everything Changes**

Author's Note: *This chapter (Chapter 178) of **Forsaken** picks up after the events covered by another one of my stories: **The Gotham Vigilantes** and you are advised to read that story before starting this chapter.*

Chicago

Four days later
Sunday night

The jet landed at Chicago Executive Airport and we disembarked into a pair of waiting SUVs that were being driven by Sam Fellowes and Paul Murphy. Curtis was picked up by Cathy and taken to Morton Grove where she would see to Curtis' healing injuries.

Chloe, Megan, the twins and I headed directly for West Ridge. The twins had slept most of the flight, which had only been ninety minutes. I had called ahead and a rather stunned Paige had prepared a pair of mattresses in our bedroom, along with some suitable food for a pair of seven-year-olds. Paige was there at the house waiting for us, with Sophia. I had also sworn Paige to secrecy as far as Marcus was concerned. At least for the moment.

Sophia was super-pleased to see us all and the twins rushed over to maul the large dog. Sophia just laid down and allowed the two kids to pat and stroke her. Not bad for a killer dog! It was also a great distraction. For now, the two kids had no idea that they were never going to see their Daddy again... Ever.

I was scared. I had absolutely no idea how to bring up a pair of young kids and I was not looking forward to going across the road to see Marcus, who, once he found out about the twins, would probably be only inches away from killing me! I had no regrets; I could only look forwards. Dave was supportive; we had talked over the phone on the jet and he had told me to be strong.

Mindy Macready, Hit Girl, Mom!

What the hell, would Daddy say?

West Columbia

"*YOU DID WHAT!*"

"This ought to be good!" Megan had commented.

Megan loved it when I was being shouted at by Marcus. One glance from Marcus, though, and the girl bolted, or rather hobbled, out of the room.

"I'll recap shall I?" I asked. "I've come back from Gotham, where I avenged you and your officers... And I brought back a pair of twins to live with me and Dave."

I said the last dozen or so words very quickly. I felt like I had just stolen something from the store, for fuck's sake! Marcus could make me feel so much shame with hardly any effort.

"Mindy, you're still a kid yourself!"

I bristled at that. We had talked animatedly before about my being a kid...

"What was I supposed to do, just leave the brats to die?"

"Mindy!" Paige cautioned.

I turned to say something, but then I took a moment to calm down. I was not about to yell at Paige.

"Mindy, I applaud you for what you do and what you did in Gotham on my behalf; we still need to talk about that. However..., *two kids*, that young, you're gonna have a lot on your plate and your plate is already very full!"

"I know, Marcus, but with your help and everybody else's, I can do this..."

Marcus paused before replying.

"You're going to listen to Paige and me?" Marcus was a little astounded.

"I'm scared Marcus. I could not leave them, but I need help. I can do many things, but none of what I know will help me in bringing up two seven-year-old kids. I *cannot* fuck this up; I know that. You've been a Dad and Paige has been a Mom. Dave will make a great Dad; he had a great Dad. I need somebody to show me how to be a Mom. My Mom's long dead and to be brutally honest, Daddy's parenting skills sucked!"

"You've got the last bit right!" Marcus had growled.

I was glad to be home and I was glad that Marcus was out of the hospital and that first hug had felt wonderful.

I just hated it when we argued.

West Ridge

That first night was *not* fun, for any of us.

I fell asleep in tears after talking to Dave as he was driving home. He would arrive much later in the day, with the others, at Safehouse D. I had Chloe staying with me until then, to help with the twins who were both fast asleep just a few feet away. They had not asked about their father, yet, and I wondered if they knew he was dead. They were perfect little angels, which had surprised me. Their father had packed up almost everything they owned in their cases. Plenty of clothes, some toys and books, not to mention paperwork, including the kids birth certificates and I had also found a signed letter from Ed Jamieson naming Dave and me as the legal guardians of his children if anything should happen to him. It had been witnessed by a notary in Gotham. The man had known that he was going to die and had prepared things for his kids.

I missed Dave, hence the tears. I was also crying with the fear of the unknown. The talk with Marcus had *not* been fun; however, I think I may have passed my first test to be a Mom. Tomorrow, I needed to sort out school for the kids. Everybody who attended school was late back to their classes, us being well into the first month of school. With the help of Dr G, we were going to provide suitable excuses and the kids would all start back in their respective grades after a couple of day's rest.

As I thought over things I realised that I had a lot to do over the coming weeks.

The twins, Petra, the twins, Hailee, the twins, Mathilda, the twins, Bruce and Selina, the twins, the new house, the twins... There was a pattern building!

I was awoken some hours later by movement on the bed.

I looked up and saw Anne-Marie creeping up the bed towards me. She stopped when she was just inches from me.

"I miss Daddy."

"I know."

"Can I sleep with you, Mindy?"

"Of course, but only until Dave gets back."

"I promise," Anne-Marie said with a weak smile.

The girl crawled under the duvet, cuddled into me, and was soon fast asleep. I swept her shoulder-length light brown hair out of her face and then closed my own eyes.

The following morning Monday

I awoke early, as was usual and went to check on Mindy and the twins.

I gently eased open the bedroom door and saw Sophia wagging her tail happily. I looked over at the mattresses where the twins had slept; they were empty. I looked over at the bed and smiled.

There was Mindy, lying on her back, fast asleep with a boy to her left and a girl to her right; both fast asleep and cuddling into Mindy.

I left them to sleep.

I awoke to find myself being shaken by a small girl.

"Hi, Anne-Marie!" I said with a smile.

"Is it time to get up?" the girl asked.

I looked over at the clock. It was just seven-fifteen!

"I suppose so!"

I sat up and saw Danny watching me from the far end of the bed.

When I went back to see Mindy after taking a long shower and getting dressed, I found Mindy sitting alone on the bed.

I looked questioningly at Mindy who simply nodded her head towards the open door of the bathroom. I could hear laughing and a lot of splashing.

"They wanted a bath, so..." Mindy explained.

"They seem to be enjoying themselves!"

Mindy looked over at the clock.

"I think it's time for them to get out; they've been in there for almost twenty minutes. If I get them out, will you get them dressed while I take a shower?"

"No problem, Mindy!"

Mindy vanished into the bathroom and after a couple of minutes, a lot of splashing, not to mention some arguing, two unhappy looking kids appeared, wrapped in large towels. I got the impression that Mindy had interrupted their fun!

I saw two sets of clean clothes laid out on the bed and set about getting the twins dried and dressed. I had not had to do anything like that since Curtis was their age! By the time I had finished, Mindy came out of the bathroom, dressed and putting her damp hair up into a ponytail. Anne-Marie looked up at Mindy and then over at me; my hair was up in a ponytail too.

"Can I have my hair up, like yours, Mindy?" the girl asked.

Mindy smirked and indicated a pile of hair bobbles on the dresser. I grabbed a pair of purple ones and a hairbrush. Two minutes later, Anne-Marie's hair was neatly brushed and pulled back and up into a ponytail.

"You want your hair in a ponytail, too?" I asked Danny with a grin.

"Just try it!" Was the reply.

"You guys like a cooked breakfast?" I asked.

"Yeah!" both kids replied excitedly.

"Just don't ask Mindy to cook!" Chloe said quickly.

My mouth dropped open in shock and I glared at Chloe before smiling.

"Okay, McDonald's it is!"

We headed downstairs. As the SUV was still on its way back from Gotham, we would have to take Speedy, which was at that moment parked in the garage. I grabbed the keys from a hook on the wall in the kitchen and took the kids down into the garage. We got them both strapped into the rear of Speedy. Just as I was about to climb in, Danny commented on the car.

"I have a picture of a car, just like this one, except it's red and it was called the Mist Mobile!"

I laughed and looked over the roof of Speedy to Chloe who smiled hugely.

"Nothing like it!" I replied as I climbed in.

"You sure?" Danny persisted looking around.

"Okay; it is the Mist Mobile – well it used to be!"

"Cool!"

After breakfast at McDonalds, I drove us out towards the north of Chicago.

Chloe gave me a strange look as I eventually turned left up a tree-lined street and then stopped in front of a pair of enormous gates. I reached into my purse and pressed the button on a small remote control. The gates swung open noiselessly. I drove in and pulled up to the side of the large property.

"Nobody other than Dave and I know about this place. We bought it a few weeks before we went to Gotham. We wanted a place to call our own, a place to get away from it all. We were going to move in after we got married. Now, though, we need the space."

I climbed out. I was followed by Chloe and the twins. I unlocked the front door and walked in. The two kids and Chloe gasped audibly.

"Danny, Anne-Marie, welcome to your new home. Go explore, see if you can find your bedrooms..."

"Awesome!" Both kids exclaimed and I could see the same look on Chloe's face too. The twins ran off.

..._...

I turned to Chloe and saw her expression change to one of concern. I felt myself close to tears; I was worried.

"How am I doing?" I asked my closest friend.

"No problems, so far," Chloe said soothingly. "You're doing great..."

"What if they reject me...?"

"We have no idea what is going to happen, but I'm with you for the long haul, okay."

"Thanks, Chloe, you really are my best and closest friend, if not more," I replied and Chloe blushed.

"I'll miss the old house."

"Only because that was where you had your cherry exploded!"

"Mindy, shush!" Chloe exclaimed as the twins reappeared.

..._...

"A cherry exploded?" Danny asked innocently.

I looked at Chloe, whose face was now the same colour as the proverbial cherry and who was far too mortified to speak.

"Err, Chloe had a problem with her fruit salad," I said quickly.

Chloe mouthed 'I hate you', in my direction along with a mock scowl.

Danny then grinned enormously. "I've found an indoor pool!"

"You bought a house with an indoor pool?" Chloe asked incredulously.

"I bought a house with an indoor pool!" I confirmed with a chuckle.

Chloe was seized by each hand and dragged towards the kitchen by Danny and Anne-Marie. The kitchen led to the pool.

..._...

The property was, to say the least, enormous.

It was located about ten miles to the north of West Ridge in a part of northern Chicago, called Glenview. The property had five bedrooms and was spread over four levels. The property also included an indoor swimming pool, and an awesome lower level with sauna and an exercise area.

The entrance hall was large and double height with a sweeping staircase curving up on the right. Under those stairs, on the right, was the entrance to the Master Bedroom, which was located on the first floor and in addition provided a large en-suite bathroom and dressing room. This was for Dave and me.

Directly ahead was a gently curved archway that led into the double height living room that had a large chimney and open fire. The room had floor to ceiling windows.

Next, to the left of the living room, through another, wider arch and up two steps, came a large open plan kitchen and breakfast room with its own open fire. There was a breakfast bar that could seat five comfortably as well as a table for four in a bay window that overlooked the back garden. Across from the kitchen was a dining room that could easily seat eight.

From the kitchen, you could also access the indoor swimming pool, which was full height and air-conditioned. Also on the first floor was garage space for five vehicles.

On the second floor, there was a library, which overlooked the living room, a laundry and three bedrooms, plus an office. Two of the bedrooms, shared a bathroom, and they would be used by the twins. The other bedroom would be a spare bedroom.

One of the twins' bedrooms had a spiral staircase that led upwards to the third floor, which had additional space for a playroom, which looked down onto the bedroom. There was also some storage space with stairs that led down to the second floor.

The lower level had a small cinema, a sauna, an exercise area and a large recreational area with a bar and kitchen. There was also, what was supposed to have been a fifth bedroom, but we decided to improve the doors and turn it into a 'Panic Room' with a secondary role as secure storage for certain 'not so legal' items.

..._...

After examining the pool, we all went upstairs and the kids found their rooms.

Anne-Marie opted for the bedroom in the corner of the house while her brother preferred the bedroom with the spiral staircase. I decided that we would need to go shopping for some clothes, toys and some bedding. Not surprisingly, Anne-Marie wanted pink, but Danny wanted blue!

Our final stop was the garage.

"Oh – my – God!" Chloe exclaimed as we entered. "Josh is going to want to have your babies!"

I laughed.

"After our visit to the UK, I found I liked the cars over there and especially those that Natasha and Cameron had. This is one step up; I ordered it months ago, it arrived a few days before we went to Gotham, so I have not had a chance to drive it much yet."

"It's enormous!" Danny exclaimed.

"It's beautiful, Mindy!" Anne-Marie added.

Chloe walked around to the rear and looked at the trunk.

"Josh will kill you if you dare mispronounce the name," Chloe cautioned. "You know what he thinks about us 'uneducated Yanks!'"

"I'll be nice and he'll get over it," I laughed.

***Chapter 179*: Petra Revealed Again**

Later that morning
Monday

Glenview

"Can we take that car shopping, *please*?"

"Okay, Chloe, just for a moment's peace!" I replied.

We locked up the house and I reversed the car out of the garage onto the drive.

"What colour is it?" Danny asked.

"British Racing Green in metallic," I replied.

"I like it!" the boy replied.

I pulled open the back door and both kids climbed onto the red leather seats. Once they were both strapped in, I climbed in myself, with Chloe beside me. I looked out over the enormous hood with its twin air vents. I pressed the brake with my foot and then the 'start' button, the engine rumbled to life instantly, the rotary gear selector rose out of the centre console, and I turned it to the right, selecting 'D'.

"Awesome!" Chloe said from the other seat.

I eased the enormous car out of the drive and the gates closed automatically behind me.

Four hours later, after an expensive trip to the mall, we had filled the trunk and we headed back to Glenview.

Both kids had selected toys and clothes, plus some bedding, towels and various other items. I had spoilt them. Chloe had warned me not to go too far or the twins might start expecting it. That was good advice.

After unloading all the new stuff at the house, we headed back to West Ridge. It had been a busy day, but the twins had enjoyed themselves and so had I.

The new car would not fit in the garage, so I left it parked outside the front of the house where I could keep an eye on it. Next, we walked across the road to see Marcus.

I watched Marcus as he waited in the living room.

Megan had gone to open the front door once she had seen Mindy, Chloe and the two young kids walking over to us. I had only briefly met the twins the previous night. I was very pleased to have Megan back home and even happier that she had not been shot, stabbed or suffered any one of a hundred things that I had dreamt about while she had been gone. A twisted knee and bruised leg was very good, considering!

My daughter had grown in the month that I had not seen her and was filling out nicely. Megan had talked almost non-stop during the morning about what had occurred. She was desperate to show me her birthday presents she had received from Mindy, but they were still in transit from Gotham. I also noticed how much Megan had grown up mentally, as well as physically. She seemed a different girl, but in a good way. The snappy, belligerent girl had been replaced with a more thoughtful young girl who seemed to think before she spoke. Even Marcus had commented on her politeness and new behaviour.

Marcus smiled as Mindy led the twins into the living room.

"Anne-Marie, Danny, please meet Marcus," Mindy said.

"Hi, Marcus," Anne-Marie and Danny said together with a little nervousness.

"It's very good to meet you both," Marcus replied. "What has Mindy had you doing today, then?"

That set the twins off telling Marcus all about the new house and the new car. I looked questioningly over at Mindy. Marcus had briefly mentioned a new house, but had not gone into detail. I looked out the window towards the other house, saw the car parked outside and then looked at Mindy with a raised eyebrow. Mindy blushed, but nodded.

"Nice set of wheels!" I commented approvingly.

"Thanks!"

That evening

I drove to Safehouse D, with Chloe and waited for the convoy to appear.

They were not far away. I had left the twins with Marcus, Paige and Megan. Marcus had hit it off with the twins almost immediately, so I decided to leave them there. This was to be a repeat of our waiting for everybody in Gotham, just Chloe and me. Only this time we were welcoming them home and not to some stinking hellhole!

I heard the air horn as Dave turned into the parking lot. I triggered the door and it raised in time for Dave to drive straight in, followed by Mia and the SUV. Dave looked shattered, as did the others. As soon as Dave and Josh had climbed down, we jumped them both, kissing them for all we were worth. When we finally let them breathe, Josh turned to Dave.

"We really must go away more often!" he quipped.

"I agree!" Dave replied.

"Assholes!" Chloe and I said together.

I told Marty to use the SUV to take him, Abby, Erika and Tommy home.

"How are we getting home?" Josh asked and then his jaw dropped as he saw the new car.

Dave smirked. He knew all about it.

"Mindy, I love the car and I love you for buying it, but you *dare* say the name wrongly and I will not be held responsible for my resultant actions," Josh said. "Which model is it?"

"I bought a Jag-*u*-ar XJR; I thought you'd approve!" I laughed, ensuring that I pronounced the name correctly for Joshua.

"Love the Jag!" Josh said approvingly.

We left all the kit for another day and headed straight home.

While Josh and Chloe were reacquainted with each other in their room at West Ridge, I took Dave over to see Marcus and the twins.

"Dave!" The twins called out as we walked in the door.

Dave was more than a little surprised to receive a hug from the twins.

"They been okay?" I asked Paige.

"No problems. Marcus has kept them very busy; he's a marvel with young kids."

"I know; I just wish I could remember back that far..."

"Marcus remembers and he says you were the perfect little angel for him," Paige said quietly.

"Now look at her!" Dave quipped.

West Ridge

We finally managed to pry the twins away from Marcus and we headed home across the street.

"I think Marcus is cool," Danny admitted.

"I like Paige and Megan; they're nice, although Megan seems a little nutty!" Anne-Marie said.

Dave and I laughed.

Ignoring the noises coming from the other bedroom, I got the twins changed into their pyjamas and they got into their temporary beds with Sophia watching them. The big dog followed both kids around everywhere they went.

I was now able to spend some quality time with my fiancé.

Josh was *not* happy!

He sat there completely naked and just stared at me. Okay, I was naked to – it was our first sex since that evening with Mindy and Erika. After an extended making out session, we got undressed and then Josh started feeling a little unhappy with my comments at the time.

"You said that Mindy ate you out better than I did!"

I squirmed on the bed.

"Well, I'm sorry, but she did!"

"I can't believe that I was upstaged by *another girl* with my own girlfriend!"

"Come on, Josh, it wasn't *that* bad!"

"You shouted it out so the whole of fucking Gotham heard you!" Josh said loudly and I flinched.

I threw my arms up in the air.

"Okay! I screamed; I couldn't help it!"

"Well, let me see if I can improve on my method..." Josh grinned.

Josh moved forward and I spread my legs open. I closed my eyes and laid back as I felt Josh's fingers gently caress me and then as he came closer, his tongue.

The following morning Tuesday

Tuesday was to be a very busy day!

"Do we have to go back to school?" Anne-Marie complained over breakfast.

"Yes, you do," I said calmly.

"But we won't know anybody," Danny added.

"You'll know Megan and Curtis will be there by the beginning of next week. They will be there if you need somebody to talk to, or you need help," Dave explained.

Neither child was convinced, but they seemed to accept their fate as they finished eating their cereal.

..._...

After breakfast, Dave and I took the XJR, with the twins, south towards Chicago and the North Park Elementary School.

The kids seemed very apprehensive and clung to either Dave or me as we entered the school. There was a lot of noise, kids laughing, playing and learning. We were welcomed by the Principal, a very pleasant woman. We spent the

next hour and a half going through some paperwork and the Principal had a chat with the twins. I felt apprehensive, too, but I had no idea why. After a tour around the school, Anne-Marie and Danny seemed a lot less apprehensive about starting second grade the following morning.

So far, only five people knew who Petra really was: Dave, myself, Josh, Chloe and Erika.

It was now time to widen who knew and to allow somebody else into Fusion. I had spent a good couple of hours talking to Hailee since our return from Gotham. We both agreed that for her to be a part of Fusion meant that all of Fusion needed to know who she was. There was also the issue of her Mother and of Marcus. I had fretted for hours figuring out how to break the news.

Finally, I decided that Hailee and I would both speak to the parents, first.

Early that afternoon

Burnham Marina

Hailee and I persuaded both Marcus and Vicki to meet us at *The Salty Swallow*.

We cruised a few miles offshore and I turned on our signal jammers ensuring complete privacy. While Dave kept watch from the flying bridge, I sat down with Hailee and the two, somewhat confused, parents in the Main Salon.

"I hate this boat, out of principal!" Marcus moaned.

"I like the name," Vicki commented with a grin, knowing that she was annoying Marcus.

"We have a small announcement to make," I began and Marcus started to groan.

"Problem?" Vicki asked.

"If this is what I think it is..." Marcus moaned. "Then, yeah!"

"Get a grip, old man!" I growled taking a deep breath and then turned to Hailee. "You ready, Petra?"

I saw Marcus brace up and Vicki reach for her pistol. Hailee glared at her mother.

"Yes, I am, Hit Girl!" She replied.

Vicki slumped back, ignoring her gun and Marcus just groaned even more. Vicki was stunned.

"Mom, meet Hit Girl, otherwise known as Mindy Macready."

"Marcus, meet Petra, otherwise known as Hailee Richards, daughter of Vicki."

Marcus turned to Vicki.

"You kept that a secret – not that I can talk!" Marcus commented dryly.

"Can't exactly blame you for having a nutcase for a teenaged daughter, can I, considering I have one, too!"

"I get no respect!" Hailee moaned with a grin.

"I'm used to it – all respect went out the window when I hit puberty," I replied.

"I see you have all been introduced," Dave commented with a broad grin as he came into the salon from the cockpit.

"Hi, Kick-Ass!" Hailee called then grinned fiendishly. "Mom thinks Kick-Ass is hot!"

Vicki blushed at that revelation.

"I think you guys need to meet the rest of the team."

That evening

Safehouse F

The place was heaving with almost everybody who knew about Fusion.

Marty Eisenburg AKA Battle Guy, Joshua Williams AKA Jackal, Chloe Bennett AKA Shadow, Abigail 'Abby' Hunt AKA Hal, Kim Burgess AKA Hawk, Paige Wilson AKA Lynx, along with her daughter, Megan AKA Wildcat, Curtis Bennett AKA Trojan, Kyle Andrews AKA Max, Cathy Bennett AKA Medic, Erika Cho AKA Mist, Tommy Morgan AKA Splinter, along with his parents, Tony and Shannon. Also present were Paul Murphy and Sam Fellowes, not to forget Sophia AKA Eisenhower and Isaac Swanson AKA Dr Gravity.

As we drove in, both Vicki and Hailee were wide-eyed as they saw the underground Safehouse for the first time, Marcus not so much, having seen the place previously. I grinned at seeing everybody together; it was rare! We climbed out of the SUV and made our way onto the mat, everybody was peering down eagerly from above us.

"Fusion! Please welcome our newest member, Hailee Richards, otherwise known as Petra!"

There were several gasps of astonishment and Hailee took a step forward and curtsied for everybody with a broad grin on her face.

"You sure she's Petra?" Megan called down.

"Come and fucking try me, Wildkitty!" Hailee called back. "Mindy's told me all about *you*!"

Megan scowled and blushed as everybody laughed. Marcus stepped forwards next.

"The very beautiful woman beside me is my second-in-command, Sergeant Vicki Richards who, for her sins, is the mother of Hailee, yet another nutcase teenaged vigilante!" Marcus said. "She has my full sympathies!"

"Vicki, I'm sure you know these two gentlemen," I said, indicating Fellowes and Murphy.

"I do; we need to talk, gentlemen!"

"I like angry women, don't you?" Fellowes quipped to his partner.

"Women are always angry – at least around here!" Murphy replied with a grin.

We all mingled for a drink, introducing themselves. It was great to be able to socialise together. Kim was almost ready to pop, literally, but I missed the twins who were being looked after at home by Sharon Fellowes.

After a while, I called for silence.

"While we are all here, I need to make another announcement."

There was silence as Dave came over and stood beside me; he knew what I was about to say.

"Most of you will be aware that ten of us went to Gotham, but not many of you will know that twelve came back. Dave and I have taken custody of seven-year-old twins, Daniel and Anne-Marie."

There were murmurings from the assembled crowd.

"Details can follow later, but these two kids are *not* members of Fusion, they will *not* know about Fusion for as long as I can help it. Nobody here will mention *any* Fusion identities in front of Daniel or Anne-Marie. The twins will be a part of everyone's lives, but only the public side. It will be difficult, but you are all able to keep secrets. I am not going to put those kids on the same path that I took from six-years-old. By the time I was their age, I was a blooded vigilante; I do not want that for them. The time will come when they will find out what we all do, but until then they are going to have a normal childhood.

"Okay, some of you will ask what I know about a normal childhood; I admit I know absolutely nothing about what a normal childhood is like. I hope that Dave and I can rely on help from all of you. I cannot do this alone..."

I faltered and Dave put his arm around me. Only a small proportion of those there that evening had ever seen me cry,

so it was a shock to some.

"Would you believe it; Hit Girl is human!" Josh announced, taking the attention from me. "I think I speak for everybody here, Mindy, in saying that we will all help in any way that we can!"

There was a general murmur of ascent and I nodded my thanks, unable to speak.

***Chapter 180*: Life Continues**

***The following morning
Wednesday***

West Ridge

I awoke early, showered and dressed before anybody else was up.

The school would provide lunch so I did not have to put together anything, which made life a little easier. At seven, I woke Anne-Marie and Danny, pushing them into the bathroom. Once they were showered and dressed, they had breakfast and by quarter to eight, we were ready to leave for school. I said goodbye to Dave and then called Megan to tell her to hurry up or she was walking!

Once the twins were strapped in the back of the XJR, we drove over to get Megan who quickly jumped in the front, looking more than a little embarrassed. Paige came over to my side of the car.

"Megan had a slight argument with the razor this morning!" She smirked. "She's still trying to get the hang of it."

I laughed and received a nasty glare from Megan as I drove off.

North Park Elementary School

The hardest thing that morning was saying goodbye and there were tears on both sides!

"Any problems you go find a teacher or Megan, okay?"

"Yes, Mindy," both kids replied.

I said goodbye to them at their classroom and said hello to their teacher. Megan rushed off to see her friends, Zach, Jake and Nikki. I felt anxious about leaving the twins, but knew that I would see them again, at ten past three that afternoon.

I hated driving away.

Safehouse D

The first visit of the day was meeting up with Tony Morgan at the Safehouse, so we could assess the damage to vehicles and equipment during our visit to Gotham.

Tony would compile a list of the required replacement parts and equipment, and then I could go shopping! We had a new van to buy for Marty to start with, not to mention all the equipment he and Abby would want to stuff the van with to bring it up to spec. There were more than a few bullet strikes to fix in both Titan and Iron Hide. The motorcycles also had moderate damage from bullet strikes.

Tony was very impressed by Chloe's new motorcycle and I showed him my upgraded mask, including how it worked. Between us, we would be compiling a list of equipment that would be obtained from Lucius Fox.

The trip to Gotham had cost us tens of thousands of dollars, if not much more. It was worth it, though.

I loved shopping!

Later that morning

Now that everybody was back at school, it was down to Hit Girl and Mist to make a high profile daylight patrol.

Battle Guy was in the Command Centre, while we both headed out on our motorcycles from Safehouse D. We wanted everybody to know that Fusion was back in town! We made our way through the City and received many waves of appreciation from civilians and Cops alike.

There was a thrill to riding around in a combat suit during the day. Normally we hid in the shadows, but not that day. I knew we were tempting fate and daylight was dangerous, but it had to be done. I loved it and Mist loved it, too.

After an hour, we were joined by Petra on her graphite-black Fireblade. The three of us made an impressive sight as we cruised the streets and it reinforced the fact that Petra was now an integral part of Fusion.

To help our friendly Cops, we also staged a pursuit where Voight's team and Marcus' team pursued us through western Chicago at speed. It was great fun, especially as both sides knew nobody was going to be caught.

We played it close, though, as we teased the Cops. We purposefully allowed them to get close, but not too close. A few shots were exchanged, but nothing came remotely close to hurting anybody. I actually received a rare smile from Voight as we came face to face at a red light before I accelerated away, pulling a wheelie. The chase raised our street cred no end, but it also showed the Mayor and Commissioner that Marcus and Voight's teams were still actively pursuing those 'bad-ass vigilantes that plagued Chicago'!

Fusion was back!

Safehouse F

"That was awesome!" Hailee yelled as she pulled off her helmet.

We were all dripping with sweat from the morning's action, but all very pleased with the results.

"Well done!" Marty announced, as we stowed our equipment.

Petra now had her own section in the armoury for her equipment. After everything was put away, we all went for showers and fresh clothes.

North Park Elementary School

I was parked close to the school by a quarter to three that afternoon.

At three, I joined the other parents awaiting the end of school. I was anxious to see how the twins' day had gone. Had they enjoyed themselves? Had it all gone wrong? Damn, I was a nervous wreck!

Fifteen minutes later, I was grinning so badly it hurt, as I saw Anne-Marie and Danny emerge. They both ran towards me and almost knocked me to the ground in their excitement. I took them back to the car and waved to Megan who ran over to join us.

"How'd it go?" I asked.

The trip back home was constant chatter from the twins as they explained every minute of their first day back at school. They had loved every minute of it. I felt a wave of relief sweep over me. They had even made friends, which was brilliant. Megan managed to squeeze in a few comments about her own day, but she was generally drowned out by the twins' excitement.

Finally, Anne-Marie turned to me.

"How was your day?" she asked.

"Pretty boring, really," I said, with a wink at Megan. "I don't get to do anything exciting."

West Ridge

While I was putting together something for the kids to eat, I heard screaming coming from the living room, plus an excited bark or two from Sophia.

I ran through expecting a problem, but instead Anne-Marie, Danny and Sophia were staring at the TV. It was the local news and they were showing some Police dash-cam footage of our chase, earlier that afternoon. In the current shot, I could see my purple Panigale with Mist's black and light-blue Streetfighter close behind as we both took a turn at high speed, leaning right over our knees almost touching the blacktop before we came back up again, accelerating away.

The Police SUV pursuing us skidded into the turn and I recognised Murphy's voice; he swore as he fought to keep the SUV on the road and then trying to keep up with the speeding motorcycles.

I laughed.

"They are so awesome!" Anne-Marie exclaimed, looking around. "That's what I wanna do when I grow up."

"Really?" I asked, trying to sound unconcerned.

"Hit Girl is the best and I *love* purple!"

"She does too," Danny confirmed. "Me? I *hate* purple!"

"Vigilantes are bad people..." I said.

"No they aren't!" Anne-Marie countered. "They help people, like they did in Gotham..."

I could not think of anything else to say, so I headed back into the kitchen, just as I saw myself pulling a wheelie as I pulled away from Voight.

At least I now knew what the twins thought about vigilantes and more specifically, Hit Girl!

That night

Once the twins were in bed and asleep, Paige babysat, while Dave and I went out on the town.

By 'out on the town', I meant riding through the darkened streets side-by-side with Kick-Ass. It was great for it to be just the two of us for a change and in relative safety. It gave us time to talk and plan. Abby was on command duty, monitoring us from her home in northwestern Chicago. The streets were annoyingly empty, but it allowed us to talk which was useful.

We talked about anything and everything. New combat suit designs, incorporating the new lighter, more flexible armour from Lucius Fox. The new command van. Upgrades for '*The Vigilante*'. The twins. We even talked about the 'boot camp' for Bruce and Selina, which was due to commence the coming Monday when they arrived in Chicago. I had some great ideas, none of which Bruce or Selina would enjoy. I had enlisted Hailee and Erika to lead the training. Dave and I would help, as would Megan, Chloe and Josh.

I loved to be a bitch – I lived to be a bitch!

I was itching for some action.

Nothing serious, but something we could get our teeth stuck into! It was quite a shock going from Gotham to Chicago. It was like night and day. I was glad to be away from that cesspool too. I was even more pleased that we had all survived and come back in relatively one piece.

Hit Girl and I talked about the following week's 'boot camp' that we were preparing for Bruce and Selina. I was a little concerned that Mindy might go too far and I hoped that Hailee and Erika would be able to keep control.

We discussed possible superhero names for Bruce and Selina. Actually, Selina was relatively easy: 'Cat...' – something – maybe 'Catgirl!' Hit Girl came up with several, some unrepeatable, selections for Bruce, but the theme that seemed to have a good ring to it was 'Bat...' – something – although 'Batboy' sounded crap! Then Abby got in on the game and started sending images through to our head-up-displays of possible 'Catgirl' outfits.

"Absolutely not!" I called out as one image popped up. "Too much leather and way too much skin! Less porno, more hero!"

Hit Girl, though, with her sewer system mind thought it would be fun to suggest some of the sexier outfits to Selina. Something told me that Selina would most probably slap Mindy if she saw them!

..._...

Our reverie was interrupted as a destination flashed onto our visors and Hal ordered us into action.

"Police radio call. Rape underway Addams Park, two-point-two miles from your position. No units are able to respond at this time."

We both accelerated to over sixty miles per hour, heading south down South Ashland Avenue. We separated at the intersection of West Roosevelt Road. Kick-Ass went straight ahead, while I turned left at speed and then made another high-speed right hand turn down South Laffin Street. I slammed on the brakes and cruised slowly into the darkened park. My head-up-display showed Kick-Ass joining from the west side of the park.

I triggered the external sensors mounted on my helmet that allowed me to hear what was going on around me and the loudest sound was a scream. My visor showed me the direction to the scream. Not far ahead of me was a kid's play area. I stopped the motorcycle, dumped my helmet and ran into the darkness.

The screaming was getting louder. I did not have my NVGs with me, but I could see what was happening as if it was day. A man was riding the screaming woman, down beside a kiddie-slide. Rapists were the scum of the earth; I despised them more than I did murderers. What rapists did was worse than murder for the victims.

"Bastard!" I growled and the man turned. His eyes grew to the size of a dodge ball before he leapt up and began to run. He managed to run only a couple dozen yards before he was caught in the glare of a blazing headlamp and then Kick-Ass flattened the man with a well-aimed punch as he rode past.

While Kick-Ass saw to the bastard, I turned to the woman. She was desperately trying to cover herself up. The screaming had stopped, but the woman shook from head to toe and could not speak.

I knew we were less than half a mile from the nearest firehouse and I could hear the sirens as they approached. Abby had called them. I stayed with the woman as the ambulance drove straight onto the grass and headed towards the play area, now lit by the headlights of mine and Kick-Ass' motorcycles. The bastard was trussed up with plastic ties and lying face down on the grass a dozen yards away. Kick-Ass watched him.

Two female paramedics jumped out of Ambulance 61 and ran over.

"What you got for us, Hit Girl?"

"Rape, Sylvie," I growled, recognising the Paramedic.

"You got him?" Sylvie Brett asked, as she began examining the woman.

"Oh yeah!" I replied, nodding towards Kick-Ass.

"Outstanding!" the other Paramedic, Gabriella Dawson, replied as she opened her bag.

Minutes later a pair of Police cars arrived and with profuse apologies from the Cops for the delay, one car left with the bastard, while the other remained to take a statement. Nobody touched us or came near us, but we were asked to give our side of the story.

"They're never gonna believe this," the young officer said as he took my. "Taking a statement from Hit Girl!"

"In case they don't believe you," I said and handed over one of my '**HG**' cards. I saw Kick-Ass shake his head in exasperation; he hated my 'calling cards'.

There was a gathering crowd building as we left to rousing cheers. We rode off, following the ambulance out of the park.

Later that night

West Ridge

"I see that Kick-Ass and Hit Girl had a busy night!" Paige commented as we arrived home.

"Did they?" I replied innocently and Paige just pointed to the late night news on the TV.

I could see images of Kick-Ass and Hit Girl talking to the Police, as the victim was loaded into the ambulance.

"I just wish..."

"I know," Dave said, knowing that I had desperately wanted to kill that bastard, but I knew that I had to let justice have its way.

"Any problems?" I asked.

"Not a one; they're still asleep."

"Thanks, Paige, we owe you one."

"No you don't. You brought my daughter back to me; that's enough."

We tiptoed past the sleeping twins and crept into bed.

"I need you, Dave!"

"I need you, too!"

Dave ran his hands across my chest, my breathing started to increase and Dave's touch was encouraging the feelings between my legs, which I loved so much, and then his hands moved gently across my stomach and down to my...

"Mindy?"

I bolted upright, covering my chest with the sheet. It was Danny. Dave chuckled – asshole!

"I had a bad dream..."

I felt my shoulders slump and I allowed the sensations that had built up in my crotch to subside. Dave passed me an oversize t-shirt and I pulled it on.

"Come on!" I said, allowing Danny to crawl under the duvet between Dave and me.

"Night, Danny!" I said feeling slightly annoyed.

"Night, Mindy," he replied. "Night, Dave."

"Night, Danny," Dave said with a laugh.

***Chapter 181*: Integrating**

Thursday

I woke up right on the edge of the bed.

In my back were a pair of feet, small feet! There was nowhere else to go, so I allowed myself to fall gently to the floor. There was an immediate chuckle from above me, and a giggle from just a few feet away. I looked over and saw Anne-Marie looking at me with a big grin on her face. I felt so stupid.

"What you doing down there?" Anne-Marie asked.

Before I could reply, Dave stepped in. "I think your brother kicked her out of the bed," he laughed.

"So funny, both of you!" I growled, but I laughed anyway.

I wanted to swear, badly, but knew that I could not swear in front of the kids, so I scrambled up off the floor and dived into the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind me.

There was a muffled explosion from the bathroom that I interpreted as: "Fuuuck!", but thankfully, Anne-Marie did not.

We were sticking to a routine, both for the kids and us. Mindy liked routines; they were like mini-missions. I knew that Mindy was *not* happy about missing out, on sex the previous night, so I knew that she would be cranky.

Nothing new there, then!

After dropping the kids off at school, Dave and I headed over to the south of Chicago.

We stopped off at a certain coffee shop. On entering, we both looked around until Dave nudged me and indicated a young woman sitting at a table alone. We walked over to the table and indicated the empty chairs on the other side of the table, across from the woman.

"These taken?" Dave asked.

"Can I help you people?" The woman asked.

The girl had long brown hair and brown eyes.

"We would like to talk with you, Mathilda," I said, sitting down across from her.

Dave and I did our best not to look threatening to her; we knew her capabilities. I saw the girl instinctively look around, checking her exits and possible threats. She was good.

"Hey, you've got me all wrong there, girl!" I said, holding my hands up and I saw Mathilda frown. I had used the exact same phrase and hand movements that I had used when we had first met.

"I'm listening..."

"We would like you to join us; you have some unique skills that have proved very useful."

"Join who?"

I smiled at Mathilda.

"Do you need your ass, kicked?" Dave said quietly.

Mathilda's eyes widened in surprise.

"Penny dropped?"

"I think so..."

The famous Hit Girl and Kick-Ass were sitting across from me and asking me to join them!

It was a lot to absorb.

"I – I'm a little overwhelmed that you should ask me..."

"You've earned it. Petra had only good things to say about you."

I hoped that Petra kept her gob shut about the other things...

"Can I think about it?"

"By all means; we are not forcing you. You join under your own steam. You have my number, give me a call."

West Ridge

We had left a rather shocked Mathilda to her morning coffee.

Mindy was off shopping before heading over to get the twins. I was resting with Sophia when my cell rang; it was Megan.

"You're not supposed to use your cell at school..." I began before Megan interrupted me, her voice sounding urgent.

"Dave, can it! You need to get down to the school, now!"

"What's happened?" I asked, suddenly alarmed.

"Somebody hit Anne-Marie and started her nose bleeding. If Mindy sees the blood..." Megan explained.

"Oh, shit!" I dropped the call and ran for my RS7.

Mindy had her Jag; I had my Audi RS7!

North Park Elementary School

I had pushed the Audi as hard as I dared.

The turbo-charged V8 engine accelerated the car steadily as the gearbox moved automatically through the eight-speed transmission and fed the power to all four of the twenty-one-inch wheels. The Sepang Blue car cut through the traffic with ease and I arrived at the school just minutes after the kids had started to come out.

As I approached the main door of the school, I could hear raised voices – one of which was my dear fiancée! The conversation was animated. The Principal was trying to explain to Mindy that kids fought and that the school would deal with it. Mindy was having none of it and I was a little concerned. I could read her body language and I could tell that she was doing everything she could to control her emotions – and her fists, which were clenched behind her. I rapidly closed and seized Mindy, pinning her fists between her back and my stomach.

"Ah, Mr Lizewski!" The Principal said, sounding a little relieved.

Mindy was struggling, so I hissed into her ear.

"Stop it, Mindy, you're scaring the kids!"

Mindy froze and looked down at Danny and Anne-Marie. They were both looking up at her and their faces showed the beginnings of concern.

"We know you care about them both, Miss Macready, but we will handle the discipline here," the Principal explained.

"I'm sorry for causing a scene," Mindy said.

"Not your fault, honey," a woman said. "It's part of being a Mom."

"It doesn't get any easier," another said. "But kids love to know they have parents who'll fight for them!"

"Thanks," Mindy said as she blushed with embarrassment.

West Ridge

Mindy was fuming by the time she arrived home.

Megan had ridden with me and we had arrived back first. I told her that she should be changed and ready to go in twenty minutes. Mindy arrived just as Megan was running across the street. As the three of them entered, I told the twins to get upstairs, giving each one a small bag and told them to get themselves changed straight away.

"Calm down, Mindy!" I said as soon as the twins had vanished up the stairs.

"I'm sorry; I saw the blood and panicked," Mindy said. "I see blood, I react!"

"As that other woman said; you behaved just like any Mom would."

Mindy blushed and smiled. The two kids reappeared at the bottom of the stairs. They were each wearing a pure white Taekwondo Gi and had sandals with Velcro fastenings on their feet. On the back of the Gi was the logo for 'D-JAK Martial Arts'. The kids looked a little uncertain and had been unable to tie the white belts and both simply held them in their hands.

"Jag - move it!" I ordered.

Megan was just running across the road as we walked out of the house. She too was wearing a Gi, this time in navy blue and with a green belt that had a blue stripe, wrapped around her waist. She too wore sandals on her feet. She pushed Danny into the middle and jumped in the back.

D-JAK

I had wanted them to have some after school activities and what better than an hour of Taekwondo. It would teach them co-ordination, courtesy, integrity, patience, perseverance and self-discipline. Neither of them had ever done anything like that before. I wanted the twins to gain some fun experiences as they grew up and I hoped that their experiences would be nothing like what I had endured.

"This place looks awesome!" Danny said as we entered D-JAK.

"Not bad, I suppose," his sister, Anne-Marie commented.

"Both of you go see Kyle and he'll start you on your first lesson and no fighting with each other!" I called out as the two kids scampered excitedly across the mat, chucking their bags in two completely different directions.

"Don't worry; I'll pick your bags up!" I called after them sarcastically.

"You make a lovely young Mom!" Paige teased as she walked over.

"Fuck me, if it isn't exhausting!" I moaned.

"You're doing fine, Mindy; it's only been four days, though!"

I sat and watched Kyle as he added Anne-Marie and Danny to the class of other novices.

Kyle stood in front of them, with Megan beside him.

"You are going to learn how to block and how to defend yourselves," Kyle lectured. "You are *not* going to be taught how to fight, not yet."

There were groans and I saw Anne-Marie grimacing.

"You will be taught how to prevent injury, how to prevent a fight from starting, how to get yourself out of a fight once

one begins," Megan went on. "We will not teach you to start a fight or join a fight; first you need to learn how to defend yourselves."

The group was made up of twelve boys and girls of between seven and ten-years-old. Megan and Kyle usually helped teach the younger kids. I waved as Hailee appeared; she was my newest instructor. She wore a black Gi with her black belt wrapped around her waist.

Once Megan and Kyle had warmed the kids up with some basic exercises and shown each of them how to tie their belt properly, Hailee started to introduce the basic blocks.

"Arae Makki – the low block. It is the most basic of the blocks and it is the technique to defend against low attacks with the outside of your wrist. Your blocking arm should start at the shoulder of the opposite arm, quickly coming down and stopping your wrist about two fists from your belt. Do not forget to keep your blocking arm straight," Hailee explained, before demonstrating each part of the movement.

With the help of Kyle and Megan, Hailee ensured that each child could perform the movement properly. This took a while for some of the kids to master. I noticed that Anne-Marie caught on very well and seemed a little bored, while she waited for the other kids, including Danny, to catch up. Once everybody was ready, Hailee moved onto the next movement.

"Olgul Makki – the high block. It is the technique to defend your face with the outside of your wrist. Your blocking wrist should start at your waist and move across the front of your body to finish right above your forehead. The distance between your wrist and your forehead should be one fist. During this motion move the other arm to the side with a closed fist, like pulling it. Keep your neck straight and look forward. The point is to deflect the attack by keeping your blocking wrist slightly above your elbow to make an angle. It is very important to block attacks that come above."

The rest of the class was spent practicing the two blocks and after the full hour, most of the kids were looking tired, including our two. Once the class had been dismissed, Kyle and Megan went over to the punch bags to do some of their own training. I saw Anne-Marie and Danny watching Megan with interest, along with a couple of the other kids.

..._...

Megan laid into her punch bag with enthusiasm. I noticed she was showing off, too. She span, kicked, punched and jumped. The other kids went home once their parents arrived, leaving just Anne-Marie and Danny watching Megan and Kyle. They then turned to watch Hailee who was showing off how flexible she was as she span and flipped across the mat, proving that she had what was required to wear the black belt.

"Can you do that?" Anne-Marie asked, looking up at me.

"I can..."

"Show us..., please!" Danny asked.

I looked at Dave who just shrugged. I went through to the back past a grinning Paige and changed into my own black Gi and black belt. I suggested to Hailee that we take things easy, so as not to give anything away.

She nodded, but smirked, which just told me that I was in for a beating if I eased off.

I watched as Mindy and Hailee stood on the mat, faced off and bowed to each other.

Megan and Kyle stopped their training, as the next class began to arrive. Seeing two senior instructors spar was something worth watching, so everybody gathered around the mat to watch. Only Mindy and Hailee wore the black Gi, as it was the sign of a senior instructor at D-JAK. I had one too, but rarely wore it. The other adult instructors wore yellow, while junior instructors wore blue, like Megan and Kyle. Chloe and Josh also wore the blue Gi.

There was cheering and gasps coming from the small crowd as Mindy and Hailee span around the mat trying to outwit each other. I just hoped that they remembered that they were in a Dojang in front of young kids and not on the streets of Gotham! For the coming class one of our adult instructors was present, Jim Cartwright. He wore a yellow Gi and watched with interest, before he looked over at me and I nodded towards the mat with a smirk.

It was time to up the ante. I whispered something in Megan's ear and she smirked and ran off to the far side. Jim and Megan started on each side of the mat, both holding a training Jō-staff. Megan nodded and both moved towards the two girls. I saw Mindy turn her head slightly. Hailee also clocked what was happening and the two girls both moved

fast as the Jō-staffs swung horizontally to trip them both. Within seconds, Megan was on her back clutching her side as Mindy kicked her. Jim had jumped sideways just missing Hailee's strike.

Megan rolled quickly and jumped back to her feet, just as Mindy flipped up the Jō-staff from the ground and brought it down towards Megan. The younger girl blocked the Jō-staff, used it to pivot around, and somersaulted over Mindy, catching Mindy's shoulder with a perfect kick. Unfortunately, Mindy then caught Megan's right foot and Megan landed with a short scream on the mat and rolled into a group of boys, knocking them over like bowling pins. Jim was fighting Hailee and never saw Mindy kick his feet out from under him and pin the man to the mat. Hailee moved in to take advantage, but Mindy caught her left leg with a Jō-staff and Hailee fell to the mat and Mindy brought her lower leg down across Hailee's throat.

The sparring was over and cheering with some applause erupted from the watching kids and parents. Megan was helped to her feet by the smirking boys, who always seemed to enjoy helping Megan for some reason or other. Megan did not seem to mind having the boys help her, either; a month or so ago, she would probably have slapped them all for touching her!

"Next class; Kyle sort them out, please, while Hailee gets her breath back!" Mindy said with a laugh. "Thanks Jim, Megan!"

"I think you need to get your own breath back, old girl!" Hailee quipped leaving Mindy speechless with indignation.

The sparring had gone down very well with all who had watched the advanced movements. I also knew that Mindy loved to show off and it seemed, so did Hailee.

"You enjoy being in that group of boys?" I asked Megan facetiously.

"Yes actually!" Megan responded with a smile.

***Chapter 182*: Amber Alert**

Thursday evening

We took the twins out for some pizza after leaving D-JAK.

They were both worn out, but they had done well in their lesson and I was very proud of them both. They had talked non-stop about what they had learnt; not to mention the sparring that they had witnessed.

Dave and I wanted to go shopping, but as the twins were tired, Paige offered to drive them home, with Megan, after locking up D-JAK once the final class was finished. We only got a mile down the road when Marty called us.

"An Amber Alert has been issued for the state of Illinois. A school bus with fourteen kids has gone missing, somewhere near Columbus Park. CPD is rolling; I have Shadow and Jackal here, suiting up. Mist is inbound with Medic and Trojan, as is Petra. Clock is ticking; we are at twenty minutes and counting."

We were only five miles from the Safehouse as I buried the accelerator into the thick carpet and changed direction rapidly, avoiding a mailbox by just inches.

Safehouse F

We had left the Jag at the Warehouse and taken the tunnel into Safehouse F.

Marty had a digital counter up on a large screen; it showed twenty-six minutes. Chloe was putting on the last of her combat suit and Josh was sorting out his comms cabling. I started stripping off as I ran for the armoury. Dave was right behind me. The first thing we both did was grab a wireless headset each, so we could talk to Marty, as we got ready.

"The bus was seen to stop on the shoulder. A dark coloured SUV pulled in front of it and some men were seen to force their way onto the bus, then the bus moved off and just vanished!" Marty explained.

"How the fuck can a bright yellow bus just vanish?" I demanded.

"Still figuring that one out. I have access to the cameras on the I-290, but they are shit quality and some haven't been cleaned in two hundred years," Marty moaned.

I heard feet running on concrete as Hailee appeared, pulling off her clothes.

"You heard?" I asked.

"Hell, yeah!"

"Mindy, I have Voight on the line and I have conferenced in Vicky," Marty said.

"Hi!" I said briefly.

"CPD and the State Troopers are ringing the City, but people who kidnap kids are ruthless and can be unpredictable. They may have already left the City, or they are staying put until the heat dies down. A lot of it depends on what they want the kids for... From what we can tell, none of the kids comes from a rich family, so ransom seems out," Voight explained.

"That sucks!" I commented. "We'll provide whatever support we can – we have three two-person teams about to leave and others out there already."

"Thanks, Hit Girl – we need everybody on this," Vicky said.

Nobody was joking around, not with what was at stake.

"I need to check my snouts; as I assume you are Hank."

"Yeah, every fucker is gonna be wrung dry!" Voight growled. "Remember, with kids involved, anything goes..."

Voight let it hang. I knew exactly what he meant.

"Anything goes..." I repeated, picturing my own two kids.

Western Chicago

Shadow and Jackal would head north.

Kick-Ass and I would head west. Mist and Petra would head east. Mathilda was out in her SUV, to the south. Medic was remaining at the Safehouse, with Trojan in case anything blew up, literally. Tony and Tommy were heading to Safehouse W to make the necessary preparations there, just in case.

I had warned everybody that we would go to any lengths to find the missing kids. Those who knew me well knew exactly what 'any lengths' meant and the first person to push me was a snout called Frank.

"I fucking know nothing – leave me alone, bitch!" Frank said as soon as he saw me.

"You're lying to me..."

"Why the fuck would I lie to you?"

"Because you know something..."

"I know lots of shit, but nothing that can help you..."

"Now, why don't I believe you?"

"You're a suspicious bitch, that's why!"

"He's right, you know..." Kick-Ass commented.

I was bored with word play; I was not very good at it. Half a second later my Tanto rested on the man's throat and blood was trickling down his throat as the hyper-sharp blade touched his skin with only a slight pressure behind it.

The man was shaking which just made the bleeding worse.

"Speak!" I ordered in a tone that the man could not ignore.

"There were rumblings a week or so ago. Two men were putting together a team – no idea what for, but they needed somebody who could access some computers and move some valuable merchandise under the radar, so to speak."

"Anything else?"

"It was way out of my league, so I ignored it..."

I whipped out a throwing knife and stabbed the man in the thigh, rapidly removing the knife. The man screamed.

"Don't make me ask more than once, again!"

Northern Chicago

"Since when did you have a snout?"

"About two months now."

"Come on, Shadow, I need more than that!"

"Tough shit, Jackal!"

Shadow stopped outside what I would call a 'greasy spoon'. It was a restaurant and it sold food which while tasty would rot your insides. It was a part of the UK I missed; all-day fried breakfast: bacon, fried eggs, sausages, fried-tomatoes, baked-beans, tattie-scone, mushrooms and some black pudding!

"You coming, or you just gonna play with yourself?" Shadow called pulling me out of my dream state.

Damn, I was hungry; I would have killed for a bacon butty right at that moment! I followed Shadow down the side of the shop. I was surprised to find a woman waiting for us. By her dress, she was a working girl. She saw me and looked very apprehensive.

"You're safe Jessi; we just need some information..." Shadow said calmly.

Jessi looked up.

"I heard some things, that's why I called you... Those kids? They are gonna be sold..."

Safehouse F

Abby had joined me and we were passing the information gathered to Voight and Vicki.

All hell had broken loose in the City; every Cop, every Citizen was out looking. The kids had been on the way back from a school trip. Their teacher was with them, too. I had the names of all sixteen on the bus, including the driver. I also had the numbers and unique identifiers for the sixteen cell phones, which were believed to be on the bus. None was reporting into any cell towers and neither was the bus' Lo-Jack system. Whoever took the bus knew exactly what they were doing.

I had come across some reports that all cell reception went down near where the bus had been seized; that indicated a cell jammer. Abby had suddenly jumped into action and she started digging into the internet.

"What you up to?" I demanded.

"If they left the jammer on, then we might be able to track the dead zone..."

"Fuck!" I said slapping my forehead. Why had I not thought of that!

Eastern Chicago

I was numb with what had occurred.

Fourteen kids! They were all aged around twelve and thirteen. Eight boys and six girls along with the male driver and female teacher. As we rode, we could see signs above and to the sides of the streets and Interstates. They were broadcasting the Amber Alert and the licence plate of the school bus. As we cruised up I-55 towards the I-94, I noticed something strange in my head-up-display. The cell signal went down to nothing and I saw a warning flash up as our communications system automatically shifted over to a different transmission method.

Normally I would have ignored something like that, but I had just spoken with Battle Guy and he had warned us to look out for any anomaly, no matter how small, including loss of cell service. We left the I-55, passing onto the I-94 heading south. Petra and I left the I-94 at West 29th Street, back tracking towards the anomaly.

I had called in the anomaly and Battle Guy had an exact fix of when our comms dropped off. I looked over at Petra as we headed west. I knew that she was very worried, just as much as I was.

Palmisano Park

We found it.

We had found the bus, only it was empty. No kids, no adults, just a cell jammer and a pile of sixteen cell phones. I reported the bus to Hal who passed it onto the Cops. They appeared within minutes and took over the scene that we had protected.

I was very surprised to receive handshakes from the appreciative Cops. Even Mist, although I noticed some of the male Cops and maybe the odd female one checking out my butt! I was pleased that we could have helped. I watched as the forensics people boarded the bus and I hoped that they would find something that would lead us to the next link in the chain.

Time was running out.

The basement

It was dark, very dark.

I could hear crying and I could sense the fear in the fourteen children that were under *my* protection. The bus driver, Jacob, was unconscious. He had tried to prevent the men boarding the bus, but he had been coshed by one of the masked men.

I had no idea why the bus had stopped on the shoulder, but Jacob said he had no choice as he had lost power. There was no knowing where we were. We had been bundled off the bus, with our hands tied and with blindfolds over our eyes.

I had to be brave for the kids.

Chicago PD, District 21

"The bus was hacked, well, sort of."

"What?" Sergeant Vicky Richards asked.

"We found a small box of tricks wired into the bus' wiring harness. They made absolutely no attempt to hide it. It looks like they just shut down the fuel and the driver had no choice but to pull over. Once the kidnappers had control they just re-enabled the fuel, all wirelessly, probably using a cell phone."

"Can you get anything off the box?"

"We hope so, but it's going to take time."

"We don't have any time to spare – get on it!"

Safehouse F

"I see their logic. A soft kill that can be easily reversed," I commented to Hal and Medic.

Trojan was peeking around the corner of the Command Centre. The kid was concerned for those out on the streets. He was still sidelined while his injuries healed. I smiled at him.

"Come and sit down, Trojan," I said, waving to a spare seat.

Normally the kids were not allowed in the Command Centre, but I did not want him left outside alone. I smiled as I watched his eyes roam across all the equipment that filled the room.

"What's that?" Trojan asked, pointing to a screen off to the right.

I looked over to where he was pointing and saw which screen it was he was looking at.

"That shows the status of the Safehouses," I said.

Then I looked closer. A warning was flashing up.

"Oh, fuck!" I groaned. "How long has that been there?"

Hal looked over and tapped some keys, bringing up a log.

"About two hours!" she replied, looking aghast.

"What?" Medic asked.

"The secondary data link to Safehouse K is down..."

Hal was hammering away furiously on a keyboard and white writing was moving up a black window on the screen.

"Primary is up, but no connection over the secondary, although I cannot see why!" Hal said, perplexed.

"It's being jammed!" I exclaimed in sudden realisation.

"Please explain," Medic demanded, confused.

"Every Safehouse has multiple data links. They all connect to each other like a web. The primary is hard-wired, fibre-optic. The secondary is wireless, over the cell network. The secondary is down, but everything checks out. So it must be being jammed," I explained as simply as I could.

"So that means that the kidnappers could be somewhere close to Safehouse K?" Medic asked.

"Possibly. Depends on the range of their jammer," Hal explained.

"We picked that location as there are deep underground basements there. The actual Safehouse is underground, like here. The above ground section is a sham," I began.

"It is very possible that the kidnappers are using a building nearby and more specifically the basement to keep the kids in. It's not all that far from where they found the bus, either," Hal finished.

I brought up a schematic of Safehouse K on the large eighty-inch horizontal touch-screen table.

"It extends down three stories and is surrounded by six feet of reinforced concrete in all directions. Sensors monitor for digging or any other form of intrusion into the Safehouse," I said, pointing out the entrances. "That was where Kick-Ass hid with Petra, on the upper level, but when we found Mathilda we took her down to the first basement level, into the briefing area there."

"Time to let the team know!" Hal advised.

Safehouse K

We had approached with as much stealth as possible and the six of us met up inside, on the surface level of the Safehouse. The place was devoid of anything, just bare concrete. Our motorcycles were parked side-by-side, ready for a quick getaway.

As we walked over to a section of concrete that was marked with a dashed yellow square, a slight rumble could be heard as a section of the concrete floor moved down and to one side, revealing a concrete staircase. We all vanished downwards and the concrete slab returned to its previous position, hiding the staircase.

We came out into a comfortable lobby that had carpet tiles on the floor and walls painted a pleasant light purple. We removed our masks and headed through a pair of double doors into a large open area that contained a briefing area, a kitchen and a place to sit to eat. As we entered lights clicked on across the facility.

On a large eighty-inch horizontal touch-screen table that was a duplicate of that at Safehouse F, we examined a map of the area surrounding the Safehouse. As we had approached the area, from six different directions, Battle Guy had used our personal communications equipment to map the extremities of the jamming. We had an approximate circumference and Battle Guy had superimposed this on the map.

I looked up at a monitor located on the wall. On it was displayed the Command Centre at Safehouse F. I could see Battle Guy, Hal, Medic and Trojan.

"It was Trojan who drew our attention to it, sorry!" Battle Guy explained.

"Not your fault," I replied with a reassuring smile. "Better late than never. Well done, Trojan!"

I saw Curtis beam with pleasure.

The approximate centre of the jamming was located about one-hundred and sixty-five metres to the west of the Safehouse. Battle Guy zoomed in and brought up an image of the building. It was in the form of a right-angled triangle and from what Hal had been able to find out it had a large basement that extended down almost six stories. Some of the levels dated back almost seventy years or more. The building was supposedly abandoned and for good reason.

The building had not had any maintenance in almost twenty years and was on the verge of collapsing.

It was a perfect hiding place and a very dangerous one, too. If the building was breached in the normal manner by SWAT, it could come crashing down. We had some planning to do. I got on the phone to Voight and Vicky.

The clock was still ticking and time was running out.

***Chapter 183*: Closing In**

Thursday night

West 37th Street

We approached the building with our NVGs mounted on our heads.

Kick-Ass and Jackal wore the additional thermal detection systems and were looking out for anybody who might be watching for our approach. We had to get in unseen and we hoped that our own research of the area and the basement systems would give us an edge over the kidnapers.

We had passed on all of our new information to the CPD, but they had decided not to believe the information – no surprise there! Voight did, however, and his team was on the way to support us. They would secure the area around the building. We carried no explosive devices, except for some detcord; anything heavier than that might have brought the whole building down on top of both us and the kids that we were supposed to be rescuing.

Our NVGs would help to show us the way with a map showing on our head-up-display. Communication were expected to be difficult underground, but Battle Guy had boosted the radio signals from Safehouse K and we were using a frequency that was not being jammed. It would be the depth underground and the construction of the building that would cause problems more than the jamming might.

...+...

There had been one stroke of luck, though.

I had received a phone call. How Marty had been able to route it to my cell, with all the jamming, I had no idea!

"Good evening, Miss Macready," the very British voice had said. "I am Lieutenant Craig Lawrence, Royal Navy."

"Hello," I said.

"We have a mutual, err, well not exactly friend, but arsehole!"

"You mean, Mitchell!" I growled.

"That's the bastard!" Lawrence responded.

I suddenly began to like the Naval Officer.

"You have a lot of respect in the Intelligence Community, Miss Macready, hence this phone call. Now, we are very aware of what is going on in your great City, right now."

"How...?"

"It's what we do at GCHQ..."

"Oh..., sorry..."

"We have had chatter from signal intercepts concerning an unknown event. However, what is going down in Chicago fits with that signals traffic. We are only telling you this for two reasons. One, we all hate Mitchell and loved what you did to him a few months back and two; we have our own interest in the man whom we believe is behind the events currently underway in Chicago. We want the man dead and we know that you can accomplish that."

"You want me to kill for you, *again*?"

"No. Nothing like that. No blackmail. However, just imagine, HM Government would owe Hit Girl a favour!"

Put like that... How could a Hit Girl resist!

"Okay..."

"He's a terrorist who will sell anything for money – even his own family... Therefore, he has no scruples about selling

somebody else's family. There is a kill order out on him, unofficially of course; we don't actually kill people anymore!"

"No...!" I commented dryly, vividly remembering our trip to the UK earlier that year.

"This man is intending to put those kids onto a ship, in Chicago. We have no idea which one, unfortunately. That ship will take them through The Great Lakes – ring a bell? You had a little fun on your cruise during the summer...," I grimaced as I remembered the summer cruise! "Once through the Great Lakes they will be passed to another vessel that will take them onwards to Africa and then from there, to the Far East. Many die on the trip..."

"You need me to get the names of the ships?"

"I believe you are familiar with extracting information from people..."

That actually gave me a thought.

"How big is the file you have on me?"

"Officially we don't keep files on vigilantes, but it's over eight-inches thick and a damn good read!"

I felt myself blushing at that comment.

"You going to tell me his name?"

"Gerry Thompson. He operates with teams of eight."

...+...

We closed the building from two directions.

Kick-Ass was with Petra and Erika. I had Jackal and Chloe.

"Contact!" Kick-Ass growled. "Third window from left, second floor."

I looked and could just make out a dim form in my NVGs.

Kick-Ass with his thermal capability would see much more.

"Petra, get up there!" Kick-Ass ordered and I moved towards the building, staying in cover.

There was a hole in the wall, about six feet up and I jumped upwards, pulling myself inside the building. Thankfully, none of the bricks gave way. I ran quietly across the concrete floor, avoiding anything that might make a noise.

Once on the second floor, I ran towards the man. He was holding a set of binoculars and had a radio on a chair beside him. In his hand was a pistol and the pistol had a six-inch suppressor on the muzzle. The man tried to turn just seconds before I drove my armoured fist into his kidney, doubling him over. My armoured knee drove upwards, into his face, smashing his nose. I twisted his neck, snapping it and allowed the body to fall to the floor.

"One down hard!" I called.

I picked up the radio from the chair and called in the displayed frequency settings to Battle Guy.

Sub-level four

The radio on the desk started to squeal.

The other radios began doing the same.

"What the fuck?" Gerry Thompson exploded.

"They're being jammed, Boss."

"I fucking know that!"

"Who?"

"They must be close, or else they're using a military grade jammer," Thompson moaned. "Check all the entrances and start patrolling the first and second sub-levels."

Thompson was worried.

The basement

The door was pulled open.

A flashlight shone in and waved across us, one at a time. Somebody was counting to make sure that we were all there.

"Hey!" I called out.

There was no reply as the door was shoved closed, and I could hear a pair of bolts rasping closed.

Sub-level one

"This place is some scary shit!"

"Why?"

"Kind of reminds me of either that episode of Stargate Universe where they get stuck underground, or possibly Aliens."

"Fuck off, Jackal!" Hit Girl growled.

The basement was dark and very creepy. We were using active infrared to allow ourselves to see. The active infrared was invisible to the human eye, but was bright when viewed via our NVGs. There was crap everywhere, which could be hiding the enemy. Jackal had the thermal sensor, so could check for body heat before we moved into an area.

I had to agree, though, the place reminded me of some programs on TV and that got my imagination working. I was not scared of the dark, but I did not exactly like it much. Oh, well, what was the point of being 'Shadow', if you didn't like shadows!

I was desperate for a rest after all the crap that we had endured in Gotham. My fifteen-year-old body had not taken kindly to all the abuse that I had been throwing at it. I was lucky, apart from being covered in quite a lot of bruises, I was not hurt; nowhere near as much as Curtis. I worried about him every day and every night. He was healing well, according to Mom, so there was nothing to worry about, but he was still my cousin and I loved him dearly – I just hoped that he never found out!

I was sorely tempted to tell Mindy that I wanted to take a week off, but I had no intention of letting Mindy, or anybody else, down. Maybe I would speak with Dave and see what we could do about getting some rest, without Mindy laughing at me.

I snapped out of my thoughts as I heard a noise. It sounded like a piece of fallen masonry being kicked across a concrete floor. I had very good hearing! I indicated to the others and turned towards the noise.

We could not use automatic firearms, nor could we use un-suppressed weapons as the sound could cause the masonry to collapse. I pulled out my FN that was already fitted with a suppressor. I aimed it into the darkness before me and used my active infrared to scan the area ahead of me. I saw a light ahead of me, it was aimed low on the ground. It was a flashlight and somebody was moving in my direction. I raised my left hand, fist clenched, halting Hit Girl and Jackal behind me.

We all moved backwards against the sides of the passageway. As long as the flashlight stayed on the ground then there was a good chance that the 'somebody' would walk past. The flashlight was screwing up the active infrared and the NVGs. It turned out to be only one man and as he began walk past me, I grabbed his neck and threw him against the wall of the passageway, which knocked him out cold. I looked over at Hit Girl, who nodded. I pulled out my short-bladed knife and slit the man's throat, allowing the blood to spread across the concrete.

For good measure, Hit Girl kicked the corpse in the head as she went past. I knew exactly how she felt about criminals who hurt kids and I agreed, as would all of Fusion and most normal human beings for that matter.

Sub-level two

I was leading, which was a surprise.

Among the many things that I was learning about Fusion was that despite the fact that Kick-Ass and Hit Girl were obviously in charge and some seemed more senior than others, everybody was treated the same; there was no real ranking system and different operations were led by different people. I was the newbie in Fusion; yeah, I could fight better than most of the others, but I was always treated with respect and at that moment, I had Mist and Kick-Ass following *my* orders!

I supposed that was what made Fusion function so well. The training was top-notch and I knew that one day I might be under the command of Wildcat who was seven years my junior, but I did not care; that was one young girl that I did respect and I seriously wanted to spar with her but had not had the chance. I was just grateful to be part of something great and something so exciting. Mindy had promised me that I was a full part of Fusion and that that made me equal to everybody else. She also said that my experience automatically made me a senior member of Fusion and that everybody would listen to me, even her and Dave.

Another surprise had been D-JAK. I had offered my skills and Mindy had instantly made me a senior instructor and given me a black Gi. It gave me an income, which was very useful as I had cut deeply into Mom and Dad's money, and it was also a way to better my skills. I loved sparring with Mindy and I knew that she was often holding back on me, but no matter how hard I pushed, Mindy would always play dumb. Privately, Dave had told me that Mindy never sparred to her limit; and that if she did then she might actually kill people.

I was also surprised to find Chloe and Josh welcoming me in. I had expected that they might be put out by my joining Fusion, but no – mind you, I had heard murmurings concerning some bedtime related activities from when they were all in Gotham; I needed to find out a bit more about that – it sounded juicy!

I was dragged out of my thoughts by a light, somewhere up ahead. I raised my left hand with the fist clenched, signalling Mist and Kick-Ass to halt. The light seemed to originate from another room, over to the right about twenty feet or so away.

I moved forward slowly, watching my feet amidst the fallen rubble. I turned and made the hand signal for a door, pointing to my right. I could hear movement very close and as a result, I did not want to speak. I waved for Mist and Kick-Ass to come up to me and they stopped, with Mist resting her left hand on my left shoulder.

I pulled a flexible fibre-optic cable from my belt and gently eased it past the doorway. The other end was connected to a camera that transmitted to a receiver on our NVG head-up-displays. We could all see the same image. As the image stabilised, we could see four men, all grouped around a table. One of the men matched the image of Gerry Thompson that we had all seen earlier, before commencing the attack.

I felt Mist squeeze my shoulder and I looked back, receiving a nod from Kick-Ass.

It was time to engage.

The basement

The door was pulled open.

A flashlight shone in and waved across us, one at a time. Somebody was counting, again.

"Hey!" I called out, just as before.

Just as before, there was no reply, but then I heard a grunt. The flashlight fell to the floor and rolled towards me. I grabbed it and shone it at the door. I almost dropped the flashlight in I shock as I saw what I had illuminated.

A man stood in the doorway. He held a pistol in his right hand, which he dropped. The flashlight must have been in his left hand. Now, though, the left hand was wrestling with a purple arm that had wrapped itself around the man's neck. The right hand joined the left in trying to wrestle the arm off his neck. I heard screams from the kids around me as they saw what was going on at the doorway.

There was a loud crack, which my mind told me was the man's neck, some more screams from the kids and the man fell to the ground.

"Good evening!" The purple, armour clad form that owned the purple arm growled. "My name is Hit Girl!"

I did drop the flashlight!

We were saved; we could get the hell out of the dark, filthy place! There was sudden movement as others moved into the room. By the light of the flashlight, I saw a set of blue-clad legs and then some of a reddish-brown.

"I am Shadow. My pal Jackal is just going to check you all out. Are you Miss Evans?" The blue-legged vigilante asked.

"Y – Yes, I am."

"Is everybody here, are any missing?"

"Two girls and a boy were taken a while ago, otherwise we are all here."

"Hi, I'm the driver, call me Roy!"

"Let's move!" Hit Girl announced and we were all passed, one by one, from one vigilante to another and out of the door.

"Are we getting out of here?" A voice asked. I recognised it as being that of one of the girls, Heather.

"It's not gonna be a walk in the park, but, yeah!" Shadow replied.

All of the vigilantes spoke with artificial voices, which sounded freaky, especially in the near total darkness.

Sub-level two

We all suddenly froze, just as we were about to enter the room.

I could hear screaming, crying and shouting coming into the room from another direction; that was an unexpected complication. The screaming and crying was obviously from kids while the shouting was some fucker who deserved to die.

"Move it, bitch!"

"P – Please..."

That was the voice of a young girl on the verge of panic. My temper was building and I felt Mist's hand grip my shoulder reassuringly. I fed the fibre-optic back out and around the doorway.

"Nice!" Thompson said, examining his merchandise.

The two girls had been stripped down to their underwear and were being examined by Thompson. I was incensed by what I was witnessing.

"Should get some good money for you two, and if the others are just as good then we're onto something. As for the snivelling brat..."

I had had enough and pulled back the fibre-optic. I was trembling with rage and I heard a whisper from Kick-Ass.

"Petra, you cover the two girls. Mist, take the boy. I'll take the bastards."

Sub-level two

I was shaking worse than I had ever done in my life.

I kept talking to myself, repeating the same sentence to keep focussed on anything but what was happening to me.

"My name is Lauren Edwards and I am thirteen-years-old; I am going to get through this."

I had never known such abject fear, it was cold standing there, in just my underwear and every limb shook, both with the cold and with the fear. I had no idea what was going to happen to us. I had no idea where I was, I just knew that Lauren Edwards was probably going to die along with her friends, Katie Gray and Philip Jacobs.

My skin crawled as I watched the men run their beady eyes across my half-naked body. I was no longer crying as I had run out of tears. Katie was still sobbing and Philip was hurting from having been kicked in the stomach by one of the men. My feet hurt from being forced to walk bare-foot across the rubble strewn floor.

I was standing next to Katie and we were both near to another doorway, opposite to that which we had entered by. Philip was on the floor, where he had been thrown, several feet away. The man who seemed to be in charge, seemed to be talking.

"Should get some good money for you two, and if the others are just as good then we're onto something. As for the snivelling brat..."

..._...

Suddenly there was movement at the doorway, a few feet away.

Into the bright lighting of the basement room came three armoured individuals one of whom was enormous and instantly recognisable by his green and yellow armour.

Kick-Ass!

***Chapter 184*: Tidying Up**

Thursday night

Sub-level two

I dove at the two frightened girls, dragging them to the floor and covering them with my body.

Across the room, Mist was doing the same with the boy. Kick-Ass was going wild; he shot two of the men with his suppressed Glock before throwing himself at the next man, smashing him against the wall. The fourth man, Thompson, had run for it.

There was an ominous cracking sound. It had come from the wall that Kick-Ass had driven the man against, maybe a little too hard. I grabbed up the two girls and shoved them towards the doorway, but bricks and other shit fell before we could get there. I turned and pushed the girls towards the other doorway, but felt something heavy land on my right shoulder blade and it hurt, knocking me down to the floor.

Then a green arm reached out and a gauntlet seized my arm dragging me out from under the fallen masonry. I seized hold of one girl as I was dragged past and saw that Kick-Ass had the other girl under his other arm.

I could not see Mist.

Friday morning

Sub-level one

I looked at the clock that sat at the top right of the HUD in my NVGs.

It was just minutes after midnight when I felt a disturbing vibration and worse, I heard the collapsing masonry.

"Fusion, check in!" I called instantly.

"Shadow up!"

"Jackal up!"

"This is Battle Guy; I've lost markers for Kick-Ass, Mist and Petra!"

For a moment I just stood there before galvanising myself into action.

"Shadow, Jackal, the exit is just ahead; let's get these kids to safety..."

I was cut off by a louder and much closer rumbling sound.

On the surface

"Holy fuck!"

I watched, appalled, as part of the building seemed to implode on itself. I turned and looked at Olinsky, who just stood there before running towards the collapsing building. Dawson and Lindsay were already there and staring into a pit that went down two storeys.

Fusion were down there and so were the kids. Nobody else in CPD believed that the kids were down there, but I trusted Hit Girl and if she said that they were down there; then they were down there...

Sub-level one

Our exit was blocked, completely.

The only way out was to go back, then down to the second or third sub-levels, and then I hoped to find a route back

to the surface. The kids were scared and choking on the brick dust. We did our best to reassure them, but I was worried.

"We're gonna die!" One boy shouted.

I span around.

I moved towards the boy I had illuminated in my flashlight beam.

"If you think you're gonna die, one thing is certain – you are going to die," I said. "Say to me: 'I am not going to die!'"

The boy hesitated. I repeated the line again and the boy responded.

"I am not going to die!"

"Repeat it!" I demanded.

"I am not going to die!"

"All of you!"

Everybody was saying the same line repeatedly and I even saw some smiles. I started moving away from the fallen masonry and deeper into the basement followed by the kids, teacher, driver and then Shadow and Jackal.

Sub-level two

I could hear coughing, once the noise of falling masonry had ceased.

That was good – dead people did not cough!

"Sound off!" It was Kick-Ass.

"Petra, here!" I called.

"Mist, here!" I heard from a short distance away.

"Kids?"

"Err, Katie, here!"

"Philip, here!"

"Lauren, here, Kick-Ass!"

"Good, now we've been introduced, is everybody okay?" Kick-Ass asked.

After hearing five 'yes, Kick-Ass', I dug through the rubble and found my flashlight. It still worked! I illuminated each person in turn. First was the boy, Philip. He looked scared, but he was still in one piece. The first girl, Katie, was shivering and I could see cuts and bruises on her pale skin. The girl smiled a little as I moved over to the last girl. Lauren grimaced from a bruise on her left shoulder, but seemed in one piece nonetheless.

I could hear Kick-Ass calling over the comms, but there was no answer. I tried and so did Mist; still nothing. I checked my belt – the comms package was badly dented, but seemed intact. I went forward to see what the route was like and found a body – it was breathing and it was Thompson. My rage returned and I hauled the unconscious form out of the rubble and sat him upright. His eyes flicked open.

"Give me the name of the ship," I asked simply.

"Never!"

I picked up a brick and brought it down onto the man's left knee, smashing it. He shrieked with the pain.

"I will break every fucking bone in your body – you fucking worthless piece of shit!"

Well, at least we were no longer in the custody of those dead bastards!

However, we now seemed to be trapped underground, which was not exactly a huge improvement. Anyway, we were all still, breathing so I could not complain. Petra had wandered off into the darkness and Mist was talking to us, keeping our spirits up.

"Bet you never thought you'd be trapped with three vigilantes, did ya?"

"To be honest, no!" I admitted and actually laughed. "I just can't believe I've been face to face with Kick-Ass, Mist and Petra!"

"Oh dear," Kick-Ass said. "Fan girl time!"

The three of us all laughed at that. I was a huge fan of the vigilantes and rather strangely, I felt awed at being in their presence. I heard a loud scream and turned towards the doorway, there was another scream. I looked at Kick-Ass.

"Petra has found the fourth man," he said simply.

I felt nothing, which surprised me. The man who had kidnapped us was being tortured. Did I care? Not really and that surprised me, too!

Several minutes later, Petra reappeared and I could see fresh blood glistening on her armour. I looked up at her as she sat down beside me.

"Thank you," I said.

Petra turned to Kick-Ass.

"I think we have a route to the surface – there is a gap in the masonry about a hundred yards down the passageway."

"Let's go – lead on Petra!" Kick-Ass ordered.

Sub-level three

We had made our way downwards and the level we were on seemed relatively intact.

The going was slow, but we managed to find another staircase that led back upwards towards the surface. We spent almost an hour and a half clearing rubble, which was hard going in combat suits, but we had no choice. I was uncertain when we could be able to escape, but we had to keep moving. The moral in the kids was at a good level and I intended to keep it that way.

Shadow and Jackal were telling jokes to try to keep the kids' spirits up as much as possible and it seemed to be working. We were still in communication with Safehouse F and Battle Guy was doing what he could to help us get around obstacles. However, there was still nothing from Kick-Ass, Mist and Petra.

I was worried about them, but I had no time to dwell on that.

Sub-level one

We made our way down a long corridor before turning at yet another pile of rubble.

Suddenly Petra raised her fist and we all went quiet. Somebody was coming. We moved into a sheltered position, with the kids behind us. I stood between Mist and Petra, waiting for whatever was coming towards us.

"We have activity ahead!"

At Jackal's warning, Shadow and I stopped the kids and moved in front of them.

"Go check, Jackal!" I ordered.

I watched as Jackal moved forward, his suppressed Five-seveN raised in front of him.

"I have multiple heat signatures!" Jackal reported.

Then I heard a suppressed pistol shot, followed by a loud exclamation.

"You fucking bastard, Jackal – that hurt!"

I rubbed my chest and glared back at Jackal as he shrugged and holstered his pistol. As I walked past him, I cracked him around the back of the head.

"Fucking ow!" Jackal exclaimed and I heard Lauren laugh.

I was very pleased to see Hit Girl and Shadow – not so much Jackal!

"Hi!" Hit Girl whispered as I reached out to touch her.

"You were actually worried about me!" I teased as she looked up at me.

"Nah – you usually turn up!" She replied, however I knew her too well and could tell by her body language that she had been worried about me.

I watched as the kids met up and welcomed each other. Now we had only to get ourselves out of there.

Easier said than done!

Dawn

Kick-Ass pushed through the final layer of bricks and daylight flooded down into the sub-level.

Within a minute, the light was blocked and I recognised the voice of Hank Voight.

"Stay out of sight – there's a shoot to kill order on you. Snipers!"

Nothing changed in Chicago!

"Fuck that!" Kick-Ass growled and I heard Voight laugh. "The kids first!"

Voight's team widened the hole and the first girl was passed up. Slowly, the kids were passed out, one by one, into the growing sunshine. They all held their hands over their eyes. Having been in semi-darkness for so long, none was ready for the bright onslaught that met their tired eyes.

However, the screams of joy were only to be heard by the fourteen children, their teacher and their driver.

I turned to look back into the hole, to thank Kick-Ass and Hit Girl, but the vigilantes had vanished from sight.

A Detective helped me out of the crater and passed me a blanket as I was still in my underwear. I had heard the other Cop's warning to Kick-Ass and I felt rage against the idiots that tried to hunt down the vigilantes. Without them, I would be dead. I owed them and I wanted to be one of them.

Ambulances began to descend on the site along with more Cops. A Paramedic checked me over and pronounced me healthy after she had cleaned and dressed my cuts. After an hour, parents began to arrive, including my own.

"How did you escape?" I was asked.

"It was Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, with their team; they saved our lives..."

"What happened to your kidnapers," the Police Officer pushed.

"Them?" I replied without emotion. "Those fuckers are dead!"

Safehouse K

We watched from one of the upper levels of the Safehouse.

Despite being amazed that we had escaped, I was overjoyed as I watched the kids smiling and crying as they were reunited with their parents. We were still the hunted, nothing new there, but I was happy with that if we were able to bring so much happiness to the families of Chicago. As we turned away from the scene, in the crowd below us, a man shouted for all to hear.

"Thank you, Fusion!"

"Fusion! Fusion! Fusion!"

The chant could be heard for quite a distance as we all climbed into the back of Mathilda's SUV. She took us away from the area and dropped us off close to Safehouse F. Once there, I thanked Marty, Abby, Cathy and Curtis.

They all went home, as did Dave and I, once we had showered.

West Ridge

It was a little after six in the morning when Dave and I arrived home.

Paige was asleep in our bed and as I looked into the bedroom, Anne-Marie opened her eyes and smiled at me.

"Hi, kid," I said with a smile of my own.

Anne-Marie scrambled out of the bed and ran over to me, giving me a big hug while smiling up at Dave. I was very tired, but it was almost time to get the kids ready for school, so I sat and chatted to Anne-Marie while Dave woke up Danny. Paige also woke up and headed home with our thanks.

During breakfast, Danny called us both through to the living room where there was a 'breaking news' story concerning fourteen missing kids and two adults. Apparently, the CPD, so said the Superintendent, was able to track down the kids and save them. There was no mention of Fusion at all.

I smiled at Dave – it was nothing new.

Friday night

'The Vigilante'

There was one more task to perform.

The suspect vessel was flying under the flag of Canada, which we knew was fake; she was US registered. Our job was to ensure that nobody escaped as the US Coastguard boarded from the shore to take possession.

After a few hours' sleep, Dave and I had headed down to Safehouse W and once darkness had fallen, we had headed out onto Lake Michigan. Along the way, we had picked up Petra and Mist. We had passed on the name of the ship, which Petra had obtained from that bastard. She was the '*MV Wolf*' and as we watched from the darkness, the US Coastguard boarded the vessel.

As expected, we saw activity off the starboard side of the vessel as several men ran down a boarding ladder and down into a twin-engine RIB. For reasons unknown to us, no Coastguard boats were available. It was up to us to find out the ultimate destination of the '*MV Wolf*' and which ship she was meeting up with on the high seas.

Once the RIB had moved away from the ship, Kick-Ass advanced the throttles and '*The Vigilante*' accelerated in pursuit of the fleeing RIB. We were racing northeast at over thirty knots and gaining on the RIB.

The feeling human traffickers had no idea that they were being pursued as we closed to less than one hundred yards.

The RIB

The man peered into the darkness behind the boat.

Something was out there; he could see the flash of white that could only be a bow-wave. Nothing could be heard over the roar of the twin outboard engines. The man leaned forward and whispered into the ear of the man in front. The message was passed down the line of six men to the driver.

The driver looked astern and his eyes widened as he saw the bow of another vessel not more than two feet from his stern. Just as he made a move to advance the twin throttles fully forward, there was a pair of explosions as the two outboards stopped dead and the RIB drifted violently to a stop.

The other vessel came alongside and the driver raised his hands, as did the other men at the sight of three sub-machine guns aimed at their heads.

While Kick-Ass rigged the RIB with explosives, us girls had some questioning to complete.

The men were handcuffed and made to kneel along the starboard side of *'The Vigilante'*.

"I need information, gentlemen. The first to give up the name of the ship you were to rendezvous with will live longer than the others," Petra growled.

Nobody said a word, so Petra moved alongside the first man.

"I am now going to show you what we think of men who traffic kids!" She growled and pulled out a six-inch blade from her belt.

She hauled the man's head back with his hair and placed a knee into his back between the shoulder blades.

"You heard the word 'enucleation', cunt?" Petra asked without feeling.

The man shook his head.

"Neither had I, till the other day. Let me show you..."

In a swift movement, Petra stabbed her blade into the man's right eye, flicking the organ into the sea. Blood spurted from the empty eye socket and the man screamed. He wrestled with the cuffs that held his wrists together behind his back but to no avail.

The horrified looks on the other men made me grin. Petra stepped to the next man in line. She leaned forwards and cut the man's belt, then with the help of Mist pulled his trousers down. The man was starting to sob as Petra seized his manhood and deftly removed it with her knife. The man screamed in agony and fell to the deck beside his enucleated friend.

The next man was beyond horrified as Mist pulled his head back and forced his mouth open. Petra then crammed the other man's genitals into the open mouth and shoved the jaw closed and held it. The man choked and then swallowed involuntarily. He collapsed to the deck.

"Now, who is brave and who is not?" Petra demanded of the remaining men.

There were times that Petra's ruthlessness concerned me, but I knew that she had demons in her past that she had not talked to me about yet. However, it was nice to have somebody who did not balk at extreme methods.

"Atlantic Trader, Atlantic Trader – please!" A man begged.

I looked towards the bridge and two minutes later, I saw Kick-Ass raise a thumb. Battle Guy had confirmed the name. I raised my Glock and shot the first three men, Mist finished off the next three and then Petra seized the final man.

"See you in hell!" She growled as she slit his throat and threw him backwards into the RIB.

The other six bodies followed and we backed off two-dozen-yards before Kick-Ass pressed a button on the console of *'The Vigilante'*. There was a bright flash as the RIB settled in the water and slowly sank, taking the men to their watery graves. I quickly sent a coded signal on a certain satellite channel, before finally relaxing. Our part of the action was over.

Kick-Ass span the wheel and turned *'The Vigilante'* back towards shore, advancing the throttle to full power.

***Chapter 185*: Moving**

Friday night

Three thousand miles to the southeast

The two warships were cruising within one nautical mile of each other.

The closest vessel, the eight-thousand tonne destroyer, HMS Dragon, cut through the waves at twenty-two knots. The other vessel, painted in a slightly different shade of grey, was holding position off the Dragon's starboard quarter. That warship was the nine-thousand tonne, USS Churchill. The two warships, operating together, had been diverted and were on a mission for the British Admiralty.

Commander Ryan Bennett studied the container vessel through his binoculars and issued commands to the OOD. As they closed, the MV Atlantic Trader continued to accelerate and despite numerous radio calls from both vessels, the British registered vessel refused to stop. It was now in the hands of HMS Dragon as Commander Ryan focussed his binoculars on the destroyer's bow.

The 4.5-inch Mark 8 Mod 1 gun swung a few degrees to port and the barrel raised slightly. With a puff of smoke and a loud bang, a shell ripped through the air, landing two-dozen-yards ahead of the fleeing merchant vessel. The automatic mechanism cycled within the turret, loading another round into the gun breech. The operator in the operations room, beneath the bridge made a slight adjustment to his aim, pressed the foot pedal and another shell ripped through the air landing only a few yards ahead of the container ship which immediately cut power and the bow wave could be seen rapidly diminishing.

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After a brief radio conversation with the Captain of HMS Dragon, the two vessels separated and took up position with the HMS Dragon off the container ship's port quarter and the USS Churchill on the container ship's starboard bow.

The OOD (officer of the deck) took a moment to glance at the ship's mascots. At the rear of the bridge was a three-foot tall, two-foot wide, poster. The high-resolution poster depicted Hit Girl and Shadow in their combat suits. Hit Girl had her twin Katana swords drawn, while Shadow posed with her bō-staff. There were similar posters throughout the ship. Anybody who dared to interfere with them risked hell on earth.

Commander Bennett issued orders to the boarding party as they lowered the ship's boats. Through his binoculars, he could see the Merlin helicopter on the stern of HMS Dragon lift off. She carried eight Royal Marines Commandos who would rapid-rope down onto the container vessel's bridge. They would ensure that the ship remained stopped. The USS Churchill's boarding party would then race over and board, searching the ship from stem to stern.

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The search had taken a little over four hours, but it had been worth it.

Commander Bennett headed down to his cabin to make a very important phone call, even before he sent a signal to CINCLANT.

Chicago

West Ridge

I answered my cell.

"Good morning, Mindy!"

"Commander," I replied.

"Two hundred and twenty-nine."

"My God!" I replied, astounded at the number.

"All safe, thanks to you and your team," Ryan Bennett said.

"Thank you for telling me, Ryan, it means a lot to know we were successful."

"Any survivors at your end?"

I knew what he meant.

"Not a one!"

"As it should be," Commander Bennett replied coldly.

USS Churchill

"... In other news, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, along with their team have put their lives on the line, yet again, and rescued fourteen kids and two adults from a people trafficking gang that was closely related to the activities today... There are understood to be no surviving traffickers in Chicago..." Commander Bennett told his crew, over the 1MC announcement system.

There were broad smiles on the bridge and several glances at the ship's mascots. Around the ship, there were similar smiles and expressions of triumph. Everybody was pleased when bad guys got what they deserved.

Commander Bennett was secretly very proud of what his only daughter did in the name of protecting the innocent.

Chicago

Saturday morning

Glenview

We were moving in, officially, to the new house.

That afternoon and evening, we were going to have a housewarming party, with everybody invited. It would also be a great opportunity for people to meet the twins. We spent the morning moving our possessions from West Ridge and doing an awful lot of shopping for supplies!

It took every minute that we had to prepare the house for our visitors. It was the end of the second week in October, but the weather was still reasonably mild and the twins spent most of the morning running around the garden with Sophia.

..._...

Anne-Marie's bedroom was now festooned with toys. Her bed was now sporting a 'Frozen' themed duvet cover and pillow set. There were also 'Frozen' curtains and bedside lamps! Danny had opted for a 'Transformers' themed bedroom, which I thought was much better as I was more a 'Transformers' fan than a fan of 'Frozen'!

I had spoiled them both, just a bit and there was a large screen TV with a Sony PlayStation for them both share, which lived in the room above Danny's bedroom.

That afternoon

The first to arrive were Marcus and Paige along with Megan.

"The house is amazing, Mindy!" Paige said in awe.

"Wow!" Megan exclaimed, so amazed that she never thought to swear.

"Nice place," Marcus commented.

When Megan saw the pool, she begged to go swimming. I had mentioned to everybody coming that there was a pool and that people could swim if they so wished. I suggested to her that she go find the twins and then they could all go swimming together.

Minutes later, Megan, clad in a dark green one-piece swimming costume re-appeared in the kitchen with Anne-Marie in a pink one-piece suit and Danny in blue swim shorts. Paige said she would keep an eye on them and took them through to the pool. I had given Danny and Anne-Marie very strict instructions never to go near the pool unless an adult was present.

Soon all three were splashing around in the water.

..._...

Within the hour, many more of our guests had arrived and the pool was getting busy. Megan and the twins had been joined by Tommy, Curtis, Chloe and Josh. Dave warned the two lovebirds to keep their swimming costumes *on!*

I felt privileged to have such good friends and I enjoyed having the house heaving with people who were all there for Dave and me. It was about as close to normality as I had ever been. Marty and Kim appeared, along with Abby. Tony and Shannon Morgan were chatting with Jack Bay, while Vicky was talking with Sharon Fellowes and Rachel Murphy. Vicky was enjoying exchanging stories about their husbands. Brad Fellowes and Cam Murphy soon joined the other kids in the pool.

Isaac Swanson was helping Paige keep an eye on the kids in the pool, while Kyle and Hailee were vigorously checking each other out on a couch in the living room. Abby was not too bothered about splitting from Kyle and had not yet decided on a new boyfriend. Erika eventually joined the kids in the pool, much to the delight of Josh and the other boys!

Everybody commented on how cute the twins were and I had been able to introduce them to everybody. Even better, everybody quietly offered every assistance that they could provide in my quest to become a Mom.

Looking across the kitchen, I saw Dave chatting with Isaac.

I soon found myself chatting with Isaac in the kitchen, from which he still had a good view of the pool.

We watched as Chloe threw Megan across the pool. Surprisingly, Megan resurfaced in a fit of giggles and had a big smile on her face.

"Chloe can be pure evil when she wants to be," Isaac commented.

"Comes in handy when she's out at night," I replied.

"I suppose it does, Dave. She's a very strong girl, but she comes across very soft and gentle."

"So can Mindy..."

"Point taken!"

"She gets her evil streak from her mother," I said with a laugh.

"Somebody talking about Catherine Bennett?" Cathy asked as she joined us.

"Yes, Doctor!" I replied with a grin.

"I am not evil – well some may think so. Now I wanted to talk to you, Dave. A friend gave me this..."

I stared. It was a copy of Curve Magazine.

"What are you doing with a copy of a lesbian magazine?" I asked with a smirk.

Cathy did not even blush.

"Like I said, I borrowed it from a friend," she replied before continuing. "Look what I found on page twenty-three..."

Cathy opened up the magazine at the relevant page and passed it over. My eyes bulged out and so did Isaac's. It was an array of photos taken outside a certain bar in a certain city and right there in the foreground were two very familiar girls, kissing. It was not just a peck on the cheek, either – you could see the tongue...

"It was a mission, Cathy – nothing untoward. They had to play it perfect, or they would die," I explained seriously.

"Did they, err, pull it off...?" Isaac enquired.

"Oh, yeah!" I explained on for a bit.

"Anything else happen?" Cathy pushed when I had finished.

I explained about Josh, Chloe and Erika. I then went on and explained about the following, all girl 'threesome', without giving too many details.

"Oh my!" Cathy exclaimed. "Josh must have felt a little, err, inadequate!"

"What you guys talking about?" Mindy asked as she joined us.

Cathy looked Mindy up and down before replying.

"Just talking about the '*eating-out*', you three had."

Mindy went so red I thought she might faint.

"Chloe told me everything – I just had to confirm it all. I found this, you see and I'm very good when it comes to interrogations..."

Mindy glanced at the photos for a minute, then turned, and stalked away upstairs. Two minutes later, she returned in a sleek, slightly revealing, swimsuit. As for the colour...

Mindy strode through the crowd of people and dived into the swimming pool. She did not resurface, but Chloe suddenly vanished underwater. Both girls soon reappeared and Mindy was whispering into Chloe's right ear. Chloe's face exploded and she looked over at us, then instantly looked away in acute embarrassment when she saw Isaac grinning. She bit her lip and sank under the water. Mindy was smiling.

"Yeah, Cathy, you are the ultimate Doctor Evil!"

Cathy smiled at that and went off to talk with Kim. I looked over at Kim; she was the size of a beached whale and I wondered how something so enormous could actually get out; Kim was a slim woman.

I turned back and smiled as I saw Mindy playing with Anne-Marie. Danny was putting a lot of effort into trying to drown Josh as Curtis watched; the boy was still being cautious due to his wounds. Chloe was hiding behind Erika, avoiding anybody's gaze.

That evening

We had ordered in a lot of pre-cooked food as I did not want to cook and neither did I want Mindy to give everybody food poisoning! The kids seemed to have made a good dent in the food as soon as it had appeared.

I was enjoying entertaining and decided that we needed to do it more often. The twins were enjoying all the attention, too. It was difficult to believe that it was less than a week since we left Gotham and brought the twins with us. They had settled into school well and we had not had too many issues, considering it was also less than a week since they had lost their father. Mindy and I were expecting that trauma to hit the kids very soon.

..._...

It was nearing eight o'clock and I was looking for Curtis and Megan, as they seemed to have vanished from sight.

"Have you seen Curtis or Megan?" I asked Cam Fellowes.

"Up in the 'petting corner'..." he replied, pointing up to the library above the living room.

Apparently, we had a 'petting corner'; 'okay', I thought! I wandered upstairs to the library and there, in the far corner there was indeed a lot of 'petting' underway. Curtis was doing the petting and Megan was doing the kissing. As for the other pairs, Chloe/Josh and Kyle/Hailee, I was not sure if it was more pornographic rather than just simple petting!

Anne-Marie was watching closely, though. Danny was talking to Marcus on the other side of the library, who kept throwing dirty looks at the 'petting corner', especially at Megan. I was surprised to see Megan with Curtis. The girl

used to be very shy about her changing body. However, that had been before we went to Gotham. That City had changed a lot for us all! Now Megan was almost happy to be touched. Mindy had told me about how much Megan had seemed to enjoy the boys helping her get back to her feet at D-JAK. Mindy had also noticed how the boys had allowed their hands to, 'accidentally', wander across Megan's chest and butt.

Considering that Hailee was now slipping off her bra from underneath her shirt, I decided that it was time for Anne-Marie and Danny to go to bed. Marcus offered to read them a bedtime story and threw Megan a dirty look as he left the room with the twins in tow.

I was tired after the previous two night's activities and more than a little sore. That was part of the price, which we paid to keep the City safe.

That night

I awoke and looked around the strange room.

It was the second new bed that I had slept in within a week. I was not complaining; the bed was wider than I was tall and the duvet cover, it was to die for! I had never had such a big room and normally I had always shared a room with my brother, but now he had his own room, too. My bedroom was almost as big as our entire house had been!

It felt strange – I knew that Daddy was never coming back and that our home was now with Dave and Mindy. They were very nice to us, but I had no idea if they might get bored and dump us. It had felt good when Mindy had gone bananas over my being hit by that other girl at school. I had also enjoyed the time at D-JAK *and* seeing Mindy spar with Hailee; that had been very cool!

Everybody had been so nice to us today and being able to splash about in the swimming pool had been awesome. I was still worried though, but I had no idea why.

I climbed out of bed and looked out of the window and down onto the front garden. I missed Daddy, but he had told us to stay with Dave and Mindy and I intended to follow his instructions. I walked out of the bedroom into the dark passageway that led past Dave and Mindy's office – we were not allowed in there. Next came the door to Danny's room on the right and then the spare room on the left.

Currently Josh and Chloe were sleeping in there – those two had made a lot of noise after they went to bed, no idea what they were doing. I then reached the balcony over the entrance hall and looked down to the front door and across the stairs. Behind me was the entrance to the library where Hailee and Kyle, amongst others, had been doing interesting things to each other.

I knew I was not supposed to be there; Mindy told us that we were not allowed to leave our rooms during the night. I knew she meant it for our own safety, but I saw rules as something to be broken, at least some of the time.

"What are you doing out here?"

I turned and saw Danny standing in the passageway.

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

"Mindy'll freak!"

"We've had a lot of change over the past week and I want to be able to look after us. Dave and Mindy may get bored of us and..."

"No they won't – they promised to look after us."

"Yeah, but adults don't keep promises."

"They really care about us..."

"How do you know?"

"I overheard people talking at the party thing, last night. Marcus said that Mindy never wants to give us up and is doing everything she can to do right by us."

I hated it when Danny was right and I was wrong!

"Let's get back to bed before Mindy sees us. I know they will look after us – I think they're wonderful; I just don't want us to be disappointed if we don't work out."

"I know – come on."

Anne-Marie was not the only one who could not sleep.

I smiled to myself as I gently and silently followed the two kids as they walked back to their bedrooms. I then padded down the stairs and into our bedroom. I cuddled into the sleeping Dave and thought about what Anne-Marie had been saying.

I hoped I could do the right thing for them both, I really did. Anne-Marie had an active imagination and a brain that needed constant stimulation to keep from getting bored. Danny was less so, but I knew that he would probably change, as he got older.

Many things were due to happen over the next two weeks, with a large life-changing event finishing it all off. Was I ready for that commitment? Yes, I was.

I fell asleep happy.

***Chapter 186*: Breakfast**

The next morning
Sunday

Glenview

"Wakey, wakey!"

"Huh!"

I laughed and the tired girl slunk down under her duvet.

"Breakfast is almost ready."

"Okay!" came the grumpy reply.

"Morning, Mindy!"

I turned to see the grinning face of Danny peering out from the shared bathroom.

"Morning, Danny – I think your sister is a little tired this morning."

Danny ran forward and dived onto the bed, then pulled the duvet cover off his sister. Unsurprisingly, Anne-Marie was not amused.

"Leave me alone; I'm tired!" she complained burying her face in the pillow.

"Maybe if you stayed in bed instead of wandering around the house at three in the morning you might not be so tired!" I commented with an evil grin.

Anne-Marie turned over and sat up quickly.

"You know?"

"I couldn't sleep, either."

"I'm sorry, Mindy; I won't do it again..."

"Just don't make a habit of it, please," I warned. "Come on, Dave is just cooking breakfast."

"Give me a few minutes."

Anne-Marie scrambled out of bed and vanished into the bathroom.

The kitchen

I laughed as I watched the rather tired looking, pyjama clad, girl grab a seat at the counter.

Her brother, though, was all smiles.

"Bad hair day, Anne-Marie?" I chuckled.

"I need food!" She replied ignoring my teasing.

I had just finished cooking the first round of pancakes when Josh came into the kitchen trailing a tired looking Chloe, still in her pyjamas.

"What is it with the females this morning?" I asked.

"Josh kept me up all night," Chloe growled.

"Yeah, I heard a lot of noise from your room..." Danny added and Chloe blushed as she took a seat next to Anne-

Marie.

"This is no good!" Mindy stated happily, when she came into the kitchen. "Josh, help me out here."

Josh smirked as he saw where Mindy was indicating. I stepped over and opened the door. Josh seized Chloe around the waist and Mindy did the same with Anne-Marie. I laughed as both girls were unceremoniously dumped into the swimming pool. They woke up very fast indeed!

"That was *not* funny!" Anne-Marie exclaimed as she glared up at her laughing brother, brushing her hair from her face.

"I suppose I needed that," Chloe commented wringing out her own hair.

Once both girls had dried themselves off and wrapped themselves in a towel each, I placed a plate in front of each of them and started dishing out bacon, eggs and pancakes.

"Thanks, Dave," Anne-Marie said.

"Yeah. Thanks, Dave," Chloe added.

That morning

After everybody had finished breakfast and was dressed, we took Sophia for a long walk around the surrounding houses.

I wanted to check things over and I wanted the twins to learn their way around the area. Josh spent most of the time winding up Chloe, much to the twins amusement. Dave was also in a wind up mood and he kept annoying *me*! We had a lot of fun and for once, I felt very happy as I cuddled into Dave and watched the twins laughing with Josh.

We actually walked quite a distance in a large square that allowed us to see much of the neighbourhood. We stopped on the way for lunch at a convenient Burger King before finishing off our walk.

That Afternoon

After we had completed our walk, I headed to D-JAK with Anne-Marie and Danny.

Today was an open house for people to just drop in and see if they liked what we had to offer. Dave took Josh and Chloe back home. I parked around the back as usual and entered by the back door. I was met by Paige.

"So, how many for an introductory class?" I asked.

"Fourteen kids."

"Not bad," I commented as I went to get myself changed and found Hailee already there.

"Hi, Mindy," she said cheerfully.

"Got your bra back on, I see!" I teased.

"Yeah – Kyle got a little bit carried away," Hailee, grinned with a slight reddening to her cheeks.

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D-JAK was busy.

Along the sides were parents and other onlookers. On the mat were two lines of seven kids who seemed to vary from about ten-years-old into the early teens. It was an even mix of boys and girls. Kyle was there, along with Megan organising them. They were all bare foot and wearing loose clothing.

"Good afternoon!" I called out. "I am Mindy, and this here, is Hailee. We are the senior instructors here at D-JAK. Today we will give you all a brief introduction to, Taekwondo. If you have any questions, please ask."

I noticed Hailee looking a little uncomfortable so I took her off to one side for a moment.

"The girl, second in from the left on the back row. You see her?"

"Yeah?"

"That is Lauren Edwards; I rescued her on Friday. The girl next to her? I caught her breaking into my house a couple weeks back."

Interesting!

"Just continue as normal and pretend you don't know them," I suggested.

..._...

Hailee settled into her introductory class, while Kyle and Megan provided demonstrations. I wandered around chatting to parents and worked my way around to the back of the class where Lauren stood. I nodded at Hailee.

"Time for a short break, I think – Mrs Wilson, over there, can provide you with a drink and something to eat," she said.

I watched as Lauren went to grab a can of Coke and a candy bar. She was followed by a younger girl, who did the same. Both girls stood together; I went to talk to them.

"Hi, I'm Mindy; who are you two?"

"I'm Lauren Edwards and this is my little sister, Lizzie."

"You enjoying yourselves?" I asked.

"It's amazing," Lauren said and she sounded excited.

"It's interesting," Lizzie added. "I think!"

It seemed that Lauren enjoyed the idea of Taekwondo, but not so much Lizzie. They both seemed very different girls.

"How old are you two?"

"I'm thirteen and Lizzie is eleven," Lauren replied.

"You want to learn to defend yourself?" I asked Lauren.

"Yeah!" Lauren replied excitedly, and then she grimaced. "I don't know if Mom will be able to afford the classes, though."

"I'll give you both a month's free classes – twice a week and then we'll see how you go..."

Lauren almost screamed with delight and ran off to tell her mother, which was the plan – I know knew who Mrs Edwards was.

"Not enjoying the class?" I asked Lizzie once Lauren was gone.

"I don't know – will I learn to hurt people?"

"No – you will learn to defend yourself. While that may hurt the person attacking you; we do not teach you how to initiate an attack."

"That's okay then – I'll do it; I don't like hurting people."

"Pleased to hear it," I chuckled.

..._...

Next, I wondered over to the corner where Anne-Marie and Danny were being shown some movements by Curtis.

"Having fun?" I asked.

"Yeah – Curtis showed us how to defeat a knife attack," Danny said with a broad smile.

I scowled at Curtis – that was not what I wanted the twins to learn about – not yet at least! I was interrupted by a voice behind me.

"Mindy?"

I turned to find myself facing Mrs Edwards.

"That's me!"

"I'm Mrs Edwards, Lauren and Lizzie's Mom. You work here?"

"I own the place, with my fiancée," I replied.

"Oh!" Mrs Edwards replied, sounding a little surprised. "Lauren told me what you did, thank you. She is very keen to learn how to defend herself."

Mrs Edwards hesitated before continuing.

"Lauren was part of the Amber Alert, the other day. She was taken by those awful men; when she escaped, she wanted to learn to defend herself. Despite what the CPD said, Lauren insists that she was rescued by those vigilantes. I believe her; she has no reason to lie."

I nodded.

"I am sorry to hear that. I saw fire in her eyes, which was why I offered her the lessons."

"You have kids?"

I turned and pointed at the twins.

"They are wonderful. If you don't mind my saying, you seem a little young to have kids of that age."

"They only came into my life very recently," I admitted.

"Kids are hard work, but it is worth the struggle, Mindy."

"Thanks, Mrs Edwards."

"Call me Emily, please."

"Excuse me please, Emily... Anne-Marie – don't kick your brother like that – those bits don't grow back!"

That evening

Glenview

It had been a pleasing afternoon.

I had made a couple of kids happy, including one who had suffered through a lot. We had all been fully debriefed after the Amber Alert was over and I had listened intently to Hailee's debrief. She had described Lauren very well. The girl was very brave and had shown a lot of courage. She seemed to have an aptitude for the Martial Arts, hence giving her the lessons. I wanted to keep her around for the time being. As for her little sister, Lizzie, there was something not quite right about that girl.

The twins had had fun as usual, despite Curtis teaching them things that he should not showing them. I had enjoyed having the house filled with people, but it was also good to have the place for just the four of us – well five if you included Sophia!

Dave pressed play on the remote and we snuggled down on the couch in the living room with Anne-Marie and Danny. It was a classic – but it was family friendly; which most of my DVD and Blu-ray collection most definitely was not!

Danny had picked out one or two films, none of which was remotely suitable for either of them! 'Let Me In' would have given him nightmares and as for 'Mr and Mrs Smith', that might have given them both ideas! I also declined 'Mulan', I was not exactly sure how that had found its way into my movie collection, but never mind.

Dave and I loved the film and we had both seen it plenty of times, the twins apparently never had. Dave was convinced that I had a thing for Harrison Ford, no comment... The song that began the film suited me too: 'Anything goes'!

"Where's Shanghai?" Danny asked.

"It's a city in China," Dave explained.

***Chapter 187*: Boot Camp**

Monday morning

Chicago Executive Airport

The jet landed smoothly and taxied over to the waiting car.

The luggage – several large cases – was loaded into the trunk and then the jet's two passengers climbed into the back of the waiting Jaguar XJR.

"Hi, guys!" I said cheerfully, turning in my seat. "Good flight?"

"Hiya, Mindy!" Selina Kyle replied with a grin.

"Hello, Mindy, the flight was not bad, thanks," Bruce Wayne, added.

"You guys ready to start your training?" I asked.

"We can take anything you throw at us!" Bruce said simply.

I grinned fiendishly.

Bruce would not be saying that in a few hours!

Forty minutes later Mindy pulled over to the side of the road and passed something soft and black to each of us.

"Put them on!" She ordered.

It was a blindfold. I looked over at Selina, who just shrugged as she pulled on her blindfold. I followed suit a little concerned, but I trusted Mindy.

"Thank you." Mindy replied.

The car accelerated hard and swung left and right. I lost track of the turns that Mindy made, then the noise changed and it sounded like we were in a parking lot, we then took a tight turn and went around and around until finally we stopped and Mindy turned off the engine.

"You can remove the blindfolds now..."

"Oh!" Was all I could say as I saw where we were; I was astounded and saw that Selina was similarly speechless with her mouth hanging open.

We had entered via a large vehicle-sized steel door. Beside the Jaguar was an armoured Range Rover and several motorcycles that included Shadow's blue Ducati Panigale. They were parked behind an eight-foot tall armoured glass shield that ran across the available width of the forty-foot wide cavern and had a large six-foot tall figure '1' on it. The top of the shield was angled over at forty-five degrees, to prevent anybody climbing the structure from our side. The floor of the 'cavern' was ribbed steel and concrete.

About a hundred and forty foot away, I could see the far end of the cavern. We passed through a door in the shield and headed towards where Mindy waited on a large padded mat. Beside her, I recognised Erika and Dave. There was also another girl about the same age as Mindy. Erika and the other girl were both clad in a Gi each. Erika's was dark blue, whereas the other girl wore black. That in itself seemed a little ominous.

Over to the far left was a glass-enclosed room that housed computer equipment and large flat screens. It was obviously the Command Centre and had a biometric palm scanner, similar to those that we had already seen in the cave beneath Wayne Manor in Gotham. Immediately beside the Command Centre was an external steel staircase.

The staircase provided access to a walkway, which ran around the central section of the cavern and provided access to a number of rooms on the second level. Another steel staircase came down to our right from the same walkway. The walkway was about ten feet off the ground and ringed with a steel and glass barrier that rose to a level of three and a half feet and the walkway itself was made of steel, but had a foam rubber covering. There were various doors,

visible, that led off the walkway into rooms, with unknown purposes. The ceiling and some of the walls had foam rubber sections that reduced the echo in the cavernous room.

"Selina Kyle, Bruce Wayne, please meet Hailee Richards, otherwise known as Petra," Dave said with a flourish.

"Pleased to meet another one of Mindy's team," I said, taking Hailee's hand.

"Good to meet you!" Selina said cheerfully.

Safehouse F

After giving Bruce and Selina an hour to say hello to Erika, Hailee and Dave, and to get themselves acquainted with the Safehouse, I decided it was time to begin their training.

"Master Wayne, Miss Kyle! Welcome to Fusion Boot Camp and Hell Week!" I growled, throwing each of the startled teenagers a small pack. "Your clothing. I suggest you both go and get yourselves changed. You have fifteen minutes before hell drops on you both."

Both of them hesitated, a little confused.

"Or, we can just kick the shit outta you, right the fuck now!" Dave growled ominously.

"We'll, err, go get changed!" Cat said quickly, grabbing Bruce and dragging him in the direction of their rooms.

Both kids reappeared within ten minutes – a good sign.

Each wore a pure white Gi and they were bare foot. They were very apprehensive as they came down the steel staircase and onto the mat.

"You two want to become bad-ass vigilantes, huh?" Hailee began.

Bruce nodded and so did Selina.

"Well there's a *lot* of work to be done!" Hailee continued and I saw Selina frown at the jibe.

"The next two weeks are going to be hard," I warned. "For the first week, you will spend eight hours here at the Safehouse, each day, training. We will teach you to defend yourselves. We will teach you to attack. We will teach you to use firearms. We will teach you to use bladed weapons. You will leave here with enough for you to continue with your training back in Gotham."

"It is going to take you months, if not years to get to a suitable level. We have promised to help you. Hailee will be your main instructor. She knows a hell of a lot, so ask her questions and do not let her slim form fool you," Dave cautioned. "Watch!"

With that, Erika and Hailee faced off against each other.

Hailee started the sparring with a kick that span through the air and which was intercepted by Erika's arm and she in turn span herself sideways absorbing the energy of the kick. Erika kicked out and was flipped over and down by Hailee. Erika landed with a brief scream of pain, but jumped up immediately as Hailee moved towards her.

Erika rolled and as Hailee moved to attack, Erika took advantage and kicked Hailee's legs out from under her.

There was something about seeing girls fighting each other, even when you were a girl!

I watched as the two, very beautiful, girls span around the mat kicking the crap out of each other. I craved to be as good as they were, but I knew that would take years. I looked over at Bruce and he was a little shocked by what he was seeing. The kid was not as used to violence as I was and the next two weeks were going to be very hard on him.

Being a street-kid in Gotham had exposed me to a lot of ugly shit and I had nightmares about a lot of it. I had learnt the hard way – learn or die! Bruce would need to learn the same thing or he would not last a minute on the streets of Gotham.

Hailee was really, very good. I had only seen one other person move as fast and that was Mindy.

I had a distinct feeling that I was not going to be enjoying myself over the next couple of weeks.

Alfred had been gloating a little too much when he had said goodbye in Gotham. He obviously knew some of what Mindy had planned for Cat and I. He could be really, really, devious at times! Alfred was expected to be joining us mid-week.

The two girls looked awesome as they flew across the mat. They were a pair of the hottest girls that I had ever seen! Suddenly they stopped and turned to face us both.

"I kid you not, this week will be hard work and deadly serious," Dave warned. "If you want to walk away then do so, right now."

I glared at the two teenagers and neither moved a muscle.

"Brave fuckers!" I growled with a grin.

Bruce looked a little unsure and the kid was so far out of his comfort zone I was surprised he had not turned and fled; I would not have blamed him.

"Let's start you off easy, shall we?" I said slowly. "I think that before we beat you through the mat, we should teach you how to defend yourselves."

"It's only fair!" Erika smirked.

"We'll see you two later...," Dave said with a laugh.

"... If you're still alive!" Mindy grinned.

"Taekwondo has a handful of basic blocks..."

Lunchtime

"Well done!"

They had performed very well. Poor Bruce was sweating badly, but Selina was very fit and coped with the rapid movements.

"Time for something to eat!" Came a voice from above us. "Assuming you're hungry!"

Bruce and Selina looked up eagerly.

"Go, see Cathy and she'll feed you," I said.

The five of us settled down to lunch and chatted, giving the two kids time to recover and build up their energy for the afternoon.

"You're Chloe's Mom?" Selina asked.

"For my sins!"

"Chloe was very brave in Gotham and I enjoyed her company," Selina added.

"Thank you, Selina."

"You look after Curtis, too, don't you?" Bruce asked.

"Yes, I do. His parents were killed almost a year ago."

"What's it like – I mean, you have two kids in Fusion?" Selina asked.

"I have many sleepless nights, but I know that what they both do; it makes me proud. They've both been wounded and I hate any of them getting hurt; even Mindy – she's like a daughter to me."

"You patched up many bullet holes, I assume?" Bruce asked.

"Yes, I have."

I lay on the mat, staring at the roof of the Safehouse.

My back hurt, my legs hurt, my arms hurt; actually, the list of what did *not* hurt was way shorter and contained one word: nothing! Selina came over and helped me up; she was grimacing with pain, too.

"Get up, Bruce!" Hailee yelled and I rapidly got back to my feet.

After showing us how to block, we had moved on to some basic punches and kicks. We also learnt that if we stayed still too long, or stayed down too long, we would be attacked. We were only allowed to rest when we went up to the kitchen for a break. I had never been so exhausted in my entire life, but I resigned myself to the hard work, as I really wanted to succeed. I was also happy in the knowledge that I was being pounded by professionals. I knew Erika, but Hailee was new to me, although I knew of Petra by her reputation and the fact that Hailee had looked after Chicago alone, while Fusion was in Gotham.

I willed Bruce to get up, as I did not want him to be pounded by Erika again.

Erika could be very cruel, especially to me, but I knew there was a good reason for it and I really wanted to become a successful vigilante. As far as I could, I also tried to look after Bruce and I did my utmost to help him as much as I could.

I actually glared at Hailee for yelling at Bruce. I knew this was supposed to be a week of hell, but I was concerned that things might go too far.

I felt bad about yelling at them and I knew Hailee did too, but Mindy had said that we had to push Bruce and Selina to breaking point. We had to find out what they were *really*, capable of if they were to become big, bad vigilantes.

I kicked my right leg and Bruce blocked it. I followed through with a punch, which Bruce deflected. Hailee was doing the same with Selina. I smiled at Bruce, who lost concentration; I kicked his left leg from under him, and he went down again, for what had to be the eightieth time that afternoon. The kid had stamina, tons of it!

I noticed that Selina was getting mad every time that somebody picked on Bruce; that was good. We wanted the two of them to become a close-knit team. I was not picking on Bruce on purpose; well actually, I was, but only to find out how Selina would behave. I nodded at Hailee and I started to go easy on Bruce while Hailee turned nasty towards Selina.

..._...

Over the next ten minutes, Hailee planted a few very good kicks on Selina and the girl was grimacing with the pain. After another five minutes, I could see tears in Selina's eyes; Hailee was cutting it fine, but then Bruce snapped.

He flew across to Hailee and drove a punch into her left side. Hailee had seen him coming, but had pretended not too. Bruce then kicked Hailee, rather hard, into her left thigh and Hailee fell backwards onto the mat.

"Stop it! Leave her alone! Can't you see she's in pain?" Bruce demanded angrily.

Hailee grinned and nodded.

"Yes, Bruce, I did," She said.

Selina came forward.

"Bruce, they're testing us. They're pushing us to our limits and I think you passed," Selina said with a smile, and then she gave Bruce a kiss on the lips. "Thanks."

Bruce looked a little astounded, not to mention embarrassed!

"Well done, Bruce – you both passed. You are both actively looking after each other. I saw your expressions, Selina, as Erika pounded on Bruce and I yelled at him," Hailee said. "I'm sorry if I hurt you, but we're not teaching you to chaperone at kids' parties!"

"I think we can call it a night," I said. "Go get showered and changed, then we can debrief over dinner. Marty and Chloe will be showing up soon and they will be spending the night here with you guys."

I turned as the sound of motorcycle engines rumbling into life cut through the Safehouse. Kick-Ass and Hit Girl were just about to leave for a night out on the town!

That night

We left the Safehouse on our motorcycles.

"You think they'll survive?" Kick-Ass asked.

"Yeah – they're both tough kids."

"I suppose so, as long as Petra remembers that they *are* kids and that they can break!"

I laughed at that!

..._...

"Coffee?" I asked seeing a vigilante friendly diner close by us, an hour later.

"Why not."

As I often did, I entered the diner without fanfare and was handed a fresh coffee. The diner rarely had trouble, as I was a frequent, but irregular caller.

It had been a long day and I was not paying too much attention. There were about a dozen people in the diner – more than usual, but I just thought it was a busy night. I left the place with my coffee and when I was a few yards down the street, I took a sip and almost baulked. There was one or two tonnes of sugar in the cup and it was gross! I turned and saw a 'closed' sign appear on the door. It was nowhere near closing time; I smelt a rat.

"Kick-Ass! We have trouble at the diner – I'm going for a Dirty Harry!"

"Sounds cool!" Kick-Ass replied from further down the street and I saw him shaking his head.

As I re-entered the diner by the back way, I moved to the door that came out behind the counter. I saw four men; three armed with shotguns, the other was armed with a large pistol. It took a moment for that man, who seemed to be the leader, to see me. He turned to stare.

"What are you doing here, bitch?"

"Most nights for the past year, I've been coming in here and Loretta gives me a white coffee, no sugar – tonight there's a tonne of the shit!" I growled. "I came back to complain. Now you boys put those guns down."

"Say what?" The leader asked, incredulously. All four weapons were pointed directly at me.

"We're not gonna just let you walk outta here!" I commented calmly.

"Who's we?"

"That would be Kick-Ass and me!"

Two shotgun blasts exploded into the diner and I felt the pellets hit my armour. Before the other two men could fire, I span, kicking the pistol out of the leader's hand and then kicked him down to the ground. One man pulled open the door and fled, but a few seconds later, he came back into the diner, although this time it was via the window and I saw Kick-Ass lowering his fist. The other two men raised their hands. Kick-Ass came in through the door and pushed them to their knees.

The leader had scrambled up from the floor; he seized Loretta and grabbed another pistol from the waistband of his trousers. I stared at the man, raising the pistol that I had just pulled from a holster.

"Go ahead, make my night!" I growled.

The man hesitated as sirens could be heard approaching, he glanced at the ominous form of Kick-Ass and then at the gaping muzzle of the Glock 22. He then carefully lowered his pistol. I seized it from him and kicked him to the floor.

"You okay, Loretta?" I asked gently.

"Hell, yeah!" The woman replied with a smile.

Safehouse F

We returned to the Safehouse an hour later.

After parking the motorcycles, we headed up to the kitchen for a proper coffee. I could hear laughter and saw Marty and Chloe seated across from Bruce and Cat. I heard the end of what Marty was saying.

"... I actually fell off my chair when Shadow replied, 'Yeah! My left boob will be totally bruised though!'"

All four of them collapsed in laughter, even Chloe. I remembered that it had been Shadow's first patrol around what was then Safehouse A.

"Fuck me; that was a long time ago, almost nineteen months!" I commented as I sat down and Marty jumped up to get me a coffee. "Chloe was only thirteen back then..."

"It was the most exhilarating night of my life and thanks to these guys; I survived it with only a bruised boob!" Chloe said, with a nod at Dave and me.

"You had fun tonight?" Marty asked with a grin.

"You weren't monitoring us?" I replied innocently.

"It was an eye opener!" Selina commented. "You watch too many old movies!"

***Chapter 188*: Weapons Training**

Tuesday

Safehouse F

The second day dawned.

I grinned as I saw Bruce and Selina eating their breakfast. They looked tired, even after only one day.

"Sleep well?" I asked.

"Yes, thanks, Chloe."

"I'd like to say that it's only going to get easier; but then I'd be lying!" I grinned.

"Thanks, Chloe – I really mean that; thanks!" Selina said with a scowl.

Hailee breezed into the kitchen.

"You two are gonna need these, this morning."

Two large black objects were thrown down onto the table.

"What?" Bruce asked the grinning Hailee.

"Wear them under your Gi."

Bruce looked at Selina, who just grimaced.

Body armour!

That could *not* be good. What could they have planned for us today?

Selina looked at me and grimaced.

Once on the mat, Hailee explained all – well nearly all!

..._...

"Eventually, you will both be wearing combat suits. What was your first thought when we dressed you in Hit Girl's combat suit?" Hailee asked Selina.

"It was heavy!"

"Exactly – armour has weight, so does your weapons, ammunition, communications... The list goes on. You need to start getting used to fighting and moving while lugging your life with you. By 'life', I mean everything that you require to survive out there, in the real world," Hailee finished.

Hailee and Erika ensured that the armour was properly secured and then we got to work.

"Weapons!"

I stood behind a large workbench in the armoury.

"As a vigilante you may be called upon to use any weapon, at any time. You will have your own personal weapon, but you may need to use any weapon that your team is using. You may also need to make use of an enemy's weapons," I lectured. "A vigilante needs to be familiar with as many weapons as possible. Today is firearms."

I saw Bruce flinch slightly. I knew that Bruce hated guns, which was understandable considering that his parents had both been murdered with a pistol.

"Here we have an eclectic collection of weapons – ooh, 'eclectic', I like that word!"

Bruce, Selina and Erika laughed. I picked up two large books and passed them to Bruce and Selina. They looked confused.

"Easy morning for you. There are eighteen weapons on the bench. I want chapter and verse in two hours! There will be a punishment for every mistake – so take your time and get it right..."

..._...

Erika and I sat on the mat outside the armoury and listened in.

"I've seen that one before – it's an E11 blaster – Stormtroopers use it!" Bruce said first, after a couple of minutes.

"What!" Selina answered, scorn in her voice.

"Star Wars!"

"Get a fucking grip, Bruce! I've seen them used in Gotham; it's a Sterling sub-machine gun – *Star Wars*, I ask you!"

Erika was trying not to laugh and so was I, unsuccessfully though!

Two hours later

"You guys done?"

"Yeah, Hailee – we are," I answered, smiling at Bruce.

It had not been easy, but we had managed it.

"Leave your notes there and come out onto the mat," Hailee advised. I did not really notice it then, but Hailee ran her eyes over our upper bodies before smirking.

I detected trouble once Bruce and I had cleared the armoury and the door was slammed shut by Erika. Then Erika and Hailee suddenly dived away, rolling into cover. I span around as I heard a loud bang and I saw Bruce fly backwards onto the mat. I turned in time to see Mindy holding a pistol and aiming it at me. There was a flash, followed by a bang. I had no time to scream before I felt something strike my chest, very hard and I flew backwards onto the mat. I stood back up, facing away from Mindy, rather painfully and then I was shoved forwards as I heard another bang and something hit me in the back, just as hard. I saw Bruce get up, but following another bang, he fell back to the mat, too.

I just lay there letting the pain subside and trying to get my breath back. My ears were ringing from the gunshots. I rolled onto my back and saw a hand reaching down to me; it was Mindy. I grabbed the hand and allowed Mindy to haul me to my feet; she was very strong for her size. Once I was back to my feet, Mindy cleared the pistol, ejecting the magazine and the chambered round.

Bruce was being helped up by Erika and Hailee.

The kitchen

"Sorry about that, but you both needed to learn what it feels like to be shot," Mindy explained.

"It's happened to us all, at one time or another. You need to be able to continue the fight, ignoring the bullets that hit your combat suit. Every strike will hurt, but you have to continue, no matter what." Hailee explained.

"In a major fight there are bullets flying everywhere. Our combat suits protect us against all small to medium calibre weapons. Only Kick-Ass and Jackal carry the heavier armour that can stop high-powered assault rifles such as the AK-74 series. As Hailee explained to you, armour is heavy and we all wish we could carry the heavy stuff that can stop a heavy machine gun, but that is never gonna happen!" Mindy added.

"It stings!" Selina moaned.

"You could have warned us!" I complained.

"Where's the fun in that, Bruce?" Mindy laughed.

"Funny! Really funny!"

"I don't like guns..."

"I know, Bruce, but they are an important part of what you want to become. I rarely use them myself, preferring my blades, however sometimes you need to go in full force," Mindy explained.

"I'll try, I promise."

"Now watch as I strip this Glock 17 Gen 4. It is a very easy pistol to strip down." I began. "First you remove the magazine. The Glock 17 has no safety, so there is no need to set that. Pull back the slide and visually check that there is nothing in the chamber, release the slide and ease the spring by pulling the trigger with the pistol aimed in a safe direction. Weapon safety is paramount in our business. Shooting yourself is embarrassing!"

"You talking from experience, Mindy?" Selina asked.

Mindy blushed slightly.

"Yes and no, I'm not telling you anything!" Mindy growled, blushing a little more.

"Mindy..."

Mindy looked like she was about to explode, but turned to Bruce and smiled.

"I'll make you a deal. Get a score of forty on the range by Saturday morning and I'll tell you one of Hit Girl's most humiliating stories!" Mindy offered.

"You've got it!" Bruce said with a huge grin.

"I want to hear this, so I'll make damn sure you get that score!" Hailee added.

"Fuck!" Mindy growled before continuing her lecture. "Always assume that your weapon, any weapon is loaded and dangerous, until you can confirm otherwise, understand?"

"Yes, Mindy."

"Yes, Mindy."

"The slide is taken out by holding the pistol like so and pull back the slide about a quarter-inch. Pull down the slide lock with your thumb and finger, like so. Release the slide forward, carefully. Remove the slide and turn it upside down. Remove the recoil spring assembly out and then remove the barrel. The pistol is now 'field stripped'.

"For now we are not going to strip the pistol any further, but in this state you can clean and inspect the weapon. The two main sections, ignoring the spring and barrel, are called the upper and the receiver. We will show you how to strip each section, but not now as it is complex and it is easy to miss components during the reassembly.

"Chloe managed to reassemble a Glock forgetting to replace the locking block pin in the right order which meant that her pistol locked back each time she fired it! She was more than a little embarrassed by that incident, which could have been disastrous if she had taken that pistol out and into action."

I was very nervous as I stood on the range and stared down at my target, twenty feet away.

I held the Glock 19 in both hands. It was smaller than the Glock 17 which we had been handling earlier, but fitted my hands better. I had just inserted a magazine that contained five nine-millimetre round and I was very much aware that I was holding a lethal weapon that could kill somebody if I was not careful.

Beside me, I could see Selina, in the same stance as myself with a Glock 19 in her hands. She looked very beautiful from where I was looking. I focussed back on my target. Hailee was beside me, ready to help as necessary. Erika

was with Selina. Mindy had gone, as it was almost time to collect the twins from school. I was looking forward to meeting the twins.

"Ready!" Hailee called out so that we could hear her with our ear defenders on.

I nodded and so did Selina.

"Five rounds – begin!"

I sighted on my target and took three breaths, holding the last, as I had been taught. I gently squeezed the trigger and felt the pistol jerk in my hands, but I held it tightly and absorbed the recoil. I sighted back on the target and squeezed the trigger again, and again, and again, and again.

The slide locked back on the empty magazine. Beside me, Selina's pistol was the same and she was grinning.

To my surprise, so was I!

My smile vanished as the target came quickly towards me on the motorized track.

There were only three holes on the target and only one within the larger black circle. I peered over at Bruce's target and my mouth dropped open. The brat had three within the larger circle, with one within the next circle. There were five holes on his entire target. I scowled at the boy.

"Well done Bruce!" I said.

"Thanks, Selina."

"Your forty is in the bag, kid!" Hailee grinned.

That afternoon we were joined by Joshua.

I liked Joshua, he was cute, although I did not dare tell anybody else that or Chloe would rip me apart! He was tall, but thin and I could see the muscles on his arms.

"I have a talent that I learned from my father; he was a British Royal Marines Commando and a member of the Special Boat Service. He taught me many skills before he was murdered by Ralph D'Amico."

Josh swiftly pulled something out of his belt and threw it across the Safehouse. There was a thud and a large knife appeared in a wooden target that was cut to mimic the profile of a grown man. Josh moved again and a second knife joined the first, barely an inch apart.

"*Shit!*" I breathed, exchanging astonished looks with Bruce.

Josh returned with the two knives that had required a good sharp pull to remove them from the wooden target.

"The Fairbairn-Sykes Commando Knife is the Spitfire of the knife world. It is an all-time combat classic. The knife has taken many lives since its inception during World War II. The knife provides excellent grip in both the dry and the wet. The scabbard is designed for silent drawing of the blade. As you can see, it can also be thrown with devastating effect. I have used them while fighting with Fusion, more than once."

I did not dare say a word, I was so enthralled by what Josh was saying and I loved his accent!

"I am the only person in Fusion who uses this knife. Others use smaller, dedicated, throwing knives. Although Shadow has a small blade that she hides on her person, in a different place each time. Mindy never knew she carried it, until Chloe needed to use it to escape when she was seized last year. It is for stabbing or cutting, not throwing. My knives are for stabbing and cutting throats, or throwing. Hit Girl's blades and those of Splinter, are purely for throwing and they are both very good with them! Chloe and Mindy also habitually use the Balisong or butterfly knife and both have killed with them. Curtis is also proficient with the Balisong. I am going to teach you how to throw the smaller blades first and then we will see how you go..."

I had to admit that I liked blades, I thought that they were – sexy – they killed with a cleanness that firearms could not.

"There are three different kinds of knives that are intended for throwing: blade-heavy, handle-heavy, and balanced knives. Balanced knives are easiest for beginners and they will make switching to the other kinds easier. Remember that you want the weight to be thrown first. If you are throwing a blade-heavy knife, you will want your blade to be thrown first. Hold the knife by the handle to throw it and vice versa; if you are throwing a handle-heavy knife, you will throw it by the blade.

"Okay. Grip the knife with your dominant hand. There are three, gripping methods that you can choose from; a firm but delicate hold is necessary for all gripping styles. Too much grip will hamper your release, whereas too little might cause the knife to fly out of your hand prematurely.

"Hammer Grip: Grip the handle of the knife as you would the handle of a hammer; place the handle across your open palm near your knuckles, wrap your four fingers underneath and around the handle, and place your thumb over the top. This grip is especially useful for throwing a double-edged blade.

"Pinch Grip: For a Single-Edged Blade, hold your palm out in front of you and move your thumb to create a crease between the fleshy pad of your thumb and the rest of your palm. With the handle pointing away from you, place the blunt edge of the knife blade into this crease so that the tip lines up with the bottom of your thumb crease. Place your thumb along one side of the blade and all your fingers except the little finger along the other side, thereby pinching the blade without pressing against the point or the sharpened edge. For a Double-Edged Blade, with the handle pointing away from you, grasp the tip of the knife so that the tip of your thumb is one side of the blade and the tips of all your fingers except the little finger are on the other side, thereby pinching it without pressing against the point or either sharpened edge. This grip does not allow for a powerful throw."

Josh was really, very good at instructing and he demonstrated well.

"Angle the knife. The angle dictates how fast the knife goes through the air and how far. For close range, bend your wrist back toward your forearm. This will allow the knife to turn over in the air more quickly as there is only a short distance to your target. For medium range, only slightly bend your wrist back. This will increase the speed of the knife turning in the air. Finally, long range; keep your wrist unbent. This will keep the knife from turning too much in the air.

"Place your weight on your dominant leg, with your non-dominant leg in front of you, keeping the weight in the back leg. Raise your dominant arm as I previously mentioned. Now, most importantly, keep the knife a distance from your face – unless you want your face cut!"

Bruce laughed and so did I.

"Swing the knife forward and shift your weight to the front leg to create momentum. When the arm is straight out in front of you, release the knife. Keep the movement fluid – it is about finesse, not strength."

We spent the next hour practicing with plastic knives, before Josh was happy that we would not kill ourselves or somebody else! I was annoyed to find that Bruce's coordination skills were very good and as good as my own.

Finally, we were both allowed to throw the real blades. I had thrown blades before, in Gotham, but they never really worked for me. Now I had been taught the correct technique, I was much better and having Joshua helping me to aim had me tingling all over!

Josh threw one of his knives into the target.

"See how close you can get to my knife!" He challenged.

My first blade got nowhere near the target, the next did not penetrate, but the third hit – eight inches from Josh's blade. Bruce was next.

The first blade hit the target, but handle first and fell to the floor.

That was depressing, then a soft hand gripped my own and I heard a calm voice in my ear.

"Take your time, feel the blade and think yourself into it and where you want it to penetrate."

I recognised Chloe's voice – I had no idea she was in the Safehouse. I followed her instructions and took a deep breath before lining up my blade. I swung, following through and heard the thud of the knife on wood.

Chloe whooped with joy. I looked at the target and saw my blade just two inches from Joshua's blade.

"Do it again..." Chloe whispered.

I did and my third knife dug into the target between my previous blade and Joshua's knife. I was overjoyed, but my smile faltered when I saw Selina's expression. However, she smiled and congratulated me.

"Thanks, Chloe," I said with a smile.

"I knew you could do it..."

Chloe produced a Balisong from her pocket, flicked it open and threw it, all in one fluid motion. The blade struck within half an inch of the embedded commando knife.

"Yeah, yeah!" A voice growled from behind us and two more Balisongs flew through the air into the target, knocking Joshua's knife out onto the floor.

"Bitch!" Josh growled at the smirking Mindy.

***Chapter 189*: Beware The Wildcat**

Wednesday

I had never felt so tired!

Selina was tired too and she was *way* fitter than I was. I had never sweated so much, either. Mind you, the sight of a hot and sweaty Selina was, err, nice.

I had no idea what the day was going to offer. Abby and Erika had stayed with us the previous night. We had been kept busy learning and practicing on the range and with the knives. We had not managed to get to bed until past eleven.

As we waited on the mat after breakfast, with Dave, our instructor arrived.

"Morning cunts! Ready for an ass-kicking?"

"Bring it on, kitty!" Selina teased when she saw who it was.

Megan laughed.

"I should be in school, but I was allowed to come here to teach you some shit, this morning. A word of warning; the afternoon session will be hell compared to this morning, but I'm gonna go easy on yer both."

The evil smirk seemed to say otherwise, I thought!

"Be warned – just 'cause I'm short does *not* mean I can't target somebody more than twice my size and weight..." Megan announced jumping up.

She then ran towards Dave and leapt into the air at the last minute, wrapping her leg around Dave's neck and then pulling him off balance and Dave crashed down to the mat. Megan followed through with a punch to his chest.

"If I had been wearing my claws, then Dave would be dead, his heart cut into three pieces..." Megan advised as she regained her feet.

"I know; I've seen you in action, Megan – I know what you can do..." Bruce said in a low voice.

"Thank you, Bruce. I don't have muscles and I don't have the ability to carry heavy armour like Kick-Ass. The same issues applied to Hit Girl when she was my age. We both use speed and agility to make up for our lack of striking power. We favour weapons that can kill instantly; we don't have the muscles to fight hand to hand against big cunts like Dave – sorry, Dave!" Megan lectured.

Dave smirked and shook his head.

"I thought you were going to be in your combat suit today?" Dave asked innocently and I saw Megan blush furiously.

I stepped forwards and opened my mouth to speak.

"Hailee, just one fucking word and I *will* gut you..."

"Wildcat no longer fits into her combat suit; her hips are too big and so are her tits!" I laughed, ignoring Megan completely.

Bruce and Selina grinned, but did not laugh as Megan glared at them without a hint of humour on her face.

"Stop being a bitch, Hailee; Megan's a big softy at heart!" Curtis laughed.

"Curtis is also short, just like me and although he has heavier armour than me, he still needs to make use of a different set of skills to the bigger kids."

"Megan has been digging into some of Hit Girl's early toys and she has made use of the rope dart, among other things. Wildcat has claws and she uses them to devastating effect. Mist uses her Sais, which are lethal and super

for both defensive and offensive work. I favour the Ninja-To, as does Jackal," Curtis lectured.

"Yesterday, you delved into the small blades – now we look at the more lethal instruments," Megan added.

"Just like Megan; beauty and lethality come in all shapes and sizes," Curtis said with a grin and Megan blushed deeply, but smiled nonetheless. "We have the Tanto, which means 'short blade'. Hit Girl carries one."

Curtis pointed to the purple handled sword where it sat on its stand in the armoury.

"Then we have the Katana, of which Hit Girl carries a pair." The twin blades were pointed out to us. "That blade is long and can be difficult to learn to control. It is however, lethal..."

"Between that sword and the Tanto are many other sizes. Kick-Ass uses a pair of Ko-Wakizashi blades. The Wakizashi is a 'companion sword' and is usually carried as a pair with a Katana. The 'Ko' variety is shorter, but just as lethal. Hit Girl also has a pair of Wakizashi as the Katana can be too unwieldy in confined spaces."

"Just because you have a large or powerful weapon, does not mean that it is suitable for all occasions. You will have difficulty using a Katana inside a building, whereas the Wakizashi would be perfect. A knife is always good for close quarters work. Now, let's see how you two fair, using different attack strategies!" Megan said

"Now," Curtis explained. "We can't use real swords, so we will use these training swords, called Bokken. We want the two of you to practice some movements, slowly to get the methodology correct, preferably without killing each other!"

Just as we picked up our Bokken, Megan went over to Curtis and...

For a moment, I was worried as Megan advanced on me, but she smiled – and it was a lovely smile.

Then she grabbed me and placed her lips onto mine and we kissed. Was it good? Actually, it was a bit wet, but it was the idea that felt the best rather than the actual act! Megan was bright red as she moved back from me and she looked shy; Megan was never shy!

"Thanks!" She said simply before turning towards Selina who was grinning.

I looked at Hailee and Erika who both shrugged, but grinned at me.

"Play to your strengths. Bruce, you have strength, even if you don't realise it. Selina, you are very flexible and have the ability to twist your body and use acrobatics. In this game, anything goes when it comes to survival of you and the people that you are protecting," Megan lectured. "Fancy movements can also scare potential adversaries. You only need to distract them long enough to be able to get close and then you can out them down, hard! You need to think on your feet, but always think about what you are doing. I dived into a situation without thinking and almost died; I have the wounds to remind of that and I see them every time I am undressed. I see them when I put on my combat suit and it helps me focus on the task ahead. Finally, before we have some fun, know your limits. I was injured during our time in Gotham and I hated being sidelined, but I would have been a danger to the rest of the team if I had insisted on going out with them."

Megan looked a little uncomfortable.

"I'll tell you a secret. When we attacked Maroni's place, I was hurt during the initial assault. Hit Girl was forced to use Shadow to protect me, which meant one less person available to do their job. Later, I surprised myself when Jackal ordered Shadow to take me away from the fight and I actually complied. Inside I felt wretched letting down my friends, but I knew that I could not go on. I know that Josh was surprised too; he had expected to have to fight to get me to go with Shadow. Maybe I'm growing up, but I'm surprising myself by the decisions I am now making that I would not usually make."

We started slow.

Selina and I needed to learn how to cut, how to strike and how to block. We were both slow to pick this up, but we learnt fast, especially as Megan would exploit every weakness. On the plus side, if there were one, Megan would explain what the weakness was and how to prevent it.

These guys were going all out to help Selina and I. They all wanted to help, even young Megan, who I also saw as a little bitch!

After about twenty minutes, Megan flattened me for the fourth time and then I heard a familiar voice.

"Come on, Master Bruce, she's a pint sized eleven-year-old!" Alfred shouted.

"Who are you calling pint-sized, old man?" Megan grinned.

Alfred strolled across the mat and past Megan, but at the last second he moved fast and Megan was suddenly face down on the mat.

"Manners, young Wildcat!" Alfred said coolly, before helping a shocked Megan back to her feet.

"Thank you, Alfred, my apologies!" Megan grinned.

"How you doing, Bruce?" Alfred asked. "Just got in a few minutes ago. Those bruises don't look good; maybe you need some more training!"

I smirked.

"He is doing very well, Alfred. Bruce is full of surprises, but then so is Selina," I advised Alfred.

"Thank you, err, Hailee isn't it?"

"Yes, I am Hailee, otherwise known as Petra!"

"I am very pleased to meet you, Miss," Alfred said, shaking my hand.

"We're just about to break for lunch," I said. "You joining us?"

Alfred glanced over at the pleading look on Bruce's face and he grinned.

"Why not!"

That afternoon

Bruce had talked almost non-stop through lunch, but had still managed to eat.

He ran Alfred through just about everything that had happened since he and Selina had arrived in Chicago. I could tell that Alfred had missed Bruce and the same was valid the other way too.

"Hope you're teaching the boy some respect, too!" Alfred teased.

"Oh, yes!" Megan laughed. "Ah, here's Tommy – he's taking you two this afternoon..."

"Время, чтобы чувствовать себя некоторую боль, детишек!" Tommy growled. He was wearing a pair of black sweat pants, a black t-shirt and a pair of light black boots.

"Huh!" I asked; Russian was on my list to learn, but I had not understood a word of what Tommy had just said.

"I'll translate," Alfred said with an evil smirk. "*Time to feel some pain, kiddies!*"

"Да!"

"You speak very good Russian!" Alfred commented approvingly.

"I had two years to learn – I had no choice... No speak Russian; no eat!" Tommy replied darkly.

"I have a history behind me that I wish I had never encountered, but shit happened and I suppose it could have been worse."

We all sat on the mat; even Alfred. Tommy Morgan was eleven and a half years old and having seen him fight, I knew that there was something sinister about him, but Mindy and Dave would never tell me what.

"A little over a year ago, Fusion rescued me from the Russians. I had been with them for a little over two years after being kidnapped off the streets of New York. Bad things happened to me; the upshot of which I learnt to defend myself. Other boys taught me to fight and eventually the Russians taught me to fight for their own entertainment," the boy explained. "I learnt to fight in any way that would get the job done... My style of fighting is different, as those who have fought against me know; I do not use anything from a book. I fight to win; otherwise, what's the point of fighting. Yes, I fight dirty, but it gets the job done."

There was complete silence and attention.

"Just a few hard learnt hints to begin with. If you can avoid a fight, avoid it! Use a pistol and kill the fuckers before they get close, or better yet kill them in their sleep..."

I saw looks of shock appear on faces around me. Even I was a little concerned. Tommy was not kidding about fighting dirty.

"You have limits, all of you – know them! You have to know when it is time to call it quits and work your way out of the fight. Alternatively, you die, simple as that."

I saw Alfred looking very grim.

"Every fight you get involved with; fight like your life depends on it! Even if it does not, somebody else's life might depend on how well you fight. Some of you can continue to fight on the ground, but it is always easier to fight on your feet. Conversely, it is good to put your enemy on the ground as soon as possible. Keep close to your enemy; his punches will be weaker, as he cannot punch properly." Tommy grinned. "Now if you're a little squeamish, you may not want to hear what comes next..."

I thought that things could not get worse, but I was wrong!

"Ears come off, very easily in fact – bite them or use your hands to rip the fuckers off! Not surprisingly, people don't like it when you rip off an ear and sometimes the fight ends right there. Put out their eyes, if they cannot see, they cannot fight. The throat is a good target, too – hurts like fuck and can kill if hit hard enough. Use your elbows and knees; they are strong and Mindy gives us all armoured joints on our combat suits, not just for protection, but also as weapons," Tommy grinned again. "Freaked out yet?"

The kid was fucking warped!

"Break the joints if you can; elbow is painful! Break some bones in the foot or hand; rip their arm back behind them and snap the bones. The collarbone – doesn't take much to snap them. As for men and boys, kick them where it fucking hurts – that applies to anybody, not just the females. Boys, kick the females in the same place; it hurts them too! Go for the ribs, or the nose, the spine is good for a permanent stop.

"Don't be afraid to fight dirty. Use everything around you. Throw dirt in their face, spit liquid in their eyes. Look around – aerosols, rocks, bottles, even a fucking stapler! Take every advantage and keep pounding and pounding till they stay the fuck down."

Alfred was the first to speak up in the total silence after Tommy had stopped talking.

"I hate to say it, but the kid knows some shit! He may be young, but he has experienced fighting that would scare most adults; listen to him, what he says may save your life."

Tommy smiled and nodded at Alfred, who still looked a bit grim at Tommy's revelations. The rest of the afternoon was subdued and was spent with Tommy showing us some vicious movements for incapacitating an opponent.

I thought I had demons in my life, but Tommy's were much, much worse!

***Chapter 190*: Labour**

Thursday

It was a perfect Thursday morning and the fifteenth day of October.

Only Kim was *not* enjoying herself, not by a long shot – she was in labour! It had begun at five that morning. Cathy had rushed over to help, with Chloe as her assistant. Kim was desperate to be able to stop lugging around her child; the novelty had worn off after nine months of strange feelings and movements.

We all knew it was happening – Chloe had sent texts to everybody!

Cathy had confirmed that it was the real deal and that the baby would be expected to appear in the next few hours. Once at the hospital, Chloe had sent the details around by text message, not to mention regular updates, such as '*Cervix at 6cm*'.

I really did *not* need the graphic detail, but Chloe seemed to be enjoying herself, even if Kim was not.

That morning

Safehouse D

"Either of you two know how to drive?"

"I do!" Selina answered. "Just not stick."

Bruce shook his head.

"Well, we can have some fun then," I grinned.

We were going to be using the same two Ford Focus POS cars that Chloe and Josh had learnt to drive in. They were still in good condition, so would be perfect for the days instruction.

"Okay, Cat – let's see what you can do..." I said encouragingly pointing at the silver Focus.

Selina ran forward and jumped in, seemingly excited at the prospect. As she had said, she could drive an automatic and took the car in a large figure eight around the pillars before returning to the start.

"Well done!" I said approvingly and Cat blushed. "Bruce?"

I sent Cat with Hailee over to see Alfred who was waiting in the black Focus to show Cat how to drive 'stick'. I climbed into the silver Focus on the passenger side, while Bruce got behind the wheel.

"Okay, Bruce – make sure the car is in 'Park' – that's with the lever fully forward and lined up with the 'P'. Foot on the brake – that's the big pedal on the left; the other one is the accelerator or gas. Turn the key..."

The engine rumbled to life and Bruce smiled, letting the key go.

"Keep your foot on the brake and press the button on the left of the gear lever with your thumb. Okay, pull it back three steps to the 'D', which means 'Drive'. 'R' is 'Reverse' and 'N' is Neutral."

Bruce did as instructed and the car dropped into gear.

"Ease off the brake very slowly – a bit faster than that – gently..."

We started to move forwards just as I heard some gears grinding on the other Focus and grimaced at the sound! The car moved forwards on its own accord, even without a foot on the accelerator. Bruce steered the car at barely five miles per hour, nudging the brakes as he manoeuvred around the pillars.

"Not bad, kid!"

I looked over at the other car and saw Cat grinning and Alfred covering his eyes with his hands.

..._...

At lunch, Cat and Bruce were full of things to talk about. They had both had great fun with the cars – Alfred on the other hand, had not!

"Women drivers!" He moaned.

I laughed.

"Women are good drivers..."

"How many vehicles have you wrecked, young lady, in just a few months? One Panigale Superbike, one Land Rover Discovery, or LR4 as you call them over here, one BMW 7-Series saloon... Should I go on?"

"Point taken!" I replied.

That afternoon

Safehouse D

"Okay, we've shown you how to fight, now you need to be able to escape," Mindy lectured. "You may have the Cops after you, which brings me to another point that I will make now..."

"Both of you look at me so I can see you taking this in. Being a vigilante has rules, a fucking ton of them! Number 1: No innocents get hurt, period. Collateral damage is difficult to avoid, but a vigilante gains respect by protecting the innocent and fighting the criminals. Number 2: No uniforms get hurt. They will chase you, but you cannot use violence against them to escape. The odd bruise is not a problem, but no shooting. Sometimes, though, the Cops are bad; Gotham is a good example of that. Mind you, we have had our own fair share of bent Cops in Chicago and in New York..."

"Remember that you have to act like a Hero, not like a Criminal or you will *not* get support from the City. Support is critical if you do not want to be hiding every damn second of the night. Darkness is our friend, but sometimes it is a lot easier to act in daylight, but the chances of getting caught are much higher. Vigilantes don't get a free pass..."

"You two had better remember all that, or we'll come knocking on *your* door!" Dave added seriously. "Or more likely smashing through your bedroom window..."

"We understand," I acknowledged after exchanging a scared look with Bruce.

..._...

"We have constructed here, a possible escape route," Mindy continued pointing at some wood-clad scaffolding that formed two separate platforms, one lower than the other. "Dave – care to explain?"

Dave grinned.

"This is a replica of an escape route used by Hit Girl, the first night that I met her. She had just wiped out some druggies in that building there," Dave said pointing at the taller structure. "I remember the words like yesterday, as I was green as they come..."

"Funny cunt!" Mindy laughed from atop the higher platform.

"As I went to use the front door, Hit Girl said, 'Hey, green asshole, you can't use the front door now'..."

There was a ripple of laughter from those present at my impression of the younger Hit Girl.

"I followed Hit Girl out the window and up the fire escape onto the roof. I asked her, 'Who are you?'"

"Me? I'm Hit Girl – and *that* is Big Daddy!" Mindy added wistfully. "I said 'Come on!' and ran towards the edge of the roof, like so..."

Mindy ran and jumped off the first platform, leaping over the gap and landing in a roll on the other platform.

"Come on!" Mindy yelled at me, just like all those years ago, and I ran after her, easily completing the leap that I had failed all those years before, rolling and coming up into a crouch beside her.

"Better!" Mindy said with a grin and a kiss.

"Now, while they make out up there, it's *your* turn!" Hailee said as we both fell to the platform together.

The Hospital

The pain was excruciating, at least I thought so the way Kim was sucking on the gas!

I could feel some the pain too, as Kim squeezed my left hand, but I did not want to say anything; I just grimaced with the pain!

"Marty, if you ever bring your cock anywhere near me again; I'm going to cut it off!" Kim growled as she fought through the next contraction. "Fucking asshole – this water melon is *not* gonna fit..."

The midwife laughed at my expression.

Over the next couple of hours or so, the contractions sped up and Kim was getting very high on the gas mixture. Her language was not improving though; quite a bit of it was aimed at me!

"Get this goddamn thing out of me..."

"It's on its way, Kim..."

"Not fucking fast enough... Bastard!"

Kim was crying now. I knew she was tired, very tired; she had been at it for hours. She was sweating all over and I was doing my best to keep her face and forehead clear.

"I..." I tried.

"I *hate* you right now!"

Safehouse D

Selina seemed better at the jumping than Bruce.

Not surprisingly, Bruce froze just as Kick-Ass had on that fateful night...

"I am not jumping down there; it's miles!" Bruce exclaimed.

"You've done it before..." Selina encouraged him.

"He has?" I asked incredulously.

"He jumped over a gap between two buildings, back in Gotham – shocked the hell out of me, I can tell you!" Selina explained as Bruce smiled, remembering.

"Just jump and land as we taught you on the mat; roll with the landing..." Hailee said calmly.

"Okay..." Bruce said, sounding anything but okay, as he turned for the very back of the platform.

Bruce sprinted towards the gap; he placed his left foot on the parapet and leapt into space.

The Hospital

Just ten minutes later, everything changed...

"Oh, fucking hell!" Kim yelled and suddenly she started to shake from a violent contraction that was the largest yet and she pushed for all she was worth.

"Breathe..."

"What the fuck do you think I'm fucking doing, bastard!"

Kim was struggling to breathe as she grabbed me by my t-shirt and held me tight – for a minute, I could not breathe either. There was a sudden rush of liquid from between Kim's legs. The liquid spilled onto the floor; it was like Niagara Falls! Then suddenly there was something there on the bed just behind Kim's legs.

"Fuck me!" I exclaimed as I looked down at my newborn child for the first time.

It was impossible to describe the feeling of seeing a new human being emerge and knowing that it was your own and that you had had a part in creating it...

The midwife rushed over and seized the baby, while a nurse clamped off the cord. Kim was shaking, as she lay herself back on the bed, breathing heavily like there was no tomorrow. Our new baby was placed gently onto her chest; the baby was covered in red goo and other yucky stuff, but it looked like the most beautiful thing I had ever seen – except for the mother of course!

Kim gazed down at our first child, oblivious to the state it was in and gently kissed the baby on the top of the head. Her smile was enormous and despite the fact that she looked knackered, she was radiant and I felt my love growing as I watched them both. The nurse passed me a pair of surgical scissors and I cut the cord. Kim shook once more as the placenta was expelled from within her. She smiled at me and I reached out to touch my child for the very first time. The baby was warm and the skin was very soft.

"Thank you, Marty..." Kim said weakly, before bursting into tears of happiness.

"No, Kim, thank *you*; the baby is just perfect... Just like you..."

"I love you Marty..."

"I love you so very much and always will..."

Safehouse D

Bruce landed on the other platform, rolling with the landing.

It was not perfect, not by any stretch of the imagination, but it had worked. We all clapped as he stood up shakily, smiling from ear to ear.

Then my cell rang; it was Chloe.

"*IT'S A BOY!*" She yelled down the phone, almost deafening me.

***Chapter 191*: Bundle of Joy**

Thursday evening

The Hospital

It was amazing how small the kid was.

His name was Matthew Eisenberg and he weighed eight pounds exactly. He was perfectly healthy and had everything in the right places. Marty could not stop beaming and Kim looked radiant.

"Congratulations pal!" I said as I looked down at the tiny new person.

Matthew was fast asleep in a crib; he looked very happy. Kim, on the other hand, was looking rather tired. She had been able to take a brief shower, but she still looked like hell!

"Dave, Mindy. We want you to be Godparents for Matthew... Also Chloe and Josh, but we haven't asked them yet, so don't say anything to them," Kim said.

"We'd be honoured," I replied receiving an excited nod from Mindy.

"He's lovely, Kim," Mindy said.

"Marty or Matthew?" I quipped.

"Funny!" Mindy laughed.

Mindy and I had agreed on something for Marty and Kim and that moment seemed as good as any; I looked over at Mindy and she nodded.

"We have a gift for you both; call it a long term loan if you want. You have a family now; that shitty apartment is no place to bring up a kid," I said.

"The neighbourhood sucks, too!" Mindy commented as Marty and Kim looked at us a little confused.

"We have no need for West Ridge at the moment, so we want you three to move into it...," I continued.

"You what?" Marty asked incredulously.

"It's just going to sit there empty, or Josh and Chloe are going to use it to fuck in," Mindy stated. "Not to mention the, err, special equipment...!"

"Yeah," I added deadpan. "No other house in Chicago has a self-destruct device and is protected by Claymore mines!"

Marty laughed and Mindy blushed.

"Thank you...," Kim was crying now and Mindy went over to hug her.

"Not bad, considering Mindy tried to kill her last year!" Marty laughed.

"Ignore them, Mindy; they're fucking assholes!" Kim growled with a nasty scowl.

Friday morning

Safehouse F

"You two scared yet?" Chloe growled. "Because if you aren't, then you will be today..."

"Yeah!" Mindy growled.

"On Saturday night, you will be going out into the City...," Dave added.

I looked over at Cat, who grinned back; it sounded fun.

"Oh, almost forgot," grinned Chloe with a glint in her eye. "You'll be on your own!"

We spent the day going over and over everything that we had learnt up to that point.

Chloe, Dave and Mindy impressed on us the importance of remembering everything we had been taught. We also had time to try on our temporary combat suits. They were nothing special, at least that was what Mindy had said, but to us they were awesome!

Both combat suits were black SWAT suits, with black boots; although they were made from a composite material, which we had been told, was bullet and stab proof. I had *no* intention, of putting that to the test! Fitted onto the suits were additional sections of armour for added protection. For weapons, we would have a pistol, knives and a Jō-staff each. We had both been learning to use the Jō-staff since Monday; I could not believe how much we had learnt in just over four days! To protect our identity, we both wore a plain black, padded mask that covered our faces completely.

I was very scared at the thought of going out on our own. Why, I had no idea; I had been living on the streets for years! However, Chicago was new territory to me and so were the bastards in it.

We practiced fighting in the suits and carrying our weapons and communications equipment. It felt different wearing a mask, not to mention carrying heavy equipment. The two of us practised working as a team, as we would be depending on each other for safety.

I knew that Mindy would not put us into danger, but I also knew that her definition of danger was very different to our own!

That evening

Glenview

Bruce and Selina had been allowed out of the Safehouse for the evening as we had a guest.

Everybody had dressed semi-smartly for the evening. Marcus was there, as were Vicky and Hailee. The twins were being entertained by Megan for the evening, upstairs. The seven of us, Dave, me, Marcus, Vicky, Hailee, Bruce and Selina were being joined by the Chicago Police Department Superintendent himself, Trevor Howards.

As last time, I was sworn to behave. Although we were on *my* turf! I had briefed Vicky, Hailee, Bruce and Selina on what they could and could not say in front of the Cop. There could be no lapses in concentration, not one!

Alfred opened the door.

"Good evening, sir; nice getup!" Alfred said as he waved the Superintendent in the door and through to the living room.

"Evening, sir!" Marcus said, holding out his hand.

"Evening, Lieutenant!"

"This is Sergeant Vicky Richards, my deputy, and her daughter, Hailee."

"Pleased to meet you, Sergeant and you Hailee."

"You remember Mindy and you haven't met her fiancée, Dave Lizewski."

"Mindy. Good to meet you Dave."

"This is Bruce Wayne and his friend, Selina. They are from..."

"... Gotham!" The Superintendent interrupted with a surprised expression.

We all retreated to the living room and sat down to chat while Alfred finished off preparing the meal; he was an amazing cook from what I could see – and smell!

"I understand your Martial Arts Studio is doing well," The Superintendent said.

"Very well. We've been turning some kids away; we're looking for some larger premises," I replied.

"Very good! I understand that young Hailee teaches there, too."

The man was very well briefed!

"She does; she is very good and has been doing Martial Arts since she was about six or seven."

"Very good!"

Hailee was unhappy being this close to the main enemy, but she was controlling her emotions, as were Vicky and Marcus.

"Dinner is served!" Alfred announced and we moved through to the dining room. I sat at one end, with Dave at the opposite end, by the windows. Superintendent Howards sat in between Marcus and Bruce, facing Vicky, Hailee and Selina, who was beside me. Marcus was on my left.

Alfred served the first course, which was soup.

"So, Master Wayne, how are you enjoying your visit to Chicago? Is it your first?" Superintendent Howards asked.

"Yes, it is my first visit to Chicago and I have enjoyed what I have seen of the City," Bruce replied with a smile.

Selina and Bruce had not seen very much *at all* having been cooped up in the Safehouse for the entire week!

"What brings you all this way?" The Superintendent persisted.

"To learn how to put down corrupt Cops, like you!" I thought and from Selina's expression, she was thinking the same thing.

"Wayne Enterprises has facilities here, in Chicago and I thought it time to visit them," Bruce replied smoothly.

"I heard that Gotham had a visit from our Number One Criminal, Hit Girl and her team."

"They were in the city, yes and they helped to clean up the corrupt GCPD!" Bruce said forcefully. "My good friend Jim Gordon of the GCPD was very glad of their assistance."

Thankfully, we had a short break in the conversation as the main course was served by Alfred.

"I cannot stand corrupt Cops!" Mindy said as we started eating again.

"Of course not!" The Superintendent replied. "Nobody of your calibre would..."

I sensed a potentially nasty atmosphere building. Marcus was doing his best to control his temper, as were both Vicky and Hailee. The Superintendent seemed oblivious to them and continued talking.

"... However justice must be allowed to function – corrupt Cops deserve a trial..."

"Maybe... But quite often they are in the employ of powerful people, such as the Mayor..." Hailee stated with a slightly forced smile.

The Superintendent did not miss a beat.

"That is the worst case, when powerful people are corrupt..."

The Superintendent continued in the same vein for a while. I could tell that some present at the table were getting very annoyed, knowing what they did about him. He was a typical political asshole who could talk pure bullshit!

I was very glad when dessert was out of the way and the bastard had finished his coffee.

"I think it is time for me to take my leave. Thank you very much as always, Miss Macready."

I did my utmost not to slam the door behind him. I turned around and my fists clenched – I needed to hit something and soon, before I exploded.

"Try this ma'am!" Alfred advised – passing over a large punch pad to Dave who smirked and braced the pad in front of him.

I lashed out, not with my fists, but with my foot, squarely into the pad and sending Dave backwards a short distance.

"Happier?" Marcus asked.

I nodded.

"Thank you Alfred," I laughed. "Well timed as always!"

"I feel like I've just been molested!" Hailee growled.

"That man was – I had no idea he was so horrible," Vicky said. "I knew he was crooked – but damn!"

"Chicago has some dark days ahead of it..." Marcus warned.

"I hate to say it, but with him and the Mayor in charge, I think Gotham could be gaining a sister city," Alfred stated simply.

"Now that is a singularly horrifying thought!" Bruce said.

Now that the bastard had gone, it was time to check up on the three monsters, upstairs.

I could hear music as I approached the bedroom:

*... I'm brushing up on looking down
I'm working on my roar...*

Megan was singing Zazu's lines, while Anne-Marie and Danny were singing those of Simba and Nala; all three were dancing about too!

*Thus far, a rather uninspiring thing!
Oh, I just can't wait to be king
You've rather a long way to go
Young master, if you think...*

*No one saying, "Do this"
Now when I said that, I...
No one saying, "Be there"
What I meant was...*

*No one saying, "Stop that"
Look, what you don't realize...
No one saying, "See here"
Now see here...*

*Free to run around all day
Well, that's definitely out...
Free to do it all my way*

*I think it's time that you and I
Arranged a heart to heart...
Kings don't need advice
From little hornbills for a start...*

I waited until the end, and clapped; Megan blushed and stopped prancing around the bedroom a big grin on her face.

"Having fun?" I asked.

The smiles that I received told me all I needed to know.

***Chapter 192*: The Butler Strikes Back**

The following night
Saturday

"Have fun Batman, you too, Catwoman!"

I was certain that Kick-Ass was laughing as he dropped us off in South Chicago, beside an alleyway, before speeding off in Iron Hide. It was very, very dark and quite cold, too. We were very much alone and it felt like it. I looked at Bruce – oops; Batman, who just shrugged his shoulders and we ran down the alleyway, trying to make as little noise as possible.

There was something, in the back of my mind, that told me it was all a setup, so I decided to try to hide from Mindy. I had done my research has on the area, so I led the way up a fire escape.

They thought that they were alone, but the reality was far from it.

I was a bitch; my alter ego was even more of a bitch, but I cared about those that I trained. It was 'all hands on deck' that night. Marty and Abby were in the Command Centre along with Cathy and Paige. Kick-Ass and Petra were trailing Bruce and Selina. On the other hand, should I say: 'Batman' and 'Catwoman'?

The rest of us were preparing ourselves for a night of fun and games, plus some serious training of course! We had a lot planned for our newest vigilantes. Their comms were isolated from everybody else, but we could hear everything that they both said in the Control Centre. We could also follow their movements on the large screen.

Currently, they were near the South Branch Chicago River on South Halstead Street and both still together. Their very first test was closing in on them, as I watched a silver dot loiter a few hundred yards away.

It had been half an hour since we had been abandoned.

We were hiding in the shadows of a large building, catching our breath. We had run an erratic route, hoping to throw off any shadows. Suddenly a bright spotlight switched on and I heard an engine revving, then saw some blue flashing lights. It was an unmarked Police SUV, skidding to a halt. The doors opened and two men jumped out.

"Stop, CPD!" A male voice shouted.

We ran!

"That was easy!"

I laughed as Fellowes stared into the camera mounted on the SUV's dashboard, his pistol by his side.

"Keep 'em runnin'!" I replied before turning to the mat.

"Let's roll!"

The four of us mounted our motorcycles and Marty flicked the switch for the large armoured door that led to the vehicle ramp.

"You lead, Shadow – I'll follow the little cunts!" I growled.

"Funny, bitch!" Wildcat laughed as she pressed the starter on her, Ducati Hypermotard motorcycle.

I had bought three machines, identical except for the body shell colour. The frame was silver; the dual-purpose tyres were mounted on black wheels. Wildcat's machine was brown with silver trim and with the licence plate: **'WILD ONE'**. Trojan's machine was green, with silver trim and with the licence plate: **'VALIANT'**. Splinter's machine was black, with silver trim and with the licence plate: **'DEMON'**.

Splinter was already out on the streets, with Mist. We powered up the ramp and out into Chicago.

"I have them!"

"So do I, Splinter!" I replied.

I led the way on my Streetfighter 848, with Splinter to my left and behind. Our HUD showed the fleeing vigilantes. They were on South Canal Street. We closed and then separated, coming back in a pincer movement, our lights off.

I saw Catwoman dive off to one side as she heard our engines. Batman was not far behind as Splinter and I sped past tossing a flash-bang each. They exploded seconds later and I yelled out...

"Fucking bastard!" I had felt a bullet hit my back armour, on my left shoulder blade.

"It was Batman!" Splinter called, sending three bullets back down the street – aimed to miss, of course.

Chloe was checking over Curtis' motorcycle.

We had just changed into our combat suits, just leaving masks, comms and gauntlets until we were ready to leave. Chloe frowned and went over to my motorcycle; she bent down and examined something under the fuel tank before standing up.

"The fucking bitch!"

"What?" I asked.

"Curtis' ECU is *not* limited – however yours *is*!"

"The fucking bitch!" I echoed.

I did not trust Wildcat.

Earlier that evening I had caught her and Shadow up to something in the workshop. Both had hid whatever they were working on and tried to look innocent as they both span around to face me. Neither had their masks on, but were suited up. I glared at Wildcat, who just smiled sweetly. Curtis had been there too, but he did look innocent and probably was.

"Not buying it!" I had growled and walked out of the workshop.

I knew that Shadow had helped Wildcat remove her speed-limiter. I knew that she would, or Wildcat would have found a way. The joke was on her though – there was a backup ECU, which was hidden and which was designed to override the primary ECU when necessary.

Was I devious? I was Hit Girl!

Why no control over Trojan? Oh yes, Curtis and his alter ego, Trojan, were very brave and he had a lot of courage, but he was also more cautious and would stop to consider things before diving in headfirst like Megan or Chloe might as their own alter egos, Shadow and Wildcat! I had not limited Splinter's motorcycle either.

I watched the two younger vigilantes like a hawk; their safety was my primary concern, especially as the night was for fun, not for serious action. Training was not a time to risk life and limb. Some may be surprised to hear me say that, but I was changing with the times – Hit Girl was a Mom, after all!

I was also silently crapping myself; there was less than a week to go. Was I ready? I always thought 'cold feet' was a myth, but damn if I was not getting 'cold feet' and not because of Dave, because of me...

"You okay, Nala?" I heard Wildcat ask.

The bitch had been calling me that ever since the previous night; apparently, Dave was Simba!

"That does *not* mean that Shadow and Jackal are Kiara and Kovu!" I growled back. "Mind you, Wildcat, Trojan and Splinter would make a good, Shenzi, Banzai and Ed!"

There was no response from Wildcat, but there was one from Lynx: "Does that make Rhino, Mufasa?"

"I heard that!" Rhino commented.

"No – I think he's Rafiki!" I quipped with a laugh.

I was getting tired.

Every time that we tried to rest, something happened. First the Cops and then the two assholes on the motorcycles throwing flash bangs! I had a feeling that I should not have shot at them, but what the hell, I was not about to be attacked and not respond. Catwoman was equally annoyed and she was muttering obscene things over the radio. At least it kept our spirits up.

"Young meat!"

I heard the voice close behind me, span around and raised the Jō-staff into a defensive position. That was good as a baseball bat soon came downwards and struck the Jō-staff, almost taking it out of my hands. There were two of them and they were large.

"I'll take the dick on the right!" Catwoman growled.

Neither of us hesitated, but dived in. The two men were good, but either they were not really trying or we had the edge; I was not very certain which! I felt a bat hit me on my left arm, so struck the man hard on his right arm; he yelled out in pain.

"I'll fucking do you for that, vigilante scum!" The man yelled, as he struck harder, and harder with his bat.

I struck back, as hard as I could, including a few kicks, too. I could see Catwoman faring well against her man, who was soon on his knees. Then we heard a siren and an unmarked Police SUV came hurtling down the street.

It was time to leave, so with one more crack of the Jō-staff, we broke off and ran.

"Fucking cunts!" Detective Olinsky growled as he pulled off his mask and rubbed his right arm.

"That was awesome!" Sergeant Voight growled, getting his breath back.

"Fucking pansies!" Sergeant Murphy laughed.

"You try being bait next time, asshole!" Olinsky laughed.

An hour later

"Got him!"

Lieutenant Marcus Williams lowered the Taser and gazed over to his partner, Sergeant Vicky Richards. She was holding another Taser, which was pointed down at the unconscious female vigilante.

"Well that fucking creep wanted us to capture some vigilantes..." Vicky announced with a grin.

"Like taking candy from a baby!" Marcus laughed.

"Is that so, fuck ass?" I called out from part way up a fire escape.

"Huh?"

"You heard me, cunt!" I responded. "Let them go, or face the consequences!"

"Go fuck yourself, crazy purple bitch!" Vicky yelled back with a smirk.

"Who the *fuck* asked you, tramp?" Petra yelled at Vicky.

'Careful!' I thought.

I jumped off the fire escape somersaulting through the air and landing on my feet a short distance from Marcus. Petra landed beside me. We had to make it look good. We wanted to make it look like Marcus, along with Vicky had caught a pair of vigilantes and then the evil Hit Girl had taken them back!

The Tasered vigilantes were recovering and when they both tried to stand; they were kicked down again by Marcus and Vicky.

"You're gonna fucking regret that..." I growled.

"You'd *never* hurt a Badge; we know you!" Marcus responded, grinning.

Devious bastard!

"Depends on your definition of 'hurt', doesn't it!" I replied.

"Fuck this!" Marcus growled and flicked open his ASP baton before firing off the other charge of his Taser at *me!*

"Taser's don't work on our armour!" I said smugly.

"But these do!" Vicky said as she pulled the trigger on her pistol three times.

I fell backwards as the three .40-calibre rounds slammed into my chest and I hit the ground.

"Fuck!" I yelled – that fucking hurt!

Petra engaged my assailant with one of her Tactical Katana Swords. Vicky was ready and deflected it with her own ASP. I jumped up, deflected Marcus' ASP with my right arm before punching him in the right shoulder with my left arm, and followed up with a kick to his stomach.

That had to be the first time that I had ever hit Marcus, let alone used anything 'Hit Girl' on him! He grunted and dropped to the ground, pretending to be hurt. Vicky span and struck Petra across the left thigh with her ASP; I heard a muttered expletive from Petra, who then hit her mother a little too hard in the chest, putting her down to the ground. Jackal pulled Batman on behind him, while Shadow seized hold of Catwoman.

They both accelerated away, followed by Petra and me.

"Bitch!"

We both said the same word at the same time and laughed.

"It was supposed to look real!" Vicki announced with a grin.

"Felt real!" I groaned.

"Get a grip, old man!" I heard a certain young lady call over the comms.

"She's gonna pay – I promise you that!" I promised.

"Not having a good night are you?"

I stuck a single finger up at Jackal as we were abandoned again in another part of Chicago.

"Let's move, Batman..."

We had not gone much more than about forty yards when all hell broke loose.

Two people were waiting for us; it was a fucking set up!

"Batman, on your left!" I yelled out.

Batman lashed out, catching one of the cunts in the side, causing him to grunt in pain. I span around, catching the other assailant around the head, putting them down. Only they did not stay down, they flipped back up again and I

was kicked down, hard.

They fell right into Alfred's lap as he blindsided Batman, kicking him to the ground.

Mathilda took down Catwoman without much effort and both vigilantes found themselves bound and facing the two black clad individuals. Both wore voice-changing masks, so that they could interrogate the fallen vigilantes without revealing their identities. It was not going to be pretty.

I watched as both vigilantes were dragged off towards Safehouse K.

"Who the fuck are you?" The man growled.

"You worst fucking nightmare!" I growled as menacingly as I could, looking over at Catwoman.

"Don't look at the bitch!" The man roared and I flinched away. "Look at me!"

***Chapter 193*: Graduation**

Saturday Night

Safehouse K

I shook with fear.

"I know who you both are – I want Hit Girl – you two know where I can find her..."

"What?"

It could not be real!

"You tell me where she is; even better *who* she is and I'll let you and your bitch leave with your identities intact..."

"I..."

"Who is Hit Girl?" The woman demanded smacking me around the head.

"Beat me. Kill me; I'll never tell!" I growled. I would take Hit Girl's identity to the grave; at least I hoped I could.

"How about we make your bitch suffer?" The man said in his weird electronic voice.

He grabbed hold of Catwoman by her left arm, hurting her; she screamed out. The man dragged her into the centre of the room.

"How about I fuck her, here and now – would that loosen your tongue?" He demanded.

I saw Catwoman shake her head and heard her whisper in my ear over the comms.

"Let them – they'll get nothing from us!" She whispered.

I yelled out as the woman punched me in the stomach. I saw Catwoman kicked in the side; she fell onto her side. Then I was dragged up and placed against the wall. I heard the unmistakable sound of a pistol being cocked.

I froze.

"No – let's threaten the broad!"

I watched as the man walked over to Catwoman, dragging her roughly to her feet. The pistol was placed against her head.

"We just want a name..."

"Go fuck yourself, bastard!" Catwoman yelled as she threw her head sideways, head butting the man.

He dropped the pistol, it was swept up by Catwoman who then aimed it at the man's head, and she pulled the trigger.

Safehouse K was probably the most secure place in the City at that moment.

Various members of Fusion were patrolling around the perimeter with heavy weapons, just in case anything kicked off. Otherwise all attention was on the first floor where our new protégés were being 'interrogated'.

There would be more intensive training for the pair, but they had done well considering I had thrown them to the sharks that night!

What the fuck?

I pulled the trigger again and then pulled back on the cocking lever. I pulled the trigger again – nothing. I pressed the magazine release button and the magazine dropped into my left hand.

"Huh?" I yelled out as I saw the top of the magazine.

The magazine was empty!

Then the man on the floor started to laugh and so did the woman. I was very confused. I looked over at Batman and saw him slump down the wall to the floor, obvious relief in the way his shoulders sagged. Then I heard clapping from behind me; I turned. Hit Girl appeared, followed by Kick-Ass, Shadow and Wildcat. They had all removed their masks and were clapping their gauntlets together.

"You have got to be fucking kidding!" I exclaimed as the man on the floor pulled off his own mask.

"Alfred!" I exclaimed. "You bastard!"

"I was convincing, wasn't I, Master Bruce!"

I pulled off my mask, astounded at the turn of events. I was angry at being duped, but I was also pleased that I had made it through the night. I looked over at Selina as she removed her mask and smiled at me.

We had survived.

Safehouse F

Bruce and Selina were grinning fit to burst as we all arrived back.

"You are a bunch of fucking bastards!" Bruce announced.

"Well?" Selina asked me, almost bursting to hear my judgment.

"I'll give you both a B+," I laughed. "Congratulations, Batman and Catwoman!"

There were cheers from everybody as Bruce and Selina were led off to get themselves changed. After a shower and some fresh clothes, Dr Bennett would check them both over; there were plenty of visible bruises!

..._...

Alfred was tenderly holding a tissue to his nose; not broken, just a little bruised.

"You pushed it a bit tonight," Cathy said seriously, coming over from the Control Centre.

"We had to – they needed to know what it is really like out there," I replied honestly. "You can't just put on a costume and go running about trying to protect people."

"Talking about me?" Dave asked as he approached.

"Yeah, Kick-Ass 1.0 did *not* get a lot done, did he?"

"A case in point; she's right, Cathy," Alfred agreed. "I punched Bruce hard; I hurt him. I hated doing that, but I had to. We let those two go out unprepared, then they are dead, simple as that. Mindy may have some outrageous methods, but they do seem to work."

"I know," Cathy admitted. "I trust her with my only daughter and my only nephew."

"They are in the best of hands, Cathy. I mean that," Alfred finished.

I actually felt my face warming up as Cathy smiled at me.

An hour later

"So, how much did you believe was a setup?"

"Honestly, Chloe, I thought a lot of it was, but then I wasn't sure – it all seemed so real..." Selina replied. "I was very scared, more than I care to think about!"

"That was the idea and I won't apologise for it," Mindy said seriously.

"I know what you are doing, Mindy and I thank you for it," Bruce said with a smile before turning to his Butler. "You too, Alfred. I know you didn't like hurting me, but it had to be done, I know that."

"You are very astute, Master Bruce."

"Sorry about the nose, Alfred...," Selina said, colouring up a bit.

"Never apologise, young miss, it's a sign of weakness – besides you did what was right."

"Thank you, Alfred."

"Oh fuck!"

"Huh?" Hailee asked.

"Guess who has just arrived – and they don't look too happy!" Mindy replied with a grimace.

"Two little girls are about to get into trouble...," I laughed.

"Fuck you, Dave!" Hailee laughed, but she looked apprehensive all the same.

Marcus and Vicky climbed the stairs and came into the briefing room. They just stared at Mindy and Hailee for a minute.

"Hi, Marcus!" Mindy said tentatively, biting her lower lip.

"Hi, Mom!" Hailee tried with a weak smile.

"What do you think?" Vicky asked Marcus. "Ground them for a month? Take their guns away from them?"

Marcus thought that through.

"Some very good ideas – only Mindy is not all that good at following instructions when she *is* grounded!" Marcus growled. "Besides she has guns hidden everywhere!"

"I'm sorry I hit you, Mom, but that ASP hurt!" Hailee whined pulling up the bottom of her shorts.

She was right; there was a very visible, large red welt on her thigh.

"My heart bleeds, daughter, but I think you can take it, eh Petra!" Vicky smirked and Hailee looked astonished at her mother's response.

"Not to mention that you tried to Taser me, and *you* shot me!" Mindy growled looking at Marcus and then Vicky.

"Is Hit Girl whining?" Marcus asked with an evil smirk.

Mindy looked at Hailee open mouthed and then glared over at me. I was struggling not to laugh and so was Paige as she watched.

"Whining little bitch!" Megan commented as she walked past Mindy.

"We get no fucking respect!" Mindy growled menacingly.

Hailee scowled at her mother and Marcus.

"Tell me about it!"

"We even?" Mindy asked Marcus.

"Not even close...," announced Marcus as he wandered off, looking for some coffee.

"Oh, we have so much fun ahead of us...," Vicky added as she followed her Boss out of the briefing room.

I tried to ignore any further thoughts of Marcus' revenge as Dave and I drove Bruce and Selina to West Ridge, along with Alfred.

They both looked very tired.

"You can both get a good lie in, as we will *not* be doing anything tomorrow. You have the entire day just to relax," Dave explained.

"We'll come by on Monday morning, about ten," I added. "Hell Week is over; you graduated. Now your training can begin!"

"Looking forward to it!" Cat groaned.

Glenview

It had been a fun night and very successful.

On Monday we would take Bruce and Selina through the events of the night and show them their mistakes and where necessary a better way to go about things.

For now, I was really tired and was desperate for sleep. The twins were already out for the count when I checked in on them.

The following morning Sunday

Nine o'clock found us at The Farm.

"Don't you think they're a little young?"

"Probably!" I replied.

"They'll break their little necks; they are only seven and a half years old!" Dave persisted. "Just because *you* started young!"

"Dammit Dave, I'm teaching them to ride a quad-bike, not to kill people!"

"Apart from themselves!"

"This conversation is over – go help Anne-Marie!"

..._...

Maybe they were a little young, but I thought it might be fun for them. I had not spent as much time with them both as I would have liked.

For now they were attired in thick leathers – pink for Anne-Marie and light blue for Danny – plus helmets in the same colours. I had considered motorcycles, but then I had been sensible and decided to start them off on quads. Dave did not agree with me, but he'd come around.

I had cheated slightly as the quad-bikes that I had bought were designed for ten-year-olds, but I figured the kids would be fine. Both machines were fitted with a 112-hp engine with Electronic Fuel Injection. They also came with an adjustable speed-limiter, which they would not be removing! The colour of the quad bikes matched each of the twins.

I had to admit that they both looked very cute in their leathers and helmets, but suggested that they removed the helmet till we were ready; Danny refused. Neither of them had ever been on a motorcycle or quad-bike before that morning, so I was looking forward to teaching them how to ride.

After showing each of them around their machines, so they knew where everything was, I showed them the kill-cord and how to attach it to their wrist. I demonstrated how once the cord was yanked from its slot, the quad-bike's engine cut out. I showed them the automatic gears – just forward, neutral and reverse. Most importantly, we covered the

brake lever and what it was for!

Dave was in his own leathers, as was I. We had both ridden up on our BMW motorcycles, which the twins had greatly enjoyed. Dave had commented that I was 'starting their training'. I had replied that I was doing nothing of the sort; I was just teaching them some useful skills...

Maybe, subconsciously, I was following in Daddy's footsteps; I would need to be careful!

***Chapter 194*: Quads**

Sunday

The Farm

We started with the quad-bikes, side by side, a few yards apart at one end of the field.

"Start 'em up!" I ordered and both machines rumbled to life.

"Try to keep a straight course and *don't* crash into each other, *or anything else!*" Dave cautioned. "Stop before you go through the fence at the other end of the field..."

Now we were going to find out *whom* the speed freak was! The machines were limited to a maximum of fifteen-miles-per-hour for the moment.

Which one of them would try to max *that* out?

What a fucking surprise!

I glared at the smirking Mindy as she clapped Anne-Marie. The young girl took her quad-bike to its top speed. Danny tried, but decided *not* to push it and slowed down; Anne-Marie, however, almost hit the fence at the far end of the field as she braked heavily and skidded in the mud!

I had to admit, both kids were enjoying themselves; they grinned broadly under their over-size helmets. We then taught the kids how to reverse their machines – especially as Anne-Marie had no choice *but* to reverse! Danny gave his sister a smug look as he reversed a little and then started driving in large figure eights in the centre of the field.

"Now, girl, keep the speed down and no rapid acceleration," I cautioned as Anne-Marie laughed, ignoring me completely, and sent mud flying as she joined her brother.

I looked over at the smirking Mindy.

"It's your entire fault – as usual!"

Mindy was about to reply, but her cell rang.

"Hi, Hailee!"

"I hate you *so much* right now!"

"Huh!"

"I've sent you a picture – Marcus thought it might be a 'good idea!'" Hailee responded unhappily. "Mom says she is gonna back date it, too!"

The brief call dropped and I heard a beep as a picture message was received. I stared at the image and laughed. It was a large glass jar, with a simple hand-written label on it. On the label were two simple words, which proved to be *very* expensive for me!

Asshole!

We stopped for lunch, before anybody was hurt and Jack fed us all.

"You having fun?" Jack asked the kids.

"Yeah!" Both replied, grinning, as they dived into the food.

One thing about the twins; they were always hungry!

Dave vanished half way through the meal and then returned a few minutes later. I gave him a questioning look, but he just shrugged; he was up to something...

I was so excited!

The day was awesome – I loved the idea of speed and as for the pink quad-bike, the pink leathers, the pink boots, the pink helmet...

After lunch, we climbed back onto the quad-bikes and Dave suggested that we go and try some more figure-eight riding. I groaned, but complied. Then I saw the mud by the rear wheels of my bike and decided to cover Mindy in mud – Dave was too far away.

I started the engine and selected the forward gear, then I released the brake and the rear wheels spun and whoa... I was flying through the air, backwards!

I landed on the soft grass, which forced all of the air out of my lungs, and I lay there gasping for air. As I stared upwards, I saw Mindy looking down at me, concern on her face.

"I'm okay!" I said, sitting up painfully.

Mindy looked over at Dave and then back to me.

"You learnt your lesson?" Mindy asked.

I nodded.

"No more rapid acceleration..."

"Dave, please set the lower speed, thanks!" Mindy said, helping me up.

Danny was smirking at me; I just glared back at him. Okay, I had made a fool of myself; it was fun, though!

"Have *you* learnt your lesson?" I asked Mindy.

"Yeah, sorry..."

"Speed is *not* always good, Anne-Marie," I cautioned.

"Hit Girl rides fast!" She countered.

"Hit Girl is a speed-crazed nutcase!" I replied, ignoring Mindy's outraged expression. "She's a menace to everybody on the roads!"

Anne-Marie scowled; she hated it when anybody said anything bad about her hero, Hit Girl. As for Mindy, she could not say a thing in case she gave herself away!

It started to rain, but we continued outside for another who or so, until everybody was covered in mud.

Then it was time to put the quad-bikes away in the barn. Neither kid wanted to stop riding, but it was time to go home; it was a long ride to Glenview, especially in the rain.

We thanked Jack for lunch and headed home.

Glenview

We rode straight into the centre garage and parked beside Dave's Audi RS7.

"Leathers and boots off in the laundry room and then straight upstairs for a bath!" I ordered the twins.

I dumped my own leathers and boots, and then ran upstairs to run the bath while Dave helped the twins out of their kit. It was still raining outside and it was getting cold, so I was glad that the heating was keeping the house

comfortable.

While the twins splashed away in the bath, Dave went for a shower in our bathroom downstairs, and I went across the passageway to the study and turned on the computer to check my emails. Once Dave was changed, I went for my shower while he battled with getting the twins *out* of the bath, which was easier said than done!

After my own shower, I found Dave more than a little damp, but the terrors were out of the bath and dressed in their pyjamas. I was going out, so left Dave in charge – I advised the kids to be nice to Dave as I left.

**South Cottage Grove
Apartment 202**

In a moment of madness, Cathy and I had thought it a good idea to give the teenagers some space and allow them to live together for a trial period.

Dave had thought it a very bad idea! However, they needed their space, as they were growing up and fast. We trusted them to an extent despite them both being only fifteen. I took the XJR, as my ass was sore from riding all day on the bike.

As I climbed the stairs to the second floor, I was dreading what I might find. Considering they knew that, I was coming and when, I was more than a little shocked to find what I did find!

..._...

I knocked on the door to what Chloe jokingly called the 'Shadow Cave'!

"It's open!" Came Chloe's voice, so I pushed the door open, closing it behind me.

I passed through the small entrance hall and pushed open the door to the living room. All seemed normal...

"Hi, Mindy – coffee?" Chloe asked, popping out of the kitchen for a minute before vanishing again.

"Wha- yeah, err yes – please..." I replied hesitantly.

The reason for my hesitancy?

Chloe was stark bollock naked!

It was not that I had not seen her naked before and more besides and technically, it was her home, but she *knew* that I was coming over. Chloe reappeared with three cups of coffee on a tray, placing the tray down on a coffee table in the living room. She was not fazed for a moment about her state of undress.

"Are you on the phone Chloe," I heard Josh call and then heard feet coming out of the bedroom.

'Oh, fuck!' I thought as I saw Josh.

"Mindy!" Josh exclaimed rapidly grabbing a towel from a pile by the bedroom door.

Chloe grinned her evil grin.

"Sorry, Josh – I forgot Mindy was coming..."

'Yeah, right!' I thought. The bitch!

"I just thought I'd check-up on *my* apartment..."

"The bed's good!" Josh commented as his face began to return to its normal colour.

Chloe remained naked as she sat on the couch; at least she kept her legs closed!

"One word comes to mind, Chloe: nymphomaniac," I commented dryly.

"That means that..." Josh began.

"Thank you, Joshua, I know what it means!" Chloe responded with a smile.

Josh, noticing my uncomfortable expression, threw her a towel and she reluctantly covered herself up, pretending to sulk. I had to admit though that Josh had a very nice body and other, err, items...

Behave, Mindy, you are getting married in less than a week!

"So, how is the new D-JAK coming?" Josh asked, ignoring Chloe.

The demand for membership at D-JAK had outgrown the current building, so a new building was desired.

I was going for part of a new build, for various reasons. It would allow for some, err, customisations, shall we say during the build! The building had been finished in mid-August, with the help of the same team who had constructed Safehouse A and installed the Safehouses in the building we were currently sitting in. Secrecy was paramount for the extra additions and this had been maintained during the rapid build. The building was in Northern Central Chicago, in a much better neighbourhood. Other businesses would be using the same building and we were taking a large unit on the second-floor that had a private entrance. I knew that Josh and Chloe would love our immediate neighbours: Victoria's Secret!

"Well – err, you two seem to be okay, so I'll leave you to whatever!"

"Come anytime, Mindy – with or without clothes..." Chloe replied.

"Chloe, behave!" Josh warned.

"Or what, you'll spank me?"

"I'm outta here!"

I almost *ran* back to the car!

Morton Grove

I had promised to check in with Cathy on the way home and report on what I had seen.

Cathy opened the door, saw my expression and grimaced.

"Coffee?"

"Please – make it black!"

"Hi, Mindy!" Curtis called out from the living room.

"Hi, kid!"

"So – what did you see?" Cathy asked as we sat in the kitchen.

"Everything!" I replied.

"Oh..."

"Let's just say it must have been laundry day and leave it at that..."

Cathy laughed.

"Both of them?"

"Yeah..."

I felt myself blushing!

"To be young again..." Cathy mused.

Curtis came into the kitchen.

"Was she naked again?" He asked.

"Yeah, how did you know?" Cathy queried.

"I said 'hello' yesterday on the way back from school and got an eye full of Chloe's butt and other regions!" Curtis complained, going a little pink in the face.

"You've seen her before," I reminded him.

The boy blushed.

"I know, but she's my cousin and it's just a little bit weird!"

"That's Chloe!" I laughed.

"So true!" Cathy added.

***Chapter 195*: Debriefing**

Safehouse F

We started just before ten that morning.

Selina and Bruce looked very much refreshed after their day off; that would soon change!

"Please be gentle, Mindy; I'm still sore!" Selina moaned.

"It was that sort of day off, was it?" I teased with a look and a smirk.

Selina blushed and Bruce just stammered out denials.

"Ignore the bitch; she's just being an ass!" Dave laughed.

Dave and I left them to settle down in the briefing room and get comfortable. Chloe and Josh were going to debrief them while Dave and I went to do some paper work!

We needed to do some reviewing of Fusion members.

Boring, but necessary, if we were to remain a cutting edge organisation. I decided to start at the top – Kick-Ass! Assets... plenty – oh yes, some very big assets that kept me very happy and – *STOP!* Get your head out of the Whore House, Mindy. Handsome, muscular, stunning when naked... Get a grip, Mindy, for fuck's sake! Like a battle tank as he forces his way through the enemy, striking them down with punches and his batons – I love it when he forces his way into me and...

Dammit – I was getting very damp down below!

Okay!

Hit Girl. Now where do I start?

What sticks out about Hit Girl? A couple of things pop immediately to mind – well they don't stick out all that far, but what there is, is very, very... I had a one-track mind; Mindy was right about that. Did I care, though – did I hell!

Hit Girl had many appealing attributes, both as a vigilante and as other things...

I sat back down again, with some clean knickers on, and got back to work.

Skipping Kick-Ass for the moment, I moved onto Shadow. Now, Mindy, get serious.

Shadow had been with us the longest, not counting Marty. She had been thirteen and a handful when Dave and I had first met her. Now, though, she was a very striking and beautiful fifteen-year-old – and *still* a handful! I looked down her 'rap sheet' that Marty had painstakingly maintained.

Her first kill had been in defence of me; she had coped in her own way and now she would not think twice about killing somebody who deserved to die; she could also be vindictive too. Many criminals were almost as scared of her as they were of me; she could intimidate with only a glance. She had been shot, twice. The first time two bullets had nearly cost the life of her boyfriend as he had dived in front of that bastard, Ralph D'Amico's bullets. Her right shoulder still bore the scars of that fight...

Her skills were exceptional, her courage immeasurable. Mind you, we had had our run-ins, together. I had kicked her out of Fusion after one of her ill thought out escapades, but we needed each other, so I let her back in. She was my right hand, especially when Dave was not around. Other than Dave and Marcus, Chloe was one of the most important people in my life; she was a sister to me and there were few secrets between us. Okay, she had ruffled my feathers once or twice; she had crashed two motorcycles among other things, but she was a very good friend and err, sex partner?

Ultimately, to show what she meant to me, I had asked her to be my Maid of Honour for our wedding; the poor girl had almost collapsed in tears when I had asked her and Josh had had to guide her to the couch!

..._...

Next, I supposed, was her British partner in crime, Jackal. Joshua was her partner in more ways, than one! She loved the boy more than she loved anything else. I had to admit that I had been unsure of the kid at first, but then he had thrown himself in front of those bullets and almost been killed. Chloe had been distraught when she thought that he had died; but the kid was made from stern stuff and he beat all the odds and survived.

The boy had survived five bullet wounds, including one received while outrunning gunman alone and at night. If all the British had his courage then they were a force to be reckoned with! His father had been murdered on the orders of Ralph D'Amico. He had been in a coma for months – however he had prevailed and he was now a key member of Fusion, second only to Shadow. He was fifteen, too and as I saw the other night – well equipped and very handsome! To me he was a brother and somebody I could talk to about anything.

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Next on the list was Hal.

Abby was a complete nutcase and a genius with the computers. She was fifteen, but had the skills and maturity of somebody much older. She had fought well in Gotham, killing for the first time, almost face to face. She had courage; I had to give her that! I trusted the girl with my life and I enjoyed having her funny, geeky humour around. Without her as support, Fusion would not be able to function.

What was more amazing about Abby was that her own mother still had no idea what it was that her daughter did for her extra-curricular activities!

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Hawk!

Well there was not much to say about her, considering that she had been pregnant for the past nine months. Yeah, there was that time I had tried to kill her – and I had almost succeeded before Marty had Tasered me – that still rankled, too!

However, despite that, we were good friends and I was Godmother to her son.

..._...

Medic, a key member of the team – without her many of us would be dead or badly crippled at best!

Despite being Chloe's Mom, she had a different character. However, I had seen her kill with my own eyes; she was cold that woman, very cold. On the other hand, she was very gentle and caring in her capacity as a Doctor. Mind you, her no-nonsense medical check-ups were something to be feared!

She had been a surrogate mother to me and provided me with guidance when I needed it, not to mention plugging a few holes when I got myself shot!

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Trojan – now he was a challenge.

Curtis was still only eleven, but having lost both his parents in a car crash almost a year ago – I was not looking forward to *that* anniversary – he bore himself like a pro who was years older. As one of the younger members of Fusion, I worried about him a lot and I hated it when he was injured. He was an amazing kid and I respected him for his accomplishments.

As Chloe's cousin, he had picked up many of his skills from watching her both in training and in action. While Chloe had hated her cousin for most of his life, the antagonistic behaviour between them had long passed and they were now more like a brother and sister, than as cousins.

The boy had been shot, three times, but he had survived our time in Gotham. As he got older, his skills would improve steadily and he would be a force to be reckoned with.

..._...

Following on from Trojan, we had to talk about *his* partner in crime.

Wildcat was a conundrum. I hated it when people called her a 'mini-Mindy', but I had to admit that maybe they were right. Sometimes I did not think that that was a good thing, *at all!* Megan was very headstrong and she often found herself in trouble, both at school, home and as Wildcat. She insisted that trouble always found her and not the other way around!

The girl is tenacious and very brave. Sometimes, though, her bravery tends to get ahead of her brain and things happen. One bad result was her being stabbed, three times, when disobeying orders. Some treated her as the 'baby' of Fusion, but her skills showed that she was anything but. Many looked at her short stature and laughed; they were usually very sorry when Wildcat had finished with them – if they lived!

Megan was my little sister; well she would be when her mom, Paige, married Marcus. We were very much alike, which as I mentioned earlier, may not have been a good thing and sometimes the thought scared me. I also worried about what she and Curtis got up to behind closed doors... Did we have another Chloe/Josh couple here?

..._...

Mist...

Erika, the cause of my sexual deviation from the norm. She used to be Marty's squeeze, but no longer. She was a stunning young woman of twenty-two and... I was feeling hot and aroused again at the thought of her in bed... She was also sexually willing to partner with either sex, as the threesome with Chloe and Josh had proved, while in Gotham.

She was also one of the few in Fusion who had been around *that night*, in New York and been shocked to the core by the live showing of the death of Big Daddy and my own antics in the D'Amico Warehouse. She was tremendously caring and extremely vindictive when fighting. As one of our newer members, she wielded her chain-whip and Sais with vicious abandon and blood lust.

The girl also had a craving for high-powered motorcycles, not that I could fault her for that!

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Splinter – what can we say about Splinter.

An amazing young twelve-year-old. Tommy was a fascinating person to talk with. His experiences were wide and not to be envied. He had been taken off the streets of New York and made to fight for the gratification of various mobs and mafias. Finding him had been a fluke at best, also leading us into another trap! He was a tremendous asset to Fusion and I enjoyed sparring with him; his fighting skills were a challenge for to, to say the least.

With him had come his Mom and Dad, both vigilantes of sorts that Dave had met in New York at 'Justice Forever'. His Dad, Tony, looked after everything we required when it came to vehicle and weapon maintenance and repair. He was highly skilled and I compensated him accordingly. Tommy's Mom, while a quiet woman, assisted with a lot of the behind the scenes asset management and record keeping.

I saw Tommy, Megan and Curtis making one hell of a team.

..._...

Now we came to our newest member, Petra.

Another young woman with a destroyed youth. Initially, I saw her as a threat, but now she was a good friend to me. Hailee's fighting skills were legendary and we could often spar to a stalemate together. While her skills should have made Hailee my number one Operator, there was no way I was going to dislodge Chloe. There had been a limited amount of animosity between the two girls initially, despite Hailee being three years older than Chloe. I had promised Chloe that Hailee was no threat to her position as my number one in Operator in Fusion.

I respected Hailee's experience as a vigilante as well as her skills. We did not use ranks in Fusion, anybody could lead an operation if their skills were the most suitable. I was happy to take orders from Dave, just as much as I would accept orders from Megan, or Hailee as the circumstances dictated.

..._...

Now for the most important member of Fusion, without whom none of it would have ever got off the ground.

I was of course, referring to Battle Guy. It had been Marty, who had pointed Dave towards Chicago. It had been Marty, who had helped Dave track me down. Without Marty, I would most probably have been dead long ago and I would never have found Dave. Without Marty's technical knowledge, we would never have been able to operate as an illegal vigilante organisation.

Damn, I was tearing up at the thought of what Marty meant to me and how without him, things could have been so different. He was a wonderful guy, sometimes a bit too geeky at times, but a great joker and it was to be an honour to have him as Dave's Best Man at the wedding.

..._...

Last, but not least, we had our favourite dick-eating bitch, Eisenhower.

Admittedly, men were not always her biggest fan, but she loved men, in her own uniquely special way and what they had to offer! She was getting older and we had limited her activity as Eisenhower. As Sophia, she was a loving, if lazy, animal and was loved by all, especially the twins.

..._...

Many other people contributed to Fusion, mostly behind the scenes.

Marcus (Rhino), Paige (Lynx), Vicky, Ryan (Neptune), Mathilda, Fellowes, Murphy and Kyle (Max), to name but a few. They all contributed to helping our organisation flourish in the face of adversity; Dave and I owed them everything.

***Chapter 196*: Something Stirring**

That same day
Monday

St Louis
Missouri

I watched as the young girl began her morning exercises before breakfast.

It was always the same, running on the treadmill, while manipulating hand weights in her small hands. She was average height for her age, about four foot five in her bare feet and thin as the proverbial rake. She was definitely a morning person, always quick to jump out of her bed with a smile and start her exercises each morning, as per her indoctrinated training. As a nine-year-old, she was typically full of energy and always active. For me though, as I approached twenty-seven, I hated mornings and I was usually a lot slower to start my morning exercises. Though not as flexible as Stephanie was, I was still over a foot taller and I could hold my own.

I took a moment to glance around at our meagre accommodation and grimaced; the place sucked bigtime. However, on both a limited income and while relying on stashed funds, you had to be careful. That was also important when you wanted to keep a low, low profile, as we did. It had been six months since we had both awoken from our drug-induced haze that had made the two of us compliant and allowed us both to be trained in unspeakable acts. For most of the time since then, neither of us had been able to sleep in different rooms and it had only been in the past month that Stephanie had finally started sleeping in her own bed.

The nightmares were so very real and we both regularly awoke at night screaming and in floods of tears. It was heart-breaking seeing the look of horror on the young girl's face. The drugs had prevented the nightmares; indeed the drugs had prevented any form of conscience or knowledge of right and wrong. The girl was only nine, but she had already killed twelve people during her three years in captivity. Me, I had only been in captivity for a little over a year but I had my own kill-count... I had already had some skills before I had been taken, not many, but some and I was an adult. Stephanie had been trained in firearms and the use of knives, but any more-advanced training, except for the most basic Martial Arts stuff had been put off until her body grew further.

We had escaped from what had been our base of operations in Southern Chicago and headed southwest, to St Louis. There I had accessed some cash, hidden away for just such an occasion. They may have trained us to be compliant and to follow orders, but they had also trained us to think for ourselves. Therefore, we were distrustful (paranoid?) of our controllers and set up what you might call 'insurance policies' and in my case, a Safehouse that was totally off the grid.

The only problem?

We were still figuring out whom we were.

"Steph, you ready for breakfast?" I asked an hour later.

"Let me grab a shower first, Miranda, then I'll be right there." Stephanie suggested; which was a good idea as the girl was soaked in sweat.

Mind you, so was I; I headed for the other bathroom and grabbed my own shower. As I entered the kitchen, tying up my still damp dark ginger hair, I found Stephanie pouring hot water into a pair of mugs on the kitchen side, a coffee for me and a tea for her. It was the same routine every morning; nothing had changed over the previous six months. Stephanie's light blonde hair was up in a ponytail, still dripping from the shower as usual.

To look at the girl, nobody would ever guess that she was both a hardened killer and a crack pistol shot. She was also a mini-ninja who could creep up behind you and jam a blade into your side. There was something else different about the girl; she had British accent, which had given me cause to wonder from where she had been abducted.

Our life was full of never ending questions

When we had awoken one morning, six months previously, we had been unaware of where we were, or indeed, why.

We had even struggled with *who* we were. We instinctively knew that we were Miranda and Stephanie, but that had really been it. We both knew each other; our minds told us that, but not very much more... The confusion was also very scary. We had found ourselves in a large apartment on the fourth floor of a large but otherwise anonymous apartment block and we seemed to be the only ones in the place.

We were also more than a little concerned about certain other things, such as our clothing, which just did not seem right, neither for me, nor for a nine-year-old girl; it was too utilitarian, rather than comfortable. Stephanie had soon appeared from her bedroom dressed and holding two items in her small hands. One was a slim gun holster and the other a pistol! She held the gun by the frame around the trigger; something told me it was the trigger-guard, as if it was a dead rat.

Something in my churning sub-conscious told me that we should get out of the place as soon as possible. We quickly stuffed clothes, limited personal effects and equipment into packs, including some guns; something told me to take the guns. We also took some files and documentation that appeared to be about us; at least they had our photos on them. On the side in the kitchen were some car keys.

We walked around the garage beneath the apartments, pressing the remote, until the lights on a late model Jeep SUV flashed. We threw in our kit and I drove out of the garage with Stephanie strapped into the seat beside me.

..._...

As I drove, my mind seemed to kick into overdrive. My senses were heightened and I was observing everything, without even trying. I was watching everywhere at once, in the mirrors, ahead, to the side, behind. It was automatic, I scanned, I drove, I scanned, and I drove. Then I saw something that set my senses on fire and I instinctively floored the accelerator.

"What?" Stephanie asked, instantly on alert.

"We're being followed..."

Stephanie spun in her seat to look out the rear window. Three cars behind a dark coloured sedan was accelerating to keep up with us and pulling into the next lane.

"We need to ditch this car!" I said urgently. "They're tracking us..."

"Then what?"

I saw Stephanie's expression changing; one moment it was fearful and then the next it was hardening.

"I'll let you know when I've figured that out..."

What was happening to me?

For a moment, I was crapping myself at the thought of being chased, but then suddenly my fear seemed to evaporate. I started to look around me, taking everything in, processing potential threats and avenues of escape. I had no idea why I was doing it; my sub-conscious just said 'do it', so I did!

"Brace!" Miranda suddenly called out and I leant back in my seat and brought my feet up onto the dashboard in front of me.

I saw Miranda stare into the rear-view mirror and then stamp both feet on the brake pedal, slamming on the brakes, hard!

The Jeep slowed rapidly and then there was a sharp jolt as another vehicle slammed into the Jeep's back end; the rear window shattered. I looked behind and saw the dark-coloured sedan with its bonnet crushed back onto the windscreen. There were two men inside, struggling to escape their deflating airbags.

Miranda floored the accelerator and turned right at the next set of traffic lights.

We dumped the SUV after driving northwest for another twenty miles in complete silence. We then took a cab back into central Chicago, and then found ourselves on the 'L', followed by an Amtrak to St Louis.

We detected no further tails.

That escapade was not the first time that we started to 'do things' without knowing why.

We noticed things changing within a week of arriving in St Louis. After arriving at the station, I instinctively took three different cabs and never the first one that pulled up either. Stephanie was giving me strange looks, too, her mind grappling with what I was doing. Finally, we stopped outside a rundown apartment block and climbed up to the third floor with our equipment.

On the way to the apartment block, I had been able to obtain a large amount of cash and the key to the apartment from a secret location. Who stashed it? Why and how I knew to go there to find the money and key, I had *no* fucking idea!

The first surprise had been Stephanie herself on the third day in St Louis.

I was bored and curiosity got the better of me, so for some reason I reached into the backpack that had the guns in it.

I brought out the pistol that I had found in my bedroom, in Chicago. My mind said meaningless things to me as I examined the pistol in my hands and then a name popped into my head.

"Heckler and Koch P30SK..."

"Huh?" Miranda asked.

My hands started doing things of their own accord and step-by-step instructions flew through my mind faster and faster.

Clear the weapon and carry out a safety check

With the magazine removed, pull the slide all the way back and hold it there

Push the slide release upwards to lock the slide back

Hold the pistol so that your thumb covers the rear of the frame and your fingers rest on the top of the frame

Pull slide back and move it to the front as far as the disassembly position

Using your free hand, press the slide release axle in from right to left

Pull slide release to the left until it reaches the locking position, pull slide forward off the pistol's frame

Turn the slide upside down and carefully push the recoil spring forward and out to either the left or right hand side, separating the recoil spring from the barrel and slide

Pivot the barrel slightly forward and press downward on the barrel-locking block through the ejection port, separating the barrel from the slide.

I executed each step exactly, resulting in the pistol successfully 'taken down'! It had taken me little more than a minute, too.

"How did you do that?" Miranda asked incredulously.

"I have no damned idea...!"

What concerned *me* more was that I had been able to reverse the process, without having seen what Stephanie had done; as far as I knew, I had never even touched a gun before that day.

Stephanie looked pensive for a minute before she reached down and pulled out another pistol from the backpack; she held it up to me.

"Glock 17 Gen 4..."

I clamped a hand over my mouth. Where the hell, had those words come from? It was my turn; I pulled out a larger

weapon from the backpack and held it up for Stephanie.

"Heckler & Koch MP5K... With Navy trigger group..."

Now it was Stephanie's turn to look shocked! She also looked a little scared.

What were we?

We both spent most days trying to remember who we were and how we had arrived at where we were.

There were fleeting flashes in our minds at night. We had no idea if they were dreams, nightmares or awakening memories. We compared notes on our 'visions' each morning and some of the notes were disturbing to say the least. More than once, I would wake up in a cold sweat with tears streaming down my face after witnessing something horrific. I would then find myself waking up the following morning in the same bed as Miranda. Several times, I had witnessed her struggling through her own nightmares.

I would lay awake at night, trying not to sleep; I knew that when I slept, they came – the nightmares came. The nightmares portrayed me as some kind of monster. Sometimes I would be viewing the 'action' from the first person, other times from the third person, as an observer. I would see through the eyes of a nine-year-old, as if it was somebody else. Alternatively, I would see myself...

I had difficulty saying the word and difficulty admitting it to myself. However, the fact that I knew how to use a gun, which scared me in itself, also made me think that the nightmares were just my memories returning. If they were, then I did not want those memories to return; if they were accurate, then I was a bad person, a very bad person. In some nightmares, I was teamed up with Miranda and both of us were...

There was that word again...

... Killing!

***Chapter 197*: Not A Night To Be Bad**

Tuesday

*Chicago
Glenview*

I was tired when I awoke.

The night had been long and I had not slept well. I seriously wanted to stay in bed, but no, I had kids to get ready for school and I had to prepare for that evening's activities.

Dave was already up and it seemed, so were the kids.

"Morning, Mindy!" They both chorused as I stumbled into the kitchen.

"Morning..."

Dave was grinning. All three of them seemed too damn happy for seven-thirty in the damned morning!

St Louis

Our first venture into actually hurting people had occurred in the third week.

We had been out shopping – it was a useful pastime and allowed us to get some fresh air, and we *did* need to buy food from time to time. It also stopped us sitting in the grungy apartment and worrying about ourselves.

As was normal, there were always some unsavoury types walking the streets that thought with their dicks. In our case the idiot could not take 'no' for an answer! The man seized my wrist; normally I would have screamed and pissed myself, but for some reason I was *not* scared. I seemed to go into automatic and found myself cool, calm and collected.

I smirked at the man, who seemed to ease off my wrist, just for a second and then I twisted his wrist and at the same time twisted my body around; I heard bones in his wrist snapping. The man screamed; I punched him hard in the neck as he bent over to grasp the damaged wrist. He fell to the ground.

The other man came towards me; I seized the incoming fist and used the man's momentum to twist him forwards. He hit the ground beside his unfortunate friend and I smashed my boot into his face, breaking his nose.

I ignored his screams; grabbed Stephanie's hand and ran.

"How the bloody-hell did you do that?"

"I wish I knew, Steph, I wish I knew..."

I looked up at Miranda with some concern. I was worried about what I might find myself doing without any control. Mind you, I was still only nine, so there was *not* all that much I *could* do! If only that were so...

A week later, it was *my* turn; I had been alone and walking back from the store. It was after dark, not that the dark worried me. A young girl of about fourteen was being annoyed by some older boys – I fully intended just to walk on by, but then something inside me snapped.

"Leave her alone, you fucking bullies!" I growled.

The four boys turned in my direction.

"That accent ain't from around here, limey!"

I rolled my eyes – not very original.

"That the best you've got – fucking wanker!" I retorted.

"Shouldn't little girls, like you, be in bed?" Another laughed.

The girl tried to use my distraction to escape, but one of the boys grabbed her and slapped her across the face.

"Stay!" He warned.

I do not know what happened or why, but I ran forwards and jumped at the first boy, grabbing him around the neck and pulling him down to the pavement. I drove my elbow into the side of his head; he stayed down. As he fell, I jumped to the next boy, then the next, and the next. Within two minutes, all four boys were groaning on the ground.

"Bloody hell; I've got blood on my jeans!" I growled and left the girl standing there in astonishment.

I was a dozen yards away before I stopped and gazed behind me.

"Holy shit!" I thought and ran back to the apartment.

"Trouble?" Miranda asked as I slammed the front door behind me.

"I just put four wankers out cold..."

"You?"

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Miranda!"

Despite her size, Stephanie could move and hit hard.

I had witnessed the punishment the punch bag took; we had repaired it twice! I had also learnt not to annoy her, as she would often resort to using her fists when she was agitated, or things got too much for her.

Stephanie's temper tantrums were something to behold – mind you that applied to most nine-year-old girls. She had a fair set of lungs and a varied and admittedly foul, vocabulary. I had learnt many new British swear words, most of which I had had to look up on Google!

Chicago

Safehouse F

I pulled a pair of Glock 19 pistols from the rack and checked them both on the table before inserting them into my holsters.

Beside me, two new vigilantes readied their own weapons.

"You two ready to do it again?"

"Hit Girl, we were born ready!" Batman replied.

"The City awaits!" I laughed.

This time Batman and Catwoman were being supported by the full might of Fusion.

It was a night to put the fear of God into criminals everywhere. That night we had twelve vigilantes and a dog on the streets and two more on duty at the Safehouse. All of Fusion's available resources were deployed.

Hal and Battle Guy were in the Command Centre. Iron Hide was being driven by Medic. With her were Batman and Catwoman, along with Eisenhower for support. On two wheels that night, we had Kick-Ass, Hit Girl, Shadow, Jackal, Mist, Petra, Splinter, Trojan and Wildcat.

It was an amazing sight, nine motorcycles roaring up South Archer Avenue, with Iron Hide behind. We rode in two parallel lines of four, with Kick-Ass out in front. Then we broke off into three teams. Iron Hide, along with Mist, headed up South Pulaski Road. Kick-Ass, Shadow, Wildcat and Splinter headed up South Central Avenue. The final team, Hit Girl, Jackal, Trojan and Petra headed up South Cicero Avenue.

St Louis

"Hey look at this!"

"What's that Steph?"

Stephanie just pointed at the TV. I could see a news broadcast; it was coming live from Chicago. I could see a large SUV trailing a line of motorcycles up a broad street. It was dark, but I instantly knew who was on display. It was those vigilantes, now why did that start to mean something to me?

I started to get flashes of images in my head. A mad sex session in the toilet cubicle of a men's room. Flashes of green and yellow. A man with a dog on his balls; now that was freaky! Standing on a rooftop. A name: Dave. I would need to work on those memories.

Chicago

"You two have fun, now!"

"Thanks, Medic!" I called back as Catwoman and I dismounted from Iron Hide.

"Catwoman and Batman are dismounting and on foot!" Catwoman called.

"I copy Catwoman and Batman on foot!" Hal replied from the Safehouse.

"Let's go Kick-Ass!" I growled.

A mile across town

"You sure about this, boss – those bastards are out, tonight – I don't feel safe."

"They're miles away from here, besides we go in, we come out, we go fence the crap, we go home – simples!"

"If you say so, boss!"

The man began to attack the window in preparation for entering the residential apartment. Within a few seconds, he slid the window up. He stuck a long leg through and climbed into the apartment.

Inside the apartment

I heard a noise; it came from the living room.

How many times had I told that kid to stay in bed and stay away from the TV! I swung my feet out of bed and headed from the living room. I turned on the main light.

"You are bust..." I began before I screamed.

A strange man was standing with his back to the window, he had knife in his gloved right hand, a ski mask on his head covering his face. Then suddenly the man seemed to vanish as he was dragged kicking and screaming back through the window. I heard a thud and then there was silence.

I dug deep for some courage and stepped slowly towards the window. I screamed again as a head suddenly appeared at the window.

"Sorry to scare you – those two won't be hurting anybody else; the Cops are on their way – goodnight!"

"Err, goodnight, err Kick-Ass!"

Safehouse F

"That's two for Kick-Ass!"

In a box on the large screen were the names of all the vigilantes out on the streets that night. Below Kick-Ass a glowing number two appeared – everybody else was at zero.

"Thanks Abby, coffee?"

"Yeah, thanks, Marty."

South Pulaski Road

"Come to me, you little bastards!"

"Batman, Mist – two coming your way, laden with the contents of a drug store..."

"Batman copies – we're ready!"

South Central Avenue

I hated this damn suit; it was too damn tight.

I had no choice, though, if I wanted to go out and fight. I had not realised how big my tits were getting until I had to squeeze them into the top of my suit! Trojan had offered to help, but I had declined his *kind* offer; there was a time and a place for everything! Now, though, I wanted to get myself on the scoreboard...

Kick-Ass had two down already, which sucked. I crept through the darkness with Shadow behind me. Then I heard a noise and raised my fist signalling Shadow to stop.

South Cicero Avenue

We were the alternative dream team.

Petra and Hit Girl. We cruised side by side up the avenue before pulling over beside a dark and forbidding alleyway. Jackal and Trojan had made their way to the opposite end of the complex alleyway system.

We were gonna score big – you go Hit Girl!

South Pulaski Road

"What the *fuck* are you?"

"I'm Batman!" I growled as I drove a fist into the man's face – God that felt good.

"What are we going to do with you?" Catwoman asked quietly of the man she had pinned to the alley wall.

"Stop playing with your food, Catwoman!"

"Spoilsport!" Catwoman replied, smacking the man across the head with her gauntlet.

The man slithered down the wall and was still.

"Oh, for fuck's sake!"

The cell rang again with more pickup instructions.

"Don't they think we have anything better to do than go around picking up their castoffs?" Murphy moaned.

"I think we're gonna need backup, tonight – call Voight?" Fellowes responded as he pushed a bound criminal into the back of his SUV.

"At this rate we're gonna spend every day till Christmas doing the paperwork!"

"Life's a bitch – get used to it..."

South Central Avenue

"Hey, not fucking fair!"

I watched as Splinter span around and drove his armoured knee into a man's face, sending him sprawling.

"You snooze, you lose, Kitty-Cat!" Splinter laughed.

I sensed something and span to my right catching another cunt around the head and putting him down.

"Oh, yeah – I've still got it!"

"Children – behave..." Shadow growled as she surveyed the scene. She cocked her head to one side and then turned towards a doorway.

"Kick-Ass – we need a door opened..." She added.

Safehouse F

The scoreboard was ticking up.

Kick-Ass was still on top, but we were still in the first quarter, with the whole game stretching ahead of us.

"Popcorn?" I asked Abby.

"Caramel?"

"Of course!"

South Harding Avenue

The two men grabbed the cash from the startled man behind the counter and ran towards the door of the store.

They got maybe eight feet before coming to a full stop. There in front of them was a sight, to behold. The woman was clad in white body-armour and had a slim, but mature figure. In her hands, she held a large, wicked-looking, UTAS UTS-15 bullpup pump-action shotgun. Beside her, snarling fit to burst was an enormous animal, clad in its own body armour. Behind them both, stood the instantly recognisable bulk of Iron Hide. The woman racked back the pump-action to get their full attention.

Both men raised their pistols up.

"You boys gonna come quietly?" An electronically distorted voice growled.

"Two against one, bitch!"

"You two know German?"

"Huh?"

"Well my dog does – Schwanz!"

The men's eyes went wide as the dog bolted forwards and sank its jaws into the one of the two available groins.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!" The man screamed as he fell to the ground, wrestling with the dog and dropping his pistol.

The owner of the store came to the door to see what was happening. He was just in time to witness the second man placing his pistol on the ground.

"Please take what belongs to you, sir!" The white apparition growled.

The owner grabbed hold of the cash bag and nodding his thanks, retreated into his store.

A crowd was gathering as Medic secured the hands of the man without a dog on his balls. She secured him to a metal eye on the outside of the store normally reserved for dogs.

"Eisenhower, tot!" She growled and Eisenhower instantly withdrew, glaring and licking her jaws.

The second man joined his unfortunate companion, grimacing with pain. Medic handed the broken down pistols to the storeowner for safekeeping until the Cops arrived.

South Cicero Avenue

"At the end of the first quarter, we have a tie for the lead – Kick-Ass and Medic with Eisenhower!" Battle Guy reported over the comms.

"Medic?" I growled.

That bitch was *not* gonna beat me; nobody beat Hit-Girl! I ran forwards into the darkness, followed by Petra. We both saw the man at the same time...

"He's mine!" I yelled.

"Fuck that, bitch – he's mine!" Petra challenged.

The unfortunate target must have shit himself as he saw two armoured vigilantes running towards him full tilt. We both kicked out at the same time sending the man flying a good distance.

"Got him!" Petra announced happily.

"Like fuck, you did!"

"My point!" Petra retorted.

"You gonna challenge me, cunt?"

"You're not much of a challenge..."

"Girls!" Jackal growled. "While I like a good chick fight as much as the next man – we have a job to do. Behave or I'll bang *both* your heads together!"

We both watched as Jackal dumped two unconscious men beside our own.

"Battle Guy; that would be two up for Jackal and half each for the two little bitches!"

South Central Avenue

"The two little bitches – err, Hit Girl and Petra are now on the board and Jackal is up there with Kick-Ass and Medic!"

The call came in just as the door exploded to the weight of Kick-Ass smashing through. I rushed past him, determined to beat Jackal or I would *never* hear the end of it! As I had suspected, we had found a drug den. The men were playing cards and there was a ton of money on the table.

"Now this can go easy, or it can go hard..." I began.

"Fuck easy!" Wildcat announced as she cannoned into the men, kicking and punching.

"I like her style!" Kick-Ass growled diving into the maelstrom.

"Fuck!" I yelled out as I glared at Splinter and we both entered the fray.

South Cicero Avenue

"Please, I made a mistake..."

"Yes, you did – any other night and maybe I might have let you walk; only tonight is not good for me...!"

I punched the man into silence and dragged him into the growing pile.

"You're getting there, Hit Girl!" Trojan laughed.

I scowled and swore violently.

Chicago Police Department District 21

"Fuck off, you two – this is beyond a fucking joke now!" Sergeant Trudy Platt announced from behind her desk.

"Sorry – it's not a night to be bad!" Fellowes grinned.

"Oh, before I forget, Voight's on his way in with eight..." Murphy laughed.

"I'll get you for this, you won't escape my wrath!" Platt retorted a smile on her face before turning to the Officers behind her. "More coming in, you sorry excuses for Cops, so get to work!"

South Pulaski Road

They never knew what hit them as we both attacked without warning.

The burning fire in the barrel highlighted our shadows, but nothing more. I kicked and I punched, sending one man towards Catwoman who swung him against the brickwork of the alleyway. I was running on the intense high of the adrenalin rush.

Catwoman had a spring in her step as she used her liveness to great advantage, sidestepping anyone who attacked her and following up with a powerful punch to somewhere delicate.

By the time we had finished there were four more for the slammer.

Safehouse F

Everybody returned very tired, but pleased with the night's work.

I had to see what the total was. I pushed into the Control Centre and groaned. We had put forty-six criminals behind bars, but I was low down on the scoreboard. Shadow had been beaten, by everybody but Wildcat, Splinter, Batman and Catwoman who had all tied with three each. Even my own Mother and Eisenhower had beaten me, with four! I was pleased to see that Hit Girl and Petra looked pissed off too, as they had drawn with Kick-Ass, Medic and Trojan.

The winner with six was the very smug looking Mist!

***Chapter 198*: And They Assemble**

Author's Note: As a reminder: Cameron and Natasha are brother and sister who first appeared in Chapter 89 of *Forsaken*, before starring in their own offshoot: *Hit Girl Hits Britain*. Brooke first appeared in Chapter 169 of *Forsaken* and yes; she is the same Brooke who appears in *KA2*.

**The following morning
Wednesday**

West Ridge

"Well done, both of you!"

"As Mindy said; well done. You have now both graduated from the Fusion Boot Camp!" I said as seriously as possible.

"Thanks, Dave," Selina said, giving me a big hug.

"It's been fun, but more than a little painful!" Bruce added hugging Mindy.

"We'll arrange to be with you, the first time you go out in Gotham. Fox should have your combat suits ready in a few more weeks – then Batman and Catwoman can wreak havoc!" Mindy said.

"I am very proud, Master Bruce and I do believe your father and mother would be, too," Alfred commented.

"Thank you, Alfred," Bruce replied.

"Now, you can both rest and do what you want until Saturday – but don't miss the parties on Thursday night – they should prove interesting!"

"Girl's behaving badly?" Selina asked innocently.

"Oh yes!" Mindy replied.

"What about us?" Bruce enquired.

"It will be an education, Bruce!" I warned.

Thursday

Glenview

They were starting to arrive from across the globe, literally.

First, to arrive were our friends from the United Kingdom, Cameron and Natasha King.

We hugged tightly almost the moment they set foot in the house. They were very good friends and we had missed them.

"Oh my God, they are so cute and adorable!" Natasha exclaimed when she saw the twins.

"Believe me; they are not!" Dave laughed.

"You told me that you had kids, but wow!" Cameron added.

Both kids looked very pleased with the praise; they just ignored Dave's comments.

"You two have funny accents – you both sound like Josh!" Anne-Marie commented, always quick to point things out.

"We come from across the North Atlantic, just like Josh," Cameron explained.

"Where?" Danny asked curiously.

'Where' was one of Danny's favourite words, along with 'who', 'when' and 'why'! I quickly taught him how to use Google!

We all went upstairs to Danny's room where there was a huge map of the world on the wall.

"Okay," Cameron mused, examining the map. "You live here – in Chicago."

He pointed Chicago out on the map, in North America. Then he ran his finger in an easterly direction and then north.

"The United Kingdom. We live about two thirds up – in Scotland, in the middle there," He finished.

"Wow!" Danny exclaimed.

"Over three-thousand miles away!"

"Awesome!" Anne-Marie added, examining the map closely. "Can we go to Scotland?"

"Maybe – if you're good, we'll go back there next year..." Dave suggested.

"Is it safe?" Cameron asked meaningfully.

"I think so," I replied.

"Do they know?" Natasha asked quietly, indicating the kids.

"No, they do not."

Next, to arrive was our newest friend from New York.

"Hi, Brooke, good flight?"

"I've had worse. Good to see you Mindy and you Dave..."

"Am I missing something here?" Brooke asked, indicating the twins who stood patiently waiting to be introduced.

"Long story – please meet Anne-Marie and Danny – our kids..."

"Wow – you two don't hang about!" Brooke quipped. "They are so sweet!"

"Wait till you get to know them!" Dave laughed and received a scowl from Anne-Marie.

We had also received a lot of cards and packages over the preceding couple of weeks.

*'Good luck to you both and Congratulations
From all at the GCPD
Jim Gordon'*

*'Congratulations from GCHQ
Lt Craig Lawrence RN'*

*'Best Wishes to you both
Damon would have been proud
Sergeant Mackenzie, NYPD'*

I had no idea how GCHQ had found out, but then I figured that was what they did! It was also good to hear from Jim Gordon and Mackenzie.

We had put the King's and Brooke up in a hotel in town; we did not really have the space for many people to stay.

That evening

Lawndale

There was a knock on the door.

Marty was busy with Matty, so I got up to answer the door. I grinned after looking through the spy hole and pulling the door open.

"You have a warrant?"

"I do; a warrant to see a beautiful baby boy!"

"Come on in then; what a wonderful surprise...!" I exclaimed. "Marty; it's Hank and Trudy!"

"We had to come and see you guys; took a while – we've had a lot of activity at the District!" Trudy explained dryly.

I tried to look innocent, but Voight just smiled at me with his knowing smile. It was next to impossible to hide anything from Voight! I led them through into the living room.

"You guys moving?" Voight asked eyeing up the piles of cardboard cartons.

"Yeah; up to West Ridge – we need space for the little guy to grow..."

"Damn good idea – well here's something from all at the District," Trudy said, handing over a large bag and an envelope.

"Thank you," I said, hugging them both.

"Extortion – SPECTRE had nothing on Trudy!" Voight laughed as Trudy blushed slightly. "After the second round the District was empty for almost two days as everybody hit the streets to avoid the front desk!"

"I remember what that was like – every time somebody had a kid the District was suddenly very empty!"

"Oh my God; he's so sweet!" Trudy squeaked as she saw Matthew Todd Eisenburg for the first time.

The boy was only a week old, but he gazed up at the visitors. Marty passed my son to Trudy; I was amazed at the transformation from fire-breathing dragon to gentle, caring person. I knew that Trudy had a heart, but she kept it well hidden!

"You getting much sleep?" Voight asked with a grin.

"Since Matty appeared?" I laughed. "Not a chance!"

"You're looking good, Kim," Voight commented. "Going back out as Hawk once he's grown a bit?"

There it was; straight out, no beating about the bush!

"You know what my response is to that, Hank..." I cautioned.

"Yeah, I know; I'm damn proud of you. You too, Marty."

"I second that sentiment!" Trudy agreed, while gently rocking little Matty. "He has his mother's eyes, but the looks of his father; he'll be a knockout when he's older – fending all the girls off!"

"He getting a sister?" Voight asked innocently.

"Anything's possible!" I replied with a smirk and a blush.

South Cottage Grove Apartment 202

Living with my favourite boy has rather opened my eyes a bit; notice I used the word 'rather' – he is growing on me and changing how I speak!

I was noticing things about him that I had never really noticed when we were not living together. There were a few

noticeable things really. Number one and the biggest one, was toast! He will eat the damn stuff twenty-four-seven, if I let him. Me, I might have the odd slice at breakfast, but very rarely – I see nothing special about the damn stuff.

Josh has three, thick slices every morning covered in thick, very tangy, orange marmalade – I hate orange marmalade, but I tolerate him eating it. Mind you, we can come back from school and he will promptly make himself a stack of toast and a mug of tea, and then plonk his ass, sorry *arse*, onto the couch in front of the TV to watch reruns of *Stargate: Atlantis*. He loves his toast; he says it makes him feel comfortable and he sees the toast as a bit of a treat – toast as a treat, in the middle of the afternoon?

What could be worse than that, you might ask?

Marmite!

It stinks!

I hate it!

It is vile!

He likes to smother it on toast and then bring it to bed of all places! The smell almost makes me throw up and then there is the 'toast crumbs in the bed' problem. Okay, I know that I have some bad habits that annoy Josh, but Marmite on toast...!

..._...

I will tolerate the gallons of tea that he drinks, as I drink the odd cup here and there; despite the fact, he refuses to touch 'American Tea'. He will only drink 'English Breakfast Tea', or that foul stuff: 'Earl Grey Tea'. Nevertheless, he also has to have certain 'comfort' foods that he says 'remind him of home'.

HP sauce – what, the hell, is in that stuff?

I admit it has an interesting taste, but I generally avoid it, although Josh loves to smother his 'chips' in the vile looking substance and by 'chips', I mean fries. Just do not get me started on his terminology for things – he refuses to use *our* words, as in *American* words, which just causes confusion for me as I try to translate things in my head!

We have met halfway on that. I cook 'chips' instead of 'fries' now and eat 'crisps' instead of 'chips'. However, he now goes to the 'bathroom' for a pee, instead of going to the 'loo', 'bog' or 'head'; it just sounds better and less crude!

One thing, though, that I *have* found myself in the habit of, is eating stuff on toast. Yeah, I slammed him for eating toast, but he loves emptying a tin of something over some toast, especially baked beans – quick and easy, can sometimes be messy, but very tasty.

My, err disturbed mind also got curious when he came home one evening with a couple of small tins of 'Heinz Spotted Dick' – *spotted dick*! That just sounded *so* dirty and I was *supposed* to eat it smothered in custard... I just *had* to try it – I ended up making Josh buy more that weekend. However, I drew the line at suet pudding – when I saw what suet was, I almost threw up at the thought of eating it. The British have some *weird* eating habits! Mind you, you should have seen Mindy's face when I told her that I had had custard with some of Josh's spotted dick for dinner and that she should try some...

..._...

Do not get me wrong, moving in with Joshua *has* been wonderful and it is working out great, I just seem to have picked up his British habit of complaining constantly! Josh says he is determined to make me speak properly and for me to learn to use a knife and fork properly. I am even getting in trouble at school for misspelling things now; I am putting extra 'L's in and 'U's. Josh can get away with that, I cannot!

I will readily admit that we spend an inordinate amount of time naked; well I did anyway. Josh was a little more reluctant initially, or maybe the word should be *reserved*.

I was a nymphomaniac and proud of it!

***The next morning
Thursday***

North Park Elementary School

"You two behave now and remember that you are being picked up by Paige and staying with them tonight, okay?"

"Will Megan be there?" Anne-Marie asked.

I knew that Anne-Marie adored Megan and the feeling was mutual. I just hoped that Megan was not teaching them anything bad!

"No, she will be at the party, tonight; I told you earlier."

"Oh yeah, you did – never mind!"

"Will we see you in the morning, before school?"

"Not sure, Danny, but we will pick you up after school, okay?"

"Okay – see ya..."

Tonight, we were all going to have some fun!

I wondered what we would be like, on Friday morning and I was a little worried about what I might be letting myself in for – I had a distinct feeling that if Erika and Chloe had anything to do with it, I would be spending most of the night naked!

Oh, well, it was not every day that you got married, so I figured that letting my hair down, figuratively speaking, was okay. I grinned to myself as I remembered the last time that I 'let my hair down'; I ended up naked and in a threesome with Chloe and Erika!

I had no idea what the 'men' would be doing; I just hoped that they would behave. Admittedly, they were all a little more reserved than Chloe!

Mind you, the thought of them all naked... Behave Mindy; you are getting married in less than seventy-two hours.

God I was nervous!

Marty was in charge of the entertainment for the men.

I had no idea what it was going to be, but I had an idea. You just have to try to have fun, otherwise what's the point... I also had an inkling what the girls might be getting up to as well!

Us, we were much more mature and reserved...

***Chapter 199*: Batchelorette**

Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that should be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a very dubious, unseemly or otherwise downright dirty nature.

A fun chapter before the good stuff begins.

As the Colonel said: 'Try to have fun, otherwise what's the point!'

That night

Glenview

It had started out as a bachelorette night, only wow, the night went off like a freakin' hand grenade!

The twins were with Marcus and Paige for the night. Dave was at West Ridge with Marty, Cameron, Josh, Tommy, Curtis, Kyle and Bruce. Glenview was full of women: Abby, Brooke, Erika, Chloe, Hailee, Mathilda, Megan, Natasha, Selina and myself. Oh, Sophia was there, too!

The best bit about the night was that we could all be ourselves; everybody present knew about Fusion, although I was not sure if everybody knew about Chloe sexual tendencies...

"You girls ready for a night of Hit Girl debauchery?" Chloe demanded loudly.

"I'll take anything I can get!" Natasha announced.

"Your accent is so cute!" Brooke commented with a grin.

"Remember – I'm only eleven!" Megan reminded everybody uneasily.

"We'll get you a blindfold then, sweetie!" Mathilda teased with a grin.

Megan scowled and blushed a little.

Chloe and Brooke started exchanging stories about me – Chloe was curious about what I was like at school. I left them to it, not wanting to hear about my time at school; those memories still haunted me. I hoped that Brooke would be honest and come clean about her part in my time at school.

..._...

A short while later, with loud music pounding, I was chatting, actually giggling, with Hailee and Erika when Brooke came over to us.

"I want to see more...!" Brooke said, dropping a certain magazine onto the table.

Chloe froze. Erika smirked. The other girls screamed out their agreement.

"Well, Chloe – up for another display?" Erika asked seductively.

Chloe blushed madly but I could see her thinking about it. I also knew that she would not say no.

"You did use the word, 'debauchery', earlier." Hailee pointed out.

"Yeah – my mouth gets me in a *lot* of trouble..." Chloe growled.

"That may be, but apparently Mindy, your mouth is to die for, not to mention that tongue...!" Selina mentioned casually.

I went bright red and tried to stammer denials.

"The whole damn Manor heard you licking out Chloe, Mindy!" Selina laughed. "What was it that Chloe yelled?"

Megan spoke up.

"You are so much better than Josh!" She screamed in a *very good* impression of Chloe screaming.

Everybody laughed.

"Chloe; any problems with watching the DVD?" I asked the mortified teenager.

"We already gave the boys permission," Chloe replied with a glance at Megan who blushed. "Not really – Megan can watch it *with* permission, this time!"

..._...

Now, you may wonder why Megan was at the party; she was only eleven, but earlier that week I had offered her the chance.

"If I let you come to the party, you have to be very grown up and mature. You will be with adults and older teenagers. I am only letting you come, as you are a member of Fusion. Do not do anything to show me, or Fusion up, understand Wildcat?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" Megan replied.

"And whatever you do, you tell *nobody* about what you witness; especially *not* Dave," I growled. "I still get the piss taken out of me for sharing a bath with Chloe in New York!"

Wow!

Watching yourself on a 65-inch television in full HD was a new experience, especially when you were naked. Every scream was so humiliating and as for the heavy breathing...!

Erika seemed comfortable with watching herself; nevertheless it was yours truly who was blushing. Mind you, everybody was captivated and nobody turned to look at me. Mindy was the first to say something when it ended.

"Wow! It's different this time round – glad this couch is leather; it'll wipe down!"

"Hands up who has dry knickers...," Selina asked, while blushing.

"Technically mine are dry; I'm not wearing any!" Erika admitted.

No hands went up; even Megan kept hers down, but she blushed quite a bit.

"That was awesome!" Natasha admitted with a grin.

I had reluctantly allowed alcohol and I had told Megan that she could have *one* drink, only.

Chloe had already started and so had most of the others – mostly Vodka. Megan had taken one sip and then spat it out, to lots of derisive laughter. She tried a glass of white wine, which Mathilda and Erika were drinking and she said it was okay.

It was not long before everybody was in the pool, only there were no swimsuits in evidence!

What a visitor might have thought, seeing ten females running about naked...? The evening was about fun, so who gave a fuck – not us at any rate! Initially, I felt a little self-conscious as some present had way bigger tits than I had, but some had smaller, so I was not complaining. I was also surprised that Abby did not bat an eyelid about stripping naked, either and neither did Megan who, other than Selina, was the youngest there, by quite a large margin.

Megan looked at me. "So... Who's showing who up and what happened to being 'grown up and mature'?" She asked with a smirk.

"Well, I forgot to invite anybody who was 'grown up and mature!'" I growled back as Erika grabbed me around the waist and pulled me screaming into deeper water.

The place was chaos, but a good chaos!

There was a lot of giggling and laughing – the alcohol was taking affect, which was not a surprise. I was amazed at the friends that Mindy had. They were remarkably caring, which in itself was a surprise considering what these people did as their alternative selves.

Most of them were killers. I had figured out who most of them were, although I was not sure what to make of Selina or Megan; they both seemed very young. Chloe was nice, just a little bit nuts. I was shocked to find that she, and Erika, had allowed themselves to be filmed infiltrating an 'L' bar!

Natasha lay on her back, on the steps on one side of the pool.

Chloe was busy administering to her needs down below, while Hailee looked after the top half. Both girls were very naked. Megan just stood there and watched, open-mouthed, as Abby and Selina ran their hands over each other's body. Erika appeared from under the water and spoke to Megan.

"Go easy, Megan – rub gently or you'll get sore!" She cautioned before swimming away with a grin.

Megan went very red, but continued whatever she was doing under the water. Mindy was chatting away with Mathilda as they swam. Considering that the last time I had seen Mindy in a sexual situation, she had been cold as anything, but now – holy fuck! I looked back over the years and deeply regretted what I had done to Mindy – the date-ditch especially. We could have been good friends, but... Anyway, I was glad we could be friends now and knowing her secret, that was awesome.

That was when the pizza delivery arrived.

Mathilda and Natasha actually answered the door, dripping wet and stark naked. Something told me *that* delivery driver enjoyed his shift considering the eyeful he had gotten!

West Ridge

There was total silence.

"That was so much better second time around!" Josh admitted.

"Hell, yeah!" I agreed.

Tommy, Curtis and Bruce were red faced and totally speechless.

"Bit much for you guys, eh!" Kyle laughed. "I need the bathroom."

"Me, too!" Cameron admitted.

"You have one hot girlfriend, Josh!" Marty chipped in.

"Steaks are ready!" Alfred called and we headed out to the deck.

Alfred had cooked a massive pile of equally massive steaks. There was salad and masses of fries to go with the steaks. Marty, Cameron, Josh, Kyle and I helped ourselves to beer to wash down the steaks. I allowed Tommy, Curtis and Bruce to have a beer each, but only the one. Curtis was not overly amused with his beer, but drank it anyway.

Tommy, it seemed, was familiar with drinking from his time in captivity, so he already had a taste for alcohol. Bruce had never touched a drink before, but he enjoyed the beer nonetheless. After the steaks, we helped ourselves to some ice cream and settled down to a movie.

I wondered how the girls were getting on – we would find out in the morning over breakfast.

Glenview

I could not remember when I had last eaten so much.

All the pizza was gone and they had been large pizzas, too! After adding copious amounts of ice cream, we all

collapsed on the couches to watch a movie. I was knackered and felt like sleeping; it had been a very energetic evening.

Nevertheless, it had been fun.

As I started to doze off, I wondered how Dave was doing.

***The following morning
Friday***

Glenview

"Oh wow!"

"You may be right there, Curtis!" Josh exclaimed as he examined the interesting scene before us.

"Megan has err, expanded a bit..."

"If by that you mean she has tits and curves; then yes, she has," Josh agreed.

"You think they forgot that we were coming over for breakfast?" I asked with a grin.

There was movement amongst the girls on the various couches. A head stuck up; it was Megan.

"What's the racket?" She asked tiredly and then she focussed on Curtis. "Fuck, fuck, FUCK!"

She rapidly grabbed a cushion and covered herself. Another face appeared; it was Selina – she sat up and noticed Bruce.

"Oh, hi, Bruce..."

"Err, hi Cat – nice err, cat..." Bruce replied staring at a very naked Selina who then looked down at herself.

"Oh, shit!" She shouted, her eyes going wide and seizing two more cushions and furiously prodding the nearest girl.

It was Mindy.

"What the fuck? I'm too fucking tired for more sex..."

"Oh wow!" Curtis repeated.

Curtis' voice seemed to wake Mindy up and she looked around before her face turned bright red.

"Oh for fuck's sake!" She growled staring up at me. "Hi, Dave!"

Mathilda and Erika stood up, oblivious to us watching and neither made a move to cover up. Mathilda glared at the other girls, all of whom were now awake. Brooke was attempting to cover up her admittedly appealing chest, while Hailee was blushing red and fumbling with the cushions. Natasha did not seem overly bothered by her display and was ignoring the scowl that her brother was giving her. Kyle was happily grinning at Chloe as she hid behind Brooke with Abby.

"Come on, bitches!" Mathilda called out. "You've all got beautiful bodies; what are you afraid of? I bet every dick over there is hard as a post! You've all got bits to be proud of, even Megan..."

"I'm not worried; we're all friends and I have nothing to hide..." Erika added.

Chloe grimaced and then stood up.

"She has a point!" Chloe admitted, coming out from behind Brooke.

Mindy smirked at Brooke.

"It's biology, bitch," She proclaimed. "Don't fight it!"

Brooke's mouth dropped open and she shrugged. I threw down a large pile of towels I had just grabbed from beside the pool.

"I think you girls need a swim or a shower and then we'll have breakfast!" I suggested.

Megan jumped up and grabbed a towel, but she took her time wrapping herself in it. She looked over at Curtis.

"You like what you see...?"

"I'm not complaining..."

"Is that all you can say?"

"Don't take offense, Megan..." Brooke said as she wrapped herself in a towel, much to Cameron and Tommy's annoyance. "If he can't think that means his brain is starved of blood; so where else might the blood be...?"

"Oh!" Megan exclaimed, catching on. "Come on..."

Megan took hold of Curtis' hand and dragged him towards the stairs down to the basement. Kyle, ever the ladies' man, helped Hailee with her towel and they both headed for the pool.

"What are we going to do with you?" Josh asked Chloe with more than a little exasperation, who was holding her towel and making no effort to cover up.

She whispered something in Chloe's ear and Josh blushed. Then they both vanished up the stairs together. Abby and Brooke went to get dressed, while Natasha and Selina remained wrapped in a towel each. I noticed that Bruce and Selina were exchanging many unspoken words and Selina was not complaining.

It was time to start cooking.

By the time breakfast was cooked, everybody was dressed.

There seemed to be a lot of chatter, and everybody was very hungry – not surprisingly! Once cooked, I left all the food on large plates on the counter and everybody helped themselves to bacon, eggs, sausages and pancakes. Sophia had a large bowl of bacon and sausages, too.

There were still more than a few blushes from the girls, but nobody was overly bothered.

That afternoon

North Park Elementary School

I looked around and then my heart leapt as I recognised the Jaguar.

"Mindy!" Danny yelled and I turned to see Dave and Mindy.

I was ecstatic to see them; we had only been apart for one night, but I found myself missing them both.

"Told you we'd pick you both up from school..." Mindy said as I hugged her tightly.

"Let's go get something to eat; then we are all having early nights as we have a very big day tomorrow," Dave added.

I was really looking forward to tomorrow; I had an awesome dress to wear. I had no idea what Mindy would be wearing, but I was certain that she would look beautiful in whatever she was wearing.

Danny would be wearing a suit. I had seen him in it and he looked cool. I could not believe that it had only been three weeks since Daddy had died; it felt like much longer and we had both been made to feel loved and wanted, every minute since then.

I was determined to do everything that I could to make Dave and Mindy's special day, very, very, special.

***Chapter 200*: Purple, Green and Yellow**

Well, this is it – Dave and Mindy are getting married!

*This momentous event is split over **two** chapters. **Chapters 200 and 201.***

*The good stuff; the wedding night, is in **Chapter 201** and needs plenty of space and I hope it will not for the faint hearted, or for those who get embarrassed when somebody says 'boob'!*

Friday night

Glenview

Dave was already asleep, but the impending events of the following day were keeping me awake as I ran everything through my confused mind.

I was not scared, but I was a little apprehensive about what was about to occur. For me it meant a stable future; I knew that I was doing the right thing, but I also had doubts and I had no idea why.

Finally, after what seemed like *hours*, I dozed off and drifted into a fitful sleep.

...+...

I found myself in a room, an empty room with white walls, and matching floor and ceiling. I was alone. At least I thought I was...

"You look pensive, baby doll."

"I am, Daddy," I replied automatically, then turned to see my father leaning against the wall a few feet away from me.

"Talk to me, child."

"I – I don't think I'm going to be good enough for Dave..."

Daddy surprised me with his answer.

"Are you fucking nuts?"

"Huh!"

"Dammit! I brought you up to be intelligent, Mindy!"

I was more than a little confused by my father's outburst, but I pushed on nonetheless; I was never one to back down.

"He does so much for me – I don't know if I deserve..."

Daddy looked at me as if I were six-years-old.

"Listen, child – I can't believe I'm actually saying this, but Dave is the perfect companion for you. He cares – he really does and I know that he would die for you. You really can't ask more of a guy than that, Mindy, you really can't!"

"I know he loves me; I don't doubt that, and I love him – but..."

"But, *what?*"

I could tell that Daddy was starting to get a little testy!

"He could find somebody better than me; I'd only be holding him back. I know I owe him, but..."

Daddy laughed and gave me a very patronising look indeed.

"Oh, yeah, child – you owe the kid! He has saved your life more than once, twice before he even knew you properly... He drove a thousand miles and searched non-stop, *for weeks*, just to find you! Then when he found you, what

happened?"

Now I felt ashamed as I thought back and heard my own words: *'What the fuck do you want? I don't need your fucking help, cunt!'* I then heard more of my own words, echoing in my head: *'Are you fucking deaf, or just an idiot? Did you not hear me, the other fucking night? I don't need your fucking help, cunt!'* Damn, I could be a real bitch sometimes!

"Not pretty, huh?" Daddy asked rhetorically.

"Not my finest hour!"

"But you've had better since, all thanks to the help and support that one young Dave Lizewski has given you. I would *never* have believed that 'Ass-Kick' would turn out as he has and that is because of you, child! You taught him everything, Mindy, and I am damn proud of you for that. However, you did not stop there – you built an amazing organisation, with a catchy name: *Fusion*. I really could not be any more proud of you, baby doll – your Mother is really proud of you, too."

I smiled and felt myself blushing.

"That boy, no that young man, he will stay with you and he will protect you and I know that you will do the same for him. Tomorrow, you will publicly make that vow to each other, as your mother and I did to each other, years ago. I am damn proud of you, honeybun and we both severely wish that we could be there with you, for your special day. I really, really, hate saying this, but Dave *is* perfect for you and he is the best thing that could have ever happened to you, Mindy. You are a special girl that needs a special person to be with her. I've been watching you – ever since Dave killed that bastard, Frank D'Amico."

That sounded so worrying on so many levels!

"You've seen *everything*?" I queried tentatively.

"Unfortunately – yes!" Daddy replied, closing his eyes and shaking his head. "Don't worry; I closed my eyes when you posed naked for Dave, before you two made out for the first time and... The less said about what happened in Gotham... The better!"

Oh, crap! I felt myself blushing madly.

"And as for the night you two got engaged...!"

"Daddy!" My face was getting very hot.

"Enough said. You will always be my little girl, whether you are eleven or nearly eighteen. I am so very, very proud of you and I miss you more than anything."

"I miss you too, Daddy."

"So, no more talk about being wrong for Dave, young lady!"

I rolled my eyes.

"Okay, Daddy, I trust you as always."

"Good call, baby doll!"

"Sleep tight, Daddy!"

I found myself in a room, an empty room with white walls, and matching floor and ceiling. I was alone. At least I thought I was...

"You ready for this, sport?"

"Definitely, Dad," I replied automatically, and then turned to see my father standing a few feet away from me.

"I'm real proud of you, pal. Okay, okay, at first I thought you were wasting your life, but then I saw what you have

made of your life since and... Wow! Thanks to Damon, I even got to see what occurred when you first met that girl."

"Damon?"

"Mindy's Dad..."

"You know Damon...? Hang on... You know who Mindy is?"

"Mindy is the girl that crept into your bedroom one night and sat crying on your bed..."

"You knew about that?"

"Yeah, I did... I was glad to see you with a girl in your bedroom – sort of!"

"Stop embarrassing the boy, James!"

Mom was now standing beside Dad. Alice Lizewski studied her son for a moment before speaking again. There were tears in her eyes.

"I am so proud of you, Dave – words just can't say how much."

The walls seemed to melt away and then...

"Dave?"

"Mindy?"

Mindy was standing two feet away from me, and leaning against another doorframe was a man that I assumed was Damon Macready, having never seen him without his Big Daddy mask, but he looked very similar to the photo of him that hung in the Safehouse.

"Damon."

Damon nodded with a smile, which was a surprise.

"Hi, James, Alice," he said, cheerfully.

"You know my parents?" I asked.

"We've been spending a lot of time together since you and Mindy, err started living together," Damon growled. "I'm glad you at least waited until she was sixteen!"

"Daddy!" Mindy exclaimed, blushing.

I reached out and took her hand in mine, reassuring her.

"Damon, behave!"

I immediately recognised Mindy's mother Kathleen. The eyes were identical, as was the shape of the face.

"Hello, Mrs Macready," I said.

"Hello, Dave – it's good to meet my daughter's partner – Damon had some, err, interesting things to say about you."

"I bet he did..." I replied sardonically.

"He means well... Thankfully Mindy got my brains..."

"And your looks, lucky for her!" James laughed.

Everything started to fade; I took one more look at Mindy.

"Weird, huh?"

"Yeah!" Mindy agreed.

...+...

"You okay?"

"What – oh, yes!"

We were awake again.

"Daddy gave us his blessing, last night."

"Been knocked on the head, had he?" Dave quipped.

I laughed.

"Or worse! Did that actually happen?"

"Your Mom is very beautiful and she has passed all her beauty onto you..."

I was blushing with pride.

"I love you Dave..."

The following morning

Saturday, October 24th, 2015

Chicago

We were up early and we all headed for a major five-star hotel in the centre of Chicago.

There we met up with the others and I reluctantly separated from Dave as we headed for different suites to get ourselves ready. I was seized by my over excited bridesmaids, which with Chloe as Maid of Honour included Abby, Erika, Hailee and Megan. Once in our suite on the forty-sixth-floor, I took a long shower and then with the help of the girls, I got myself cleaned up and dressed.

I needed help as I was trembling with fright – a novelty for me I can tell you! I could not even shave my own damn legs for fuck's sake, but I was being waited on, hand and foot. Chloe fussed over me like a mother hen, ordering around my bridesmaids to ensure that nothing was missed. I had chosen some very seductive lingerie to wear beneath my dress, which I hoped would make Dave explode, and Chloe ensured that I was wearing the correct set.

The makeup took the longest, which was also a novelty; I never usually bothered with any makeup but Chloe was determined that I should look right for my big day. For somebody who normally does everything herself, being waited on and not being allowed to do anything for my self was a little trying!

Once I was as ready as I could be, I sat and stared out of the window while the others showered and prepared themselves for the day. I had never felt so nervous and it took all my concentration just to remain sitting still. All around me there was chaos as the five girls dashed around and sorted themselves out.

In the middle of it all Marcus appeared with Anne-Marie, so she could get ready.

..._...

"Hi, Marcus – bit busy – see ya!" Megan called out as she ran past Marcus and Anne-Marie wearing nothing but her bra and knickers.

Marcus just stood there a little stunned.

"Marcus!" Chloe exclaimed – she was wearing even less with only a towel to maintain her dignity – assuming she had any left after the party! She seized Anne-Marie's hand and dragged her off towards the bedroom, telling her to strip.

I grinned at the man who had raised me for the first five years of my life and then taken me in again for some of the most difficult years of my life. He paused as I stood up and his mouth just flapped for almost a full minute.

"You look – beautiful, Mindy..."

He was speechless and I blushed badly!

"Thank you," I said quietly, feeling tears of happiness welling up as I gave Marcus a kiss on the cheek.

"I never thought that I would ever see you dressed so beautifully – it just never seemed to be your thing!"

"I never thought I would either – with this dress, I feel like a different woman – I feel like Mindy Macready today and *only* Mindy Macready..." I felt the tears in my eyes and gripped my hands together to stop them from shaking.

Marcus had a momentary thought. "You packing?" He asked quietly.

"Do I really need to answer that?" I replied with an embarrassed grin as I pulled up a side of my dress, turning away from where Anne-Marie stood as she came out of the bathroom wrapped in a fluffy white towel.

There on my right thigh, secured in a white thigh holster, was a custom Glock 26 Gen 4 with a white frame and a purple slide!

"Specially commissioned for today!" I grinned sheepishly. "You never know..."

"With you? No, we never know... Tasteful, though," Marcus quipped dryly. "Matches the dress!"

"That was awesome!" Josh commented, gazing at my bare leg as he came in the door.

I quickly dropped the dress and scowled at Joshua.

"You can check *me* out, if you wish," Chloe suggested, pulling up one side of her own dress to reveal a single, long leg.

"Almost as good," Josh quipped.

"Asshole!" Chloe growled with a grin.

Once all the girls were dressed and ready, we headed downstairs to the venue. At least we tried to; my legs would not move I was so nervous. Chloe enlisted Hailee and Erika to assist me to the elevator.

The time had come... It was happening.

I was nervous as hell.

Standing there with my Best Man, Marty, I was shaking from head to toe. I had only felt this nervous once before and that was when I had been strapping on a jetpack that had Gatling guns attached! Even that had seemed easier than standing there waiting for Mindy.

To ease my nervousness, I glanced around the venue. The place was very full. Everybody that we had invited was present. I could see all our friends: Isaac Swanson, Jack Bay, Bruce Wayne, Selina Kyle, Alfred Pennyworth, Cameron and Natasha King, a crying Paige, and Cathy Bennett with Ryan. Tony and Shannon Morgan were there too, along with Kim and baby Matty. Also present were Brooke, Vicky Richards, Sam Fellowes and Paul Murphy along with their own families.

I felt a slight pang in my stomach as I wished that Dad and Mom could have been in those seats, along with Damon and Kathleen, but it was not to be.

My thoughts were interrupted by the Wedding March beginning.

..._...

I turned and saw Marcus appear in the doorway.

Behind him came Josh, Kyle, Tommy and Curtis. All wore Lingfield grey morning suits with ivory waistcoats and wing collars with purple cravats, as did Marty and I. Each morning tailcoat had a jade green pocket square. The suit seemed to crush me and I was having trouble breathing, but I knew that was just the nervousness.

Next came Anne-Marie and Danny. Anne-Marie was our flower girl and wore a pure white dress with a purple sash that tied in a broad bow at the back. She wore a purple flower in her hair that had been curled and tied back; she

looked very beautiful. Danny wore a smaller version of the same suit that I wore and he was our pageboy.

Marcus guided the youngsters to the aisle between the chairs and they were followed by Tommy and Curtis, then Kyle and Josh. Then came the Bridesmaids, all of whom wore floor length, purple, off the shoulder dresses, they all looked stunning, and most of them were blushing. It struck me as strange that these same young women while looking so beautiful and normal were also quite lethal when out fighting Chicago's worst criminals.

The Bridesmaids formed up behind the groomsmen with Megan and Abby in front, with Erika and Hailee behind. It had to be the first time that I had ever seen Hailee in a dress; she looked stunning and she was blushing madly. In pride of place, behind the bridesmaids came Chloe in her position as Maid of Honour. She was blushing madly too and she looked simply amazing.

Marcus stood still behind them all, his left arm out ready to receive his daughter's hand.

I was sweating badly and the suspense was killing me.

..._...

Finally, Mindy appeared and she took Marcus' hand.

I was *astounded* by what I saw.

Mindy's sleeveless dress was floor-length and of white satin, with a V-neckline and an empire waist. The dress was finished off with a purple sash and a white and purple court train. Mindy's natural blonde hair fell past her shoulder, and was draped loosely down her left side. She wore diamond earrings and a diamond necklace.

She was smiling, as I had never seen her smile before. She was more beautiful than I had ever seen her and I was speechless. Right at that moment, you could have knocked me down with a feather! She was gripping onto Marcus' arm rather tightly I noticed; she must have been very nervous.

The processional began and with a nudge from Josh, the twins began their walk towards me, Anne-Marie blushing sweetly. It seemed to take an age for them to come level with me, but finally they arrived. Josh smiled encouragingly as he turned and stood beside Marty with Kyle, Curtis and Tommy. The girls lined up on the other side of the aisle, all still blushing and enjoying the attention that they were receiving.

"Damn you look hot, Megan!" Curtis said which made the colour of Megan's face almost match her dress.

He was right. Now that Megan was developing a more feminine figure, the dress did match and accentuate her developing curves very well.

As Marcus handed Mindy over to Dave, he glared at his future son-in-law.

"You take good care of her, you hear me!"

Mindy scowled and Marcus grinned at his adopted daughter.

"She's your problem now, Dave!" Marcus added and then he took a deep breath. "Thank God for that – freedom!"

There was a ripple of laughter from the assembled guests.

"Hey – you've still got me, remember!" Megan called out.

"Don't remind me!" Marcus replied, grimacing.

The Ceremony

"The ceremony of marriage in which you come to be united is one of the first and oldest ceremonies in the world. Marriage is the clasping of hands, the blending of two hearts and the union of two lives into one. Your marriage must stand, not by the authority of the State, nor by the seal on your wedding certificate but by the strength and power of the faith and love that you have for one another."

Somebody was crying – I could hear sobbing; how dare they cry, it was supposed to be a happy event!

"We are gathered here today to witness the coming together of two people whose hearts and spirits are entwined as one. You are adding to your life not only the affection of each other, but also the companionship and blessing of a deep trust as well. You are agreeing to share strength, responsibilities and love."

I peeked to the side – Chloe, Abby, Erika, Hailee and Megan were all tearing up; I was tempted to tell them all to get a fucking grip!

"Love is cultivating flexibility, patience, understanding and a sense of humour. Love is having the capacity to forgive and forget. Love is giving each other an atmosphere in which each can grow. Love is not only marrying the right partner, it is being the right partner."

"Here we go!" I quipped and heard polite laughter.

"Dave and Mindy will now exchange vows."

"I, Dave Lizewski, take you, Mindy Macready, to be my wife, my partner in life and my one true love. I will cherish our union and love you more each day than I did the day before. I will trust you and respect you, laugh with you and cry with you, loving you faithfully through good times and bad, regardless of the obstacles we may face together. I give you my hand, my heart, and my love, from this day forward for as long as we both shall live."

"You may now place the ring on her finger."

Dave delicately pushed the ring he had been holding onto my hand. The ring stopped against my engagement ring. Oh, fuck! *I was crying* – God, I hoped they were tears of joy!

"I, Mindy Macready...", I faltered for a moment; the emotion was getting too much. "...Take you, Dave Lizewski, to be my husband, my partner in life and my one true love. I will cherish our union and love you more each day than I did the day before. I will trust you and respect you, laugh with you and cry with you, loving you faithfully through good times and bad, regardless of the obstacles we may face together. I give you my hand, my heart, and my love, from this day forward for as long as we both shall live."

"You may now place the ring on his finger."

I was shaking – it was ridiculous, I was losing control; my hands shook as I pushed the band of gold onto his finger.

"As you wear these rings, whether you are together or apart for even just a moment, may these rings be a constant reminder of the promises you are making today. You have shown your love and affection by joining hands and have made promises of faith and devotion to each other. You have sealed these promises by the giving and receiving of the vows. You shall no longer walk alone. As your hearts will be your shelter and each other's arms will be your home. From this day forward, may your days be good and beautiful upon this earth... It is my privilege by the authority vested in me to pronounce you husband and wife!"

"Cool!" Megan exclaimed, causing a ripple of laughter.

"You may now kiss the bride!"

Everything around me seemed to dissolve as I gazed into Dave's blue eyes; they sparkled and were hypnotic. I felt his lips on mine; they tingled – and then I fucking melted! I felt the tears as they streamed down my cheeks when I wrapped my arms around my new husband and kissed him like there was no tomorrow.

We were finally interrupted by a discrete round of coughing from Marcus.

I let go of Dave and turned, holding his hand tight, not wanting to let go of him, not even for a second. I was blushing severely and my face was wet with my tears. I had never been happier than at that moment, not just because of my new husband beside me, but also because of all the people who stood in front of us smiling, clapping and cheering. They were there for Dave and for me, and they *all* meant so much to me.

...+...

I took a moment to think back to the start of everything.

The scared Kick-Ass at Rasul's apartment.

Almost killing Kick-Ass for causing my Daddy to die.

Then Kick-Ass stepping up and saving my life in D'Amico's kitchen.

Again, he stepped up with his immortal words:

"Hey! Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

Then that damn bazooka – awesome!

...+...

"Daddy, I wish you could have been here," I whispered to myself.

I noticed that Mindy had started crying again.

My hand had hurt where Mindy had been squeezing it, at least until I had squeezed her back just as hard and she had reluctantly loosened her grip. Mindy was happier than I had ever seen her and I loved her more than ever. The day had been so perfect and it was such a great feeling to have all our friends around us for such a special day.

...+...

I took a moment and thought back.

It had been six years and almost six months since I had first seen Hit Girl in Rasul's apartment. I remembered it well, including what she had said to me on the roof in answer to my question:

"Who are you?"

"Me? I'm Hit Girl!"

It had been six years and a month since she had first introduced her true self to me and the first time that I had really seen her for whom she really was without the mask:

"Mindy, Mindy Macready..."

...+...

There was the tinge of sadness again that neither of us had had our parents there to witness the day, but that was life.

"I think that went well, don't you, James?"

"I would have to agree with you there, Damon – they are perfect for each other and Mindy is the image of her mother and very, very beautiful."

"Thank you, James, but flattery will get you nowhere!" Kathleen Macready said with a grin.

"James, stop flirting on your son's wedding day!" Alice Lizewski cautioned.

"I was just stating the obvious – Dave has managed to find himself the prettiest damn girl on the east coast!" James Lizewski persisted.

"I never thought I would ever see our daughter that happy," Damon Macready commented.

"Well your parenting skills were, to say the least, horrendous, Damon!" Kathleen said with a grimace.

"I did my best and yeah, in hindsight it probably wasn't all that successful..."

"Hey! This is supposed to be a happy day, so let's not go there again!" Alice called.

"Damon, remember, stay out of their suite tonight – you may see something that you will regret!" James cautioned with a laugh.

We moved outside, into the hotel gardens and the vixens gathered.

"You bitches, ready?" I called out and I threw my bridal bouquet behind me and instantly turned to see where it fell.

There was a rather violent clamouring of hands from the single females present and then I saw just one girl holding the bouquet triumphantly upwards. I laughed when I saw who it was and smiled at her and she smiled back.

"Oh, fuck!" Joshua exclaimed as he saw Chloe smirking at him and holding up the bouquet with a look of barely concealed lust on her face.

I laughed. They were both too young to marry, but their time would come.

After what seemed like several hours of photos, I was starting to feel hungry; it was time to eat.

The Wedding Lunch

We all sat down for an enormous meal.

It was great to chat with my friends and I was enjoying all the attention, which surprised me; I had been brought up to avoid attention and to keep to the shadows.

After the meal and a good deal of Champagne, Marty stood up to begin the speeches. I cringed at the thought of what the speeches were going to uncover, but I was pleased that we were in public, so certain stories could *not* be talked about!

..._...

"I've known Dave since first grade and I am so very happy and more than a little jealous, to be here today to see him marry the hottest girl around – err, other than Kim, of course!"

"Nice save, Marty!" Josh called to some laughter.

"I know they both love each other unreservedly and will always support each other till the day that they die. They are a unique couple, with their own, very unique, outlook on life. My time with Mindy has been an education and I love her like a sister. Anyway, I have plenty of embarrassing stories; so please see me after the meal. For now though, please raise your glasses for the Bride; Mindy Lizewski!"

..._...

Once Marty had sat back down, Chloe stood up and she looked absolutely stunning in her dress.

"Meeting Dave and Mindy changed my life, for so many reasons. I see Mindy as my big sister and Dave as my big brother. They have helped to guide me along the right paths as I have grown up over the past few years. There have been times that I have ignored them to my cost, thinking that I knew better, but they have always been there to pick me up when all went wrong and calmly tell me *where* I went wrong. I love them both to bits and I thank them for allowing me to be here for their special day and for choosing me to be their Maid of Honour. Ladies and gentlemen, the Groom, Dave Lizewski."

Chloe was crying as she sat back down again and I smiled over at her, ignoring my own tears of happiness.

..._...

"Welcome, everybody and thank you for coming to this auspicious event!" Marcus began. "As many of you know, I looked after Mindy from when she was only a few days old, until she was a few days past her fifth birthday. She was the sweetest baby I had ever laid eyes on. As she grew, she had not only the eyes of her mother, but also her looks, not to mention some of her traits.

"It is a tragedy that Kathleen Macready is no longer with us, she was a fabulous woman and she would have been so very proud of her daughter today. To me, Mindy is a very special young person who despite many distractions along the way has grown into the fabulous young woman that she is today.

"When she was eleven, she came back into my care after the death of her father, Damon. Mindy was very different to the five-year-old girl that I had last seen, all those years before; she was taller for a start!"

There was general laughter.

"Mindy had also picked up some new skills along the way; none of which I approved of. There were again plenty of tantrums and problems as she grew up – ask me later, I have plenty of stories! She became involved with a boy; a boy I did *not* initially approve of but one that persevered and I am glad that he did.

"That boy helped to keep Mindy on the straight and narrow – most of the time at least! While there were a few lapses, he was mainly successful. I owe a lot to that boy, or my daughter may not be here today as the perfect daughter that she is. Thank you, Dave Lizewski for being there for Mindy, every step of the way and every time that she needed you."

I was crying again! I loved Marcus as much as I loved Dave and he knew it, but... I jumped up and hugged Marcus almost to the point where he was struggling to breathe.

"Thank you..." I was unable to say anymore, so I sat back down again.

"It is amazing to see Mindy running a successful business and raising two of the most lovely, well behaved kids that I have known in a long time..."

"That is not exactly how I would describe Anne-Marie and Danny!" I quipped and received scowls from both of my kids. I smiled back as people laughed. "My kids are little monsters!"

"... She may be right!" Marcus continued with a grin. "Again, Mindy has only been successful thanks to the support of her friends and mostly thanks to the encouragement from the man who is now her husband, Dave Lizewski. Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses to the Bride and Groom, Mr and Mrs Lizewski!"

..._...

Dave and I both stood up.

"Before we get flooded out by the women crying, I would like to thank you all for coming today and showing your support for us both; it is very humbling to know that we have so many good friends. For those of you not familiar with Mindy, she is usually a *lot* stronger than this and she does *not* usually burst into tears at the drop of a hat!" Dave said, squeezing my hand tightly.

"Thank you, all of you..." I could not say another word; I just hugged Dave as we both raised our glasses to everybody.

Late Afternoon

The Party

After a short rest, it was time to let our hair down and have some fun – just not the sort we had had the previous night!

As was expected, Dave and I had the first dance. To make things easier for me, the train of my dress was removable, which Erika and Hailee took care of for me. I grinned as the music began – somebody was having a laugh!

Okay, I will admit it; Dirty Dancing is one of my favourite films – especially the final dance... I looked Dave in the eyes as he began mouthing the words to me – we both knew them by heart. We both knew the dance movements too...

*Now I've had the time of my life
No I never felt like this before
Yes I swear it's the truth
and I owe it all to you*

Then I was mouthing the words back to Dave...

*'Cause I've had the time of my life
and I owe it all to you*

Whoever picked the song for us knew what they were doing...

*I've been waiting for so long
Now I've finally found someone
To stand by me*

It must have been Chloe...

*We saw the writing on the wall
As we felt this magical fantasy*

I felt so happy singing together with Dave...

*Now with passion in our eyes
There's no way we could disguise it secretly
So we take each other's hand
'Cause we seem to understand the urgency*

Just remember

You're the one thing

I can't get enough of

So I'll tell you something

This could be love because

The chorus was my favourite bit:

*Because... I've had the time of my life
No I never felt this way before
Yes I swear it's the truth
And I owe it all to you
'Cause I've had the time of my life
And I've searched through every open door
'Til I found the truth
And I owe it all to you*

No, we did *not* do the jumping thing. I mean, I could have done it – but it was just a little too public! It felt good being able to dance with Dave; he felt so soft and warm as I hugged him. I was also feeling a little aroused by the events of the day – no idea why!

..._...

Then the music changed as the DJ selected another suitable track, which upped the tempo and brought Chloe and her bridesmaids out onto the dancefloor with the groomsmen.

*I don't give a damn 'bout my reputation
You're living in the past, it's a new generation
A girl can do what she wants to do and that's what I'm gonna do*

*An' I don't give a damn 'bout my bad reputation
Oh no, not me*

Chloe, Hailee and Megan had jumped up eagerly as the first bars of the tune began – they all loved Joan Jett. While the song played and I hugged Dave, I thought again back over how we had come together. The assault on the D'Amico Penthouse being the start of everything. I remembered the elevator, the corridor and then the kitchen... Being rescued by Dave...

After that second, faster Dance with Dave, I took the opportunity to dance with Joshua, while Chloe danced with Dave.

"Thank you, Chloe; you have been wonderful at organising all the other girls, not to mention Anne-Marie and Danny," Dave said and I felt very embarrassed.

I would do anything for Dave and Mindy, without reservation. I had been overwhelmed when they had asked me to be their Maid of Honour; it was an amazing opportunity and it had showed me how much they loved me.

"I love you two and I am honoured to be able to this for you both..."

"We know," Dave said with smile and a kiss on the cheek. I felt my face warming up to overheat!

Dave laughed and passed me to Marcus, while he danced with Erika.

The day was so beautiful and I was grateful to have been a part of it.

Hearing so many people say such nice things about Dave and Mindy confirmed my feelings that they were good people. I loved the dress that I wore and everybody kept taking photos of me; I was in heaven! They also kept saying how sweet and cute I looked. The attention was fun, but I hated being called 'cute'!

My brother, however, enjoyed the attention he was receiving from the girls; he did *not* mind being referred to as 'cute' and lapped up all the attention!

My feelings for Dave and Mindy were growing day by day. Danny and I had talked about calling them Mom and Dad, but while Mom may not have been too bad; it had been a while since she had gone.

Dad, though, was still too fresh in our minds.

I finally got a chance to dance with my Maid of Honour.

"Thank you..."

Chloe was crying and I felt myself crying too as we hugged.

"I'd do anything for you, Mindy; today has been unbelievable and I have loved every minute," Chloe said quietly. "Thank you for entrusting this responsibility to me."

"I trust you unreservedly Chloe. You are a sister to me and you have always been there for me; even when I never listened..."

We hugged, holding each other tightly.

"You two going to cry all night?" Megan demanded.

"No," Chloe laughed, smiling down at the young girl. "Your turn, kid."

That evening

Now that the evening was in full swing, it was karaoke time!

Dave went up first.

"You sing something that embarrasses me; I'll fucking gut you!" Mindy growled.

This ought to be good, I thought. The machine kicked into life and I heard the music and saw the song – oh, cool! Mindy glared. The words started and Dave started singing, looking directly at Mindy...

*Every time I look into your loving eyes
I see a love that money just can't buy*

Mindy was actually starting to blush and was averting her eyes. Dave never flinched as he gazed at his new wife...

*One look, from you, I drift, away
Afraid that you, are here, to stay*

Mindy was now very red and Anne-Marie was enjoying every minute of it, dancing to the music...

*Anything you want, you got it
Anything you need, you got it
Anything at all, you got it, baby*

Mindy braced herself, looked up at Dave, and smirked, still an interesting shade of pink...

*Every time I hold you, I begin to understand
Everything about you tells me I'm your man*

I could see tears spilling down Mindy's cheeks and she seemed oblivious to them, or the people watching her...

*I live, my life, to be, with you
No one, can do, the things, you do*

*Anything you want, you got it
Anything you need, you got it
Anything at all, you got it, baby*

*Anything you want, you got it
Anything you need, you got it*

Anything at all

Josh and Marty now joined in...

*Doo doo doo doo doo
Doo doo doo doo doo
Doo doo doo doo, you got it*

They left Dave to finish the song...

*I'm glad to give my love, to you
I know, you feel, the way, I do*

Everybody joined in for the remaining chorus...

*Anything you want, you got it
Anything you need, you got it
Anything at all, you got it, baby*

*Anything you want, you got it
Anything you need, you got it
Anything at all, you got it, baby*

Anything at all, you got it, baby

Then Dave had the final word...

You got it!

Mindy leapt up from her chair and jumped into Dave's arms hugging him tightly. The perfect song from the perfect man, the genius Roy Orbison.

Then it was Joshua's turn.

"Bet you can't match that!" Dave challenged.

"I am dreading this!" Chloe moaned as she sat down, taking off her heels to ease her swollen feet.

"I considered, 'Devil Woman!'" Chloe glared and Josh flinched. "But changed my mind..."

*Does she walk? Does she talk?
Does she come complete?*

*My homeroom homeroom angel
Always pulled me from my seat*

Chloe blushed – it was one of her favourite songs: Centrefold by the J Geils Band.

*She was pure like snowflakes
No one could ever stain
The memory of my angel
Could never cause me pain*

*Years go by I'm lookin' through
A girly magazine
And there's my homeroom angel
On the pages in between*

Chloe was giggling and blushing as Erika whispered something into her ear.

*My blood runs cold
My memory has just been sold
My angel is the centrefold
Angel is the centrefold*

...

*It's okay I understand
This ain't no never never land
I hope that when this issue's gone
I'll see you when your clothes are on*

*Take your car, yes we will
We'll take your car and drive it
We'll take it to a motel room
And take 'em off in private*

As Josh came to the end, Chloe jumped up, gave her boyfriend a big hug and a very deep kiss that seemed to shock Joshua, and caused more than a few wolf whistles.

The night was warming up steadily!

Now it was our turn!

"Okay, bitches – get up here!" I called.

We had prepared the song, just for that night: Abby, Erika, Chloe, Hailee, Megan and myself. Once in position, Hailee hit the music.

*When the going gets tough
The tough get going, tough, tough
When the going gets tough, the tough get ready*

I think the men were enjoying our singing.

Yeah, oh, du da do da

Even Marcus was enjoying the beat, along with Paige. Cathy was dancing with Ryan. I could even see Bruce and Selina dancing too.

*I got something to tell you
I got something to say
I'm gonna put this dream in motion
Never let nothing stand in my way
When the going gets touch
The tough get going*

Anne-Marie was dancing with her brother!

*I'm gonna get myself 'cross the river
That's the price I'm willing to pay
I'm gonna make you stand and deliver
And give me love in the old-fashion way*

Dave, Josh and Marty were now dancing to the music...

*Darlin', I'll climb any mountain
Darlin', I'll do anything
Ooo, can I touch you?

And do the things that lovers do
Ooo, wanna hold you
I gotta get it through to you, oh*

Kyle had attracted the attentions of Brooke – hope he knew what he was in for!

*When the going gets tough
The tough get going
When the going gets rough
The tough get rough
Hey, hey, hey
Oh baby*

Curtis was dancing with Natasha and doing very well, too.

*I'm gonna buy me a one-way ticket
Nothin's gonna hold me back
Your love's like a slow train coming
And I feel it coming down the track

Darlin', I'll climb any mountain
Darlin', I'll swim any sea
Darlin', I'll reach for the heaven
Darlin', with you lovin' me, ooo*

Everybody joined in with the final chorus, which ended with Dave and me kissing. Chloe vanished with Josh into a dark corner – I had a feeling what might be happening!

..._...

The DJ now took over with a request, I think from Erika, for Megan and Curtis who were kissing in one of the darker corners. They jumped up as the DJ called out their names. I laughed as I recognised the song: Absolute Beginners by David Bowie! Megan scowled at Dave and me. I just laughed and smiled back.

You can now go on to **Chapter 201!**

Please be warned that Chapter 201 will include smut and behaviour that should be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a very dubious, unseemly or downright dirty nature.

***Chapter 201*: The Wedding Night**

Please be warned that this chapter will include smut and behaviour that should be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a very dubious, unseemly or downright dirty nature.

Well, what did you expect for a wedding night?

A quick fumble under the duvet?

Get a grip!

That evening Saturday

I was all bubbly with excitement.

"Congratulations, Mindy; you look radiant," Bruce said, blushing slightly.

"Thank you all for coming!" I said as I hugged Selina and gave Bruce a kiss on the cheek while Dave shook Alfred's hand.

"We would not have missed any of it!" Selina said happily.

"You two make one hell of a couple!" Alfred commented. "Congratulations, Dave!"

"Thank you, Alfred. It has been one hell of a journey to this point, but I do not regret a thing. Well, maybe the odd thing here and there!"

I scowled.

"We'll see you in a few weeks then," Alfred said.

"Definitely!"

It was wonderful to see all these people and knowing that they were here for Dave and me. Everybody was really having fun, which was great and the whole idea of course.

Cameron and Natasha were next.

"You two having fun?" I asked.

"Thank you for inviting us, Mindy; we would not have missed it for the world," Natasha said, giving me a kiss. "May I?"

I nodded and Natasha gave Dave a big kiss that made Natasha blush.

"Good luck, Dave – have fun tonight!" Cameron said with a wink and a grin.

"I will; Mindy won't be able to stand by the morning!" Dave promised and I felt myself blushing furiously, but I did not care.

Cathy came by and gave me a kiss, before handing me something surreptitiously. Once she was gone, I looked down at my hand and saw a large packet of purple condoms. I stuffed them into Dave's pocket, with the others; Marcus had slipped me some green ones earlier that evening! I had to laugh; it was funny.

As I looked around the room, I could see Brooke talking to Anne-Marie and my daughter was laughing happily in response to whatever Brooke was saying. I could see Megan and some hands, which I assumed was Curtis – I grinned and left them to it!

Marcus and Paige were still dancing together which made me feel all happy inside. It was rare that they were able to enjoy themselves, just the two of them.

Where was Danny?

I continued looking around. I could see Hailee, Kyle and Erika chatting together. I continued looking around and... There! The boy was sitting in between Josh and Chloe and the three of them were laughing about something. I was pleased to see the twins happily integrating with my friends. They both needed a family and Fusion was their family, even if they never knew who was watching their backs.

An hour later

I took a moment to say goodnight to the twins.

"Please be good for Marcus and Paige, okay?"

"We will; we're both perfect little angels for them," Anne-Marie tried and I laughed.

"You both did so well today and you look beautiful, Anne-Marie, and *you* look very handsome, Danny," I said and both kids blushed. "We're very proud of both of you and thank you so very much for helping to make our day so special."

After a kiss and a cuddle, they both ran off to play. I would miss them; but it was only until the following morning.

Dave whisked me upstairs and swept me off my feet as he carried me through the open door, then he booted it closed with his foot. He dumped me unceremoniously into the large L-shaped couch.

As I stared up at my husband, I felt like the happiest woman on earth, if not in the universe.

That night

The Bridal Suite

We were finally alone.

I was so full of energy and surging emotions, it was unbelievable and Dave could sense it.

"So, how is my new wife feeling? Do I sense a nuclear explosion, or two, in the night's action?"

"Oh, hell, yeah! There's gonna be fucking chain reactions; they'll think world war fucking three has broken out!"

My underwear was soaked; Dave had been winding me up all afternoon. There was gentle, soothing music playing in the background and I felt so aroused it was ridiculous considering that Dave had not actually touched anything to that point!

Dave pulled off his jacket, throwing it into a corner. He knelt down beside me and kissed me, his tongue pushed into my mouth and I pushed back with my own. For some reason Dave tasted better than he ever had before. I was getting desperate for skin on skin contact. I ran my right hand down Dave's front and then smiled, even though we were still kissing – Dave was as turned on as I was!

Despite the champagne at dinner, I was still fully in control of myself and I felt Dave's hand move up my right leg and stop at my thigh. I felt his fingers move across my thigh and then he held up his hand.

"Don't want something to go off accidentally, do we?" Dave smirked as he held up the pistol and placed it onto the small side table.

I giggled; I had forgotten all about the pistol.

"This can go too!" Dave placed the throwing knife down beside the pistol. "Anything else to declare?"

"You'll have to search me – inside and out..."

Dave smirked and he moved down the couch and gently removed my shoes, which was a blessing as my feet and ankles hurt. His hands on my skin, even if it was just my feet, was unbelievable. I felt his hands move up my legs and stop, just below my knees.

Damn, the fucker was teasing me!

I loved to tease Mindy.

Not many people could, without suffering a lot of pain afterwards. She was breathing heavily and I had felt the wetness on her inner thighs. I pulled Mindy to her feet, went behind her, and gently unzipped the dress. Mindy shrugged her shoulders, the dress slipped noiselessly to the floor, and I moaned at the sight of her smooth, pale skin. Mindy giggled and blushed; she was radiant.

She was wearing a bra and skimpy knickers, both purple. There was a garter on her left thigh, which was also purple. On her right thigh was the white holster for her pistol. She wore nothing else but the two rings on her left hand.

Damn, if I got any harder something was going to explode.

As I stood there in practically nothing, I bit my lip as Dave ran his eyes from my feet to my eyes, pausing occasionally.

I grinned as he paused at the pistol holster! I stared at the bulge in his trousers and felt my knickers getting wetter, if that was actually possible. I screamed as Dave suddenly picked me up and then dropped me roughly onto the floor. It hurt, only a little, but it turned me on even more.

Dave then knelt down, spreading my legs apart and he started to kiss my feet, then my ankles. I felt tingling sensations running up and down my legs. The sensations paused at my crotch before rocketing via my nipples to my brain. I clenched my fists, fighting against the sensations, prolonging the inevitable for as long as possible.

I moved up Mindy's legs, touching, kissing, and caressing the soft skin on the inside of her muscular thighs.

I felt my wife shuddering as my lips and fingers ran across her sweet smelling skin. I touched her purple knickers, which were sodden. I gently eased them down and off, chucking them behind me. I ran my fingers through the moist, dark pubic hair that covered her vulva. She shuddered much more that time. I moved upwards, inch by inch and ran my hands over the firm stomach and visible abs.

I smirked and moved my hands to Mindy's sides, just above her hips and she started to giggle and laugh. She was very ticklish just there; not many people knew that and I was sworn to secrecy on penalty of a violent death! Next, I found myself level with her breasts; they were now a cute 32B. I pushed the bra upwards so her breasts came out and rested on her chest. Mindy pulled the garment over her head and threw it away across the room.

Mindy was in a state of barely concealed excitement. Her heartrate had increased along with her breathing. Her breasts had enlarged too as she became aroused.

She closed her eyes as I ran my tongue around the surface of her breasts, staying clear of the erect, pink nipples and sensitive surrounding skin. I could hear Mindy moaning and groaning – partly because of what I was avoiding!

Just the thought of making love to one of the most dangerous women in the world was intoxicating. Even better, she was my wife and we were the keystones of the most feared anti-crime organisation in Chicago.

I slowly moved back downwards, kissing her and enjoying the shudders and squeals as I went. I paused at her pelvis. Mindy began to moan and her hips were moving gently from side to side in eager anticipation. I kissed her at the top of her vulva and gently ran my hand over her soft and moist pubic hair before pushing a finger in between her outer labia and then through the swollen inner labia that had darkened as they were engorged with blood.

I stayed well away from the top of her labia where she was most sensitive as she became more and more aroused. I looked up Mindy's body, which was slightly flushed with her arousal, and she had never looked so beautiful. Her eyes were tight shut as she struggled to control the emotions, which tore through her slender body. I was sure she was purring – that was new!

Mindy's legs spread open further allowing me to get closer to her. I ran my tongue from the top of her opening to the bottom, tasting her as I had done many times before. Her hips were moving steadily now and the purring had been replaced by a steady moaning. I pushed my tongue in as far as it would go and moved upwards seeking out that most sensitive of places and when I found it, Mindy screamed!

Her fists beat down on the floor and she started to writhe around. I paused for a second to catch my breath...

"Don't you fucking *dare* stop – *OH, MY GOD!*" Mindy called out, her back arching upwards.

I was not stopping – not for anything!

All I could hear was my heart pounding at an immensely high rate.

Blood was pounding in my ears and the sensations that Dave was sending through my body were indescribable, but both intense and unbearable at the same time. My nipples tingled and I was struggling to sort out what I was feeling down below as Dave's tongue moved inside me. The emotions and stimulations all seemed to arrive at my brain together and I could not tell what I enjoyed more; it was all fucking heaven to me. It was better than anything I had ever experienced...

I tensed up and my back arched upwards. I pounded the floor with my fists and I lost control of my hips as they moved of their own accord. I took a deep breath, pushing Dave's head out of the way, as I screamed and brought my legs up to my stomach. I rolled onto my side.

I could not breathe; it had to be the biggest orgasm that I had ever experienced. I could not feel my limbs, or for that matter anything. I felt like I was floating as the sensations rocketed from one part of me to another.

Then suddenly it was over and I was able to lie back. I looked upwards into the eyes of my husband as he grinned down at me.

Now *that* was a Hit Girl orgasm!

Mindy was covered in a fine perspiration from head to toe and she was breathing heavily. She had held her breath for what must have been over two minutes as she fought through the sensations that I had caused her.

Finally, she was able to sit up and I hugged her; she smelt so gorgeous. Needless, to say, the carpet was very wet where she had been lying!

The phone rang and Mindy reached up, hitting the speakerphone button.

"Hello? This is the Hotel Manager; we heard screaming, is everything okay?"

"Hell yeah!" Mindy yelled. "We need some Red Bull and, err, strawberries – I'm going again!"

Then she giggled as she hit the speakerphone button again before the mortified Hotel Manager could say another word.

The Hotel Lounge

"Something's going on..."

"Marcus, stop being so damned suspicious all the time!"

"Sorry, Paige, but..."

Then I heard it. They were whispering about the Bridal Suite and the... Oh God... The screaming! Paige was laughing as she saw my expression of pure disgust.

"Dave must be good..."

I scowled!

The Bridal Suite

The kid that delivered the Red Bull – twelve cans – and the strawberries was eagerly looking around as he entered the Suite. Dave was sitting nonchalantly on the couch while I lay next to him, only Dave's hands protecting my modesty. The kid's eyes went wide when he saw me and almost dropped the tray!

"C – Compliments of the Hotel Manager – he thought you might need several cans..." The embarrassed kid stammered before he fled.

"You are awful, Mindy Lizewski!" Dave laughed as he gently rubbed my pubic mound with his right hand.

Those two words sounded so good together and I loved them. Dave was now mine forever and ever, nothing could ever separate us. For now though, I wanted to be as intertwined as it was possible to get. I finished off the last strawberry and my second twenty-fluid-ounce can of Red Bull. I was revitalised...

I seized Dave and threw him onto the floor – it was his turn!

Damn!

Being thrown to the floor by a naked woman was – indescribable! She looked so gorgeous and irresistible as she gazed down at me from her hypnotic green eyes, her soft blonde hair hanging down.

"I'm all yours, beautiful..."

Mindy giggled and started to unbutton my shirt, and then she removed my cravat and pulled my shirt open. Her fingers moved across my chest and gently teased my nipples before she ran her hands across my very firm stomach. I lay back and closed my eyes. The hands moved further down and then my new wife began to attack my trousers – and I *mean* 'attack'!

My belt sailed across the room and I am sure the zipper ripped open. Mindy squealed with barely concealed glee and pleasure as she saw her target under just one more layer of clothing. My shoes thudded to the floor a few feet away; they were soon joined by my socks. My shorts and trousers vanished a few seconds later and I opened my eyes to see Mindy bite her bottom lip as she started to breathe heavily and she gazed down at my rock hard cock.

She gently ran her middle finger up me and I shuddered at the touch. I was in a very advanced state of arousal and I was like a bomb with a hair trigger!

"I need some sauce to go with my strawberries!" Mindy said with a small laugh.

She continued to play with me and I was struggling to contain myself as her other hand massaged what hung beneath and then she lay down on top of me and kissed me. I desperately wanted to be inside her, but knew that now was not the time. Mindy pulled back and grinned, then she sank down my body and I took a deep breath as she took me in her mouth and I felt her tongue caressing me.

I could not hold on much longer. Now it was my fists pounding the floor and I started to massage Mindy's back with my hands, which in hindsight must have been rather painful! Mindy's tongue was exquisite as it moved purposefully around and she gently teased me as she ran her tongue up and down my shaft and then licking my balls.

"Mindy!" I called out.

I saw my wife peer up at me, and then she grinned fiendishly and began to move faster and faster. Then it came – I came! Mindy seemed unsure whether to remain on me or to move out of the way. She was caught just inches from me as I exploded in her face. She screamed, but started laughing. There was a gooey substance all over her face and in her hair. It ran down her chest and over her breasts down onto her stomach. Some even reached her pubic hair.

"Damn! You were storing that lot up!" She giggled.

I reached up, wiped my hand across her face, and then wiped the cum on her thighs. I pushed her backwards and lay down on top of her. Mindy screamed as she felt the gooey substance squashed between our bodies. I took her mouth in mine and kissed her for all I was worth.

"I love you more than words can say, Wife."

"I am happier now than I have ever been, Husband, and I love you so, so much..."

After another can of Red Bull and some more strawberries, courtesy of room service, we took a shower – together!

The bathroom had a shower without partitions. It was a 'drench' shower and we enjoyed the hot water as it washed away the cum that was all over our bodies. Then I think Dave wanted more as he started to massage my nipples before taking my left nipple into his mouth and...

Dave sunk down and started to kiss my stomach and then down into my pubic hair and then I moved my legs apart allowing Dave to use his tongue on places that had me moaning and groaning within seconds. I put one hand out to brace myself against the tiled wall of the shower. Just moments before I was overcome by another orgasm, Dave stopped.

I lost the power to think as my legs went all weak, I allowed Dave to lower me to the tile floor, and he protected me from the shower spray as he started to kiss me on the mouth and then moved back to my nipples. I felt my legs spreading of their own accord and I moaned audibly. Dave was grinning and my love for him was more than I had ever known in my life.

I felt him gently pass inside me and I felt so very, very fulfilled. I finally had my husband inside me where he belonged... I barely felt the hard tile floor under me; Dave was so gently, but firm at the same time. I was building up to another crescendo of enjoyment and I loved every second of it. I never wanted the night to end.

I braced myself as the sensations became almost too much for me to handle as they ran into each other; I screamed, forcing myself to accept more and more, but then I broke. I screamed much more loudly. Dave braced up as he came again and I felt the warm sensation inside of me as he exploded for the second time that night. Dave collapsed on top of me. Neither of us could move; we were spent.

Dave reached up and hit the button to cut the shower before we drowned.

The bed was a waterbed!

I had never slept on one of those before.

"Hope you've not got any more blades secreted on your body, or we're gonna get very wet and maybe drown!" Dave quipped.

"Well you've checked every inch of me, so you're safe from drowning!" Mindy replied with a grin.

We were both still naked as we climbed into bed, I cuddled into Dave, and he wrapped his arms around me.

"You think your Dad is watching?" Dave asked.

"God, I hope not!" I replied feeling a little mortified at the thought.

We were both exhausted and it did not take long for us to fall asleep entwined in each other.

The next morning Sunday

The Bridal Suite

When I awoke, Dave was still wrapped around me.

I felt so happy, I really did not want to move, however I had an urge – an urge for Dave! I wanted more of what I had received the night before; it had been so perfect. Dave began to move and then I felt his hands moving across my still naked body. He touched first one erect nipple and then the other one and I stifled a moan. There was something poking me in the back and that was turning me on fast.

Dave began kissing my neck and it tickled. I started to giggle as he moved around and began to kiss down my backbone, which was one of my unpublicised weaknesses! He stopped and I moaned out loud in annoyance. Dave moved out from behind me and I fell back onto the bed. My husband gazed down at me and then ducked in for a passionate kiss that had me screaming inside.

After ten minutes of it, I could feel dampness spreading between my legs. I kicked back the duvet and felt around until I found something that was both hard and soft, while being very warm at the same time; he was mine! Dave groaned at my touch and began to suck my left nipple.

It was the previous night again, I did not want it to end and I willed myself to stay calm to keep going as long as possible before I was ripped apart by yet another orgasm. Dave's hands were wandering across my body, I could feel my breathing increasing, and I felt my love for Dave spreading throughout my body. Dave reached down and dived

inside me, gently running his finger across my clit, which made me jump and I squealed then giggled as Dave sucked harder and moved his finger around inside me, touching every point that he knew would have me moaning and groaning.

I was in heaven.

My wife was purring again.

What had changed to have her purring since we had married, I had no idea, not that I was complaining – no complaints, not a one! She was writhing around on the bed as I stimulated her to orgasm, which did not take long as Mindy was on a very short fuse after the previous night.

She screamed as the orgasm overtook her and I jumped back, allowing my wife to bring her knees up and work her way through the sensations that tore through her body. It was several minutes before Mindy could start to control her breathing again. She stretched out her thin frame and gazed up at me; her body covered in a fine sheen of sweat. She had never looked more beautiful.

"I need a shower..."

I followed Mindy into the bathroom and joined Mindy as she hit the button for the shower. I grabbed the shower gel and squirted it across Mindy's body, front and back. She took a sharp intake of breath; the gel was cold!

My legs were like jelly as I stood in the shower.

The previous night and the morning had taken their toll on me; I was exhausted and I could remember Dave's boast the previous evening: '*... Mindy won't be able to stand by the morning!*' Well, he had not been wrong – I was struggling.

Now Dave was hosing me down with shower gel – cold shower gel, and I knew what was coming – pun intended! I felt my husband's hands as he gently rubbed the shower gel into my skin. He was standing behind me as he began with the back of my neck. His touch was more than sensual; it made my skin tingle at his touch. Then the hands made their way around the front of my neck and under my jaw. As he did, he bent his head down and started to nuzzle my left ear – I moaned at his touch feeling the sensation shooting through my body.

His hands moved down my front across my collarbones, which tickled. He did not stop there as he massaged in the shower gel, taking in my breasts and making me squeal gently as he caressed my overly sensitive nipples. My breathing was hitching and I was melting into Dave's chest as he continued down my body, his hands passing over my abs and then across my stomach which was dancing at the thrill of where his hands were going next...

I closed my eyes as I felt the strong hands move over my crotch and then over my thighs.

Mindy's thighs were strong and voluptuous.

Nothing new there, but they I loved running my hands over them and then around to her tight buttocks. Mindy was like putty in my hand, rubbing against me as I rubbed against her. I knelt down in front of my wife and ran my hands down, first one leg and then the other, caressing the powerful thigh muscles and those of her calves.

I gazed upwards and examined the body of my new wife; I knew and loved every inch of her five-foot five-inch body. I stood up and hit the button for the drench shower sending a torrent of hot water over Mindy's lithe body, washing away the soap.

She opened her eyes and smiled up at me.

"My turn!" She growled seductively as she grabbed the shower gel.

***Chapter 202*: Back To Work**

*Three weeks later
Saturday night*

Southern Chicago

The man saw nothing in the darkness and thought he was alone.

However, his 'sixth sense' told him that something was wrong. Then he caught a movement in his peripheral vision and tried to duck but saw the thick tread of a boot, only inches from his face. The boot struck his left cheek sending him backwards.

The owner of the foot that was encased in the boot rolled as they hit the ground coming back to their feet and turning to face the man as he struggled back to his feet. The eyes glowed a dull green as the creature stared at him from a few feet away.

"You gonna come quietly, cunt?" The creature's electronically enhanced voice asked casually.

The man reached into his belt and pulled out his Smith & Wesson pistol, taking aim at the green-eyed apparition. He was not fast enough as the creature bolted towards him and kicked the pistol out of his hand, and then he found himself back on the ground only this time in the dull glow of a street light he saw the green eyes barely a foot from his own.

However, it was not the eyes, which had his full attention, it was the three, razor sharp claws that extended from the creature's left gauntlet. The murderous looking points were a mere inch from his face. It was then that he felt something touching his groin. All the fight went out of him at the mere thought of where the other set of claws might be...

"Please..."

"You deserve to die..."

The man began to sob in terror...

"Wildcat!"

The sharp comment came out of the darkness – another electronically enhanced voice. Something purple came close and the man saw the claws vanish from sight as they retracted into the green-eyed monster's gauntlet and the pressure on his groin vanished.

The man heard the roar of powerful motorcycle engines and then listened to the engine noise fade, only to be replaced by a siren and then then he was bathed in blue flashing lights as a marked Chicago Police Department unit pulled up with a screech of tyres.

The man gave up without a fight and allowed himself to be cuffed and pulled to his feet.

"Ah shit!" One uniformed Cop exclaimed.

"Huh?" His colleague asked.

"The idiot has gone and pissed himself!" The first Cop grinned.

"They – they were inhuman..." The man tried to say as if in explanation.

The Cops both grinned as they exchanged looks.

"That, my damp friend, would be Fusion!" The second Cop laughed.

Three miles to the east two motorcycles rode side-by-side.

One was a purple Ducati Superbike 1199 Panigale R sporting the licence plate, **'HIT N RUN'**. The other machine was

smaller and was a brown and silver, Ducati Hypermotard SP with the licence plate, **'WILD ONE'**.

"You're a nasty bitch," The purple, armour-clad, rider of the Panigale announced. "You know that, don't you?"

The other rider, clad in a similarly armoured, mottled-effect of three browns, turned her head towards her fellow vigilante.

"I learnt from the biggest, nastiest, bitch of them all!" She declared without hesitation.

"I have to agree with that statement...," A voice interrupted inside the helmets of both riders.

"What have you got for us, Battle Guy?" Hit Girl asked.

"Your last target was picked up, only the Cops were *not* happy!" Battle Guy explained. "Seems he managed to piss himself..."

"Fucking cool!" Wildcat announced. "I've still got it..."

"You mean the suit scared the piss outta him," Hit Girl interrupted.

"Okay, I will admit the combat suit is awesome and I love my new appendages," Wildcat allowed. "Yours is pretty cool, too bitch!"

"Your next target is ready for you, six point six miles – route is coming up on your HUDs now..."

"Awesome!" Hit Girl exclaimed as a route was projected onto the inside of the darkened visor of her motorcycle helmet.

Both riders twisted the throttles and accelerated taking the next turning on the right.

Safehouse F, Command Centre

Marty Eisenburg, otherwise known as Battle Guy leant back in his comfortable high-backed leather command chair and studied the wall ahead of him.

The wall was dominated by a horizontal array of three, ninety-inch flat panels. The right hand panel displayed a satellite image of Chicago with streets overlaid. There were four dots on the screen, in pairs; two were purple and brown, another pair were green and black. Both pairs were moving towards their own spinning red circle with a crosshair over it. Each spinning circle had an estimated time of arrival, or ETA, beside it.

Marty's command chair was raised up about a foot from the ground, giving good visibility of the screens. Beside him was a pair of computer keyboards and a pair of trackballs.

On the left hand panel was a breakdown of the two teams currently out on patrol. Detailed below each vigilante name were various statistics that included fuel remaining, current speed and course and status of equipment.

The central panel was currently split into four and showed four full colour, high definition camera views. The cameras were mounted on the motorcycles of the four vigilantes and the information was transmitted back to the Safehouse. Superimposed on each image was speed, course and location and the name of the vigilante.

"Abby?"

"Yeah, Marty," Abigail 'Abby' Hunt replied.

"Remind me to check Hit Girl's speed sensor – I think it's malfunctioning..."

"Why do you think that?" Abby replied, trying not to laugh.

"She seems to be obeying the speed limits..."

"Funny bastards – I heard that!" Hit Girl growled over the open comms.

"Maybe marriage agrees with her!" Abby suggested.

"How are the boys doing?" A voice asked.

Marty span his chair around to face Chloe Bennett, otherwise known as Shadow. Behind her stood Hailee Richards, otherwise known as Petra. Both wore their combat suits, but without their identity concealing masks. The two girls were awaiting the call to provide assistance if required.

"They are having a peaceful night, so far – they are about mid-way through their patrol – no activity for them so far tonight," Marty reported.

"The girls?" Hailee asked.

"Well... Wildcat made one guy piss himself with those new toys of hers!"

Chloe grimaced, well remembering her first meeting with those 'new toys'.

Southern Chicago

We were a few minutes from our next target, so I began thinking back over the past three weeks.

After all the excitement of the wedding, it had felt a little strange being back home and getting back to a normal life. Dave and I had decided not to head off on a Honeymoon; I did not want to leave the twins, not yet. Nonetheless, we both got ourselves stuck back into things. We had taken a few days off from Fusion, though, but we had a City to protect so we needed to get ourselves back into fighting shape.

...+...

Talking of shape, I had had to acquire Megan a new combat suit – she had grown somewhat around the chest and hips, quite a bit actually, over the previous month or so and now had a much fuller and more feminine figure as well as having grown about three inches upwards!

Curtis had seemed to enjoy the changes, as did the other boys both at school and at DJAK. Despite Megan having enjoyed a brief period of allowing boys to touch her, she had now gone shy about the more visible physical changes to her body. She also seemed to have gone back to being quite moody, and Curtis had seemed to suffer the brunt of this! Curtis, as usual, was actually quite sweet about it, despite his being a little embarrassed by it all.

There was one slight problem, though. I was aware that for a while, Curtis and Megan had been quite intimate with each other; indeed, how far they had gone down that road, I had no idea and I had not wanted to pry. Now though, when Megan and Curtis were sparring, Curtis was often too scared to put his hands or fists anywhere near her chest, which usually meant that Megan flattened him without hesitation!

"Curtis – they're breasts; they won't bite!" I told him.

"*They* won't; but *she* will, if I touch them!" Curtis replied and I laughed in response.

"For fuck's sake Curtis, they are a part of me – I don't mind if you touch them," Megan said, then added quickly with a deep blush. "Accidentally, of course!"

"It just doesn't feel right!" Curtis moaned.

Then Megan surprised me enormously by grabbing Curtis's right hand and placing it on her left breast!

"Does *that* feel right?" Megan teased.

Curtis yanked his hand back as if he had just been burnt and blushed bright red and I thought, '*you brazen little bitch!*'

After *that* little episode, Curtis ignored Megan's breasts when sparring, much to Megan's displeasure when Curtis accidentally hit them!

...+...

Wildcat's new suit was one of quite a few that I had ordered, but it had been the first to be delivered and it was also the first to come out of Lucius Fox's funhouse in Gotham and it was the first of a very new, cutting-edge, design.

"It feels awesome!" Megan had exclaimed as she first appeared from the armoury where she had changed.

The combat suit was in the same, three brown, mottled effect colour scheme as previously, but there the similarities stopped. The black undersuit weighed less than the one that she had previously worn and allowed the skin to breathe better during extreme activities; it was also stab and bullet resistant to Type IIA standards. The modular contoured armour, in the same mottled brown, clipped onto the undersuit and joined to the other sections of armour to form a semi-rigid Type IIIA armour that covered the important parts of the body. The armour was ultra-flexible which suited Wildcat's fighting style perfectly.

To test this, she performed some complex somersaults and movements that proved her agility in the new armour. The updated full-face mask was fitted with the same anti-lift feature as my own and was slimmer while still being fitted with the voice changing technology as before and, of course, the ears. One other small difference were the eyes – they glowed! For intimidation purposes, the eyes of the mask glowed a dull green and the eyes were shaped like those of a cat. I had to admit that they were quite ominous in the dark.

Fox had designed a new utility belt, which was both slimmer, lighter. The belt was fitted with a more compact, integrated encrypted communications system. Wildcat's SIG Sauer P250 fitted securely into a holster that was mounted on her right thigh, with three spare magazines mounted on her belt. Fox had thoughtfully provided a removable mounting on her back armour, for Wildcat's Wakizashi sword.

Next, were the gauntlets, and her claws; it seemed that Fox was a fan of the Wolverine...

The claws had been embedded into the back of her new, slimmer, gauntlets and they were extended and locked in place at the press of a button, mechanically – Fox said he was working on an electromagnetic version. Once secured in place the three claws on each gauntlet were a natural extension of Wildcat's hands.

"So, you like it?" I asked after watching the young girl test out her suit for a few minutes.

Wildcat pulled off her mask and she was grinning fit to burst.

For a bit of fun, we had agreed not to let on about the claws to anybody else.

..._...

A few days later, it had been Shadow's turn to model *her* new combat suit.

There was the same undersuit as Wildcat wore, in black, and on top of this were the dark blue and slate grey contoured armour panels attached to form the semi-rigid Type IIIA armour. Her new gauntlets were just as slim as before, but lighter, while retaining the extra layer of slate grey armour on the back that would allow Shadow to deflect blows from swords, or other melee weapons. The gauntlets extended up her lower arms to the elbows, with extended sections to protect the elbow joints. These connected with armour that extended down from each shoulder, protecting the shoulder joints with Type IIIA armour and extending down over the upper arms. The gauntlets were Navy blue, but the shoulder and upper arm armour sections were slate grey. Additional armour extended up from her chest panels to protect the collarbones and neck.

The new armour was able to withstand more punishment in combat, but overall the combat suit was much lighter. Again, like Wildcat, she wore the new utility belt with the enhanced, integrated communications.

Shadow's mask now included integrated voice changing technology, as well as the anti-lift feature, which would become standard for all members of Fusion.

...+...

The two girls had faced off against each other across the mat at the Safehouse.

Shadow moved in first, striking Wildcat in the chest and nodded with approval as she tried to strike again, but Wildcat seized her fist with her right gauntlet and twisted it, before Shadow then got the shock of her young life. Wildcat raised her left gauntlet and brought it up towards Shadow's face, and then suddenly Shadow screamed and froze as three, fatally sharp, titanium blades suddenly appeared just inches from her face.

Before Shadow knew what was happening she was on her back with the triumphant Wildcat, kneeling on her chest, one set of claws at her neck and the other hovering over her heart. There was applause from the balcony above.

"Fucking hell!" Shadow yelled out angrily recovering from her shock. "Get the fuck off me, Wildcat; you're heavy!"

I saw the claws retract in an instant and Wildcat stepped back, away from Shadow so that the fallen vigilante could regain her feet. Both girls pulled off their facemasks and Megan was grinning. Needless to say; Chloe was annoyed.

"What the *fuck* were those?" She growled angrily.

"These little things?" Megan asked raising her left gauntlet and triggering her claws, which shot out and locked into place.

"Yeah, *those!*" Chloe replied with combined admiration, annoyance and curiosity as she moved in closer to examine the claws. "Retract them..."

Megan did as requested and the claws vanished.

"Neat!" Chloe said approvingly, smiling at Megan.

She had then turned to me, understanding the little stunt.

"Funny, Mindy – very funny!"

Megan and I just started laughing and Chloe just scowled.

...+...

That had all been the weekend after wedding.

A couple of days later, though, was one of the most eagerly anticipated days of my life!

I was legally an adult...

It had been my eighteenth birthday and I had felt like a kid on Christmas morning. Now, we did not have sex eighteen times, although Dave and I had tried our best! It felt different being an adult, officially at least – I had been an 'adult' according to my fake id for the past three years!

As for my birthday presents – more about them later...

Northern Chicago

The two motorcycles pulled over into the darkness of a badly lit alleyway.

The largest machine was a monster Ducati Diavel Carbon in black, green and yellow, with the licence plate: '**KICK**'. The other machine was not a Ducati, but was a Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R in tan, with the licence plate: '**JACKAL**'.

The formidable green and yellow, armoured form of Kick-Ass rose from the Diavel. He was shortly joined by Jackal and they both headed down the street waving at the pleasant greetings that they both received from ordinary Chicagoans.

The night had been peaceful for the two veteran vigilantes, who were enjoying the peaceful stroll. They were on a regular patrol route, which probably explained why there was no trouble; both vigilantes commanded instant respect. As always, they stopped to chat and exchange pleasantries with the Russian Mafia Kryshas who stood guard at the edge of Mafia territory.

The Fusion/Russian Mafia truce was still in effect. We both kept out of each other's territory and we maintained friendly relations between former enemies. You could see it as a Cold War in Chicago, but it worked and had kept the peace for several months.

Suddenly the night began to warm up as the two vigilantes headed north.

"You hear that, Jackal, my boy?"

"I did – breaking glass!"

I ran towards the sound with Jackal close behind. As we approached the local Mom and Pop store, we heard the noise again. It was Arnold and Marie's store; they often gave us a coffee to keep us both going at night; they loved

seeing Hit Girl and Shadow.

"I'm going around back..." Jackal announced darting down a dark alley.

A dozen yards down the street I noticed three Range Rover SUVs parked up – something was happening, something that required backup.

I brought up my left gauntlet and pressed a button on the five-inch touch screen visible there.

Safehouse F

The green dot on the flat panel changed to a spinning green circle and an alarm sounded.

"Kick-Ass just called for backup!" Marty called out. "Shadow and Petra, roll out!"

Shadow and Petra pulled on their masks before they ran for their transport. Petra dived onto her graphite black, Honda Fireblade ABS CBR1000RR motorcycle, hitting the starter and adjusting her equipment.

Beside her Shadow mounted her Ducati Superbike 899 Panigale in navy blue and black with the licence plate: '**SHADOW**'. Shadow smirked as Petra accelerated out of the opening vehicular-access door ahead of her, her licence plate read: '**BITE ME**', which Shadow always thought was amusing. Shadow followed a few yards behind, racing up the tight spiral of the concrete ramp.

Both motorcycles burst out of a darkened alleyway before accelerating towards Kick-Ass and Jackal. They followed the navigation directions, which were projected onto the inside of their darkened visors.

North Chicago

The moment I entered the store, all hell broke loose.

Firstly, a bottle of something smashed into my back armour, followed by something more solid. I studied the scene before me and saw four armed men smashing up the store while the storeowners, Arnold and Marie were held at gunpoint by another man. My anger rose past boiling point and headed for critical mass.

"Stand down!" I yelled out and all five men turned in my direction.

There seemed to be a consensus between the five men and they all replied in the same manner. I ignored the bullets as they collided with my heavy chest armour. They wanted to play, well I was in a mood to play; nobody fucked with our friends...

I reached the first man and seized hold of a large jar of pickles, smashing it into the side of the man's head. Blood exploded into the air and the man dropped to the ground. The next man struggled to reload his pistol as I advanced on him, smiling as I grabbed a tin of 'Heinz Spotted Dick' before smashing it into the man's face.

Two down!

That was when Jackal made his appearance as one man ran towards the back entrance and promptly returned to the shop unconscious as Jackal shrugged off bullets and made for the fourth man. The fifth man was mine; I rubbed my gauntlets together in eager anticipation and my target seemed to blanch as I advanced towards him.

Jackal's man hit the counter at the front of the store and he slid down to the floor, not moving before he went to cover the main door. The last man was still pointing his pistol at Arnold and Marie.

"Do I need to say anything?" I growled menacingly.

The man was obviously trying to figure a way out of his predicament and was constantly looking towards the main door of the store. The man had reinforcements who might arrive at any moment. I was certain that the Range Rovers up the street contained those reinforcements.

"Kick-Ass, this is Shadow – one minute..."

"Three black Range Rovers – watch out!" I warned.

"I see 'em!" Petra reported.

Shadow and I pulled over in the darkness of a broken streetlight.

The black Range Rovers were visible a couple dozen yards ahead. I removed my helmet and pulled out a G-36C from the back of my motorcycle. Shadow was doing the same with her P90.

"What do you want to bet that those are as armoured up as Beast?" Shadow asked.

"No bet – I can see the extra weight from here!" I replied.

"Now what would armoured SUVs be doing here?" Shadow asked reasonably.

"Notice a lack of tags?" I commented.

"I did – no way to know why they are – thoughtful of them..."

"Plan?" I asked.

"We wait..."

It took only a few minutes as a door opened and two men climbed out of the centre of the three vehicles. Each man was armed with a SCAR-L Mk 16 PDW, a nasty weapon that fired 5.56-millimetre rounds.

The good news was that our armour would protect us, but the rounds would hurt nonetheless!

***Chapter 203*: All The Superintendents Men**

Northern Chicago

The two men looked around, checking for any problems.

They seemed oblivious to our presence; we were hidden in the shadows. We just needed to find out who or what they were. I had an idea...

"Jackal, Shadow – could you step out onto the sidewalk for a moment...?" I asked, knowing that I would get hell for it later on.

I watched as the unsuspecting Jackal appeared out of the store. The two men responded after a brief moment spent checking to see who had appeared out of the store. They sent a dozen rounds towards Jackal.

Jackal dived back into the store.

"Three comments. One; the natives are restless. Two; those bullets hurt. Three; Shadow you are dead meat!" Jackal announced.

I grinned inside my mask and looked over at Petra who was shaking her head. I watched as she pulled out a flash-bang grenade and threw it towards the two men where it exploded less than a foot away. Both fell to the ground, hands around their heads in agony. We both jumped up and ran forward.

The rear door of the centre Range Rover was still open so I threw in another flash-bang, incapacitating the driver and anybody else in the vehicle. The front vehicle started its engine and began to move, the rear Range Rover was empty. I ran forward and fired my P90 point-blank into the passenger side window, which crazed and started to give way under the onslaught of almost fifty rounds, but the vehicle accelerated away and escaped around a corner.

I instantly swapped out the magazine and advanced on the two men who were starting to regain consciousness. I seized their hands and secured them with plastic ties. Neither had any form of identification on them and neither did the driver. We kept watch in case anybody else turned up to cause trouble and to guard the evidence until Voight arrived.

..._...

Over the comms, I heard Kick-Ass updating Battle Guy.

The store was secure; the owners were safe and uninjured. It looked to have been a protection racket job gone wrong. Only these men were not Russian Mafia, or Sicilian Mafia; it was the wrong part of the City for either.

It all became clear when Voight arrived with his team. I nodded at Detective Erin Lindsay; I liked her. Olinsky looked pissed as he recognised one of the men.

"That bastard works for the Superintendent!" He growled.

"What?" I exclaimed.

"That, young Shadow, is one of the Superintendent's picked men; they are dirty and in this case, they are shaking down these people – that bastard should fucking hang!" Voight confirmed.

St Louis

It was time to return to Chicago.

I needed Dave's help; we could not find out what had happened to us alone – St Louis was getting too dangerous and our skills were now coming to the fore and those skills scared the hell out of both of us. I was also scared for Stephanie and I did not see that I would be able to give her the care that a girl her age needed.

There was still the problem that I was unsure who Dave was and where to find him, but my subconscious told me to go to Chicago, which would be dangerous as hell. My memories, the ones I needed, were still slow to return.

I had no choice – Chicago was it...

Chicago
Safehouse F

"You causing shit again?"

"As always, my love..."

I kissed my husband.

"Get a room; jeez!" Megan moaned as she headed for the armoury.

"She needs a release..." Jackal announced.

"Yeah – she needs Curtis!" Chloe grinned.

"Dirty fuckers!" Megan growled.

I studied my husband.

It was the first new combat suit that Kick-Ass had had in a while.

I had put extra work into it, with Fox. The suit was built up from a brand new form of composite armour, which could take heavy punishment and still be lightweight. It was also modular to allow it to be customised for different missions as operations dictated.

The basic combat suit was a two-piece: pants and a top. The colouring was a very dark grey that was almost, but not quite, black. The suit went from the top of Dave's neck, down to his ankles and wrists. The lower ten-inches of suit, beneath his knees were of a thinner material to allow for his boots, which were armoured and which locked together around his calves. They looked heavy but were remarkably light. The boots were the same dark grey, but with subdued green and yellow highlights running vertically upwards from the ankle on the outside of each boot.

The same thinner material existed on his lower arms, where conformal gauntlets pulled on like normal gloves, but were then secured around his lower arms with their embedded armour. Both gauntlets had integrated full HD, five-inch screens mounted beneath transparent armour on the back of each wrist. The screens were touch sensitive, but only to Kick-Ass' gauntlets and they were linked back to the Control Centre where images and data could be uploaded as required. The screens were impossible to see in their normal mode, unless Kick-Ass was wearing his face-mask/helmet.

The combat suit provided integrated armour for his knees, thighs, groin and chest, on the front. The rear of the suit provided heavier armour for the upper back, spine and pelvic areas. There was also protection for the elbows, shoulders and collarbones. The back armour had integrated mountings for Kick-Ass' batons and swords. On the thigh-plates were mount points for holsters and any other required equipment. The new communications equipment was integrated with the pelvic armour that ran around his waist and joined up with the groin armour. Additional equipment and ammunition pouches could be attached as required.

The overall look was dark grey, but the armour sections all had subdued green and yellow flashes to show his identity. There was one final piece to add to the basic combat suit, the face-mask/helmet.

It was more helmet than facemask.

It was full-face, but retained a removable lower section around the mouth. The lenses of the helmet were dark and they had a built in HUD that was connected to the wrist screens. The helmet was pulled on over the head and then secured around the neck. The anti-lift technology was included and would be standard for all new Fusion combat suits. On the sides of the helmet, above the ear-grills, were mounted two powerful multi-function LED lamps that could light up the area in front of Kick-Ass. The lamps were very slim-line and almost invisible.

If required, additional armour could be fitted to cover the chest and stomach, wrapping around the sides and enhancing the back armour. Extra armour sections could be clipped around the thighs, lower legs and upper arms as required. There were also additional mountings available to allow Kick-Ass to carry extra ammunition or other equipment should the need arise.

I had watched as Kick-Ass had tried out some moves in the new suit. His movements had not been restricted in any way.

"Very light – no heavier than what I wore before!" He had commented.

Then it was my turn!

The new combat suit used the same design as Wildcat's, although mine was predominantly dark grey with subdued purple flashes and highlights. I had selected two different masks; one was my standard design that came down to the bridge of my nose while the other one was full-face. I also had additional armour that could be attached to the suit if we were going to be doing any heavier than normal fighting.

I was physically bigger and stronger than Wildcat, so I would be able to handle the additional weight. Not that it weighed all that much, to be honest. I could carry all the usual equipment and weapons, in all the usual places, however I had a new toy – two actually!

In the knuckles of each gauntlet were a pair of electrodes. If desired, I could ram my fist into an assailant and trigger off a Taser blast. Each gauntlet was good for six stuns each before I would need to switch out the power cells. I would carry two spare power cells on my belt.

I retained the wig on my open mask, but not on the full-face one. The full-face mask was for serious combat where the mask and indeed the cape, would not be desired.

Did I also tell you about the trouble at home?

Grief has finally caught up to the twins. Danny? He was coping in his own way and he allowed Dave and me to talk to him about his feelings. As for Anne-Marie – she spent one Monday afternoon trashing her bedroom... She would ignore anything we said and was nasty to almost everybody; even the school was complaining about her behaviour.

I had no idea what to do. I knew what she was going through; however, I had been older, much older. She would not talk to Dave or me. I knew that she had to talk to somebody. After a week of major problems, I had one more card to play: Megan.

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Megan had come home with us after school while Danny had gone to stay with Marcus and Paige for the night. Marcus had commented on it being an unfair exchange as we had ended up with Megan! However, Megan was a friend to the twins and Anne-Marie might open up to her, not to mention that Megan had her own way of manipulating people.

"Where is my brother?" Anne-Marie demanded.

"With Marcus and Paige," I replied.

"Why?"

"We need to talk, young lady –"

"No we don't and you are *not* my mother so I don't have to listen to you!" Anne-Marie retorted.

"No, I am not your mother, but..."

"So get off my damn back, Mindy!"

With that, the girl stormed off upstairs. I made to follow but Megan seized my wrist. Megan had fire in her eyes.

"Leave her to me," she growled.

I ran up the stairs and saw Anne-Marie vanishing into her bedroom.

I followed her, catching the door as it was slammed in my face.

"That was not nice!" I growled.

"What do *you* want?"

"I want to talk with you; we're friends, are we not?" I asked Anne-Marie.

"Yes, we are, but I need space to deal with this, err, stuff..." She replied slightly less malevolently.

"You need to talk, Anne-Marie, and we are all here to help you."

"I don't need any of you, least of all *them!*"

"You mean, Dave and Mindy."

"Yes, them – they, they – they are not our parents..."

"They are the closest thing you have to parents..."

"No – they can never replace my parents; they don't love us, they..."

"Don't you *dare*, say anything against Dave and Mindy. For your information, they *do* love you both and would do anything for you. Although right now I can't see *any* reason for anybody to love *you!* Okay, your Dad is dead; so is mine, so is Mindy's, so is Dave's, so is Josh's – get over it, talk about it – we are all here to help you, despite you causing so much crap!"

"I..."

"You ever upset Dave and Mindy, I will personally sort you out and I don't care how old you are! I owe Dave and Mindy everything – I will not see some stuck up seven-year-old fuck with my friends... Dave and Mindy have gone out of their way to give you and Danny a damn nice home. They even had you at their wedding – right there out front where everybody could see you. They were both real proud of you for what you both did for them. So why fuck them off?"

"I'm sorry..."

"It's not me that you need to apologise to – I couldn't give a fuck about what you think of me – even if it does hurt me inside."

"I miss Daddy; I miss him so much..."

Anne-Marie crumpled onto the bed and started sobbing. I had been the same as her when my Dad had died. I had made things so hard for my Mom, when she just needed me to be there for her, just as she was always there for me. I missed my Dad and always would; I still cried at night when I thought about him. Now, though, I had Marcus and I could move on with my life.

I hoped that Anne-Marie and Danny would be able to do the same.

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I had had no idea what had gone on upstairs, but I had heard raised voices, although not what had been said. Nevertheless, an hour later a very apologetic Anne-Marie had appeared downstairs. Megan seemed to vanish, along with Sophia.

Anne-Marie, Dave and I had a long talk for almost two hours. Many tears were spilled, but finally we were back as a family. Anne-Marie had been grounded for a week for destroying her bedroom and she had had to help Dave repaint one of the walls as part of her punishment. Seeing her brother playing in the pool while she was stuck doing her homework or other chores sucked, and her behaviour changed for the good in short order.

I decided that we should have a change of scene and as the weather was still reasonable, we went to spend a day offshore.

Burnham Harbor Marina

"You own a boat!"

Anne-Marie and Danny were astounded at the sight of my pride and joy.

"What's a 'salty swallow'?" Danny asked innocently, looking at Dave.

Dave looked at me.

"Yes, Mindy – what does it mean?" Dave prompted grinning.

I felt myself going very red and decided that Marcus had been right about my choice of name!

"I forget – come back when you're both fifteen!" I said lamely.

"It's a bird that likes to fly out over the sea," Dave said with a big grin on his face.

"This place is awesome!" Danny exclaimed as he entered the main salon his eyes wide.

"It's enormous – Mindy, it's amazing."

Anne-Marie had changed completely and she was being civil and nice to everybody. I could see the guilt in her eyes – and the sorrow.

"Come on, girl, we need to get the lines while Dave and Danny start the engines."

The Salty Swallow

Two hours later, we were ten miles offshore.

Anne-Marie had lost both her dignity and her breakfast! Danny was fine with the motion and was having fun at his sister's expense.

"I'm okay – I think..." The pale looking girl said as she came back from the bathroom.

"Get up on deck and focus on the horizon; you'll be fine," Dave advised. "You'll get your sea-legs soon."

The afternoon was fun and we were all able to enjoy ourselves playing games. Anne-Marie was ravenous by the evening and was able to eat a large meal and keep it down, too. By the time we returned to the Marina, it was dark, so we decided to spend the night aboard.

"You decided to stop being so nasty?"

"Yes, Danny – I made a mistake okay."

"I'm glad you're back, though. They both care about us, you know that."

"I do, but I forgot for a moment. Losing Dad was bad and it took a while to sink in – but yes, I know we're both safe and we always will be as long as we are with Dave and Mindy."

"Finally something useful comes out of your mouth," Danny laughed. "Other than your breakfast!"

His sister glared at him.

"Come on you two – sleep!" Dave's voice called from outside the door.

"Night, Dave. Night, Mindy."

Back to the present ***Sunday morning***

Glenview

"That fucker is going down, Marcus. When I see evil I have to stop it..."

"I know, Mindy – I know!" Marcus replied.

"He's a senior Cop; we need to tread carefully – *very* carefully!" Jack warned.

"He needs to die – I won't stand for him in Chicago..." Hailee added vehemently.

"You can't kill him..." Vicky responded. "It would set a precedent and turn everybody against you."

"I know, dammit!" Mindy growled.

"Dave, can you keep these two under control?" Marcus asked, indicating Mindy and Hailee.

"I'll try!" I acceded.

"Sorry, I spoke out of turn," Hailee apologised. "We'll do this by the book."

"Yeah, I really don't want to have to move again!" Mindy added.

***Chapter 204*: Ambush At The Rail Yard**

Sunday evening

*South Cottage Grove
Apartment 202*

"I keep telling you, I am really sorry!"

"Don't believe a word of it!"

"Joshua!"

"Chloe – I hurt in more places than I care to mention – all thanks to your little prank..."

"I knew your armour would protect you... Probably..."

"You try my patience, girl – you really do, but unfortunately I love you and these..."

Josh ran his hands over my bare chest – I knew he would not be able to resist my naked body!

*Two days later
Tuesday night*

Eastern Chicago

It was a warzone.

Bullets were flying everywhere. Shadow and Hit Girl were pinned down behind a container in the capacious rail yard off West Ogden Avenue. Sixteen members of Fusion were now involved, fourteen of whom were now under fire at the rail yard, although at the beginning it had only been three. We had been fighting for over an hour – two hundred yards away the CPD were involved in their own firefight.

We were fighting the Sicilians while the CPD were fighting the Russians – somewhere in the midst of everything were the Superintendents Cunts orchestrating the whole, damn thing. As far as I could tell, we had been setup to be caught in between the Sicilians and the Russians, only the CPD had unwittingly intercepted the Russians.

It had been Jackal, Kick-Ass and Battle Guy who had been caught up in the opening fight – yes, Battle Guy! Battle Guy had been road testing one of our new vehicles – an armoured, dark grey GMC Yukon Denali. Kick-Ass and Jackal were providing escort on their motorcycles. Luckily, Battle Guy had been fully kitted out and so had the Yukon. That particular Yukon, one of two identical vehicles, which we had recently received, was called 'Sentinel', the other was 'Hound'.

It had been an ambush, which had forced the three of them into the rail yard. Jackal received several heavy rounds into his side and he was hurt, unable to ride. Thankfully, the rail yard was a little over four miles away from Safehouse D and F. The alert had gone out and everybody at the Safehouse, which was most of Fusion, had scrambled.

Some yards away, I could see Kick-Ass and Mist returning fire from behind Sentinel – the new vehicle was a mess, its armour having taken a pasting. The wounded Jackal was inside Sentinel with Battle Guy who was looking after him until Medic arrived. She was on her way in Titan, along with Splinter, Lynx and Eisenhower. Hal was in the Safehouse co-ordinating everything with the help of Hawk and Max. It was also the first outing for Lynx as an operator and she was nervous.

Hawk had been in the Safehouse with Matty and Hawk had been training, getting herself ready to go back out. I was alongside Trojan and Wildcat as we kept up a steady stream of fire towards the well-armed Sicilians. The final piece was Leon (the code name for Mathilda); she was currently on the top of one of the tall container loading cranes with her sniper rifle. She would take shots every minute or two when somebody came into her sights. She also provided and overhead view for us.

Down the road, with the CPD, Voight's team, along with Marcus's team and Mom were engaging the Russians. There were wounded on both sides and the fight was continuing in the semi-darkness. The rail yard was floodlit, but not all

that well and there were plenty of shadows.

We needed to end the fight soon, before we ran out of ammunition.

Titan

We had to fight our way through the Russians to get to the rail yard and then through the Sicilians to get to the wounded Jackal.

I was driving with Lynx beside me; she looked nervous, but she also looked formidable in her full body armour with an MP7A2 on her right hip. Behind us sat Splinter, with Eisenhower beside him.

I floored the accelerator as I approached the CPD roadblock and leant on the air horns, which had the Police officers scurrying to clear a gap for Titan. We blazed through with inches to spare! I drove directly at the Russians who ran at the sight of the enormous vehicle, although I may have '*accidentally*' clipped one or three shooters on the way through...

Behind a shipping container

On a whim, I had selected my full-face mask.

I was glad I had as the bullets were kicking up quite a bit of shrapnel, which peppered my head. Shadow had received several strikes to her armour, as had I. Our new armour was proving very good, but we were still pinned. I was down to my last pair of G36 magazines while Shadow had one more magazine left for her P90.

I could see Petra with the dynamic duo as they were trying to move towards us. Every now and then, there was a thud, as a heavy bullet from Leon's sniper rifle hit the ground, dissuading the Sicilian's advances.

Petra picked her moment and then ran forwards while Trojan and Wildcat provided covering fire with their P90s. Petra was part of the way to us when I saw a Sicilian pop-up and I saw him aiming a 40-millimetre grenade launcher. Petra was facing away from him as she ran towards us.

"Petra – grenade launcher – get down!" I yelled over the comms.

Either she did not hear me, or she ignored my warning. Either way, the grenade struck the ground and exploded just feet from Petra and her body flew through the air landing twenty feet or so away from where we were pinned.

"Petra is down – repeat – Petra is down!" I yelled in horror.

To add to my horror, I saw Wildcat and Trojan leap up and run towards Petra.

"Get back!" I yelled. "Wildcat, Trojan get the fuck back!"

"Like hell we will!" Wildcat yelled back.

"Grenade!" Trojan called, diving to the ground.

Wildcat was a little slow and the girl was just diving down as the grenade landed. The explosive force caught Wildcat and flipped her over several times, but after she hit the ground she just shook her head a few times and crawled over to Petra with Trojan beside her.

The rail yard

Petra was lying on her side.

With her full-face mask, it was not easy to see if she was breathing. I yanked off a gauntlet, shoved my hand under the mask to her neck, and was able to feel a pulse; it was strong and steady. Petra was just unconscious. After replacing my gauntlet, I ran them both over her combat suit and found several gouges, but I was unable to tell if any shrapnel had penetrated the armour.

"Petra's alive!" I called and then looked over to Wildcat.

"I'm okay, Trojan..." Wildcat said, breathing heavily.

I would have to trust her. I provided covering fire as Wildcat held onto Petra. Then I heard the blast of an air horn and the roar of a large turbo-diesel engine as the bright lights of Titan roared across the rails towards us. Twenty seconds later, it skidded to a halt, blocking us from the Sicilians.

The rear door flew open. Lynx and Splinter dived out to help drag the unconscious Petra into Titan. Once we were all in, the rear door was clammed shut and Medic drove over towards Shadow and Hit Girl. Wildcat and I continued firing out of the ports on the side and rear of Titan.

Titan stopped and we both jumped up just as a heavy bullet hit Shadow on her heavy chest armour.

The impact sent her flying backwards into the container. She hit the steel hard and fell to the ground; I seized her and dragged her towards Titan where several pairs of hands hauled her inside and I followed, heaving the door shut behind me.

The injured Fusion members were piling up fast!

Medic headed over towards Sentinel and the others. I jumped out with Splinter, Wildcat and Trojan on the way and we ran over towards the hidden Iron Hide. There I restocked my ammunition and we both headed towards a flanking position on the Sicilian's right.

Medic dived out of Titan, with Lynx covering her, sending out short bursts from her MP7.

Battle Guy dived inside and took over the driving. I helped the wounded Jackal inside and started kitting myself out for action. With help from Lynx, I clipped on additional armour to the front, rear and thighs of my suit. The extra armour added to the weight I was already lugging, but it would be needed if we were to finish that night alive.

I left Titan, with Mist, Lynx and Eisenhower. In my hands, I had my H&K 121, a 200-round belt loaded and ready. We ran towards the Sicilian's left flank.

"Hit Girl, Kick-Ass – moving to the opposite flank!" I called.

We had no idea how many of the Sicilians were left.

We were going in blind.

Altogether a crap tactical situation.

"Hit Girl; you have three targets behind the next container..." Leon called.

I nodded at Wildcat who pushed her P90 behind her, brought up her gauntlets – and she deployed both sets of claws from her knuckles. Wildcat moved around the container with Splinter following as backup. I kept my G36C raised and kept an eye open for trouble.

Wildcat was three feet in front of me as we came around the final corner of the container.

I moved wide to keep her insight, my Ninja-To in hand. There was a shout: "Dietro di te!"

One of the Sicilians span around as Wildcat somersaulted into the air and landed on a set of shoulders, burying the claws of her left gauntlet into the man's throat. Blood shot out as the claws were withdrawn and Wildcat jumped, kicking away an assault rifle that was being pointed at her. She landed on another set of shoulders, repeating the movement with her claws.

"Two more heading towards you, Splinter!" Leon reported.

I ran forward and drove my Tanto into the third man, just as another two men ran out of the darkness. They fired their assault rifles, catching me in the chest, but I span around, two knives embedding themselves in one man's throat. Wildcat plunged her claws into the other man's chest after she had flipped through the air avoiding the bullets from the assault rifle.

Wildcat landed heavily and rolled on the ground. Something was not right about her movements, but she regained her feet and retracted her claws, pulling around her P90.

"All clear!" Leon called.

Farther over to the east, we heard the loud report of a large calibre machine gun on automatic.

I pushed forwards the H&K 121 to my shoulder dropping Sicilians left and right.

Bullets were striking my armour, but thanks to the heavier composite panels, I was unhurt. Behind me came Lynx and Mist, both with their MP7s at the shoulder and firing short bursts, dropping more men.

As a distraction, Lynx would yell, "Schwanz!"

Eisenhower would dart in amongst the Sicilians and cause them to drop their weapons to defend themselves. Once a man was down, wrestling with the animal that was gripping his manhood, Mist would put a bullet in the man's head then call: "Tot!" and Eisenhower would move onto the next unlucky victim.

Periodically a man would fall with a large hole in his chest or head as Leon built up her body count.

Fifteen minutes later

The main road

I fired several more rounds from my Colt M4A1 Carbine before I ducked down beside the SUV.

"Still hot up there?" Voight asked as he changed the magazine in his own M4A1.

"Fuck, yeah!"

The Russians were playing hardball and several Officers were down. It was not all one-sided though, several Russians had been dropped too. I knew that Dave and Mindy were fighting the Sicilians a few hundred yards away, but apart from lots of weapons fire, I had heard nothing and I prayed that nobody was hurt.

I had seen Titan blaze through CPD lines, heading for the action. I hoped it was bringing in reinforcements.

Then over the sound of gunfire, I heard engines and beyond the Russians, I saw three large vehicles appearing. In front was Titan, followed by Iron Hide and another armoured SUV that I did not know that name of yet. They roared out of the rail yard and stopped a few yards behind the Russians. From the three vehicles, Fusion deployed.

I saw Hit Girl jump out of Iron Hide with Wildcat beside her. Kick-Ass was in the flatbed of Iron Hide and he was sending out bursts of fire from his machine gun. Then I was shocked to the core as I recognised Lynx firing a weapon, with Trojan and Mist alongside her.

What the hell, was she doing out there; the woman was almost three months pregnant! I saw my fiancée killing Russians with the rest of Fusion. The killing did not last long as the Russians soon figured out that they had been outflanked and they soon have up, throwing down their weapons.

I pushed through the mass of Cops, trying to reach Lynx, but Fusion rapidly mounted up and seemed to vanish amongst the chaos.

Safehouse F

I knew that I was in trouble, big trouble.

I had seen Marcus and it was obvious that he had seen me...

"What were you doing out there, Mom?" A very angry Megan yelled as she pulled off her mask.

"Doing what I needed to do, Megan – so keep a civil tongue in your head!" I responded.

"She has a point, Paige; you are pregnant and you were not supposed to leave Titan!" Medic exclaimed as she helped Jackal out of Iron Hide. "But arguments can wait; we need to get Hailee down to the Medical Centre."

As soon as I was back in the Safehouse, I pulled off my mask, dropping it with my weapons at the stop of the steel steps down to the lower level.

I ran down and went straight into the Medical Centre.

Hailee was lying on the table there and she was still unconscious. Her mask was off. Paige and Erika were helping Cathy to remove her armour. Sitting on a bed, in the corner was Josh with Kim winding a bandage tightly around his abdomen. Chloe was on a chair holding an ice pack to the side of her head. I could see no sign of Megan and knew that she had been hurt, too.

Fuck; what a fuck up the night had been!

I now had to call Vicki and let her know that her daughter was badly hurt. Marcus was also going to freak once he found out Paige had gone into action.

I was seething with anger.

The elevator down to the Safehouse seemed to take forever.

"Take it easy, Marcus – you don't know the circumstances..." Vicki said.

After an interminable amount of time, we exited the elevator and walked down the corridor, through another door and then through the kill zone into the Safehouse.

The place was busy, people moving purposefully around, removing combat suits, reloading and cleaning weapons. I saw Megan with Curtis and Tommy. Abby was with Marty in the Command Centre, but there was no sign of Paige or the other women.

Then I saw Mindy coming up from the lower level; she still wore her combat suit. Dave came out of the armoury having removed his own armour. Mindy saw us and headed over. Her expression told me that something was wrong.

"Don't say anything Marcus, not yet," Mindy said before turning to Vicky. "Hailee is downstairs, a grenade went off close to her – she's in a bad way..."

For a moment, I did not register what Mindy was saying, then it hit me, my daughter was hurt and she needed me.

The three of us ran down the steps to the lower level. When I entered the Medical Centre, I saw my daughter; she was out of her combat suit and just wearing shorts and her sports bra. I could see angry welts on her skin and several bloody injuries. Cathy was working with some surgical instruments, removing shrapnel from the wounds.

Cathy looked around and saw me.

"She'll be fine, Vicki; Hailee is young and she *will* heal."

I squeezed my daughter's hand and left the room with Marcus and Paige.

"What were you thinking?"

Marcus was mad.

"I got carried away in the moment and had to help; they were short-handed..."

"It's my fault, Marcus – I put her in danger – don't blame Paige..." Mindy cut in, coming out of the Medical Centre.

Marcus was torn between what he should do.

"God damn vigilantes!" Marcus growled and hugged his fiancée and daughter.

There was yelling coming from

The four of us ran up to the main level.

"You were hurt; I know it – get downstairs and let yourself get checked out!"

Curtis was yelling at Megan who was ignoring him.

"You were hurt! I saw you flipped through the air..." Curtis persisted.

"I'm fine..."

Tommy then poked Megan hard in the side and she screamed in pain.

"Point made!" Tommy added without any sympathy.

"I thought you had stopped hiding injuries, Megan?" I asked.

"I had – it's just a bruise..."

"Show me!" Paige ordered.

Megan hesitated, but pulled off the top of her combat suit. She was in pain just doing that, I noticed. She then lifted the bottom of her sweat-soaked t-shirt.

"Holy shit!" Marcus exclaimed.

Megan's stomach and side were badly bruised.

"Anywhere else?" I demanded.

"Mindy, I haven't looked yet..."

"Why did you disobey me, again? You and I are going to talk later, but for now – upstairs so I can check you over – move!" I was angry.

The following day

Monday

Early morning

Safehouse F

Things had settled down some.

Most had gone home. Once she had removed her combat suit, I had found that Megan was covered in bruises; her new suit had protected her from anything worse. I would talk to her later about her disobedience. Hailee was out of danger, but still unconscious. Josh and Chloe were at their apartment. Josh had bruised two ribs and he was in a lot of pain. Chloe had banged her head and had some blurred vision. Both would heal though.

Hailee was out of danger and she was resting in the Medical Centre overnight. Marcus and Vicki had left, along with Paige. Marcus was still very annoyed with Paige, but I hoped that they would be able to sort things out between them; I would hate it to be my fault that they had split up.

We had a lot of work ahead of us.

Central Chicago

"So, what happened?"

"The Sicilians and the Russians took a major hit and they ran..."

"Those fucking vigilantes?"

"All survived as far as we know..."

"We have stirred up a fucking hornet's nest – Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, along with the other members of Fusion need to die and soon!"

***Chapter 205*: Psyche**

That morning
Monday

Safehouse F

As soon as I had dropped the twins off at school, I headed down to the Safehouse to check on Hailee.

Cathy was already there and checking on the patient.

"Hi, how you feeling?" I asked.

"I hurt everywhere – my first grenade!" Hailee grimaced.

"The girl is doing well," Cathy said. "If she behaves she can go home this afternoon."

"Oh, well, she'll be here till Christmas then!" I quipped.

"Thanks, Mindy!"

"Well maybe next time I say, 'get down', you *will*, 'get down!'"

"Yeah, I'm sorry!"

Cathy left the room and I got serious, throwing some photos onto the bed in front of Hailee. She stared down at the photos and started to bite her bottom lip.

"What the fuck were you thinking?"

"I wanted to help you, I..."

"Not fucking good enough – you fucked up and you almost got Megan fucked up! Fucking up has consequences, Hailee and you should damn well know better. I expect Megan to disobey me; she is only eleven, but you are almost eighteen and an experienced vigilante, Petra."

I was just building up steam.

"Look at those photos – Sentinel was beaten to shit by the Sicilians and you could have been just as fucked up!"

"Mindy, look..."

"Hailee, I've fucked up too many times so I know how easy it is to ignore shit in the heat of the moment – I DO NOT want to lose anybody and I fucking hate it when anybody gets hurt. I feel like shit lecturing you, but I had to say something..."

"Mindy, I'm so sorry – I'm not used to operating in a team. It's not an excuse; I know better, but I had to say something."

"Let that be an end to it – time to move on!"

"I can live with that."

"Get better, so I can kick your fucking ass!"

That afternoon

D-JAK

I picked up the twins, Megan and Curtis from school.

We headed to D-JAK for the late afternoon session. Megan could not train, due to her bruises, but that was not going

to stop me tearing her apart!

"Curtis, get Danny and Anne-Marie changed and start them off on some movements," I instructed and Curtis grimaced knowing what was about to happen.

"Nice knowing you, Megan!" He whispered.

Megan looked a little apprehensive as I led her into the back office, nodding to Paige as we passed, and closed the door – she was next!

"You know why you are here," I began. "You disobeyed me again and now you're bruised to fuck!"

"I got caught up in the moment and I should not have spoken to you like that – I wanted to help Hailee..."

"You're grounded from all Fusion activities for the next week."

"You can't do that!"

"I make the rules, bitch – you break 'em, I enforce 'em!"

"Okay – I'm sorry I let you down again, Mindy..."

"I know why you do it, Megan and I can't blame you for it – I just want to keep you alive; you're my little sister. You never let me down though; I am proud of you for what you did, you're a very brave girl."

"Mindy – now Mom is running around killing cunts, when do ya think Marcus will become a vigilante?"

I laughed.

"Somewhere in between the United States becoming British and hell freezing over!"

..._...

"Hi Paige – how did Marcus take it?"

"It wasn't easy but I think I turned him around," Paige replied and then she smiled. "A set of handcuffs helped..."

"Oh I did *not* just hear that!"

I left Paige rather quickly...

As I headed over towards the twins, I stopped to say hello to Lauren and Lizzie who were practicing their movements on the mat with Kyle.

"How you doing, girls?"

"Brilliant, thanks Mindy!"

..._...

"Okay, you two," I said to the twins in a corner of D-JAK beside a pair of hanging punch bags. "If you get annoyed, if you feel emotions building up inside you, emotions of fear, grief, anger, pain and a whole host of those other emotions – you use those emotions. Turn them around and turn them into energy and put that energy behind your punches."

They both punched the bags – just not hard enough for me.

"Think of something that really makes you mad..."

Anne-Marie punched the bag hard and her face was full of concentration.

"Put your grief, everything bad into that punch, focus and punch..."

While Danny was doing well, Anne-Marie was doing better – she obviously had quite a lot of pent up emotions!

"So, Anne-Marie, what emotion did you use?" I asked.

"You grounding me!" She replied with a smug grin.

I laughed.

That evening

I was walking Sophia along with Anne-Marie.

We would walk in a large square, each evening and we knew the route by heart. We often met our neighbours, one of whom was Bill Wright and his wife Beth who, besides thinking that Anne-Marie was cute as a button, also had a very handsome German Shepherd, called Rex, who had a thing for Sophia!

Usually, they just played and chased each other, only this time they both vanished into the bushes followed by Anne-Marie. There was a scream and Anne-Marie came running back out again, her face very red.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Rex is banging Sophia!"

"Okay – why would you think that?"

"Mindy – I may be seven, but I'm *not* stupid, besides Megan showed me a YouTube video of two dogs 'at it'..."

The girl actually used her fingers to accentuate 'at it'!

"Okay, I need to have a word with Megan about what is appropriate for you two to watch...!"

Just then, the two dogs reappeared and they both looked very pleased with themselves...

The following night Tuesday

North Central Chicago

I was fucking pissed.

It had to have been the Superintendent; he had set up the attack – it had to have been him. That bastard almost cost us our lives – he had almost caused the death of Josh, Hailee and Megan... I also knew why – the bastard wanted us to target him and then the whole CPD and the City would be gunning for us.

We had other ideas though to take down that bastard – Marty and Abby were busy with round one.

Dave and I had taken great joy earlier that evening watching as the Superintendent's credit card was destroyed before his very eyes. Marty had hacked into the Superintendent's schedule, and he had found out where the bastard was having dinner that night, with his wife and he had booked us a table... his wife was both humiliated and pissed!

Oh yes, they did the, err 'personal ads' bit, too!

Remember what Abby had wanted to call herself when she first joined us during The Week of Hell? 'Zero Cool' or 'Acid Burn'. She was a big fan of 'Hackers' and so was Marty – I will admit that I had watched the movie once or twice, too...

'MESS WITH THE BEST – DIE LIKE THE REST!'

..._...

While Marty and Abby were having fun with the Superintendent, they were also identifying the Superintendent's men and gathering key evidence against the Superintendent. The most important thing was for his men to be taken down by the CPD – Voight had that task along with Marcus.

Not that we did not intimidate them – we started to follow them around the City, stopping the various nefarious schemes that they were involved with; we must have hurt the Superintendent's cash flow more than a little!

Some of his men were freaked out by seeing a masked vigilante almost everywhere that they went; we made ourselves known so they had no choice but to behave.

We did however have a brush with the Sicilians again!

The bullet came out of nowhere and collided with Kick-Ass' back armour.

"What the fuck?" He demanded as he span around.

"We have some unfinished business!" A man shouted with a strong Italian accent.

There were eight men, all sporting firearms.

"Do you really want to do this?" Kick-Ass went on.

"We do."

"Your funeral!"

Bullets flew as I crouched down behind Kick-Ass, taking advantage of his heavier armour. As silence descended, I span from behind Kick-Ass and emptied both pistols into the men. The first few rounds shoved them back, but did not put them down; they were wearing body-armour – nobody said they were stupid!

I altered my aim, but not before the men began to fan out and I was only able to drop three. Kick-Ass had turned and drawn his own Glock pistols. He caught one man in the thigh as he dove for cover before advancing on the remaining four men as they took cover behind their SUVs.

I decided enough was enough and after checking that there were no innocents around I pulled the rings from two grenades, rolling them under the SUVs.

"Violent bitch!" Kick-Ass growled as he casually walked away from the SUVs.

I looked back just as the grenades exploded and I was suddenly awe-struck with the most amazing image of Kick-Ass in his new combat suit casually walking towards me as the two SUVs seemed to take off vertically behind him in a violent orange cloud of flame and destruction.

I was fangirling!

It was rare, but that night we had collateral damage, despite our best efforts.

As I went to re-join Hit Girl in Hound, I noticed something in the shadows. It was easy to miss and I almost ignored it, but something made me investigate.

"Hit Girl, hold up – I may have something here!" I called.

"Whattaya got big guy?" Mrs Kick-Ass asked.

What I had, was a young girl, lying on her side against a wall. She was unconscious and possibly a victim of the fight. Something told me that this was not just an ordinary young girl and an image of a certain apartment and a certain other young girl came unbidden into my mind.

The girl was dressed in black jeans, a black t-shirt, black boots and a black leather jacket that was unzipped. I placed my gauntlet onto her chest and could feel the rise and fall of her breathing; however, my gauntlet came away wet.

"She's hurt!"

I briefly checked her over and found a gash in her t-shirt from a knife, and what might be a close shave from a bullet. I also found something else that surprised me, and which proved that the girl was *not* just some innocent bystander. The young girl, and she was very young – younger than Mindy was when I had first met her, was wearing a shoulder harness and under her left arm was a small pistol, hanging in a holster. Under her right arm were two spare magazines. I also found a knife, mounted vertically, on the back of the harness as I picked her up.

I gently placed her onto the back seat of Hound and we headed back to Safehouse F.

Safehouse F

As soon as Hit Girl slammed on the brakes, I dived out and carried the girl down to the Medical Centre.

Cathy was on her way in, but she was still ten minutes out. Marty had the Medical Centre up and running ready for us. I placed the girl on the table and pulled off my mask and gauntlets, Mindy came through the door and started to wash her hands; I joined her. We both pulled on some rubber gloves and I removed the girl's jacket and shoulder harness. Marty took the shoulder harness and weapons to the armoury for safekeeping.

The girl was short and slim, under four and half feet and she had long blonde hair, which was currently in a ponytail. I pulled off her boots while Mindy started to cut away her t-shirt to get a better look at the girl's wounds.

The t-shirt was soaked in blood and her pale skin was awash with it. The slash across her stomach was oozing fresh blood and there was a bullet wound, which appeared to be just a flesh wound on her left side. Initially Mindy and I just covered the wounds to keep them clean and stop too much blood loss. There was bruising and some cuts to her face, but nothing a few days rest would not fix.

That was when Cathy and Chloe arrived. Cathy immediately took over treating the wounds with Chloe's help, while Mindy and I both headed upstairs to change and shower.

I awoke with a start.

I struggled to open my eyes; I felt weak.

Everything was dark, I tried to move and then I felt a searing pain coming from my stomach and left side, which had me gasping for air as tears fell down my face. My face felt bruised too. What was happening to me? Where was I? I reached down to my stomach, fearful of what I might find. I felt bare skin and then a soft material that was wrapped tightly around my stomach – a bandage.

As my eyes started to focus, I could see a dim light being emitted by a fitting on the wall. I was in a room that looked and smelled like a hospital – yes, I had been wounded before. I listened, but I could hear no ambient sounds, just the hum of the air conditioning. If I was still in the City, then I must be underground, which also fitted in with the fact that there were no windows in evidence.

I gently pushed back the sheet covering me and swung my feet over the side of the bed. I was at least wearing my knickers, but nothing else. I looked around the room and saw my clothes neatly hanging on a chair.

Ignoring the sharp jolt of pain, I slid off the bed and looked for my weapons. Not surprisingly, they were missing; however, my jeans, boots, socks and leather jacket were on the chair. My t-shirt was missing and so was the knife that normally lived in my right boot – bastards!

It took an age to pull on my clothes. Without a t-shirt, I zipped up my jacket to cover my chest – not that there was anything to cover. Once I was dressed, I hesitantly reached for the door handle and turned it, fully expecting the door to be locked.

To my surprise, the door opened as I pulled it towards me.

..._...

I was in a passageway.

There was only one way to go – to the right. At the end of the corridor was another door, again it was unlocked. I found myself in a kind of vestibule.

The door I had just passed through had a sign: 'Medical Center', which seemed logical. To my left was another door that read: 'Power/Generator/Pyro Store'. That door also had the usual 'DANGER – ELECTRIC SHOCK WARNING' type signs, plus a palm scanner for access. To my right was another door that had large bolts on the outside of it; the sign read: 'Interrogation & Holding'.

Ominous!

The other doors seemed to lead to couple of storerooms and all had palm scanners beside them. The final wall, farther to my right, was mostly glass and through the glass, I could see a Martial Arts training centre. Even more important, I could see Jō-staffs and other potentially lethal weapons in a rack off to one side. However, the glass door was locked with a palm scanner too!

All that was left were some steel stairs that led upwards.

..._...

I crept up the stairs, slowly and quietly.

Once I could see the next floor, I stopped and looked around. There was limited lighting, as according to the clock in the Medical Centre, it was shortly after three in the morning. As I emerged into what appeared to be a large cavern, I stopped dead.

I was roughly mid-way down the cavern. Behind me was there was a large vehicle-sized steel door and some large vehicles. I instantly recognised Iron Hide, not to mention the pair of Ducati Panigale motorcycles, one in blue and the other a purple colour and a larger motorcycle in black, yellow and green. They were parked behind an eight-foot tall armoured glass shield that ran across the available width of the forty-foot wide cavern and had a large six-foot tall figure '1' on it. The top of the shield was angled over at forty-five degrees away from me, to prevent anybody climbing the structure from the far side. The floor of the 'cavern' was ribbed steel and concrete.

Beside me was a large training mat and in front of me, at the end of the cavern and over to the left was a glass-enclosed room that housed computer equipment and large flat screens. It was obviously a Command Centre. Immediately beside the Command Centre was an external steel staircase leading up.

The staircase provided access to a walkway, which ran around the central section of the cavern and provided access to a number of rooms on the second level. There was another steel staircase, which came down behind me. The walkway was about ten feet off the ground and ringed with a steel and glass barrier that rose to a level of three and a half feet and the walkway itself was made of steel, but appeared to have a foam rubber covering. There were various doors, visible, that led off the walkway into rooms, with unknown purposes. The ceiling and some of the walls had foam rubber sections that I presumed were designed to reduce the echo in the cavernous room.

..._...

"So, you're awake!"

It was a statement more than a question.

I looked up to see a masked person looking down at me from the walkway that ran over the training mat. I kept my eyes on the person as they walked around the walkway and then down the stairs, behind me.

"Hi, I'm Shadow."

I said nothing, I just glared – I knew exactly *who* she was in her armoured combat suit.

"You're injured; you should be in the Medical Centre – in bed!"

I rolled my eyes and Shadow laughed.

"What do we call you?"

"They call me Psyche..." I offered, looking around and playing for time as I got to grips with the facility.

Shadow was watching my eyes.

"We're here to help you, Psyche."

"I want out of here..."

"Look, I know you're scared; I've been in your position, waking up somewhere strange and not knowing what the hell is going on..."

"I am *not* bloody scared!"

"Have it your way, then..." Shadow replied. "You're British, aren't you?"

"What of it?"

"Nothing – I have only good things to say about the Brits – honest!"

I had had enough gossiping – I flew for Shadow. I kicked out, catching Shadow in the chest and sending her backwards. She regained her posture, but did not attack.

"Come on, you muppet, do something useful!" I growled.

"I don't want to hurt you..." Shadow began.

"Your loss, tosser!" I called out as I span, kicking Shadow in the side of her head.

Shadow fell to her side, still not attacking.

"Pillock!"

Then I paused as a searing pain burst out in my stomach and I was forced to wrap both arms around myself. The pain was immense as I fell to my knees and then I fell onto my side. I heard voices.

A woman's voice: "Quick, get her back downstairs..."

I felt hands rolling me onto my back and then my jacket was unzipped. I was in too much pain to resist.

A man's voice: "She's bleeding again – her bandages are soaked!"

Shadow's voice: "Take it easy with her – she's hurting..."

Then I heard nothing more as I sank into blackness.

***Chapter 206*: Aurora**

Tuesday night

Safehouse F

I must have fainted with the pain, because all I could remember was the sudden explosion of pain in my stomach and then collapsing on the mat in the large cavern, and then – nothing...

Now though, I was aware of my senses returning and I could hear voices. However, I could not make out what they were saying; nevertheless, I did get the impression that they were talking about yours truly. Keeping my eyes closed, I instinctively relaxed all my muscles, feigning continued unconsciousness as I tried to determine where I was, other than in a bed in the Medical Centre!

I could hear at least three voices speaking. Two were some distance away. Male and female sounding, older than myself, but younger than Miranda. The third was practically right next to me, to my right. It too, was female, but much younger sounding and closer to my own age. I was, just as I had been earlier, naked but for my knickers and covered with a thin sheet.

"Do you think she's a mini you?" The male voice asked. "When I saw her, all my senses were reminding me of you when I first met you."

"Ass! Possibly," the distant female voice stated. "She was armed like I used to arm myself, at that age – when I wasn't wearing my costume. Nevertheless, she undoubtedly knows how to use that gun and knife; they were in perfect condition – *used* condition I might add. She had a good go at Shadow, but then Shadow refused to respond. I think she might be able to take somebody closer to her size, in hand-to-hand – like Wildcat maybe. It is obvious that she trains; you can see the muscle she has built up – that is not a normal nine-year-old and I should know! It feels strange seeing a girl like that – I suppose you felt similar when you saw me as me. Up until now it's just been the hormonal bitch, over there..."

"Step back Wildcat," the male voice suggested. "Give the girl some space – oh never mind – just don't say I didn't warn you!"

"Relax, Kick-Ass. The little bitch is out cold," the voice that I decided was Wildcat stated. She poked me in the chest, to demonstrate.

Enough was enough – I hated being poked! I tensed up immediately, and opening my eyes, I thrust out with my right arm and grabbed the gauntleted hand as it reached out to poke me again. Then I almost crapped myself...

"Oh, fuck!" I yelled and I froze as three very long claw-like blades appeared just inches from my chest...

"Okay, okay!" I called out in a sudden panic.

Wildcat retracted her claws and I gingerly sat up in the bed. The fight had gone out of me; I was in too much pain and more humiliatingly, I needed the loo.

"I'm sorry," Wildcat apologised, retracting her claws.

"I need the loo – I promise I'll behave..." I said urgently.

"Wildcat will help you – as Shadow said earlier; we're not here to hurt you – if we wanted to..."

"Yes, I know, I'd be dead as the proverbial dodo!" I growled with a weak smile, looking over at the purple form of Hit Girl.

Next to her, stood the immense and very intimidating, armoured form of Kick-Ass and I suddenly felt very small in his presence. Something at the back of my mind told me that I was in the presence of royalty – vigilante royalty.

I noticed that Hit Girl and Kick-Ass both turned away as Wildcat helped me off the bed and over to the attached bathroom. I felt humiliated and embarrassed considering my limited clothing; I could feel myself blushing too.

"That bed sucks; I've spent more than a few nights in it myself," Wildcat said conversationally with her back to me as I pissed my life away.

Once finished with my ablutions, I was helped back into bed.

"Well this is a turn up for the books!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Two raging, murderous kiddies; what did I do to deserve this?" Kick-Ass moaned.

I laughed; I myself was surprised – potentially having somebody that I might actually be able to relate to – somebody who had had similar experiences in their presumably non-existent childhood. I just hoped the girl in the bed did not have a freakin' nutcase for a father – sorry Daddy!

"Psyche, I – I think I know some of what you might be going through. I began my life as Hit Girl when I was six and it has never stopped."

The girl was staring down at the sheet, as she had been since returning from the bathroom.

"You know we can't let you go – not like you are; you're injured..." Wildcat added conversationally.

"I know – I wouldn't last five minutes... Thanks – for saving my life..." The girl muttered.

"You're welcome," Kick-Ass replied.

"Is there anybody we can contact?" I asked with genuine concern.

"She's called Aurora – she's all I got..."

Was that a quiver in her voice? I knew what was about to happen – I had been there...

"I think you need some sleep – we'll check on you later – okay?" I said somewhat hurriedly.

I quickly ushered Kick-Ass and Wildcat out of the room.

"Thank you..."

Just as I closed the door, I heard the tears falling.

"She's hurting badly – she's psychotic most likely or there is some other underlying issue."

I looked over at Cathy.

"You mean that young girl is a fucking disturbed nutcase like me!" I growled rhetorically.

"No – well, yes."

"It's okay to say I'm nuts; I am, but how could somebody do such a thing to such a girl – I always hoped I was the only one; hoped that nobody else had to suffer like I had..."

I was steaming and I ignored the tears spilling down my cheeks as I vented.

"When I find whoever turned that little girl into a cold killer – I'll..."

Dave hugged me as I muttered obscenities and cried. I looked up at a screen in the Command Centre and I saw the girl, Psyche, crying her heart out into the pillow on the floor below us.

This was going to end – no more kids were going to be turned into killers – those people were now at the top of my shit list and that was a privileged place to be. Once it had been Frank D'Amico, then it was Chris D'Amico and then finally it was Ralph D'Amico!

Notice a theme?

Those at the top of my shit list died – eventually...

***Late that night
Southern Chicago***

Where was the little bitch?

She knew I hated it when she went out alone and she was late. I had tried her cell, but it was dead; I could not get a GPS position off it either.

The girl had been restless and she had said that she wanted to check out the area – I could not stop her; that girl listened to no one but herself! We had been together, as far as we could remember, for six months and we were all each other had; I missed her.

Early the following morning

I was beside myself with worry.

Stephanie should have been back hours ago; she was fully armed, of course, and now that a lot of her training had returned, she was a mobile menace. I missed seeing her on the couch, with her feet up reading a gun magazine – she had recently found that she liked to read them. She would also be listening to some rubbish, like her favourite group: One Direction, on her smartphone with headphones.

I had but one option; I had to find *him*.

That was not so difficult; I knew where he lived but I just could not bring myself to face him. I also had a nasty idea who else I might find living with him. Yes, I knew he was Kick-Ass and I knew that he was active with Hit Girl – I also knew that he was married to Mindy Macready – the age was about right; she *had* to be Hit Girl. She would and could tear me a new asshole, even if Dave did not!

My training then kicked in, unbidden – I could control certain parts of it and I chose to use what I needed. For the moment, I needed to be cold and collected.

I needed Dave's help – I hoped he would help me.

***Later that morning
Glenview***

As per my training, I scoped out the entire area around their house before I chose the right moment to make my way to the gates.

I pressed the buzzer. I could have opened the gates myself, but then they might not have trusted me.

"Hello?" Came the response.

Even over the intercom, I recognised his voice – so many emotions grew and subsided all at once.

"Dave – it's Miranda..."

There was a pause – a long pause.

Then the gates started to move.

"Somebody at the gate? Dave – you look like you've seen a ghost!"

"Heard one actually... Get the kids into the bedroom – we have company..."

I saw Mindy go pale and then she ran towards the living room.

"Anne-Marie, Danny – into Anne-Marie's bedroom now!" She yelled.

That room had armoured doors and deadbolts – it was a panic room with steel shutters for the windows, only I did not trigger them yet. A minute later Mindy was at my side, a mini-Uzi in her right hand and passing a Glock 17 to me. I had just called Marty and as I lowered the cell, I had heard the klaxon sounding in the Safehouse.

I opened the front door with the Glock behind my back.

Earlier that morning **Safehouse F**

It had been a weird morning.

I had awoken feeling a little better and I was met by a smiling face, instead of a mask.

"I'm Cathy – you hungry?"

"Yes, I am thank you."

"A very polite young lady; I'm not used to that! First I'll check you over and then I'll leave you to get washed and dressed – there's some clean clothes on the chair for you..."

With that, the woman checked the bandage around my stomach and then she checked the bruising and cuts on my face; she seemed happy and then she was gone.

I eased myself out of bed. As the woman had said, there were clean clothes on the chair – they were not just clean, they were brand new! I made use of the bathroom, where I found soap, a towel and a toothbrush plus some toothpaste – my mouth tasted of crap – not that I knew what crap tasted like, but you get the idea.

Once I had pulled on new knickers and socks, a white t-shirt and blue jeans, I tied the laces on the new trainers and checked myself out in the mirror. I was very uncomfortable with the bandage, but not as bad as the previous night. I looked like crap; my face was bruised and my hair sucked, but I tied it back as best I could.

I headed out the door, following the same route that I had taken the previous night.

I was met at the top of the steel steps by a tall teenaged girl.

"Hi, I'm Chloe – I'll take you to the galley."

I was a little overwhelmed by the welcome considering that I had attacked them only the previous night.

"You're Shadow?" I asked, not expecting an answer.

"Bright little spark aren't you!" The girl, Chloe, replied.

I actually felt myself blushing.

"Stephanie..."

"What?" Chloe asked turning.

"My name – it's Stephanie, but please call me Steph."

"Hello Steph, I'm pleased to meet you."

I could smell food and I was ravenous. One thing I had picked up in America was the enjoyment of large breakfasts! As I followed Chloe into the galley, I suddenly felt a little shy; there were several people sitting at the tables there – and they were all looking at me.

Chloe guided me into a chair between a young girl who was maybe a couple of years older than I was and a tall teenaged boy.

..._...

Chloe introduced everybody.

"Over there is Marty, beside him is Cathy and to your left, is Megan and finally, to your right, is Josh. Everybody, please meet Steph."

There were plenty of 'hellos', but one registered more than the others. It was the teenaged boy, Josh; his accent – it was most definitely *not*, American!

"A voice from home...," he said with a smile.

"I've not heard a proper accent in years – I miss it."

"You've got a very nice accent, Steph..."

I blushed again.

"Hey! Joshua – she's way too young for you!" Chloe cautioned with a laugh.

Cathy put a plate down in front of me – it was overflowing with food!

"Sorry about the claws last night – you triggered them accidentally!" Megan said with a grin.

"They were very cool – if a bit scary...," I admitted.

It felt good to be able to talk with other kids; yes, they were older than I was, but we all had something in common – unfortunately, that something was nothing good, but I recognised killers when I saw them.

Just as breakfast was finishing, Marty took a phone call and I saw his face turn serious. He jumped up and hit a red button on the wall. A klaxon sounded and he ran down the stairs with a single word shouted behind him.

"Nightingales!"

Glenview

"Miranda..."

It was definitely her – only she seemed different somehow.

"Dave... I need help..."

"You'd better come in, then..."

As soon as Miranda was in the door, I slammed it shut and Mindy stood covering Miranda with the mini-Uzi; I stood well out of the line of fire.

"What are you carrying?" Mindy growled ominously.

"Two pistols and a knife..."

"Table..." Mindy indicated with her head.

I had no choice, but I trusted Dave; I had to trust them both.

The pistols and the knife went on the table, then Dave frisked me – I did not enjoy it as much as I thought I might. Nevertheless, I got straight to the point.

"Dave, I am no longer that woman – 'Night'. That was not me; I still have her memories and some of her skills, but I now have my conscience back. I did wrong – a lot of wrong and I am so sorry... But – She's missing – she was part of the same corrupt program; she's only nine..."

"Who is only nine?" Dave asked.

"Stephanie – she has the same training and..."

I saw Dave and the woman exchange a glance.

"Aurora?" The woman asked; I assumed she was Mindy.

There was no way that they could have known my codename – unless...

"You've seen her?" I was full of hope...

"Psyche?"

Safehouse F

"Stand down!"

It was Marty's voice. I cursed as I started removing what body armour I had already pulled on. As I came out of the armoury, pulling my blouse back on, I saw Steph looking around anxiously; she looked lost, which was a surprise.

"What's happening, Chloe?" She asked.

"No idea!" I replied.

"We have friendlies inbound; twenty minutes..." Marty yelled.

Twenty minutes later...

I watched as the orange lights began to rotate and flash as the vehicle access door opened.

Into the Safehouse came Dave's RS7. He climbed out and I watched as the passenger door opened and I was surprised to see a woman step out; she had dark ginger hair and she was tall, but thin. They made their way through the armoured screen and the moment Steph saw the woman, she ran forwards and jumped into her arms.

I heard tears – tears of joy.

Dave was smiling, but I noticed that something was troubling him. I walked over, but he waved me away.

"Not now, Megan – I'll tell you about it some other time."

I was so happy when I saw Stephanie.

She ran towards me with an enormous grin on her face and jumped into my arms. She cried and so did I. She was also grimacing.

"What is it?" I asked when she finally let me go and I dropped her gently to the ground.

Stephanie gently pulled up her t-shirt and I saw a large bandage.

"Oh, my God!"

"She was in a fight; she was shot and cut with a knife," Dave explained. "You can see the bruising."

It was only then that I noticed the bruising on Stephanie's face.

"You pleased to see Miranda?" Dave asked Stephanie.

"Absobloodylootely!" She replied happily, which I assumed meant 'yes'.

The following morning Wednesday

Morton Grove

Here we go again!

I wrote the title on the top sheet of paper of my pad: 'STEPHANIE WALKER: INTERVIEW #2'. I then glanced up at the girl sitting across from me; she looked self-conscious, shy and a little unsure of herself – all a surprise after the experience of only two hours previously!

"Are we more in control of our emotions?"

"Yes, ma'am... I am very sorry about earlier... It won't happen again..."

I saw the girl glance over at the hole in my study wall. She went slightly pink in the face. I had to admit, she was trying – she had just got herself a bit agitated and punched the wall before storming out. Now, though, she had cleaned herself up and her hair was neatly up in a ponytail. She was still wearing the new clothes I had bought and not the black getup.

I had picked her up from the Safehouse early that morning to have a discreet and private chat with her. Miranda remained at the Safehouse – she was very tired and needed rest.

"Don't worry; you err, have a lot of anger to work out and I will admit I learnt some new words today!"

Stephanie went a deeper shade of pink. I casually peered down into my purse, where the yellow handle of a Taser was visible and easily grabbed if necessary. I was not alone; Paige was in another room, just in case – with another Taser. We trusted Stephanie, but I knew that she was unstable, as Mindy had once been.

"Let us take things slowly..."

Safehouse F

"Let's start wading through some of the crap Miranda brought us!"

Marty was *not* happy. Something was off about him; I knew that he had known Miranda from years ago and her turning on everybody as a Nightingale had hurt him.

"On it!" I replied as I began typing. "What the hell is Treadstone?"

Six thousand miles to the east

Tbilisi, Georgia

There was a chime as a new message appeared in the email application.

The well-built man got out of his comfortable chair and wandered over to the laptop. He glanced at the email and grimaced.

"Fuck!"

"What is it?" The blonde woman asked, coming into the room.

"Somebody has just opened a ten-year-old can of worms..."

"Why can't they leave the damn thing closed? It's been eleven years, actually, but who's counting!" The woman replied rhetorically. "Where?"

"Chicago."

***Chapter 207*: Nightmares**

*Later that afternoon
Wednesday*

*South Cottage Grove
Apartment 202*

I knocked on the door.

"It's open!" Came Chloe's voice, so I pushed the door open, closing it behind me.

"Keep your fingers crossed, Steph!" I warned.

"Why?"

"You really don't wanna know!"

"Hi, Steph!" Chloe called out as we entered the living room. "Hi, Mindy!"

"You're wearing clothes – that's a change!" I grimaced.

"Ignore her, Steph – Josh is in the kitchen."

..._...

Once Stephanie had gone through to the kitchen, I sat down with Chloe.

"How is she?" Chloe asked with genuine concern.

"Struggling, but under the circumstances I think she's doing well. She asked to see Josh – I think the British connection helps," I explained.

"What are you going to do with her?"

"We don't know – she has no home; she only has Miranda and I'm not sure about Miranda either."

"You trust Miranda?"

"Not really – especially after past experiences; but we have no choice. We need to find out what happened to Stephanie, so we can try to help her."

"Where will she stay?"

"Funny story – well, your Mother seems to think that as Stephanie and I share similar, err mental instabilities, she err thinks Stephanie should stay with me, at least at first," Mindy replied. "Plus I have the skills to physically control her if necessary. She is, we hope, bonding with Josh so he can help with her mental side a bit."

"I really feel for her – she is such a sweet girl when she isn't being, well, you..."

"I know..."

I stopped talking as I heard a little scream from the kitchen.

"Oh Josh, that is so good; I need more, give it to me..."

"I'm coming, I'm coming!"

I looked at Mindy and her mouth fell open.

"They couldn't be..." Mindy began.

We jumped up and peered into the kitchen.

Stephanie was sitting at the kitchen counter, stuffing something into her mouth.

"It's so good!" She squealed with her mouth full.

She turned as we entered, swallowing.

"He's got Marmite; I love Marmite – it's been years!" She said happily.

"The ultimate comfort food," Josh explained smugly. "Marmite on toast – she's on her fifth piece!"

"She eats that shit? Kinda explains things!" Chloe muttered.

"I love it – you've got to try it, Mindy, Chloe – it's heaven!" Stephanie replied grinning broadly for the first time.

"I admit I've never tried it..." I admitted.

"Don't Mindy; it's like eating gun grease!" Chloe warned.

"I like the taste of gun grease; I'll have you know..."

"What a surprise!" Chloe growled. "Don't blame me if you puke..."

Stephanie passed over a small piece of toast with butter and some black tar-like stuff on it. I tentatively licked it. Not so bad... The smell was intriguing... Strange taste – salty, interesting, sharp...

"Not bad!" I said, finally.

"Always knew you were fucking strange!" Chloe growled with a laugh.

That night

Glenview

"Nice place, Mindy!"

"Thanks... Before we go in, I need to talk to you. My kids have no knowledge of who Dave and I, or the others for that matter, really are. You let out our little secret and *I – will – rip – you – apart*, nine-years-old, or not..."

"I believe you."

"I can see that you do – so I want you to be on your best behaviour, understand – I know it won't be easy for you, but I *will* be there for you whenever you need me; the same with Dave."

"Thank you, Mindy."

We climbed out of the XJR and headed inside.

"Hi, Paige and thanks for looking after the little terrors!"

"They've been angels as always..."

"Mindy!" Both kids yelled, running over for a hug.

"Kids, I'd like you to meet Steph. Steph is going to be staying with us for a while. Please make her feel welcome. She'll be sleeping in your room, Anne-Marie, okay?"

"Cool! Hi, Steph – I'm Anne-Marie and this is my brother, Danny. Come on, I'll show you my room."

"You going to be okay, Mindy?"

"Yeah, thanks, Paige."

"Come on!"

I dragged Steph up to my room. She seemed a little surprised when she saw my bedroom.

"It's enormous!"

I was a little taken aback by the different accent, but I was used to Josh, so it was no big deal and I did not comment on it.

"It is, isn't it?" I replied feeling a little embarrassed. "You'll sleep on the pull-out bed over there. My brother sleeps in the room through the bathroom. I love sleepovers – not had one in a while though. How old are you?"

"Nine."

"Danny and I are seven and a half, eight in March. You got some pyjamas?"

"Actually, no!"

"Yes, you do..." Mindy said as she came in the door and threw a large white t-shirt at Steph.

I saw Steph's eyes go wide when she saw what the t-shirt had on the front – it was the younger Hit Girl in her best pose – she was standing sideways, but facing the camera, with a pistol held out, aimed at the camera! Mindy calls it her 'SOMF' t-shirt; I understood Dave bought it for her, one birthday. Mindy won't tell me what 'SOMF' stands for, though...

"Should be long enough to keep you decent, Steph. I'll take you shopping in the morning."

I was humbled by the way that I was being treated.

I was a killer, a bad person and I had attacked them, but they treated me like a friend. That alone said a lot about what Fusion stood for. As I lay there in the darkness, I looked over at the bed across the room. Even that young girl at seven-years-old was happy to let me into her life and allow me, a complete stranger, to sleep in her room. Mind you, Anne-Marie and Danny saw me as an ordinary nine-year-old girl. Dave and Mindy knew different, but they still treated me the same. Mindy had shown me where her bedroom was and she had told me to wake her if I had any problems.

Problems? Like what? A desire to kill people?

It was going to be very different not having Miranda nearby, but she was sleeping back at our apartment. Anne-Marie had been curious about my bandage when I had undressed before bed. I explained that I had been hurt in an accident and Mindy had backed me up, telling Anne-Marie to stop being so nosy!

Despite my being hurt, I was pleased to have found myself in with Fusion – Miranda was not so happy and she refused to tell me why. I could tell that there was a history between her and Dave, but I had not wanted to pry.

For the first time in months, I felt safe and I actually felt happy.

"She gonna kill us in our sleep?"

"Funny, cunt – as much as I would!"

"I'll never see the morning!"

"Seriously, I trust her and I think she trusts me – but just in case..."

Mindy brought a Glock 26 out from under the pillow – it was fitted with a suppressor.

"Better safe than sorry..." Mindy added with a sheepish grin.

Later that night

It was past two in the morning when I decided to check on the girls.

As I approached the open door to Anne-Marie's room I could hear somebody talking and it was not my daughter. I

was about to go into the room when I heard movement and saw Anne-Marie getting out of bed.

She went over to Steph who was obviously having a nightmare – I was about to intervene, knowing how I might react if I were awoken from a nightmare of the sort Steph was probably having. Anne-Marie shook Steph's shoulder and the girl awoke instantly. In the dull illumination of a night light, I could see that the girl was covered in sweat and breathing heavily; she was shaking too.

"I'm sorry, did I wake you?" Steph asked.

"You were having a nightmare..."

"I get them a lot; I'm sorry..."

"I get them too – you look a mess. Why don't you come and sleep in my bed; then you won't be alone."

Steph hesitated, but Anne-Marie had grabbed Steph's wrist and was dragging her across the room. Anne-Marie could be very pushy at times! Once the girls were in bed, I could hear them talking together.

"I get nightmares a lot – ever since our Dad was brutally murdered in Gotham; the first week was the worst and I was a wreck, but Mindy helped me through it. She can help you, too; Mindy is one in a million and I love her – Dave too... Are you crying?"

"I'm sorry – I'm just not used to having people care about me like this. You've only known me for a few hours, yet you are happy to share your thoughts with me and help me..."

"Get a grip Steph – Mindy asked us to make you feel welcome, so that is what I'm gonna do!"

"Thank you – you're a credit to your Mum and Dad you know..."

"I suppose I am..."

I waited until they both fell asleep and then headed back downstairs to bed.

The following morning Thursday

Glenview

I was up early and found Anne-Marie and Danny already up, washed and dressed.

Steph was still in bed, but awake.

"You two sleep okay?" I asked the girls.

"Steph had a nightmare but we sorted it."

"Come on, breakfast!"

Steph groaned, but threw back the duvet and rolled out of bed.

..._...

After breakfast, Dave took the twins to school while I helped Steph remove her bandage so she could shower. I didn't mention anything about what I had witnessed the previous night, but Steph was smiling which was good.

Our first stop of the day was a clothes store where we picked up the essentials that Steph would need. We also stopped off to see Miranda and pickup Steph's kit.

"You look a lot better, this morning," Miranda said to Steph.

"I feel better, thanks. What about you?"

"Knowing that we are both in good hands, I slept remarkably well."

"Will I see you later?"

"Dave is picking me up this afternoon, so yes."

Safehouse F

"What's this?"

"A test!"

Arranged on the table in the armoury were various gun parts – quite a lot of them and they were all mixed up!

"Reassemble what you can..." Mindy prompted as she left the room.

I emptied my mind and focussed on the contents of the table. I felt my mind taking over and my hands started to reach for the various components, arranging them into groups. I smirked as I identified a wildcard – Mindy was trying to be clever! It did not take me long to reassemble the weapons and lay them neatly on the table.

When I was finished, I looked around the armoury. I saw my own weapons, over on another table. I took in the massive array of firearms, knives and other equally lethal weapons. I also took in the racks of ammunition. There were steel containers, cardboard boxes and loaded magazines. A part of my mind was telling me to seize a weapon and escape, but I forced that order back down – I wanted to stay where I was; I was *not* about to jeopardise my relationship with Mindy.

Mindy reappeared and looked approvingly at my results.

"Well done! For a bonus point – what is the extra component and where does it belong?"

I stood up and walked over to the array of pistols, selecting one from the rack.

"Browning Hi-Power – the slide stop – is that the best you've got, Hit Girl!"

Mindy laughed.

"Cocky bitch!"

I grinned.

The Galley

We were alone, which was ominous, although I was certain there was somebody else in the Safehouse; I could hear other activity.

Mindy passed me a mug of tea and sat down with a mug of coffee.

"Tell me about the other night – what happened?"

I was still piecing together the events that had put me in the Medical Centre, but I owed Mindy, so...

...+...

Tuesday night

I was bored, so I wanted to check out the area – just to be safe, of course.

Miranda tried to dissuade me, but I forced the issue, pulling on my weapons and jacket, before heading out the door. I knew Chicago was dangerous – I vividly remembered the events of that first day of our new life. I kept to the shadows, only there were already some other men using those same shadows.

I tried to sneak past, but they saw me and as I turned to run, another one took hold of me by the arms. I tried to fight only to receive a punch to my face, which damn well hurt! I fought back but then one of them shouted an order.

"They're here; stop playing with the bitch and kill her!"

A knife appeared, which I deflected, but it slashed my stomach, which really hurt and I screamed out. Then came the gun and after the gunshot, I heard and saw nothing until I awoke in the Safehouse Medical Centre.

...+...

Thursday

Safehouse F

"Sounds like you had fun!"

"Thanks, Mindy!"

Mindy looked at me and I realised that she could read my expressions and she looked worried.

"Mindy, I hate what I am – I don't want to be me; I want to be normal – a normal nine-year-old... A normal girl."

"I know how you feel, I really do; I've been there."

I had a nasty thought.

"Will I ever be normal?"

Mindy hesitated before she replied.

"To be honest, no..."

I did not like the sound of that, not one bit...

"Stephanie, you will never be normal again. Believe me, I know – I wished so many times, but it never happened. Like you, I was brain washed into doing unspeakable things without any hint of conscience. Daddy made it a game and I indulged in it; I loved the purple suit and the pink utility belt was to die for – I always wore it, even when doing my homework!"

"Then Dave came into my life and I kinda developed a crush – an eleven year-old crushing on a dick in a wetsuit! Then after a night of hell, my reason for being was removed – Kick-Ass killed Frank D'Amico. It was over; there was no need for Hit Girl... I went back to what I thought would be a normal life."

"If you can call an eleven-year-old putting down two fifteen year-old bullies on her first day of school, normal!"

"Hi Dave!" Mindy laughed.

"Did she really do that?" I asked.

"They spent a week in hospital!" Dave replied with a grin. "Mindy tried her best to be normal, but she struggled – it took a few years before she finally found out what she was – who she was."

"I was fifteen and despite trying to be a good daughter to my Step-Dad, I wasn't comfortable being Mindy Macready. Then Dave's Dad was murdered and the funeral was attacked – then I fucked things up, but I discovered that I had but one identity; I was Hit Girl!"

"But..." I began.

"It's complicated," Dave said. "Stay with me; it will all become clear, Stephanie."

"I was forced to leave New York and things started well, but then one tiny mistake – I killed a cunt who tried to steal my motorcycle – and I almost died as I led a feral existence controlled by Hit Girl. Dave searched for months and finally found me here, in Chicago – I treated him badly and I still feel bad about that."

"Mindy basically told me to go fuck myself!"

"She always was a bitch!" Chloe said sitting down beside Mindy.

"Then I got myself shot and Dave saved my life – only I was an ungrateful bitch and I told him where to go even though he had just bandaged my side up!"

"I'd figured Mindy out; I was probably the first to do that, but not the last, though. All of us, even nutcase Chloe here, have two identities. We switch by taking off our costume and going back to our normal lives. Mindy cannot do that – by the time her Daddy had finished with her, Mindy Macready and Hit Girl were so intertwined that they could never be separated – I was the first to work that out."

"I am damaged, Stephanie – I cannot exist on my own. There are two people, in my life, who are able to control me and keep me as a person with a conscience and a human being. Without them, I would not be able to be Mindy Macready. I owe everything to these two – Chloe and Dave are what keep me, me."

"I hate to say it, but you are me – you will never be Stephanie Walker nor Psyche. You can only be Stephanie 'Psyche' Walker, as I am Mindy 'Hit Girl' Macready. The way you described your thoughts and behaviour to Cathy – I am sorry, but the damage is done."

I did not know what to say. I got up and went for a walk around the walkways to think through what I had been told.

"Got a minute Steph?" Chloe asked a while later.

"Of course..."

"I want you to watch something."

It was a video – YouTube.

"Hello boys and girls..."

"Is that...?"

"Just watch – but yes, that is Mindy's father, Big Daddy and over there – Dave..." Chloe said quietly.

Oh, crap! It was a fucking snuff movie!

I was horrified... Nevertheless, I could not take my eyes away...

"Even with my metal plates and my fucked up nerve-endings, I gotta tell yer; that hurt!"

I turned to see Dave standing behind me. He smiled and I turned back to the video.

'... This for all you cavemen out there... Is fire... Fire... Fire is good... Fire is our friend... Gentlemen... Time to die...'

"Holy shit!" I exclaimed as the first man went down and things went black.

"I was scared, but my training took over and I killed every last one of the murdering bastards..."

This time it was Mindy and she looked pained.

We watched as the much younger Mindy went into action. I took in the anguished yell when she saw her father burning, the strobe light, and the men dying – all the way to the end.

'... Show's over motherfuckers!'

I was stunned.

I turned to see Dave hugging Mindy tightly.

"Well?" Chloe asked pointedly.

I was speechless.

"So – what do I do?"

"You have choices to make, Stephanie. You can never be a normal girl, not without help. You can never exist as Psyche – you'd be dead before you were twelve. You have a gift, just as I have. It took me a long time to understand that. I am a bad person, but I channel my hate and use it for good. My Daddy taught me morality and it was a key part

of my being Hit Girl. If you want, I am willing to teach you to control Psyche and turn her to your advantage. I can teach you what you need to know to have a life."

"You mean I can join you?"

"I thought I was crazy allowing two ten-year-olds to join up, but you have skills – exactly what they are I don't know yet. You would be an asset to us and I think you would get a lot out of it. It will take time and a lot of hard work. You would need to go to school; you would need to live a double life."

"My Mom is willing to take you in and help with your mental stability – she can be very strict and she does not take any shit!" Chloe offered.

"None of this is charity, Steph. You will be expected to work hard and earn your keep," Mindy stated before her expression turned hard and cold. "I also want to take down those that made you what you are..."

"I..."

I had no idea what to say or do.

"Think about it – don't rush; take your time."

"Why?" I asked feeling tears welling up inside of me.

"I look at you and I see me. I was lucky, I found Dave. You have nobody – Miranda is damaged too. I never thought I would ever find somebody who was as badly damaged as I was. You are not alone and you never will be – if that is what you want."

That afternoon

Glenview

Anne-Marie had me in tears.

Nothing bad! I had just taken her washing back to her room and dumped it on the end of her bed for her to put away; she was on her tablet sitting cross-legged on the bed.

Then she suddenly jumped up and hugged me.

"Thanks, Mom!"

She then jumped back onto the bed and went back to her tablet. I was shell-shocked. Then I felt tears building up and I ran downstairs and into our bedroom. I just sat down and cried. It was stupid, but just that one three-letter word meant so much to me.

Not to mention the hug.

"What?" Dave asked as he came in and saw me crying.

I smiled.

"She called me 'Mom'..."

Dave grinned; he knew what it meant to me.

That evening

"Dave, they'll tear me apart..."

"You scared, little Mindy?"

"Damn right I am!"

"You are unbelievable..."

"They are real Mom's, I'm just..."

"Get a fucking grip, girl – it's a damn get together for Moms!"

"But, what if..."

"Do I need to slap you? I'll get Megan over; she'll slap you!"

"Once upon a time you would quake in your boots when I glared at you... Where did I go wrong?"

"I found your soft side!"

"You are *not* helping..."

Four hours later

"You kill anybody?"

"No I did not!" Mindy retorted. "It was a piece of cake..."

"Did they torture you?"

"No."

"Did they make you feel less of a Mom?"

"No."

"Did they threaten you in any way?"

"No!"

"So what was the big panic about?"

"I overreacted, okay?"

"Any juicy gossip?"

"That would be between me and the other Moms!"

***Chapter 208*: All Change At The Chicago PD**

Two days later
Saturday morning

Glenview

Two very tired girls made their way into the kitchen that morning, still in their pyjamas.

I grinned at Dave who just shook his head, but smiled back. Danny was digging into a bowl of cereal at the counter already.

"Stephanie, we have a tradition here, where when tired people drift into the kitchen, we wake them up..."

Anne-Marie suddenly braced up at my comment and tried to run.

"No..." She almost screamed as I scooped her up and headed for the pool.

Dave followed suit with Stephanie who had absolutely no idea what was going on or what was about to happen to her. Danny followed with a big smile on his face. There were two violent splashes and lots of high-pitched screaming!

A now wide-awake Stephanie glared up at me, with an equally evil glare from Anne-Marie.

"That was not nice!" Stephanie exclaimed with a smirk as she swam to the side of the pool.

"Sorry, Steph, I forgot to ask if you could swim..." I commented as I helped the young girl out of the pool and passed her a towel, with another one for Anne-Marie.

That evening ***Central Chicago***

The warehouse was large, covering almost six-acres.

It was cold out and very dark. Outside there were no signs of activity. Inside, though, was another story as large packing cases were inventoried and moved around. Six large eighteen-wheelers were lined up and being either loaded or unloaded by forklift trucks.

The warehouse was bustling with activity, everybody going about their business in a professional manner. In the security office, there were three men on duty gazing intently at the array of security monitors, which were connected to a large array of security cameras that covered both the internal and the external areas of the warehouse.

One of the monitors went from showing a picture of a large vehicular access door at the east side of the warehouse to white snow. Next, another monitor, this one covering the main gate into the facility, turned to snow.

"Main Gate, this is Central, check in..."

The radio hissed with static.

"Main Gate, this is Central, check in..."

Only more static was heard.

"Patrol Two, we have a camera out above Door 3 and we have lost coverage of the Main Gate – investigate, over..."

"What the fuck?" The watch supervisor exclaimed, checking his equipment when he again heard nothing.

"All stations check in!" He ordered over the radios.

Suddenly the radio speaker jumped to life, but not with a voice. Instead, a high-pitched squealing sound hurt the men's ears. One of the men switched frequency, but within two seconds, the high-pitched squealing was heard again. He switched frequency again, and again... Next, he picked up the wired telephone. He raised the handset to his ear and then turned to his supervisor looking worried.

"It's dead..."

"I'd better call the Boss..." The supervisor began as he pulled out his cell.

..._...

The night was torn apart as two large simultaneous explosions ripped Door 3 off its track and severed a large section, which then dropped to the ground with a resounding crash. There followed several cracks as cylindrical objects flew into the warehouse, exploding on impact with bright flashes and thundering bangs. Men were rolling on the concrete floor of the warehouse hands over their ruptured eardrums.

Then with a roar, a huge, dark grey vehicle smashed through the remains of the roller-shutter and skidded to a stop several metres inside the warehouse. The rear door of the vehicle burst open and several people, all clad in body armour, dived out firing weapons.

The fires of hell began to envelop the warehouse.

Fusion Command Van 'Mirage'

"Jamming is still active – all communications and monitoring is down. Team 1 is inside the warehouse. Team 2 is joining up."

Battle Guy looked closely at the images being relayed from Titan as Mist, Shadow and Kick-Ass engaged the warehouse's security forces with Trojan and Splinter. A minute later, a purple motorcycle skidded to a halt behind Titan with two onboard.

"Hit Girl and Wildcat arriving!" Hit Girl reported.

"Copy Hit Girl and Wildcat joining the fight!" Battle Guy replied.

The warehouse

I dived off the back of Hit-Girl's purple Panigale, with my SIG Sauer P250 Compact raised and sending death into the warehouse.

I covered Hit Girl's back as she headed towards the big-rigs; we had to make sure that none left the warehouse. If our information was correct, those trucks were loaded with contraband that belonged to the Superintendent's organisation. With that evidence, we could take him down with no chance of parole.

The warehouse was flooded with security personnel and many of the workers were armed too. I dropped two men in rapid succession. Hit Girl had both of her Glock 19 pistols out, pouring more death across the warehouse.

A short distance away, I could see Kick-Ass carving his way through the men with his AA-10 shotgun. He was wearing his additional armour, which made him look even more badass than usual! Hit Girl had her full-face mask on which made *her* look even more evil than normal – if that were possible.

A man appeared to my left and I deployed my claws into his neck for his trouble, kicking his body down to the ground. A bullet hit my left thigh, sending a shot of pain through my body – not all of me was healed from earlier in the week...

I staggered, but kept on my feet, pushing the pain down deep and jumping onto a packing crate. There I swapped out my pistol magazine before holstering the pistol and pulling around my MP7.

I was able to take aimed shots from my raised position as I crouched on the crate.

I moved forwards with Splinter beside me.

We both had MP7s to our shoulders, sending bursts of fire into the security personnel. They were responding with a mix of weapons from H&K G36s to AKS-74s. There were also shotguns in evidence, not to mention the pistols.

I paused to swap out a magazine, but I was jumped from the side. A large man shoved me to the floor and I dropped

the MP7. Splinter moved to shoot the man, only he was kicked down by another man. I jumped to my feet, drawing my Sais.

I attacked.

Splinter was up, his Ninja-To in his hand, laying into his attacker and he was not holding back. Neither was I...

I enjoyed fighting beside my cousin.

I covered her back while she advanced, shooting anything in sight with her P90. My MP7 was to my shoulder and I sent three-round bursts into anything that moved. Then I saw something land on the concrete floor, bouncing towards us...

"Grenade!"

I shoved Shadow hard in the back, sending her sprawling behind a packing crate and I dived on top of her.

I heard the shout from Trojan, but before I could react, I was shoved hard in my back.

I fell to the floor behind a large wooden crate and the next thing I knew something heavy landed on top of me knocking the breath out of my lungs. Then there was a massive explosion and a section of the packing crate fell on top of both of us.

I looked upwards and saw my masked cousin looking down at me.

"Thank you, but you can get up now; I'm perfectly fine..."

"Glad to hear it, Shadow!"

I pushed off the broken wood and packing material and took a moment to gaze at the neatly stacked firearms in the destroyed crate – all brand new Chinese QBZ-95 assault rifles. There was some serious shit going down in that warehouse.

I got to my feet, with the help of Trojan, and we moved back into the action.

I had finally made it to the security office.

Two rounds from the AA-10 quickly shattered the hinges on the wooden door, which then just needed a firm kick to come crashing down. The three men inside immediately opened fire with pistols. I shrugged off the rounds, my extra armour reducing the strikes to nothing more than minor irritations.

I drove my armoured fist into the face of the first man, the butt of the AA-10 into the second and smashed the third man's face, into the brick wall.

"Security office is secure!" I called as the last man fell to the floor.

I moved out towards the eighteen-wheelers at the loading dock.

Safehouse F

"This fucking sucks!"

"Hailee, I have work to do – if you're just gonna bitch, go do it elsewhere!" Abby responded with an annoyed tone.

"Sorry, I just hate seeing everybody else fighting while I'm stuck on the sidelines."

"I'm here too, remember," Josh announced. "It sucks being hurt, but life goes on, Hailee – deal with it!"

The Warehouse

Hit Girl and I were pinned down.

The majority of the security seemed to have concentrated around the trucks, which told us that they were still at least partially loaded. Hit Girl was engaging the security personnel with her G36C and ducking the return fire. I ensured that nobody crept up on us before backup arrived. The warehouse was enormous and Fusion was spread out across the building.

I saw Kick-Ass heading towards us, firing off shotgun rounds in different directions. He came down to one knee beside me and looked down.

"How you doing, kid?"

"I'm having the time of my life, Kick-Ass!" I replied as I blew a man's head apart.

"Well let's get going, freaky little beast!"

"Good of you to join us!"

"You seemed to be having all the fun, so I thought I'd wander over..."

"Funny, Ass-Kick!"

Two of the big-rigs started their engines, followed by a third and then a fourth. The large doors in front of them were opening. Time was running out if we were going to stop them.

"Tyres!" I yelled adjusting my aim for the truck tyres instead of the men.

Wildcat followed suit, as did Kick-Ass. The three of us blasted away at the nearest eighteen-wheeler's tyres, shredding them, both on the tractor and the trailer. The driver dived out of the cab and rolled underneath the trailer to escape the gunfire.

Then it happened; two of the trucks pulled forward out of the warehouse.

"Let's move!" I yelled, running for my motorcycle.

Several minutes later

We had disengaged from the fighting and quickly climbed aboard Titan.

Medic was driving – she had remained inside Titan during the fighting to guard the vehicle. We were moving at sixty miles-per-hour, in pursuit of the two trucks that had driven away. Hit Girl was ahead trying to shoot out the truck tyres, but she spent most of her time preventing herself from being squashed by the enormous trucks as they swerved from side to side.

Anyway, we needed the trucks intact, if possible, as evidence. As we left the warehouse, Voight and Marcus were descending on it with their teams to gather crucial evidence.

I had to admit that Mom was one hell of a driver! She threw the almost nine-tonne truck all over the road as she attempted to come parallel with the first truck, having already overtaken the trailing one.

Kick-Ass reached up and pushed the roof hatch open before hauling himself out and then reaching down for me. I was hauled through the hatch as if I weighed nothing! I took hold of one of the steel handles attached to Titan's roof and braced myself against the windblast, most of which was being blocked by Kick-Ass.

The massive truck was just a few feet away as Titan drove alongside. We were on a two-lane highway and Titan was constantly swerving onto the shoulder as the truck tried to force us off the road. The trailer's side and roof was aluminium and I would need to use the blades on my lower arm to grab hold. The blades were a new feature of my current combat suit and I had not used them to that point.

"You ready?" Kick-Ass called and I nodded my ascent.

He physically grabbed hold of me and threw me over the gap towards the trailer. One miscalculation and I would be

hamburger under the racing wheels below me! I hit the side of the trailer with my arms on the roof. I dug in my blades, which sank into the aluminium, and I used all my strength to pull myself onto the roof. That was when bullets started to punch holes in the aluminium roof of the trailer.

..._...

I rolled from side to side to avoid the bullets, but then a bullet grazed the inside of my thigh and another above and to the left of my groin. I knew that neither bullet had penetrated the suit, but they still fucking hurt! I grimaced with the pain but dove for the driver's cab as Kick-Ass raked the trailer with gunfire from his G36K, his bullets punching through the thin side of the trailer.

I reached the gap between the trailer and the tractor. The driver was on the left-hand side, so I jumped over and then after a brief glance, I swung down with both feet smashing the passenger window and landing on the passenger seat beside the startled driver who fumbled with a large .45-calibre automatic.

"Brake, now!" I yelled at the driver, my FN Five-seveN out and pointed directly at the man's face.

I braced my feet against the dash as he braked heavily, bringing his rig to a halt fifty or more yards later. The other truck was skidding to a halt too and its trailer was jack-knifing. I watched in the side mirror as Hit Girl swerved out of the way of the trailer and accelerated to safety.

"Get the fuck out!" I yelled kicking the man in the side, forcing him out his door.

The other truck was assaulted by Hit Girl who hauled the driver out and threw him down to the blacktop. We approached the rear of each truck, a team for each one. The doors were hauled open and the surviving guards, overpowered, hauled out, and secured with plastic cuffs.

Before the Police arrived, we left the scene ensuring that the trucks were immobilised and the men were secure.

We were heading back to the Safehouse, ten minutes later, when Marcus reported in.

"You need to go now and apprehend the Superintendent – he'll most likely bug out when he finds out we've seized his haul and the warehouse. The Mayor is in the clear; blackmail. We have no idea who we can trust, right now, so it's up to you..."

"We're on it, Rhino!" I responded as I performed a rapid, and smoky, one-eighty on the road and winced as I saw Medic throw Titan into a wide one-eighty, the massive tyres screeching in protest on the blacktop.

Battle Guy informed us that the Superintendent and the Mayor were in a meeting with other senior members of the CPD, plus the City Treasurer and the City Clerk. On the way, I veered off to rendezvous with Battle Guy in Mirage. He was rapidly printing out the evidence that we needed to indict the Superintendent and his men.

Later that night

North LaSalle Street, Chicago City Hall and Office of the Mayor

There were plenty of surprised looks as Titan roared up the dark street, coming to a halt outside City Hall with Hit Girl on her purple Panigale.

Fusion immediately deployed to protect the main entrance to City Hall. Certain trusted Police Officers from the 21st District were guarding the other exits from City Hall and included Officer Roman and Sergeant Platt.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl made their way into City Hall with their weapons holstered and they demanded to be taken to see the Mayor.

We made our way up the stairs to the fourth floor.

There we barged through the twin glass doors into the Office of the Mayor. The Security Officer on duty just raised his hands and stood back. He used his head to indicate which door the Mayor was behind and we headed for the indicated door, which had a sign: Conference Room.

As we had agreed, Kick-Ass would do all the talking, allowing me to keep watch, as we were very much in the lion's den and risking our freedom.

"What is the meaning of this?"

It was the Mayor himself, who spoke as we entered the Conference Room amid general unrest from the others present.

"Mr Mayor, I am Kick-Ass and this is Hit Girl," I began, rather unnecessarily.

"Forgive me, but that's pretty obvious!" The Mayor replied with a smile. "You must have a damn good reason for being here, I assume."

"We have incontrovertible evidence against the Superintendent over there," I explained. "Part of our mandate in this City is to uncover the corrupt elements of the Government..."

"I can't believe that we are listening to these criminals!" The Superintendent blurted out in anger.

"Something to hide?" I growled, fixing my gaze on him as I dumped the several-inch thick dossier in front of the Mayor.

The Mayor spent a couple of minutes flipping through the printouts, passing some to the Police Commander to his right.

"I trust you both, despite what you represent," The Mayor said finally, with a nod of agreement from the Commander. "There is, as you say, incontrovertible evidence for the Superintendent to be arrested."

That was when the Superintendent jumped up and pulled out a pistol.

"I am taking these two into custody; they are criminals!" He blustered.

"And if we refuse to come quietly?" Kick-Ass asked conversationally.

"I'll..."

"Shoot us?" I enquired, indicating our armour.

..._...

"Kick-Ass, take him down!" The Mayor ordered, coming to a decision.

I looked at the Mayor.

"I cannot; I am sworn to protect this City and I *will not* act against an Officer of the CPD..."

The Mayor was smart; I had to give him that. He hesitated for little more than a second, before he looked directly at the Superintendent.

"Trevor, you're fired!"

"Thank you..." I replied and stepped forward ignoring the bullets from the ex-Superintendent's pistol as I advanced on him before driving him into the drywall and then throwing him across the room.

The man landed in a heap on the floor just as several uniformed Police Officers burst into the room. They looked unsure, not knowing what to do, taking in the scene before them. Specifically, the sight of their boss on the floor unconscious and Hit Girl standing over him.

The Mayor again took control.

"The Superintendent has been fired – take the corrupt bastard away!" He ordered before continuing. "Kick-Ass, Hit Girl and Fusion are *not* to be impeded in *any way*..."

Once the unconscious former-cop was dragged away, by many willing hands I might add, the Mayor turned to me.

"We owe you a lot, Kick-Ass and you too Hit Girl, as well as the rest of Fusion. While I cannot condone what you do; you have all done the City a great service and removed the corrupt scum from the top levels of Government."

"Thank you; we serve the City and its people."

"I am disbanding Lieutenant William's organisation for the time being. I will not have you hunted; I think we can agree to disagree on what you do and how you do it. For now the City needs Fusion."

"Isn't that a little unfair..." I began, but then I saw the sly smile on the Mayor's face.

"I have a lot of people to reward – as well as fire, please bear with me..."

***Two days later
Monday morning***

Glenview

Marcus was speechless, as were the other four people who stood around him.

The Chicago PD was changing.

Commander Jack Bay was refused early retirement by the Mayor and he was instead offered the position of Superintendent in place of the shamed Trevor Howards. Of course, he had accepted.

Amongst the string of firings and promotions were Marcus and Vicky. Marcus was now a Captain and the Executive Officer of District 21, under Commander Ron Fischer. Vicky had been promoted to Lieutenant and she was now in command of the 'Organised Crime Taskforce' or OCT. However, Fusion were no longer on the Taskforce's radar!

Hank Voight had been promoted too; his 'Intelligence Unit' was being upgraded and as such, it required a Detective Lieutenant to run it. Alvin Olinsky had been promoted to Detective Sergeant as Voight's Executive Officer.

The City of Chicago was now protected by people who would put the City first.

***Chapter 209*: Cleaning House**

Monday night

Safehouse F

By the time that Kick-Ass and I had returned to the Safehouse, everybody was waiting.

"Job done! The bastard is no more..." Dave commented as he pulled off his mask.

There was lots of applause and cheering from those present in the Safehouse. We had accomplished something big and something so important to the City that we were sworn to protect. I was pleased, very pleased.

We spent the next hour catching up on the events of the night. I was impressed with Curtis – he had saved his cousin from a grenade, which might have killed her. I was pleased to see that the event had pushed the two cousins closer than they had ever been, but concerned that the event had taken place at all.

Chloe was also bruised from the attack on the big-rig. I had to admit that it was funny, even though Chloe threatened enormous pain on anybody who laughed. Apparently, she was badly bruised in places that meant she and Josh would *not* be having carnal relations for a while!

Even Megan had admitted to receiving more bruises, which was a step in the right direction for the girl.

We had accomplished a lot out of such a small piece of intelligence.

Three days earlier

Friday evening

Chicago Police Department

District 21

"I'm saying nothing without my lawyer and Department Rep..."

"I don't think you understand your position..." Sergeant Voight continued. "You speak to me, or you speak to my friend..."

"Who...?"

The man looked beyond the cage in which he was being held and out into the large open space. The far door opened and the soon-to-be-ex-Police Officer went white, moving as far back in the cage as he could at the sight of what walked in the door.

"It's me or the vigilante..." Voight elaborated with an evil grin.

"You know who I am?" The electronically enhanced voice growled without preamble.

"Of – of course..."

The man was in a state of barely controlled panic as the vigilante, clad from head to toe in dark grey body armour with purple highlights, leant casually against the wall. In her right hand, Hit Girl expertly flicked a razor sharp Balisong knife.

"I hope I'm not intimidating you..." She growled.

"No – yes – I'm fine."

He very obviously was not!

"You know things – now I want to know things," Voight said calmly. "I think you know *who* we're talking about."

"I talk – I die..."

"You don't talk – you die – eventually!" Hit Girl interrupted.

Voight opened the door to the cage and she walked straight in, ignoring the panicked screams.

...forty-two seconds later...

"He has a warehouse; it's the central hub of his shipping network... You have to believe me..."

"I don't – but I will... However, if you are lying to me..."

***Five days after the Superintendent's downfall
Thursday morning***

Safehouse F (lower level)

I watched from the bottom of the steel steps.

The two girls, each with their blonde hair tied back, were exercising together. Their movements were both coordinated and precise. They had been at it for almost an hour and sweat patches were visible on their clothes.

I pushed open the glass door and entered the room, walking around to face the two girls. Mindy looked as hot as ever in nothing but a sports bra and skin-tight shorts. She was dripping with sweat, which to me, only made her look so much more attractive. Beside her was Stephanie, in a t-shirt and shorts, and she too was dripping with sweat.

I was concerned that Mindy was pushing Steph a bit fast, but the young girl looked to be handling herself well. Mindy was putting Steph through her paces, so that we could work out what the girl could do, what she was capable of doing and what she was not capable of doing.

"So – what can Psyche do?" I asked with a friendly smile for the nine-year-old.

Mindy grabbed a cold bottle of water from the fridge, passing another to Stephanie.

"The bitch ain't bad – she has some basic skills which we can build on. I want her at D-JAK, at least three times a week. Right now, she can put somebody down, but not effectively and she will struggle with anybody bigger than Megan is. Not her fault; we just need to complete her training."

"I'd take that as a compliment, Steph – it's the best you're gonna get!" I explained.

"Thanks, Mindy."

"I am impressed, Steph; you did well for a nine-year-old. You need to rest – I will not have you doing too much until you are properly healed. Get upstairs, take a shower and get yourself cleaned up."

The girl ran off and I grinned at Mindy.

"What?"

"You're having fun, ain't ya?"

"Just a bit – she's a great girl and she'll do well..."

"But..." I could tell from Mindy's expression that there was a 'but'.

"She has a lot of demons inside her – she has to come to terms with who she is before she can move on and that won't be easy. I don't know what it is, but there is something really big bugging that girl."

"Hopefully Doc Bennett will find it."

Safehouse F (upper level)

As I dressed after my shower, I felt pleased with how the morning had gone.

I had been able to keep up with Mindy, kind of, but it had been painful. I was pleased that Mindy thought I had done

well.

"You did well, I understand," Miranda commented as she came into the bedroom.

"It was good, if tiring. How are you doing?"

"Not bad, I've just got back from seeing Dr Bennett. I've brought over the rest of your kit – but you'll need to sort it out before you take it to Mindy's as there is a lot of shit in there that she won't want her kids seeing."

"Thanks, Miranda."

Central Intelligence Agency Langley, Virginia

The operator at the computer terminal looked up as his terminal beeped, indicating an incoming message.

The operator opened the message, read it and after checking for the messages ultimate destination in an online directory, he forwarded it on. He then made a note in another file called: 'TREADSTONE', acknowledging receipt of the message and the message's originator: 'ECHELON'.

The operator had no idea what sort of trouble and consternation that single message was about to cause as it triggered another beep on another terminal several floors above him.

Safehouse F

It was just the three of us girls.

Megan and Stephanie sat across from me in the briefing room. There was nobody else at the Safehouse.

"Megan, as we discussed earlier, you are the closest in age to Stephanie, I want you to help and guide Stephanie through her Fusion training. You two will become a team; you will train together, spar together and operate together.

"Stephanie. I want you to see Megan as your partner and as an equal. Trust her, confide in her and listen to her. She may only be eleven and a scrawny, gobby little bitch, but she has learnt the hard way about being a young vigilante and you could learn something from her. Anything you say to her will be kept between the two of you, unless Megan deems it prejudicial to safety or secrecy, in which case she will talk to Dave or me.

"Anything that comes from her, about you, will also be kept in the strictest confidence by me and Dave, with the same caveat. We will both respect your privacy as an individual, but we will both be here to help you. Megan has been around the block, and she knows the 'lay of the land' in Fusion. She knows my rules, too and what happens when she breaks them! Megan will train you at D-JAK and bring you up to speed, reporting back to me, your progress."

Stephanie sat there for a few minutes taking in all that I had said and processing it.

"Thank you, Mindy, and you Megan. I trust you both and I am happy for anything that I say to be made known between you two and Dave, unless I say otherwise."

"Megan is *not* allowed to discipline you; that is for myself and Dave, only – and we *will* come down on you hard if we need to. However, if you are putting yourself, or somebody else for that matter, in danger then and only then, will she be allowed to act against you – okay?"

"That's fair," Stephanie admitted, smiling at Megan.

Two days later Saturday

D-JAK

Stephanie's wounds were healed enough for her to start training properly.

I had warned Megan to take it easy; however, we were talking about Megan! I watched as Stephanie was kicked to

the floor for the fourth time. Megan was smirking and Stephanie was in pain, but the young girl never lifted a finger to protect herself. I ran over before Megan could put Stephanie down again.

"What are you playing at, Megan?"

"I can handle her, Mindy!" Stephanie said, despite breathing heavily.

I could see tears in the girl's eyes. What was she doing? Then just as Megan was about to attack Stephanie again, it clicked. I turned and yelled out a warning to Megan, but not fast enough, as Stephanie caught Megan's ankle as it came towards her face and she viciously twisted Megan over and sent her crashing onto the mat.

Megan screamed and then looked up in surprise. I grinned.

"You were trying to control your emotions and prevent yourself from reacting...?"

"Yes..."

Stephanie sank to the floor as Megan jumped up and came over, her face full of concern.

"I am so, so sorry Steph – I got carried away!" Megan exclaimed.

"No pain, no gain," Steph replied.

"Don't push yourself too hard or you'll never heal," I warned.

"Message received!"

The following morning Sunday

The Farm

I was doing everything that I could to distract Stephanie from her former life and to inject some fun into her new life.

Often there was giggling well into the night between Stephanie and Anne-Marie. I had also noticed the same between Stephanie and Megan, which was also good. Cathy had commented on Stephanie's emotional state, which seemed to have changed – for the better. The contact with other kids, be it Anne-Marie, Megan or Josh, had had an effect upon her – a good effect.

"Here!" I announced passing the girl a helmet.

"I see – that explains giving me back my boots, black jeans and leather jacket."

"Until I get you some proper motorcycle leathers..."

I wanted to see what the girl could do on two wheels. I had questioned her and Stephanie had hinted that she could ride a motorcycle. Therefore, while the twins were roaring around the field on the quadbikes under the watchful eyes of Dave and Superintendent Bay, I would concentrate on Stephanie.

Chloe had wanted to come up too. However, Sunday was also the anniversary of Curtis becoming an orphan. I remembered that day well and I hated it. Chloe and Cathy were spending the day with Curtis to help him get through the day.

I watched as Stephanie pulled on the helmet and then followed her movements as she checked out the motorcycle before climbing on and starting the engine. I was impressed! The girl knew her way around a motorcycle. I jumped onto my BMW and followed Stephanie out of the barn and towards the field.

..._...

Not surprisingly, Anne-Marie's quadbike was on its side. It looked like she had taken the corner too fast – again! However, she was on her feet while Dave righted the quadbike before picking up and dumping the girl on the saddle – none too gently either.

"Little bitch!" I heard over the comms as Dave saw us approaching.

Stephanie kept her speed down as she turned into the field keeping the motorcycle under control. She managed to, avoiding Danny with a quick skid, which she controlled nicely. She knew what she was doing... I rode up beside her and waved her to a stop.

"Let's go for a ride," I suggested.

Dave waved at us as we rode out of the field and behind the farm, following the same track where Dave and I had taken Chloe and Josh, months before. We paralleled the river for a while, heading south before we found ourselves at the County Forest Preserve. I stopped almost exactly, where Josh had made his last stand, that night when Jack and Natalie had been shot.

"Joshua almost died, in that ditch. He fought off almost a dozen men, single handed and was shot himself. I was unable to get to him, but he used his training and survived."

I knelt down and stood back up with an empty P90 cartridge case in my hand. Not all of them had been recovered. I passed it to Stephanie.

"P90 or Five-seveN – 5.7-millimetre," she offered.

"P90..."

"They all mean a lot to you, I can see that. Thank you for helping me, Mindy – I know you care."

"That's part of my problem. I never used to care..."

"Like me. I was trained to think about me – and me only. The mission came first, second and third!" Stephanie said quietly.

"It sucks to be us..." I agreed.

That night

Morton Grove

"Since when do you knock?"

"Just trying to be polite, Doc!"

"No problem, Megan."

I laughed and led Megan through the living room where Chloe and Curtis sat.

"I see!" Chloe said with an evil grin. "Curtis – time for you to have some fun..."

"Excuse me!" Megan scowled.

"I know why you are here," Chloe continued. "Mom, I think Curtis and Megan should go upstairs for a while – you know, get some *alone time!*"

I rolled my eyes and grinned.

"Curtis..." Megan suggested.

The boy blushed and grinned, but followed Megan upstairs.

"What are you doing here?"

"Dumb question, Curtis!"

"Dumb or not, it still stands."

"I'm here to offer you a distraction..."

"Like what?"

"Like this..." I growled, pulling off my jacket, shirt, shoes, pants and socks.

Curtis' eyes almost bugged out.

I pushed him backwards onto the bed and started to undo his pants – he did not interfere or try to stop me. I left his shorts on, to spare him any blushes. It was all just a bit of innocent fun; while I had hit puberty, as far as I could tell, Curtis had not – so nothing was going to happen, even if I had wanted it to... Despite his shortcomings, he was definitely distracted from his other problems, I noticed, looking at his shorts where something was moving...

Okay, I was a tease – but as far as I was concerned, I was Curtis' for as long as he wanted me and he could do what he wanted - it wasn't like he had never seen me naked before... I allowed Curtis to fiddle with my bra, eventually releasing the catch and it fell to the bed. I slid off my remaining article of clothing and surprisingly, he did the same.

I lay down beside him and gave him a kiss.

An hour later

"They're very quiet - unlike you!"

"Thanks, Mom, I really needed to hear that!"

I felt myself blushing.

"You and Dad aren't much better... Ewww, I can't believe I said that."

I could hear movement upstairs and then footsteps on the stairs. Megan was wrapped in a towel while Curtis was wearing a t-shirt and shorts. I raised an eyebrow as I looked at Curtis. My cousin blushed but smiled back at me. Megan as usual was looking as innocent as ever.

"Had fun, Megan?" Mom asked.

"Yes, thank you, I was well satisfied."

"Well done, Curtis!" I commented with a grin which made my cousin blush even redder.

Three days later Wednesday Night

Paige lay in a pool of blood, her dress soaked.

Marcus lowered his pistol, gun smoke still swirling from the end of the barrel. He looked at me as I lowered my borrowed weapon, conscious of the two dead bodies a dozen yards away. Behind us were more injured people. I ripped the bottom off my expensive cocktail dress and used it to stem the flow of blood in Paige's chest.

I could hear sirens as Paramedics approached. Superintendent Bay arrived at my side, resting his hand on my shoulder, his own weapon in evidence at his side. I looked up at Jack and we exchanged glances. Somebody was going to die – at *my* hand.

Dave reached me just as I started to shake with shock and anger. Why did things have to happen to my family, the people that I loved?

***Chapter 210*: The Wait**

Later that Wednesday night

Glen View

Marcus had gone to the hospital with Paige.

Dave had driven us home. It would be my job to break the news to Megan... As I entered the house from the garage, I was welcomed by the four kids who suddenly screeched to a halt when they saw the blood on our clothes and my torn dress. Behind them stood Erika who had been keeping an eye on the miscreants.

Then came the crunch.

"Megan, I..."

I saw the young girl go white as all colour drained from her face and then she put out a hand to steady herself against the wall.

"Mom..."

A single whispered word and then she sank to the floor of the kitchen, sobbing. Anne-Marie, Stephanie, and Danny all looked up at me in abject horror.

"Paige has been shot, but she's alive and Marcus is with her," I said quietly, sitting down on the floor and hugging the sobbing Megan to me.

Early Thursday morning

I was awoken about two the following morning.

Not that I had really slept at all. In the bed, between Dave and I, was Megan and she had struggled to get to sleep. I grabbed the cell, vaguely recognising that it was Marcus' number calling. There was no pre-amble.

"She's out of danger and the baby is safe..."

I paused for a moment before replying.

"Thank God."

"I'm staying with Paige until the morning. Are you okay looking after Megan?"

"Of course – we'll look after her for as long as you need."

"Thank you, Mindy..."

As I replaced the cell on the table beside the bed, I felt Megan move and her eyes opened.

"Mom?"

"That was Marcus; your Mom is out of danger and the baby is safe. Go back to sleep."

I saw the tears beginning again and I hugged Megan until she fell asleep.

Twenty hours earlier Wednesday morning

Glenview

It was a normal morning, part of a normal day.

I awoke at six, as usual – dragging Anne-Marie and Danny out of bed. I ignored the sleeping Stephanie – for the moment. Dave got the kids showered and dressed while I made them some breakfast.

Over breakfast, I explained to the twins that Dave and I would be late back and that Erika would be keeping an eye on the three of them and Megan.

"Why, where will you be?"

"At some big hotel in the centre of the city. It's a 'hello' for the newly promoted Police Officers," I explained briefly.

I did not say that they had tried to invite Kick-Ass and Hit Girl – but they would be there, anyway!

For a change, I was dreaming pleasant dream, which was nice.

No – my dream was private and somewhat embarrassing for a nine-year-old young girl, so I am saying nothing else...!

I was dragged from the dream by the world's biggest bitch.

"Come on!" Mindy yelled as she pulled the duvet off me. "Wake up!"

"If you weren't Hit Girl, I'd kill you where you stand!" I growled, opening one tired eye.

"Enjoyed your dream? That smile on your face was something!"

"Anybody told you that you're a bloody bitch?"

"Daily!"

I gave up and swung my legs onto the floor.

"Why so ruddy early?"

"It's time for a certain young lady to start school – your books are on the table in the dining room. You have thirty minutes to wash, dress and eat some breakfast."

"You're shittin' me?"

"No shit, I assure you – move your butt!"

"I'll move my *arse*, when I'm good and ready..."

"Do not challenge me..." Mindy warned with a dangerous look and I caved.

..._...

After breakfast, I walked into the dining room and studied the pile of books on the table.

"What is this crap?"

"Fourth grade text books – Math..."

"Can't you talk properly – it's Mathsss – there's an 's' on the end!"

Mindy ignored me.

"...Science, Literacy and Grammar..."

"If you think I'm going to start talking like a damn Yank, you're several rounds short of a full magazine!"

"...And Social Studies." Mindy finished.

I picked up the 'Math' book and flicked through it – it seemed easy...

"Where do I start?"

"Try chapter one..." Mindy laughed as she headed for the kitchen.

"... And no fighting with the other kids!" Dave added, having just returned from taking the twins to school.

I looked around the empty dining room.

"You trying to be funny?"

"My bad!" Dave laughed and heading after Mindy.

I opened the book at 'Chapter 1: Place Value of Whole Numbers'...

My life sucked!

That afternoon

"What's Steph doing?"

"Her homework – just as you should be, young lady..."

"Can we sit with her?"

"Yes, just no giggling and no talking – you all have work to do."

"Yes, Mom! Come on Danny."

An hour later

I looked up from my completed homework and my mouth fell open as Mindy walked into the dining room.

The off the shoulder dress was floor length and emerald in colour. There were diamonds hanging from each ear and a diamond necklace around her neck. Her hair was tied up in a bun on the back of her head.

"Wow, Mom – you look awesome!"

"Bugger me!" Steph announced, her eyes popping out of her head.

"Wow – if I were a man, I'd be rock hard!" Erika commented as she walked in the door with Megan.

"Tell me about it!" Dave added with a grin. "May I kiss the beautiful, sexy lady?"

"Of course..."

"Ewww!" Steph and I said together as they kissed. "Yuk!"

"Double yuk!" Danny added, pretending to throw up.

"Not bad for a thousand bucks!" Mom announced, ignoring us and giving us all a twirl.

"Behave tonight!" Megan laughed.

I had to let Dave drive the Jag as the dress prevented me from doing very much.

The looks I had received from both Dave and Erika had made me blush. I was pleased that the kids were impressed too.

"You packing?" Dave asked.

"Not necessary; it's a Cop Party – what could go wrong?"

In a few hours, I would regret not packing a fucking Gatling!

West Columbia

It was the first time that I had seen Marcus in his new Captain's uniform.

"Congratulations, old man!"

"Feels strange..."

"But he looks good enough to eat..." Paige added.

"I did *not* just hear that!" I squeaked.

"You look beautiful, Mindy, as you always do," Marcus said.

I blushed wildly at the compliment – Paige looked stunning too.

Trump International Hotel and Tower Chicago

Dave pulled up outside the main entrance of the hotel.

There were uniformed Police Officers everywhere, as they gathered for the night's fun. We passed through the glass doors into the double height hotel lobby. We were then escorted to the sixteenth floor and The Terrace. All heads turned in my direction and most of the chatter ceased as I entered on Dave's arm, behind Marcus and Paige.

I immediately headed for a group of Police Officers over in one corner.

"Damn, Mindy!"

"You're looking very nice, this evening, Lieutenant Voight," I replied, blushing again. "You too, Sergeant Olinsky."

Sergeant Alvin Olinsky just grinned.

"He cleans up pretty good, don't you AI?" Detective Erin Lindsay announced with a smirk.

"Love the dress, Erin – awesome."

"Yours, too – are those diamonds real?"

"Oh yeah!"

"Well, well, Captain – you look dashing!" Lieutenant Vicky Richards grinned as she strode over.

Behind her was a stunningly attired Hailee who was blushing at the attention she was receiving from the younger Police Officers.

"You're showing a lot of leg there, Hailee!" I commented.

"I like to show my legs," Hailee replied. "I don't normally get the chance."

"You look very good out of your purple shell," Voight whispered into my ear and I blushed enormously.

Hank Voight could be very charming when he wanted to be!

"Good evening, all!" Superintendent Jack Bay announced as he joined us.

"Hi Jack – the uniform suits you," I commented as I received a kiss and gave one in return.

"It is not very often that I see such a beautiful young woman in such a beautiful dress. You look perfect, Mindy – as always. The image of your mother."

"Thank you, Jack."

..._...

We passed back through the wine bottle lined foyer and towards the Grand Ballroom. We all sat down to dinner and speeches from the Major and the City of Chicago's new Police Superintendent.

The night was fun and I enjoyed being able to talk with Marcus, Paige, Vicky and Hailee. Just as we were moving on from the main course, I felt a chill – something was wrong. I tried to ignore the sensation, but my Hit Girl sixth sense was tingling. I nudged Dave, beside me and he looked into my eyes. I saw him nod in understanding. Next, I looked over at Marcus and then Hailee. They both reacted to the look in my eyes. I saw Hailee looking around the room casually, but purposefully.

Marcus reached down to his ankle and came back up with a napkin in his hand. He passed the napkin over to me – under the napkin was Marcus' backup piece – a Glock 26 sub-compact pistol. I noticed Vicky passing over a similar package to Hailee.

"I came equipped!" Dave commented, indicating the Glock 19 in a holster around his right ankle.

Our table was over by a window, just feet from a door to the passageway. Hailee spoke first.

"Far corner, eleven o'clock. Other corner, two o'clock."

"I got 'em," I growled.

However, before we could do anything, a host of waiters and waitresses appeared to clear away the empty plates. I lost sight of the two men and then there was gunfire.

After the gunfire, came the screaming and then came the panic.

"Everybody shut the fuck up!" A man yelled as he pointed his compact submachine gun, which I recognised as a Kriss Vector Gen II, upwards, sending two rounds into the ceiling.

His shouts were ignored as the undisciplined screams continued from those non-Police present. The gunmen's plans did not seem to be going well! They seemed to be reacting though and altering their plans accordingly. They closed in on what was obviously their target – the Mayor. It seemed more like an assassination rather than a kidnapping.

Jack had the Mayor down behind the table and he fired off several rounds at the gunmen. Dave flipped our table over as a shield, other tables followed suit and I could see Voight throwing a look in my direction, a pistol in his hands. Almost everybody was behind cover as a gunfight began sixteen stories in the air. There were six gunmen, with automatic weapons and they concentrated on moving towards the Mayor, while the innocent civilians were led out under covering fire from over a dozen Police Officers.

When it was Paige's turn, she refused to go, despite Marcus shouting at her to go to safety. Paige was a stubborn bitch, which explained where Megan got her attitude! We all had limited ammunition, considering we were attending a dinner and not a war, so there was no way that we could out-shoot the gunmen. We just had to persuade them to leave.

I grabbed hold of Paige and shoved her none too gently towards the doorway with Hailee providing covering fire as we went. We found ourselves in the Grand Foyer just outside the Grand Ballroom. Just then, another door burst open further along the corridor and a gunman appeared. I threw Paige down and sent three bullets towards the man. I switched out the magazine and dived down as several shots came in our direction from another gunman as he came through the door. I heard a scream behind me, but ignored it as I concentrated on the gunman.

Marcus came up behind me, we both fired our last rounds off towards the gunman, and he fell down in a pool of blood. I began to hear shouts of 'clear' indicating that all the gunmen were down. That was when I turned in relief and saw Hailee staring at the floor.

I followed her gaze and saw Paige, a pool of her blood spreading across the thick carpet and soaking her dress.

Thursday morning

Glenview

Breakfast was a very quiet and subdued affair that morning.

Megan was in a bad way – which was understandable and everybody was trying to be close to her and to give her the space she needed – which was not easy. Dave said he would look after the twins and get them to school while I took Megan and Stephanie with me down to Safehouse F.

Megan needed a distraction.

Safehouse F

Megan had not said a word on the drive down.

Neither Stephanie, nor I, wanted to break the silence. When we arrived, I suggested to Stephanie that she take Megan upstairs to get themselves changed, ready for some exercise. I also wanted to get an update on the situation.

I found Marty in the Command Centre pounding away on his keyboard.

"What do we know?"

"The six dead gunmen were mercenaries. The CPD is still tracing back the money to see who hired them. Jack has ensured that we get a copy of any evidence and I'm doing my own searches. We have seven injured, with bullet wounds, but thankfully, nobody other than the gunmen were killed. How's Paige?"

"I've heard nothing since the early hours, but she and the baby were stable."

"Megan?"

"Only time will tell."

..._...

I headed downstairs to where I was expecting to find the girls. Only they were not training. Stephanie was sitting with her back against the wall and hugging Megan who was crying. As I entered, Stephanie smiled weakly.

I sat down on the other side of Megan and gently touched her arm. She turned to look at me and I had never seen her so miserable.

"Come on, let's get to work," I said, getting to my feet and pulling Megan with me.

"I can't focus..." Megan began.

Stephanie pulled Megan onto the mat and stopped dead centre. She smirked at me before she then turned to face Megan from a couple of feet away.

"Hit me!" Stephanie ordered.

"I told you I..."

Whack! Stephanie slapped Megan hard around the face.

"You..."

Whack!

"Act like a whiny bitch, get slapped like a whiny bitch!" Stephanie explained with a smile.

"Fuck you!" Megan growled back and I saw her expression change.

There followed a rapid thirty seconds of violent movements as both girls attacked each other before pausing to catch a breath.

"You're weak..." Stephanie growled at Megan.

There followed another brief assault on Stephanie, which she fought off reasonably well.

"Time to get your head in the game, Wildcat, so stop acting like a little pussy!" Stephanie laughed as she planted a kick on Megan's thigh before flipping the older girl on to her back.

Stephanie placed her foot on Megan's throat, pinning her to the mat.

"This nine-year-old girl just owned your ass!" She growled. "Your Mum's in hospital and she's hurt – but she's alive, so get with the programme and let's avenge her – got it?"

Megan looked a little surprised, but nodded as Stephanie removed her foot from her neck.

"I guess I deserved that – nice moves by the way!" Megan said as she got back to her feet.

"We're partners, you and I..." Stephanie reminded Megan.

Megan gave Stephanie a hug as Dave appeared.

"Can I interrupt this lesbian love fest for a moment?"

"Just getting Megan's mind focussed," I laughed as the two girls sprang apart and both glared at Dave. "You have obviously been telling Stephanie some of my tricks!"

Dave laughed. "Just a few!"

"What?" Megan asked pointedly getting the conversation back on track.

"You want to go see your Mom?" Dave asked. "Marcus rang – you can go to the hospital if you want."

"I'll be changed in thirty seconds!" Megan announced sprinting for the steps.

***Chapter 211*: The Wildcat Avenger**

***The next morning
Friday***

Glenview

"Morning, Marcus!"

"Well hello, my wayward daughters!"

"Problem?" Megan asked innocently.

"Innocence is not your strong suit, Megan, nor yours, Mindy..."

"We've been good girls!" I insisted.

"Mindy – do I look like I just fell out of a monkey's butt?"

Megan smiled and opened her mouth to reply, so I rapidly put my hand over her mouth and replied for her.

"Of course not, Marcus."

"So the cat-like injuries that several *living* criminals had when they were arrested last night came from...?" Marcus prompted.

"...A stray cat?" Megan suggested deadpan.

Marcus did his best not to laugh.

"Where were you two between eight and midnight? A certain warehouse was found filled with the mutilated remains of many others. The ME used several words to describe the injuries: blast, emasculation, evisceration and decapitation."

"We'd like to plead the fifth on that question!" I replied with a good attempt at an innocent smile.

"Not buying it," Marcus growled.

"I was behind on my biology homework...?" Megan suggested.

Marcus did laugh that time.

"Please control your blood lust – we have enough problems as it is without you two literally carving your way through the city."

I had to admit, it was good to see a smile on Megan's face for a change.

It was obvious what Mindy had done the previous night. She had done it with Joshua when Jack and Natalie had been shot. As soon as I had heard about the rash of cat-like injuries, I knew it was Megan with her damn claws!

Paige was safe and out of danger. Seeing her bleeding out had scared me half to death. She was not alone though. Another six were still in hospital with one Officer already released. The CPD was in an ugly mood and every Officer had a short fuse after such a blatant display at the hotel.

Jack was working hard to find out who and what was behind the outrage. It was going to be a major test of his leadership to keep the CPD together.

The previous evening

Safehouse F

"Stephanie, I want you to watch and learn as we deploy into the City, tonight. Marty will take you through how we operate and show you what goes on at his end of the operation."

"No problem, Mindy," Stephanie replied.

"Hit Girl and Wildcat are two up and ready to roll!" I called as Stephanie headed towards the Control Room.

"Have fun!" Battle Guy replied as I dropped the purple Ducati Multistrada into gear and accelerated up the ramp.

The roar of the powerful one hundred and sixty horsepower, 1200cc engine was intoxicating and it was great to be on two wheels again. Wildcat needed an outlet for her anger and I knew exactly where to go. A mile or so north-west of the Midway Airport was an industrial area and in a certain building was a drug-den that we were fully aware of, but had not had the time to do much about, until that night.

..._...

I pulled up in the shadow of an adjacent building and hid the motorcycle.

"Battle Guy, Hit Girl and Wildcat are moving in!"

"Battle Guy copies – put those claws to good use, Wildcat!"

"Oh, I will, Battle Guy, I will!" Wildcat replied.

I looked down at the younger vigilante.

"Let's move, Wildcat – no risks and don't get hurt..."

"Hey, it's me!"

"That is what I'm afraid of..." I growled as we ran towards the target building.

I was angry.

Some fucking bastard had put my Mom in hospital. There was nothing, I could do about that – for now. The people who did it, were dead, but whoever had ordered the hit on the Mayor had caused the collateral damage that had put eight, including Mom, in the hospital.

I was annoyed that it had taken Stephanie to get my head sorted out, but as she had said, we were partners. She was doing what she could to help me. Being put down by a skinny, British, nine-year-old was a little embarrassing, but that was my life!

I knew why Hit Girl had brought me out; it was to allow me to vent my anger through killing. My mind was in turmoil and normally I hated killing unnecessarily, but I needed to hurt somebody and those bastards that dealt drugs only had themselves to blame.

Hit Girl was ahead of me as we ran through the darkness and I forced myself to focus on the task ahead, channelling the pain and worry in my heart, into energy that I could use to fight.

There was a man patrolling outside a side door.

"Take him!" I growled.

Wildcat approached from behind and then ran at the man, deploying her claws as she ran. She leapt into the air and landed on the man's shoulder. She drove the claws of her right gauntlet into the man's neck. As the corpse fell to the concrete Wildcat rolled off and then back onto her feet.

"Done!" She replied.

I approached the door.

"Code is: seven – nine – eight – nine – nine..." Battle Guy advised and I punched in the numbers.

The door opened silently allowing us access to the facility. In the distance, I could hear aircraft taking off from the airport and more importantly the roar of a powerful motorcycle. The inside of the warehouse was brightly lit, not that we were worried.

"Howdy, cunts!" I growled as we both stepped into the light.

"Holy fuck – its Hit Girl..."

Any other yells of horror were drowned out as a guard opened fire with his pistol. We both braced for the impacts of the bullets. He was a crap shot.

"Not a nice way to treat two ladies!" I growled, flicking a knife into the man's forehead.

More men appeared and more guns with more bullets. I drew both pistols and opened fire on the guards while Wildcat flew at the other men like a demented Angry Bird. The four-foot eight-inch vigilante dug her claws into bodies as she went, leaving a bloody trail behind her. There was screaming and yelling; I loved it!

I ignored the stings of bullets as they collided with my combat suit. I span around, my twin Glock 19 pistols spitting fire in every direction. For the occasion, I had fitted 33-round high-capacity magazines into my pistols allowing me plenty of firepower. As I dumped the empty magazines, I inserted another pair of 33-round magazines and ran after Wildcat. I followed the bloody trail and found her, SIG Sauer pistol in hand.

There were several spent casings beside her and three dead bodies before her. As I watched I saw each bullet count – Wildcat was an expert shot. Her combat suit had blood on it, but her movements told me that it was not her own blood. We worked our way forward, Wildcat deploying her beloved claws and slashing anything that came close.

I was purely along for the ride; it was Wildcat's night.

I had never felt so free.

Normally, Hit Girl kept me under control, but she was letting me run wild. The blood flew and landed on my combat suit; my claws and gauntlets were covered in blood. I smoothly switched from claws to pistol and back to claws again. I was on automatic, savouring the one-sided fight as I made my way towards the offices located above the main floor.

I wanted the cunt that ran the organisation and they had an appointment with my Wakizashi.

There were six men guarding the bottom of the stairs that led up to the office.

"You are in our way..." Wildcat announced as she shot the first man dead.

The remaining five fell to our swords – we wanted some good old-fashioned fun! Wildcat had drawn her Wakizashi and advanced on two of the men, ignoring the bullets and severing a leg and then dumping the second man's steaming entrails on the floor before him. The remaining three? One lost his head in all the excitement while the other two would be an interestingly challenging jumble for the medical examiner to rearrange.

..._...

We left bloody footprints as we climbed the steel staircase. At the top was a steel door.

"Open the fucking door!" I yelled.

"Fuck you!"

Not very original! I studied the door, the surrounding wall and the mountings. Time for a lesson – I reached into the small pack on my lower back.

"Wildcat, this is called Detonating Cord. It is a plastic tube filled with pentaerythritol tetranitrate, rolls off the tongue that! Or just call it PETN for short..."

I took a moment to shoot the man who charged up the stairs, rudely interrupting my lesson.

"... PETN explodes at a rate of, near enough, four miles per second or as far as we are concerned, instantaneously. I

prefer Primacord with a PETN core, but there are other versions..."

Another two men fell as I turned back to Wildcat, holstering my Glock.

"... Before I was so rudely interrupted... Oh for fuck's sake – I'm trying to teach here!" I growled and pulled the pin from a grenade, throwing it down into the warehouse towards where some bullets were originating.

I ignored the explosion as I continued.

"We need a good blast to remove that door – those stupid cunts fitted a steel door into a standard wooden wall. So instead of removing the door, we..."

"... Remove the frame, with the door!" Wildcat finished.

I nodded.

"We bunch up the cord, taping it in long coils with insulating tape – called double stranding. Then we fix it to the walls with duct-tape – like so – all around the door. Now a remote detonator and..."

I dragged Wildcat to one side before pressing the button on the remote trigger. There was a sharp crack and a yell from inside the office. For a moment nothing more than a cloud of dust and wood splinters erupted. The door was still standing.

"Huh?" Wildcat queried.

"Knock! Knock!" I yelled out and gave the door a firm prod with a single finger.

The entire door and frame crashed backwards into the office. I walked in, my swords crossed in front of me.

"Mind if we come in?" I growled.

I had enjoyed the impromptu explosives lesson.

Hit Girl definitely had a flair for the dramatic! Before us stood four men, all with fear etched on their faces.

"Who's first?" I growled, moving towards the nearest man.

The man was not very brave; he threw down his MAC-10 and moved backwards against the far wall. I moved fast, twisting my Wakizashi and myself in several smooth motions. At first, the man just stood there, but then his eyes rolled back into his head and his body began to collapse. The pile of severed body parts dropped to the carpet and the other three men all looked on in horror.

"Clothes off, now!" I ordered.

I saw Hit Girl glance in my direction; I knew she would be frowning under her mask.

Within a minute, the three men were standing there, naked as the day they were born. I was no stranger to a naked male body; I had seen my first, months before, in Gotham. I felt uncomfortable at the sight, but I continued with Hit Girl watching my every move.

I took a step towards the first man. I placed the point of my Wakizashi under his dick and gently lifted it. The man closed his eyes and grimaced, as his dick visibly shrivelled. I removed the blade gently without causing any damage. I almost laughed as the man let out the breath of relief, he had been holding.

I moved onto the next man and repeated my teasing and then again on the third man.

"Wildcat, we do not have all night – stop playing!" Hit Girl warned.

As the third man's dick sat on my blade, I flicked the sword up and watched as the severed member flew through the air and then heard a scream as both of the man's hands flew to his groin and he fell to the floor. My blade came down in one smooth movement, severing the man's head. Copious amounts of blood erupted across the floor and both of the other men pissed themselves out of fear.

I kicked the next man against the wall and then emasculated him with the tip of my blade quickly followed by cutting

his throat from ear to ear. A torrent of scarlet blood flowed down his bare chest and soaking the carpet beneath our feet.

The final man was on his knees and begging for his life. I had had an idea! I dragged the naked man to his feet and threw him down the steel stairs. He screamed as he landed and he kept screaming. He was still alive, good!

I duct-taped the man's legs and arms together, with the man lying on his back, before turning to Hit Girl who had followed me down the stairs.

"Grenade, a foot of Primacord and a remote detonator..."

Hit Girl complied without hesitation. I wrapped the Primacord around the grenade, securing it with duct-tape and I connected the detonator. I rammed the IED between the man's legs at his crotch, pulling the pin from the grenade.

"Night, night!" I growled and we both headed towards the exit.

..._...

As we exited, I was surprised to see Kick-Ass astride his Ducati Diavel motorcycle, with Shadow beside him on her Panigale.

"Hit Girl – hit it!" I growled.

Hit Girl pressed the button on the remote trigger and I heard a large explosion, which rattled the entire building.

"Can't leave you two alone for a minute, can I?" Kick-Ass growled.

"The girl's in pain; I let her have a little fun!" I replied.

"With explosives?" He queried.

"Hey, she's growing up!" I responded with a laugh.

"Move it, Hit Girl – we still have work to do!" Wildcat called as she strode towards the building where we had hidden our motorcycle.

I shrugged and followed the young vigilante into the darkness.

Friday morning

Now Kim and Marty were living at West Ridge, Kim was making a lot of use of the exercise and training facilities.

"I need to get back in shape and get Hawk back out on the streets!" She had told me.

It would be good to have Hawk back with us. We were short of healthy operatives. Josh was still healing, although he was much better. Hailee was hurting from her wounds and the other evening had stressed her wounds a little. I was also a little worried that Megan was going to come unstuck.

The girl had worried me at the warehouse on Thursday night. Maybe I had let her be carried away with her adrenalin rush! However, it seemed that Megan was a lot happier and coping with her Mom's near-death experience. She spent a lot of time talking with Stephanie, which was good for both girls.

Cathy had insisted on talking to Megan to see how she was really feeling. Cathy's report had not been good. Megan was developing some nasty psychotic problems and I had only myself to blame. I just hoped I could control her and stop her going the same way as me.

Lake View High School

I could not resist it; the shot was perfect.

The tenth grade boy and girl were kissing – as usual. The boy was skinny, but muscular and handsome. He had the

most adorable British accent, too. Everybody in school knew that Chloe Bennett and Joshua Williams were a couple and a girl went near Williams, only if she had a death wish; Bennett could get very violent!

I aimed and focussed on my targets from less than a dozen yards away, ignoring the other kids as they wandered the corridors. My moment to strike came as I saw Williams' hand move up Bennett's chest.

I pressed the trigger.

I turned at the sound.

"Damn you, Lauren – put that camera away!" I growled, and then I paused. "Any chance of a copy?"

"I'll bring a copy to D-JAK tonight," the girl agreed before running off.

"You want a copy?" Josh asked.

"I've never seen us making out..."

"You are so strange!"

***Chapter 212*: Psychology**

The following morning
Saturday

North Avenue, Chicago

"Where are we going?"

"Where are we going?" I repeated, in answer to Stephanie's question and smirked at Megan in the seat beside me. "You are about to enter another dimension, a dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind. A journey into a wondrous land of imagination. Next stop, the Twilight Zone!"

"Very funny, Mindy!" Stephanie laughed.

We parked on the rooftop parking lot and then headed towards the elevator.

The second floor

As we exited the lift, Mindy turned left and we joined a mass of people before we passed by 'Express' and 'J. Crew', before we reached 'Victoria's Secret' and I had to pull Megan away from the entrance. That shop was just wrong in oh so many ways!

"Chloe gets stuff from there, mail order," Mindy commented.

"Dirty bitch!" Both Megan and I said together.

We continued around the corner until Mindy stopped outside some double glass doors, beyond was darkness. She unlocked the locks top and bottom with some keys before pushing the door open. A loud beeping sounded – the alarm. Mindy walked over to a glass panel set into the wall to the right and placed her hand against a designated area that looked squishy. Within a second, the beeping stopped and a green message appeared on the glass: 'ALARM DISARMED – ACTIVATING SYSTEMS'.

"That panel will take a handprint, but not leave one – so nobody can dust and lift – cool huh!"

"Awesome – where are we?" Megan demanded.

"Welcome to D-JAK..."

Lights set into the ceiling and along the walls began to snap on, illuminating the room. To the left was a large area dedicated to changing rooms, toilets, showers and lockers. To the right was a large reception desk with three large, wall-mounted TV screens mounted one above the other behind it. Beyond the desk was a large open-plan area. In the central area was a large training mat and located between the reception desk and the central mat, were two smaller mats for separate classes. Behind and to the left of the reception desk was a private area with an office and a room equipped with soft chairs and couches. There was also a small kitchen.

At the far end of the space there was an area dedicated to exercise machines, punch bags and some other, similar, equipment. At the far right, was a staircase, which led to the lower entrance of D-JAK. Mindy led us both into the room with the couches, we all sat down, and Mindy turned serious.

..._...

"Megan," she began. "I want to talk to you about the other night. I will get personal, so if you want Stephanie to go and play – then she will leave us."

"No, Mindy. Stephanie is my friend and my partner, she has also stayed by my side since Mom was shot and she has helped me through this. She stays."

Mindy then turned to me.

"No interrupting, Steph. Just listen, okay?"

Stephanie nodded.

..._...

"You got a little carried away the other night, Megan – then again, I did let you. You did surprise me, though."

"I had a lot of issues to work out of my system."

"Why'd you want those men naked?" I asked.

Megan blushed slightly.

"After Gotham, I thought it would be a good way to show that I was in charge. Clothes denote power; I take the power away..."

"Interesting logic... It surprised me that you were comfortable with seeing naked men."

"I was *not* comfortable with it – by no stretch of the imagination... The sight was disgusting and I was revolted, but it had to be done."

I looked over at Stephanie.

"What about you?"

"I've seen a naked adult man before – I can't say that I liked what I saw, but the human body can't be avoided; it is what it is. Men have a weakness – their 'family jewels', so why not exploit that!" She responded.

"I like you Stephanie!"

That night ***Central Chicago***

The man had not deserved to die, but no matter, he had still been eviscerated by the triple claws of Wildcat.

"What did you do that for?" Shadow demanded.

"I felt like it, I suppose..."

Shadow paused, as if she were about to say something, but then seemed to think better of it and just walked away from the younger vigilante.

"She's going too fucking far!" Battle Guy complained as he looked down at the dead body.

"Tell me about it," Kick-Ass added sourly. "But she's not the only one..."

"I know," Battle Guy replied as he looked over at Trojan.

Shadow chased the two younger vigilantes across the roof, catching up with them as they stopped to talk.

"This *has* to stop, you two!"

"Well it's not going to, so get the fuck used to it Shadow," Trojan growled before heading off into the darkness.

"Listen to me! Hit Girl is *not* going to stand for this. A bit of advice from somebody who cares? Calm the fuck down and follow the rules."

"Fuck you!" Wildcat retorted. "Or you will get these..."

Wildcat deployed and swung her claws. Shadow took a step back to avoid the lethal claws as Wildcat stalked off into the darkness without another look, following Trojan. Shadow found herself on the edge of the building and try as she might, she could not regain her balance and fell backwards into the void.

The Edwards Apartment

Lizzie Edwards gazed out at the night, looking past the fire escape outside of their bedroom.

"Nothing ever happens here..."

"What?" Lizzie's big sister, Lauren, asked sleepily.

"This place is so boring!"

"Go back to sleep, Lizzie..."

Lizzie continued to gaze out into the night.

"I want something to happen..."

Suddenly something big and heavy dropped out of the night and landed on the fire escape with a crash.

Lizzie jumped back with a start and Lauren sat bolt upright in bed.

"Lauren – there's something on the fire escape..."

"God, you so annoy me!" Lauren responded as she reluctantly scrambled out of her warm bed.

Lauren looked out onto the fire escape.

"There's nothing... Oh my God; it's a vigilante!" Lauren breathed.

Lizzie slid the window open and leant out. Prodding the armoured form.

"Lizzie – don't touch!"

Lizzie ignored her sister and touched the edge of the vigilante's mask. There was a flash and a crack. Lizzie screamed as she jerked her hand away.

"That hurt!"

There were a dozen bright flashes as Lauren snapped a dozen high-definition photos of the seemingly unconscious vigilante. The vigilante's head turned toward us.

"Am I gonna get a copy of those?" Shadow growled, rubbing her head with her right hand.

"Sorry – don't hurt me... Shadow."

"I won't... You recognise me?"

"You helped rescue me from the basement of some hellhole when I was kidnapped a few months ago," the older girl replied.

"Now I need your help... err..."

"Lauren and this is my little sister, Lizzie."

I froze for a second. I thought I had recognised the voices; I taught both girls at D-JAK!

Shadow made to sit up.

"Oh, wow, my head hurts and so does my back..."

The words came out a little slurred, but I understood what she was saying, then she continued talking, but not to us.

"Fusion, this is Shadow – I need an extraction... I'm a little woozy, but I can walk, I hope... Copy that; I'm on my way down..."

Shadow turned to face me.

"Goodnight Lauren, it's time for me to go."

I watched as Shadow slowly got to her feet; she looked awesome as she steadied herself before starting down the fire escape and I lost sight of her as she vanished into the darkness below.

***The following morning
Sunday***

Glenview

"You doing okay, Chloe?"

"Yeah, thanks, Mindy – I'm just a little bruised on my back and my ass, but I'll heal!"

"Bit of a coincidence landing on that fire escape, huh?"

"Just a bit!"

As I put the cell down, I started to consider the reasons behind Shadow dropping off that building.

***The next day
Monday***

Lake View High School

I was a little fragile, but I was still able to attend school.

The first period was peaceful and I had Josh to fuss over me. Due to the painkillers that Mom had given me, I was a little hazy, which was not much use when I was walking down a corridor between lessons. As I turned a corner, I saw a crowd of kids gathered by a noticeboard

"Chloe, you gotta look at this!"

It was a very overexcited Avery, who ran over and pulled me through the crowd. There beside the noticeboard was Lauren and on the noticeboard were some A3 size pictures. My eyes went wide at the high-resolution images of a certain blue-clad superhero.

"She's awesome; isn't she?" Riley exclaimed and Avery looked like she would explode.

I had always known that my friends thought Shadow was awesome and most of the boys in the school who had reached puberty fancied the pants off her! I froze, my drug fogged mind unable to figure out a response that would not reveal my secret.

"I am... I mean she is..." I mumbled receiving a strange look from Lauren and Riley.

"Where did you get them from?" Riley asked Lauren.

"It was awesome – she landed on the fire escape outside my bedroom and she allowed me to take some pictures."

I had no memory of ever giving my permission, but there I was in vivid colour, weapons and all.

"Can we get copies?" Some of the boys asked.

"I could do that," Lauren replied.

"I want some of those!"

I turned to find Josh grinning down at me. I glared back.

"You fancy Shadow over me, do you?" I demanded facetiously.

"Now you mention it..."

I glared at my boyfriend.

"Shadow has a very different figure to you, Chloe – she's much more curvaceous and her tits are bigger too."

I actually had no response to that so I just shrugged.

That evening

Glenview

The four kids were in the pool.

While Paige was still in hospital, Megan was staying with us. I had no problem with that as it also allowed me to keep an eye on the girl. At that moment, watching the kids playing, you would have never known that two of them were cold killers. I was supposed to be worrying about Stephanie and *her* mental stability, but instead I was worrying about the mental stability of Megan and Curtis.

I was alone with the kids, apart from the very pregnant Sophia. Yes, Sophia was pregnant – three weeks! After her episode with Rex, we had taken her to the vet for a routine check-up and... Therefore, somewhere around the middle of January, next year, there should be some puppies – anywhere up to ten or so apparently!

Dave and Erika were out on the streets – Shannon and Tony had been having some trouble down at the bar they ran on North Ashland Avenue and West Bryn Mawr Avenue.

The bar was called the Edgewater Lounge.

The Edgewater Lounge

The normal clientele were behaving remarkably well that evening.

Usually they were a bit rowdy, but never out of control. However, for the past couple of weeks there had been some trouble, so Shannon had reached out for a friend or two to visit.

"Holy shit!" Harry growled at the sight of who was sitting, chatting away to each other, at one end of the central bar.

"Evening, Harry – just some friends who have decided to make this their regular watering hole," Tony offered nonchalantly.

"Okay – bourbon, neat!"

..._...

The trouble arrived, as usual, a few minutes before nine that evening.

"My favourite bar..." The man drawled to his three companions. "Move along – I want those seats!"

Four men seated on stools at the bar, ignored the man.

"Hey, fuckers, I..."

"I think it is time for you and your compatriots to leave!" Shannon announced strongly.

"You gonna make me?"

"No..."

"But we will!"

The man turned to find himself face to face with two armour-clad vigilantes. The green and yellow armour of Kick-Ass towered above the other vigilante who was clad in light blue and was known as Mist.

"You go easy, or you go hard..." Mist drawled in her electronically enhanced voice, staring at the man.

The man glared around the bar.

"There's better fucking places than this fucking dump – let's go!"

The men stormed out of the bar.

"Hey, asshole – get outta my face!"

"Did you just threaten me?"

"Yes, I fucking did, you black bastard!"

There was a pause, followed by a scuffle. Kick-Ass led a small crowd out of the bar and to the sidewalk outside.

"Captain Williams!" Kick-Ass growled.

"Just tidying up the streets – nothing to see here people!" Marcus grinned as the four men were cuffed and pushed into a pair of waiting Police cars. "Goodnight!"

***Chapter 213*: Clash of The Titans**

***Two days later
Wednesday night***

Hit Girl flew across the room, cannoning into the brick wall.

Jackal ran forwards but he was kicked in the stomach for his trouble. The teenaged vigilante fell to the floor, but quickly rolled back to his feet. Hit Girl tried to regain her feet but the enormous figure strode over and kicked the veteran vigilante in the thigh, eliciting a scream of pain.

Hit Girl rolled with the kick, before kicking out herself. Her armoured heel striking the equally armoured leg closest to her. The owner of the leg barely registered the strike.

Hit Girl was getting seriously annoyed.

I turned as Kick-Ass thundered forwards, moving fast towards Hit Girl and her attacker. I was still sore from dropping onto fire escapes days previously, but I struggled up from the floor where the armoured assailant had thrown me.

"Hey!" Kick-Ass yelled. "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

The man turned to meet his next attacker.

..._...

Size wise, the unknown attacker was six inches taller than Kick-Ass, wider too. His armour looked to be as cutting edge as our own and it had protected the man from our weapons, including our bullets. He had single-handedly taken down Hit Girl, Jackal and me with barely a scratch.

Now it was the turn of Kick-Ass.

***Earlier that day
Wednesday afternoon***

Glenview

"Why do you both look so unhappy?"

"Mom cooked," Anne-Marie replied simply and Danny pretended to vomit.

I laughed and then tried to stop as Mindy came out of the kitchen.

"They've only been with us a few weeks and they already know that your cooking sucks!"

"They were hungry!" Mindy replied defensively.

"Isn't that classified as 'cruel and unusual punishment'?"

Mindy's mouth dropped open in shock.

"You bast..."

"Mindy!"

Mindy scowled and the kids laughed at her discomfort.

"I'm still learning, okay!"

"You keep learning, Mom," Danny advised. "Just, please practice on somebody else!"

"Not funny!" Mindy grimaced.

Later that afternoon

Megan was late back from school.

Apparently, she had been in detention and she was in a foul mood. As I understood it, Marcus had had a go at her, too. We tried to be nice, but Megan was being bitchy – super bitchy! Then it all came to a head and I was glad Dave had gone out immediately after dumping Megan.

"Megan – cut that language out and be nice – grow up!" Mindy said sharply.

"Fuck you; you're not my fucking mother!" Mindy retorted angrily.

I saw Mindy's eyes flash.

'Oh, shit!' I thought and unbidden I grabbed the hand of each twin. I dragged them both upstairs out of the line of fire. The last I saw of Megan was when Mindy seized hold of the back of her blouse and her feet left the ground.

Mindy hauled Megan away towards the basement.

"Get the fuck off of me!"

I threw Megan onto the mat where she landed in a heap.

"You gonna kill me now?" She growled as she stood up.

"Your arrogance just keeps getting you into shit, doesn't it? You don't know when to quit."

"Come on; hit me, you fucking pussy!"

"Unlike you, Megan, I have self-control. You deserve to be hit and hard, but I won't do that – not to you."

"Why?"

"Because I care about you – Curtis too. I know that you've both been going through a lot. I should have been there to help you both before things went too far."

"There is nothing fucking wrong with us – you think we're going psychotic, like you?"

"Not like me, no – that takes a long time and worse crap than you've been exposed to. A lot has happened over the past year or so, Megan. You lost your Dad. Your Mom lost her job. You were forced to live in that shithole where we found you."

Megan was calming down – slowly, too slowly.

"Fucking hit me!" She growled furiously.

"Look, if you want to be a bitch, I'm sure Sophia will lend you one of her collars..."

"What!" Megan exclaimed.

"You want to be a *real* bitch, then we can fucking well treat you like one!"

Megan glared at me for a moment.

"You wouldn't..."

Megan did not sound too confident.

"You think I wouldn't put a collar on you and make you sleep in a dog bed? I would make you eat out of a bowl on the floor, with your butt in the air, too – and remember dogs don't wear clothes, either!"

Megan looked decidedly unhappy with that threat.

"You wouldn't fucking dare..."

"Try me, bitch!" I growled back with an evil smirk. "Strip – clothes off now – all of them... I'll go get that collar."

Megan glared, but then tears started to show themselves.

"Go sit on the couch," I said quietly.

I followed the young girl to the couch and sat down beside her.

"Megan – you've suffered a lot. You've been stabbed and badly hurt during some nasty fighting. You've got nothing to prove to me or anybody. You are one of my top operators and I am damn proud of you. Now your Mom's in hospital and that has tipped you over the edge – yes?"

Megan nodded hesitantly.

"We're all here to help you. Both of you – Curtis is talking to Chloe and Cathy, right now."

"How can you be so nice to me, considering what I've done... The way I've been treating everybody, especially you?"

"We all fuck up, once or twice," I replied. "Ask Dave and Chloe – I've fucked up more times than I care to think about!"

Megan paused for a minute before speaking again. She looked at me directly as she spoke.

"I need a rest, don't I?"

"Do you?"

"I can't bear the thought of not being Wildcat, even for a minute, but if I don't rest then I may never be allowed to be Wildcat again, right?"

"You got it, kid!"

"So, I'm grounded?"

"That's up to Marcus, but I'm standing you down from Fusion, as of right now. Get upstairs and you apologise to Anne-Marie, Danny and Stephanie. Then you spend some time being an eleven-year-old girl, okay."

Megan hesitated and then she nodded.

"Thank you, Mindy and I am really sorry for swearing at you. I mean that, I really do."

"I know."

Megan paused at the bottom of the stairs from the basement and she turned to me.

"Would you really have made me strip naked and put a collar on me?"

I laughed and then put on my evil face.

"We'll never know, will we, Megan!" I growled. "Unless, of course, you start behaving like a bitch again..."

Megan fled up the stairs.

That evening

"Hey, Mindy!"

"Hailee! You ready to look after these, err kids?"

"I can take it – I've faced worse..."

"Don't bet on it!"

"Hi, Hailee," Danny called out. "Guess what?"

"What?" Hailee replied.

"Megan owes the 'swear jar' about fifty-thousand bucks!"

Hailee laughed, which earned her a scowl from Megan.

"That bad, huh?"

"It was bad!" Anne-Marie confirmed with a grin, sticking her tongue out at Megan who did the same in return.

Hailee laughed.

"You have any trouble with Megan – just wave this at her," I said, placing a dog collar on the kitchen side.

Megan froze. She smiled sweetly and then suggested that they all go and watch a movie.

"Megan's learning to be a kid again," I whispered into Hailee's ear. "See you later – tonight should be a breeze!"

Three hours later

South Wells Street and West Van Buren Street

We had received a call from Voight.

The CPD had met up with something that they could not handle. Voight had reported it as somebody in an armoured suit – somebody big! There were only four of us on patrol that evening.

I was on my Multistrada while Kick-Ass was driving Iron Hide with Jackal and Shadow making out in the back! We came up West Jackson Boulevard and turned right onto South Wells Street driving beneath the 'L'. We stopped as we reached the southeast corner of The Loop.

It looked like the entire Chicago PD was out, including SWAT. We were met by Matthews who detailed four cops to watch our vehicles.

"He's in there," Matthews motioned towards a door with '404' displayed above it. "Second floor. Everything we fire at him seems to bounce off – he makes Kick-Ass seem rather small."

Kick-Ass growled.

"Down boy!" I quipped. "Leave it to us..."

Hit Girl and Shadow ran into the main door, pistols up in front of them.

Jackal jumped upwards pulling down the ladder to the fire escape. He rapidly climbed up to the second floor while I followed. A cop held the ladder in position. As we both reached the second floor, we heard radio chatter.

"Contact!" It was Hit Girl's voice.

I heard several shots, mostly the booms of Hit Girl's .40-calibre Glock 22 pistols, but interspersed with the sharper cracks of Shadow's 5.7-millimetre FN Five-seveN pistol.

"The fucker's bullet proof – at least Level III!" Shadow growled.

"Shadow run!" Hit Girl then growled as I heard heavy booms from .45-calibre gunfire. "The fucker has a fucking .45-calibre Kriss Vector!"

I felt cold inside my suit at that – those rounds would cut through the girls' lighter armour. There was no time for niceties so I drew my own Glock and shot out the glass in the nearest window. Having made my entrance, I ran through the office with Jackal close behind. I peered out of the door into the passageway and caught sight of a dull red shape.

Fuck the guy was huge! I fired off an entire magazine – but my rounds just bounced off the cunt! I did attract his attention though. He sent a few rounds in my direction before his magazine was empty. I took my chance and ran forwards. I seized hold of the Vector sub-machine gun and wrestled it out of the cunts hands as Jackal kicked at the tree trunks that the man used for legs.

Jackal managed to topple the giant as I ripped the Vector from his grip and threw it out of the nearest window. I turned as Jackal came flying past and the cunt ran up the next flight of stairs.

He was pursued by Hit Girl and Shadow, followed by Jackal. I followed along behind.

We were blindsided as we exited the stairs.

I felt myself being picked up and thrown to the floor. I rolled to absorb the impact and crashed against the wall. I looked up to see Hit Girl fly past me and hit the brick wall with an audible thud. She fell to the ground not moving.

"Hit Girl is down!" I called over the comms.

Jackal ran to help Hit Girl, but he was kicked hard in the stomach and he fell to the ground, an arm holding his stomach.

"Bloody wanker!" Jackal grimaced in obvious pain as he drew a pistol and emptied twenty rounds into the giant cunt as he turned back to the still form of Hit Girl.

"Hit Girl, move!" I yelled and I saw her stirring.

The veteran vigilante was not moving fast enough, being kicked in the thigh before she could fully move out of the way of the advancing juggernaut. I heard her scream out in pain, but she rolled and kicked out. The giant barely registered the strike.

As I got to my feet, Kick-Ass appeared from the stairs like a raging bull elephant. His body language told me that he was beyond pissed.

"Hey!" Kick-Ass yelled. "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

They clashed, punching and kicking each other as they took over the office with their fighting.

We all very quickly moved out of harm's way before we were trampled. It kinda reminded me of the T-Rex vs I-Rex fight in Jurassic Park! Kick-Ass was putting every ounce of his ample strength behind his punches and 'Red', we had no other name for him, staggered under the onslaught, but then he struck back and hard.

I winced inside my mask as Kick-Ass received two solid blows, one to his chest and another to the side of his head. Kick-Ass almost lost his footing but he then drove in with punch after punch pounding Red in the face, stomach and kidneys. The sound alone of the strikes, armour against armour, was awesome.

We could all hear Kick-Ass as he was on VOX and he was swearing worse than Hit Girl! Red was pushed down onto one knee, fending off the blows, but then he kicked out and swept Kick-Ass' left leg from under him, sending him crashing to the floor. However, Kick-Ass was not done; he drove his fist upwards and struck Red hard in the stomach, almost doubling him over with the power of the punch.

Kick-Ass rolled away and regained his feet, but he looked shaky.

"Kick-Ass – how about we teach this fucker to fly?"

"Sure would beat round fucking two!" Kick-Ass growled.

"We take him on three..." I replied, flexing my muscles – I was going to need every damn one of them.

"Three!" I yelled and we both ran forwards seizing an arm each and bracing our shoulders against Red's chest.

We drove the bastard backwards, increasing our momentum, fighting for purchase on the wood floor. Gunfire erupted as the girls got in on the act and blasted a window open – one that had no fire escape beyond it.

"Battle Guy, Hit Girl – tell Matthews that he has incoming!"

We had less than two feet to go and then the red cunt was airborne. He knew it too and he struggled against our combined strength, but we had the edge. He was fighting harder, knowing that he was going to die, but we just pushed harder knowing that he would kill us if we let him go.

"Stop!" Red yelled.

We did not stop.

"Why?" Kick-Ass roared back.

"Who are you?" I demanded with what little breath I had left.

"My name is of no consequence..."

"Fuck this – two, six, fucking heave!" I growled to Kick-Ass.

One more, hearty shove and the cunt fell backwards. I felt myself grabbed by a pair of hands and was thrown to the floor before I followed Red the quick way back to the street below. Kick-Ass fell off to the side against the window frame and collapsed to the floor. I turned to look up into my girl's hidden eyes.

"Thank you, gorgeous!"

"Fuck, I – am – in – pain!" Kick-Ass declared.

***Chapter 214*: The Godfather**

***Three days later
Saturday***

The Sicilians attacked us.

On the other hand, maybe a better word would have been, *ambushed*. Fusion was off its game and that was worrying me, badly. The call had gone out; there was trouble in a part of the City where the Sicilians had gathered. Our intelligence gathering apparatus had failed us – I would be having personal words with my snouts – which meant that we had no idea of the well-equipped army that awaited us.

We also learnt *who* was behind all the Sicilian activity: The Godfather, himself.

That night

We departed in full force.

Something in the back of my mind told me that the D'Amico family were involved somehow – I just had that feeling. It was also the first night back out for Petra – she had passed an exhaustive set of checks administered by Cathy. Hailee had complained about the check-ups, but her mother had told her that she would backup Cathy if she was not fit enough to go back out.

I advised Hailee that it was not a good idea to argue with Cathy!

***Safehouse F
Control Centre***

It was always the part, which I hated: everybody departing for a potentially dangerous operation.

I knew Hal hated it, too. As we both watched, names appeared on the large vertically mounted screen on the right hand side of the main wall of the Control Centre, as Fusion members departed the Safehouses.

'HIT GIRL' appeared in purple as she accelerated up the ramp on her Panigale. Next came 'SHADOW' in blue as she followed on her own Panigale. 'JACKAL' joined the list in black as he followed Shadow on his tan Ninja ZX-10R. Three more names appeared simultaneously as Iron Hide roared out of the Safehouse, 'KICK-ASS' in green, 'SPLINTER' in orange and 'MIST' in grey. Finally, 'PETRA' appeared in pink as she joined the convoy on her own motorcycle.

Four other names were visible on the board as allocated to 'SAFEHOUSE F'. 'BATTLE GUY' in gold, 'HAL' in silver, 'MEDIC' in white, and 'HAWK' in red. Hawk and I were backup and Hound was ready to deploy at a moment's notice.

I watched intently as the variously coloured dots appeared on the large map of Chicago and moved northeast at speed.

Forty minutes later

Northeast Chicago

The ambush had closed around us.

Over twenty armed men, many of whom appeared to be mercenaries of various sorts. We *had* expected something, but we were still caught with our proverbial pants down! We were inside a large multi-floored structure that used to be a theatre – more precisely the Uptown Theatre on North Broadway. The place was a goddamn nightmare; it was immense and in a bad state of disrepair. There was no way that we were going to back down, so we dove into the fight, seven vs over twenty.

We had faced worse odds!

Uptown Theatre, Mezzanine Level

Bullets flew, striking our armour as Shadow and I dove for cover behind the seats of the mezzanine level.

On entering the theatre, we had split up. Petra and Splinter, along with Kick-Ass and Mist had stayed below, heading onto the main floor of the theatre. Shadow and I had headed up to the mezzanine level, slowly climbing the sweeping staircase that led upwards.

We had almost immediately come under fire from balconies above us. We both opened fire on anything that moved, dumping magazine after magazine – we were going through ammunition too damn fast!

I could hear shooting from down below as the other teams engaged the enemy within the seating and on the stage. The building was going to be a nightmare to clear and we would be under fire the entire time.

Uptown Theatre, Main Level

I had not expected the night to go well, but things sucked!

The gunfire was heavy and bullets pinged off of my heavy chest armour as I engaged targets with my G36K. I grinned as the odd body fell from height and crashed into the seating. Mist yelled out a warning as men appeared from a doorway to our left and she dropped one with her chain whip, almost taking his head off.

Splinter and Petra were fighting hand to hand as more men appeared. Everything was going to shit – we needed ammunition and help, fast!

Uptown Theatre, Main Entrance

Battle Guy had put the call out and SWAT was inbound, but over ten minutes out.

I was on guard outside when I received the call for more ammunition. I cleaned out each transport and slung packs over my back as I accelerated for the main door – my trusty Ninja NX-10R smashing through the glass door. I skidded on the marble floor, but regained my balance and aimed for the right-hand of the two curving staircases.

I came under fire from the balcony to my left and took a moment to send a burst of automatic fire from my P90 that was slung across my chest into the balcony. Two bodies fell to the marble below and did not move. I accelerated up the stairs and onto the mezzanine level.

Uptown Theatre, Mezzanine Level

Damn, Jackal knew how to make fucking entrance!

I heard the roaring engine before he appeared, kicking a cunt off the level, sending him crashing into the seating below. He skidded to a halt beside me and handed me a pack of ammunition and magazines.

"Gotta go!" He growled and span his rear wheel as he turned about and headed back towards the lobby.

"He's fucking nuts!" Shadow growled with a slight chuckle.

Uptown Theatre, Main Level

Normally I would have put riding a motorcycle inside a theatre down to Hit Girl, however...!

I saw Jackal roaring onto the Mezzanine Level above, before accelerating away. He had given Hit Girl and Shadow much needed ammunition. I had no idea where Jackal was heading next, but a minute or two later he appeared on the main stage and started to take shots at cunts with his P90, ignoring the return fire as bullets struck his heavy armour.

Splinter and Petra took the opportunity to make for the stage where they would have better coverage as they took down cunts. Petra fended off a pair of cunts while Jackal reloaded his P90 before accelerating off to clear the private boxes that ringed us on both sides.

Then I heard a scream and looked up to see Hit Girl plummeting towards me; she had fallen off the Mezzanine Level. Hit Girl struck me and we both collapsed to the floor. The bitch was giggling!

"Just thought that I'd drop in!" She growled before running for the nearest stairs that would take her back up to Shadow.

Uptown Theatre, Mezzanine Level

Fuck, I was starting to tire.

Hit Girl was fighting with an enormous cunt, who then threw her over the balustrade into the seating below. Thankfully I heard her voice over the comms as it appeared she had crashed into Kick-Ass! I shot the cunt who threw her, in the head.

Hit Girl reappeared two minutes later, her Tanto in her hand and dripping blood.

"Having fun?" I enquired as I punched another mercenary in the face, busting his nose.

"I've had better days!" Hit Girl replied with a laugh.

I could hear the roar of Jackal's Ninja as he engaged cunts around the theatre – Mindy was going to be mad at him for upstaging her with that stunt!

Finally, the level was clear and we headed up between the seating to clear the rooms behind.

..._...

We found a room being guarded by a dozen men; they covered the corridor, but moved out as we approached and caught us in a crossfire. Bullets flew all around and several struck my armour, which fucking hurt. We were majorly outgunned, but then our saviour arrived!

"Incoming!"

It was Jackal and as he approached on his Ninja, he skidded and put his machine flat on the marble floor where vigilante and motorcycle skidded past us, taking out gunman after gunman and sending them flying. Jackal was firing his FN Five-sevenN pistols as he skidded down the corridor on his back, dropping many more.

I cringed as I saw my man and his machine smack into the wall at the end of the corridor. Hit Girl and I both jumped up and ran after him, killing anybody that moved.

Well, that was fun!

I jumped up and dumped my magazines, inserting fresh ones before I turned, ready for action. There before me, were my two favourite girls running towards me, Hit Girl had her Wakizashi drawn, with a pistol in her other hand. Shadow brandished her bō-staff, itching for action.

"Fusion, Battle Guy; SWAT is onsite and engaging!"

"Copy that – about time, too!" I growled.

We approached the room that they were guarding, unsure about what we might find. The door was now unguarded and I kicked the door in, so Hit Girl and Shadow could dive in.

"Clear!" came the call.

..._...

I entered the room cautiously.

There was a large screen TV, a laptop and a webcam setup on a table in the otherwise empty room.

"Am I the only one who is confused?" I enquired.

The screen came to life and we saw a man sitting in shadow. His face was obscured, but he chuckled appreciatively.

"Well done, Hit Girl – I am impressed, but annoyed, to see you still in one piece, let alone walking about!"

"Sorry to disappoint you, I have a tendency to survive!" Hit Girl growled back, stowing her blade and pistol.

I moved to cover the doorway while Hit Girl's attention was taken by the TV.

"Hit Girl, we are at war..."

"Why?" I enquired.

"You know of the Genovese?" The man continued.

"Should I?" I replied, genuinely at a loss.

"The Godfather, my Grandfather, is Vito Genovese..."

"Look, I have not got time for a Goddamned history lesson, so cut to the fucking chase!" Hit Girl growled impatiently.

"... And he had a daughter, Angie..."

"Oh, fuck!" Kick-Ass growled as he entered the room, catching the end of the sentence, but it took me a few more seconds to join the dots on a certain family tree.

"Angie D'Amico!" I growled. Chris D'Amico's Mother.

"Well done!" The man chuckled.

"The family honour is at stake – we have no choice but to avenge Angie, Frank, Ralph and young Christopher."

"Why, they were all fucking nutcases and they were a cancer on New York and Chicago. Oh, by the way, we never killed Angie."

"That may be, but you were involved, which is enough..."

"Who the fuck are you?"

"I am Anthony Genovese, son of Carlo Genovese, son of Vito Genovese."

***Chapter 215*: Miranda Departs**

The following morning Sunday

That morning was bad for so many reasons.

We were all in pain, which accounted for many of the reasons, not to mention the disturbing information that had cropped up the previous night. The D'Amico family was still fucking us about and that pissed me off, big time! However, there was another reason. Stephanie had regressed into a feral state. What had caused it?

Miranda.

The scene had *not* been pretty!

Dave and I had known ahead of time what was about to happen, so we were prepared. We had agreed that Miranda should break the news and we would be there to assist as necessary. Dave was convinced that Stephanie would freak out – in a major way – and he was not wrong!

Maybe Dave was somehow tuning into how nutcases like us worked.

Safehouse F

Miranda was very uncomfortable, twisting her fingers together as she tried to prepare herself for what had to be done.

She was standing alone in the briefing room, at least until Dave and I appeared with a somewhat confused Stephanie. The young girl was perceptive and I noticed her body language changing as she went on guard.

"Miranda? What is it?" Stephanie asked her voice fearful of the response.

"Stephanie, I'm leaving – there are some things that I must do..."

Stephanie frowned and her eyes narrowed.

"No – you are *not* leaving me!"

"I have to – Dave and Mindy will look after you..."

I could see emotions sweeping across the nine-year-olds face. Fear, panic, apprehension, anger, hurt.

"You promised that we would stay together, always!"

Stephanie was shouting now and I could tell that she was on the verge of losing control.

"Please, Steph, please. I know how hard this will be on you, but these are good people; I've known for a while Dave and he's the best there is..."

"No, no, *NO!*"

I nodded at Dave and I felt so bad about what I was doing, but I had to go. Dave seized Stephanie in a bear hug from behind, easily lifting the skinny nine-year-old off the ground. She fought, she struggled and she swore – badly!

"You can't leave... You bastard, Dave, get the fuck off me or I swear to God, I will fucking kill you!"

I turned away from Stephanie and tried to block out the screaming that was rapidly turning borderline hysterical. I headed down the stairs towards the exit and the elevator. The screaming rang in my ears as I felt hot tears of sadness and shame, flood down my face.

Even after I had left the Safehouse, I could still hear her betrayed screams in my head.

"You shitty fucking bastards; you are *all* going to pay for this!" Stephanie screamed, still struggling against Dave's iron grip.

She kept trying to smack the back of her head into Dave's face and she kicked everywhere that she could reach but Dave still held onto her for what seemed like an hour, but was more like ten minutes. Finally, she calmed down, just a bit and sobbed into Dave's shoulder, hugging him tightly.

Half an hour later, Stephanie appeared to have calmed down, at least enough for Dave to let her go.

"I'm sorry," Stephanie said quietly.

"It's okay," I replied gently.

"I need to go clean up."

"Yes, you do. I'll come with you."

"Why do females all go to the bathroom together?" Dave asked.

"It's a woman thing!" I grinned in reply as we headed to the bathroom across the way that was reserved for girls.

..._...

While Stephanie washed her face, I pulled out her hair bobble and brushed her hair; there were always a few hair brushes lying around in the bathroom. Once properly brushed, I put Stephanie's blonde hair back up into a pony tail, ready for the next bit of action that I knew was coming.

"You feeling better?" I asked, knowing the response.

"Like bloody hell I am!"

"Oh?" I enquired innocently.

"I'm bloody pissed to fuck!"

"So do something about it..."

"Like what?"

I pulled the girl out of the bathroom and out onto the walkway, pulling her around to face me.

"Hit me, if you think you can..."

Stephanie bristled at that, but otherwise she did not move.

"Show me what you can do, dig down deep for all that anger, use it. Show me what Stephanie Walker is capable of, show me what Psyche can do."

"I... I can't..."

I slapped the nine-year-old on her left cheek. For a moment I thought that she was about to burst into tears, but no.

As I watched from the other side of the Safehouse, I saw the two girls reappear from the bathroom.

Stephanie looked better, at least her hair was neat and tidy as usual. Then after a brief exchange, Mindy slapped the girl. That surprised me, for all of two seconds, before I remembered who my wife really was!

At first Stephanie just stood still, but then she tensed up and threw a punch at Mindy, which of course missed. That seemed to tip Stephanie over the edge as she launched into a vicious attack, using everything she possessed including some of her newly acquired skills from D-JAK and Megan.

Mindy kept dodging before she ran down the steps to the mat.

"Come on you fucking British bitch – you're a fucking pussy!"

Stephanie was kicking and punching, trying her utmost to catch Mindy. Only Mindy was too good for her, naturally, and dodged everything, goading the young girl without mercy. I could see Stephanie getting more and more enraged by Mindy's treatment of her. Mindy, though, was smiling which was only making it worse.

"You sure about this?" Marty asked as he joined me on the walkway.

"I got it!" I replied with a grin, showing Marty the green and yellow X26P Taser in my hand.

"Who is that for?" Marty asked, showing me a black X2 Taser.

"Which ever bitch gets out of hand first!" I laughed.

Stephanie was able to land a few strikes on Mindy, but nothing that did anything. The young girl was going all-out, but Mindy was barely breathing hard. I decided that it was not fair; it was time to even the odds.

"Marty, watch 'em for a minute..."

I saw Dave vanish below, but ignored the irrelevance.

My opponent was raging and her anger was aimed at me; which was good. I wanted her to throw everything she had at me and to do that she had to be so mad, so pissed. Then I found out where Dave had vanished to – the evil cunt!

He sauntered past the mat and threw a three-foot Bokken towards Stephanie who deftly caught the wooden training weapon and smirked happily as she started to attack me with it – quite successfully too!

I threw Dave a scowl that said, 'I hate you' and 'I'll fuck you up for that', all in one!

"Mindy doesn't seem to like your change!" Marty commented with a chuckle as I re-joined him.

"What's new!" I laughed back.

Stephanie handled the training weapon well, much to Mindy's obvious disgust! My wife moved speedily and nimbly to escape the painful weapon, dodging several good strikes.

"It's not a fucking tampon – start fighting with it, not waving it around like a soggy sausage!" Mindy taunted with a smirk.

"Fuck you, bitch!" Came the enraged reply.

Stephanie deftly stepped inside of Mindy's next dodge and jammed the end of the weapon into Mindy's side eliciting a scream of pain. If Mindy was not pissed before, she was now and she was raging – almost as much as Stephanie. I had to watch out or Mindy might actually kill the nine-year-old!

However, Mindy just took the strike in her stride and lazily kicked Stephanie in the chest, sending her flying backwards onto the mat. Mindy's insults followed as the girl struggled back to her feet.

"Get up, you useless fucking shit!"

"You fight like a bloody used tampon!"

"Dave was better than you when he first started being Kick-Ass – before he got stabbed and knocked down by a car, that is!"

..._...

Marty burst out laughing at that last one...

"Low blow, bitch!" I yelled down, only to receive the middle finger of Mindy's right hand in return.

"Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you!" Stephanie yelled back, her face red with her exertions, but she was not giving up.

She bolted forwards, brandishing the Bokken and laying into Mindy who seemed to have been taken by surprise! Mindy fended off the strikes with her arms, before seizing the Bokken and throwing Stephanie across the mat where

she landed hard enough to scream in pain.

"Enough!" Mindy said strongly as Stephanie regained her feet a little shakily.

"No fucking chance!" Stephanie growled and launched herself at Mindy.

Mindy fought off the rabid younger girl. Every time that Mindy put Stephanie down on the mat and then released her, the girl jumped up and struck again, only to be put down, again!

Talk about a bitch in heat!

Mindy was *never* that bad. Stephanie was out of control; she was going to hurt herself. The only option was to restrain her before something bad happened. I ran down and while Mindy distracted Stephanie with an attack, I seized the wild girl around the waist and then pinning her to the mat on her back.

"Mindy said, *enough!*" I roared at Stephanie before roughly flipping her over onto her front and securing her wrists with flexi-cuffs behind her back.

Surprisingly, Stephanie never said a word while I secured her. After a minute of being face down on the mat, she spoke.

"I'm sorry. I freaked out a bit. You can take the cuffs off..."

Mindy nodded and I removed the cuffs. Stephanie peered to her right before jabbing out with her right fist and catching Mindy on the side of her jaw. Mindy reacted with a jab to Stephanie's side, causing Stephanie to scream out in agony and I replaced the cuffs before anything else happened.

"Let's talk, shall we?" Mindy suggested with a smile, rubbing her jaw as I helped Stephanie get back to her feet.

That evening

Glenview

"Megan?"

"Yeah, Steph."

"Mindy suggested I should ask you something..."

"What?"

"She said that if I wanted to be a bitch then I should ask *you* about what the consequences might be?"

I saw Megan's eyes go wide and then a pained expression appeared on her face.

"Believe me when I say: don't be a bitch!"

"Why?"

"It's way too humiliating; trust me, partner..."

Later that evening

I heard laughing and giggling as I walked past Anne-Marie's bedroom.

They were watching a movie and I recognised the tune, but I could not remember the movie and then as I peered around the door, I remembered: *Mulan!*

"Hi, *Mulan* – err, Mindy!" Megan laughed.

"You'd make a great warrior, Mom," Anne-Marie said seriously with a big grin on her face and Danny nodded his agreement.

"Thanks, but that's not me," I grinned in response with a wink at a smirking Stephanie.

The following afternoon

Monday

West Columbia

"Mom!" Megan yelled excitedly.

Megan ran to her Mom and hugged her.

"Careful, Megan; I'm still a little sore," Paige warned, having only left the hospital an hour earlier.

"You doing okay?" I asked.

"Yes, Mindy, I am and thanks."

"For what?"

"For looking after that temperamental hand grenade that I have for a daughter!"

Megan blushed.

"I loved looking after her..."

"You're not a good liar, Mindy," Paige laughed. "Marcus told me what you did for Megan, keeping her on the right road. Thanks to you, I still have a daughter..."

"I..."

I had no idea how to respond. Instead Paige gave me a hug and a kiss. I felt my face getting very warm.

"I'm very proud of you, Mindy," Marcus added.

That was it, my face exploded and I suddenly felt very embarrassed – but in a good way. I put an arm around Megan and hugged her close.

"You taking her back, then?" I asked.

"Only if we have to!" Paige replied and Megan's mouth dropped open in shock.

When I awoke, something felt strange, but I could not figure it out.

I stretched and realised with a start that I was not in my own bed and as I looked around me, I found myself in Sophia's dog bed! I sat up quickly and studied my surroundings; I was in the kitchen at Mindy's. Why? I had gone to bed at home. Then I felt something around my neck, it was a dog collar! What the fuck was happening to me... It had to be Mindy!

I tried to take the collar off, but I could not undo the buckle. I stood up and swore under my breath; I was naked! I made a move for the door to find some clothes and a mirror to get a better look at the damn collar, so I could get it off. It had to be Mindy; I would not have put it past her to have taken me from my bed, stripped me and then put the collar around my neck and left me in Sophia's bed!

I had taken maybe three paces and I was in the middle of the kitchen, when I heard voices; I froze. I felt like the proverbial rabbit in the headlights as Mindy appeared in the kitchen; she looked me up and down and grinned. Next came Anne-Marie, Danny and Stephanie; they all stopped dead and stared at the scene before them. Close behind was a grinning Dave and I noticed that he had something in his hand – a dog leash!

..._...

Anne-Marie, Danny and Stephanie started laughing and pointing at me as I stood there completely naked, except for the damn dog collar.

"Time for your walk, Megan," Dave commented with a sly grin as he walked over to me and casually attached the leash to my collar.

"What?" I exclaimed as the reality of my situation finally took hold and my face exploded with intense embarrassment and humiliation. "You can't... I'm naked... How...?"

"No time for questions, walkies!" Mindy said cheerfully as she took the leash and led me towards the front door.

"No!" I screamed, my panic growing as I considered being taken outside, naked, but everybody just laughed. Danny ran ahead to open the door and a minute later I found myself standing outside in the freezing cold, the front door being pulled shut behind me.

..._...

"Shouldn't she be on all-fours?" Anne-Marie asked as she took the leash from Mindy.

"Yes, she should," Mindy agreed before turning to me and saying sharply, "Megan, down!"

For some strange reason, I found myself complying and there I was being pulled towards the grass by Anne-Marie. I was on my hands and knees, still naked, with my ass sticking up in the air and on a leash. I thought that it could *not* get any worse.

Then it just got worse!

"Now, Megan, time for you to pee!" Anne-Marie chuckled gleefully. "If you need the other end, you'll have to use the flower-bed."

I was blushing fit to burst, but again, I found myself following commands and squatting down on the grass where much to my disgust...

..._...

I awoke with a jolt – I was in my own room, at home; it had all been a fucking dream or should that be a nightmare. Thanks a bunch, Mindy, for putting that fucking shit in my mind and for giving me a goddamn freaky nightmare!

I struggled to get back to sleep.

***Chapter 216*: Would You Believe It**

The next day
Tuesday evening

Safehouse F

Megan and I made our way down into Safehouse F, and as she always did, she pressed the button and then entered her personal code – nothing happened for a moment, but just as she was about to try again, the doors opened. Megan just shrugged and we stepped into the elevator where she pressed the 'F' button. The doors opened before she could place her hand on the scanner - now that was out of the ordinary and a little strange! Mindy had suggested that I was going to give my own access; I had a swipe card, but it was not fully functional yet. I looked at Megan and she just grinned at me. We walked down the corridor before turning left and as normal Megan pressed her hand against the scanner beside the armoured door, but nothing happened.

"Not funny!" she yelled out, glaring at the camera.

"Sorry, Megan!"

It was Abby's voice. The door lock released and Megan pulled the door open, stepping into the catchment area. The inner door was released as the outer door finished closing, without any intervention - again out of the ordinary. As I watched, Megan stalked over to the Control Centre and placed, more like smacked, her hand on the scanner pad beside the door. Nothing happened – it just flashed red, instead of the usual green.

"Abby!" She yelled angrily and I saw Abby come to the door.

"I can't let you in, Megan – they're waiting in the Galley for you."

"Galley?"

I looked around and I could see nobody. We both headed up the steel staircase on the left.

"I would suggest that you go and wait in the Briefing Room while I sort this shit out!" Megan suggested and I followed her suggestion, but watching her head down the walkway.

As she approached the closed Galley door, it was unlocked remotely and she pushed the door open, letting it close and lock behind her.

There at a table sat Mindy, Marty, Josh and Chloe. None of them smiled at me.

Looking decidedly unhappy was Curtis, sitting in a chair facing them.

"You ready?" Mindy asked with an evil grin.

"Do your worst!" I replied.

I know I should not have been listening, but...

"What's going on – none of the scanners are working for me?" Megan demanded.

"Me too!" Curtis complained.

"You've both been locked out," Marty said simply in answer to my question.

"Should I be worried?" Megan laughed.

..._...

"Yes, you should," I heard Chloe say without any humour.

"Sit!" Mindy ordered, pointing at a chair facing the four of them.

That was when I realised how badly Mindy had fucked up. Seated in front of her, and looking very pissed off, were four of the top five members of Fusion.

"What is this?" Megan pushed.

"Call it an intervention," Chloe stated.

"Or a fucking bollocking!" Josh added.

"Or just your only chance of wearing a combat suit, again, ever..." Mindy finished. "Both of you."

"So," Marty began. "Where do we start? With the malicious wounding, the unnecessary killings, the putting other operatives at risk..."

"... Or maybe the fucking up of Fusion's reputation!" Mindy finished.

Oh, shit! Megan and Curtis were in deep, deep, crap!

..._...

Marty started things off.

"Over the past week or so – things have gone to shit for the both of you. You have both killed when it was *not* necessary. Fusion is respected for being restrained; *we only kill when required*. They also need to deserve it. Muggers are worthless shit, but they do not deserve to die – despite what our guts tell us. Curtis – you cut a fucking guy to pieces – Dave counted them; sixteen chunks! I know you like your sword, but that man should have gone to Jail. You gonna explain?"

"I couldn't control myself; it just seemed like the right thing to do. He won't hurt anybody else."

"Where did you both go to when you were supposed to have been guarding Iron Hide?" Josh demanded.

"It was boring – guarding shit sucks!" Megan admitted without a hint of shame.

"Whose idea was that, then?" Chloe asked.

"We talked it over and we *both* agreed to go hunting," Curtis said.

"*Hunting!*" Marty exploded.

"Our mandate is to protect the City – not guard SUVs!" Megan pointed out.

"You do what you are told to do!" Mindy said evenly.

I raised an eyebrow, considering Mindy had not sworn, which I had learnt showed how pissed she was.

"What about threatening Shadow on the roof?" Josh continued.

"That was *not* my fault – she wound me up and I reacted – I never even knew that she had fallen off the damn roof!" Megan exclaimed. "She should have kept her trap shut and not started complaining..."

"I was trying to help you!" Chloe said angrily.

"Like we need your help!"

"We've been around the block – we can look after ourselves. We discuss our ideas and agree between ourselves before acting," Curtis explained. "We are a team!"

"What the...!" Mindy began angrily.

"Who the fuck suggested you use each other as sounding boards?" Marty inquired.

"Stephanie."

Oh crap – busted!

Yes, I had been trying to help, but I never knew...

A few little errors in judgement and they were going to kick Megan and Curtis out! There was movement in the room and then Megan's voice.

"Let me out!"

A second or two later, the door clicked open.

Safehouse F – Level 2

I was looking down at the mat when Megan appeared, followed by Curtis.

Something was definitely wrong. I put an arm around Megan and led her down to the Briefing Room. By the time we had sat down, Megan was sobbing.

"I've lost everything..."

"Me too," Curtis added as he sat down beside Megan.

I never noticed the change, but less than ten minutes later, Megan stopped crying and she stood up, shrugging my arm off her shoulder.

"You thinkin' what I'm thinkin', Curtis?" She asked.

"Could be!" Curtis replied with a smirk.

I did *not* like their expressions.

"You – stay here," Megan suggested.

"Huh?" I queried.

"I'll call you when we're done."

..._...

I had absolutely no idea what was going on.

Something was off, though.

Their behaviour was concerning and had been for a while; I would admit that. I had considered telling Mindy, but I had not wanted my friends to get into trouble. Instead, I had offered them advice. In hindsight, maybe I should have gone straight to Mindy, probably!

I heard a raised voice, Abby. Then I heard the foul mouth of Megan. There was some scuffling followed by some swearing from Abby and then silence. I peered over the walkway and I could see Abby, she was lying on the floor of the Command Centre, unconscious.

About thirty seconds later, I heard a klaxon.

Safehouse F – Level 2

'Fuck this!' I thought.

I ran along the walkway and tried to open the door to the Galley. It was locked and I could see Mindy inside shaking her head at me. She pointed to her ear and then she mouthed a single word – '*RUN*'... With a brief glance at the others in the Galley, I dived down the steel steps and then down again, to the lower level. I rapidly yanked off the cover to an air vent, dived inside and pulled the cover back into position. I took a moment to take stock of the situation.

Megan and Curtis had gone nuts and taken over the Safehouse, imprisoning Mindy, Marty, Chloe and Josh. I was alone and I wanted no part of it. I also had the chance to prove myself to Mindy and to Chloe. I had figured out for

myself that Chloe did not fully trust me; I could not blame her really.

Then I thought about Mindy's signal – her ear – then it clicked and I stuck my hand into the pocket of my jeans and removed a small plastic box. Inside was a small headset that fitted neatly into my right ear. I pressed the button on the end and after a brief burst of static, I could hear Mindy, Marty, Chloe and Josh talking.

I listened for a few minutes, without saying anything.

..._...

"... Before one of those urchins, locked out the database. I was also able to copy that user to the backup datacentre next door, before I severed the link. I was able to sever the link just before next door was compromised, so it's safe. Furthermore, I locked out access to all files that pertain to next door."

"You lost me after about the first three words....," Chloe admitted, sounding confused.

"It means that we can use next door to jump start this place once we regain control!" Marty explained excitedly.

"Why the bloody hell, does he keep going on about 'next door'?" Josh asked, sounding just as confused as Chloe.

"This bunker that we call Safehouse F is actually the second bunker on this site. The original, which we call Safehouse E, is located about a couple hundred yards that away!" Mindy explained. "The Navy built this place and then they abandoned the other one."

"If you say so," Josh conceded.

"The entrance is in the back of Tony's engineering store, only the hatch is massive, and it took both Dave and Marty to lug it open the last time," Mindy added with a grimace.

"Err Mindy, do you trust Stephanie?" Marty asked.

"Yeah – well, to an extent – we talked about it last night...," Mindy paused. "Why?"

"Well – the user I had open was Stephanie – she now has all your access rights!" Marty admitted. "I had no choice – hers was the only user open and while it was open it could not be locked out – until they dumped the database!"

"So, Stephanie, assuming that she is not in league with Bonnie and Clyde out there, she could be our only hope," Josh groaned.

"Looks like it," Chloe replied dubiously.

"You guys having fun in there?" I ventured.

Safehouse F – The Command Centre

I had not intended to hurt Abby, but she should not have fought back.

The stupid girl had pulled out a pistol the moment that I had entered the Control Centre. She had seen me swipe the card, that I was not supposed to carrying. Abby had thought the threat of the pistol would be enough, but I had known that she would not shoot me – not sweet Megan Wilson!

Disarming her had been easy, but she had kicked out at Curtis sending him into the glass wall, hurting him. That had made me angry, so I had put her down, hard. We had both then taped her hands and feet with duct tape.

"You will *not* get away with this – she'll fucking gut you both!"

"Abigail – shut up before we gag you!" I growled. "Curtis, go get our combat suits."

I pressed the keys on the keyboard to release the doors for the armoury and Curtis ran out.

Safehouse F – The Galley

"Finally! Speak of the devil and she shall appear!" Mindy chuckled.

"Sorry – you weren't all that specific with your orders, oh great leader!"

"Cocky bitch!"

"Well – what are we gonna do about Neo and Trinity who seem to be existing in their own virtual world?" I asked.

I laughed at the reference!

"That is where *you* come in..."

I groaned.

"I feel like I've just been called up!"

"Your mission, should you choose to accept it..."

I think Mindy must have heard my eyes rolling!

"Sorry – you need to take a walk up to my bedroom on Level 2. You will be safe in there; the room is armoured."

"I can do that – I think..."

"You got your swipe card?" I asked.

"It's in my pocket..."

Safehouse F – Level 0

I reluctantly crawled out of the ventilation space and crept towards the steel steps.

There were no sounds; which was ominous. I went up, one-step at a time before peering out onto the next level. I saw nobody, so crept up the steps, but then I froze and ducked down as I saw Curtis appear from the armoury with a combat suit in his arms; he was wearing most of his already. He vanished into the Command Centre, so I jumped up quickly, running towards the other steps that would take me to Level 2.

I heard feet pounding behind me and looked over my shoulder to see Megan running towards me, a yellow Taser in her hand and she triggered it off, but I dived and rolled before running up the steps; the Taser missed. I was able to dive into the bedroom and slam the door before Megan caught up with me – I triggered the deadlock and slid to the floor, out of breath and livid.

I could *not* believe that my best friend and my fucking partner had just fired on me with a fucking Taser!

Safehouse F – The Galley

"She made it, but Megan is pissed!"

"Don't worry, Megan has no idea about next door, so she will think that Stephanie has trapped herself and she will ignore her; I hope!"

"Okay – our Mini-Brit will need to use the air vents..."

"She should fit; she's skinny and has no tits!" Chloe suggested with a laugh.

"I can still hear you!" I growled.

"Err, I meant that she has a compact body form...", Chloe added quickly.

"You and I are going to explore the famous British self-restraint when we next meet..." I growled to Chloe.

"Get your butt into that air vent, above the bed and think small!" Mindy suggested.

I hoped they all enjoyed my vile swearing that Mindy's comment generated!

Safehouse F – Dave and Mindy's Bedroom

I looked up at the air vent.

It was small and located high up.

"Who the bloody hell do they think I am – Spider Girl?"

"Go spidey!" I heard Mindy laugh.

"If you have nothing better to say Hit Girl then shut the fuck up!"

"Sorry!" A chastened Mindy replied.

Safehouse E/F – Ventilation System

Damn it!

I had had to strip down to my knickers just to fit into the goddamn vent and what that gooey stuff was I just slid over, I had no idea! Great, Stephanie – you are crawling through air ducts, almost naked, dozens of feet underground. Oh well, it could *only* get better!

"Oh, yeah," Mindy said in my ear. "Almost forgot, you need to watch out for the 'anti-Skinny-Brit traps' in the vents – sorry!"

I paused and glared back in the vague direction of Mindy.

"We are going to have a *long* talk when I get out of here – just you, me and a very big stick!"

..._...

I crawled further into the ventilation system. I had the access card gripped tightly in my left hand and my mobile in my right, using the torch to see where I was going. The ventilation duct was cold underneath my bare skin, as was the air that ran through the duct; I was starting to shiver. After crawling what felt like miles, I saw something ahead of me and I slowed down. Then I studied the object attached to the side of the duct.

"Fuck you, Mindy!" I yelled.

"You found something, kid?"

I studied the device. There was a box, about six-inches by eight-inches attached to the air duct. Extending from the box were a pair of wires that attached to the opposite side of the duct – trip wires.

"What do I do to get past it?"

"Good question..."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Marty says there is a keypad, enter the code: four – six – two – nine – seven, and then press the green key..."

I studied the device in vain.

"I don't see no bloody keypad!"

"Oh, that'll be one of the decoy ones!" Mindy exclaimed.

"Thanks a damn bunch, bitch!" I exclaimed with relief, unclipping the trip wires and proceeding onwards.

..._...

There had been two real devices to be disarmed as I had made my steady crawl through the air vents, but they had both had a keypad and I was able to disarm them – I hated explosives.

I was nearing the end when I suddenly stopped as I felt something snagging on my knickers. I reached backwards, but I was unable to sort out the problem. I tried to move backwards, but that just gave me a chronic wedgie, so I reluctantly crawled forwards again allowing them to slide down my legs, leaving them behind in the vent.

Just when I thought my situation could *not* get *any* worse!

Chapter 217: Safehouse E

Tuesday evening

Safehouse E
Level 4

"Fucking ouch!"

I dropped to the floor from the air vent.

"You okay?" Mindy called.

"Like you give a bloody shit! I think I scratched my backside."

"Are you in?"

"Yeah, uncaring bitch, I'm in!"

"We'll check your butt later – mission first!"

"Okay, okay!" I grumbled as I took in my surroundings. "You got lights in Hit Girl's fun house?"

"Find a card swipe and swipe your card – Marty says!"

"Great, just fucking great! I'm fumbling my naked backside around a dark and very smelly bunker!"

"Did you say, '*naked*'?" Mindy demanded. "I thought you had knickers on?"

Shit!

"They got caught on something in the vent and I had to err, abandon them!"

Fuck me if I was not blushing and the laughter in my ear did *not* help!

..._...

"Ha!" I yelled as I swiped the access card and lights began to come on all around me.

Thanks to the lights, I now felt *very* exposed in the long concrete corridor. I also felt very cold all of a sudden, as the heating was most definitely *not* on!

"It is fucking freezing in here!" I complained.

"I would suggest you head for the armoury and stores then, and get your bare butt dressed," Mindy suggested.

"Unless you enjoy running around butt naked!"

"Funny slapper!"

..._...

I ran down the corridor, my bare feet echoing on the cold concrete. I suddenly skidded to a halt as I saw a sign on a large steel door: **STORES**. I swiped the access card through the reader and the door lock released.

"Awesome!" I exclaimed – imitating Chloe's accent.

"You should find something close to your size on the right," Mindy advised.

Ten minutes later, I had pulled on a black t-shirt, black joggers and some trainers. I left the stores and made my way further down the corridor before stopping outside a large steel door: **ARMOURY**. Again, I swiped the card and the door released.

"Fuck me..." The door was fucking heavy!

"No thanks!" Mindy quipped.

"You remember what I said earlier, Yank? Shut it, before I come over there and fucking shut it for you!"

"Bitch with attitude – cool!" Mindy laughed then got serious. "I promise to shut up now."

"Like that's ever gonna happen!" I heard Chloe laugh, followed by a slapping sound and a, "Fucking ouch!"

"You do that, Mindy – 'cause you gonna pay, purple bitch!"

..._...

I entered the armoury. Wow! There must have been a thousand firearms in there.

"Which war is all this for?" I quipped.

Mindy did not reply.

I pulled out the smallest vest I could find and started adding weapons. Once I had loaded myself up, I headed out into the corridor again.

"Where next?" I asked.

Mindy did not reply.

"Mindy, you there?"

I was alone.

Glenview

"Echo?" I queried as I read the display on my cell.

Why was I receiving a call from Safehouse E? Oh yeah – Mindy!

"Dave, its Stephanie and things suck!"

Stephanie sounded a bit stressed and worried.

"What is it Stephanie?" I asked seriously.

"Megan and Curtis have gone rogue and taken over the Safehouse – I escaped and Mindy sent me to a nearby bunker. However, I've lost all communication with Mindy... Please help me."

Stephanie sounded very worried and a little scared.

"Hang in there, Stephanie; I'm on my way."

I hung up the phone and called Cathy, followed by Hailee and Erika.

Safehouse D

Fifty minutes after Stephanie's call, we were gearing up.

No combat suits, just body armour and non-deadly weaponry, such as Tasers. I sent Cathy to the entrance of Safehouse F, while I took Hailee and Erika towards the entrance of Safehouse E.

"Are we about to enter another one of HG's fun palaces?" Hailee asked with a little apprehension.

"Err, yeah!" I replied.

"Any chance we're going to live through this?" Erika added.

"Hey, it's Mindy!"

"Yeah, that's what worries me!" Hailee grimaced.

I laughed and continued towards a building that looked like it was a garage or a workshop. Both Hailee and Erika looked dubious about entering, but I just grabbed them both by the arm and shoved them through the door I had just opened.

It was different!

I looked at Dave and then Erika. We were in a smartly laid out workshop. In the centre of which was a 1982 Pontiac Trans-Am in gloss black. Okay, I was a fan!

"Ignore that – Tony has a fetish with it and Mindy is funding it!" Dave commented as he headed for the pit beneath the car and headed down some concrete steps.

There in the floor was a large steel hatch. Dave pulled open a small steel door in the side of the pit that was almost invisible amongst the oil, grease and grime. Inside, was a keypad – Dave punched in an eight-digit code.

The hatch motored open slowly, revealing a cavernous black opening.

"Here we go!" I growled.

An hour and a half earlier

Safehouse E Level 4

I decided that heading *up* would be my best option.

The place was still cold, despite my clothes, so I started jogging which wasn't easy with the weapons I had added. I found a door that led to some steel stairs. I swiped the card, releasing the door. The stairs vanished upwards and downwards. I noticed a sign: 'CIC'. It pointed up, so up I went.

On the next level was another corridor, but not as long as that on the level below. I had heard nothing over my ear-piece for quite a while, which worried me. What might Boris and Natasha be up to in the other Safehouse?

Wow, my life was going in some strange directions! I stopped in front of a large steel door and swiped my trusty swipe card...

"Oh, wow!"

I could not help myself; I was in awe at what lay before me. The room was enormous and spanned two levels. I was on the top level and I could see down onto several computer consoles. The equipment was old, in most cases, and there was a *lot* of dust! The place must have been cool when it was in operation *waaaay* back before I was born. Over in one corner, something was different, the equipment was newer. I ran down a set of steel steps and over to the corner.

..._...

There were several very modern computers and some large flat-screen displays. Marty had been there. I also found a modern phone – all the others in the facility that I had discovered were old and dead. I tentatively picked up the receiver and held it to my ear...

A dial tone!

I quickly got Dave's mobile number from my own mobile and dialled.

Safehouse D Level 1

"So where is she?"

"I don't know, Erika, but I think the only working phone is in the CIC on Level 3."

"This place stinks!" Hailee moaned, wrinkling her nose.

"Sorry, Petra; I should have cleaned before we came!" I growled back and received a nasty glare in return.

We pressed on, passing several closed doors as we followed the concrete corridors.

"The décor sucks," Hailee commented.

"Are you gonna moan the whole freakin' way?" Erika complained.

"Hey, bitches – you can make out later – let's just find Steph, okay?"

"Not a bad idea..." Erika grinned.

"One track mind her!" Hailee laughed.

A few minutes later I found what we were looking for.

"Here we are, stairs heading down..."

We went down two levels, coming out onto Level 3. After a short corridor we found a steel door. I swiped my access card, but nothing happened. I punched in an override code and the door opened. The lights were on, but otherwise there was no sounds of movement. I brought up my weapon and we all moved forwards in silence.

I caught three flashes off to my right and then felt three painful impacts on my body armour which pushed me backwards.

Then there was movement.

"Whoops!" Stephanie announced as she revealed herself.

The Glock 23 pistol was held in both hands and now pointed at the floor.

"Sorry, Dave – I just reacted!" The embarrassed girl apologised.

"Are you alright?" I asked, ignoring the pain from the bullets. The girl looked very frightened.

"This place gives me the creeps!"

One hundred feet beneath Chicago

We had left the CIC and we had made our way to the entrance of Safehouse F.

There was an enormous steel door, that took all four of us to open. After a short walk and some interesting booby-traps, we found another, identical, door. We edged it open just enough for us all to get through. We came out into the engineering store. We prepared ourselves and then ran out of the store, into the Safehouse.

I was steeled for a fight, however, my mouth just dropped to the floor at the sight before me. Arrayed on the mat beyond the glass shield were quite a few people. Mindy, Marty, Abby, Josh, Chloe, Cathy and the two Fusion 'Most Wanted' were standing out in front!

As I walked through the open gate in the glass shield, everybody started clapping. I turned to see a smiling Dave, with Erika and Hailee on either side; both were clapping and smiling at me.

Then it fucking clicked!

"*It was all a fucking put up job!*" I exclaimed, my anger rising steadily.

"Some of it," Megan exclaimed. "The grilling was mostly real – we were both in shit and the tears were real too. Mindy forced us to trick you into thinking we had taken over the Safehouse. Which, by the way, we would never do..."

Period!"

"Anyway, you fucking passed, you bitch!" Mindy said with a big smile and my anger faded – slightly.

"Despite being forced to crawl through ventilation ducts and Safehouses naked and dodging bombs, I can see why you put me through that... I'm just glad the bombs were not real!"

Mindy looked a little sheepish.

"Oh, the bombs were very real!"

"What!" I yelled out. "You used *real* fucking bombs for *training*? What sort of fucked-up psycho would do that?"

"Yeah..." Mindy began without a hint of shame.

"You get used to it, Steph!" Dave admitted with a grimace.

I just scowled before I then turned to Chloe.

"I still haven't forgotten about us having a little girl to girl chat, Chloe..."

Chloe grinned.

"I'm looking forward to it, immensely, dear Stephanie!" She replied in a good attempt at a British accent.

Then I turned back to Megan and Curtis.

"I'll talk to you two, later and it won't be pretty!"

I turned to the grinning bitch.

"Now, Mindy – if I am *not* mistaken, you and me have an appointment with a very big stick..."

I grabbed hold of Mindy's blouse and dragged her towards the armoury.

"Dave, you gonna save your wife from mortal danger?" Mindy grinned.

"Nah, you're on your own!" Dave laughed.

"Hit her hard, Steph – she deserves it!" Chloe yelled after Mindy.

The next afternoon

Safehouse F

"Please tell me that this is not another crazy test?"

"No, Steph, you are safe from any of my bombs!" Mindy grinned.

I scowled at Mindy's attempt at humour.

"Steph, we have a surprise for you," Mindy said carefully. "I am entrusting you to Megan; she will sort you out."

Megan grabbed hold of me by the hand and almost dragged me up the steel stairs and into one of the bedrooms.

"Strip!" She ordered the moment she had closed and locked the door.

"Come again?"

"Get your clothes off..."

"Hey, Megan – we may be a team and you're a nice girl; I like you. Okay, you *did* try to fuck me yesterday, but I am *not* a bloody lesbian..."

Megan laughed.

"Well, neither am I; I leave the pussy munching to others – so get stripped... Your new combat suit awaits..."

"Oh!" I exclaimed sheepishly and started pulling off my clothes as Megan whipped a sheet off the bed, revealing an array of multi-coloured body armour.

"I would advise you to just wear your knickers and a thin t-shirt under the suit," Megan suggested, then she smirked. "A sports bra too, once you get tits!"

I scowled and considered slapping her, but I decided to let it slide.

..._...

First, I pulled on the padded undersuit which consisted of two parts. The jacket, which zipped up the front, was a dark royal blue in colour and actually very appealing. The trousers were a deep royal red, which I liked too.

"The undersuit is bullet and stab resistant to Type IIA Standards..." Megan monologued as I changed.

Next, I was handed sections of contoured modular body armour. The armour sections were in the same red and blue as the undersuit and clipped onto the undersuit and together to form a semi-rigid Type IIIA armour that protected the important parts of my body. I was surprised at how light it was – it was still heavy, but I would be able to manage it.

"... The armour is like mine and ultra-flexible to allow for maximum agility when in combat..."

Embossed onto the chest plate was a large gold symbol, Ψ , much like a trident. Megan saw me looking down at it, upside down.

"... The Greek letter 'Psi' – it denotes psychology..."

"Nice!" I commented approvingly.

Megan then handed me a pair of red boots that came up my legs and connected with the armour on my thighs. The boots had stab-resistant soles and were amazingly light and comfortable to wear. In the top of each boot was a slot, although I had absolutely no idea what the slot was for.

"Try this..."

I took the gold-coloured utility belt and with Megan's help attached it to the top and bottom halves of the combat suit. On each side was an empty pistol holster and around the back, pouches for other equipment which included a section for the communications equipment. Attached to the belt was a short, deep royal red, skirt which went as far as midway down my thighs.

"Now to cover your face, your very distinctive hair and that cute little Brit accent..."

I scowled at Megan as she grinned back. I was handed what looked like wig, well actually a brunette, shoulder-length wig, only the wig was attached to a mask. Megan took hold of my ponytail and with the help of some hairclips, secured it up and out of the way. I pulled the mask and wig over my head. The inside of the wig was padded and very similar to the mask that Megan wore. I realised that beneath the hair was armour to protect my head. What was visible under the hair, was blue. The mask protected the sides of my face, back of the neck and covered the area around my eyes and down the bridge of my nose. My forehead, and jaw were still visible.

As I was changing, I watched my metamorphosis in a mirror – each step was awesome to watch. Megan took the fingers of my right hand and moved them to my mask and under one side where I could feel three buttons.

"The first, here, enables the comms, the second enables the voice alteration technology and the third activates the anti-lift tech..."

After pressing each button in turn, Megan picked up a handheld radio.

"Psyche, this is Wildcat, over..."

In my mask I could hear Megan's voice quite clearly. She pointed to the left of my chest and I pressed my hand there.

"Receiving, over..." I responded, letting go of the Push-To-Talk button.

I heard my own voice coming out of Megan's radio, but an electronic sounding voice was heard in the room. Megan

saw my smile.

"Cool, huh!"

"Awesome!"

Megan showed me how to activate the hands-free or VOX mode on the communications equipment and then she handed me a pair of dark royal red gauntlets which extended up my forearms and joined with the armour a few inches below my elbow.

"Those gauntlets will protect you from knives and other blades. You have built in knuckle-dusters and they are weighted to improve your punch – we can ditch those as you get bigger. Your fist will also be protected when you pound somebody, or something."

The final item, which I thought was bloody awesome, was a plain cape, the same colour as my skirt. The material was strange, but light and fluid.

"Bullet resistant and fire-proof, among other things..." Megan explained as she attached it to my collar.

The cape came down as far as the backs of my knees.

"Okay, Psyche – Armoury!"

..._...

Megan led me out of the bedroom and down to the Armoury where I found Mindy and Josh. I felt shy and I blushed as they checked out my new combat suit.

"Way to go, Psyche!" Josh said approvingly.

"Her face almost matches her cape!" Mindy laughed.

"Funny!" I growled, hearing the same electronic voice again.

"Nice voice, too – very manly!" Josh quipped.

"Can I hit him?" I asked Mindy.

"Later..." Mindy replied as she led me over to the main, central, table. Mindy began indicating items. "Your weapons – a pair of Heckler & Koch P30SK nine-millimetre pistols and six magazines – two for the pistols and two spares for each pistol; ten-rounds per magazine. Suppressor for each, plus combined flashlight and laser sight. Two throwing knives – a combat knife and a pair of custom Sais."

Josh helped me load up: the loaded pistols into the holsters, the spare magazines into their pouches on my utility belt, the knives into slots on the same belt. The Sais latched into the slots in the top of each boot.

I felt a little weighed down, once I was done!

***Chapter 218*: Psyche Mk 2**

*Tuesday evening
Thirty minutes later*

Safehouse F

"Psyche, put any apprehension behind you and lay into the bitch – she deserves everything that she gets!" Mindy said seriously.

"Gee, thanks, Hit Girl!" Wildcat growled as she paced from side to side, flexing her hands.

"Stop winging Kitty Kat!" Josh laughed from the walkway that ran over the mat.

Wildcat muttered something vile and started to move towards Psyche. Two minutes later, Psyche was on the mat, face down, for the second time. Both put downs had been hard, too, so the girl must have been hurting. I pulled Psyche back to her feet and looked directly into her eyes. I could see pain and worry.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't want to do it, I mean I do, but I can't... She's my partner..."

"Get angry, like you did with me – dig deep for something that makes you angry. Look into your past, seize hold of something or somebody when something bad happened to you. Use the anger from that moment, or the fear. Bring it forwards and then before it consumes you, turn it around and turn it into hate. Use that hate and focus it against your target."

I saw the girl's eyes go dark and focused.

"Go get the bitch!"

Wildcat was not expecting the wild attack which put her down hard enough to make her scream in both surprise and pain. Psyche had turned away from me, her body language had changed and she had grabbed up a four-foot training Jo. With it, she had pounded on Wildcat, and all the older vigilante could do was use her gauntlets to protect her head, which seemed to be Psyche's target. Wildcat managed to deploy her claws and flip the Jo out of Psyche's hands. Psyche was not phased for a moment as she punched Wildcat hard in the chest.

"Fucking bitch!" Wildcat yelled out in pain. "That was my fucking tit!"

"Poor little kitty!" Psyche growled.

The younger girl was not holding back as she laid into Wildcat. She punched and she kicked – using all that she had learned to that point. Wildcat was holding back, just a bit, which was good, but Psyche was not. At one stage she managed to get Wildcat into a headlock. Rather than let Wildcat's neck be broken, I intervened, kicking Psyche off to one side. I was not wearing any protective suit, but I knew that my skills would protect me. I picked up the Jo and faced off against Psyche. She was raging. Wildcat was back on her feet and I waved her off.

Psyche could move well, which impressed me, yet again. She was light on her feet, despite the extra armour and weapons. She used her gauntlets to fend off the Jo. Within two minutes I had beaten the younger girl down. She lay on the mat, breathing heavily. What skin I could see was soaked in sweat. I dropped the Jo, kneeling down beside the girl where I rolled her onto her side and gently eased off her mask.

"Water!" I ordered, clicking my fingers and Josh appeared, an ice cold bottle in his hand.

I gently eased Stephanie to a sitting position and held the bottle to her lips.

"Small sips only..."

Stephanie was soaked and exhausted. After she had taken a couple of sips of water, she lay back on the mat unable to move. I waved and Josh picked up Stephanie and carried her upstairs.

"Megan, get changed – Josh and I'll sort out Stephanie."

Later that night

Glenview

When I awoke, I was in my own bed at home.

I looked around me and I saw a grinning Anne-Marie sitting cross-legged on her bed a few feet away.

"So, you're awake," she said.

"How long have I been here?"

"About four hours – Mindy brought you home with Josh and they put you to bed. They said that you had overdone it at D-JAK – idiot!"

I smiled weakly.

"Something like that, yeah..."

"Plus you stink!"

"Great!" I laughed, noticing that I was all sweaty and clammy. "Thanks Anne-Marie – I love you too!"

I threw back the duvet and climbed out of bed. I felt a little weak as I pulled off my t-shirt and knickers before heading for the shower.

Two days later

Thursday evening

Safehouse F

"Can I have your attention, please!"

Everybody stopped milling about the mat and looked up at me on the walkway.

"Please welcome the newest member of Fusion: Psyche!"

There were cheers and applause as the red and blue clad Psyche came out of the armoury with Wildcat and Trojan on either side of her. The poor girl looked incredibly embarrassed, but everybody gathered around her and took a chance to examine her new combat suit and weapons.

Stephanie was a very popular girl and everybody liked her.

That same evening

Safehouse D

I had given Josh and Chloe a challenge.

They had both needed new motorcycles for their vigilante personas, for winter, as they had both lost theirs in Gotham. I had suggested that they research and pick machines for themselves. Erika also decided that she needed a winter machine too, so I gave her the same challenge.

Once they had purchased their machines, they were to be sent to Gotham and Wayne Enterprises for some updating. I would have no idea what they had bought, however, Fox would give me a thumbs up or a thumbs down when he received the machines. I was annoyed when I received an email from him: 'Three thumbs up!' I was hoping they would flunk, but no – maybe they were learning! Dave just told me to have faith in my protégés.

..._...

The day finally arrived when the five of us arrived at Safehouse D to examine the container that had been delivered from Gotham. After checking the security seals, Dave unlocked and pulled open the doors of the container. He then went in to unstrap the first motorcycle.

"Mist – your ride!" Dave prompted.

Erika moved forwards full of excitement as her Yamaha Super Tenere in black and light blue, with the licence plate **'MIST'**, was wheeled out of the container.

"Very nice choice, Erika – you have my respect as always," I said with a grin that had Erika blushing.

"Shadow!" Dave called out as he wheeled out another machine.

"Oh, wow!" I exclaimed as my mouth dropped open.

The Suzuki V-Strom 1000 ABS motorcycle was beautiful in its navy blue livery, right down to the licence plate: **'SHADOW'**.

"Damn, Chloe, fucking well done!"

"You sound surprised, bitch!" Chloe commented with a grin.

"When you actually *use* your brain, you do well!" I retorted.

Chloe laughed.

"Jackal, you British rat!" Dave called next.

"Oh, well done – a very nice machine and not a surprise now I think about it!"

The tan coloured motorcycle with the licence plate **'JACKAL'** was from the British manufacturer, Triumph. The Tiger 800 ABS was a good strong machine and I was impressed. All three machines were fitted with Continental TKC-80 Twinduro tyres, ready for winter.

The plan had been an outrageous success – but then what would you expect from Hit Girl?

All my plans worked – well most of them...

Friday evening

Glennview

My life was complete, apparently.

It had been ten weeks since Daddy had died and we had left Gotham for the first and the last time. So much had happened to us in less than three months. Danny and I actually sat down to take stock.

"We have a beautiful house," I began.

"With an indoor pool!" Danny added.

"We have our own bedrooms..."

"I don't have to put up with you farting all night!" Danny chuckled.

"What about your snoring?" I replied with a scowl.

"We have a dog..."

"Who's 'up the duff', as Stephanie calls it..." I laughed.

"That's another thing – we have Megan and Stephanie. Both are really good friends, although they are both very strange..."

"I have to agree with you there, Danny."

"Daddy always used to worry about money and buying food, but we have never wanted for anything..."

"We have the most perfect Mom and Dad, now."

"I still miss Daddy..."

"We always will, Danny... But now we have Dave and Mindy and they love us."

"If it weren't for them..."

"I have nightmares that nobody came to rescue us..."

"I do, too. I hate them, but I suppose there's no way to avoid them."

"We've learnt to ride quad-bikes!"

"Yeah, I love them – the speed!"

"The speed... You're always coming off your quad 'cause you ride too fast," Danny chuckled.

"You ride like an old granny!" I replied, sticking my tongue out at my brother.

"Do you ever think that there's something that Dave and Mindy are not telling us?"

"They're adults. Adults have secrets. I trust them both, so if there is something that they are hiding from us, it's for our own good."

"Okay, that's fair."

"What else – oh, yes, I can kick your ass!" I grinned.

"You cannot – I'm better than you!"

"Are not!"

"Am too..."

What the hell was going on upstairs?

I headed up the stairs and heard a scream of pain – it was Anne-Marie...

"Ha – told you I was better!" Danny exclaimed happily.

I peered in the bedroom door just in time to see Anne-Marie kick her brother's feet out from under him.

"What do you two think you are doing?" I bellowed and both seven-year-olds froze.

Neither said a word as they turned to face me. Both knew that they were in big trouble.

"Well? I'm waiting for an answer!"

"She started it..."

"I did not..."

"Did..."

"Did not..."

"Did too..."

"Stop!" I said sharply making both kids jump. "What have you been told about sparring outside D-JAK?"

There was some muttering.

"Speak up!"

"Never spar outside the Dojang," both replied.

"It is one week before Christmas, should I ground you till *after* Christmas Day?"

"No, please Dad..."

"Those puppy dog eyes are not going to work on me, girl – your Mom's been trying those on me for many years and they never worked for her, either..."

"They did too!"

I turned to see my wife grinning at me, trying on her own puppy dog eyes.

"So adorable – a bit like a rabid Rottweiler that wants to rip somebody's throat out!" I quipped with a chuckle.

"Where did I go wrong with him? I used to be able to scare him half to death with a mere glance!" Mindy muttered quietly.

"You're such a softy!" I teased.

Mindy ignored me and went over to our daughter where she roughly took hold of her head and checked out the bloody nose.

"No permanent damage! Bed both of you – now..."

"But it's only..." Danny began.

One glare from Mindy and he fled to his room. Anne-Marie stamped the floor with her foot and headed over to the bathroom. I grinned at Mindy.

"You used to stamp your foot like that, too – so cute!" I laughed.

Mindy did not reply – she just stalked off downstairs.

I knew that Danny and Anne-Marie were in trouble – again!

Mindy had given me a ton of homework which had taken me two hours to finish. Mindy could be a real bitch! I had to catch up so that I could start at school in January – I hated school and had not attended one for almost two years.

Once I had finished I was exhausted. I was still a little sore from Tuesday, but most of the bruises were fading well. I said goodnight to Dave and Mindy before I headed upstairs. Dave was still winding up Mindy – how he had the temerity to do that, I had no idea! When I got to our bedroom, I found that Anne-Marie was still awake and sulking. I grinned when I saw her scowling face peeping out from under the duvet. She glowered at me as I got undressed for bed.

"If you're gonna break the rules, make sure you don't get caught..."

I saw Anne-Marie's mouth moving, but I never heard the words of her reply!

West Columbia

I was so excited!

It was happening. In the space of a little over a year all my dreams had come true. I was getting a Dad and I was getting a big sister. It had also occurred to me that I was going to be gaining a niece and a nephew, too. Oh wow, that was going to make me an Auntie – at eleven-years-old!

I was getting too giddy for Mom and Marcus, so they had sent me to bed early.

Oh, I was going to so enjoy Saturday morning.

***Chapter 219*: Wedding Bells**

That weekend
Saturday morning

I was actually getting used to wearing revealing dresses.

That had surprised me, almost as much as it did everybody else! It was a wedding, only this time I was the Maid of Honour. Megan was a bridesmaid, as was Chloe. This was to be very low key, compared to my own affair.

There had been a time when makeup and jewellery had meant nothing to me – except maybe for the odd necklace that could double as a garrotte! Now my tastes seemed to have matured, just as I had.

A far cry from what I used to be, when Dave had first met me.

I was so proud of what Mindy had become.

She had matured into an amazingly beautiful young woman who captured the eyes of men, and some women, everywhere she went. When she was fifteen, the thought of showing any skin willingly was almost abhorrent; now though, she seemed to enjoy wearing beautiful dresses.

Yes, she had worn a short dress for a date, all those years ago, but I had insisted! Normally Mindy was only ever seen in jeans, jogging pants, maybe shorts, or a combat suit! She had a lovely body and I was glad that she now had an opportunity to show it off.

She was the image of her mother, Kathleen. Kathleen had loved showing off her body; that had been what had attracted Damon to her. She liked to tease, but she had the goods and men fell over themselves to please her. Mindy had inherited her Mother's beauty – all of it, right down to the eyes and the long legs.

Mindy even managed to look beautiful in a damned combat suit!

I was very nervous.

This was going to be husband number two. I missed Ray, but he was a part of my old life; I had a new life with my daughter. It had been a little over a year since Megan had brought home Hit Girl to our rancid apartment – end of October; I would never forget it. I was at my wits end trying to support the then ten-year-old girl.

Now I had new friends, yes my Boss turned out to be a vicious, no holds barred, murderous vigilante, but I had met that vigilante's father and... That had been just the previous Christmas when Marcus and I had kind of come together. At that point I had no idea what his daughter did for a living! Then it had all gone public...

We had been kissing in the kitchen when in had come Megan and Mindy.

"Mom!"

"Marcus!"

"What!" Marcus had responded, sounding annoyed, as he had removed his lips from mine.

"I'm in enough fucking pain!" Mindy had growled angrily and stormed out of the kitchen, dragging my appalled daughter with her!

As I stood with Marcus I felt so happy; my life was finally complete and back on track. I was gaining a fabulous eighteen-year-old daughter, who just happened to be one of the world's top assassins. I think it will be Marcus who gets the short end of the deal; he gets Megan! One not so good thought was that I would become a grandmother to two little terrors – a grandmother at thirty-three!

I barely heard the vows.

I was buried in my thoughts. I was overjoyed for Marcus; all I had ever wanted was for him to be happy and now he was. I was also gaining a little sister – a wild girl, not all that different from myself, I had to admit.

I looked down at the eleven-year-old girl; she was struggling to contain her emotions. I took hold of her hand and gently squeezed it, showing her I was there for her. She smiled up at me in a silent thank you.

As the marriage was completed, I also realised with a start that for the first time in my life, I actually had a Mom...

..._...

"Congratulations, *Mom!*" I grinned, hugging Paige.

"I'm far too young to have a daughter your age..."

"Who cares. I'm just so happy to have gained a Mom and a Sister."

"You serious about the Sister part?" Paige chuckled.

"She's grown on me!" I replied.

"I love you too, sis!" Megan chimed in with her usual shit-eating grin as she tried to hug both me and *our* Mom.

"Daughters from hell!" Marcus grimaced.

"I suppose congratulations are in order, *Dad!*" Megan said as she hugged Marcus.

"She does have a cute side – but just like the moon has a dark side; we never actually see it!" Marcus deadpanned.

Megan smiled sweetly.

"Hi, Megan, you look really nice."

"Thanks, Steph, so do you," Megan replied, before looking a little concerned. "I hope I didn't hurt you the other day..."

"Nah, I'm tougher than I look; I was just exhausted and you put up a good fight. I'm sorry for taunting you."

"Hey, I'm a big girl, I can take some abuse – I get it all the time from everybody!"

"We're good then?" I asked tentatively.

"Always, Steph!" Megan replied, giving me a hug.

"Very sweet!" Josh commented with a grin as he walked past.

We both scowled at him.

"Us girls need to stick together!" Megan growled.

"Congratulations, Captain!"

"Thank you, Lieutenant!" Marcus laughed. "Seriously, thanks, Hank..."

"Finally, you've made an honest woman out of Paige!" Trudy Platt said cheerfully.

"An honest woman?" Paige hinted suggestively. "Oh, I hope not!"

"You go girl!" Erin laughed.

"Respect, Marcus!" A grinning Alvin said shaking Marcus' hand.

"Can we call you Grandma now?"

"If you have to!" Grandma Paige replied, a little reluctantly.

I looked at Danny and smiled. We had never had grandparents before. It was yet another new experience that we had discovered since moving to Chicago. I was in another really pretty dress, which I loved – dressing up was fun. Danny did not like dressing up, but he endured it without complaining.

"How're my little granddaughter and grandson doing?" Grandpa Marcus asked with a smile.

"Being perfect little angels!" I replied grinning back.

"Somehow I doubt that!"

"I have to agree with you there, Marcus!" Mom said, sticking her tongue out at me.

I scowled back and stuck my own tongue out in return.

After the ceremony we moved onto a fancy restaurant for an early dinner and then for some fun going into the night.

The meal was fun and enormous. It was good to have time to chat with my friends and just relax. I saw Voight whispering something to Kim and her mouth dropped open in surprise. Kim and Marty were next to get married, only they had yet to confirm a date.

As I looked around the room, everybody was laughing and smiling, enjoying the evening. It was what everybody needed – to let their hair down, figuratively speaking of course, and enjoy themselves. There had been too much pain and trouble in the City. I was so looking forward to a peaceful Christmas and, I hoped, a very happy New Year!

Marcus was so happy; happier than he had been for a long, long time. The man had struggled when Paige had been shot – we all had, but Marcus had been beside himself with worry and I had really felt for him.

Finally, it was time for fun and games...

The 'daughters from hell' began the entertainment.

"Oh God no!" Marcus moaned as we both climbed onto the stage and grabbed a microphone each.

"This is for our Mom and Dad..." I announced.

Megan began with the opening verse:

*I come home in the morning light
My mother says when you gonna live your life right
Oh mother dear we're not the fortunate ones
And girls they want to have fun
Oh girls just want to have fun*

Then it was my turn:

*The phone rings in the middle of the night
My father yells what you gonna do with your life
Oh daddy dear you know you're still number one
But girls they want to have fun
Oh girls just want to have*

And together:

*That's all they really want
Some fun
When the working day is done
Girls – they want to have fun
Oh girls just want to have fun

Some boys take a beautiful girl*

*And hide her away from the rest of the world
I want to be the one to walk in the sun
Oh girls they want to have fun
Oh girls just want to have*

*That's all they really want
Some fun
When the working day is done
Girls – they want to have fun
Oh girls just want to have fun,
They want to have fun,
They want to have fun...*

Everybody was laughing and singing along to the last verse. Marcus just grimaced, though, while Paige loved it! We both stepped down and allowed Chloe and Stephanie to take their turn with a surprise rendition of 'I'm So Excited' by the Pointer Sisters. For a small girl, Stephanie had a fair set of lungs!

Then Paige surprised the hell out of everybody, including Marcus, by climbing up on the stage with Kim. Despite being four and a half months pregnant, Paige was still very able. Together they sang an unexpected tune: 'Man! I feel like a woman' by Shania Twain.

We all took a break and enjoyed each other's company. It was a very special night. Considering the time of year, we also decided to dance to some songs to mark that time of year. That brought everybody out, including our friends from the 21st District.

At the end of the evening Dave and I were joined by Marcus and Paige.

"Dave, Mindy – we have an *enormous* favour to ask..." Paige said as she stood next to Marcus.

"No problem – what can we do?" I asked enthusiastically.

"Well, we're gonna be out of town for a few days, so we wondered if you could look after our little monster, err, girl," Marcus finished without a hint of shame.

Megan appeared and caught the last few words; she scowled and I smirked down at my, not so little, sister who scowled back.

"I can't believe that I'm being treated like an unwanted *pet!*" Megan moaned.

"We'll feed her and she can always sleep with Sophia!" Dave commented facetiously.

"I get no goddamn respect around here!" Megan growled heading off to join the others kids.

I laughed as Megan stalked off.

***Chapter 220*: The Willis Tower Job - Part I**

***The following afternoon
Sunday***

They are such geeks!

A whole group of us had just returned from watching Episode VII – in 3D. Marty, Josh and Dave had talked non-stop since leaving their seats – Chloe and Stephanie had chipped in, once or twice and so had Hailee – but talk about a goddamn geek fest... How could anybody get themselves so engrossed in a damn movie – even one as good as that one was? Hit Girl was not a geek – damn it!

Oh, who was I kidding – Mindy Lizewski was a major geek for anything sci-fi! I had loved the movie and Dave had been stunned that I had actually managed to sit still for so long... Okay, sitting still was not one of my strong suits; I preferred action and damn did I get it with 'The Force Awakens'. Now, where could I get a cross guard lightsabre from... I could just see myself with one – or maybe a pair with purple blades... I would be unbeatable!

"You fantasising about having a purple lightsabre again?" Dave inquired.

"Huh?" I replied.

"You had that same expression you have every time we watch a Star Wars movie!" Dave laughed. "What a geek!"

"You're one to talk..." I retorted.

"At least, *we're* proud to be geeks!" Marty teased.

"I have a certain reputation to uphold..." I challenged.

"Fuck that – your reputation went out the window a long time ago!" Chloe laughed.

That night

8:00 P.M.

Safehouse F

"Mindy, please!"

"Okay! I just want you to be safe..."

"You're like an old mother hen!" Stephanie complained.

"Mindy – she's all kitted out and I've checked all her weapons and gear..." Megan insisted.

"It's her first time out – I want it to go well and well, not like Dave's..."

"Gee, just what I wanted to be reminded about!" Dave growled.

"Get over it!" I laughed.

"Come on..." Chloe grinned. "What's the worst that could happen?"

Two and a half hours later

10:30 P.M.

Central Chicago

I looked below me and shook off the beginnings of vertigo as I took stock of our situation.

The nine-year-old vigilante hung ninety stories above the ground.

I was hanging over the edge at a bad angle, so I could not pull her up and the combined weight of my combat suit and weapons were threatening to pull me over the edge too.

Earlier that night

8:26 P.M.

Safehouse F

"Fusion standby!" Hal called over the comms as she made a final check of the surrounding area.

I was astride my Ducati Multistrada, engine running and ready to roll. Beside me was Shadow, she was astride her Suzuki V-Strom, just as ready. Next over, was Jackal on his Tiger 800 XCA. Jackal was two-up. Behind him was an over-excited nine-year-old. Psyche was ready to rock and I knew that she would be safe with her British friend. Finally came Petra, on her trusty Fireblade.

Joining us for the night was 'Sabre' our updated variant of *Beast*. The 5.0-litre V8 Supercharged and heavily armoured, Range Rover Sentinel was being driven by Kick-Ass, with Wildcat riding shotgun.

"Fusion – area clear..." The steel door slowly opened revealing the curving concrete ramp. "Fusion – move out!"

The engines revved and I led the pack, followed by Jackal and Shadow, with *Sabre* behind and Petra at the rear.

We headed towards the centre of the City.

Along the way, we received a call from a snout – Worm. I went on with Petra to go talk with him, along with Psyche. We met up with my best informant, snitch, snout in a barely lit alley.

"Who's the little one?"

Apparently, Psyche took exception to being referred to as 'little!' The admittedly short vigilante flew at Worm and placed the point of a Sai in his crotch.

"Who, exactly, is little? Think very carefully before you respond, or I spear your chipolata..."

"I... I... Help me, Hit Girl!"

"You're on your own, pal!" I chuckled – Psyche could look after herself.

"I meant no offence, good lady..."

The man winced as Psyche applied a little pressure to her Sai.

"Just a slip of the tongue..."

"You just control that tongue in future!" Psyche growled. "Now, spill!"

"Yes, ma'am – err, what is she called?" Worm asked, tilting his head towards Psyche.

"I am Psyche and don't you forget it!" Psyche growled back.

I smirked beneath my mask – Psyche was ensuring that the man respected her, despite her diminutive size.

"Psyche told you to spill – so spill!" I growled.

"Yes – I have some information concerning the Genovese; would that be useful?" Worm asked, smirking a little.

The creepy bastard obviously knew that I would be very interested in anything that concerned the Genovese. Worm also knew that I hated to be led along.

"Continue..."

"I have the location of their offices in the Willis Tower..."

I growled.

"The 97th floor – suite 9750. Anthony Genovese is there, right now!"

"My normal terms and conditions apply – if the information is good; I pay. Conversely, if it is bad; you die!"

"You should really get that printed up!" Worm quipped.

"Don't give her any ideas!" Petra growled.

As soon as Worm had left, I informed everybody about what had been said.

We could not pass up the chance to find out more about the Genovese family. However, the Willis Tower would be a tough nut to crack – the security was second to none and there was no ready escape from the place.

I left Battle Guy and Hal to worry about that while we headed towards Chicago's tallest building.

Forty minutes later

Safehouse F

"We have access!" Battle Guy called.

On the large screen before him a three-dimensional rendering of a skyscraper appeared. Hal selected several sections which zoomed in on another screen. The first floor lobby, the 97th floor and the elevator shafts.

"We control the elevators – local access is locked out!" Hal advised.

We left our vehicles down an alley across the street and under the watchful eyes of Jackal. We entered the South Franklin Street lobby and were met by the security guards there.

"Sorry, you need to be on 'the list' to be allowed access – even vigilantes..."

"Check 'the list', pal!" Wildcat growled.

Everybody and everything that arrived at the tower had to be logged into the iVisitor system – and we were – thanks to our resident hackers!

"Okay – please don't make too much of a mess!" The shift supervisor said as he waved us through.

"Well done, guys!" I growled to the two computer geeks back at the Safehouse.

We took one of the 104 elevators in the tower up to the 95th floor at 1,200 feet-per-minute, changing once.

10:08 P.M.

The 97th floor

We exited the elevator and turned to the left, Kick-Ass leading, with Petra to his right and Psyche behind him. Wildcat was beside Psyche – I followed at the rear with Shadow.

I had seen the girl training and I knew that she could fight.

However, I had not yet seen her kill. We had not really talked much about that aspect of her life. Cathy had touched on it in their discussions, but that was all. Stephanie knew how to use her weapons, that was obvious.

From a vigilante point of view, I was keen to see how she reacted to taking a life, which was not an easy thing to do, no matter what the movies depicted.

..._...

At the end of the elevator lobby were a pair of glass doors. There was no visible activity, but then gunfire erupted from behind us as two men opened fire with pistols. The bullets did not penetrate our armour.

Kick-Ass went ahead with Wildcat, Psyche and Petra, while Shadow and I engaged the Sicilian guards. We were definitely in the right place! Shadow dropped both men with four double-taps from her FN Five-seveN pistol. More men appeared from a passageway to the left. We pushed forwards, gunning them down.

Kick-Ass kicked open the locked glass doors, which shattered at his kick.

"Knock, knock!" He bellowed.

The two young girls headed forward, pistols up. There was movement at the far end of the corridor which ran past several glass fronted offices. I kept watch over the entrance, guarding my colleagues rear.

I could hear the gunfire from the other side of the floor – so much for a stealthy attack!

I was having fun, my first attack as a vigilante!

The adrenalin was flowing and it gave me a strange feeling, like I was high on it – I loved it. It must have been the danger ahead of me. I must have been distracted with my thoughts as we moved slowly past empty, glazed offices. We were about to reach the point where the corridor turned to the right when something struck me from the side.

We flew through an archway.

Psyche was struck by a large man.

Another man thrust me against a wall. Two more attacked Kick-Ass. I triggered my claws and made my attacker regret his actions as blood flew across the nearest glass partition – that was actually really cool!

I moved to help Psyche and saw her being thrown towards the windows and she hit with such force that I thought she might actually go straight through and plunge to her death – instead she bounced back and hit the floor.

I kicked the man in the kidney and he went down on one knee, trying to regain his breath.

I ran down the corridor and saw Kick-Ass putting down his last man.

To my left I could see that a man was on his knees. Psyche jumped up from the floor and landed on his back, down on one knee. She drew a Sai from her right boot and flipped it around before bringing it down fast into the nape of the man's neck. The man stopped struggling immediately and dropped like a sack of cement as Psyche rolled off the corpse.

"I think he got the point!" Psyche quipped in her 'cool as a cucumber' British accent which actually sent a chill down my spine.

I looked over at Kick-Ass who just shrugged. I turned back as Psyche wrenched the Sai from the man's neck, cleaning it off. Wildcat shook her head and we all headed back towards the elevators – our part of the suite was clear.

After wading our way through the guards, we found that the cunt had gone.

The guards had been a distraction so that Anthony Genovese could make use of the fire stairs. I kicked open the door and ran down the stairs.

"He's running – he's on the 95th floor!" I called.

I thundered down the stairs, with Shadow close behind. Below us, I heard a door kicked open and I heard a radio call.

"Kick-Ass and girls are on the 89th floor, heading up!"

They had taken a shortcut in the elevator. I heard shooting and knew that Genovese had been cut off.

"He's running onto the 90th floor, towards the rooftop!" Petra called.

I kept heading down and then my heart sank as Hal called us.

"CCTV at the tower shows a helicopter approaching the roof at the 90th floor!"

Shit – he was going to get away. Kind if reminded me of that bastard D'Amico – he had escaped from a tower in a fucking helicopter, too.

I burst through the fire door and found myself in a large open area. I could see various contraptions that I figured had something to do with washing the windows on that side of the tower. Kick-Ass was fighting with three men, Wildcat was removing her claws from another man, while Psyche was kicking Anthony Genovese himself. Petra was struggling with her own cunt near the steel door that opened out onto the 90th floor rooftop.

I could see somebody over by the steel door, near to a control panel.

The door began to open.

As soon as it had raised two feet, Anthony Genovese kicked away from Psyche and rolled under the door. He was closely followed by Psyche, a pistol in her hand. By the time I reached the door I could hear the throbbing sound of a helicopter close by.

Outside it was cold and breezy. I could see the bright flashing lights of a small helicopter and the silhouettes of two people running towards it. The smaller silhouette was obviously Psyche. I could not fire in case I hit the helicopter and sent it plunging to the street, ninety stories below us.

I ran out towards the helicopter and the young vigilante.

***Chapter 221*: The Willis Tower Job - Part II**

Sunday night

10:28 P.M.

***233 South Wacker Drive
Chicago***

Psyche was kicked backwards by Anthony Genovese and she rolled towards the edge of the skyscraper.

I shot the final guard in the face and he dropped, before I could run towards the helicopter, I heard a scream and as I turned my heart actually skipped several beats. I saw the girl stumble over the rails for the window-cleaning robots. I saw what was about to happen and dropping my pistol, I dived for her as she fell backwards and I tried in vain to catch one of my legs on the same rails that had tripped Psyche over the edge. I grabbed hold of her utility belt as she fell, but her weight and that of her weapons pulled me over with her.

I started to lose my grip on the rails when I felt an intense pain below my waist as Shadow grabbed hold of both legs, pinning them in place. I looked below me and shook off the beginnings of vertigo. I took stock of our situation.

The nine-year-old vigilante hung ninety stories above the ground.

I was hanging at a bad angle, so I could not pull her up and the combined weight of my combat suit and weapons were threatening to pull me over the edge. Shadow was clinging to my legs and I could hear her frantically scrabbling for a better hold on the roof top.

"Shadow, you drop me and I'll fucking kill you!"

Psyche was on the verge of panic.

As she went over she had screamed in terror which had then given way to yells of desperation and violent struggling.

"Help me... Please help me... Don't drop me..."

I had to calm her down or she would take us both over the edge and to certain death – I wasted no time believing that we might survive the almost twelve-hundred-foot drop to the ground below us.

"Stop struggling, Psyche, I have you..."

She wasn't listening...

"Help... Help... I'm falling... Please..."

Considering that we were hanging in mid-air with nobody anywhere near us, I decided to break the rules.

"*Stephanie!*" I yelled.

She stopped moving and then I saw her looking up at me. Despite the mask I could see the fear in her eyes.

"Look at me – you are *not* going to die. You *think* you are going to die, then you *are* going to die! You are *not* going to die, Stephanie... Say it!"

I saw her mouth moving but heard nothing over the comms.

"Stephanie – fucking say it!"

"I... I am not... I am not going to die..."

"Again!"

"I am... I am not going to die..."

"Again!"

"I am *not* going to die..."

"Keep thinking that while I figure things out, okay?"

"I trust you, Hit Girl. My life is in your hands."

She was bang on too! Both of my hands were wrapped around the girl's utility belt.

"Damn, you had too many pancakes this morning!" I growled and the girl actually giggled.

"Well, well, well! Another fine mess for Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass mused over the comms.

That was all I needed, a wise-ass Kick-Ass; I had to admit, it was a different 'mess' than my usual ones. Three vigilantes trapped hanging off the fucking ninetieth floor of the Willis Tower – I would never live it down!

"We'll be back with you soon, Hit Girl, we won't leave you *hanging around* for long!" Kick-Ass laughed.

"Fuck you!" I growled back. "This little bitch ain't as skinny as she looks!"

..._...

"Well, kid, at least you're getting a good look at the view!" I commented.

"It's all fucking upside down!" Psyche complained bitterly.

"There's no pleasing you, is there?"

"Sorry!"

"I'm going off comms for a few minutes, but don't be scared, okay?"

There was a short hesitation before she replied.

"Yes..."

"Battle Guy, give you and me a secure channel."

"Go ahead, it's just us..."

"I want you to shut-off Psyche from all, but me. I don't want her hearing the discussions over her rescue. She will only hear my voice and only you and me will hear her voice, understand?"

"I do – anytime you want to talk without Psyche listening, just ask for a secure channel," Battle Guy acknowledged.

"Cut her back in, please."

"Done!"

"Hey, kid – I'm back!"

"I've not gone anywhere!" Psyche replied.

Her voice indicated how she felt and I was worried that was going to start panicking again.

"Help is on its way – you can do this – I am *not* leaving you."

A few minutes of silence passed.

"Hit Girl?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm really scared..."

"I know you are, but I've got you..."

That was reasonably accurate for that moment. My arms were getting very sore and it took all of my willpower to lock my fingers around the girl's utility belt and keep them there. I worried about cramp; there was no way that I could let go with even one hand for a moment – she would plummet to her death if I tried...

The helicopter was gone by the time I arrived on the rooftop, I ignored the dead body and headed for where I could see Shadow lying prone on the edge of the roof.

As I got closer I could see the black and purple legs of Hit Girl – there was no sign of Psyche, but then there was no sign of Hit Girl's top half either! I yelled for Jackal to bring certain items from *Sabre* and I sent Wildcat down to guard our vehicles.

..._...

Jackal arrived a few minutes later and first things first, Jackal, Petra and I attached the ends of three lengths of rope to a safety support on the roof top. Next came Shadow.

"Sorry about this, Shadow!" I quipped as I reached between her legs for the carabiner that hung from a mount just below her utility belt. The carabiner was normally hidden under the utility belt.

"Never thought I would ever have Kick-Ass reaching up between my legs!" Shadow said with a chuckle.

"What!" Hit Girl growled.

"Yeah, what she said!" Jackal growled.

"You have a firm touch, Kick-Ass!" Shadow added with a giggle.

"I'll break his fucking fingers!" Jackal muttered.

"Yeah, what he said!" Hit Girl added.

"I'm coming between *your* legs next, gorgeous..." I said, placing a hand on my wife's left buttock.

"I wish..." Hit Girl moaned!

"Time and a place, people!" Battle Guy cut in.

"That's two secure!" I advised as I secured the second rope to Hit Girl's carabiner. "Jackal, take in the slack on Hit Girl. Petra, take in the slack on Shadow."

"Wow, Hit Girl – you need to lay off the marshmallows, you are *heavy*!" Jackal exclaimed.

"Would you care to repeat that..." Hit Girl growled.

"Ah, not really..." Jackal replied.

"Good..."

Once the ropes were hauled taut, Shadow let go of Hit Girl's legs and rolled to one side. She sat up and flexed her aching muscles. Her part was not over, though, not by a long shot.

Shadow was safe and Hit Girl was safely secured.

Next, we needed to secure the hanging Psyche.

I had felt the tension grow on my harness and I knew that I was safe – I would not die when I struck South Franklin Street at terminal velocity.

Shadow was gone from my legs, but now came the difficult part. I looked to my right as Shadow appeared, slowly moving down the vertical face of the building.

"Psyche, Shadow is going to clip a rope onto your carabiner and then I am going to let you go. You will swing a bit, but you will be safe..."

"No..." Came the frightened reply. "Don't let me go, please... You said that you would never let me go..."

"I will only let you go once I am certain that you are safe..."

I watched as Shadow carefully reached over and clipped a rope into the carabiner on Psyche's suit.

"Take in the slack, Kick-Ass!" Shadow called.

The slack was hauled in and as the rope went taught I tentatively let go with one hand and then the other. Thank God! Psyche swung a bit as her body sorted out its equilibrium. She screamed at the movement, but Shadow moved down so that she was looking directly into Psyche's eyes.

"Battle Guy! Enable Shadow into Psyche's comms!"

"Psyche, look at me, look at my face and nothing else..." Shadow said gently to the scared vigilante and I saw Psyche move her head and look directly at Shadow. "Keep looking at me, no matter what..."

All three of us were now moving upwards. I was never so happy to feel the rooftop beneath me and I grabbed Psyche the moment that she was over the roof edge and safe.

I hugged her tightly and I was not ashamed to admit that I was crying almost as much as she was.

Safehouse F

Everybody was very sombre as we returned to the Safehouse.

That had been very close, too close. I was very rattled by what had happened, which surprised the hell out of me and Stephanie hadn't stopped shaking since she had been hauled back onto the rooftop. I took the girl upstairs to my bedroom and helped her to remove the combat suit in private. Once the suit was off, Stephanie sat on the bed for a moment taking deep breaths before bolting for the bathroom and vomiting violently into the toilet.

I had expected it, hence the privacy.

It had also been the reason behind restricting the comms. I hadn't wanted her to be embarrassed later by anything that she said while hanging twelve-hundred-feet in the air. When Stephanie had finished retching, she started to sob as she sat down on the bathroom floor, hugging her knees to her chest. Her t-shirt was soaked with sweat and I managed to persuade her to take a shower, but I still had to help her up from the floor and then into the shower.

Dave appeared, having taken his own shower downstairs. He had two mugs of steaming hot chocolate, suitably laced with ample quantities of marshmallows. Dave knew exactly what Stephanie and I needed!

Once Stephanie had reappeared from the shower, wrapped in a towel, Dave sat with her while I went for my own shower.

"Dave?"

"Yeah, Steph."

"I am so sorry for screwing up... I put everybody at risk..."

I stared at the girl.

"Mindy does something to people who whine like a bitch, only I'm not like Mindy. You did nothing wrong – shit happens, live with it. Let me tell you a story... Quite a few years ago, long before I met the ten-year-old Mindy, I decided to try and become a superhero, only it did *not* quite go the way that I had planned it... Not many people know about Kick-Ass 1.0 – he sucked, big time and well he only lasted like five minutes!"

"What happened?"

"Well, I err, I tried to take on these two guys that were trying to break into a car, but it kinda went to shit and I was stabbed in the stomach," I explained. Stephanie lowered her mug and turned to me, her eyes wide in surprise. "I tried to get away, but then I was hit by a car..."

Stephanie just stared at me and then she burst out laughing. She quickly put the mug of hot chocolate down before she spilt it and burnt herself.

"Yes, it was so fucking funny!" I said sarcastically.

"I'm – sorry – it's just – so funny!" Stephanie admitted, in between fits of laughter.

"I'm glad I've cheered you up, little bitch!"

"Come on... It *is* rather funny!"

"If you stop laughing for a minute, I'll tell you the rest."

Stephanie forced herself to stop laughing, which seemed to be quite an effort for her. Finally, she stared up at me, but still smiling.

"Well, you see – I err, had to ask the ambulance guy to promise not to say anything and to dispose of the costume, so I was only in my shorts by the time I got to the hospital. Well, that got people talking and they thought that I had, well, that I had been... You know... Raped!"

I could tell that Stephanie was trying desperately, not to laugh!

"After I was fixed up, I spent a few months with people thinking that I was – well... Gay!"

That was way too much for Stephanie and she literally fell over laughing; tears were pouring down her face. After a couple of minutes, the laughter seemed contagious and I started to laugh too! It was funny and I knew that Mindy and Chloe loved the story and I would have laughed, if it had happened to somebody else!

The story, however, had had the desired effect.

When I returned to the bedroom, I found Stephanie sipping her hot chocolate and sitting on the bed with Dave – she was giggling.

"Feeling better?" I asked as I sipped my own hot chocolate.

"A little..." Stephanie admitted.

"I told her the story of Kick-Ass 1.0!" Dave chuckled.

I laughed.

"Dave, I'm staying here tonight, with Step. You get home to the twins; they'll have killed Erika by now – I'll be along in the morning."

"No problem. Chloe, Josh and Hailee are staying too."

The following morning

Stephanie began the night on the upper bunk in one of the bedrooms, with Hailee on the bottom.

However, later that night I found that I had a companion in my bed. I had expected it – the young girl had had a bad nightmare related to her experience and I had been awoken by a distraught Stephanie coming in my room. I hugged her until she fell asleep. Why did I care about the girl so much? Was it because I saw myself in her?

Only a few short years ago, I only cared about me and Daddy. Then it was me and Dave. Then it was many people, from Dave all the way through to the twins that were my children. Now I was caring about a nine-year-old assassin. The girl was all alone in the world – maybe I could do something about that; I would talk to Dave.

I had to do something.

When I awoke I was more than a little startled to find that I was not in the same bed that I had gone to sleep in!

I opened my eyes to find Mindy smiling at me from the other side of the bed. I briefly looked around me and found that I was in Mindy and Dave's room, in their bed; talk about embarrassing! I buried myself under the duvet as I felt my face exploding with the humiliation. I was *not* a scared five-year-old, so what was I doing in Mindy's bed? Moreover, why was she tolerating it? I was not used to having somebody caring for me, but I liked the feeling that it generated within me.

Since appearing on their doorstep – or rather being scooped up off the pavement by Kick-Ass – I had been accepted into their community. For the first time in quite a while, I had real friends who liked me for who I was. I had been with them for a month now and my wounds were fully healed, yes I had lost my former companion, Miranda, but I was not as alone as I thought I might be.

I had Joshua – I liked him; he was always nice to me and his accent from home, not to mention the Marmite, helped me cope with being in a foreign country and surround by foreigners. Chloe? She did not seem to like me, but she tried not to show it – maybe there were trust issues. Of everybody, apart from Josh, I seemed to feel closest to Dave. He always cared about me, as I knew Mindy did, but I just felt safe around Dave for some reason or other.

Oh, God, I was crying again! The previous night had been very traumatic and I had been scared out of my mind – without Mindy though, I would have lost it completely and fallen to my death. Chloe had been a rock, too. I would have to thank her later. I felt a hand reach over and then I was being hugged by Mindy.

The feeling of somebody comforting me just made me cry even more!

I had an idea of what the young girl was going through.

There had been times when I had felt so alone and I had also endured some very harrowing and traumatic experiences.

I was even more determined to find those people responsible for the way that girl was.

***Chapter 222*: Xmas Fusion Patrol**

Author's Note: Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that could be seen as indecent and salacious, including the use of words or insinuations of a very dubious, unseemly or otherwise downright dirty nature.

Monday evening

Glenview

"Motherfucker!"

"You bellowed sweet thing!"

"Dave – I just can't get this fucking right – I..."

"Look dear – not everything can be fixed by punching, kicking and generally being obnoxious!"

"Who fucking says? It always has worked for me!"

"Okay, before I come any closer can you please put the knife down... The scissors too... And just to be safe, the Sellotape as well... Thank you."

Who would have thought that there was an ever increasing list of things that Hit Girl could not do! At the top of the list, of course, was cooking without a microwave – mind you, she sucked at that too. That night we discovered another one – wrapping Christmas presents without losing your temper.

Mindy was surrounded by unwrapped presents and a rather large pile of mutilated and destroyed wrapping paper, not to mention several empty rolls of Sellotape. Actually, she *had* managed to wrap one present – well, sort of!

"Laugh at me and..."

..._...

I laughed and a second later I was on the floor with Hit Girl on my stomach. I grinned at my wife and chuckled at her expression.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?" Mindy demanded as she slid backwards and then her eyes went wide. "Yep, I felt *that!*"

Mindy adjusted her position on my groin. I reached up and took a good hold on the collar of her blouse and pulled her down so I could kiss her. She yelped, but allowed herself to be manhandled on top of me.

"Fuck me!" She groaned.

"By your command!" I replied as I pulled open her blouse and began to massage her breasts. They hardened to my touch as I pulled the bra out of the way.

Mindy loosened her belt and undid the button on her jeans. I slid them down her thighs exposing her purple knickers which seemed slightly moist. Mindy in turn pulled open *my* pants, which I had to admit was a relief!

"Give me a minute..." Mindy said, before jumping up, kicking off her jeans and losing the knickers, blouse and bra.

Completely naked, she sat back down, but only after dragging my pants and shorts down to my ankles. She allowed me to guide her onto my cock and she took a deep breath as she sank down to my groin.

"Oh... That felt good..." She exclaimed.

"Tell me about it!"

"We've never done it in here, have we?" Mindy commented as she gently rocked backwards and forwards, looking around the living room.

"Err, kitchen, bedroom, basement, garage, XJR... No, we haven't..."

"Another room off our list then!" Mindy giggled.

There was a whining sound from the door and we both looked up to see Sophia standing there. She looked thoroughly disgusted and turned away shaking her head. Her belly was sagging quite a bit now with, we believed, about six pups.

..._...

We got back to the work in hand – actually, I had Mindy's waist in my left hand... My other was further up on her chest. Mindy was struggling to breath as sensations of joy coursed through her. She moaned each time that I touched a very tender nipple. She was enjoying every second and so was I.

Then I decided that it was time for me to do some work and I flipped Mindy off me and onto the floor. She screamed, but then she started to purr... I looked down at my gorgeous wife and I felt the happiest that I had ever felt since I had first met her.

"Fuck me like there is no tomorrow, Kick-Ass!" She groaned, pulling me down on top of her, her legs spread wide apart.

I reconnected and started to move steadily and then faster and faster. Mindy groaned and began to thrash around on the wooden floor. I continued thrusting and Mindy's face screwed up, her eyes tight shut and then she screamed and I mean *screamed*; I was surprised that most of Chicago did not all turn to see who was screaming!

We both climaxed within seconds of each other and I rolled off Mindy as she curled up fighting off a massive orgasm that rocked her short, thin frame from top to bottom.

"God damn it!"

I was finally able to speak again... That had to be the worst – or the best, depending on how you looked at it – orgasm ever! My legs were like jelly and my crotch was on fire and I felt like I would never walk again.

Dave was grinning at me with his dorky grin that I loved.

"Merry Christmas, Hit Girl!"

"Merry Christmas, Kick-Ass!"

..._...

Sophia poked her head around the door to see if it was safe.

"You can come in now – the fun's over!" I giggled and she came over slowly. I gave her a reassuring hug, despite being completely naked and sitting with my legs crossed on the floor.

We spent the next hour wrapping the presents. The impromptu sex had soothed my temper and with my husband's help, I managed to get the presents wrapped properly, without any more temper tantrums.

Almost!

I looked up at the clock.

"Oh, shit!"

"What?"

"The kids'll be back in a few minutes!"

"Oh..." I replied as I looked down at my still naked body.

We both pulled on some clothes and pretended all was normal, just in time too.

..._...

"Hi, Dave, Mindy!" Hailee called as she came in with the three kids.

Stephanie gazed around the living room suspiciously. All the presents were already hidden away in our bedroom, but there was still evidence of our work around.

"What have you two been up to?" Stephanie inquired.

"Nothing, why?" I replied innocently.

"Nothing...?" Hailee commented, holding up my bra which she had picked up off the floor.

I felt my face heating up rather quickly.

"Ewww!" Stephanie exclaimed with a pained expression on her face.

Anne-Marie and Danny grimaced, but said nothing.

"So, how was the party?" Dave asked as he smirked at my discomfort.

"Not bad – Danny got kissed by *three* girls – all under the mistletoe!" Anne-Marie said with a grin.

Danny went bright red.

"What about you? I saw you with Jimmy Edwards..." Danny countered.

Now it was Anne-Marie's turn to blush.

"Stephanie got hit on too!" Hailee added.

"I'm outta here!" A slightly embarrassed Stephanie growled as she ran out of the living room and we heard her running up the stairs.

She was followed by Anne-Marie and Danny.

..._...

"Can't leave you two alone for a minute, can we?" Hailee asked, twirling my bra around her finger.

"Okay, we had sex – I was getting a bit wound up..."

"She threw a major hissy fit and I had to calm her down," Dave laughed.

"Got everything done?"

"Yes, we did. Thanks for taking them tonight."

"Anytime, guys – Merry Christmas!"

The following night

Central Chicago

"What the fuck are you wearing?"

"I thought Hit Girl loved Christmas?"

"Yes, Kick-Ass, I do – but you just look, well... Ridiculous!"

"Nice Santa hat, Kick-Ass!"

"Thank you, Shadow... Just getting into the *mood*, unlike Hit Grinch over there!"

Hit Girl growled as she turned and headed out of the alley.

..._...

We were out in the City, ensuring that the Season was to be one of 'Glad Tidings and Joy' for all. Some, however, had *not* got the memo! We had not gone very far when we found our first score...

"Aw, come on – it's fucking Christmas, guys!"

The two men turned to find themselves face to face with their worst nightmare. Hit Girl stared at them, no weapons in evidence.

"We've got families to feed – we need..."

"It's Christmas, so I'm in a good mood – ignore Kick-Ass; he's just loopy..."

The two men were staring at my Christmas headgear.

"... Here – take this and fuck off home. I see you out again and I will *not* be pleased!"

"Wow!" The man said as he examined what he had just been given. It was a thick wad of cash – real cash.

"I... Merry Christmas, Fusion!" The man exclaimed and they both bolted down an alley.

"Common thieves – they need to be with their families..." Hit Girl said simply.

..._...

It was a good night to be around the town. Everybody was out having fun, doing some last-minute shopping or just enjoying the atmosphere. Just our presence gave many a sense of well-being and safety.

Everybody loved my Santa hat – except Hit Girl!

We posed for quite a few photos. Many wanted a photo of me with Hit Girl, or Shadow with Jackal. It seemed that Wildcat had quite a fan club and she received many requests to display her claws and she even allowed herself to be kissed while having her photo taken!

If we only made one person happy that night, I was happy. It was a far cry from my early attempts at walking the streets. Now, nobody wanted to fight me just to boost their hits on YouTube! Nobody wanted to fight me, period...

Wildcat was in a funny mood that night.

I was very surprised that she allowed people to pose with her, let alone allowed herself to be kissed! I had not realised that there were many who fancied Wildcat and her claws were very popular.

I did notice Trojan bracing up every time that somebody put their arm around her or kissed her. I noticed Splinter taking a firm hold of his arm at one stage, just in case.

Shadow was also very popular. Her combat suit nicely accentuated her developing curves which attracted many teenaged boys, much to Jackal's disgust.

We never saw any action, that night – our weapons went unused and unfired.

I was happy with that, just for a night – especially at Christmas.

***Chapter 223*: Kick Hard**

Author's Note: *This is intended as a fun chapter for Christmas and yes, it rips off a certain cool movie! Enjoy...*

Chicago
The John Hancock Center
41st Floor

It was the 23rd December, and we had been invited to a Christmas party.

Mindy was happily chatting with another woman, whom we knew from the school. Holly Rickman had a son in the same year as Danny and Anne-Marie. Her husband worked on the 41st floor of the John Hancock Center for some banking conglomerate that was hosting that night's party.

I was not a big fan of parties and knew that Mindy was only tolerating it because of her friend, Holly. Mindy treasured every friendship that she possessed; she had missed out on having friends for most of her life. I was starting to get annoyed with some dickhead in a thousand-dollar suit who kept trying to hit on Mindy.

I had decided to take a moment to freshen myself up – actually I needed a piss!

While I was in the bathroom, I took a moment to enjoy the silence – I had endured nearly thirty minutes of women jabbering away. Despite Mindy insisting that she did not get on with 'the Moms', she was getting on like a fire, fuel and air mixture – explosively!

..._...

Then my senses went on high alert – was that gunfire? Oh, fuck – I was in a goddamn skyscraper, at Christmas and something bad was happening – a plot for a bad movie? Actually, no, it was the plot for a fucking awesome movie! Anyway, we had a problem and I could be a part of the solution – Yippee-Ki-Yay!

There must have been some eighty people at the party and my wife was among them. We could help easily, but what about our identities? I suppose if I kept Mindy out of it, I could just Kick-Ass!

Yeah, that was funny...

Maybe not!

One of the side effects of being married to Mindy was that I had inherited some of her traits and not the good ones either – I had no need for boobs and other certain items!

I reached down and checked my left ankle – I carried a ceramic throwing knife with a six-inch blade in a scabbard. Being ceramic I had easily passed through the metal detector without incident. I also knew that Mindy was probably carrying an arsenal about her person. First things first, I needed to figure out what was happening.

I moved towards the doors from the bathroom and out into the corridor.

I was having so much fun.

Dave had actually had to pin my arm behind my back and march me to the car earlier in the evening! I was glad he did too; I could have fought him off, but a part of me wanted to socialise – it was a skill that was still new to me.

Four years earlier, Dave was my only friend – how sad was that!

Holly was great and so were her friends. Dave had started to get annoyed with an asshole called Jake, who was a total idiot, despite his expensive taste in designer suits. He kept leering at my subtle curves and exposed skin, not to mention creeping me and the other women out. Dave had wandered off to the men's room to cool off; we did not need a scene!

"What are you doing after Christmas – going anywhere?" One of Holly's friends, Rebecca, asked.

"We're hopefully going to spend a week in the Caribbean on our yacht – we all need a break..."

I was cut off as the gunfire ripped out from over by the elevators...

As I peered out into the party, I saw several armed men herding everybody together.

Some more armed men were heading towards the offices to clear them. The men threatened and swore at everybody, using intimidation tactics to overpower the men and women present. I saw two men heading in my direction, both armed with Cz Scorpion Evo 3 A1 sub-machine guns. Oh dear, it looked like I had brought a knife to a gunfight!

I dived for a door that opened up into an area for hanging up coats and shit. While I ran, I pulled out my cell and punched in the Fusion Alert code. Rather than beep, with the screen flashing green, the cell buzzed and the screen flashed red. I tried again, and again with the same result. Then I noticed the symbols at the top of the screen – there was no cell signal!

Fuck!

The men were shouting as well as shooting their Cz Scorpion Evo 3 A1 sub-machine guns.

It sounded a bit like German! I was getting a seriously bad vibe about all this – kind of reminded me of a film from way before I was born, which was one of my favourites. We were all herded into the southeast corner of the floor; many of the women were panicking, but I noticed that Holly was made of sterner stuff.

"Holly, stay close to me," I ordered and she nodded.

Under my limited dress I had a pair of throwing knives and a very small automatic pistol, a Glock 43 in a holster, up high on the inside of my thigh. It only held six rounds and I carried no spare magazines – hey it was a goddamn Christmas party for fuck's sake!

I was counting the men and I had reached fourteen, but I knew that there would be more as I could still hear gunfire on the far side of the floor. I also noticed that Dave had not returned from the bathroom. Where was he? What were his intentions? Would he do something stupid? No, I trusted him; he would know what to do.

"All of you – hands on head – now!" A voice called out and we all did as we were told.

If only they knew who they had under their weapons, just then!

I found myself by the elevators.

The buttons were red; I stabbed them, but nothing happened. The men were good, they had obviously locked out the elevators after their arrival.

"Hey!"

I turned to see a gunman aiming his Scorpion at me. I rolled as he opened fire and hit the fire-door and then started running up the fire-stairs. Up? Why not down? I had no idea why I went up – it just seemed the right thing to do!

Bullets struck the door frame as the heavy fire-door swung shut behind me.

I noticed one of the men who was not holding a weapon and seemed to be in charge.

'You are a dead man!' I thought to myself, taking a mental photo of his face.

Then a gunman appeared and spoke rapid German to his leader. The leader looked very annoyed at the news that he was receiving. He gave his man a curt order and he ran off towards the elevators. Then the leader raised his hands for silence and started to speak.

"Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen..."

I left the fire-stairs at the 45th floor.

The place was like a building site with lots of exposed wires and incomplete office walls. Now, how to send out an alarm... I was interrupted when I heard the 'bong' of an elevator arriving.

A very large man stepped out of the elevator, his Scorpion held out in front of him. If I played my cards right, I might get myself an automatic weapon. I kept to the shadows, at least I was trying to until the damned asshole turned on all the goddamn lights! I was suddenly completely exposed...

I dived forwards just as the gunman saw me and he brought his weapon around to shoot me. I dodged the first burst of nine-millimetre projectiles as I dived behind a desk, the computer monitor taking the burst instead. I scooped a stapler off the desk and threw it as a diversion – and the stupid cunt turned away from me giving me the chance I needed to attack.

I drove a fist into his right side, causing him to partially double over. He dropped the sub-machine gun and turned towards me, lashing out with the fist of his right hand. I caught the blow on my lower right arm, kicking out and catching him in the right knee. He bellowed out in pain as I followed up with a punch into his stomach.

His elbow came around and caught me in the side of the head causing a burst of bright light in my head and I stumbled momentarily trying to regain my balance. I ducked as another blow was aimed at my head and I rolled backwards towards the fallen Scorpion Evo 3 but I was intercepted and missed it as he kicked out sending my skidding across the floor, away from the gun.

"Fuck!" I yelled out in frustration.

"Leck mich am arsch!" Came the crude reply. I did not speak German, but I caught the drift of the insult.

I took the moment to draw my six-inch ceramic blade from its scabbard on my lower leg. My opponent grinned as he drew his own nine-inch blade. I shrugged – size was not everything; just look at Mindy!

We circled for a moment before we began to fight.

"Fucking, Yank!" The German growled as he swung the blade forward.

I deflected it with my own, kicking out, but the man dodged and he was able to swipe at me again with his knife cutting my jacket.

"My wife would not like that!"

I slashed, catching the man in the right arm. Blood oozed from the wound but otherwise he kept moving, ignoring the pain.

'Impressive,' I thought.

Then he made a mistake and I was able to stab him in his right bicep. He yelled out and I seized his right arm, snapping it back and hearing the cartilage of his elbow cracking. I elbowed him in the side of *his* head and forced him to drop the blade.

I wrapped my right arm around his neck.

"You kiss *my* fucking ass, fritz!" I growled as I twisted his head until I heard a satisfying crack.

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I pulled off my ripped jacket knowing that I would have Mindy to deal with – she had bought me the suit.

Next went my tie – I might as well fight comfortably! I retrieved my knife, cleaned it off on the dead man's clothing and returned it to its scabbard. I retrieved the Scorpion sub-machine gun and checked it still functioned correctly. There were about fifteen rounds left in the magazine. As I inspected the dead man, I found three more full magazines, two small blocks of C4 explosive, a remote detonator, a small handheld radio and a Zippo cigarette lighter.

All of the extra equipment was in a small black daysack. I stuck a spare magazine into a pocket and left the rest in the pack.

It was time for some intelligence gathering...

"I wanted this to be a professional operation, efficient – however, your boss; he will not be joining us for the rest of his life! This can go any way you want – you can walk out, or be carried out in a body bag... Have no illusions – we are in charge! Decide now, each of you..."

My mind registered the 'bong' of an elevator arriving as I listened to the 'leader' and his fairly standard demands. He was a professional, I had to give him that. His men, too. One thing – professionals were predictable. If they were mercenaries, then they most likely were soldiers – that meant that they had been trained and most soldiers the world over received the same basic training.

It was a weakness and one which could be exploited... A woman screamed and I turned instantly to search for the danger – oh fuck!

There was a dead body resting in the elevator...

At least it was not Dave... it was only a fucking terrorist!

I was lying prone on the roof of the elevator car.

The doors opened and I heard a woman scream – she must have seen the body – oops! A man entered the elevator – he looked to be the leader; he carried no obvious weapon and the other, armed, men appeared to defer to him.

I listened as they talked two feet beneath me.

"A security guard we missed?" One man inquired in English.

"They're usually retired Policemen, growing fat on a pension – no, no, no, this is something else, something different..."

The leader was obviously smart...

"We have to do something, Hans..."

"Yes, we do... We have to tell Karl that his brother is dead! Tell him to come down..."

"Karl... Herunter kommen!" A man said into a radio.

"Franco, you and Fritz take the body upstairs and out of sight; I don't want the hostages to think too much."

I looked up and saw movement on another elevator far above me.

As I watched, a gunman appeared from the elevator.

He was raging and kicking out at anything – he sent a table of food flying across the room. I smiled.

"God, that man looks *really* pissed!" Holly stated.

"He's still alive..." I said quietly feeling elated inside.

"What?"

"Only my husband can drive somebody that crazy!" I replied.

Other than me, of course!

I continued up to the roof and tried to use the radio that I had appropriated.

Damn! It was encrypted and required a code to be entered for use. I tried various channels but I was unable to transmit. That was when bullets came pouring in my direction – Karl, I assumed; he seemed pissed for some reason!

I returned fire with the Scorpion, being careful to conserve my limited cache of ammunition. I ran down one side of the building and found a hatch – I kicked it open and dived inside, pulling it closed behind me. There was a locking pin which I inserted into the handle, just as I heard pummeling from the other side.

I found myself at the top of a concrete staircase. I proceeded downwards, looking out for the enemy.

"Come to a party, get together, we'll have a few laughs!" I commented sardonically

..._...

Then Karl appeared.

I assumed that it was Karl – he was large and very, very pissed. He came around a corner and we both saw each other at about the exact same time which made firearms useless. He got the first punch in which sent me flying backwards – it fucking hurt like hell, too!

I dropped the Scorpion as I fell and Karl dived towards me, punching at me. I fended off many of the strikes, but not all – I had the advantage as I only felt *some* of the pain. I managed to kick out and Karl flew backwards into the wall. I dived after him...

"Motherfucker – I'll kill ya!"

The leader – he seemed pissed as he reappeared from an office.

He gazed around and he focussed on Holly. He strode forward and seized her arm, dragging her to her feet.

"Get your fucking hands off her!" I growled, yanking her back down to the floor. I stood up. "Take me, bastard!"

"No, Mindy..."

I shrugged off Holly's frantic hands and stepped forwards.

"Any woman in a storm...!" The leader said smoothly.

I was dragged away from the other hostages.

"I have a use for you... Mindy, did she say?"

"Yes, Mindy – but I'd prefer it if you called me Mrs Lizewski!"

"If you wish... Mrs Lizewski."

"You should have heard your brother squeal like a fucking girl as I snapped his chicken neck!"

Maybe not the best thing to say – it seemed to piss him off even further! The fight was getting nowhere; we were fairly evenly matched.

He reached for a pistol that had dropped onto the floor – Karl swiped it up and sent several shots in my direction. I rolled and dodged each one as they threw up concrete dust from the floor. I pulled my knife and flicked it back towards Karl.

Bullseye!

Karl fell to the floor, the knife dead centre in his forehead.

Now, to find the leader and the others.

I reached the 41st floor, only to find... Nobody.

All the hostages had gone – including Mindy. Think, Dave, think! What were they doing here? I checked every office and shot dead three more gunmen who had been checking each office for any stragglers. I was shocked to find a dead man in what was obviously the Boss' office. There were plans of the building arranged on a table.

I checked my weapons – oh, shit; I had two rounds left in my pistol! I checked the gunmen – their weapons were all empty – crap...

I checked the plans again; one particular page appeared to have been selected.

It appeared to be a vault...

On the 32nd floor...

We were on the 32nd floor and I was being dragged along by the man who I now knew was called Hans.

Most of his remaining men were guarding us, about six – although I thought that it may have been all of them. We stopped at a vault...

"After all your posturing, all your little speeches, you're nothing but a common thief."

"I'm an exceptional thief, Mrs Lizewski and since I'm moving up to kidnapping, you should be more polite!"

I rolled my eyes as the man went back to the vault.

..._...

"Oh, Hans!"

I snapped my head around at the sound of my husband's voice. Karl and his men did the same. Something told me that this was the endgame... I gasped as Dave came into sight and I saw the torn clothes, the blood on his face and shirt. He had a pistol raised towards Hans.

"Hi, honey!"

"Honey?" Hans echoed.

"Yeah, that is my wife and I am having a very bad day..." Dave growled back as he edged slowly closer. "Any chance that you can give me a hand here, honey – I'm feeling kinda down to two right now!"

I immediately grasped the situation – Dave only had two rounds left – there were seven gunmen, including Hans who had his own pistol a few inches from my head. The other gunmen were all reaching for their own weapons. Time to earn your keep, Hit Girl!

I thrust my head backwards, catching Hans in the nose which exploded. I rammed my left elbow into his chest and dived for the floor pulling out my pistol. I fired six times, catching six men – all headshots – and I dropped the pistol. Dave fired at Hans – two rounds. Both passed through him and hit the glass window behind him.

Hans stumbled backwards towards the window – he hit it quite hard. The glass cracked badly... It gave way and Hans fell through, but not before he caught hold of the window frame. I moved towards him and knelt down.

"Happy trails, Hans!" I growled, prising his hand off the window frame – he seized my arm.

Hans pulled out his pistol as he hung there, gripping onto my arm with his other hand. I yanked backwards and I watched with cold eyes as the man dropped the pistol and struggled to regain his grip, but he failed and he began to fall and fall.

"Yippee-Ki-Yay, motherfucker!"

I turned as I heard somebody approaching, it was Mindy.

"Where is the bastard?" she growled.

"I let him go..." I replied with a smirk.

***Chapter 224*: An Unexpected Gift**

Author's Note: *A very Merry Christmas to everybody!*

Thursday evening
Christmas Eve

Glenview

I looked in on the kids' bedrooms and asked both Anne-Marie and Danny to join me in the study.

"Close the door, please, and sit down."

Both kids looked worried.

"You're not in trouble," I reassured them, then smirked. "For a change...!"

They did not look too convinced, but I went on anyway.

"Tell me, what do you think about Stephanie?" I asked. "Be honest, I want to know your thoughts."

"She's nice and she helps me with my homework," Danny replied. "She's kind to me and I see her like a big sister."

"Steph's a good friend and I enjoy sharing a room with her – we look after each other," Anne-Marie replied. "She can be a bit strange at times, but I'm not exactly what you would call normal, so I won't hold that against her."

That was exactly what I had hoped to hear.

"How would you like her to become your big sister?" I asked them both. "For real..."

I saw looks of surprise on the two young faces before me.

"You mean she would become a Lizewski?" Danny asked. "Like us?"

"Yes, and she would then be the big kid in the family."

They both thought about that for a minute, looked at each other for another minute and then they both nodded.

"Yeah!"

I got up from my chair.

"Mom?" Anne-Marie asked as she stood up, intercepting me.

"Yeah."

"Can I ask her... You know, if she *wants* to be our big sister?"

"If you want; we'll do it together, all of us."

A short time later

"Should I be worried?" Stephanie asked as she came into the living room and found all four of us sitting down on the couches, waiting for her.

"Probably," I replied, but with a reassuring smile.

"Anne-Marie has something to ask you, Steph – come and sit down," Dave said, indicating a seat on the couch beside him.

Stephanie sat down, still looking a little apprehensive. Anne-Marie too, looked apprehensive and she paused for a

few seconds before diving in with a simple question.

"Steph, would you be our big sister?"

Whatever Stephanie had *thought* the question was going to be, she was taken aback by what was actually said. She looked over at me and then up at Dave. Her face was a wonderful mix of emotions, but mainly confusion.

"I don't understand," She finally said.

"Steph, we want you to become a Lizewski – Stephanie Lizewski, to be exact," Dave said quietly.

"You would be a big sister to these little monsters!" I cautioned.

Anne-Marie laughed and looked at Stephanie.

"You want to adopt *me*?" Stephanie asked, sounding astonished at the mere suggestion.

"You're not *all* that bad!" I commented.

I think we must have overloaded the poor girl as she began to cry. Dave hugged her as she cried and I was fairly certain that they were tears of happiness – at least I hoped so!

"Did I say something wrong?" Anne-Marie asked, looking very concerned.

I was about to say something, but instead Stephanie pulled away from Dave and spoke first.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to worry you. I just... Well, nobody has ever been so nice to me as you guys have... If you really want me..."

"Of course we want you, Steph – otherwise we would have never asked," I replied with a reassuring smile.

Stephanie began to cry again and Anne-Marie went over to hug her – she was soon joined by Danny. I looked over at Dave as he moved over letting the three kids sit together.

He smiled and nodded.

When it came time for bed that night, they were all very excited, it being Christmas Eve and all.

I turned out the lights and headed back downstairs, but then I heard feet on the landing behind me and I turned to see Stephanie running towards me. I was shocked when she grabbed me around the waist and hugged me tightly. After a minute she looked up at me, an enormous smile on her face.

"Thank you, Mindy, for the best Christmas present ever..."

"Stop it – you're gonna make me cry!" I laughed and I wasn't kidding either.

"I just wanted to say thanks," Stephanie said, releasing me and heading back to the bedroom.

"No problem! Goodnight, Stephanie."

The following morning

Friday

Christmas Day

Glenview

It was very cold outside and the rain was coming down in buckets – *big buckets!*

As usual, it was toasty warm inside though. I was enjoying the best of dreams – of course there was blood – who the hell did you think I was? Then I was rudely awakened...

"Merry Christmas, Mom!"

"I'm too damn tired – leave me alone!"

"Payback's a bitch, ain't it?" My husband laughed without sympathy. "Get to it, kids!"

Mindy screamed as first Danny and then Anne-Marie began to jump on the bed. Finally, she sat up, looking very tired.

"So not funny!" She growled, but she still gave each of the twins a hug and me a kiss.

"Why so tired?" Stephanie grinned with a wink. "Did Dave keep you up all night?"

Mindy's mouth just flapped like a goldfish...

"No... It's got nothing to do with you, young lady, anyway..." Mindy chuckled. "Merry Christmas, all of you!"

Then she saw the clock...

"It's not even six-thirty yet!"

"Normally, it's *you* waking *me* up!" I commented dryly.

It was going to be a very special Christmas.

We were a real family, just the five of us – oh, and Sophia too! Nobody got dressed until almost lunchtime. It was good to be able to sit in the cosy living room, a roaring fire in the fireplace and the kids ripping open their presents. We all had mugs of hot chocolate – with plenty of marshmallows!

After the floor in the living room had quite literally vanished beneath wrapping paper, cardboard and other assorted debris, I suggested that it was time to clear it all up. That suggestion did *not* go down well, until I hinted that there *might* be another present for each of them and then suddenly all of the wreckage mysteriously vanished within a few very brief minutes!

..._...

I pointed at the door to the garage.

The three of them went in very slowly and dubiously, especially Stephanie – what were they expecting, a bomb! Then there were three very loud screams and yells. I looked at Dave and smiled. He wrapped his arm around my shoulders and gave me a kiss, then we headed into the garage.

In the centre of the space where my XJR usually parked were three motorcycles. Two were identical in size and style, but with different colour schemes. The other was bigger and in yet another colour scheme.

The first two machines were Honda CRF70F trail bikes, one in blue and the other in pink. The third machine was a small-wheel Honda CRF125F in yellow. The three kids were smiling fit to burst as they jumped onto their new motorcycles. Considering Anne-Marie and Stephanie were still only wearing the over-large t-shirts that they slept in, they looked a little strange! Danny was in his Transformer pyjamas as usual.

I allowed them to start the engines, just so that they could hear them. I think we had picked the correct machines – the smiles assured us of that!

..._...

While the kids ran off to play with their presents and talk about their new motorcycles, I called Marcus to wish him, Paige and Megan a Happy Christmas. Megan was being very noisy in the background and the excited eleven-year-old took some coaxing away from her presents to say Merry Christmas.

I called Cathy and she seemed to have a very quiet house, so I asked where Josh and Chloe were.

"Upstairs!"

"Oh – I won't ask any more!"

"Tell me about it!"

..._...

We all sat down to an enormous meal that afternoon.

Sophia was included, with her own big bowl of Turkey and other trimmings. Dave did most of the cooking, with the help of Stephanie. I was ordered out of the kitchen, as usual! Dave was a remarkably good cook, for a man – and I told him so.

"Well, you are a remarkably good vigilante – for a girl!" He whispered into my ear and I felt all warm and fuzzy inside for some reason.

There were some difficult moments too.

It was the first Christmas for the twins, without their father and they had felt very sad at one stage. Dave talked to them and we made sure that we remembered their father. Stephanie, though, she did not want to talk about her family, even though Danny asked her about them. I glossed over the question and moved the conversation onto something else, sensing Stephanie's unease.

I of course missed my Daddy, as Dave did his. Nevertheless, we were determined that everybody would enjoy the special day. We had Noddy Holder blaring out around the house, along with plenty of the other songs to keep everybody happy.

By the early evening, everybody was very full and feeling tired. Sophia fell asleep in front of the fire and we all dozed off at one stage, thanks to the warmth and good food.

It was a very memorable day and our first as a real family.

No matter how much I tried to be normal, I knew that I never would be.

Hit Girl was a part of me and all the integrating into society could never change that. Being normal allowed me to experience new things. I knew that was important to Marcus, who dreamed of me being permanently normal – but he was realistic and he knew that it would never happen. Dave was happy, no matter what persona I took.

I hoped that bringing Stephanie into the family would give her a chance at a normal life. The nine-year-old was as damaged as me, so she needed the support of people who were familiar with her situation and would be able to control her. Dave and I were the only people who could do that. Unchecked, Psyche would take over Stephanie, as Hit Girl did to Mindy Macready, all those years ago when I first came to Chicago and before Dave found me.

A big part of me fought against being normal – Hit Girl hated to be normal, but another part of me craved normality and the love of another human being. If I had not taken up Dave's offer in that taxi, back when I was fifteen, where might I be now?

"You dwelling on the past, again?"

I looked up to see Dave standing beside the couch.

"Just a little..." I replied.

That night, I went up to see the girls.

"Danny – in your own room, please..."

"Night, Mom..." Danny said, giving me a hug and heading to his own room.

I sat down on the end of Anne-Marie's bed before speaking again.

"Are we in trouble?" Stephanie asked.

Why did they always think that they were in trouble?

"No, Steph... But it *is* about you... Nothing bad!" I replied quickly. "Stephanie, you're going to be ten soon and if you're

gonna be living with us permanently, then I think you should have your own bedroom. There's an empty room just across the landing and round the corner – it has its own bathroom and everything."

I watched as both girls looked at each other, however it was Anne-Marie that spoke.

"Can we stay together for just a *little* longer, please?" She asked.

It was amazing how easily, and quickly, the two girls had bonded, despite there being almost two years' difference in age, not to mention that they had been brought up in very different cultures and countries.

"Okay, we'll talk about it again in the New Year."

"Thanks, Mom."

"Thanks, Mindy."

I smiled and gave each girl a hug before heading back downstairs.

"They want to stay together a little longer," I said as I entered the living room and passed Dave five bucks.

"Told you!" Dave grinned pocketing the bill.

***Chapter 225*: A Change of Scene**

The next morning Saturday

It was in the early hours of the 26th December that I was awakened.

"Mindy, quick!"

It was Anne-Marie and she was in a panic, mumbling something about Stephanie. I jumped out of bed and followed my daughter upstairs to where I could hear sobbing. It was Stephanie and she was sobbing uncontrollably into her pillow. When I finally got her to talk, after carrying her downstairs to our bedroom, she kept saying the same sentence repeatedly.

"I killed them... I killed them..."

Dave had been awake when I had returned to the bedroom with Stephanie.

We were both more than a little concerned by her comments. Dave had a very grim expression on his face. I had no idea what it was all about, but it was obviously something from an early part of Stephanie's life.

Between us, we managed to calm the young girl down enough for us to find out what was going on. Stephanie explained that she had had a flashback about her parents' death, brought on by queries earlier that day and talk about adopting her, on Christmas Eve.

Over the space of an hour, she was able to recall the flashback.

...+...

"In this program, you will save the lives of our citizens..."

The voice was always the same; middle-aged, throaty and female. I had no idea who she was, but she spoke with a British accent; that in itself was strange as I knew full well that I was currently in the United States of America. The lecture was always something about patriotism, national pride and saving lives - usually American and British lives.

Never any other nationality, but the emphasis was on the British aspect, which I assumed was because I was British.

"As part of this program, you will need to sacrifice your old life..."

...+...

Stephanie was shaking as she detailed her thoughts and memories.

"I had been with them for about four weeks... I was prevented from sleeping... Noise in my cell – yes, it was a cell... I had been on holiday with my family and I was taken... Constant questions... Constant talking..."

I looked at Dave and his horrified expression mirrored my own.

...+...

Like always, I was in a small room.

I had no idea exactly where it was; I never did, but it looked like an examination room in a hospital. Against one wall was one of those wheeled hospital beds. In the middle of the room was a metal desk with a computer workstation sitting atop it.

Over in the farthest corner, were three occupied chairs with two adults, a male and female, and a young boy about the same age as me.

...+...

Stephanie began to cry again.

"Though they had hoods covering their heads, I knew exactly who they were. The hoods were not to hide their identities from me; but mine from them..."

I was still in the dark about exactly what was going on, but something at the back of my mind was adding things together and a nasty conclusion came into my mind, which I dismissed instantly as being too horrid to contemplate.

"They were my past – my family; my father, my mother and my younger brother, Jimmy..."

...+...

I became aware that there was someone beside me.

The owner of the voice; somehow, I felt that I knew her, but I had no idea who she was. She was thin, tall and horse-faced with greying dark hair. She was still lecturing me – as usual.

"An asset's greatest weakness are those who know them. People who know you can tell others about you; therefore, they must be eliminated..."

The woman stepped forward and stood before me. Her arm came up and in her hand was a pistol. I instantly recognised it as a Heckler & Koch P30SK.

...+...

The girl was shaking and sobbing, so we took a break and I went to get some water for Stephanie from the bathroom.

"Dave, I can't – it's too hard..."

"Take your time, Steph. However, I believe that you need to follow this through to the end. I have been through these things with Mindy and keeping things bottled up... Just trust me, you need to get it all out of your system and talk about it."

"I'll try..."

"That's good advice, Steph, believe me," I offered.

...+...

"Take this weapon and eliminate those closest to you. When you have done so, you will leave here not as who you were, but as Stephanie Walker."

Calmly, I took the weapon from the woman, grip first. I could tell it was loaded, by the weight – three rounds; one for each member of my family.

It was easy to do; it felt natural. Three gentle squeezes of the trigger and as the smoke from the gunshots was sucked away by the air-conditioning and the sound of the gunshots faded – three bodies lay dead. My family was dead.

The doctor walked over to them, pulled the hoods from the heads of their slumped bodies. I had shot all three in the head; instant, clean kills...

My first...

...+...

Holy, shit!

I stared at Dave, unable to speak. He was horror-struck, as was I. He held Stephanie tightly as she shook violently with each sob. I thought that *my* life had been fucked up – but I had never killed my own family as part of my brainwashing...

I just kept coming back to: holy, shit!

I felt for the girl, I really did.

I also wanted to kill that woman – she deserved to die; she deserved to suffer...

By the time we awoke, later that morning, Stephanie was back to her normal happy self.

She had stayed with us, in our room, on the couch. I had lain awake for quite a while, with Stephanie's story going around in my head. I was horrified, I was angry... Thank God we were getting away from Chicago for a week.

..._...

We all desperately needed a change of scene. Everybody was suffering from something, be it boredom, anxiety, PTSD – whatever... A holiday was required and what better than somewhere hot – a few weeks earlier, I had decided on the Caribbean; I had an asset there which should prove to be perfect.

Preparations had been ongoing since November.

"Can I see *my* passport?" Danny asked.

I grinned, handing it over and passing an identical looking one to his sister. I passed another to Stephanie.

"Wow!" Anne-Marie commented as she examined the small blue booklet.

I watched as Danny eagerly flicked to the photo page and he smiled happily. I knew why too.

"It says my surname is 'Lizewski!'" He announced proudly.

Anne-Marie dived to her own photo page and smiled too.

"Wondered if either of you would notice. You are both officially Lizewski kids!" I confirmed.

Anne-Marie then looked over at Stephanie.

"How come her passport is different?" She asked, noticing the differently coloured document.

I laughed, pleased with my daughter's powers of observation.

"Stephanie is British, so she has a British passport. You two are American citizens, so you have American passports."

Anne-Marie took Stephanie's passport while Stephanie took Anne-Marie's.

"European Union, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland," Anne-Marie read off the cover before flipping to the photo page – she laughed.

"You look a dork!"

"Says you, Yank!" Stephanie replied with a smirk as she held up Anne-Marie's photo.

..._...

I had enjoyed winding Chloe up before Christmas.

"Oh, Chloe?"

"Yeah!"

"You need to go shopping..."

"Cool – what do I need – besides another *very* revealing bikini?"

"Something to cover your body with – more specifically, a cocktail dress..."

"A cocktail dress?" Chloe repeated.

"Yeah..."

"Why?"

"Because we have been invited to a 'Cockers P', in Antigua."

Chloe looked majorly confused and a little wary.

"Sorry, I have absolutely no idea how to respond to that!" Chloe finally replied.

"It's a Royal Navy Cocktail Party; you know the Brits – they're a bit strange!" I went on to explain. "You remember Lieutenant Lawrence? He helped us during the Amber Alert at the beginning of October. Well, he is going to be in the Caribbean, in *HMS Dragon*, which is exercising with *USS Churchill*. They will both be alongside in Antigua when we are. Commander and Mrs Bennett were invited with guests – the Commander's daughter – you, and her partner – Joshua. Apparently, Mr and Mrs Lizewski rate their own invitation from the establishment!"

"I suppose *that* explains everything!" Chloe commented dryly.

***Chapter 226*: The Atlantic Storm**

Saturday Afternoon

Miami

The sun was very bright as we left the aircraft and after collecting our bags, we all climbed into the waiting vehicles.

The mini-convoy took us through Miami and along the MacArthur Causeway. Across the water, we could see the cruise ships lined up, ready for their Caribbean and Atlantic cruises. We headed to South Pointe, in the South Beach part of Miami. The vehicles stopped at the shore end of a long jetty. Our many bags were collected by a porter who followed us down the jetty towards our accommodation for the week.

At the other end of the jetty, lay the '*Atlantic Storm*'.

..._...

The *Atlantic Storm* was white, from stem to stern and a little over one hundred and twenty-one feet long overall. She displaced over two hundred tonnes, which was more than four times that of the *Salty Swallow*. She was powered by twin 1,450-horsepower diesels that could push the vessel to over twenty-five knots.

The *Atlantic Storm* was an ocean going yacht built by Ocean Alexander. There were four decks: Sun Deck, Bridge Deck, Main Deck and Lower Deck. On the Sun Deck, above the enclosed bridge, was a Jacuzzi. The Main Deck had the Dining Area, Main Salon, Galley and the Owner's Cabin. The Lower Deck had two further Queen Size Guest Cabins, a pair of twin Guest Cabins and there were three Crew Cabins, two of which had bunk beds, located in the bow. Immediately aft of the enclosed bridge was the Captain's Cabin.

The yacht had been ordered months before and she was very ready for what would be her maiden voyage after her shakedown cruise from the builders in Vancouver, Canada.

Everybody was stunned by her size and beauty.

"Christ, Mindy!" Josh exclaimed as he ran his eyes along the yacht from stem to stern.

"What?" Mindy asked innocently.

"I thought the '*Salty Swallow*' was big..."

"Maybe she's compensating for something," Chloe grinned.

"Yeah, her tits..." Josh laughed.

Smack!

"Fuck, Mindy, that hurt!" Josh exclaimed, rubbing the back of his head.

"Idiot!" Megan growled as she pushed past the annoyed Joshua.

"What she said," Stephanie added as she and the other kids followed Megan up the gangway.

"Get your gear put away, properly, and get changed!" I called out after the kids.

..._...

At the top of the gangway, I was met by a large man with a big smile on his face.

"Chief Tyrol, Mrs Lizewski. The engines are warm; diesel's topped off, as is the lube oil. The gyros are spun up and she's ready to depart."

"Thank you, Chief."

"I've also taken the liberty to complete a few upgrades here and there in the communications, radar and navigation

areas. Maybe I should show you what's what..."

"Lead the way, Chief – Dave, you'd better come too."

We followed the chief up to the bridge.

..._...

Almost an hour later, the Chief left us with a wave and I headed aft and outside to the Aft Bridge Deck, before taking a gangway up to the Sun Deck. There I found Stephanie and Megan showing off their very limited bikinis to a very happy Curtis and Tommy who had changed into swim-shorts and t-shirts. Stephanie was by far the thinnest and palest; her recent scars were very evident on her abdomen, not that she seemed to be worried about them.

"Girls! You'd better get some lotion on your skin or you'll be cooked within an hour – Megan, take care of that, would you, please."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n!" Megan replied, throwing a mock salute.

"Funny!" I laughed. "Care to walk the plank?"

An hour later

I walked to the base of a different plank, more specifically the gangplank of the *USS Churchill*.

"Mrs Lizewski!" The Petty Officer at the base of the gangplank said cheerfully.

I frowned.

"You know who I am?"

"How could I forget a beautiful young lady? I saw you come aboard, in Scotland, Ma'am. You, too, Miss Bennett. The Captain is in the hanger – please go aboard."

"You bucking for promotion, Petty Officer?" A familiar voice called down from the flight deck as we headed aboard.

"Always, Captain!" The Petty Officer called back.

Chloe grabbed hold of her Dad and gave him a big hug.

"Hi, pumpkin!" Commander Ryan Bennett laughed, hugging his daughter back.

"Less of the 'pumpkin', Daddy!" Chloe growled.

"Of course... *Pumpkin!*" Commander Bennett laughed as Chloe glowered up at her father.

"You ready, Captain?" I asked, steering the conversation away from Chloe and orange fruit.

The Atlantic Storm

Ryan Bennett stood on the capacious bridge for a moment, studying the electronic chart on the computer screen. He checked the engines; both were throbbing away at idle. He moved out onto the port wing and engaged the port manoeuvring controls. From there he could conn the large yacht out of her mooring while still being able to see the dock. Dave was beside him, watching and learning. I sat on the cushioned seat ahead of the bridge, taking in the view around Miami. Chloe and Josh appeared along with Abby. Chloe and Abby each wore a skimpy bikini with Josh in shorts and a t-shirt. All were barefoot.

"Mindy, why is there a foreign flag flying from the back of the boat?" Chloe asked.

"Where do we start?" I laughed. "First the back of the boat is the 'stern' and the 'flag' is an 'ensign'. Normally I would prefer to fly the Stars and Stripes, however, for various reasons that I am not going into now, I opted to go for a so-called 'flag of convenience'. That ensign hanging off our stern right now, is the Red Ensign of Gibraltar."

"Gibraltar is a British Overseas Territory on the south coast of Spain, Chloe," Abby explained.

"I know that!" Chloe responded tartly and her Dad chuckled.

Four hours later

**45 miles east of Long Key
64.4nm logged**

We were all gathered on the Sun Deck, apart from Ryan who was on the Bridge.

Danny, Stephanie, Tommy and Anne-Marie were playing a card game at the table while Josh, Megan, Curtis and Chloe were chatting on the sun loungers. Dave was in the galley with Cathy and Abby, preparing dinner. I *had* offered to help, but Cathy had made a scathing comment about my cooking abilities and I had stormed out of the galley in disgust.

It was really good to see everybody having fun, no more fighting, just the sun, the warmth of the breeze and the open sea. Everybody had a chance to be themselves for a change and we could forget about being stabbed, shot at and punched. That was most important for the pre-teen members of Fusion.

..._...

Everybody had been instructed by Ryan on the SOLAS, or Safety of Life at Sea, regulations. Everybody was issued with a lifejacket suitable for their body size and where spare ones were stowed. Instructions were given on how to abandon ship in an emergency. Anne-Marie and Stephanie actually received a telling off from Ryan for not taking it seriously enough.

We also covered other equipment such as the GMDSS, EPIRBs and SARTs. Dave had passed exams in all that stuff, I was still learning. The GMDSS (Global Maritime Distress and Safety System) allowed our position to be pinpointed by satellite if we got into trouble and the vessel was sinking, all with the press of a single red button on a console at the rear of the bridge. Everybody was shown this button and how to activate it – it was protected by a plastic orange cover labelled **DISTRESS**. The EPIRBs and SARTs were devices to help searches pinpoint our position via satellite (EPIRB) or radar (SART).

We would be out of sight of land for much of the cruise, so knowing what to do in an emergency was essential for all on board. We covered the fire alarm, the general alarm (seven short blasts and one long blast on the ship's horn) and most importantly the man overboard alarm (three long blasts on the ship's horn).

..._...

We had demonstrated the man overboard drill a couple of hours out of Miami.

It was both an important thing to learn and a bit of fun, too. Ryan ordered everybody to don their lifejackets and muster on the Aft Bridge Deck. After checking that everybody was correctly attired, I turned to everybody.

"Right, now you all have your lifejackets on, we can practice our man overboard drill," I suggested.

"Oh, you can fuck right off!" Josh growled, backing away from me. He had been used on the *Salty Swallow* for our drill.

Unfortunately for him, he backed into Dave who picked him up and threw him overboard, somewhat effortlessly. Most laughed at Josh as he swore violently before he hit the water with a huge splash. I seized one of the ship's telephones and punched the tannoy button.

"Man overboard, port side!"

Immediately the ship's horn sounded three long blasts and the helm was thrown over to port, taking our churning propellers away from the bobbing Joshua.

Chloe and Megan laughed, but Anne-Marie, Stephanie and Danny, looked a little shocked at Josh being thrown overboard.

"Now, kids, keep an eye on Joshua – the inflated orange life jacket makes him easy to pick out," I directed. "We have two options; we could perform a Williamson turn, which would bring us back on a reciprocal course or we could just turn and head directly back towards him, as he is still in sight."

"Cool!" Danny commented.

"Let's go get Josh – he should be suitably damp by now!"

..._...

I headed forward onto the bridge and stood beside Ryan who was looking through some binoculars as he span the wheel and adjusted the throttles.

"I don't think he likes you!"

"What do you mean?"

"My lip reading skills are a bit rusty, but I think he just said: 'I – fucking – hate – you – Mindy!'"

"He loves me really!" I laughed.

Ryan expertly manoeuvred the *Atlantic Storm* onto a new course taking us into a position where the winds and currents would bring Josh to us. Finally, Ryan cut the engines to ensure that Josh was not sucked into our propellers and chopped into fish food! I jogged back aft to watch as the rather annoyed looking Josh, who was gently bobbing up and down in his brightly coloured life jacket, came closer. I went below to the Swim Platform and lowered a ladder. Josh swam over and climbed out of the Atlantic Ocean. A smirking Chloe came down and handed the dripping Josh a towel.

"Bloody funny!" Josh said with a scowl.

..._...

Dinner that night was in the Main Salon as we lay hove to, so all thirteen of us could eat together. We had a good meal of steak, egg and chips for the first night aboard. Danny and Curtis were teasing Anne-Marie about her chucking up her breakfast the last time she was on a boat, which ended up getting a bit rowdy when Megan stuck up for Anne-Marie and told the two boys where to stick it in her usual, rather forceful and crudely descriptive manner!

Josh was teased mercilessly about his dip too, which gave everybody something to laugh about.

That night

All but Ryan and Tommy were in bed.

They had the First Watch until midnight. We would arrive in Nassau at approximately ten that night. Dave and I would be in the bridge for our arrival in a little over two hours. With a bit of pushing I managed to get Danny and Anne-Marie into their cabin and into bed. They were both overexcited about their first proper cruise at sea. I made them promise to remain in their cabin and not go up on deck without me or Dave.

Next, I checked in on the two lovebirds – they had already started their carnal activates, so I left them to it! Next, I headed forward and down to the crew's quarters to check on the remaining pre-teens. They were all in their bunks, which was a surprise. They were all tired, even though they weren't ready to admit it, but the gentle rolling of the yacht, despite her stabilisers, had them nodding off in no time.

Once all four were asleep I headed to the Owner's Suite and found Dave in bed awaiting my arrival. I kicked off my sandals and dropped my bikini bottoms, top and t-shirt.

"Damn you look hot, Mrs Lizewski!" Dave murmured.

"Well, Mr Lizewski, I want you to make me so much hotter!"

***Chapter 227*: Into The Caribbean**

That night
Saturday

22:00

The Atlantic Storm
1 nautical mile off Nassau, The Bahamas
Position: 25.0600° N 77.3450° W
145nm logged

Dave and I were awoken by the anchor, as it plunged down into the water.

It was dark as we both joined Ryan and Tommy on the bridge. Ryan passed us both a coffee from the large pot on the table.

"All quiet, ma'am!" Ryan chuckled.

"Thank you, captain!" I replied with a smirk.

Ryan showed Dave and I where we were on the chart and explained the anchoring procedure. Tommy was packed off to bed while the three of us checked that all was secure and we shut down the engines.

Ryan went off to join his wife in bed, while Dave and I went back to our own stateroom, looking forward to some fun, the following morning.

The following morning
Sunday

06:00

Nassau, The Bahamas
Position: 25.0600° N 77.3450° W
145nm logged

Dawn broke warm and pleasant.

I opened my eyes to see my husband looking back at me, a big grin on his face. However, before we could consider doing anything, the door to the stateroom burst open and Anne-Marie ran in and jumped on the bed.

The seven-year-old was dressed in her one-piece swimsuit, but with shorts and t-shirt over the top – she was barefoot.

"You look happy, this morning," I commented.

"It's beautiful out there!" The little girl exclaimed.

I had to agree with her, the view out of the starboard windows was awesome and the sunlight streamed in indicating a beautiful day.

"Come on, Dave – time to get up!"

"Oh, Cathy said coffee is on and breakfast should be ready in half an hour," Anne-Marie said as she bolted for the door.

I went to check on the others.

..._...

Chloe looked very pleased with herself as she emerged from her den of iniquity that morning and I noticed some marks on her neck.

"Please tell me that you did *not* bring that damn collar?"

Chloe smirked.

"I would never lie to you..."

"Well, I wish you would – ewww!"

"What's ewww?" Megan asked appearing in the lobby.

I was about to say 'nothing' when Chloe grinned fiendishly.

"You remember that collar which Mindy threatened you with – you know; the strip naked and be a bitch collar?" Chloe chuckled.

"Vividly!" Megan replied with a painful grimace which had Chloe laughing before Megan then turned on Mindy. "I can't believe you told Chloe about that, you bitch!"

"You sure you don't want to dress down for us?" The fifteen-year-old teased.

"No!" Megan growled back, blushing furiously.

"I wouldn't mind seeing *you* in only a dog collar, Mindy..." Josh commented with a grin, joining the conversation.

"Well, I wouldn't mind seeing somebody ripping off your dick and balls!" I replied with a smirk. "Somehow, I don't see that happening, either..."

"Moving on..." Josh said smoothly as he headed for the Galley and breakfast.

The Galley

I was impressed!

Cathy must have been up for ages – there was a virtual mountain of food on the table and Josh dived straight in. The other kids appeared, one by one, looking tired, but amazed at the view out of the windows. Outside, it was hot, however inside, with the air conditioning, it was comfortable.

Off to the south, about a mile away, was Nassau, the capital and largest city of the Bahamas, and the towering hotels of Paradise Island. Around us were several other mega-yachts, all at anchor. I grabbed a coffee and a plate of food before heading up to the Sun Deck, the highest point on the *Atlantic Storm*.

I found Ryan already there, with his nephew.

"Morning, Ryan, Curtis."

"A lovely day, Mindy!" Ryan replied.

"I've never seen anything like it..." Curtis commented.

"Plenty more to see, son, plenty more..." Ryan added.

Breakfast was fun, and a good chance for everybody to chat and enjoy the hot sun and perfect view over the azure waters of the Caribbean. Curtis apparently, had enjoyed ensuring that Megan was thoroughly covered in sun screen – he had been slapped, though, when he thought that the skin covered by her bikini top also needed sunscreen! Surprisingly, Stephanie had allowed Tommy to do her back and shoulders – without maiming him. Anne-Marie had thought that Curtis' behaviour and the fact that Megan had enjoyed it, was thoroughly disgusting!

"I'll bear that in mind when *you* are wrapped around some boy, in a few years' time!" Megan retorted, receiving a scowl from the younger girl.

..._...

After breakfast, we opened up the boat garage at the stern and put our tender in the water.

The fifteen-foot Castoldi Jet Tender, in white and dark blue, slid gently into the water. The tender was capable of over thirty knots and could carry seven people. The propulsion was provided by a single 110-hp, diesel engine which powered a waterjet at the stern. This had the advantage of there being no propeller to be worried about in shallow water, or when beaching the tender.

At the tender's maximum speed, we would have fuel for just over three and a half hours.

I went out with Chloe, Megan, Anne-Marie, Stephanie, Danny, Curtis and Josh. It was the first time out for the tender, so we needed to thoroughly test it. We all wore compact inflatable life-jackets – just in case.

"You know how to use that life-jacket, don't you, Josh?" Megan teased.

"Would *you* like to test *yours*?" Josh growled back with an evil smirk. "Right now?"

"Err, no thanks, Joshua..." Megan replied with an uneasy grin, swapping seats with Stephanie, to get further away from Josh.

"Does this boat have a name, Mom?" Danny asked.

"Yes, this tender has a name: *Tempest*."

Tempest

We bounced over the waves at around twenty knots, passing between other yachts and enjoying the cooling breeze and salt-water spray as we moved.

Everybody was holding on tight as the ride was 'active' to say the least! After several fun minutes, I slowed to allow Chloe a turn at the helm – she took off like a bitch in heat, which was not altogether surprising considering Chloe's love of speed and we rapidly exceeded thirty knots.

All of the kids loved it!

For a bit of fun, we headed towards Paradise Island and ran the tender into the shallow water and we all went onto the beach and enjoyed the feeling of the hot sand between our toes. None of us had experienced such beauty as there was on that beach. Beautiful sand and azure waters that were warm and clear.

All of the kids learnt very quickly not to drink the salty water as a massive water fight erupted – mainly caused by Chloe and we were all very quickly soaked, not that it mattered as the hot sun rapidly dried us off. Josh was able to find us some enormous ice creams which went a long way to refreshing us before we pushed the tender off beach and headed back towards the *Atlantic Storm*.

It would have been great to spend more time on the Bahamas, but we were on a tight schedule – maybe on the return trip. As we circled our floating home, I got in some really good, high quality photos and video. Dave and Cathy were waving at us as we cruised past – I also noticed that Dave was holding a camera and he videoed us too.

I hoped to have many happy mementoes of our first family holiday.

***Chapter 228*: The Bahamas**

That morning
Sunday

10:00

The Atlantic Storm
Nassau, The Bahamas
Position: 25.0600° N 77.3450° W
145nm logged

The fun was cut off rather abruptly as we approached ten o'clock.

By then, everybody had had a go at driving the tender. We needed to get underway and head south, towards Antigua. Once the tender was safely stowed in its garage and the door closed and sealed, we completed preparations to weigh anchor.

Every hatch, was checked and double-checked. Every rope and cable, was checked and double-checked. Once all the necessary checks had been completed, and only then, the engines were started. Just one rope wrapped around a propeller at that point, could wreck the entire cruise. The twin diesel engines throbbed away ready to propel the *Atlantic Storm* through the calm azure waters.

..._...

At exactly 10:00, the anchor lifted off the sea bottom and I gently eased the twin throttles forward and span the wheel to starboard, taking us onto an easterly heading. Ahead of the bridge, I could see the Portuguese bridge settee crammed with Steph, Anne-Marie, Chloe, Abby and Megan, all enjoying the view and the cool breeze as we left Nassau, heading north-east to round Eleuthera.

Behind me, Ryan and Cathy were enjoying a beer and a glass of white wine, respectively, as they sat on the couch with Dave and Josh. Tommy and Curtis were visible on the bow, in the eyes of the ship, as far forward as they could get.

As we left the lee of the land, we began to pitch and the yacht casually absorbed the waves, the twin gyroscopic stabilisers keeping her on an even keel. We increased speed to twenty knots and I could not help smiling – everything was just perfect. Nothing could ruin our holiday; I had my family and my friends with me.

I was in heaven.

Two hours later

12:00

20nm northeast of Spanish Wells on Eleuthera
Position: 25.6525° N 76.9160° W
Course: 032°, Speed: 20 knots, 185nm logged

It was midday and my turn on watch.

On watch with me, I had Stephanie, while Mindy relaxed above us on the Sun Deck, in the Jacuzzi with Chloe and Abby. Ryan was on hand if required, but he too was enjoying some down time with his wife on the bow – you don't want to know! Half an hour later, we turned onto a new course of 095° and I put Stephanie to work, plotting our position on the chart and learning some nautical navigation. She was bright, despite only being nine and picked up quickly on the complexities of longitude, latitude and how to plot a position using a compass rose and parallel rules. The *Atlantic Storm* had every modern electronic navigation system available and they were bang up to date, but Ryan thought it important that everybody should know how to navigate with a paper chart – paper charts did not break down!

A little over an hour later, we were turning southeast onto a course of 136° – Stephanie proved very competent at the helm, too.

..._...

Cathy, Ryan and Chloe brought us lunch and stayed with us while we ate.

While we were talking, Cathy and I both noticed Chloe slowly and stealthily reaching for a bottle of Budweiser...

"Did I ever tell you about Chloe, when she was twelve?" Cathy asked me, pretending that she had not noticed.

Chloe froze.

"No," I replied, sensing a good story.

"It was the first time she ever had alcohol..."

Chloe scowled and withdrew her hand from the bottle of beer. Cathy smirked as she continued speaking.

"Ryan was at sea and I was at home with young Chloe... Late one evening, I heard singing from upstairs – but I thought nothing of it, until Chloe's bedroom door burst open and she came prancing out and stood at the top of the stairs, shouting for me.

"Well, I went to the bottom of the stairs and looked up... There was Chloe standing with her hands on her hips, staring down at me – only she was completely naked! Now, back then, Chloe did not have a figure – in fact she did not have much of anything, let alone hips for that matter."

Chloe was going very pink in the face, but she kept her mouth shut as her father smirked in her direction. I nodded for Cathy to continue.

"Well, Chloe started to come down the stairs, but when she only had two steps to go, she fell and sprawled at the bottom of the stairs, ending up on her back... She lay there giggling for about five minutes before she jumped up and bolted for the bathroom where she promptly and spectacularly threw up! She promised me then that she would never touch alcohol again!"

"Not my finest moment..." Chloe muttered.

"A certain young lady learnt something that day, didn't she?" Ryan commented.

"Yes, she did..." Chloe confirmed.

..._...

At 16:00, Chloe and Megan came on watch.

Ryan was there to watch the handover. Chloe had learnt navigation and boat handling from a young age, so she was entrusted to stand a watch, with Megan to assist.

"Course: one three six degrees. Speed: twenty knots," Stephanie advised Chloe. "No issues, no traffic."

"Thank you, Steph – you are relieved."

"Cool – I need to get a tan!" Stephanie said quickly as she departed the bridge at speed.

"You two behave, now!" I warned as I followed Stephanie.

"Yes, Dave – all under control," Chloe chuckled and Megan rolled her eyes.

"I'll make sure Chloe doesn't get drunk!" Megan said with a scowl at Chloe.

I found Mindy in the Jacuzzi, chatting with Abby and Cathy.

They waved for me to join them and it felt glorious being able to snuggle up to my wife and I gave her a very deep kiss – much to somebody's discomfort!

"Ewww!" Stephanie moaned as she slid in beside Mindy. "God, it's only been four hours since you last saw each other!"

Ryan laughed as he appeared on the deck and heard Stephanie's comment. He began to prepare the grill, to the starboard side of the Sun Deck for an early dinner. He also passed his wife a chilled glass of white wine, which she gratefully accepted. Mindy and I each received a beer. Abby and Stephanie had cold Cokes with ice.

..._...

Our tranquillity was destroyed when there was a violent ear-splitting scream from aft and I turned to see Anne-Marie berating her brother who had just emptied a bucket of cold water over his sister – with the help of Curtis. Tommy was laughing fit to burst.

"Boys!" Anne-Marie exclaimed before sliding into the Jacuzzi next to Stephanie.

"It's getting a bit packed in here," Cathy observed. "I need to go get the meat out of the fridge."

While Cathy headed down the steps to the galley, I laid back and enjoyed the view. There were a few other vessels about, some large container ships and a few yachts of varying sizes, but nothing came close and our gentle rolling on the waves went uninterrupted. I must have dozed off as I soon found Mindy prodding me and I could smell steaks cooking on the grill a few feet away.

..._...

"Looks good – I assume Chloe hasn't collided with anything..." I quipped.

"No, they seem to be doing well; they turned onto a course of 142°, heading between Rum Cay and San Salvador, a few minutes ago – although I think Megan is getting a little annoyed with her instructor!" Mindy replied, indicating the deck below.

I listened and I could hear Megan complaining bitterly and loudly, while Chloe told Megan that her markings on the chart were 'a load of shit!' Chloe could be a real bitch when she wanted to be, but I also knew that Megan was very keen to learn how to navigate, so she took Chloe's bitching, like the bitch that she herself was.

The steaks were done, as was an enormous pile of salad and other delicacies from the Galley.

Curtis took a pair of steaks below for the two girls on watch who, it seemed, were very hungry and desperate for some food! I had to admit that I was quite surprised that Megan and Chloe had not fought while on watch together. Sometimes the two of them wound each other up, with bad results. However, at that moment, I was impressed; both could be very professional when the need arose.

An enormous cruise ship passed us, heading north at a distance of two miles and we could see a lot of people waving at us and we waved back. Other than that, we were very much alone as we continued to head south. Which turned out to be good as Curtis and Josh had decided to see how loud they could get the almost five-figure sound system in the Main Salon!

..._...

Everybody aboard was soon dancing to Duran Duran and the track: 'Hungry like the wolf' – hey, it was an awesome song with cool lyrics. I may only have been an egg at the time when it came out, but I loved 80s music and, so it seemed, did almost everybody else. Anne-Marie was not too amused at first, but she soon got into the music and enjoyed dancing about like a lunatic!

Chloe thought it was incredibly embarrassing when her Father appeared on the bridge – dancing!

It then got worse as Josh went on to play the *uncensored* version of the Beautiful South and 'Don't Marry Her'... That did not exactly help as Danny, along with Curtis and Tommy, took great joy in following Josh's example and using the original wording: '*Don't marry her, fuck me*', while Anne-Marie wanted to know what '*sweaty bollocks*' were...!

..._...

The ever perceptive Josh seemed to notice that Dave and I were not impressed by his choices of music, so he selected a tune that he *knew* would calm me down – cunt!

'Now, I've had the time of...'

I smiled at Josh and he shrugged before he headed up to the bridge. There, as I understand it, he began dancing, somewhat provocatively, with Chloe – which freaked out Megan more than a little! Me, I just clung to Dave and we enjoyed the track.

I had to admit that on the cruise, I was having '*...the time of my life...*'

That night

20:00

Midway between Ponta Guarico, Cuba and Southwest Point, Inagua Islands

Position: 23.6098° N 74.4365° W

Course: 142°, Speed: 20 knots, 387nm logged

At 20:00, the helm was put over and we turned 45° to starboard and onto a new course of 187°, to pass between Long Island and Crooked Island.

It was a perfect night and I was standing watch with Tommy. The light was fading, but we still had very good visibility. I hoped that my steak and the beer that I had drunk at dinner would not put me to sleep during my watch!

It was awesome being out in what was almost total darkness. Tommy and I were both fascinated by the stars above us; they seemed larger and brighter for some reason. Apart from keeping an eye on the radar and our position, we both enjoyed identifying the formations of stars – it kept us awake too.

Tommy, despite the boy only being two months short of his twelfth birthday, was interesting to talk to. His childhood had been ripped apart too. His kidnapping had forced him to learn new skills very rapidly so that he could survive. The kid continuously impressed me with his skills and I enjoyed sparring with him as he often liked to fight dirty, which gave me a challenge.

We whiled away the hours until midnight chatting and laughing – Tommy also knew some very crude jokes! We were both looking forward to when we could go to our beds.

***Chapter 229*: At Sea**

The following morning
Monday

20nm west of Crooked Island
Position: 22.2777° N 72.6209° W
Course: 187°, Speed: 20 knots, 467nm logged

At midnight, Cathy and I took over the watch from Mindy and Tommy.

I gave Mindy a big hug as she went below to bed – she looked very tired; Tommy too. We both settled down to another watch at sea. Cathy enjoyed the night – she said it was peaceful. At a little after one in the morning, we turned southeast onto a course of 154° heading towards the eastern tip of Cuba – we were also joined by another body for the watch.

"Can I join you guys? Please."

"Feel free, Steph," I replied. "Can't sleep?"

"I'm still getting used to all of this, Dave – it's not easy..."

"No action, is that it?" Cathy asked with a smile.

"Something like that – the past few years have been all go, with very little down time... and now, all of a sudden, I can be a normal child and enjoy myself... I can never get rid of that other part of me, but at least that is not all my life is... Does that make sense?"

"Yes, I suppose it does," I replied, offering the young girl a Coke.

"Thanks."

Whatever Stephanie was, she was always polite. She was also a cold killer and we had seen her in action – only the once, but we knew that she was capable of killing with as little emotion as Hit Girl. The rest of us actually felt emotions when we killed and we fought them constantly, but Hit Girl and Psyche; they were different, from a psychological point of view at least.

I left Stephanie and Cathy talking out on the port bridge wing while I updated our position on the chart.

At five that morning, we were passing between the eastern tip of Cuba and the Inagua Islands. Fifteen minutes later, we altered course to the east, onto a course of 092° to bypass the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the British Virgin Islands.

We had a full day at sea, plus most of the following morning.

..._...

Despite us being on holiday, I was *not* about to let my fitness lapse.

Each and every morning, before breakfast, I did my exercises before heading up to the Galley to eat. I also tried to spend at least an hour each day on some Taekwondo, which was safe when Anne-Marie and Danny were around. I would have loved to have been able to get some weapons practice, but that was not possible – no weapons would come out during the cruise.

When I practised, others joined me – sometimes Megan and Stephanie, sometimes Josh and Chloe and even Anne-Marie and Abby! It gave us all an appetite and also built up a sweat.

..._...

That morning, after breakfast, I signalled for Dave to cut the engines and we lay hove to, gently rocking on the waves. We were alone, with no other ships visible. I ordered everybody to come aft on the Main Deck – for some reason Josh hung back, well away from me!

"Time for some fun – who has noticed the large 'item' on the aft end of the Bridge Deck?"

"I did!" Curtis called out with a grin – he knew what it was; he'd peeked.

"Anybody else...?"

I was interrupted by the hum of hydraulics and electric motors as the coaming at the rear of the Sun Deck opened and a telescopic crane made its appearance. The crane jib swung aft under the control of Ryan, lowering the steel cable with a hook at the end, towards the Bridge Deck where Dave attached the hook to a four-point sling on my newest toy.

"Damn!" Megan breathed as the, jet black metallic and deep pewter satin, watercraft was lowered over the side and into the water.

Once floating alongside, I reached out and secured the painter to a cleat. I smiled hugely as Dave appeared beside me at the stern.

..._...

"What is it?" Danny asked, looking at the new arrival as we launched the *Tempest* too.

"That, is the *Twister*," I explained. "*Twister*, is a 295-horsepower, 3.5-metre jet ski that can carry three people at over sixty miles-per-hour..."

"She insisted on speed and went for the 1,600-cc engine!" Dave said with a grimace. "Now, I am going to take the *Tempest* – who wants to ride with Mindy?"

Two nutcases raised their hands.

Fifteen minutes later, I was racing over the waves at over forty miles-per-hour.

Behind me, I had Chloe and Stephanie. Both were holding on *very* tight! Fifty yards away, *Tempest* raced around – we were *much* faster, so we ran in a large circle around *Tempest* and *Atlantic Storm*. Speed! It was awesome. Behind me, I could hear Chloe giggling and laughing, along with Stephanie who was doing much the same.

I took every opportunity to jump over the waves, crashing down again and riding up the next. The spray was cool in the hot sun and I was enjoying myself. As we swept past *Tempest*, I saw the smiling faces and the laughter. That was what everybody needed – time to be a kid, time to be a teenager – time to have fun...

The holiday was perfect.

Mindy was fucking nuts!

I held on as tight as I could – you could say, for dear life; quite literally! My arms were wrapped very tightly around Chloe's waist and the teenager was giggling fit to burst, with the odd scream thrown in as we periodically crashed down into the water.

I just prayed that I would live long enough to see my tenth birthday!

I was seriously worried about my wife.

She had gone completely nuts over power and speed!

I knew that she was skilled and that she had excellent reflexes, however she often pushed things too far and... I trusted her, but I also knew her – very well... I angled *Tempest* towards the speed freak on *Twister* and moved to intercept.

Not an easy task, *Twister* was far more manoeuvrable than *Tempest* and Mindy was not making it an easy intercept, either!

I had to be careful as I did not want to empty my six passengers out into the open ocean. I kept *Tempest* on an even

keel as much as possible, but *Twister* still had the edge and Mindy knew what she was doing. I had to outwit Mindy if I wanted to gain the upper hand.

"Hold on!" I called to my passengers.

I received yells of acknowledgement and excitement as I increased the throttle and executed a sequence of manoeuvres that tricked Mindy into thinking we were moving to port when we were actually heading to starboard and we soon found ourselves in a position to cut her off.

Mindy wisely decided to call it a day, rather than risk anybody getting hurt.

That night

100nm north of the Dominican Republic

Position: 20.4450° N 68.9659° W

Course: 092°, Speed: 20 knots, 859nm logged

At eight that night, we were passing north of the Dominican Republic.

It was my first nighttime watch and I was more than a little bit nervous, however I trusted Chloe and knew that despite our rivalry, she would help me get things right. We often argued and teased each other and I knew that I got on her nerves which had resulted in us fighting, on more than one occasion.

As Chloe updated our position, half an hour after we came on watch, I asked her a question.

"Chloe... I..."

Chloe turned and smiled at me.

"Spit it out, Megan."

"Why do I antagonise you?"

Chloe grinned and sat down on the couch, patting the seat beside her.

"When you first appeared, I saw you as a threat – another girl who was surprisingly good at what she did."

I felt myself blushing at the hidden compliment, but let Chloe continue.

"I also saw a lot of me, in you. When I was younger, about nine I suppose, I was a major bitch and I often went out of my way to piss people off – I enjoyed it, seeing the reaction that I had caused. It wasn't until a couple of years later that I began to see the hurt that I caused by my acting out. I suppose that I didn't want you to go the same way.

"I have the utmost respect for what you do, Megan, and I would fight by your side, any day, any place... Despite the way that I often treat you, I see you as a younger sister and a very good friend. You have saved my life on more than one occasion, Megan and to be honest, sometimes I am jealous of you..."

"What?" I exclaimed, stunned at that revelation – the famous Shadow was *jealous* of little Wildcat!

"Just don't go spreading it around – I have a reputation to uphold."

I grinned back at my friend.

***Chapter 230*: Antigua**

Author's Note: Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that could be seen as indecent and salacious, including the use of words or insinuations of a very dubious, unseemly or otherwise downright dirty nature, from the outset.

**The following morning
Tuesday**

**North of the British Virgin Islands
Position: 20.3752° N 72.5398° W
Course: 092°, Speed: 20 knots, 939nm logged**

At midnight, Dave and I climbed up to the Bridge.

For once, we were together on watch.

"You two get to bed and don't wake anybody!" I said to the two girls as they headed below.

Megan turned and grinned at me.

"I hope you two are going to behave..."

"I always behave, little Megan," I replied with a wink.

Megan grimaced and ran after Chloe.

"You are going to behave I assume?" Dave enquired.

"Are you...?" I teased, walking around the Bridge and locking each access door.

"Navigation first – play later..."

"Horseshit!" I replied as I gently released the clips on my bikini top and allowed it to fall to the deck.

Dave just shook his head and rubbed his eyes with his left hand. I also noticed a growing bulge in his shorts as I stepped out of my own. It felt kind of weird to be standing completely naked on the Bridge, but who gave a shit!

..._...

I sat on the back of the couch while Dave dropped his shorts to the deck and then pulled off his t-shirt in one swift movement. He was definitely ready and as hard as he ever got. He gently ran his hands over my bare chest and I yelped when his rough, manly palms rubbed over my hyper-sensitive and very erect nipples. I kissed my husband on the lips deeply and passionately while his left hand made its way downwards, across my stomach. I tingled all over as I felt his fingers running down through my pubic hair and towards my engorged, and very ready, labia.

His very touch had my heart racing and my breathing increasing like I had just fought a major battle against a hundred ninjas. My increasing arousal was intoxicating and I began to forget that I was on a mega-yacht, with eleven other people onboard, fast asleep below. All that mattered, was me and Dave, everything else came a distant second at that moment.

Dave also enjoyed my initial stages of arousal as my breasts enlarged and my heart raced, just as much as I did. I always began to moan – I couldn't help it! My hips would move, totally unbidden, as his ministrations put my body on auto-pilot and up on the proverbial cloud nine. My insides, especially my lower regions, felt like live grenades were exploding within me. Then I was struck by sensations that made me feel like I was being Tasered. I could do nothing but arch my back over the couch and then it hit me full strength and...

I screamed and I screamed.

..._...

As I was coming down from my cloud nine, I was suddenly very thankful that there was an entire deck between us

and everybody else who was sleeping! I kissed my husband like I had never kissed him before and then, it was my turn to return the favour once my I was able to breathe again.

I sank down onto my knees – mainly because my legs wouldn't support me, but also as I needed to, and I gave Dave the best damn blow-job he had ever had.

Damn – Mindy was on a roll that night.

Her perspiration covered skin reflected the red lighting that illuminated the bridge and it made her look somewhat sinister, naked and bathed in red light. She may have been Hit Girl, she may have been Mindy, but right at that moment, she was my wife. Her orgasm had been epic, one of her best, and I felt very pleased for causing it... Now she was determined to return the favour and Mindy being Mindy – well, she was *never* to be outdone!

Her lips wrapped around me and she took me in deep before gently pulling back and licking me from top to bottom, concentrating on the more sensitive areas and I felt my legs beginning to weaken as she picked up speed. I closed my eyes, visualising her supple but muscular body, bathed in sweat. I had a feeling that I was the only person in the world that Mindy would actually kneel down before – willingly at least...

..._...

I suddenly had the weirdest thought – what if we had a collision right then, right at that moment? I could visualise the court of enquiry: '... and what were you doing at the time of the collision, Mr Lizewski?'

My answer? It would have to be truth...

'Fingering my wife to an explosive orgasm and then receiving the best damn blow-job known to man!'

I actually laughed and accidentally drove myself further into Mindy's mouth which made her choke for a moment. She glanced up at me for a moment her eyes wide, but then she smirked before eagerly returning to her meal.

I had no problem with the deep-throat part – it was just a bit of a surprise...

What Dave was laughing about while I had him in my mouth, I had absolutely no idea – however, if he was happy, then so was I... At that moment, I had the weirdest thought – what if somebody walked in on us? Would I continue, or would I stop? Hey, I was Hit Girl – I'd just keep on blowing!

I sensed that Dave was struggling to stand as I ran my tongue around the top of his cock, enjoying the saltiness of his pre-cum and I could feel the blood throbbing inside him as it kept him hard. He was moaning and groaning, his hips moving rhythmically with my head as I moved up and down him.

Then I felt it, a small tremor, and then another – Dave was about to blow...

..._...

It felt like a flamethrower had just hit the back of my throat – the liquid actually burnt! There was an awful lot of the salty, but sweet tasting fluid as it continued to pump up into my mouth. I swallowed as much of the liquid as fast as I could but I still felt some oozing out between my lips and dribbling down my chin. Dave pulled himself away from my mouth and I swallowed the last of him, licking my lips clean.

He sank to the deck of the Bridge behind the couch and did his best to control his breathing which was heavy to say the least. I giggled at the sight of my husband struggling to breathe.

I was *very* proud of myself.

At ten to four that morning, the aft Bridge door opened and Cathy strode in with Abby.

Cathy sniffed the air, gazed over at Dave and I, then grimaced at Abby.

"Dirty bastards!" The fifteen-year-old girl growled as she scowled at us both.

"What?"

"Don't play innocent with me, girl," Cathy chuckled. "The Bridge stinks of sex!"

I sniffed the air myself, not detecting anything out of the ordinary. It must be the doctor in Cathy.

"Smells like my daughter's apartment..." Cathy added.

I felt myself blushing and decided to go find Cathy some coffee. Dave just smirked. As I returned, I heard Cathy talking.

"Was it good?"

"The best!" Dave replied and I felt myself grinning from ear to ear.

"Well, Mindy seems to be positively floating across the deck!" Cathy commented.

At 09:00, after breakfast, we reduced speed to twenty knots and rendezvoused with *USS Churchill*.

It was the first chance that Ryan had had to check on his Command. It took a couple of hours from first sighting the destroyer, to us coming together and cruising on a course of 130° together. The destroyer smoothly and expertly pulled alongside and adjusted her speed to keep pace two-hundred yards to starboard.

We exchanged courtesy messages over the radio while Ryan used the satellite phone to get a more in depth update from his Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Wes Edwards.

USS Churchill

"Fuck me!" The sailor commented. "The one in the blue and white bikini has some awesome curves!"

"Let me see!"

The two sailors jostled for the mounted 'Big Eye' binoculars – the second sailor forced his mate off and glued his own eyes to the lenses.

"You're right – awesome tits *and* curves... What have we here? Another girl in a purple number – she looks damn fuckable – hold on blue and white girl is lying down on the sun-pad, tits down... She's untying her top..."

"Watch boring you?" Came a voice from behind.

..._...

The two sailors span around to see their worst nightmare.

"Morning, XO, sir!" The two sailors called out, standing at attention as the Executive Office put his eyes to their binoculars.

After a few seconds, the officer stood up and turned to the two unfortunate sailors.

"You two wouldn't be ogling the Skipper's semi-naked daughter now, would you? Nor the Skipper's semi-naked and very close friend?"

"No XO!"

"Get back to work!"

Mindy and I took the opportunity to top up our tan on the Sun Deck.

I had selected my most revealing bikini and received a very disapproving scowl from my father for wearing it – he knew, as I did, that there were 348 enlisted sailors and 31 officers two-hundred yards away.

I wanted no tan lines, so I opted to undo my bikini top for that all over tan. Josh appeared and he readily rubbed in some sun block – I did *not* want to get burnt! Mindy also allowed him to do the same with her back – Josh actually looked very uneasy; I think he expected Mindy to attack him...

I was pleased for Daddy – he missed his ship, but I knew that he was enjoying the time with Mom and me, plus Curtis. I was enjoying the extra time with Daddy; it was special and I knew that Mom was overjoyed at the extra time she had with her husband.

The cruise was perfect and it benefited everybody – we could all let our hair down and just be kids for a change. We had left all the trouble behind, in Chicago. Nobody was shooting at us; nobody was getting injured – we were in paradise.

..._...

I had been worried about my best friend, Mindy.

The past few months had been very difficult for her. As I gazed over at my friend, dozing happily in the sun, I was able to visualise all the times that she had been in pain, both physically and mentally. I had shared her pain when Marcus had been shot; the anger that she had felt in Gotham when Megan and Curtis had been injured. The sadness when she had taken custody of Anne-Marie and Danny after their father had been killed. We had all shared the pain when Paige had been shot down and we had all stood beside Megan and Marcus during *their* pain.

Mindy had almost lost another, a hundred stories up above Chicago – Stephanie had survived what had to have been the scariest night of her life and Mindy had adopted the girl. Mindy now had two families – her own *and* Fusion. I felt great pride at being such a close and personal friend to Mindy – it was almost two years since we had first met and I never regretted a moment.

We stayed with the American warship until 15:00 when we altered course for the last time towards our ultimate destination, Antigua.

That evening

St John's, Antigua

Position: 17.1327° N 61.8632° W

1,331nm logged

We had arrived!

Atlantic Storm entered Deepwater Harbour at a little after seven, that evening. To port, moored alongside the dock we could see *HMS Dragon*. We came around and went alongside, starboard side to the dock and facing the sea, about a hundred or so yards from the destroyer's bow. The 500-foot British warship towered above our meagre 120-foot yacht. Ahead of us were two giant cruise ships, moored at the head of the harbour.

As soon as we were secured and satisfied the Customs Officers, Abby was left in charge of the little monsters while the senior crew members got changed for that evening's activities.

***Chapter 231*: Cockers P**

That evening
Tuesday

St John's, Antigua
Position: 17.1327° N 61.8632° W
1,331nm logged

The Type 45 Destroyer, HMS Dragon

The three-year-old, five-hundred-foot destroyer was festooned with flags and bunting from bow to stern and bright floodlights lit up her hull from the waterside. On the dock there was a small Royal Marines band playing some gentle music as people arrived. At the base of the gangway a very smart and well-armed Royal Marine stood guard. Beside him were two sailors armed with L85A2 assault rifles and Glock 17 pistols; evidently, the Royal Navy took their security seriously.

After showing our invitations, we were waved up the gangway towards the flight deck at the stern of the warship. At the top of the gangway we were met by a Royal Navy Lieutenant in a short-sleeved white bush jacket, matching trousers and white leather shoes.

"Lieutenant Lawrence. Welcome aboard Her Majesty's Ship Dragon, Mrs Lizewski, Mr Lizewski."

"Good evening, Lieutenant, we meet at last," I replied, offering my right hand which Lawrence took and *kissed!* I blushed – I had never had my hand kissed before.

"Mr Lizewski," Lieutenant Lawrence greeted with a shake of Dave's hand – Dave seemed somewhat relieved! "Mr Williams, Miss Bennett; welcome aboard. This way please."

..._...

We were escorted into an enormous marquee that had been erected on the even bigger flight deck. Inside there were tables of drinks and some food. The marquee had been decorated with flags and I could see through into the capacious hanger, in one corner of which was one of the ship's two Wildcat attack helicopters. I had noticed a twin at the far aft corner of the flight deck outside the marquee, as we had come aboard.

There were many people already present, sipping cocktails and talking amongst themselves. I noticed Ryan and Cathy talking to a senior Royal Navy Officer. Lieutenant Lawrence led us in that direction.

..._...

"Ah, Mindy, Dave!" Commander Ryan Bennett announced. "Please meet my opposite number, Commander Richard Perrin, Captain of *HMS Dragon*. Commander Perrin, please meet Dave and Mindy Lizewski and my daughter Chloe and her, err partner, Joshua Williams."

We all exchanged pleasantries, before conversation began.

"So you own that white beauty down the dock, Mrs Lizewski?"

"I do, Captain," I replied, pleased that the *Atlantic Storm* had been noticed.

"I understand that you are all enjoying a break away from Chicago?"

"Yes, we have had a very stressful few months."

"I bet you have," Commander Perrin commented with a wink, "– complete with getting involved with that idiot, Mitchell!"

I blanched at the mention of Commander Mitchell, but rapidly pulled myself together. I scowled and looked to Lieutenant Lawrence for support.

"All is well; the Captain wouldn't rescue the Commander if he were drowning!"

"Too true – that idiot was a very bad example of a Royal Navy Officer. My apologies young lady. Anyway, I understand he is gone."

"Indeed he is!" Lieutenant Lawrence continued. "He was only an Acting-Commander, so when he literally fell flat after that job, well done by the way, he lost his half-stripe... Guess who got it, too!"

"Spook here, managed to worm his way into Mitchell's job – from next week he is Lieutenant-Commander Lawrence, no less!" Commander Perrin advised.

"Congratulations!" I said and I was genuinely pleased for the man.

"The Captain is well aware of the assistance that you gave HMG, both in the UK and the other month. He is a firm believer in what you, and your team, do in Chicago," Lieutenant Lawrence went on.

"Now, I must go and see to our other guests," Commander Perrin said cheerfully. "Please avail yourselves of the drinks – except for you two of course; there are plenty of soft drinks available!"

Chloe scowled.

The steward came towards us with drinks.

Mindy was first.

"Horse's Neck, ma'am?"

"I suppose," Mindy replied curiously, taking a glass and peering into it dubiously.

"It's a cocktail, ma'am," The steward explained. "Brandy, ginger ale and lemon peel."

"Thanks," I said taking one for myself, smiling at my wife's obvious hesitation.

Chloe reached over for a glass, but the steward deftly span his tray 180-degrees, revealing a pair of Cokes.

"Would the young lady prefer a Coke?" The steward asked smoothly, politely and rather pointedly, without missing a beat.

Chloe grimaced and then scowled, annoyed that her attempt at an alcoholic drink had been dashed, yet again.

"Yes, the young lady would, thank you!" She replied curtly, accepting the soft drink.

"Sir?"

"Thank you," Josh said as he took his Coke, smiling at Chloe with a patronising expression.

The steward moved on and we sipped at our drinks. It was a surprisingly friendly atmosphere and we all felt very at ease. Lieutenant Lawrence moved off to talk to some other people, leaving us to chat together.

..._...

"Not bad!" I commented, as Ryan and Cathy came over to join us.

"Nobody does this better than the Royal Navy, remember that," Ryan commented. "The Brits were doing Statecraft a hundred years before the United States were even remotely considered. Nobody is better – never try and outtalk a Brit – it never happens!"

"Well, you should know, dear daughter!" Cathy grinned looking at Chloe.

"Why?" Chloe asked defensively, a little worried about the response.

"Well a certain Brit talked himself *into* your knickers, or should I say, he talked you *out* of your knickers!" Cathy explained and then laughed as her daughter's mouth dropped open in shock and she blushed in acute embarrassment.

"Not fair..." Chloe moaned.

"But very funny!" Josh added with a grin.

"You ever want to see me with no knickers on..." Chloe began, but then shut her mouth and walked over to look at the helicopter.

We all laughed at Chloe's discomfort and chatted for a few minutes. Josh wandered over to join Chloe, while we continued to talk.

I was chatting with Chloe, when we were approached by a Royal Marines Commando Colour Sergeant.

"If you will excuse me, sir, but you must be Joshua Williams – you look strikingly like him."

"Excuse me?" Josh asked a little confused.

"I knew your Dad, Paul – we went through basic and a few wars together, lad. I'm very sorry for what happened to him."

"Thank you."

"I also knew your Mother, Sarah – I was your Dad's best man at their wedding. I remember you being born too; your Dad was over the fucking moon, if you'll excuse my French, young miss."

Chloe blushed slightly.

"I remember you... Jim Reynolds," Josh exclaimed. "You used to come around when I was younger; when we lived up in Arbroath."

"That I did and yes that is me. Your Dad would be very proud of you, right now, Jackal, my lad! You're doing good, living up to his expectations, and I'm very impressed by your choice in women, too – very Shadow-y! A United States Navy Commander's daughter no less – not bad, Joshua!" Jim turned to Chloe. "You look after this lad, young miss, he's a keeper, and I can promise you that."

"I know, thank you," Chloe replied a little confused.

Chloe and Josh both found themselves back with Chloe's parents who were chatting with Commander Perrin.

"You expecting to become a Grandmother any time soon?" Commander Perrin enquired, as Chloe joined the group and he completely ignored the horrified look that he had generated on her face.

"I would hope not, but eventually, it might be nice..." Cathy Bennett replied before she indicated her daughter and Josh. "Mind you, even the randiest rabbits known to mankind take more time off than these two!"

"Mom!" Chloe exclaimed, blushing madly and peering around to see who might have overheard her Mother.

"Don't get me started!" Commander Perrin laughed. "The moment my youngest daughter – she's nineteen by the way – the moment she discovered the joys of sex, that was it – squeaky bedsprings morning, noon and night!"

"Tell me about it!" Dr Bennett replied with a chuckle.

"I even suggested to my daughter that she should buy shares in Durex!"

"I'm certain that Chloe and Josh buy in bulk – at least, I hope so..."

"Mom could we *please* change the subject from our... Ughh!"

..._...

Further humiliation for Chloe was averted when they were joined by two more people, a shapely woman in her late forties and a young girl of maybe nineteen-years-old.

"Ah, finally!" Commander Perrin exclaimed, embracing the woman and giving her a kiss.

"Hi, Daddy!" The girl said in greeting as she hugged her Father.

"Commander Bennett, Dr Bennett, please say hello to my wife, Alexandra, and my daughter, Cassandra..."

"Oh, please don't call me that – call me Cassie!" The girl interrupted with a glare at her Father.

"Alexandra, Cassie, please meet Commander Ryan Bennett of the *USS Churchill* and his wife, Dr Catherine Bennett."

"Very pleased to meet you," Cathy replied. "The blushing creature beside me is my daughter, Chloe and with her is her boyfriend, Joshua."

"Hello," Chloe said.

"Good evening," Josh added politely.

"An Englishman!" Cassie exclaimed, then she winked at Chloe. "Too many damn Yanks!"

"Born and bred. I'm trying to convert a few of these traitorous colonists!" Josh replied with a laugh.

"The thirteen colonies are ours, Joshua – it is far too late for an insurrection now!" Commander Bennett laughed.

"Just let me know, Josh and my Royal Marines will support you," Commander Perrin chuckled with a smile at his opposite number.

Cassie Perrin studied Chloe for a moment and then she scowled at her Father.

"Please tell me that you have not been discussing *my* sex life, nor been telling that appalling condom joke?" She complained.

"A British Naval Officer never lies!" Her Father responded with a sly smile.

"Oh, God!" Cassie exclaimed, blushing slightly. "Chloe, Josh – my apologies, come with me. There is a much better place to sit and chat up by the Phalanx guns, than down here with this lot!"

Cassie grabbed Chloe's hand and headed for the helicopter hanger.

"Cassie knows this ship almost as well as her Father," Alexandra Perrin commented as the three kids vanished.

Cassie took us up two gangways to a point on the upper deck where we sat down in the shadow of a six-barrelled Phalanx, twenty-millimetre, radar-controlled cannon – yeah, I had spent enough time onboard warships to know what was what!

"So, where do you live?" I asked Cassie.

"A small town – you'll never have heard of it..."

"I might..."

"A town in Scotland, called Stirling..."

"Outside Falkirk?"

"How could a Yank know that?" Cassie demanded, very surprised.

"We spent some time in Falkirk, earlier in the year," Josh replied. "We have friends there."

"I spend a lot of my life there, while Dad is away at sea; I miss him when he goes away," Cassie said quietly.

"I know what you mean – I don't see anywhere near enough of my own Dad and yeah, I miss him..."

"It's not easy being the daughter of a sailor, but I love my Dad and I know that he loves what he does," Cassie added.

"I have to agree!"

"So," Cassie said, turning to Josh. "What's *your* story and how do you end up romantically involved with a Yank?"

"My Dad was a Royal Marine – I grew up following him around places like Poole and Arbroath. Then he left the Royals and we ended up in the US. My Dad got involved with a bad crowd and then... Well, he was killed."

"Oh, I'm sorry..."

"Shit happens!"

"Tell me about it..."

Cassie was not tall a tall young woman, about an inch over five-feet.

Her shoulder length dark brown hair hung loose and matched her dark brown eyes. She was obviously very intelligent and seemed to be very much a Daddy's girl. Almost as much as another girl, I thought, as Cassie and Chloe chatted together.

It was turning out to be a very nice evening. As the girls chatted, I looked out over the dock and I could see the *Atlantic Storm* moored alongside ahead of us. She was lit up from stem to stern and looked very beautiful in the fading light. It was strange meeting a colleague of my Dads, especially one that I had actually known. It was a first for me and it had stirred up some varied emotions inside.

What did my future hold for me?

***Chapter 232*: Guadeloupe**

The next morning
Wednesday

The Atlantic Storm
St John's, Antigua
Position: 17.1327° N 61.8632° W
1,331nm logged

When I awoke at seven that morning, I felt so happy – nothing could destroy such a beautiful day.

The sun shone and the temperature was in the high twenties. The previous night had been just perfect and it had been good to be able to spend time with Dave. We had met new people and gained some new friends. One thing that did worry me, was Joshua. He had been a little subdued when we had returned to the *Atlantic Storm*. Josh had waved it off to fatigue but I caught the warning look from Chloe and did not press it. The look told me that Chloe was worried, but that she could handle it.

I gave everybody a not so gentle boot as we were due to leave for nine o'clock, that morning. The kids had been up until almost eleven the previous night having a mini party and I was sure that I could hear the music from the *Dragon!* Whatever, Abby said that they had all enjoyed themselves – which was the point and there were empty cans of Coke everywhere, not to mention the remains of many pizzas! Needless to say, it was *not* easy to motivate the tired kids to get up and dressed.

..._...

With breakfast over, we had the engines running and were ready to depart on time. Commander Perrin, his wife and Cassie, along with Lieutenant Lawrence, were on the dock to wave goodbye. We slipped our moorings and headed out of Deepwater Harbour on a course of 254° at 20 knots. Everybody was excited to be back at sea again. They all enjoyed the open ocean – all of us had grown up in cities, so having nothing to block our vision was something totally new and much enjoyed.

Our destination was the island of Guadeloupe. The island was shaped like a butterfly and our final destination, Guadeloupe's largest city, Pointe-à-Pitre, was in the south of the central portion that joined the butterfly's two 'wings'. We would arrive off the northeast coast and pass down the east side of the right hand part of the island before wrapping around to the west along the south of the island and then north to Pointe-à-Pitre.

I wanted the island to be a great place to unwind before we headed home.

Almost six hours later

Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe
Position: 16.2278° N 61.5353° W
1,432nm logged

By 15:00, we were moored at a dock in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe.

We used the tender to ferry people across the small harbour to where there was a beautiful beach with pleasant white sands. All the kids; including the teenagers, wanted to play in the sand – I had to admit that I was one of them: yes, Hit Girl liked to play in the sand!

Megan and Chloe seemed to be the most excited about the prospect of playing on the beach – miles ahead of Stephanie, Anne-Marie and Danny. Tommy and Curtis were looking forward to messing about in the water and Abby was intending to just sunbathe.

I, on the other hand, had other ideas...

The sun felt hot on my skin as I lay on the warm sand.

I had never been to such a place. My holidays, when I was younger – and when I still had a family – had been to

cooler places, such as Scarborough or The Lake District. My pale body was screaming out for some sun after many months of being covered up from head to toe in black clothes and boots.

My thoughts were interrupted as I heard mutterings and the mutterings were getting closer... I braced myself as the mutterings sounded very much like Tommy and Curtis. What did the two idiots have planned...

I screamed as freezing cold water landed on me and I opened my eyes to see the two wankers pouring two large bottles of iced water over me!

I heard Stephanie scream.

No big surprise as I had watched the two boys moving carefully towards her while unscrewing the tops of two large bottles of iced water. I knew exactly what they had planned but I had no desire to intercede; Stephanie could look after herself, very well.

The girl sprang up and chased after Curtis who seemed to be the slower of the two boys and Stephanie looked furious with the laughing eleven-year-old. She never caught Curtis as Tommy intercepted her with a well-executed tackle that had the two kids rolling across the sand laughing.

I went back to kissing my husband in the shade of a palm tree.

Twenty minutes later, Dave and Ryan headed back to the *Atlantic Storm* for what they called: 'male bonding' while I decided to go shopping – I may be a cutting edge vigilante, but I was still female and I enjoyed shopping, either for a new pair of jeans, or an assault rifle.

I pulled two pairs of shorts, two t-shirts and two pairs of sneakers out of a bag.

"Anne-Marie, Danny – put these on..." I called.

"We going shopping?"

"Yes, Danny, we are."

As the two kids got dressed, I sought out Stephanie.

"You want to come, Steph?"

Stephanie popped her head up from the enormous hole that she and Tommy were digging. The sand covered girl thought about the question for a moment before she replied.

"No thanks; got a lot of work to do here."

"Okay – stay out of trouble!"

"We won't..." Came the response from Tommy and Stephanie.

It was hot and there was a very pleasant warm breeze; I was happy.

We were taking a walk a short distance from the beach and the sea. It was paradise and I had never experienced anything like it. The kids just loved it; it was a far cry from that hell on earth called Gotham where they had grown up and even their current home in Chicago for that matter.

The kids had spent the past hour on the beach, digging holes in the hot sand. I did not want to dwell on what Josh and Chloe were doing – let's just say that Josh was very thorough with the suntan lotion! Mind you, so was Curtis, and Megan just squealed... Cathy was out somewhere, shopping with Abby who had given up on her sunbathing.

..._...

The shops were full of the usual tourist rubbish, but I thought it would be good for the kids to have a souvenir or two to take home with them, to show their friends. We passed dozens of places, none of which had what I was after.

"Mom, where's Anne-Marie?" Danny asked.

"Huh? She's..."

I looked around, expecting to see my daughter close by. There was no sign of her; no big problem, she would never have gone far. I started looking at the crowd around us – there was still no sign of the seven-year-old girl. Where had I last seen her? I thought back... She had stopped to look at some t-shirts and I had called for her to come... Then I had been distracted by Danny and we'd kept walking. How long? It could only have been five minutes – maybe ten?

Oh my God!

Despite my training, I felt panic rising inside me. I had just lost one of the two very young people that I had promised to protect with my life! I looked around, everywhere, keeping a very tight hold on Danny's hand as I did so.

"Anne-Marie!"

I was yelling now and yes; I was really panicking.

"Anne-Marie!"

***Chapter 233*: Rogue Missing**

That afternoon
Wednesday

The Atlantic Storm

Pointe-à-Pitre
Guadeloupe
Position: 16.2278° N 61.5353° W
1,432nm logged

"This is the life, eh, Dave!" Ryan laughed as we both sat on the Sun Deck, enjoying a cold bottle of beer each.

It was great to have the 120-foot megayacht to ourselves for a change; no noisy kids – just peace and quiet as the waves lazily lapped against the white hull. It was paradise itself, at least, I thought so. Ryan and I just wanted to laze around – it was what men did when on holiday...

Every hour spent without being shot at or chased by ninjas, was a blessing and I was determined to enjoy every damn moment of it. Mindy – well, she *missed* not being shot at or chased by ninjas – but despite that, I was happy for her; she was having the time of her life and I hadn't seen her so happy in quite a while.

It was the same for the others... Our peace was destroyed as my cell rang...

"Oh, crap!" I growled and reached for the offending device.

"No peace for the wicked!" Ryan teased.

"It's the purple one!" I commented as I answered the call.

I grinned at his comment.

But then my grin began to fade as I saw Dave's expression go from amused to shocked and then onto scared for a moment before his entire face then went steadily darker and darker.

He slowly put the cell down before turning to face me. For a moment, I felt a little bit of fear as I saw the darkness in Dave's face. Something *very bad* had just happened. It took a minute for Dave to focus on something as archaic as speech.

He just said one word – actually, just a name.

"Anne-Marie."

The Beach

I was busy groping Chloe when my mobile rang – crap fucking timing!

"Ignore it!" Chloe whispered as she giggled to my touch.

I knew that I had to answer it; it was Dave.

"Put Chloe down, we have a situation..." I shivered; Dave's tone was colder than I had ever heard it, "– Anne-Marie is missing..."

"What? When?"

"Mindy is searching the streets – she has Danny with her, Ryan and I are going ashore, too. I need you and Chloe to get the others together and safely back to the *Atlantic Storm*."

"Got it!"

I turned to Chloe who looked very worried by my expression.

"Get everybody together – we're going back to the boat. It's Anne-Marie – she's gone missing..."

Chloe just stood there for a second, her hand over her mouth.

"Move it, girl!" I growled and Chloe jumped into action, running towards where Megan, Stephanie, Tommy and Curtis were playing.

I had a bad feeling in my stomach. If anything happened to that young girl, Dave and Mindy would be devastated... However, on the other hand, whoever had taken Anne-Marie should be afraid, very afraid – if they only knew what hell they had just unleashed upon themselves.

The Caribbean was about to get a damn sight hotter!

Two hours later

The Atlantic Storm

I was sobbing fit to burst when I finally returned to the boat empty handed.

Cathy had met up with me and taken Danny back aboard earlier on. Dave and Ryan were still out there, searching. Chloe had met me at the gangway and I could see that she had been crying too. I collapsed into my best friend's arms and she helped me into the Main Salon and then onto the couch.

..._...

Ten minutes later, it came.

The message.

It was confirmation that my daughter was not just lost; it was confirmation that she had been taken. Chloe walked into the Main Salon, she was carrying something in both hands and her face was full of sorrow. I had held on to the hope that Anne-Marie was just lost and that the Police would find her... Cathy, Stephanie and Megan froze – they looked horrified.

Chloe hesitated before she spoke, the anguish evident in her face.

"A motorcycle courier just delivered this," she said quietly and calmly, fighting back the tears.

..._...

In her hands was a large padded envelope. On the outside was a simple note.

*FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS – SHE LIVES
ANYTHING ELSE – SHE DIES*

Chloe carefully opened the envelope and I stood up to see what was in it.

She pulled out what looked to be a piece of pink material. I felt my heart beating harder and I was struggling to breathe. I sank to the deck, unable to comprehend what was happening as I felt the hot tears pouring unrestricted down my cheeks. I had never felt the way I was feeling right then – my mind was reeling and I could not focus on my thoughts. I felt arms hugging me tightly as I cried – it was Megan.

I looked up at Chloe and at what she held in her hand. I recognised it immediately; it was my daughter's t-shirt – the very one that I had given her and that she had been wearing that very afternoon and...

"Is that blood?" Cathy demanded, taking the t-shirt from her daughter.

..._...

Why?

Every time something good happened in my life, it was closely followed by tragedy. The past few days had been

heaven – now... Why? It was too much – I bolted for the nearest bathroom and violently vomited up everything that I had eaten over the past few hours. I kept retching even when my stomach was empty – I had never reacted like that over *anything*, not even the death of my own Daddy.

I was Hit Girl, I had an iron stomach – or so I had thought.

Time since abduction: 00:03:00

USS Churchill

Twenty-two nautical miles to the northwest

"XO, Captain on the SatCom – secure!"

Lieutenant Commander Wes Edwards grimaced. That probably meant trouble and he was *not* wrong!

"Sir, how..."

"Can it, Wes! I need a list of all air and sea traffic leaving Guadeloupe in the past three hours; track and destination, and I need it yesterday!" Commander Ryan Bennett ordered his Executive Officer.

Questions could wait – the Captain had spoken...

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Hanging up the satellite phone he relayed the order to the Combat System Officer – his department ran the state-of-the-art SPY-1D AEGIS radar system that was at the heart of the destroyer. The department's motto was '*In God We Trust. All Others We Track...*'

Next, he called up *HMS Dragon* and spoke directly to her Captain, requesting anything that her equally state-of-the-art, mast-top mounted Sampson AESA radar had detected in the previous three hours. Within minutes, all relevant information began to flood through the high-speed, digital Link 16 data system that allowed NATO warships to exchange radar and fire control data.

As a final act he ordered the ship's course altered towards the south.

Somewhere in the Caribbean

I felt woozy as I struggled to open my eyes.

For a moment, I thought that I was safely back in my cabin on the *Atlantic Storm*, but something didn't feel right and I had a headache. My vision was blurry as I looked around me and it took me a moment to focus. I was on a boat, that was for certain and pretty obvious; I could feel the motion – we were definitely at sea and I could hear the engines throbbing away beneath me.

I sat up, noticing almost immediately that my t-shirt and shorts were both missing, but I was glad to see that I was still wearing my one-piece swimsuit and my sneakers. I looked around me, taking in my surroundings; I was sitting on a scrappy looking mattress on a narrow bunk, in a small cabin.

I began to feel scared and I felt fear. The fear rapidly grew inside me and I began to cry, sobbing as it gripped me from within. I just sat there on the bunk as I struggled to get my mind in order – how had I got here? I could not think; I was too scared... Where was I? The tears streamed down my face as I continued to sob; I could not stop them – I was alone and my family was gone... Maybe for ever! What was going to happen to me?

My mind cleared for just a moment and I seized upon it, I stopped crying and it all started to come back to me in a giant rush: Guadeloupe, the beach, shopping, t-shirts – the hand across my mouth.

I remembered struggling against the hands that held me as I was dragged away from the daylight, away from my family. I remembered a sharp pain as somebody slapped me hard across the face – I reached up and felt the dried blood around my nose. I then had a vivid memory of an evil smelling rag that had then been clamped over my nose and mouth. I was still fighting even as I succumbed to the blackness...

... Then I woke up – here and now. The fear came back with a vengeance – I was shaking as I started to sob again, the tears flowing freely. I had only ever felt so scared, just that one time before; when Daddy had been murdered in Gotham, just before Dave and Josh had rescued us – but back then, I had not been alone...

"Mommy..."

Time since abduction: 00:03:46

The Atlantic Storm

Pointe-à-Pitre Guadeloupe

"Mommy... Where is my sister?"

I had moved from the deck to a more dignified position on a couch where I was hugging my young son who was very scared.

"I don't know, Danny... But I promise you, I *will* find her, and those that took her, they *will* motherfucking pay!" I hissed.

Danny looked up at me in surprise; I never usually swore in front of Danny or Anne-Marie. As I looked down at my scared seven-year-old son I came to a difficult decision and I focussed on him.

"Sorry, Danny; I should not have sworn like that, but I am really pissed and... Well, it's time you learnt a secret – a *big* secret..."

Time since abduction: 00:03:51

Nine minutes later

It was unbelievable – I had trouble taking it all in... I just sat there, stunned.

I looked over at Dad – or should it be 'Kick-Ass' – and Mom, or rather 'Hit Girl', then over to Chloe... Megan just smiled at my confusion.

"It's all true, Danny – I'm Wildcat..."

"Chloe is Shadow, Josh is Jackal, Curtis is Trojan...?" I added.

"Very good!" Dad commented. "It will make it much easier for us to operate and for us to find your sister if you know the truth, Danny – your sister is 'Rogue', by the way..."

"Now, Daniel..." Mom began getting my attention.

My proper name – that worried me, and for a moment I felt scared again; there was something cold in the way Mom spoke.

"You will *never* breathe a word, Daniel Lizewski, or there *will* be consequences."

Somewhere in the Caribbean

The door to the cabin flew open.

The man was *huge*, but I still glared at him – it had been a while since my sobbing session and for now, I was over it.

"Don't look at me like that, you fucking little bitch!"

The man had a strange accent – not American, but not quite British – maybe a mix of the two.

"Why are you keeping me?" I demanded, forcing myself to be brave.

"Your Mummy and Daddy are going to pay for your safe return... Won't that be nice?"

"Not nearly as nice as watching my Daddy smash your face in!"

Maybe that was not the best thing to say!

I was grabbed roughly by the arm, dragged off the bed and thrown towards the door, crumpling to the deck where I caught my knee and grazed it making me call out in pain.

"Get up!"

I was dragged out of the cabin and up some steps. I saw that I was on a yacht – an older yacht, made of wood. I found myself being picked up and carried down a gang-way before being thrown into the backseat of an old SUV.

"Move and I cut you – understand?" The man growled.

I flinched at the sight of the very large knife and nodded, my brief show of bravery had evaporated.

Time since abduction: 00:04:11

The Atlantic Storm

Pointe-à-Pitre Guadeloupe

The waiting was the worst.

I felt awful and I knew that everybody else did too. All were back aboard and we were just awaiting the inevitable. My mind was racing with possibilities – money was not a worry; we had plenty. Part of me said to just pay up and get Anne-Marie back. However, my core principals came to the fore – *somebody* was going to pay and it was *not* going to be me...

To keep myself occupied, I put my mind to contemplating all of the *wonderful* things that I could do to whomever was behind my daughter's kidnapping – stress made me *very* creative! I was just contemplating if you really *could* cut somebody's heart out with a spoon, when my avenging thoughts were cut off as another padded envelope arrived.

..._...

Again, it was straight to the point.

\$1,000,000
18.1467N 64.6095W
48 HOURS

In the padded envelope was another item of clothing – my seven-year-old daughter's shorts. I did not know how to react – my hands balled into fists as I closed my eyes, trying to control my many emotions. I felt conflicting emotions; I wanted to cry, I wanted to scream, I also wanted to hurt somebody, and I wanted to kill – oh, I so wanted to kill... I looked up to see that my family and my friends were too scared to come near me...

Only, I needed them, so I forced a smile and gave in to my emotions, allowing the tears to fall. Chloe and Stephanie ran forward and they hugged me as Ryan took the note and headed for the Bridge. He was back within two minutes.

"Those co-ordinates are for Road Harbour in the British Virgin Islands. We can be there in eleven hours. The engines are warm – we can depart immediately."

Time since abduction: 00:04:11

Time to deadline: 01:23:54

***Chapter 234*: Rogue Search**

*That night
Wednesday*

The Atlantic Storm

*Location: 20nm northwest of Guadeloupe
Position: 16.5584° N 61.8272° W
Course: 315°, Speed: 20 knots, 1,292nm logged*

Time: 22:00

We left the dock at nine that night.

We were heading north towards the British Virgin Islands where I hoped to be reunited with my daughter. The whole situation was getting to me and I needed to be on my own, so I headed to my stateroom and closed the door behind me. I lay on the bed, just staring at the ceiling for about half an hour before I was disturbed – it was Dave.

"Talk to me..."

I took a deep breath and sat up.

"I'm worried about how this is going to pan out."

"We've been in tough situations before," Dave pointed out.

"Yeah, but this is different – we volunteered for this shit..."

"I know; I know – Anne-Marie did not."

"We promised to protect them with our lives..." I reminded my partner.

"We did, and that is exactly what we are doing right now. We are heading north to get our girl and we will *not* stop, till we get her back."

That same time

Somewhere in the Caribbean

I soon found myself in yet another boat, a much bigger boat. Only, this time, I was not alone in the cabin.

My hands were bound behind me and I was sitting in a soft chair. I could see out a window, but all I could see was water – a lot of water. In front of me were two men and they were both armed with pistols in holsters under their arms. There was also a woman – she had a pistol on her belt.

My bravery had decided to return, so I decided to see how far I could push them.

"I need to pee."

"Cross your legs."

"I have been – I *really* need to pee!" I persisted.

"For fuck's sake!" One of the men swore.

"I'll take the little bitch!" The woman hissed.

She yanked me out of the chair, dragged me down a corridor and then she opened a door and shoved me into a bathroom. I just stared at her.

"My hands are tied; how can I go!"

The woman muttered under her breath as she spun me around roughly and untied my hands.

"Get peeing!"

"I'm not going with you watching!"

The woman turned her back in disgust.

"I don't trust you, you'll look..."

The woman glared at me like I was an idiot. Then she punched the wall and slammed the door shut. I was alone and now I had to figure out how to escape... I looked around the bathroom – it was all marble. I did need to pee, so I did, but took my time over it.

"You done?"

"Almost..." I yelled back.

I had to think fast... I opened the cupboard under the sink – bingo! After finishing my work, I banged on the door.

"I think we have a problem?" I called out.

The door was yanked open and...

"Oh, shit!" The woman yelled as she saw the toilet overflowing, courtesy of seven strategically placed toilet rolls.

The woman ran off towards some stairs and I took off in the opposite direction, pushing my way through a door and down another corridor. There ahead of me was another door, a sliding one and it was partially opened. I moved forward quickly and quietly, there, I found myself peering through an open door which appeared to lead onto the bridge.

I crept through the door and found the place empty – ahead of me was a whole load of hi-tech equipment and the wheel. I knew I had merely seconds before I was found – there, over to the right, a phone! Mom had drilled into my brother and me, a number for use *only* if we were in big trouble – I dialled it.

Safehouse F Chicago, USA

I was in the Command Centre with Kim and Matty when I heard a chilling sound.

"What's that?" Kim asked.

"It's the 'Hit Phone'..." I replied ominously.

"Mindy will kill you for calling it that..."

I hit the button to answer the call and a voice came over the speakers, echoing around the room.

"Hello?"

Jesus Christ!

"Anne-Marie! Where are you?"

"I... I don't know – I'm on a massive white boat..."

"Look around, can you see land?"

"No, just ocean – it's dark..."

"Look around you, anything... anything that can help us..."

"Err, G – W – A – P... Somebody is coming..."

As we listened, we heard a door open and then voices – a man and a woman.

"The sooner we get that little bitch to the island, the happier I will be."

"She'll be safe there, no escape – unless she's a good swimmer!"

There was laughter which was rapidly cut short.

"What the fuck...?"

Anne-Marie screamed.

"No... No..."

There was the sound of a slap and then the call was cut off.

Somewhere in the Caribbean

I lay on the deck and felt the blood on my mouth.

"You fucking little bitch!" A man growled into my ear as I was dragged up from the deck.

I was carried back to the Main Salon and thrown onto the couch. As I landed, I felt a hand across my face – the pain was immense and I started sobbing, both out of pain and fear. My hair was seized and my head pulled back. I found myself staring into the dark eyes of one of the men.

"You see this?" A knife was shoved an inch from my eyeballs and I flinched backwards away from it. "Try anymore shit and I gut you like a fucking fish... Now sit your fucking arse down, like a good little girl and fucking behave!"

The Atlantic Storm

Time: 22:45

"Mindy – I've got Marty on the VC!"

Abby came running into the Sky Lounge, aft of the bridge and seized the remote, changing channel on the large-screen TV. I saw Marty and he was not smiling, behind him stood Kim.

"I have mixed news, Mindy, Dave – you need to listen to this..."

"Hello?"

I grabbed the remote from Abby and turned up the volume as I heard my daughter's voice... Tears began to well up inside me...

..._...

Then came the scream.

"No... No..."

There was total silence in the Sky Lounge as everybody there heard the slap. Several faces turned to look at me as I felt extreme anger building up within me. They *dared* to lay a hand on my seven-year-old daughter... They *dared* to hurt her...

I was brought back to my senses and everybody jumped as there was a sharp and loud, cracking sound. I looked down and saw that I had snapped the TV remote control in two.

I wrapped my arm around Mindy and focussed on Marty.

"At least we know that she is alive. We also have two new facts – she is being taken to an island, possibly a private island? We also have four letters – G, W, A and P."

"What do those letters mean?" I asked.

"Sorry, Dave – I have no idea..."

"I do."

We all turned to look at Ryan.

"A callsign. If she was on the bridge, then she may have seen the boat's callsign – or part of it..."

Marty interrupted Ryan.

"I have sixty-seven vessels with GWAP in their callsign. I'm gonna have to narrow things down a bit."

"See what you can dig out on private islands near the British Virgin Islands – especially people with 'massive' mega-yachts."

"I'll get back to you..."

Marty was gone.

Time: 23:00

We were heading north towards the British Virgin Islands and on the way, we would plan what we were going to do once we got there. I decided I needed to talk to everybody before anything went sideways. Dave did *not* agree with what I was about to say, but I pushed on anyway.

Everybody was crowded into the Main Salon and they all looked at me expectantly as I stood ready to speak. I took a deep breath and looked at them – my friends and my family.

"You all know what has happened. You also know that I am going to do *everything* and *anything* to get my daughter back. However, the risks will be high – we are no longer in Chicago, this is the real world where law and order does not exist and I don't want to put *any* of you at risk. Dave and I will execute the mission..."

I paused for a moment, out of curiosity, as I noticed Josh leaning into Chloe.

"You wanna do it, or shall I – you'll leave less of a mark..." He said calmly, but I could see irritation in his face.

"You wanna fucking bet?" Chloe replied. She looked livid and her eyes were flashing with anger – only I missed the danger.

I opened my mouth to continue when Chloe stood up, strode over to me and...

"You hit my Mom!" Danny exclaimed indignantly as the cringeworthy sound of skin slapping skin echoed around the Main Salon.

"Talk like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch!" Chloe growled ominously as Mindy put a hand up to her very pink looking left cheek and just stood there looking stunned.

"You hit my Mom!" Danny repeated.

"Yeah, I did, Danny; sometimes, she needs it. Very few people can slap Hit Girl and survive – however, I am one of them."

Chloe then turned to the stunned Mindy.

"You stopped being so goddamned stupid? We are *all* ready and willing to risk our lives to go after Anne-Marie – and don't you *fucking* forget it, or you'll just get yourself slapped again!" Chloe finished, sitting back down again, still fuming.

"You were saying..." Josh said to Mindy as he smirked.

"Forget I even spoke..." Mindy said very quietly as she blushed to match the outline of Chloe's hand on her left cheek

before turning and heading forward to her stateroom.

"We already have!" Cathy commented with a chuckle.

I went after Mindy.

I followed her into the stateroom, closed the door behind me and sat down on the couch by the portside windows.

"Mindy, you are not alone. We are all in this together – we are a team; we are Fusion... Even in the Caribbean!"

Mindy turned to me as she sat on the bed.

"Thank you, Stephanie, thank you for reminding me of that..." Mindy smiled. "Talk about embarrassing!"

"Yeah – it must have been; that handprint looks good though..." I grinned. "I've got to look after my Mum, don't I!"

Time: 23:30

Nobody mentioned the embarrassing situation from earlier – which I was very happy about – as Dave and I began to prepare our equipment.

Me, being me, I was always prepared... We had no idea what sort of a fight was before us – but I was fairly certain that it would be on a tropical island somewhere. We could not exactly bring all of our usual vigilante gear with us – our normal combat suits were not wearable in the tropical conditions of the Caribbean, so we would need something more lightweight and suitable for both the climate and the terrain. In the boat garage that was located in the stern of the *Atlantic Storm*, I had several discrete equipment packs stowed there that were masquerading as life-rafts.

For any waterborne assault, there were a pair of Zodiac FC470 Commando Assault Boats with 55-horsepower outboard engines. Each could carry ten persons with their equipment, although we would use both for any assault. Dave and I broke open two of the other containers that contained equipment for everybody on board – except for Danny, Abby and Ryan, of course!

We called everybody to the Aft Bridge Deck and began to hand out equipment.

..._...

Each person received a pair of pants and a combat shirt in the British MTP (Multi-Terrain Pattern) colour scheme. On top of those would be worn an MTP assault vest for weapons and equipment. Each vest was also customised with additional composite light-weight body armour and the wearer's normal colours were added to the vest to allow for easy identification in battle. For footwear, I supplied each person with a set of light-weight Viper MTP boots. Everybody was also provided with a facemask that would conceal their identity, covering the area around their eyes and nose. I allowed individual users to select their own headgear, be it a bush hat, baseball cap, or a Fast helmet. Light-weight gloves were also provided.

Those who selected the Fast helmet would have the option of carrying night-vision equipment. Another container from below was filled with weapons. I had everybody's favourite pistol and PDW available, plus some heavier weapons.

Those heavier weapons included the FN Minimi Mk3 in 5.56-millimetre calibre, the FN40GL-S 40-millimetre grenade launcher and Kick-Ass' favourite, the Atchisson AA-12 12-gauge automatic shotgun.

..._...

Danny was wide-eyed as he watched all the activity going on throughout the *Atlantic Storm*. Cathy was preparing medical supplies which would be added to everybody's kit. Ryan was on the Bridge keeping an eye out for anybody sailing too close – we did not want to be spotted with so much illegal equipment up on deck! Josh insisted on playing motivational tracks over the yacht's music system at full blast; these included Queen's, 'One Vision' and Survivor's, 'Eye of The Tiger' among others...

Everybody spent time checking out their equipment and weapons to ensure that everything was ready. Kick-Ass and Jackal would carry the heavy weapons while Psyche and Wildcat would be our light-fighters carrying the lightest loads; each with a pistol and an MP7A2 only, plus knives, and relying on their skills. On that note I had made Wildcat's day by producing an updated set of claws for her to wear, which were embedded in a set of light-weight

gauntlets.

Both Megan and Stephanie spent a lot of time sharpening their knives – Stephanie was a very different girl now that she was preparing for action and she was very serious as she focussed on her tasks.

Shadow and I would carry a P90 and G36C respectively, plus a selection of our usual bladed weapons. Trojan and Splinter would both carry P90s and they would be tasked with protecting the exfiltration zone and our backs during the initial assault. They would also be backup, as required. Medic would remain with the boats, as required – we seriously hoped not to require her medical skills.

Neptune and Hal would remain on the *Atlantic Storm*. Hal would co-ordinate the attack as she was used to doing in Chicago. Extra technical support would be provided by Battle Guy who would connect via satellite to assist Hal – we had sworn Marty to secrecy; I did not want anybody else in Chicago to find out about Anne-Marie.

As for the yacht itself? To tone down the white hull we had tons of dark grey camouflage netting to hang about the superstructure before the attack so we could come in close without being seen in the moonlight.

All of the fervent activity and preparation kept everybody from worrying about Anne-Marie. We even kept Danny busy with numerous tasks as he was *really* missing his twin sister. There was another problem too; Dave.

Our daughter had been with me, when she had been taken. Nobody blamed me, at least nobody dared to say anything about it, but I detected something in Dave's manner towards me. There was nothing that I could put my finger on, but I felt like he was blaming me for losing Anne-Marie. He was caring and loving towards me, as he always was – only something felt different between us.

That moment was *not* the time for a rift between us, so I decided to leave it until our daughter was safe.

Early the following morning

Thursday

New Year's Eve

The Atlantic Storm

Location: 20nm north of Saint Kitts

Position: 17.6068° N 62.8969° W

Course: 297°, Speed: 20 knots, 1,380nm logged

Time: 01:40

We had finally identified where Anne-Marie was being held – at least we hoped so!

Traffic analysis completed by *USS Churchill* had discovered a boat leaving Guadeloupe and that boat had departed on a northerly course about thirty minutes after Anne-Marie had gone missing. That boat had stopped at an island – a small privately owned island. Another, much larger craft had been tracked on a course similar to that which we were now on. With some more detective work by *HMS Dragon* and Marty we also knew the identity of that yacht and more crucially, who owned it – that yacht had the callsign: GWAP6.

Our final destination was to be Buck Island. The island was privately owned by a British ex-pat and it was located in the British Virgin Islands. I was getting excited: we had an amphibious assault to plan – a first for me and a first for Fusion.

Dave was very keen to go all Matrix – if we let him!

Time since abduction: 00:08:41

Time to deadline: 02:19:24

Later that morning

Thursday

The Atlantic Storm

Location: 2.2nm east of Buck Island

Position: 18.4309° N 64.5173° W
1,485nm logged

Time: 09:00

We were at anchor and as close to our final destination as we dared.

We had, after much deliberation, put together an assault plan and we were going to act on it to the best of our abilities. Ryan had spoken with Commander Perrin and Lieutenant Commander Edwards, advising them of certain aspects of our plan – there was nothing that the two Naval Officers could do openly, but if we happened to blow the lid off a drug cartel, for example, *then* they could act – however, they both agreed that running an exercise close by, would be acceptable...

..._...

Almost everybody was below, getting some much needed sleep before the night's action. My first destination was the Bridge as it was to be our Command Centre. Following me to the Bridge were Ryan and Dave.

"Time to go purple, gentlemen!" I said with a grin as I reached under the starboard helm console, slid back a hidden protective cover and pressed a recessed button, twice.

A small touchscreen keypad illuminated on the right hand portion of the upper console below the wind speed and direction indicators. I rapidly entered an eight-digit code and the right-hand of the four nineteen-inch touch-screens changed to a menu system of twelve options. Dave chuckled at the purple tint that appeared around the menu.

"Nice!" He quipped.

I ignored him as I selected option 4 on the menu: '**UAF-1 ESM**'. The Racal ESM or Electronic Support Measures system was totally illegal on the *Atlantic Storm*; just don't ask where I got it! The system was designed to sniff out electronic signals, such as search radars, and tell us how far away the transmitter was and in which direction. It could even tell us the frequency and band which could help us identify the transmitting vessel. Even better, we could detect them *using* their radar, before they detected us *with* their radar.

The ESM system would be critical in getting close to the island without being detected. If we identified a radar on or around the island, we would then be able to jam it with the next option on the menu; option 5: '**Type 675 ECM**'. The Thorn EMI ECM or Electronic Counter Measures system was again, totally illegal – probably more so than the ESM; if you must know, the two systems fell off the back of a Brazilian Type 23 frigate! The ECM system was capable of jamming a wide variety of electronic signals, including communications, but primarily radar. The ESM system would identify a signal and the ECM system would then jam it, making it useless.

Ryan actually raised an eyebrow as he perused the list of options.

"Most of these weren't purchased from your average yacht chandler!" He mused and I felt myself blushing slightly.

"They were... Just not a normal one..." I replied before lapsing into embarrassed silence.

"When do we use option 1; that looks like fun?" Ryan enquired.

"You'll know when you need it, Commander."

Dave and I went below to get some sleep

Time since abduction: 00:14:11
Time to deadline: 02:13:54

***Chapter 235*: Rogue Rescue**

That evening
Thursday

The Atlantic Storm

Location: 2.2nm east of Buck Island
Position: 18.4309° N 64.5173° W
1,485nm logged

Time: 19:00

Down below it was a show of organised chaos as everybody was changing into their combat gear.

Danny sensibly stayed on the bridge with Ryan, well out of the way. I was wearing the MTP pants, shirt and boots. Around my waist I had a webbing belt that carried my communications equipment, plus it supported a holster on my right hip for a Glock 23, which was strapped to my thigh. Arrayed around the belt were spare magazines and a nine-inch combat knife. Once I was changed, I went around the yacht checking on everybody else.

First stop was the bow.

..._...

Chaos, was a very accurate word to describe what I found!

The only one with pants on was Tommy. Megan and Stephanie were still in their underwear and seemed to be struggling with their assault vests.

"You guys getting dressed anytime soon?" I asked.

"Sorry, we were sorting out all these straps..." Stephanie said.

"Curtis, eyes off Megan's ass!" I warned.

"I don't mind..." Megan began.

"Get some clothes on – we have a mission..." I grumbled.

I decided to leave them to it!

Time: 21:20

"You look ready to kick ass!"

"Funny, Neptune!"

"Sorry, Kick-Ass – just trying to lighten the mood... Wow..."

Shadow appeared on the bridge, blushing beneath her mask, an MTP baseball cap on her head backwards.

"Very nice, daughter of mine!"

"Thanks, Dad!" Shadow replied, giving me and her Dad a twirl.

She wore the same kit as me, except that she bore an FN Five-seven in a holster on her right hip and she held her bō-staff in her left hand with her P90 suspended from the front of her assault vest and a pair of spare fifty-round magazines on her left hip.

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Jackal appeared next and he carried much the same equipment as Shadow, apart from the bō-staff. On the back of

his vest he carried his Ninja-To and on his chest he bore three Fairburn-Sykes fighting knives. He smiled appreciatively at his girlfriend and slapped her on her behind which received a giggle in response! Neptune rolled his eyes and went back to his own preparations as Wildcat, Psyche and Splinter appeared, closely followed by Trojan and Medic.

Neptune grinned as his wife showed off her own armour and the SIG Sauer P226 in a holster on her belt. Medic in turn checked out her husband's body armour and his own SIG pistol. Hal took her place on the bridge, setting up a pair of laptops on the table at the couch. Hal was also wearing body armour; I was taking no risks. Around her slim waist was a belt with a Glock 17 pistol in a holster.

Kick-Ass and I checked over each and every member before Chloe and Josh did the same for the two of us. We were finally ready.

Even Danny wore body armour – as I said, I was taking no risks.

Some hours earlier

Buck Island

I was brought ashore.

There was no way to know where I was, except that I had been able to see plenty of land. I had been dragged off the yacht – a much bigger yacht than the *Atlantic Storm* and thrown into the back of an open topped SUV. I think I might have annoyed the two men and the woman – they seemed to enjoy throwing me around and I could feel bruises all over my body.

We drove up a stone track that led towards a hill that had a building on it. The SUV pulled up outside the building, which turned out to be several buildings, and I was physically handed to another man – what was I? A suitcase! He did not look happy as I smiled at him and he slapped me around the face, which stung. I did my best not to cry, but just glared at the man, wishing that he would drop dead – I had already figured out that if I was going to survive, I would have to toughen up. The man began to issue orders and I was thrown at the woman who dragged me down some steps and towards a swimming pool.

The woman was gripping my swimming costume tightly and she used it to drag me over to a building to one side of the pool.

"Hey – the swimsuit is new!" I called out.

"You think I give a shit!"

The woman pushed me hard through an open door and I fell into a metal something and then to the concrete floor. I felt something trickling down my face and when I reached up to it, my hand came away red. Then the door was slammed shut and I heard a bolt slammed into place.

I jumped up and banged on the door, yelling to be let out, but all I heard was the woman's feet walking away. I gave up and sank to the floor – I had never felt so alone. I had no idea where I was and nobody else did, either. My family were hundreds of miles away and now I knew that I would never see them again, ever...

I started to cry again.

That night Thursday

Location: Two miles to the southeast of Buck Island

Time: 23:20

The attack had begun.

Through the darkness the island waited, swathed in deceptively protective darkness. Beside a dock at the north end of the island lay an enormous yacht, much bigger than the *Atlantic Storm* – it would be secondary target. Our reconnaissance had shown that coming ashore near to the residence, at the southern tip of the island, would be very

dangerous and probably very deadly for us all, thanks to towering cliffs and the roaming, well-armed, guard force.

Instead, we could come ashore at the north-eastern tip of the island. From there we would move almost the full length of the 43-acre island – almost 850-metres – taking out any armed men as we went. Most of the island was dense tropical greenery and it would take a couple of hours to make a stealthy approach to the residence which was perched on the top of a small hill.

..._...

The two, 4.7-metre Zodiac Commando Assault Boats were launched from the stern and everybody climbed aboard. After a final check of persons and equipment, the two coxswains: Kick-Ass and Jackal, gently backed away from the *Atlantic Storm* before turning for the distant shore.

As I crouched next to my partner, I felt feelings of hope course through me – we had to succeed; I needed my daughter back. However, as I looked back at my yacht, I had a funny feeling that I was not gonna see her again...

I quickly lost sight of the 120-foot yacht, blacked out as it was and covered in copious amounts of camouflage netting.

Time since abduction: 01:04:11

Time to deadline: 01:23:54

The next morning – early!

Friday

New Year's Day, 2016

Time: 00:01

The north-eastern beach of Buck Island

The attack had begun and we were ashore.

The two assault boats were pulled high up the beach and into the trees, well away from the surf, and anchored. Kick-Ass and Jackal moved forwards and spread out, raising their Minimi machine guns to their shoulders and scanning the area through the NVGs on their helmets.

Shadow and I moved forwards between the boys and raised our suppressed PDWs. We both bore NVGs on our helmets too. The beach was clear, just as we had expected. Splinter and Trojan hid amongst the palm trees with their suppressed P90s at the ready.

Wildcat, with Psyche beside her, ran up the beach and they both took off to the south, towards the main building on the south cliff of the island some seven-hundred metres away.

"Fusion ashore!" I called.

"Hal copies Fusion ashore – see you in a few hours – bring back our girl!"

I checked my watch, it was just after midnight.

'Happy New Year,' I thought to myself.

Time since abduction: 01:04:51

Time to deadline: 01:23:14

Time: 00:12

It was Psyche who got in the first kill of the night.

"Wildcat; I have a contact, twenty yards ahead, in the trees. Looks like a guard, smoking."

"Go for the kill, Psyche – and keep it quiet!" I reminded her.

In my NVGs, I saw the slim frame of Psyche move forwards silently, her boots making almost no noise on the soft

sand and tropical grass. I watched in anticipation as she closed on the unsuspecting guard and then I saw her leap into the air, coming down on the man and driving a nine-inch blade through his neck while her other hand clamped over his mouth. The guard fell to the ground and I saw Psyche remove her knife and stab the man again, this time through the heart.

"One down!" Was the curt response which sounded so cold when delivered in a monotone British accent – 'oh, I've just killed a fly, oops'.

That girl was cold when she had to be – I supposed it was her training from before we found her – still gave me the creeps though! I caught up with my friend, who was nonchalantly wiping off her blade on the guard's clothing before replacing it in the scabbard on her belt.

We moved off as soon as we had dragged the guard into deeper foliage.

..._...

Behind us, the main assault force followed our cleared path. We took our time – rushing made noise and noise could get Rogue killed.

The next two kills were mine – I drove the claws of my left hand into another unsuspecting guard's throat, ripping it open and I pushed his face into the sand until he quit moving. His pal appeared, busily zipping up his pants – his weapon, an AK-74 assault rifle, was leaning against a tree. As he reached for it, he saw his fellow guard lying prone on the trail. He lived for only a few more seconds as I drove the right set of claws into his left side, destroying his left kidney and chopping up his intestines. The other set of claws were driven directly into the man's heart, cutting it into three pieces.

The massive internal bleeding and severe shock killed him very quickly.

Time: 01:15

"I'll say this for him: he had a lot of guts!"

"Fuck me!" I groaned at the incredibly bad joke. "We *really* need to talk!"

Psyche had just ripped open a man's stomach with her knife before following through by stabbing her blade through his heart.

"Quit your bitching, Wildcat – we have work to do and it's two all, I believe..."

With that, Psyche vanished into the undergrowth and I rapidly followed on behind. Was that crazy bitch keeping score?

..._...

We skirted around the buildings at the base of the first hill.

That would be for the main assault force to handle. It was tough going – the night was humid and the undergrowth was thick. Our boots kept us upright on the slippery bits and we moved in complete silence, searching for our next prey.

Two-hundred yards' behind

We were the main assault force – all four of us!

The man who lived on the island had to have a private guard force and we found them, fast asleep and spread across three chalet type huts down by the sea on the north-west side of the island. There *were* three men on guard duty – extra emphasis on 'were'!

Hit Girl and I ran forwards, directly at the men. They never saw us coming in the darkness as Hit Girl drove her knife into the throat of the first man, then she gently lowered him to the ground.

"Does it hurt...?" Hit Girl growled as she drove the blade deep into the man's heart. "Good, very good..."

I concentrated on my own targets – the two men were eight feet apart. I whirled around, one blade of my bō-staff severing the head of the first man as I finished my movement by driving the opposite blade directly into the other guard's heart – he was dead before he hit the soft white sand beneath him.

Kick-Ass took the first chalet and Jackal the second – Hit Girl took the third while I stood watch.

The men never knew what killed them.

I pulled a suppressed Walther P22 pistol from my webbing and promptly fired off six rounds – plink, plink, plink, plink, plink, plink. The pistol had been selected precisely for the reduced sound emitted by the weapon. Outside the hut, nobody would have heard a thing...

I checked that the hut had six corpses before turning for the door.

All three seemed to reappear at the same time.

I had not heard a thing, but all three changed out the magazine on their Walther P22 pistols before stowing them in their webbing. Kick-Ass held up six fingers, Hit Girl – five, Jackal six. Seventeen kills – just like that.

We moved off into the jungle.

Up ahead

I was determined not to fuck up.

Not like the last time, when I ended up dangling from a tall building, over a thousand feet above Chicago! I had a single mission – to rescue my little sister. I could *not* fuck up – not even once... I was in my element – I dug deep into my programming and focussed on nothing but the mission. I was Psyche, I was a killer, I was unbeaten...

I was also annoyed to find no more men to kill!

Time: 02:25

"This is Psyche; we're at the residence... approaching from below the pool..."

"Copy that!" Hal replied.

"Take care!" Hit Girl added.

We were approaching up a steep grassy slope with trees and undergrowth, well away from any pathways.

We had hiked almost a kilometre during our detour around buildings and pathways. Above us was the swimming pool. To the left were the pool house and behind it, a pair of chalets. To the right was the main residence. So far, nobody knew we were on the island – however, several men were dead and they would be missed sooner rather than later...

I took a moment to look out to see – there was something out there; I could feel it. Was it good, or were we in deeper shit than we already were? When you looked at it from a certain point of view, Fusion had just invaded a foreign country. The British Virgin Islands, were a British overseas territory and the British had fought wars over less...

We separated and I went to the left – towards the pool house, while Wildcat continued around to visit the chalets. I took a brief look behind me with my NVGs and smiled as I made out Shadow, Hit Girl, Jackal and Kick-Ass approaching up the slope in the near distance.

..._...

The pool house was dark and the door was closed.

I turned the handle and carefully pulled the door open – the hinges were obviously well oiled. I scanned the area with the NVGs, enabling the active infra-red. I could see a blanket and some other items – a plate with a partially eaten

sandwich and a can of Coke.

Rogue!

I quickly searched the pool house and sadly, I found nothing else.

"Fusion – just found where they were holding somebody – no joy, though."

"Copy that!" Hal replied.

I left the pool house and immediately ran into another guard – I pulled out my knife, but he deflected it.

Time: 02:50

As I watched the residence from a hundred yards away, I saw Psyche appear and immediately get into a fight with a guard.

The girl could move when she needed to and ever since landing on the beach, she had been an ice cold killer. As a vigilante, she had to control her temper and limit the killing, but here on the island, I had let her off the leash, so to speak and she was working out beautifully. I also knew that she was very, very pissed off about somebody seizing her little sister and she wanted revenge, just as much as I did.

The man she was fighting, was good, but Psyche was smaller and more agile; she dodged his knife thrusts with jumps and dives, rolling along the ground at one stage. I did not dare say anything over the comms, in case I distracted her. Then the nine-year-old girl drove her knife into the man's chest and I saw blood erupt out of the man's still beating heart. The blood splashed over Psyche as she lowered the man to the ground and then stood up.

She turned to face us and the young Brit threw us a casual salute, before heading up the stairs away from the pool. I just chuckled to myself and I saw Shadow shaking her head, but smirking all the same.

All hell seemed to break loose!

I was hauled out of the bed and dragged down a corridor. I could hear gunfire and I was scared – it was dark and there was shouting and flashes and... I was pushed into a room and the door was slammed shut and locked.

I covered in the corner and just shook with fear. It had been so close, that man – he had tried to remove my swimsuit. Only minutes before, he had pulled me out of the pool house and taken me to his room. I had no idea what he had in mind, but he obviously wanted me naked for whatever it was...

Then the gunfire had started and interrupted things.

I heard the gunshots and we all bolted up the hill, ignoring all further attempts at stealth.

Over to the left, in the second chalet, I had seen the flash of gunshots, then Wildcat had emerged and I could see blood dripping from her claws. She headed towards the main residence, following in her partner's wake.

Jackal and Kick-Ass ran up and over to the left to get into position to cut off reinforcements that might come up the stone track. I followed Shadow over the perfectly manicured lawn, dropping a guard with a throwing knife. We dropped down onto a bricked drive where there was a parked SUV.

As I passed by, I attached a remote charge to the underneath and then continued on towards the residence.

Dammit!

I had not been quick enough and that bastard had got two shots off – both had missed, but the damage had been done. However, the bastard had paid, with my claws in his heart... I dived out of the chalet and saw Psyche pushing her way into the residence.

By the time I caught up with her, she was raging. The young girl had pinned a guard against the wall, the muzzle of her MP7 buried deep in his throat.

"Where is she?" Psyche bellowed as she drove her right knee upwards into the man's stomach.

"I – don't – know..." The man gasped.

"There must be a hundred reasons why I shouldn't blow you away. Right now, I can't think of one..."

With that, Psyche literally blew the poor bastards head apart with a three-round burst. The girl was gone before the body had hit the ground.

As Shadow and I ran down the steps towards the front door of the residence, we came under heavy fire.

I dived to the left and Shadow to the right, we both engaged with our heavier weapons. The fire was accurate too as bullets pinged off the stonework that we were hiding behind. Then I heard some bad news.

"Contact! Contact! Contact!"

It was Kick-Ass and then I heard the FN Minimis commence chattering away and I knew that reinforcements were trying to come in from behind us. I returned fire, dropping a man – we had to move and we had to move soon, Rogue's life was at stake.

Dammit, we were so close!

The Residence

Time: 03:05

"Who the bloody hell is attacking us?"

"We have no idea boss – we seem to have lost several men already, but we have extra men coming up from the barracks on the mainland and they will cut off the attackers' escape route. A group of men are cutting off the residence, as per standing orders."

"Are they soldiers?"

"We have no idea; nobody has actually seen them yet."

"Are they here for the girl?"

"No way – no way they could have found out where we took her. The girl's parents are just rich fuckers – no way they could have had an operation mounted this quickly. It's probably just a competitor, boss."

"Whoever they are – kill them and if possible bring one to me – I want answers!"

Shadow and I were able to break out as we laid down some heavy fire.

The main door was closed to us, but that was soon remedied as I slapped a block of C4 onto the locking mechanism in the centre. I yanked out the activation tag and dived behind the nearest wall...

There was a crashing explosion and part of the door sailed over our heads. We both surged forwards, finding two dead men – at least it might have been two; it was difficult to tell... My Glock 23 barked out orders of death as we moved forwards. I felt a bullet strike my body armour – damn it hurt! I swapped my Glock to my left hand and raised my G36C in my right – pouring death in two directions as I dived for cover behind a couch.

Shadow crashed down beside me as she swapped out the magazine in her FN Five-seveN pistol.

Atlantic Storm

Time: 03:18

Things did *not* seem to be going well.

I monitored all the voice traffic as the team fought. Beside me was Danny – or rather 'Ravage' as he should be called.

"We need to get closer, just in case..." Neptune announced as he spun the wheel and advanced the throttles.

There was a whopping sound from the radar system as a large contact was detected eighteen miles out and closing at six knots.

"We have company!"

Buck Island

We had joined up with Wildcat and Psyche in the kitchen.

Psyche had just put a bullet into a man's face after pistol whipping him with her SIG. She was smiling – the girl was enjoying the killing, just as I did...

"He says she's in there!" She growled over the comms pointing at a large wooden door.

I felt my heart beating harder – we were close.

"Kick-Ass – we have a location, northern-most building, ground level..."

"Copy!"

I placed another charge – this one smaller than before.

Again, I pulled the tab and crouched down.

..._...

The door burst open and I rolled in, shooting at anything that was over five feet tall.

I saw my daughter, right there, across the room behind the men. She was still wearing her one-piece swimsuit and sneakers, nothing else; she looked very scared as she huddled into the corner. I felt anger surge through me as I found myself desperately wanting to get close to my daughter so that I could hug her and get her out of that dangerous place.

"I have eyes on Rogue!"

There was an explosion from across the room as a window shattered and Kick-Ass made his entry, almost ripping the head off a man as he twisted the head in anger. Several men ran out of another door and as the other members of Fusion appeared, we took control of the room.

Shadow kept a lookout at one door, Wildcat the other.

..._...

"Well hello there!" I said as I saw the boss cowering on the floor – he matched his photo perfectly.

He did not seem too happy to see me...

First though, I had to see to my daughter. She was still in the corner of her room. Her eyes were tight shut and her arms were over her head and ears trying to block out the noise. I could see the streaks of tears on her dirty face as I approached. There was no recognition from her, she seemed too stunned to notice me as I knelt down beside her.

I gingerly reached out and touched her shoulder.

I felt the gloved hands take hold of me and I heard a voice.

"This is Hit Girl; I have Rogue – repeat, I have Rogue!"

I looked up into a face that was masked. I could not see who it was, but for some reason I felt safe, I had no idea why. All around me I could hear shouts and the sounds of battle being fought. It reminded me of the war films that Danny

loved to watch with Dave. I never liked them, but the place sounded just the same. Around me I could see death; people were dying as they tried to stop me from being rescued.

The gunfire began to fade and I was pulled around to face my rescuer.

"Are you okay?" The voice growled, but it felt familiar somehow.

I knew that I was safe, but I needed more...

I spoke through my sobs...

"I want my Mommy..."

"She's here, little one, she's here," I said as soothingly as I could and I hugged my daughter tightly.

Anne-Marie looked up at me, desperate for the love that she so desperately needed from the one person that was so badly *needed* at that moment.

"Where?"

The little girl looked around anxiously and a little confused.

"Right here..."

I just stared, uncomprehending, as Hit Girl reached up and began to pull off her helmet and mask.

Was I about to find out who Hit Girl really was? Then I saw blonde hair appearing and... Oh my... Mom?

"Mom!"

I hugged Mindy so tightly. My Mom... She was Hit Girl and she had come for me; I was safe, I was complete. I looked up as an enormous shape cast its shadow over the both of us. I recognised the green and yellow markings, it had to be Kick-Ass and I took a hopeful chance.

"Hi... Dad...?"

"Hi, sport – ready to go home?"

"Yes, please!"

Time: 03:30

***Chapter 236*: Rogue Descent**

Later that morning
Friday
New Year's Day 2016

Location: Buck Island

Time: 03:35

She was scared and she was shivering with the cold even as her Mother wrapped her arms around her.

She began to feel safe for the first time. The roughness of the military clothing and body armour against her skin felt surprisingly reassuring to her as the arms clung to her like glue. The sight of her Father, standing not too far away, clad in similar military clothing and body armour gave her a feeling of pride, security and well-being. She had been shocked to find out who had come to rescue her from captivity and even more shocked to find out who had been beneath the masks.

Her Father had replaced his own mask soon after allowing her to see his face, however her Mother, had not. She had rising suspicions about the identity of the other masked vigilantes who stalked the perimeter toting large and angry looking weaponry, ready to tear into anybody who dared to approach. She desperately wanted to leave, but her Mother was busy talking to her captor, using words, some of which she had never heard before, but all of which she knew were bad, very bad.

..._...

As she focussed on the man that had tormented her, she felt an intense anger building up inside of her, like she had never felt before in her short life. She had the irresistible urge to want to hurt the man and that thought scared the seven-year-old girl to her core.

As she watched, Hit Girl kicked the man in the chest, sending him sprawling onto his backside. His hands were bound behind him, so he yelled out in pain as he landed on the floor.

"Do you know *who* you were fucking with?" Hit Girl growled with venom in her tone.

The man just shook his head; he looked scared, really scared.

"Do you know *who* that little girl belongs to?"

Again, the man shook his head.

"I am Hit Girl; *she* is my daughter and *you* are going to die..."

A rush of recognition spread across the man's face.

Everybody knew about Hit Girl and what she was capable of. It was obvious by his expression that he knew he had made an enormous mistake. The fear in the man's face seemed to move on and he started to shake. I felt nothing but hatred for the man; I wanted him to die – he had hurt me and taken me from my family. I so wanted to hurt him. I got to my feet and walked over to Mom.

"Hi, honey," Mom said, looking down at me as I hung onto her arm.

I looked up into her eyes and then down at the man lying on the floor.

"I want to hurt him..."

I saw shock in my Mom's eyes and on her face, but only for a moment as she smiled, ignoring the man on the floor. She knelt down and looked into my eyes.

"That is a big step, honey – but if you want to, you can."

I felt a hand on my shoulder – it was Dad, he nodded down at me and smiled.

"I want to kill him..."

Now, she was really scared.

The young girl wrapped her small hands around the butt of the small pistol – small it may have been, but the Walther P22 was still large in her hands. She shook from head to toe at the thought of the power that she held in her hands. The man was hauled to a kneeling position before her. A puddle of clear liquid spread across the floor beneath the man.

Her Mother gently whispered encouraging words into her ear as her larger hands braced the pistol.

"Breathe in and out, in and out. Keep calm, both eyes open, aim the pistol at your target – centre mass – the chest is good..."

The man's eyes were wide with fear. What shocked me was that I actually *enjoyed* his fear; I was in control, instead of him – he was at *my* mercy. Mom's whispering continued as I focussed on my target.

"Feel the anger, think of what he did to you and focus that into hate... When you are ready, gently squeeze the trigger, *again* and *again*..."

I focussed along the top of the weapon, keeping both eyes open. Then, as my breathing became slow and regular, I gently squeezed the trigger. The pistol jerked in my hand. My brain registered a flash, followed by a large bang and some smoke. I squeezed again, and again, and again – ten times I squeezed before the pistol just clicked with each further squeeze.

..._...

What did I feel? I felt nothing.

Mom gently lifted the pistol out of my hands, and I looked up into her face. She smiled down at me reassuringly before she stood up and pulled on her mask and helmet, switching her identity in an instant. Even though I was now looking at Hit Girl; I knew that she was still my Mom.

I finally turned to the man. He was lying on his back and his chest was covered in blood and his shirt was ripped to shreds. There was a large pool of blood spreading around him. I would have expected to have been freaked out by what I was seeing, but I was not. *Why?*

I looked up at my Father; he nodded his approval, as did the vigilante that I recognised as Shadow. Another man began to move on the other side of the room. There was a single gunshot and Shadow replaced the pistol in her holster – that man did not move again.

..._...

"Come on, little sis..."

I felt another arm around my shoulders – familiar. Despite the mask and blood-soaked combat gear, I knew that it was my big sister, Steph. I smiled, still overawed by everything that was happening around me.

"Here, put this on..." She said and handed me a t-shirt.

I dragged it on and was then helped into a thick camouflaged jacket.

"This is body armour; it will help protect you as we head back to the boat..." Steph went on calmly, securing the jacket around me – it was heavy.

I got a close up look at all the blood on Steph's gear – I hoped none of it was hers. I took in the large knife and the pistol on her belt – she was all business. I struggled to comprehend that my nine-year-old sister was armed to the teeth, but I had no chance to get my mind straight as I was dragged off by Steph, towards the destroyed door.

My sister pushed me roughly against the wall with her left hand and raised her machine-gun with her right, before sending a short burst down the corridor and then she moved, pulling me with her. Immediately behind me, were Mom and Dad.

Dad was facing the other way, watching behind us, an enormous machine-gun in his hands.

"You guys had better hustle – we have many inbounds from the north..."

"Copy that, Jackal – we're moving out now with Rogue."

I was worried now – the ride out was not going to be easy. We had my daughter; now we had to get her to safety... I tried to shield her from the violence and dead men, but that was going to be impossible. I forced myself to focus on the extraction and not my daughter.

As we came around a corner, we found ourselves back in the kitchen. There was a woman there – she wore body armour, but instantly dropped her pistol to the floor and raised her hands. She glared at Rogue who moved closer to Psyche, gripping her left arm tightly.

Psyche looked down at her sister for a moment.

"Did that woman hurt you?" She asked Rogue.

Rogue nodded. Psyche's lip curled, she raised her MP7 and sent three, three-round bursts into the woman, sending her flying backwards across the kitchen before the corpse crashed into a glass-fronted refrigerator. The body was quickly covered in cakes and other items of chilled food.

"She won't hurt you or anybody again... She got her just desserts!"

Shadow actually laughed as we moved out of the kitchen.

Gunfire erupted from the next corridor and Psyche yanked Rogue down and thrust her against the wall, putting herself between the danger and her sister.

Wildcat took up position behind Psyche as backup. Rogue put her hands over her ears and hunched against the wall – I could see her shaking with fear. Our stocks of ammunition were getting low – very low! We had to break out and soon – in the jungle and the trees we would stand a chance.

"I'll handle this..." I growled as I reached behind me and into my webbing. I winked at Kick-Ass "Corridors are my speciality!"

My hands reappeared holding an FN Five-seven in each hand. I dived over towards a small counter ignoring the bullets that hammered into it. I sat on my haunches, leaning against the counter and steadied my breathing, my two pistols held up either side of my head. A flood of six-year-old memories appeared unbidden in my mind, but I shoved them away and focussed on taking out the gunmen.

"Hit Girl is moving in three – two – one..."

I rose up from behind the counter, diving out to my right and began firing each pistol – not a round was wasted as I sent death in every direction – using the furniture to jump into the air, I rolled and flipped my way down the corridor using the walls as leverage for my next dive towards a target.

My eyes kept sight of each of the dozen or so gunmen as I moved. I dived to avoid their bullets, watching their aim and dodging accordingly – I felt bullets passing very close and I was certain some had clipped me.

I span as two bullets connected with my body armour throwing me off and I hit the corridor wall before falling to the floor. A man came close but I sent three bullets into his groin and another into his face dead centre. Three more men appeared at the far end of the corridor, only six feet away. I raised both pistols from my crouched position and was about to fire when the three men seemed to explode with blood and flesh flying...

I turned to see four weapons spitting fire as Kick-Ass, Shadow, Wildcat and Psyche poured bullets into the three men, shredding their bodies.

Silence reigned as the three bodies fell to the floor of the corridor in a pool of blood and shredded flesh.

"Don't do that again!" I cautioned Hit Girl as I strode past. "You looked beautiful out there..."

My wife smiled up at me as she reloaded her pistols before keeping them in her hands ready for use. Psyche came forward with Rogue, averting the younger girl's eyes from the carnage about her. Shadow and Wildcat came last, covering our rear. I was down to my last two-hundred round belt for the Minimi and had just two thirty-round magazines left for my G36K.

Jackal joined us as we left the residence. He had been lying prone on the ground, sending short bursts of fire north from his Minimi. I pressed the button on a detonator and the charge that I had placed on the SUV detonated, taking two men with it.

Kick-Ass sent half a dozen smoke rounds towards the road from his FN40GL-S 40-millimetre grenade launcher.

Time: 03:55

We ran across the beautifully manicured lawn and down into the trees.

From the sound of the gunfire, we would need to fight our way back down to the beach. Dawn was rapidly approaching and we could 'see' and 'be seen' as the light level steadily increased. We gathered together for a moment and checked over our ammo loads.

Hit Girl had just blown through forty rounds and I knew that she was low on ammo for her G36C. Shadow had just over half a magazine left for her P90 – about thirty rounds. Wildcat and Psyche had one thirty round magazine left, each.

We also had injuries – three. Nothing serious, but a dressing was applied to Hit Girl's upper left arm and the same for Psyche and Jackal. Psyche had taken a bullet to her right thigh – only a gouge, but it still bled and Psyche was ignoring the pain, just as Hit Girl did. Jackal had received shrapnel in his left shoulder from a grenade, but that would have to wait until we got back to the *Atlantic Storm*.

I was annoyed at being wounded, but shit happened and that corridor had been murder...

I was more worried about Psyche and Jackal, but they told me to 'stop fucking winging' – damn Brits! Once we were all sorted out, we began the trek back to our assault boats. Trojan and Splinter had reported men coming ashore near them, with vehicles. They were in a difficult situation – they could not engage without compromising our boats – our escape. They had to guard the boats and they would both be safe as long as nobody headed in their direction.

I turned as I heard a helicopter, back up at the residence.

That had to be more reinforcements... Damn it!

..._...

The first fifty yards were fine, but then the bullets began to fly from two different directions and we caught in a deadly crossfire.

Psyche and Wildcat were lying on top of Rogue, keeping her protected at all costs as the bullets cut through the dense vegetation. We were pinned down and our two Minimi machine guns were getting low on ammunition. We could not move without endangering our lives. Then I heard the whine of multiple turboshaft engines and the throb of many rotor blades – kind of reminded me of *Apocalypse Now*...

..._...

Four helicopters flew overhead in formation.

Two were United States Navy MH-60R Seahawk helicopters and were armed with four Hellfire missiles each. Flying as escort, were a pair of Royal Navy AW159 Wildcat HMA.2 maritime attack helicopters, crewmen evident in the doorways firing their pintle mounted, Browning M3M .50-calibre machine guns into the gunmen that were blocking our escape.

All that was missing was Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries at full volume!

A Hellfire missile was launched from one of the Seahawks; it rocketed off its launch rail and dived downwards towards a truck that was moving towards our position. The truck exploded seconds later. Two more missiles were

launched by the other Seahawk and there was a much larger explosion as the mega-yacht, moored at the pier, bulged in the middle and then exploded.

..._...

"Fusion, *Atlantic Storm*..."

It was Neptune.

"... Make for the pier, we're coming to get you!"

"Fusion copies – give us twenty minutes and say thanks for the gunships!" I replied.

It was not over, but we now had a chance. More men were heading down from the residence where they had been deposited by the earlier helicopter. Our rear was unprotected. In the expanding light of dawn, I could make out a blue helicopter flying a short distance away – there was a man in the main cabin and he was aiming a machine gun directly at us, but before I could do anything the helicopter exploded as a stream of .50-calibre rounds from one of the Wildcat helicopters shredded the fuselage.

..._...

Then the comms came to life again as Hal called in.

"Fusion, *Atlantic Storm* – bringing callsign Four Two Charlie onto your frequency..."

Huh?

"Break, break. Fusion this is Four Two Charlie – we have your backs. Go for the pier. Out!"

The voice had been British and the callsign was of a format used by the Royal Marines Commando. We were not alone on the island... Seconds later, we all heard medium machine-gun fire, about sixty yards distant and we could see tracer rounds from two different firing positions reaching out for the approaching gunmen.

I needed no further encouragement and we ran. Kick-Ass, his Minimi exhausted of rounds, seized hold of our daughter and scooped her up into his arms.

Wildcat and I were on the left flank when we heard movement in the trees.

That was when I fucked up – I was very tired and I missed the roots at my feet and as a result I sprawled to the ground losing the grip on my MP7. Wildcat made to help me up, but then a gunman appeared in ambush and he brought his rifle up...

Before either Wildcat or I could react – a fucking *bush* rose up and casually snapped the gunman's neck! The 'bush', winked at me and then vanished back into the undergrowth. Fuck me! That must have been a bloody Royal Marines Commando – between him and the gunman, I was going to need some clean knickers...

Atlantic Storm

Time: 04:31

I edged closer towards the island.

Dark smoke blocked out the approaching dawn. The almost two-hundred-foot mega-yacht was belching smoke as she lay on her port side, leaning away from the far side of the dock. Men were evident on the dock and around it – that would never do.

I had ferreted amongst Dave and Mindy's weaponry and selected a suitable solution.

"Go Rambo!" Hal quipped as I stepped out of the bridge, a FN40GL-S 40-millimetre grenade launcher in my hand.

I laughed and began to fire and reload the single-shot weapon, sending high-explosive rounds into the water around the dock. The men ran, some sending bullets in my direction. Several of the men fell as Splinter and Trojan engaged

them at the end of the dock.

Once the dock was clear, I ran back into the Bridge and guided us alongside the end of the dock. I ran to the bow and with Danny's assistance I got a pair of lines onto the dock. I had one final task – I sent a dozen smoke grenades onto the beach to shield us from the shore.

..._...

As we lay alongside the end of the pier, we were a sitting duck.

From the starboard bridge wing of the *Atlantic Storm*, I scanned the smoke-strewn beach and the trees through the binoculars. It was like a scene from some old war movie. I could make out burning debris and dead bodies. Splinter and Trojan were midway down the pier ensuring that nobody could make a rush attack on the *Atlantic Storm*. Across the pier the burning remains of the mega-yacht settled into the water.

I could hear the chatter of machine-gun fire, not too far away. The helicopters had been a godsend otherwise there would have been no way for me to bring the yacht into the dock.

Time: 04:44

Finally, I saw movement.

It was my daughter, or rather Shadow with her P90 to her shoulder, clearing the way ahead of the main assault force and on either side of her I saw Wildcat and Psyche. Less than a minute later came the lioness herself, Hit Girl, emerging triumphantly from the smoke and the trees, her head held high and in her arms, her cub.

I breathed an audible sigh of relief as behind her came the lion, in the form of Kick-Ass, guarding both his lioness and his cub. Beside him was Jackal – everybody was safe. Thank God!

My wife ran down the pier, urging everybody to move and helping them up the boarding ladder I had hung over the bow. Kick-Ass turned halfway down the pier and once everybody was past him, he raised the FN40GL-S 40-millimetre grenade launcher and sent a pair of rounds into the boathouse at the shore end of the pier. He turned back towards the yacht as the boathouse came apart in response to the pair of explosions within it.

Kick-Ass was grinning as he boarded the yacht. As soon as all were aboard, I advanced the throttles and we gently backed out away from the dock before turning and heading out to sea at twenty-two knots.

Time: 05:00

I was not letting my daughter out of my sight!

Once we were aboard, Dave carried her down below while I followed barely a foot behind. Cathy already had a bath running, so as soon as Anne-Marie set foot in our stateroom, she was stripped and dropped unceremoniously into the hot water. Cathy would check her over as soon as she was clean.

I stripped out of my clothes and body armour, and while my daughter relaxed in the tub, I took the opportunity to take a shower – I could still see Anne-Marie through the steamed up glass partition, so I was content. Dave was keeping us *both* in sight at all times as he pulled off his own body armour before helping our daughter wash her hair.

As she was swung into the bath I had seen the dark bruises all over her body, not to mention several cuts. I was incensed that anybody could do that to a young child. I felt absolutely nothing for those that had died – they had brought it upon themselves...

..._...

Once I had finished my shower and examined my own bruises and cuts, I wrapped a towel around my body and sat on the edge of the tub. Anne-Marie put her head against my thigh and I gently stroked her wet hair.

"Thank you, Mom..."

"I would never leave you, either of you. I love you both very much. I am so very sorry that you were taken and that you had to experience something so horrific..." I took a deep breath. "You also learnt a secret, today. Something

which I wanted to keep from you and your brother until you were both old enough to properly understand what we do..."

My daughter looked up at me.

"Mom... I have only the utmost respect for what you all do. I've known that you and Dad have been up to something, but I never thought for a minute..."

"I was worried that you would hate me for what I do..."

Anne-Marie took my hand and she squeezed it.

"Never... If you were not a vigilante, then me and my brother would be dead in Gotham, instead of being cared for. I know I let you down and sometimes I don't acknowledge what you do for us, but after this... I know that you and Dad love us and would do anything for us..."

I lifted my daughter out of the bath and wrapped a soft towel around her. I sat her on my lap and hugged her, letting the tears fall along with those of my daughter. Dave came and wrapped his own strong and reassuring arms around us both.

After several minutes, Anne-Marie went quiet and then she spoke.

"So I assume that everybody onboard is a vigilante?"

I grinned – Anne-Marie had an insatiable need for knowledge.

"Except for Ryan, yes," I replied.

After Anne-Marie had been checked over thoroughly by Cathy and dressed, she was mobbed in the Main Salon by everybody wanting to check on her.

As she sat on the couch, she went from person to person, pointing with her finger.

"Shadow, Jackal, Wildcat, Trojan, err..." She stopped at Tommy.

"Splinter..." Tommy said.

"Hal..." Abby added.

"Medic..." Cathy chimed in.

"Psyche..." Stephanie said with a grin.

"Ryan is Neptune and you, young lady, you are 'Rogue' while your brat of a brother, is 'Ravage'," I added.

"Rogue... I like that..."

"I think Ravage is kinda cool!" Danny added as he sat next to his sister, overjoyed at having her back.

Joshua was not happy.

He was on his bed face down, holding on tightly to my hand. Mom was busy swabbing his damaged shoulder and injecting some local anaesthetic before she got to work with some tweezers. The skin was black and blue from the abuse it had received and Josh was in obvious pain. Beside me sat Steph, a clean white bandage on her right thigh.

She had insisted on staying after Mom had dressed her wound so that she could help Josh. I had no problem with that, so we both held his hands as he grimaced with the pain until the area began to go numb.

Mom then set to work removing the jagged pieces of plastic and metal that had dug into the flesh. After ten minutes of careful work, Josh's shoulder was tidied up and a large dressing was applied.

Chapter 237: Rogue Escape

Later that morning
Friday
New Year's Day 2016

The Bridge of the Atlantic Storm

Location: 50nm north of Buck Island
Position: 19.2616° N 64.5542° W
Course: 000°, Speed: 20 knots, 1,715nm logged

Time: 07:30

A little over two and half hours later, we were fifty nautical miles north of the island.

We had all thought it was over, but it was not – not by a long shot!

An alarm began to sound and a symbol flashed on the radar screen to the right of the helm console. It was the CPA or Closest Point of Approach alarm. The computer that drove the radar had calculated that a contact would pass within our two-mile buffer zone – in fact, the computer decided that the contact was on a collision course as it closed at over thirty knots from our port beam. It was intending to do us harm; my training and experience told me that. I reached under the helm console, slid back the protective cover and pressed the recessed button.

As soon as the small touchscreen keypad illuminated on the right hand portion of the console, I rapidly entered the eight-digit code and as before, the right hand of the four nineteen-inch touch-screens changed to a menu system with twelve options. I still found the purple tint that appeared around the menu amusing.

I selected option 1: '**BATTLE MODE**'. Instantly a loud klaxon sounded throughout the *Atlantic Storm*.

..._...

'Battle Mode' made significant changes to the operation of the yacht. Firstly, the de-rated engines were restored to their full power rating, adding a few hundred extra horsepower to each of the engines. The engines were also permitted to be pushed way past the red-line for a limited period allowing bursts of almost thirty knots.

In addition, various electronic systems automatically came online – most of which were illegal for the average civilian vessel to carry. It was to be assumed that the advancing vessel was using its radar to track the *Atlantic Storm* from beyond visual range. As soon as the ESM system came online it immediately began to identify and prioritise any electronic emissions that it detected. I ignored the enormous returns from the distant warships' immense radars while the computer concentrated on the much closer and infinitely smaller radar of the converging contact as an imminent threat. With the press of a key, the ECM system began transmitting via a narrow beam on the exact same frequency of the approaching radar and on a much higher power setting, drowning it out. The advancing craft would be blind.

I advanced the twin throttles, increasing our speed to twenty-six knots.

Mindy and Dave arrived on the Bridge in response to the alarm that had just stopped sounding, just as an ESM alarm sounded from the console.

I turned to check the screen. An identical pair of radars as that which we had already detected were moving closer. I selected the ESM and set it to jam those radars, too. It was fairly obvious that two more high-speed craft were on a converging course. Mindy picked up a phone and called the Main Salon.

"Josh, get the kids down below into the crew quarters. Have Megan and Curtis break out the MP5s and stand guard."

The crew quarters in the bow were protected, both by the inbuilt strength of the bow and the layers of Kevlar armour in that part of the hull. As long as the kids remained in the central crew area, they would be safe. As I watched, Dave punched another code into the same keypad that Ryan and I had used previously, only this time a camouflaged hatch was released in the deck beside the helm.

Dave hauled out three G36K assault rifles with folded stocks and two magazines each. Chloe, wearing body armour

appeared on the Bridge hauling a case of loaded magazines which she dumped onto the deck. She had another G36K strung over her back. She took six magazines and headed up to the Sun Deck where I knew Josh would be waiting with a Minimi.

We had to prevent them from boarding – if they did, it would all be over. We had no chance of sinking them, but we would try. Dave and I would man the Bridge wings while Ryan coned the yacht. Abby would assist Ryan.

We had all pulled on our body armour, again.

Time: 07:40

Somebody was obviously pissed at our destroying their operation!

How far were they willing to go to for revenge? Were they like me? I had allowed revenge to consume my childhood; were these people the same? My answer came quickly...

Tracer rounds reached out for us from the closest go-fast boat. Each of the 36-foot Rigid Inflatable Boats had a mounted heavy machine gun in the bow. They were ultra-maneuvrable and targeting them at speed was not easy. We were in trouble and we needed help. I seized the radio handset and punched the button labelled '16', before pressing the transmit button.

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! This is Atlantic Storm, Atlantic Storm, Atlantic Storm. Call sign Zulu Golf Charlie Sierra Seven. Break. Mayday! The vessel Atlantic Storm is located in position one-nine-decimal-two-six north, six-four-decimal-five-five west, course two-seven-zero, speed two-three knots. We are a British-flagged Motoryacht and we are taking fire from multiple unknown attackers and are in need of immediate assistance."

I released the transmit button.

***HMS Dragon
Forty-five nautical miles to the southeast***

Commander Richard Perrin turned in his chair as the bridge radio, tuned to Channel 16, jumped to life with every mariner's worst nightmare.

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! This is Atlantic Storm..."

He recognised the female voice almost immediately, but the moment he heard the distressed vessel's name, he leapt into action.

"Bearing of that signal!"

"Three-one-seven, sir!"

"Officer of the Watch, alter course, three-one-seven, take us to twenty-six knots!"

"Aye, aye, sir – alter course three-one-seven and increase speed to twenty-six knots! Helm..."

The Officer of the Watch (OOW) passed the new orders to the helmsman while Commander Perrin continued issuing his own orders.

"Quartermaster, flying stations! Scramble the ready Wildcat!"

The Quartermaster began to issue commands over the ship-wide tannoy as the nine-thousand-ton destroyer heeled to port, altering its course to Starboard and her twin screws beat the wake into a raging white torrent as *HMS Dragon* accelerated like the thoroughbred she was. In every compartment aboard a speaker burst into life.

"For the alert flight crew, for the alert flight crew: scramble, scramble, scramble!"

..._...

Almost two hundred feet further aft, the pilot and observer ran out of the Wardroom, heading aft towards the flight deck where their helicopter awaited them. They immediately climbed aboard and strapped in as the flight deck crew

began to remove the lashings securing the Agusta-Westland Wildcat HMA.2 helicopter to the flight deck.

The twin Rolls-Royce/Honeywell T800 turboshaft engines rapidly came to life with an increasing scream. Minutes later the rotors began to rotate, steadily increasing in speed. Within another two minutes the helicopter was cleared to launch and the pilot released the harpoon deck lock before the helicopter leapt into the sky.

The Wildcat translated to port to clear the destroyer's superstructure before dipping its nose and gaining forward speed, accelerating to over one hundred and sixty knots.

..._...

While the helicopter was launching, Commander Perrin tried a scare tactic.

"Atlantic Storm, Atlantic Storm, Atlantic Storm. This is British Destroyer Dragon, British Destroyer Dragon, British Destroyer Dragon. We are turning to assist, armed air support is launching and will arrive first."

It was hoped that the aggressors would hear the response and seriously consider whether or not to take on a state-of-the-art 9,000-ton destroyer in battle.

..._...

Ten minutes later, the Wildcat had made radar contact.

"Captain, PWO, Talon 376 is reporting four radar surface contacts. Interestingly, one of the contacts is actively jamming the other three. Even more perplexing is the fact that the jamming is coming from a Royal Navy Type 675 ECM, sir! The jamming contact has altered course in our direction, too, sir."

Commander Perrin chuckled as he muttered to himself, "Clever girl! Where did you get *that* from – definitely not Tesco!"

With the *Atlantic Storm* having turned towards them, they were now closing at almost fifty-knots. In forty-five minutes they would be in gun range. For now, the helicopter would have to run interference.

He then responded to his Principal Warfare Officer.

"Classify the jamming contact as the *Atlantic Storm* and confirm intent of the other vessels. Engage only on confirmation of belligerent intent."

Royal Navy Wildcat HMA.2 Call sign Talon 376

On a terse command from the pilot, the two crewmen aboard slid open each side door, locking them back and they readied their Browning M3M .50-calibre machine guns that were mounted in each side-door on a pintle mount. Each heavy machine gun had a hopper of 600-rounds ready to fire. The weapon could empty that hopper in less than a minute if required. The weapons were carried as they were more than capable of punching holes in boat engines and stopping a chase before it even began, but then the Wildcat was directly descended from the world's fastest and most agile helicopter, the Lynx, so a chase would be over very quickly anyway. The Wildcat could fly faster *sideways* than most go-fast boats could travel *forwards*!

The pilot observed the four craft heading in his direction. The largest was the 120-foot *Atlantic Storm*. She stood out, a pure white leviathan against the azure blue water as she cut through the waves at over twenty-five knots. The 190-ton vessel was able to cope with the ocean waves much better than the three much smaller go-fast boats that were harassing her.

The *Atlantic Storm* was zig-zagging every time that one of the other craft tried to line up a shot. Tracer rounds were evident coming from machine guns on the go-fasts. The pilot put his helicopter into a steep dive before buzzing the first go-fast at less than fifty feet. The crew ducked and then somebody did something very stupid – they opened fire on the Royal Navy helicopter.

"This is Talon 376; we are taking fire and declaring self-defence – engaging!"

The Atlantic Storm

Time: 08:05

Commander Ryan Bennett looked out of the bridge windows at the gratifying sight of the British maritime attack helicopter.

The staccato sound of the heavy machine guns engaging the attacking boats drowned out the lighter machine guns of the go-fasts and the gunfire from outside the bridge as Dave and Mindy engaged the go-fasts with their assault rifles and the heavier gunfire from the Sun Deck above being delivered by Joshua with Chloe's assistance. It was lucky that the armoured glass, required for ocean-going vessels, also had the unintentional side-effect of being bullet resistant! Nonetheless, there were still numerous chips in the glass.

He knew that support from *HMS Dragon* was coming – the *Dragon's* mast-top Sampson radar was being tracked by the ESM system as it topped the radar horizon. However, they had to get to within ten nautical miles for the *Dragon* to be able to engage with her 4.5-inch deck gun.

There was still seven miles to go – almost fifteen minutes.

Royal Navy Wildcat HMA.2
Call sign Talon 376

The pilot smiled as one of the go-fast boats exploded in a spectacular fashion.

He swore that he saw at least one body spinning across the wave tops – 'Fuck 'em,' he thought. He aimed his helicopter at the next boat, weaving as he avoided incoming tracer fire. That was fine; if they were firing at him, then they weren't firing at the civilian yacht. He was paid to be shot at; they were not, although he was not altogether certain about the 'civilian' status of the yacht, despite the defaced Red Ensign that flew from her stern.

As he observed the white yacht, he could see various crew members on the yacht firing weapons at the go-fast boats. On the upper deck, he could see a machine-gun in use and a girl firing an assault rifle. On the bridge wings, a man and a woman could be seen also engaging the attacking boats with assault rifles.

Only the previous day, he had flown the very same helicopter against drug-dealers on an island. His crewmen had engaged mercenaries *and* he had achieved an air-to-air kill; a rarity for a helicopter. He had also heard that a child had been kidnapped, which had been the catalyst for the attack and that was all the reasoning he needed to put his life on the line.

"Crew, coming around again, standby to attack..."

Time: 08:18

HMS Dragon
Twelve nautical miles to the southeast

Commander Richard Perrin was pacing his capacious bridge when word finally came in from his PWO that they were approaching gun range.

"Officer of the Watch, hands to Action Stations, if you please!" He ordered.

The General Alarm sounded, followed by the Quartermaster's voice: "Hands to Action Stations, hands to Action Stations!"

'What hornet's nest have you stoked up now, Mrs Lizewski!' he asked himself as his ship rumbled to the sound of many feet and the closing and securing of hatches.

..._...

A few minutes later, and with the precise targeting information provided by Talon 376, the firing sequence for the 4.5-inch gun began.

"Target correct..."

"Four five on, bearing red zero-six-eight, range eighteen-thousand yards..."

"Command approved, four five..."

"Four five, engage... Four five, shoot..."

The deck-gun on the destroyer's bow elevated and turned to port as a round slid smoothly into the open breech, which then slammed shut. With a loud bang and a lot of smoke, the gun fired, instantly ejecting the spent casing and loading another four-foot-long round.

The fired projectile ripped through the air at 2,850-feet per second – it would take just nineteen seconds to reach its target.

The Atlantic Storm

There was a ripping sound, like torn linen.

As Mindy watched, a water-spout appeared a few yards from one of the go-fast boats, soaking it in salt-water. Thirty seconds later another projectile ripped through the air and then another close behind. The go-fast was fighting for its life as it twisted and turned, then the craft seemed to stop before it came apart as it tried to occupy the same spot as the 114-millimetre diameter projectile. The explosion was spectacular as three-kilogrammes of RDX/TNT detonated on contact sending wreckage and body parts in all directions.

There was still one go-fast left and that quickly fell to the Wildcat helicopter, despite its violent manoeuvres and attempts to escape, as it blew up under the onslaught of .50-calibre rounds. Mindy breathed a huge sigh of relief, clearing her G36 and placing it on the deck. She watched as the British helicopter matched the *Atlantic Storm's* speed and course, the pilot showing off as he flew *backwards* at twenty-six knots!

"Atlantic Storm, Atlantic Storm, this is Talon 376 on your starboard beam, over!"

"Talon 376, Atlantic Storm. All clear, no injuries, nice flying. Over."

Mindy entered the bridge just as I finished responding to the helicopter.

"Area is clear. We will shadow you till mother arrives, Talon 376, out."

Mindy looked over at me, then at the bullet marks on the windows. That annoyed her! She grabbed a phone and punched the tannoy button.

"Stand down, stand down, return all weapons and report damage to the bridge."

Mindy was all business – and I thought *I* was a hard Captain! Thankfully nobody had been hurt in the attack – only Mindy's pride.

"Thank you, Ryan – you threw this tub around like a pro!" Mindy grinned.

"Not the first time I've been under attack!" I replied.

Twenty minutes later, *HMS Dragon* hove into sight, a giant White Ensign flying from its yards.

By then, all weapons had vanished from sight and the casings of all expended rounds had been cleared away. Within minutes of the British destroyer taking up station to port, a boat delivered a package from Commander Perrin. The package had details of a layover point.

We were to follow him to an island – an island that was unnamed on our charts!

***Chapter 238*: Rogue Challenge**

That evening
Friday

Eight hours later

Location: CLASSIFIED
Position: CLASSIFIED

1,865nm logged

Time: 17:00

Officially, the island did not exist.

Unofficially, it belonged to the British Government.

Officially, there was neither a state-of-the-art destroyer, nor was there a state-of-the-art mega-yacht anchored in the crystal clear waters of the lagoon. Officially, we were not anchored off the shore of an island with a guard force that had 'shoot-to-kill' orders on anybody unlucky enough to wander ashore without prior authorisation.

The island was a secret. I had no problem with that; I liked secrets. My life was a secret. Almost everything about me, my husband, my family, and my friends was a secret. At that moment, a pair of Royal Navy divers were inspecting the below water sections of the hull of the *Atlantic Storm* for any damage from the attack. I was furious at what had happened to my yacht. Almost as soon as we had anchored I had taken the tender out to get a good look at my vessel.

There were a lot of bullet holes and plenty of shrapnel damage on the starboard side, mainly, but some to port as well. The bridge windows were damaged, but intact. Watertight integrity appeared not to have suffered, so we were in no danger of sinking. However, the *Atlantic Storm* would need to go into a shipyard for hull repairs and some new glazing. She had done her job and she had protected us; nobody was injured in any way – for that I was eternally grateful.

We would make cursory repairs to the hull with the help of Commander Perrin's crew, so that problem was solved. Another problem was our exposure – all of the men behind Anne-Marie's kidnapping on that island had died, along with their hired mercenaries and we had jammed all of their communications during the attack on the *Atlantic Storm*; the credit would go to *HMS Dragon* for sinking the go-fast boats. That just left the crews of *HMS Dragon* and *USS Churchill*.

I would talk to Commander Perrin about it over dinner that night.

..._...

Moored a few hundred yards away from us was a large grey vessel.

She was the Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker, *RFA Wave Knight*. On our arrival we had been directed to moor alongside the 31,500 tonne vessel, where we received a little over four thousand gallons of diesel to top off our capacious full tanks and quite a few litres of fresh water. We had burnt a lot of diesel while out-manoeuving the go-fast boats that morning.

Unfortunately, it was just another vessel and another crew of witnesses – nevertheless, I did appreciate the fuel!

..._...

There was one other problem left to be solved, well two actually.

The first was that my youngest daughter had killed a man. She was not yet eight, but she had killed her tormentor and she had shown maturity way beyond her tender years. What was that going to do to her? So far she had not shown any sign of acknowledging those ten bullets that she had fired into that man. I was not keen on bringing it up in conversation yet, either. Cathy had suggested that Anne-Marie might be blanking the event out, or that other events were preventing those crucial memories from coming forward.

Either way, it was a problem would have to be addressed at some stage or other...

..._...

The second problem... Stephanie – she had fought really well, but there were times that she had gone over the top – I was not complaining, but Megan had been worried by Stephanie's behaviour, as had Chloe. She had helped to avenge Anne-Marie and at the time, I had not been bothered with collateral damage on that island. However, back in Chicago – we could not have the girl going off like a loose cannon and killing everything in sight in an undisciplined manner.

I would talk to the girl at some stage.

..._...

On the cruise to our current location, Dave and I gathered Chloe, Megan and Stephanie together. The three of them were the only ones to witness the events inside the residence.

"I need to talk to you three about what happened..."

"You mean when Anne-Marie fired off ten rounds into that cunt?" Stephanie enquired.

"Yeah... At the time, I thought it right to allow Anne-Marie to get some revenge. I could understand why she wanted to hurt the man, but when she asked to kill him..."

"Kind of shocked me a bit, that did... I thought we only had one psycho!" Megan said, tipping her head at Stephanie.

Stephanie scowled but let it pass.

"You can talk!" Chloe chuckled, receiving her own scowl. "I was more than a little surprised that you went along with it, Dave – Mindy, I can understand; she's a nutcase, but you...?"

Dave just smiled without replying.

"Thank you, Chloe... I love you too. For now, please don't say anything to anybody else about what I allowed Anne-Marie to do. I know what it is like to kill at seven-years-old... If Marcus finds out, he will probably kill me – when Danny finds out what his sister did..."

"I suppose it is enough of a shock to find out that your parents are Kick-Ass and Hit Girl. I know, from my own personal experiences, the shock of finding out who is under those masks. I also know the pressure of keeping such a big secret. I also know that I caused shit by constantly wanting to become a vigilante, despite being told that I was way too young – and maybe I was. The poor girl has a lot of crap ahead of her and I for one, will be there for her."

"Well said, Megan!" Dave commented, speaking for the first time. "We'll all be there for Anne-Marie."

Chloe gave Megan a hug and nodded. It was good to see the two of them getting along better.

"Our lips are sealed, Mindy," Stephanie said and the others nodded.

Chicago, USA

'... A Sky News special report... It has been reported that a privately-owned island in the British Virgin Islands was assaulted last night and it is reported that a drug-dealer and his men were killed during the vicious attack by unknown para-military forces...'

Marcus looked up at the TV – he closed his eyes for a moment...

"Please – no..."

"What?" Paige asked.

"It had to be her – it just has to be!"

'... The Admiralty has reported that a Royal Navy warship was involved in action against drug-related behaviour, in the Caribbean where three fast boats are reported to have been destroyed... Reports of a private yacht being

involved in the skirmish have been met with the standard 'no comment'...

Marcus was lost for words...

That evening

Location: CLASSIFIED

Position: CLASSIFIED

Commander Perrin came aboard with his daughter, Cassie.

The Commander's wife was currently topping up her tan in Antigua while Cassie spent a week with her father aboard *HMS Dragon*.

"Are you guys all right?" Cassie exclaimed, almost the moment she came aboard.

"Yes, thanks to your father, amongst others," I replied, giving Cassie a hug. "I suppose you know..."

Cassie looked awkward for a moment before replying.

"Yes, Daddy told me what you all do 'behind the scenes'," Cassie said before scowling at her father. "Daddy then went on to tell me in glowingly colourful terms what you might do to me if I blabbed – *not* that it was necessary!"

Commander Perrin showed no hint of shame at having threatened his daughter on my behalf.

"I trust the Commander; therefore, I trust you Cassandra – just keep that warning in mind..." I said darkly, intentionally using the name that I knew she hated to show how serious I was.

We moved onto happier things as Cassie was introduced to the others who had not attended the cocktail party in Antigua. She thought that Megan and Stephanie were very cute – if only she knew them. As for the twins, they were classified as 'sweet and innocent' – again, she obviously needed to get to know them!

..._...

We all sat and chatted in the Main Salon while Cathy, Abby and Chloe prepared dinner. As usual I was banned from the Galley, especially for something as important as that night! Conversation tended to avoid the events of the previous few days and concentrated on happier times. Cassie was keen to find out more about Fusion, as were Danny and Anne-Marie.

Dave took great delight in telling some *very* embarrassing stories about Mindy Macready and Hit Girl, which got a lot of laughter from everybody and more than a few scowls from me! I was actually pleased that Danny and Anne-Marie could find out more about their adoptive parents; there were to be no more secrets, I had promised them that.

Cathy had appeared at one stage with some of her own anecdotes – I did not *ever* dream that there was a condition beyond 'total humiliation'. Dave rescued me by telling everybody that I needed to cool off before my face set fire to something!

..._...

Dinner would have been a cramped affair, what with fifteen people, but we managed it by sending the younger kids out to the Aft Main Deck, to eat there, while the adults and the older teenagers remained in the Main Salon. Commander Perrin had brought a selection of wine over with him, plus some beers, too. Some of the beers had already been drunk by Ryan, Dave and the Commander during the 'let's all embarrass the fuck out of Mindy' session, earlier.

For the meal, I allowed Josh, Chloe and Abby to have a drink – it was *my* yacht after all! They each had a glass of wine, which Josh enjoyed, Chloe tolerated and Abby turned down after a few sips. I had to admit that it was not too bad – I was developing a taste for alcohol. I had no idea if that was good or bad!

"Let's make sure you can still walk when you stand up, my girl!" Cathy warned her daughter who blushed in response.

The meal was good – steaks with corn on the cob; not fresh but we *were* in the Caribbean after all! Dave had to check on the younger members of the crew a few times as they seemed to be getting a bit rowdy while the sun went

down.

..._...

"Commander, how come there were Marines and helicopters at the island?" Chloe enquired – a question on all our lips.

Commander Perrin chuckled for a moment before replying.

"You can thank Spook for that. He got onto his controller, in London, and reminded them – quite strongly I might add – that HMG owed Hit Girl – it was merely an hour later that I received my orders: '... Assist in recovery action at Buck Island without endangering your Command...' I requested extra assistance from *USS Churchill* and they loaned us their helicopters – they wanted to do more, but they could not.

"Anyway, the moment it was suggested that the Royals were required to go play in jungle swamps, they jumped at the chance. I have never seen the damn Bootnecks so happy! They set off in their little rubber boats as soon as we were close enough. The flight crews jumped at the chance to fire off some real ammunition too..."

"Thank you, Commander – we all owe you our lives..." I said.

"Nonsense, girl – I'd do anything for a pretty lady in distress!"

Cassie blushed with embarrassment – I blushed too, but with pleasure!

Dave stood up towards the end of the meal.

He called in the kids from the stern and had them gather around the table.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to propose a toast. To Anne-Marie Lizewski – for keeping her wits about her, despite her ordeal."

The poor girl blushed bright red as everybody cheered for her. Dave then turned to Commander Perrin and Ryan.

"Commander Perrin, Commander Bennett – thank you for providing your expert assistance. Ladies and gentlemen, the Royal Navy and the United States Navy, in the form of *HMS Dragon* and *USS Churchill*!"

It was the turn of the two Commanders to colour slightly as the applause arose for them both and their commands.

..._...

It was well after eleven by the time the Commander and Cassie returned to the *Dragon*. We were due to depart by 06:00 for the long trek back to Miami and then onto Chicago and home.

It would be good to get back to our, not so normal, lives.

***Chapter 239*: Fusion - The Voyage Home**

Saturday morning

Location: CLASSIFIED

Position: CLASSIFIED

1,865nm logged

The Atlantic Storm

Time: 06:00

We had nine-hundred and fifty nautical miles ahead of us, about forty-three hours.

The idea was to arrive in Miami in the early hours of Monday morning. Until then, we would have a pleasant cruise home and allow time for our bruises to heal. I had every intention to enjoy the warmth of the sun on my body.

..._...

I inadvertently tried to keep Anne-Marie in sight at all times. Once or twice, I lost sight of her and I started to panic inside. It was the same with Anne-Marie, too. She never wanted to be alone and she had refused to go anywhere on-board unless somebody was with her – this had resulted in Megan accompanying her to the bathroom, more than once! Although to my mind; as long as my daughter was with somebody, I felt happier letting her out of my sight.

A few times I had engaged her in conversation and tried to find out what had happened to her after she had been taken, but my questions were ignored – Cathy advised me to give her time; she would tell me when she was ready.

..._...

For now, Anne-Marie played happily with the other kids and I tried to ignore the vicious bruises and cuts all over her body. Those bruises and cuts still made me mad, every time I saw them. In turn, Anne-Marie had been unhappy about the small bandage on my upper left arm, not to mention those on Stephanie and Joshua. Anne-Marie knew that the wounds had come from rescuing her, but none of us complained about the wounds or why we got them.

I was really happy to be safe and back with my family and I knew that nothing would happen to me now.

It had been my fault that I had been taken – if I had listened to Mom, back on Guadeloupe, then all would have been well and nobody would have got hurt. I hated to see the bandages on Steph and Josh, not to mention, Mom.

I felt really bad about it all. Mom had tried to talk to me about what had happened, but I kept shutting her down – I was not ready to talk about it, not yet. I knew that I had to, but there was something else that I would then need to talk about...

I had killed that man.

Time: 10:20

I was fast asleep on the Sun Deck with Anne-Marie snuggled up beside me, when I was rudely awakened by the General Alarm blaring throughout the *Atlantic Storm*.

I sat up so fast that Anne-Marie fell to the deck and she yelled out in pain and annoyance. I dived for the companion way below and rushed onto the Bridge, arriving at the same time as Dave and Ryan. Chloe and Megan were on watch.

"Who hit the alarm?" I demanded, glaring at the two girls.

"I did," Chloe began. "We have visitors..."

Megan pointed out the starboard side and for the first time I noticed a large ocean-going tugboat heading in our direction, about five miles distant. I seized a pair of binoculars and ran out onto the deck; Ryan did the same. He

studied the tug for a moment and then he ran back onto the Bridge, rammed both throttles fully forwards and after shoving Megan out the way, spun the wheel hard to port.

The *Atlantic Storm* accelerated and heeled over to starboard as she turned hard to port.

"Pirates!"

..._...

"We can outrun the tug – no sweat, but she may put fast boats into the water..." Ryan explained.

"They already have!" Chloe interjected.

I turned back to the tug and saw two large boats appear from around her stern. They headed directly for us and I could see a dozen men in each – all armed.

"No, dammit – they are not going to take us – Megan, get the grenade launchers and the high-explosive rounds. Chloe, find Josh and get the Minimis out and plenty of ammo," I ordered as Dave pulled out the G36K assault rifles from the compartment in the deck.

Abby appeared in the Bridge doorway with Anne-Marie by her side.

"Abby – get the kids into the bow..."

Abby vanished, dragging Anne-Marie with her.

Less than ten minutes later, we were ready.

We all wore body-armour and we were ready to repel borders. No, softly, softly – I was in *no* mood for fucking about! I took a Minimi from Josh and we both headed up to the Sun Deck. Mindy and Chloe seized a grenade launcher plus a G-36K each and went forward to the bow.

Once the girls were in place, Ryan altered course, turning directly for the approaching boats. The expression on the pirates' faces was priceless; they were not used to a civilian vessel suddenly turning on *them!*

Josh and I were lying prone on the sun pads either side of the Jacuzzi. The Minimis were on their bipods and aimed forward. As the two pirate craft crossed our bow, I pulled the trigger, sending bursts of 5.56-millimetre rounds at each boat. At the same time Josh opened fire, along with Mindy and Chloe.

..._...

Grenades rained down on the pirates, exploding in the water beside them, closer and closer as the girls quickly got the range. Our bullets struck the fibre-glass hulls of the large craft and I was gratified to see the odd spray of blood as we chewed into the men on board the boats.

A grenade or two landed in the closest boat and it promptly blew up, sending men and sections of boat flying through the air and skidding across the waves. The other boat tried to turn tail, but Josh and I got its range, filling it with holes and killing most of those onboard. Then the range was too short and we coursed past the sinking boat as Mindy and Chloe poured fire into the swamped hull from their assault rifles.

The tug boat in the near distance was turning away and heading for the Gulf of Mexico.

Time: 10:48

We quickly got back on course, tidied up and stowed all the weapons.

I was back on the Sun Deck with Anne-Marie as if nothing had happened. I had never fought wearing just a bikini and a flak-jacket! I had found it exhilarating somehow... So, it seemed did Josh and Chloe who were up to no good on the other side of the Jacuzzi...

"Is life as Hit Girl always this exciting?" Anne-Marie asked with genuine interest.

I just laughed.

"Yes, it is..." Dave replied for me as he lay down beside our daughter.

Danny and Curtis came up the companionway and they sat down with Megan, Tommy and Stephanie to play a game at the table. Abby was curled up on a sun lounger with her laptop. Ryan and Cathy were down below on the Bridge – I did not want to even *think* about what *they* were doing!

"This is going to be so much fun..." Anne Marie commented. "Will I get to see your lair? Josh said I would be able to see the Hit Cave..."

"It is *not* called that – *Joshua!*"

That afternoon

I was down in the galley – I was *not* cooking, just making a sandwich; so *that* was allowed!

For a moment's peace and quiet, I decided to sit by the galley windows and relax. My mind seemed to wander and I found myself thinking back to my first meeting with Dave and that fun evening at Rasul's...

I was jerked back to reality by a gentle, but persistent, prodding in my side. It was Anne-Marie.

"What's up?" I asked, seeing the uneasy expression on her face.

"Can I sit with you..."

"You don't need to ask – here, have some of my sandwich..."

"What's in it?"

"Bananas."

"A banana sandwich?"

"What's wrong with that?" I retorted.

"Just a little weird, but I suppose weird is what I have to get used to, huh?"

I laughed at that comment.

"Mom..."

"Yes..."

"When did you become Hit Girl?"

Oh – and the questions begin!

"Where do I start?"

"At the beginning?" My daughter offered.

...+...

"Okay... Once upon a time, there were two super-cops called Daddy and Marcus who were very good at getting bad guys. Frank D'Amico was the baddest guy of them all and he came up with a plan to get rid of Daddy. Being framed as a drug-dealer was the worst possible thing that could have happened to Daddy. Prison was *not* his natural habitat... He was *very* upset!

"With Daddy in prison, his pregnant wife was all alone, and could not cope... But all clouds have a silver lining and out of her death... Mindy, was born! Marcus became the child's guardian and Daddy started a plan of his very own. Five years later, he left prison and *he* was ready. Now it was time for *Mindy* to get ready, too.

"My Daddy took custody of me and took me away from Marcus and he started a game... A game of super-heroes... I

was Hit Girl and he was Big Daddy – we would fight crime in New York City and ultimately, we would take down Frank D'Amico and his entire organisation... At least that was the plan."

...+...

"How old were you when you started to train to be Hit Girl?"

I knew where this was going – Anne-Marie had taken a bite of the forbidden apple and she had found that she liked it, just as I had twelve years previously – and now she wanted more, much more.

"At an age that was far too young and I know what you are thinking, young lady, and it ain't happening!"

"But..."

"No buts!" I said as strongly as possible without scaring the girl.

"But I..."

"Your mother said it was not happening, Anne-Marie, so leave it at that."

I turned to see Dave leaning against the galley counter, Danny was beside him as was Stephanie and Megan. Dave's tone had been one which the kids knew not to argue with – as did most of the others.

"I've never heard that version..." Megan said quietly.

"It was what my Daddy fed me to make me go along with his plan and not to question the killing and the violence. I was young, naive and knew nothing about life. Daddy managed to corrupt my conscience and my emotions – it was all a game... Until he died."

"Let's leave your mother in peace, kids..."

"No, Dave; they need to hear it – all of them. I am damaged and I will always be the way I am – I never wanted any of this world for any of you. Not you, Megan, nor Curtis. Tommy found his way into the nastier part of life as a consequence of his kidnapping. Stephanie was brainwashed, just as I was. Now you both know about our lives, I can't keep you both out of it, but I can prevent you from putting your lives at risk – *and I will!* I will train you, Anne-Marie, and you, Danny, so that you can protect yourselves to the point where you can both use lethal force as a defence against harm, but I *will not* train you both to fight offensively."

Anne-Marie opened her mouth to continue arguing, but one glance from Dave and she shut her mouth, glaring down at the galley table.

Sunday

Location: 45nm north-east of Turks and Caicos Islands

Position: 22.3677°N 71.4688° W

Course: 298°, Speed: 22 knots, 2,393nm logged

The Atlantic Storm

I awoke around ten and headed up a deck and aft to get some fresh air.

There I found Stephanie staring out towards the horizon. She turned as I stepped out of the Main Salon and the doors closed automatically behind me. She smiled, returning to stare out to sea.

"Hi..." I said.

We had not talked since Mom's speech in the galley, the previous afternoon. I sensed that she was avoiding me.

"What's your story, Steph?" I asked. "I remember the nightmares on your first night with us... Plus others."

Stephanie turned towards me and smiled.

"I was on holiday and I was about your age – we were in Colorado somewhere; my memories are fuzzy. I was taken and brainwashed. They turned me into what I am..."

She shrugged.

"You saw me at the island – you saw what I am capable of... I wish you had never seen any of it; as Mindy said, we are both bad people and neither of us had a choice about our lives. If you don't want me to be your big sister, now that you know what I am..."

I had never seen Anne-Marie so angry.

She punched me in the stomach, quite hard and I went down on my knees, my arms wrapped round my abdomen.

"You are an ass, Stephanie!"

I looked up at the angry girl and felt ashamed for what I had said.

"I don't care what you are inside – you came for me, you killed for me, you protected me, you risked your life for me..."

Anne-Marie then jabbed at my bandage, which made me cry out in pain.

"You even got wounded for me. You are everything that a big sister should be and so much more. I would not trade for anything."

Anne-Marie then stalked off, leaving me on the deck. She paused at the ladder to the Bridge Deck and turned to face me.

"I'm not apologising for punching you, either – you deserved it!"

I headed onto the Bridge where I found a scowling Mom and Chloe.

"What?" I asked.

Chloe pointed at the screen to the left of the helm.

"Oh..."

On the screen was a full colour image of Stephanie getting up from her knees and rubbing her stomach.

"I assume there was a good reason for that?" Mom inquired with a raised eyebrow.

I explained what had happened. Chloe smirked then laughed before she spoke.

"Beware, Rogue at large!"

Stephanie spent the rest of the morning looking a little embarrassed, but I saw her chatting happily with her younger sister as if the morning's events had never occurred.

For our last evening aboard, we were going to have an enormous meal – the idea being to consume as much of the supplies as possible, especially the perishables. This meant a lot of preparation which took up most of the afternoon.

I ended up sitting down for almost five hours, writing up the Ship's Log. A lot of time was spent figuring out what I actually *could* put in the Log! I finally went with the basics for the official document, but sent the unedited version to Marty.

Everybody also spent time packing their kit, ready to go ashore.

That evening

The party began...

Josh put on his usual selection of dubious tracks and everybody got a drink – soft for the under sixteens. Abby and Cathy had been baking all afternoon and there was a wonderful select of food on offer. We did not sit down to eat, it was to be a buffet. Dave was cooking steaks on the Sun Deck, with Curtis to help him.

Everybody was excited at the prospect of being back home and I was pleased that everybody had happy smiles on their faces. I had my family: Dave, Stephanie, Anne-Marie and Danny. I also had my wider family: Fusion. I had never been happier.

Only twenty-six months previously, I had left New York, I had left Dave – I had been alone.

Then it had all gone so badly wrong...

I was running.

I was scared.

I was alone.

I had nothing, but the clothes on my back... And the blood on my hands.

My safety, my freedom, it had all been forsaken.

***Chapter 240*: Home - Finally**

Monday

Location: 20nm south-east of North Cat Cay, The Bahamas

Position: 25.4974°N 78.9752° W

Course: 273°, Speed: 22 knots, 2,749nm logged

The Atlantic Storm

It was after midnight when things began to calm down.

I was able to dance with my husband to some cheesy music that Chloe had selected: Celine Dione with her 'Beauty and The Beast'! I enjoyed the feel of my husband's rough skin, ignoring the appalled look on Stephanie's face as we kissed.

On the couch, Anne-Marie and Danny were fast asleep, worn out with all other eating and fun. I could hear giggling from the Aft Deck and it sounded like Chloe and Josh were enjoying themselves! Ryan and Cathy had vanished to the Captain's cabin – 'to keep an eye on the radar'...

A little over two hours later

The Atlantic Storm

Port of Miami

Position: 25.7648° N 80.0572° W

2,724nm logged

Home!

Well, not quite home – but at least we were back in the US. I stood on the Bridge of *Atlantic Storm* for the last time and gently rested my hands on the large steel wheel at the helm. She had done us proud – now though, after two-thousand seven-hundred and twenty-four nautical miles, eighty-four bullet holes and having expended over seven-thousand gallons of marine diesel, the old girl was going in for a refit – she would come out even better than before.

In the summer, I hoped to return and maybe cross the North Atlantic to Europe.

..._...

"You coming?"

I turned to see Dave waiting at the door.

"Yes. I'm going to miss the old girl – she's done us proud."

"That she has," Dave agreed.

I reluctantly left the Bridge and made my way to the stern and the gangway ashore.

Late morning

Chicago

West Columbia

"Anything exciting happen on your cruise?"

I studied Marcus for a moment and then I grinned.

"Business as usual..." I replied.

Marcus knew exactly what that meant!

"Do I want to hear about any of it?" He groaned.

"The twins know..."

"Oh?" Marcus asked sternly and I winced. "How did that come about, then?"

"We invaded the British Virgin Islands!" Megan announced with a smile.

Marcus groaned.

"I *knew* that was you..."

"So, is Fusion at war with the British now?" Paige enquired with a chuckle.

"Hey, we gave the goddamned island back!" I growled in response.

..._...

"How many holes, this time, Megan?" Paige asked her daughter as they hugged.

Megan scowled.

"Not a one, Mother!"

"Wow!" Marcus chuckled.

"It was Mindy, Steph and Josh that got hurt this time..." Megan explained before shutting up as I glared at her.

Marcus raised an eyebrow.

"Flesh wounds, nothing more – honest!"

Glenview

Sophia was over the moon to see everybody – and very big!

It was great to be home, too. Kim gave me a hug as she and Marty headed out the door after dropping Sophia back home.

"Thanks, guys – see you tomorrow."

I gave Dave an enormous, and very deep kiss, which had me standing on the tips of my toes...

"That is so goddamn disgusting!" Stephanie growled.

"I feel sick..." Anne-Marie added with her own grimace.

"What she said," Danny finished mirroring his sister's expression.

I laughed as Dave put me back down. I turned to my three kids and smiled.

"Why don't you three go get some rest – so Dave and I can..."

"You want *us* to get lost – so *you* can get fu..."

"Stephanie – language!" Dave said quickly and Stephanie smiled sweetly.

"Actually, Steph, you're bang on!" I replied with a dirty smirk and the nine-year-old pretended to throw up as she ran towards the stairs followed by the twins.

..._...

Once they were gone I turned to Dave.

"Hey, Kick-Ass, you big stud!"

"That's me, honey."

"Take me to bed or lose me forever."

"Show me the way home, Hit Girl!"

God, I loved those white uniforms...

That night

The kids were tired and grumpy come dinner time.

Once they were fed, they were sent to bed – it had been a *very* long day for us all! I said goodnight to Danny and went through to see the girls. Both were in their beds and grinning – looking innocent was not their forte!

I gave Anne-Marie a kiss.

"Thanks for coming to get me, Mom."

"I will always do anything that I can to keep us all together. Night, Steph."

"Night, Hit Girl!"

The following morning

Tuesday

I awoke late – well after ten.

Dave was snoring, so I went to check on the kids. I had checked on them in the early hours of the morning and I had found Stephanie in Anne-Marie's bed with the younger girl snuggled up to her sister. She was asleep, but Stephanie was still awake. She saw me and whispered an explanation.

"Nightmare – tell you about it in the morning."

"Thanks," I replied as I left and went back to bed.

I was glad that Anne-Marie was not alone and that she had somebody with her who had an idea of what she was going through.

..._...

When I got to the kids' rooms, I found Danny fast asleep and snoring. The girls were already awake and they were enjoying a hot bath with quite a few bubbles!

"I think we overdid the bubbles..." Stephanie commented as loads of bubbles flooded over the side of the bath.

"Ya think!" I chuckled, then got serious. "You want to tell me about last night?"

Anne-Marie knew that I was talking about and to her; she grimaced, but nodded.

"I had a *big* nightmare and Steph came to keep me company."

"You ready to talk about what happened?" I asked.

My youngest daughter nodded slowly.

"Okay – when you two are finished, we'll talk over breakfast... *Please* don't flood the *entire* house!"

"No promises!" Came the shout as I headed downstairs.

I was alone in the kitchen when my two daughters appeared, their hair still wet.

Dave had taken Danny out, leaving us girls alone – apart from the puppy-filled Sophia! They grabbed some cereal and then sat down at the counter to eat.

"They used something to make me go to sleep..." Anne-Marie said between bites of cereal. "... They hit me too, making my nose bleed."

I looked at Stephanie who was taking in every word and her expression had hardened.

"I woke up on a boat – I got really scared when I found that I was on my own... Then a man appeared and he..."

The story continued on for half an hour – Stephanie and I both laughed when Anne-Marie mentioned the toilet rolls stuffed down the toilet – I hated every time that my daughter recounted a moment when she was hit or otherwise hurt. Stephanie's expression, like my own, was getting frostier and frostier as the story progressed and it hit absolute zero as Anne-Marie recounted the man attempting to undress her... Turned out it was the man whom she had killed.

Anne-Marie had no concept of what the man had considered doing to her when she was naked and I was very pleased about that. It was obvious from Stephanie's expression, and her clenched fists, that she knew only too well what the man had intended to do.

The story finished with my unmasking and Anne-Marie learning who Hit Girl was. I looked at Stephanie and she was shaking with fury and I will admit that she looked scarier than I had ever seen her. Her look of hate for those people bore into me as she looked back into my eyes. She reminded me of myself at that age; no remorse – nothing but hate. I had to agree with her sentiments – they had all deserved to die.

Every last one of them...

Atlantic Storm

Type: Ocean Alexander 120 Megayacht

Length Overall: 120' 2" (36.93 metres)

Waterline Length: 102' 10" (31.34 metres)

Beam: 25' 2" (7.67 metres)

Draft: 6' 9" (2.06 metres)

Displacement: 187.5 tons (190,509 kilogrammes)

Fuel Capacity: 7,000 gallons (26,468 litres)

Propulsion: Twin MTU Marine Diesels providing 2,900 horsepower at 2,250 rpm

First Cruise

Total distance logged: 2,815 nautical miles

Fuel Expended: 7,256 gallons of diesel

Rounds expended: 3,784

Injuries: Minor abrasions only

Log

Saturday 26th December 2015

14:00 Departed Miami, USA.

16:00 Completed Man Overboard Drill – Joshua not amused!

20:00 Watch change. Course 131°. Speed 20 Knots.

22:00 Arrived Nassau, The Bahamas. Anchored 1nm offshore.

23:59 Watch change. At Anchor.

145nm logged. Final position: 25.0600° N 77.3450° W

Sunday 27th December 2015

00:01 At Anchor.

04:00 Watch change. At Anchor.

07:10 Tender deployed.

08:00 Watch change. At Anchor.

09:40 Tender recovered.

10:00 Departed Nassau, The Bahamas. Course 038°. Speed 20 knots.
11:59 Watch change. Course 126°. Speed 20 Knots.
12:30 Course change to 095°.
13:42 Course change to 136°.
16:00 Watch change. Course 136°. Speed 20 Knots.
16:35 Course change to 142°.
20:00 Watch change. Course 142°. Speed 20 Knots.
20:00 Course change to 187°.
23:59 Watch change. Course 187°. Speed 20 Knots.

467nm logged. Final position: 22.2777° N 72.6209° W

Monday 28th December 2015

01:15 Course change to 154°.
04:00 Watch change. Course 154°. Speed 20 Knots.
05:15 Course change to 092°.
08:00 Watch change. Course 092°. Speed 20 Knots.
09:10 Engines Stopped.
09:30 Sea-Doo deployed.
09:40 Tender deployed.
11:59 Watch change. Hove to.
12:00 Sea-Doo and Tender recovered.
12:10 Course 092°. Speed 23 Knots.
16:00 Watch change. Course 092°. Speed 23 Knots.
20:00 Watch change. Course 092°. Speed 23 Knots. 100nm north of Dominican Republic.
23:59 Watch change. Course 092°. Speed 23 Knots.

939nm logged. Final position: 20.3752° N 72.5398° W

Tuesday 29th December 2015

04:00 Watch change. Course 092°. Speed 23 Knots.
04:30 Course change to 130°.
08:00 Watch change. Course 130°. Speed 23 Knots.
09:00 Rendezvoused with *USS Churchill*. Reduced speed to 20 Knots.
12:00 Watch change. Course 130°. Speed 20 Knots.
15:00 Course change to 124°.
16:00 Watch change. Course 124°. Speed 20 Knots.
19:30 Arrived St John's, Antigua. Moored alongside.
20:00 Vessel secured – party in *HMS Dragon*!

1,331nm logged. Final position: 17.1327° N 61.8632° W

Wednesday 30th December 2015

09:00 Departed St John's, Antigua. Course Speed 20 knots.
09:20 Course change to 183°.
09:45 Course change to 131°.
12:00 Watch change. Course 131°. Speed 20 Knots.
13:10 Course change to 258°.
14:25 Course change to 317°.
14:50 Arrived Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe. Moored alongside.
15:00 Vessel secured.
17:30 Anne-Marie missing.
19:40 Confirmation of abduction received. FUCKING BASTARDS!
20:00 All aboard, except Anne-Marie.
20:10 Ransom demand received.
21:00 Departed Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe. Course 174°. Speed 20 knots.
22:00 Course change to 267°.
22:30 Course change to 317°. Increased speed to 22 knots.
23:59 Watch change. Course 317°. Speed 22 Knots.

1,498 nm logged. Final position: 16.3003° N 62.0933° W

Thursday 31st December 2015

04:00 Watch change. Course 0317°. Speed 22 Knots.
05:00 Course change to 306°.
08:00 Watch change. Course 0306°. Speed 22 Knots.
08:30 Course change to 307°. 2.5nm southeast of Beef Island. Reduced speed to 6 knots.
09:00 Anchored off Beef Island.
10:00 Tender launched for reconnaissance of Buck Island.
11:59 Watch change. At anchor.
12:15 Tender recovered.
16:00 At Anchor.
20:00 At Anchor.
21:00 Weighed Anchor.
21:40 Deployed assault craft.
23:00 Assault underway.
23:55 Assault force ashore.
23:59 Hove to off Buck Island.

1,665 nm logged. Final position: 18.4269° N 64.5558° W

Friday 1st January 2016

00:01 Happy New Year!
02:52 First sounds of gunfire ashore.
03:25 Anne-Marie recovered.
03:55 Altered course for pier on Buck Island. Helicopter support arrived.
04:37 Moored alongside. Deployed protective measures onto pier.
04:44 Assault force returning – with Anne-Marie!
04:58 Underway at 22 knots.
07:30 CPA alarm. Vessel on intercept course. Engaged Battle Mode.
07:40 Under fire from three go-fasts.
07:41 Mayday issued. Position: 19.26° N 64.55° W. Course 270°.
07:42 Increased speed to 26 knots.
07:50 Mayday answered by HMS Dragon. Altered course to intercept HMS Dragon - 137°.
08:00 Under attack from three go-fasts.
08:05 Royal Navy helicopter engaging go-fasts.
08:12 First go-fast destroyed by RN helicopter.
08:20 Second go-fast destroyed by shell from HMS Dragon.
08:28 Third go-fast destroyed by RN helicopter. Attack over. Standing down.
09:02 In company with HMS Dragon. Altered course for unknown destination.
11:59 Watch change. Course: CLASSIFIED. Speed: CLASSIFIED.
16:00 Watch change. Course: CLASSIFIED. Speed: CLASSIFIED.
17:00 Arrived at CLASSIFIED. Moored alongside Royal Fleet Auxiliary for bunkering.
19:10 Vessel secured. At anchor.

1,865 nm logged. Final position: CLASSIFIED

Saturday 2nd January 2016

06:00 Departed CLASSIFIED. Course: CLASSIFIED. Speed: 22 Knots.
08:00 Watch change. Course 298°. Speed 22 Knots.
10:20 General Alarm. Pirates!
10:30 Altered course to intercept incoming pirates.
10:48 Sank two pirate craft.
10:50 Resumed course 298°.
11:59 Watch change. Course 298°. Speed 22 Knots.
16:00 Watch change. Course 298°. Speed 22 Knots.
20:00 Watch change. Course 298°. Speed 22 Knots.
23:59 Watch change. Course 298°. Speed 22 Knots.

2,261 nm logged. Final position: 22.3677°N 71.4688° W

Sunday 3rd January 2016

04:00 Watch change. Course 298°. Speed 22 Knots.
05:40 Course change to 329°.
08:00 Watch change. Course 329°. Speed 22 Knots.
10:40 Course change to 305°.
11:59 Watch change. Course 305°. Speed 22 Knots.
16:00 Watch change. Course 305°. Speed 22 Knots.
17:00 Course change to 277°.
18:40 Course change to 251°.
20:00 Watch change. Course 251°. Speed 22 Knots.
19:45 Course change to 236°.
21:05 Course change to 286°.
23:05 Course change to 273°.
23:59 Watch change. Course 273°. Speed 22 Knots.

2,393 nm logged. Final position: 23.3362°N 73.4582° W

Monday 4th January 2016

01:05 Course change to 290°.
03:05 Arrived: Port of Miami.
03:20 Finished with engines.
04:00 Handed *Atlantic Storm* to Shipyard Crew.

2,815 nm logged. Final position: 25.7648° N 80.0572° W

End of Log

***Chapter 241*: Nightmare Attack**

Thursday

There was something strange about certain people in Chicago.

I was putting together a file on Hit Girl and Fusion – for my own amusement. I already had quite a few photos, only something did not quite add up. There was something familiar about the people in my photos, but I had no idea where from...

That afternoon

D-JAK

I ran up the stairs with my sister close behind.

"You two are late!"

"Sorry, Chloe!" We both answered running to our places in the class.

Chloe smiled and rolled her eyes. I blushed in response and took up the same stance as the other kids, my younger sister following my actions beside me.

..._...

Forty minutes later I was dripping with sweat and desperate for a drink.

I saw Mrs Wilson – oops, Mrs Williams, appear and she had some cartons of juice for us all. Chloe called us together and sent us for a ten-minute break. While I drank my juice, Mindy, dressed in her black Gi, came over.

"Hi, Lauren – you're doing really well."

"I'm really enjoying myself, thanks Mindy."

There was something about Mindy – she was nice and I liked her; only her eyes told me something... But I had no idea what. It was the same with our instructor, Chloe – her eyes were the same. I had no more time to contemplate my thoughts when we were called back to our places.

"Now kiddies – let's up things a bit!" Chloe growled.

The following night

Friday

I should not even have *been* in that part of the city where I was.

It was stupid, and it was dangerous. But I needed to get some more photos – was I getting fixated on Fusion? I had no idea where they would be that night, but I thought that if I stuck to some of the darker parts of the city then I might find them.

I was waiting in the shadows of an alley, just off the street, when I heard a noise from down the alley. I was feeling scared – I was being stupid. It was time to leave...

There was somebody close, I could feel it. I made to move – then a hand came around and clasped itself across my mouth. I tried to scream as I was physically lifted off the ground, I struggled and fought against whoever held me.

"Get the little bitch into the SUV and let's go..."

I was being kidnapped!

A black hood was pulled over my head and I was thrown into the back of something.

Beneath me, I felt a leather seat – then my camera was pulled from around my neck and I heard it dropped to the floor of the SUV. I tried to use all my senses to identify what was going on and maybe where I was going.

I sensed movement close by and then I felt a stinging pain in my head and...

..._...

When I came around, my head was sore. But I felt something that was much worse than a headache – I felt hands on my belt...

I was lying on my back, on a bed, with my arms over my head. I tried to move them, but they were tied together at the wrists and then to something solid. Ominously, my legs were tied too, but spread apart about the width of a normal bed. I opened my eyes, but I must have been blindfolded as all I saw was blackness. I could hear things, though, and there was defiantly somebody moving about.

Whoever it was, they were undoing the belt on my jeans – that freaked me out and I started to struggle against my bindings.

"Keep still!" Came a gruff voice.

I froze and opened my mouth to cry out only to find that I had been gagged, too. I felt my belt being pulled out of the belt-loops and heard it fall to the floor. The same hands then got to work on the button of my jeans, quickly opening them and pulling down the zip. I was crying now and begging through the gag as the fear grew inside of me.

My right ankle was released from the bed and I tried to kick out as my jeans were pulled down my legs. The jeans were pulled off my right leg and I realised that I was no longer wearing my sneakers nor my socks. The right ankle was then secured again. The process was repeated on the left ankle and leg so the jeans could be removed completely.

I was relieved to still feel my knickers – at least for the moment.

..._...

Nothing else happened for several minutes.

I was shaking with fear and my bare legs were starting to get cold. Then I felt hands on my chest and I realised that I was not wearing my thick jacket. Something cold and metallic touched my stomach and I felt it move upwards. I also felt cool air on my skin – somebody was cutting off my t-shirt and sweatshirt. I started to struggle against my bindings again.

The movement up my stomach stopped and I felt a stinging sensation as a hand slapped my left cheek. I cried out in pain and stayed as still as I could as I was stripped completely. I felt the cold across all of my body as the last item of clothing, my knickers were cut off me. Then to top off my humiliation, I heard the click of what could only be my camera. What was happening to me?

Why?

I was sobbing and I felt complete hopelessness with my situation. Then I felt my restraints being removed and I hoped that things were going to get better...

Forty minutes later
Eastern Chicago

"You enjoying your 'peeping tom' routine?"

"Funny, Hal – I'm not *peeping*, I'm... *scanning!*"

"Yeah, seen any naked men yet, Leon?"

"Look, I – break – Fusion, I have a situation; range: two-four-eight yards, bearing: zero-eight-seven, from my current location, fourth floor!"

"Leon, Hit Girl – what do you see?"

"I have a naked girl – twelve or thirteen – she's being raped by some fat fuck; Leon is engaging..."

The Apartment

The pain was extreme.

I had never felt anything like it – he was rough and it hurt. After the first few minutes, my body started to react strangely. Something started to feel *good* – and that sickened me. I knew what was happening to me; I was not stupid – I knew an orgasm building.

The man was enjoying himself, ramming his thing inside of me again and again. Then, just as I reached my climax, he reared backwards and I heard a sound – breaking glass? Then the man's head seemed to – well... Explode!

I reacted instantly as stuff splashed across my face and body – his brains I guessed. I pushed his body out of the way and rolled off the bed onto the floor. I jumped up and made for the door to the bedroom and then out into a hallway. I had no idea where I was going, but I saw what looked like an external door. I pulled back a pair of bolts and yanked at the door; it was heavy, but I hauled it open enough to squeeze out.

..._...

Two sensations hit me as soon as the door clicked shut behind me. First, I felt a chill and realised that I was still completely naked and standing on the fourth floor of an apartment block. Second, I could feel the man's bodily fluids dribbling down the inside of my left thigh. I ran down several flights of stairs and I burst out into an alleyway. The cold hit me full force and I felt disoriented for a moment before I fell to the snow covered ground, shivering almost immediately.

As I lay on the snow, I heard an engine – a big engine. I heard snow crunching under some large tyres. Then came the sound of doors opening and several voices. I heard feet approaching on the soft snow, crunching towards me and I felt something rough push underneath my bare back and thighs and I was then very gently hoisted out of the snow and carried a short distance into blissful warmth.

Just as gently, I was placed onto something soft and a blanket was wrapped around my still shivering, naked body.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

The senior Doctor on duty that night ran towards the main door.

She burst out into the ambulance bay where an enormous black vehicle rested. The rear hatch opened and the easily recognisable form of Kick-Ass appeared, a blanket wrapped bundle in his arms. The armour-clad vigilante strode over to where a pair of nurses were waiting with a gurney. He gently laid the bundle down and turned to the Doctor.

"The girl is aged around twelve to thirteen. We found her, naked in the snow, after breaking up her rape."

"She's in good hands," Dr Cathy Bennett replied as she waved the gurney towards the door and began issuing orders. "Reese give us a hand here – Maggie, page Dr Manning."

Eastern Chicago

The Apartment

I sat alone in the darkness.

I was silently stewing in my own anger as I awaited the return of the other man. On following the trail from outside the apartment building, I had found the fourth floor apartment and ignoring the headless corpse that lay just three feet away from me, I had found evidence of somebody else living in the apartment.

I would have been both mad and itching for revenge even if it had been just any teenaged girl who was unlucky to find herself seized and raped. However, I knew the girl and she was under *my* protection. What was the stupid girl doing in a place like the apartment? I had found her clothes and her camera – I also knew that she had a thing for Fusion and taking photos of us in action.

About half an hour after I had sat down to wait, I heard a knock on the door and then the door being pushed open.

..._...

"Bert?"

So the headless bastard was called 'Bert'.

A hand reached in and flicked the light switch – once, twice and then again for good measure.

"Damn bulb – what's happened this time?"

"I smashed it!" I growled from the darkness and almost laughed as the man jumped like a hundred feet in shock.

I stepped forwards and the light spilled onto the purple gauntlet of my right hand – the man began to scream.

An hour later, I stood up and turned to the man.

"Thank you for your help, Frank..."

I aimed my pistol at his head.

"But, you said..."

"I lied!"

"Nooooo..."

I pulled the trigger twice and left the apartment, closing the door behind me.

An hour and a half later

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

I had spent the past couple of hours being prodded and poked in the most humiliating ways.

Don't get me wrong, everybody had been real nice to me, but arriving stark naked for a start, was embarrassing once I had been warmed up and I was able to understand what was happening to me. The full body examination as part of the rape-kit had been very humiliating as a complete stranger inspected every square inch of my body – including a painful internal examination.

It was also the first time that I had acknowledged that nasty four letter word – yes, I had been kidnapped, stripped and then raped. It had happened, whether I liked it or not...

..._...

Finally, I had taken for a bath to wash off all the dried blood and brains that were all over me. Then I had been given an ill-fitting hospital gown and taken to a bed in a small private room. I endured a visit from the Chicago PD too, which was not much fun. The Doctor, who seemed slightly familiar – I was sure that I had seen her around at D-JAK, well she reassured me that I was fine and that I should rest.

I had dozed off for a short while when I heard something and came wide awake, instantly fearful of being attacked again.

"Have no fear... We are not here to hurt you."

The voice was electronic and it scared me until I realised that I had heard it before. A light came on beside the bed and I recognised a blue armoured gauntlet. Then I heard another voice and saw a very familiar purple form appear in the light.

"You need to stop pursuing us, Lauren – please don't do it again... You are safe from the men that did this to you and I have your camera, which I will return to you in due course."

"Who found me?"

"That was Kick-Ass – he brought you here to the hospital."

"Thank you," I said.

"Stay safe..."

With that, Shadow and Hit Girl were gone.

***Chapter 242*: Visiting The Hit Cave**

Late Friday night

"Seriously!"

I was livid as I pulled over to the side of the road. The marked CPD SUV with flashing blue lights pulled in behind me. I had *not* been speeding! I rolled down my window and awaited the CPD clown who had pulled me over.

"Licence and registration, Hit Girl!"

I laughed as I turned to look at the *two* CPD clowns.

"Fucking assholes!"

"That's no way to talk to the Police, young lady..." Murphy chuckled.

"We deserve respect; I believe..." Fellowes added with a smirk.

I was not in the best of moods, considering the night I had had, so...

"Well, guys, Hit Girl is fresh out of respect – eat this!" I growled as I dropped the car into 'Sport' and put my foot to the floor, spinning the large rear tyres of the Jaguar XJR and leaving the two cops in a cloud of tyre smoke.

Saturday morning

"It is *not* called that..."

"But it's such a cool name!" Danny persisted.

"I agree with Danny..." Anne-Marie added.

"They have a point," Stephanie interjected reasonably.

Dave just chuckled.

Minutes later, the two kids' eyes went wide as the XJR finished curling down the circular concrete ramp and we stopped beside Iron Hide under the bright lights of Safehouse F as the door closed behind us. I jumped out and opened the back door, letting my two daughters out. Dave did the same for our son and before long the twins' eyes were darting around so fast that I thought their eyeballs might spin around or drop out of their heads.

"Cool!" Danny breathed.

"The Hit Cave!" Anne-Marie exclaimed.

"It's... We don't..." I turned to glare at the grinning Joshua. "You see what you've done!"

It was both exactly as I had expected and nothing like I had expected.

I had expected awesome and it *was* awesome, but it was *so* much more – I had dreamed about being part of Fusion for ages. Now it was all coming true... I was struggling to take it all in. Steph was grinning at me and I felt pangs of jealousy; she had known about all this for weeks. Not only that, she was a vigilante – Psyche.

Mom had tried to explain to me that Stephanie was 'different', but I hadn't really understood and I could tell that there was stuff that Mom did not want to go into. Danny was actually drooling, which was disgusting!

Megan pulled me over to a room full of computers and there I found Marty and Abby. The computers and the big screens were amazing – it was like Star Trek, only way better...

My brain was overloading...

It was... It was awesome... The roof of the Safehouse towered above us... I was speechless...

"Danny – please stop drooling; it's really embarrassing!"

My sister scowled and passed me a tissue.

"I love it... Almost worth you getting yourself kidnapped..."

"Ow!"

My sister could punch hard when she wanted to!

I dragged the two overawed kids upstairs and into the Briefing Room.

They gazed down into the Safehouse and across the mat. I directed their attentions over to the photographs and they were both mesmerized.

"At the top there are my Mom and Dad and next to them, Dave's Mom and Dad."

"They're all dead?" Anne-Marie asked.

"Yes, they are – below them is me and my Daddy – actually Hit Girl and Big Daddy."

"You look awesome, Mom – and I love the pink belt."

"I loved that belt – I still have it somewhere; it was my favourite colour..."

"Other than purple!" Josh quipped.

"Other than purple," I confirmed with a smirk.

"That was how I first met Mindy – she was wearing that getup," Dave said with a shudder.

I laughed.

"I think I scared him back then."

"Who are they?" Danny asked, looking at the next picture down.

"Justice Forever!" Marty said quietly. "That's me, the dork at the front – Battle Guy. Kick-Ass with Miranda..."

Stephanie actually leant in closer to Dave at the mention of Miranda's name.

"... Night Bitch. Insect Man, Dr Gravity and..."

"My Mom and Dad," Tommy added with a smile. "Remembering Tommy."

"Last but not least: Colonel Stars and Stripes. She's not there, but Sophia was a member, too – Eisenhower."

"Even the damn dog is a vigilante!" Anne-Marie laughed.

"Language!" I growled and Anne-Marie smiled sweetly focussing on the final photo.

"Who's the guy in the cool looking uniform?" She asked.

"That's my Dad," Josh said. "With my Mum."

"Those photos are a memorial to the fallen – many of those on that wall, they fell while fighting the worst scum on earth. They died for us all – doing what was right," Dave said as a reminder to us all.

While Marty and Abby showed the twins around further, Dave, Josh, Chloe and I took Megan aside into the galley and had a quiet chat about our newest vigilante, Psyche, and her behaviour on the island.

Once we had finished talking, I went to find Stephanie. She was downstairs in the dojang with the twins and Abby. I asked Abby to take the twins upstairs and closed the door after them. Stephanie looked worried as I waved for her to sit down on the mat.

"This is difficult for me, but we need to talk about what occurred on the island... You enjoyed yourself – didn't you?"

Stephanie smiled.

"I won't deny it – I *did* enjoy it, which shocked me, just a bit..."

"You were very good and it was the first time we got to see what Psyche could really do when let out on your own..."

"But..." Stephanie interrupted.

"But... Some had concerns over your behaviour – now, you did beautifully and without your participation, Anne-Marie may have died. I will also owe you for taking part in her safe return. At the time I did not care how many died, or how they died. Dave said that you reminded him of me when he first met Hit Girl. I was cold, calculating and without remorse.

"The two of us are different to the others – we are not normal and we never will be. That is part of the reason for my adopting you; I want to help you have as normal a life as possible. Now we are back in Chicago, things are different. You cannot kill indiscriminately, nor can you cause collateral damage. As I said, on the island everybody was fair game. However, I was a little concerned by you dropping that woman in the kitchen."

"She hurt Anne-Marie, so she deserved to die..."

"I know, only she was unarmed and she was surrendering. I turned a blind-eye to it at the time, considering the circumstances and the fact that we were not taking any prisoners. Please, think before you kill – it's bad enough that Anne-Marie and Danny know about who we all really are, but for them to see us killing..."

"I promise to control my emotions in future – I let my emotions run wild and that was why I killed that woman. It won't happen again..."

"It mustn't; but I did the same, back when I was eleven and my own emotions almost got me killed – twice! Dave rescued me both times – Hit Girl is not infallible and I know that you aren't either."

I stood up and Stephanie followed suit. We hugged for a minute before we were interrupted by a visitor.

..._...

"You two finished, or are you going to make out..." Josh inquired with a dirty grin as he came into the room.

"Can I hit him?" Stephanie asked.

"Feel free..."

Two seconds later Joshua was on the mat, Stephanie having sent a flying kick to his head. Chloe came in just then and glanced down at her boyfriend.

"What did you do this time?" She asked with an exasperated tone and expression.

"Just 'cause I'm on the floor, why do you always assume it's something that I've done?" Joshua complained.

Josh looked up at the three icy glares from the surrounding females.

"Christ – okay...!" Josh growled.

"Here..." Stephanie stepped forwards and helped Josh back to his feet.

"Thank you, Steph – nice kick, by the way."

"Thanks," Stephanie replied, smiling at Josh. "Hope I didn't hurt you."

"Oh, little Stephy has a thing for Josh..." Chloe grinned. "I have a competitor..."

"Have not!" A furiously blushing Stephanie retorted.

That evening

Safehouse F

While Stephanie and Joshua embarrassed themselves, I had gone back to see Marty who had been examining Lauren's camera.

He did not seem sure where to start and looked a little embarrassed, so he just showed me her photos. There was a mixture – typical of a teenager with a camera. Photos of her friends at school, photos of her younger sister and her mother, photos of parts of Chicago and then...

Holy fuck!

There were images of Lauren at the apartment – in the first few she was dressed, but then began a selection of degrading photos showing more and more skin before almost forty images of the girl completely naked and in some very unflattering positions... I was furious and very pleased that both men were very, very dead – although I would have liked to have made 'Bert' suffer more!

"It shocked the hell out of me when I saw them – the poor girl..." Marty stammered.

"That fits in with what the surviving cunt said – they must have been for blackmail or something similar – destroy those photos, keep the genuine ones..."

"Will do!"

As I was walking out of the Command Centre, I had an idea.

The following morning

Sunday

Eastern Chicago

I was back home after being allowed out of the hospital.

Mom had brought me some fresh clothes and I had been very glad to get home. I was uninjured, apart from some scratches and bruises. After cuddles from my very worried younger sister, I retreated to my room where much to my surprise, I found a box sitting on my bed. Tentatively, I opened it and was very surprised by what I found inside; it was my camera!

Along with the camera there was a purple card, on one side was embossed, **HG**, while on the other side was a simple message: 'Stay out of trouble!'.

..._...

I turned on my camera and checked my pictures – they were all there...

Huh – I never took those!

I was seeing images of Fusion: Kick-Ass, Hit Girl, Shadow, Jackal, Petra, Wildcat, Hawk, Trojan and Mist. I had no idea where they were taken, but it was obvious that whoever had taken the images had been very careful about what was captured. There was a photo of Hit Girl posing beside her purple Panigale. Another had Kick-Ass standing next to *Titan* with Jackal and Shadow. My favourite was a photo of the two leaders together: Hit Girl and Kick-Ass side by side.

I had no need to follow Fusion anymore.

Two days later

Tuesday evening

Emily Edwards looked up as she heard the knock on the door of their apartment.

She was not open to visitors – it had been a trying week, what with her eldest daughter being kidnapped and then raped. However, the knock sounded insistent and she was more than a little surprised to find out who was standing outside her door...

"Good evening, Mrs Edwards..."

If Mrs Edwards was shocked to find two female vigilantes at her door, she did not show it. She stood back and waved them both in before closing the door.

"Sorry for the intrusion, but we wondered if we could speak with your daughter, Lauren," Hit Girl said.

"You are welcome any time – Fusion has saved the life of my daughter *twice*..."

"I am only sorry that we could not have helped her sooner..." Shadow said.

"She's upstairs with her sister... Lauren!" Mrs Edwards called, but there was no response.

"Lauren!"

No response.

"Lizzie!"

A young girl appeared at the bottom of the stairs and she seemed very anxious about something.

"Where is your sister?"

The girl stared at the floor before bursting into tears.

"She went out – she said that she needed closure and had to find out more..."

"What?" Mrs Edwards exclaimed.

"Shadow, stay with them – I'll go find Lauren," Hit Girl ordered as she headed out the door.

I knew exactly where I might find the girl and I wasn't a moment too soon.

Lauren was heading down the same alley where we had found her, only a man was headed towards her with a smile on his face. I came up behind Lauren and raised my pistol.

"I don't think you want to be here tonight..." I growled.

The man stopped and raised his hands.

"I don't think I want to be here tonight..." The man said as he turned and ran.

Lauren span around.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"Saving your ass again, Lauren."

"I can look after myself – I *need* to look after myself..."

"Okay – I know when I'm not wanted."

"You don't know what it is like to have everything taken away from you and to be forced to do bad things..."

I did, but now was not the time.

"I have never experienced what you experienced the other night and I am really sorry that we could not have helped you sooner."

"You killed the other man, didn't you – I wanted to do that..."

"Yes, I killed him..."

"I need some sort of closure – they violated me, they made me pose..."

"I know – I saw the pictures... I destroyed them."

"Thank you."

"What you went through will take time to heal... A lot of time. But you have to stop doing this – your Mother is so worried about you."

"What the fuck would you care?"

"I care – more than you know..."

"Why?"

"Because you are a strong young woman and I think you will go far – you may be a bloody nightmare, but I intend to help you every way that I can."

Lauren began to sob and I held her tightly for several minutes before she sorted herself out.

"I have something to show you, if you are willing..."

I pulled *Sentinel* over to the side of the road and turned off the engine.

"Why have we stopped?" Lauren asked.

"With the information that I obtained from that other man – this is happening..."

I waved at a building several dozen yards down the street. Several black-clad men were moving down the sidewalk before smashing down the front door of an apartment block and rushing inside. There was an explosion of noise and at least three gunshots. Then a man bolted out of a side door and ran towards us up the sidewalk.

"Lauren – get ready to open your door... Now!"

Lauren pushed open the heavily armoured door and the runner slammed into it very hard before falling to the street unconscious.

"Awesome!" Lauren laughed as she pulled the door closed.

Within minutes we saw the Police reappear and bring out men in handcuffs along with several young women in various stages of undress. They were rapidly wrapped in blankets as ambulances began to arrive. A Cop ran towards us, took a glance at our vehicle and dragged the unconscious man back down the sidewalk without another look.

"I know it won't mean much, but those girls are safe thanks to the information I acquired the other night."

***Chapter 243*: Urban Predator**

*The following morning
Wednesday*

North Park Elementary School

I turned to the three girls and one boy.

"Be good, *all* of you – especially *you!*"

"Why single me out?" Stephanie demanded somewhat defensively.

I scowled at the nine-year-old.

"What did I tell you earlier?"

Stephanie rolled her eyes before responding.

"No maiming, no killing, no being abusive, no being overprotective of my siblings..."

Megan was giggling and there was a growing smirk on Anne-Marie's face. Danny just looked a little concerned.

"I'll be a good little girl, all day, I promise!"

"If she isn't, I'll put her out!" Megan promised, laughing at Stephanie's annoyed expression.

"Have fun, otherwise what's the point!" I said as I gave them all a hug before they headed into school.

Then I had a thought – what might I bring to my first day of school?

"Stephanie!"

"What now?"

"Hand it over..."

The girl's shoulders slumped as she knew that she had been rumbled.

"But..."

"Now!"

The girl reluctantly reached into her backpack and produced a black Walther PPK/S .22-calibre pistol. I palmed it smoothly so it was not seen by any of the other parents.

"We'll talk later, and if necessary you'll be strip-searched in the car every morning!"

That night

The Edgewater Lounge

Mindy and I were spending the evening at our usual watering hole.

Shannon had just served me a beer and Mindy a Coke while we sat at the bar. The kids had all survived their first day back at school – even Anne-Marie, despite her kidnapping experience... I knew that she was not over it, but we were working on that.

Surprisingly, we had not received a call from the school Principal saying that Stephanie had killed another kid – so that was good too!

It was nice for Dave and me to have some time together of an evening away from everything.

Several minutes later, my attention was drawn by two people entering the bar. One, a dark haired well-built man maybe two inches under six-foot tall, sat on a stool directly across from us on the other side of the bar. The other, a woman who was a couple of inches shorter than the man but with long mousy blonde hair – she sat down next to the man.

What had caught my eye was the fact that neither of them actually looked at Dave nor me – a dead giveaway that they were looking *for* us. However, it also occurred to me that they were being very obvious and exhibiting just enough 'trade-craft' to let me know that they were people to be taken seriously. I gave Dave a kiss, letting my eyes look on his own – he had picked up something too.

We moved away from the bar to a booth – we both sat on one side with Dave on the outside. The vacant seat opposite us was an obvious invitation, which was accepted once the couple had been served their own drinks – a beer and a glass of white wine.

"May we join you?" The woman asked with a smile.

"Of course, please..." Dave replied with a disarming smile.

"Shall we skip the bullshit?" I suggested.

The man grimaced, but grinned quickly.

"Jason, Jason Bourne."

"Nicky Parsons."

"I assume that you know *our* names," I continued.

"Dave and Mindy Lizewski," Nicky replied without hesitation.

Both the man and the woman seemed to be able to handle themselves, but neither seemed armed – however the man seemed to be a weapon all on his own.

"So?" I pushed.

"You've been looking into something that was supposed to remain buried – Treadstone..."

"Let me guess – you're another product of those delightful people at the CIA?" Dave suggested.

"I believe I am not the only victim of brainwashing, Mrs Lizewski..." Jason mentioned pointedly.

I grimaced.

"Why were you searching?" Nicky asked, getting things back on track.

"We discovered a young victim – only this one was only partially trained. Her brainwashing was not completed..."

"Urban Predator..." Nicky breathed looking at Jason with venom in her expression.

"The bastards went ahead... How old is she?"

"Nine..."

"Fucking bastards – they were supposed to have stopped that before it ever got going – training little kids from an early age!" Nicky exclaimed angrily. "I hate to say it, but they got the idea from you..."

"Is this place secure?" Jason asked.

"We can talk safely..." Dave confirmed.

"I was the last survivor of Treadstone – I made sure of that..." Jason said darkly.

"I was part of the Treadstone operation. I was helping to apprehend Jason after he went rogue," Nicky explained. "It was a top-secret operation that transformed ordinary US Service members into assassins. It was a way of getting around certain Congressional interference when it came to assassinations. Treadstone used a behaviour-modification program to remove morality and make them unstoppable in their missions. The participants' loyalty was absolute – or so the CIA thought until Jason upset things for them!"

"There was another attempt – Blackbriar – we fucked that up for them too," Jason advised us with a grin.

"So there are more kids out there?" I enquired, a little horrified.

"Teenaged assassins?" Jason asked. "Yes – the aim of the program was to have them ready to operate by about thirteen to sixteen. We have no idea how many actually 'graduated' from the program – we hoped none. However, if you have one – then there may have been many more. Was there an adult with the girl?"

"Yes, there was – she was also brainwashed," Dave replied quickly.

"Some adults were intended to be guardians and a control figure for the kids during training."

"That makes sense..." I growled angrily.

"I am very pleased to see your reaction to this – it means we were right to seek you out," Jason confirmed. "You are going to need our help to sort this out."

"Can we meet her?" Nikki asked – genuine concern on her face.

"The girl's welfare is *my* responsibility – let me think things through," I replied. "How can we contact you?"

The following morning Thursday

I noticed something as we walked down the street.

My senses said there was a problem. I instantly went on alert and guided Nicky down the next street on the left. She looked up and grimaced at my expression – shew knew; we were able to communicate without words. It was not a surprise – the CIA were not stupid; not totally, anyway! They had tracked us to the Chicago – I knew they would; getting in and out of the US was getting harder.

Now, I was going to make them dance to *my* tune for a change...

Glenview

Mindy hung up the cell.

Her expression was a mixture of worry and amusement.

"That was Bourne – the CIA are in town and we need to setup a little ambush..."

"That sounds like fun, honey – I don't think I've kicked over a CIA Agent before," I grinned before going cold and serious. "It'll be good to start having a go at those that made Stephanie..."

"Somebody call me?"

"Hi, Steph – we may have use of your skills tonight... We also want you to meet somebody."

"Who," Stephanie asked and she actually sounded interested.

"Somebody like you."

"A psychotic nut job?" Stephanie asked with a grin.

I thought for a moment before replying.

"Probably, yes."

That same time

Central Intelligence Agency

Langley, Virginia

"What the *hell* is *he* doing in Chicago?"

"He just showed up – a complete fluke we spotted him, really."

"What is going *on* in that city? First we lose that Walker girl and that Swedlow woman, then we have persona non grata number one, Jason fucking Bourne turning up!"

"Not to mention all those vigilantes..."

"Fuck those sad bastards – idiots in costumes; they're not important... Mind you – where's that Fusion file from December?"

Mark Martin took a moment to fish through the files on his boss's desk before passing over the relevant file. CIA Deputy Director of the Support Directorate Noah Vossen seized the file and flicked through it for a moment.

"There – Fusion gained a new member soon before Christmas. Female, short and violent and if that weren't enough, she's using her fucking codename - Psyche! She has to be living somewhere – how come we haven't found her yet?"

"We've checked all across the city; schools everything – no Stephanie Walker anywhere..."

"Time to make 'Urban Predator' *work* for a change – I'll show those fucking bastards that I can still kick ass!"

CIA Station

Chicago

Paul Stein checked his email and was annoyed to find an urgent tasking waiting for him.

He scanned the email briefly, taking in certain names and phrases: 'TREADSTONE', 'URBAN PREDATOR', 'FOXTAIL', 'AURORA', 'PSYCHE', 'BOURNE', 'VOSEN'.

There were some very specific instructions detailing his next actions. He was concerned about operating in Chicago; the CIA had no mandate to operate within the Fifty States, not that they did not operate covertly.

His first task, was to activate a deep-cover operative: Saoirse Doherty – a hell of a name!

That afternoon

St Benedict Parish School

Northern Chicago

The ninth-grade girl paused as the cell buzzed on the table beside her.

She picked it up and after unlocking it, checked the text message: 'FOXTAIL-ALFA-NOVEMBER-UNIFORM'. A smile crossed her lips and her eyes lit up with excitement as she replied: 'FOXTAIL-YANKEE-BRAVO-LIMA'. She had no idea that just a few miles outside the school, a man checked his cell, nodded and then drove off, his task complete.

The girl checked the time and headed off for her last class of the day as if nothing had occurred. To look at the girl, you would not see a highly trained assassin. She was almost five and a half feet tall, with short, dark brown hair and blue eyes. While she was in ninth-grade, you could be forgiven for believing her to be in the tenth or eleventh grades.

..._...

After the last class, she was about to leave the school when another girl came up to her.

"Office asked me to give you this, SD..."

"Thanks."

The girl checked the plain brown envelope and examined the seal – it was intact. She walked over to the side of the building and broke the seal. Inside the envelope were some photos – a man, a woman, a young girl and another woman. There were names on the back of each photo and warnings concerning how dangerous all four were – especially the young girl.

After examining and memorising the photos, Saoirse Doherty walked back into the school and over to the Office.

"Hi, Mrs Grey, could you shred this envelope for me?"

"Of course, Saoirse – one second."

Once the envelope was completely destroyed, Saoirse Doherty took a brief walk and jumped on her bus home.

That same time

Glenview

Stephanie was quietly fuming.

She was sitting cross-legged in the bath while Mindy awaited her decision. Mindy had made *her* decision, but she was allowing Stephanie to make hers out of respect for the girl.

"Come on, make up your mind – you either dye it or lose it..."

Thanks to the CIA being in town and presumably hunting her, Stephanie needed to change her appearance. She had been given two choices; dye her long blonde hair another colour – or have it cut short. Stephanie of course, wanted neither however, so after a lot of screaming and struggling she had found herself in the bath awaiting one fate or the other.

"Alright, dye it!" The nine-year-old growled reluctantly.

"Finally!" Mindy chuckled.

"At least you don't have to worry about the drapes matching the carpet!" Megan laughed as she smirked down at Stephanie.

"When I get out of here, you are bloody history, kitty-kat!"

..._...

Only that was *not* the end of it!

Megan had then suggested that *both* girls should have their hair dyed – making them the same. Mindy had thought that a good idea – but that was where the arguments had started. Anne-Marie was hauled into the bathroom to see what she thought; she liked the idea – only the girl wanted 'Hit Girl Purple'!

Mindy actually considered that idea a good one, but then contemplated what Marcus and the kids' school might say...

..._...

Finally, the two girls were finished – again after a lot of complaining as both girls had quite thick hair and it took a while.

For a time, they both sat gloomily examining their new hair in a mirror. Both were now a deep copper red colour which was very similar to Megan's own hair colouring, but darker. To all intents and purposes, the two girls did look like sisters, which was the end result that we had wanted.

"Get a grip, you two – I think it suits you both..."

"You would – I hate the colour!" Stephanie moaned.

"Live with it – it might just save your life..." Mindy warned.

That Night

Safehouse K

The CIA were not exactly hard to track, which was a somewhat pleasant surprise.

Despite that, we were not taking any chances as the three armoured SUVs raced through the open gate and into the yard behind Safehouse K. As soon as the vehicles stopped, we piled out, leaving only the drivers behind.

We all rushed into the Safehouse as all three SUVs quickly vanished out the gate.

..._...

"Nice place you have here!" The man commented as he gazed around the immense open area.

Hit Girl turned to the man as he removed his balaclava.

"You ain't seen nothing yet!" She hissed.

"She sounds like you when you're 'on the job!'" Nicky chuckled, pulling off her own balaclava.

"This way..."

As we walked over to a section of concrete that was marked with a dashed yellow square, a slight rumble could be heard as that section of the concrete floor moved down and then to one side, revealing a concrete staircase. We all vanished downwards and the concrete slab returned to its previous position, hiding the staircase.

We came out into a comfortable lobby that had carpet tiles on the floor and the walls were painted a pleasant light purple. We all headed through a pair of double doors into a large open area that contained a briefing area, a kitchen and a place to sit and eat. As we entered, lights clicked on across the facility.

I had never been there before and it looked cool.

..._...

"Love the colour scheme, Mindy!" Nicky commented.

"Thanks," Hit Girl said as she pulled off her mask. "We should have some time before those goons show up."

Kick-Ass pulled off his own mask and made for a large eighty-inch horizontal touch-screen table that was a duplicate of that at Safehouse F. It was already active and it showed the surrounding area in visual, night and infra-red modes.

Then Mindy turned to me.

"Time to show yourself, Steph."

I took a deep breath and pulled off my mask, feeling shy for some reason or other. I looked over at the two new people; I knew their names, but nothing else about them. Mindy waved for us all to sit down while Dave leant against the table and watched.

Shadow and Petra kept their masks in place while they kept watch on the surveillance systems.

"Stephanie, my name is Jason Bourne and this is Nicky Parsons. We are very familiar with your situation and how you are what you are..."

Stephanie looked confused.

"You're only nine, am I right?" Nicky asked.

Stephanie looked at me and I nodded with a reassuring smile.

"Yes."

"British?"

"Yes."

"Jason is a product of a CIA program called Treadstone – he was brainwashed into becoming a mindless assassin that would follow orders without question. You are the product of another one of the CIAs less clever ideas – Urban Predator..."

Nicky went on for twenty minutes. During that time, I saw Stephanie's eyes go wide with amazement and then narrow with anger. When Nicky stopped talking, Stephanie just sat there, staring at the floor.

"Steph?"

I was a little worried by her quietness.

"There are others like me out there?" Steph asked quietly.

"We believe so – only we have no idea who or what. You were not the first, but I hope you were the last..." Jason confirmed.

"So that is why I had to have my hair dyed this ridiculous colour this afternoon?"

"You look really sweet, Steph," Nicky said and I heard Shadow giggle behind us.

Stephanie scowled and was about to retort when Petra shouted over.

"Incoming!"

***Chapter 244*: Ambush at Safehouse K**

Thursday night

**Southwest Chicago
Safehouse F**

They came out of the darkness, in six separate, but identical teams.

Each team consisted of six bodies and they closed on the Safehouse from four different directions. No lights were in evidence so they were obviously making use of NVG equipment. I looked over at Jason.

"You going to turn your hand?" I offered.

"Show me the way, Hit Girl!"

"Shadow, take Mr Bourne to the armoury and find him some body armour, NVGs and weapons. Petra, let's get ourselves ready."

"What about me?" Stephanie asked indignantly.

I winked at Nicky as I replied.

"I need you to stay with Nicky – she needs guarding, plus I can't leave a stranger in the Safehouse alone."

Stephanie glared at me as she pulled on her mask. I had expected an argument; however, Psyche just readied her weapons and took up station near to the entrance.

Safehouse K had five floors above ground.

The entire first floor was entirely devoid of obstacles – just 22,000 square feet of open concrete with a concrete staircase rising up in the centre, on the north side. On the south side, again in the centre of the long side of the building, was a single lift shaft with a cargo elevator. At the back of the building, on the west end by the loading docks, was a steel fire escape that gave access to and from each floor.

The CIA team separated, one team went to each of the five floors while the remaining team remained outside to guard against our escape.

"Overwatch, any sign of snipers?" I called.

"Still scanning the area, Hit Girl," Leon replied from her roof-top perch two hundred yards away to the south-west.

"Jackal, Wildcat – check in!"

"We found their vehicles and they are wired – two men on guard..." Jackal replied from two streets away where he and Wildcat monitored the CIA's six SUVs.

"Hawk, Splinter, Trojan – check in!"

"We have the control van under surveillance – no obvious guard, but we are still covert," Splinter replied.

The three vigilantes were in *Beast*, half a mile away, and about thirty yards from a large black van that purported to belong to an electrical maintenance company. No one was going to escape without *our* express permission...

"CIA teams are moving into position. They are at each fire door on the northwest corner fire escape," Battle Guy announced from Safehouse F.

"Ready!" Petra announced from her position on the fifth floor.

"Ready!" Shadow announced from the fourth floor.

"Ready!" Spectre called from the third floor – Jason needed a name and it had been Nicky's idea.

"Ready!" I growled from the second floor.

"Ready!" Kick-Ass hissed from his position in the side alley, eight feet from two armed CIA men.

"Ready!" Psyche added from the basement level.

Out of the night, there came sniper shots from three separate directions as gunfire poured into the fifth, third and second floors of Safehouse K.

"Heavy rounds coming in!" Petra announced.

"No shit, Sherlock!" Leon replied as she scanned the area for the snipers.

"Triangulating!" Hal announced from Safehouse F using strategically placed microphones to measure the time between sound reaching each microphone. "Sniper One – eight-zero-zero yards, zero-nine-zero!"

"Sniper One is masked from my location!" Leon responded.

"But not from mine – I have him..." Medic replied from across the nearby water where she was the backup in *Titan* with Mist.

"Sniper Two – seven-nine-one yards, one-nine-seven!" Hal called.

"I have him..." Leon replied and then two rapid shots were heard over the comms. They were suppressed, but the round was supersonic. "He's dog meat!"

The coroner would have fun with that body – the first bullet had obliterated the man's head while the second had entered the destroyed base of the skull and then travelled the length of the body before exiting at the crotch and burying itself into a concrete wall.

"Sniper Three – five-one-six yards, two-five-eight!" Hal called.

Overwatch Position

"Oh fuck!" I said calmly over the comms. "He has me..."

A large round struck just inches from my left hand sending up chips of concrete. I had no time to flinch; I steadied my rifle and muttered a curse as I sent the tip of another .50-calibre round downrange...

"Fucking bastard thought he could outshoot *me*..." I exclaimed as my bullet bored straight through the other sniper's scope and into his brain via his right eye.

For good measure, I shot the man who had been guarding the sniper's back and who came forward to see what had happened to the now very dead sniper.

Titan

Almost a kilometre away, Medic moved stealthily through the darkness with Mist a dozen yards behind.

The sniper was still shooting – but he had a protector, guarding his back. As Mist watched with a P90 to her shoulder, Medic advanced towards the protector who turned and raised his Colt M4 carbine, sending a three-round burst of 5.56-millimetre bullets into Medic's heavy chest armour.

"You fuckers make me sick!" She exclaimed in her electronically shrouded voice as she pulled the trigger three times on her Kel-Tec KSG shotgun, blasting the unfortunate CIA man into a bloody mess. "Fuck with a little girl's mind will you, you sick bastards?"

Medic advanced and blasted away at the sniper even as he rolled to meet the new threat from behind him. His head was vaporised as the contents of four 12-gauge shells exploded out of the end of the shotgun.

"Sniper One and another sick fuck are down – permanently!" Medic growled into the comms.

Safehouse K

The assault teams had thought they were onto an easy entry.

They had sniper support which was normally an equaliser, but they had become more and more worried as they had heard each of their own snipers go off the air, not to mention the cautionary warning of an enemy sniper in the area. The fifth floor team made their entry at the same time as the other teams, blasting open the fire escape with a block of C4. They pushed through the debris and began firing single shots in prearranged directions and then fanning out in pairs to cover the 110-foot width of the open plan area. There were numerous wooden packing crates scattered in a seemingly random arrangement.

There was nothing random about the layout; Safehouse K was used for multi-aspect training.

Safehouse K: Basement

From my *safe* location in the basement, I was able to monitor the attack.

Yes, I was annoyed at being kept *safe*, but I had no choice. Every floor had low-light and infra-red closed-circuit video surveillance, so I was able to follow the fight with Nicky beside me. As I watched, I saw Petra up on the fifth floor as she moved forwards and toward the centre of the open space before jumping up onto a stack of wooden crates.

Almost a minute later, she smoothly and silently drew a single combat Katana from her back, and then casually took off the head of a CIA attacker as he moved past. His partner turned at the movement to take the same Katana in the neck.

..._...

I laughed as I saw the confusion in the other two pairs of Agents on the fifth floor as they called for the third pair to respond.

"That was very well done!" Nicky said appreciatively.

"Your man has nothing on us!"

"Is that so..."

..._...

Spectre was on the third floor – we could see him moving through the darkness.

"Spectre, movement at your nine o'clock – M4 to the right shoulder..."

We saw Spectre move over to one side slightly and raise a hand with a knife visible. The hand plunged downwards and sideways into the neck of the unfortunate CIA Agent who died without knowing what had killed him. His partner lasted only a few seconds longer as his legs were kicked out from under him and he dropped his carbine, crashing to the floor. The knife plunged down again, into his heart, killing him instantly.

The man crashing to the floor had attracted other attention and bullets peppered the wall behind Spectre as he dove to the floor, rolling and bringing up his Glock 17 pistol, squeezing the trigger several times.

"Six down..." Spectre said in a cold monotone that echoed Psyche's own.

Half a mile away CIA Command Van

There was intense consternation in the Command Van as the on-scene commander fretted about his men.

They were dying and he had no idea why.

"What the fuck is happening in there?"

His snipers were no longer responding – which probably meant that they were dead – there was an enemy sniper in the area and his men were being engaged on all levels of the building. Maybe there was more to these Fusion guys than had been briefed.

"What was that?" The commander said as his attention was drawn to a flat screen monitor mounted in the large control panel that ran down the left side of the van's interior.

"Not sure, boss..."

A large dark form seemed to materialise out of the darkness beside his outside team. The wireless camera had been placed just before the attack, along with several others.

"Team seven – check your six..." The commander ordered urgently over the communication circuit.

The two men turned and both opened fire with their M4 carbines, however their bullets did not seem to do anything as the menacing dark form advanced towards the men. The dark form was wearing obvious, heavy body armour and it simply raised a wicked looking AA-10 shotgun and several blasts later, the two CIA men fell to the ground.

"Fuck!"

Seven hundred miles to the east Washington DC

"Christ! What is going on in that fucking city?"

A masked face, with green and yellow markings, appeared on the screen before them. CIA Deputy Director of the Support Directorate, Noah Vossen stepped back involuntarily.

"You're running out of men, Vossen – give it up!" Came the electronically enhanced voice of Kick-Ass.

Then the screen went blank – the blast of the shotgun, the last thing they saw. Vossen threw his cup of coffee across the conference room where it smashed against the wall beneath the large flat-screen monitor mounted on the wall.

"Fuck Kick-Ass; fuck the lot of them – kill them all!"

Chicago Safehouse K: second floor

The first pair died together, each taking a Katana in the chest, cutting their hearts in half

I reached down and pulled the comms off the head of one of the dead – a woman.

"You feeling scared yet?" I growled into the microphone and I saw two pairs of CIA Agents freeze. "Well, you should be; I'm just getting warmed up, how about you?"

"All teams, switch to alternate channel!"

I dropped the comms, smirking as I headed into the darkness.

Safehouse K: fourth floor

I grinned at Hit Girl's psychological attack on the CIA.

She loved fucking with people's minds! I had seen the Agents on my level freeze as Hit Girl had spoken – they had all heard Hit Girl's announcement, as had been intended. I raised my FN Five-seveN pistol and secured a suppressor to the end of the barrel – it was time for target practice!

I stalked my prey.

That voice had freaked me out; I would not deny it!

The voice was full of evil and menace – I knew that it was Hit Girl and I knew her reputation... We had to be careful. I looked over at Carl; he looked a little freaked out too, but our training quickly took over and we moved steadily through the darkness.

My mind registered the flash first, then the sound of suppressed gunshots as Carl's head exploded, covering me in blood and brains. I instinctively triggered off half a magazine in the direction of the flash.

"Wrong direction, cunt!"

The voice scared me to the core and I knew what was coming next. My brain momentarily registered the sharp pain in the side of my head as the bullet smashed through the bone...

Half a mile away CIA Command Van

"Who do we have left?"

"Of the thirty that went into the building?" The tech agent replied. "Zero... Of the six guarding the perimeter... Two left..."

"Better make that zero!" Another tech reported despondently as there were several flashes on a screen before him.

The commander turned to a third tech.

"Get us the fuck outta here!"

The tech scrambled into the driver's seat and had just started the engine when he heard the roar of a large and powerful engine from his right. Bright lights illuminated, dazzling him as the roaring increased and whatever it was, struck the Command Van broadside.

Beast

The van was flipped over onto its side as the reinforced bumper on the front of *Beast* struck it squarely in the side.

Hawk stamped on the brakes and leapt out, raising her Assegai spear and throwing it towards the first man attempting to escape. It struck the man in the back of his right shoulder and he went down, screaming.

Splinter and Trojan pulled open the rear door of the van. Seven rounds later, there was silence in the Central Intelligence Agency's Command Van.

Hound

Wildcat and Jackal approached the two CIA guards who seemed very jittery.

"Howdy, cunts!" Wildcat growled as her claws ripped into and through the neck of the first man.

Jackal said nothing as he violently twisted the neck of the other man. Both men were dead before they hit the ground.

"Good work, Wildcat!"

"Can I blow 'em now?" Wildcat asked. "Please? Pretty please? Pretty please with a cherry on top..."

"You do that..." Jackal chuckled, walking back towards *Hound*.

Wildcat pulled a remote detonator from her belt and flipped off the safety.

Safehouse F

Six almost simultaneous explosions told me that Wildcat had just put a small dent in the CIA's vehicle inventory.

It was over. I was not pleased with all the killing that had occurred, but they had invaded *my* building! It would take a

while to sanitise everything, but I had a distinct feeling that the CIA would do it for me; they would not want any evidence to remain.

The CIA would remove all traces of the attack.

Washington DC

Vossen turned away from the screen and glared at his subordinate.

"Get a clean-up team in there – tonight *never* happened!"

Two days later Saturday afternoon

I was walking down the street with Anne-Marie, not too far from home, when I had the weirdest feeling.

It felt like I was being watched – my training kicked in and I instantly became more aware of my surroundings. As I casually looked around, though, I couldn't see anybody acting suspiciously and my counter-surveillance skills were seeing nothing. Then I passed a girl who seemed older than Chloe, but younger than Mindy, maybe sixteen or so, or possibly older. There was something about her that triggered something deep in my subconscious.

The girl actually smiled at me as she passed by, but I ignored her.

..._...

An image was forming in my mind as I sat eating my dinner that evening.

I was receiving some strange looks from the others as I ate, just gazing into nothing.

"Problem, Steph?" Mindy asked.

"Maybe..." I mused, and then it hit me like a brick. "I've seen her before!"

"Huh?" Danny asked, his fork halfway to his mouth.

Images began to form in my mind, images that had been lost, deep in my subconscious. They were old memories from my very earliest days of being trained by the CIA. I remembered sleeping in a large dormitory with many other girls of varying ages. That face – the girl had slept only three beds away from me. I remembered getting up each morning and showering with the other girls before breakfast. I had always hated showering in public, at first, but that feeling about any loss of privacy had soon gone away. I remembered eating breakfast with the others, which had included boys too.

All the faces were blurry, all except one. That girl – she was definitely another me, only she was much older which meant that she was probably fully trained – an assassin. Had she recognised me? My hair was a different colour, but would that fool her?

It wouldn't have fooled me, I knew.

..._...

"Stephanie!"

Mindy was shouting now; I must have tuned out.

"I don't remember her name, but I remember the face – she's part of *Urban Predator*..."

"You certain?"

Mindy looked worried as I nodded.

"My nemesis..."

"That doesn't sound good," Mindy commented as she bit her lip – she was worried.

"She can only be here for one reason..."

"To kill you?"

"Yes."

***Chapter 245*: Puppies**

That evening Saturday

I could not believe that it had been so easy!

Once I had seen that photo of the young blond-haired girl, I knew that I had seen her before. I had wracked my brains to remember where and when. Then I had it – Glenview! I had walked the streets each afternoon and evening – then all Saturday.

There was something about the two girls with copper red hair. One of them was about the right age and her eyes... They were not the eyes of a normal girl which told me something about her. I had smiled at her as I had walked past – just being friendly, nothing more. It was not until I was a couple of dozen yards beyond her, that my brain added everything together – it had been *her*, my target!

I had turned back instantly, but the girl had vanished...

Sunday morning

There was an argument going on, up the stairs.

Usually, the arguments ended up getting violent so I thought that I had better intervene. As I got to the top of the stairs I noticed Josh loitering outside the girl's bedroom.

"What are they arguing about *this* time?" I asked, dreading the answer.

"Girly shit."

"Who started it?"

"Err, that would be Chloe!"

"Chloe...! What's the argument over for God's sake?"

It was getting quite heated, too – I left Josh to it, but kept an ear open.

"You are so wrong!" Chloe exclaimed.

"Am *not*!" A very hyped up Stephanie replied with fire in her eyes.

"You are *both* wrong!" An indignant Anne-Marie chimed in.

"Not happening – I should kill you all where you stand!" Megan challenged with a smirk.

"Okay – we are at a standoff, so let's sum this up..." Chloe began diplomatically, pointing at each girl in turn.

"Anne-Marie: Pinkie Pie... Stephanie: Rainbow Dash... Megan: Sunset Shimmer... Me: Apple Jack..."

"I preferred Twilight Sparkle..." Mindy mentioned as she walked past the door. "Although Rarity was awesome in her own way..."

"What!" All four girls exclaimed sounding very surprised.

"Hey, I did do things *other* than killing people when I was younger!" Mindy replied offhandedly.

"To be honest, I fancied Fluttershy; no idea why..." Josh chimed in as he walked away.

Sunday afternoon

"Oh you *have* to be kidding!" I exclaimed as I passed by the living room.

They were *all* crying! Mindy, Chloe, Stephanie, Megan and Anne-Marie; they all had tears running down their faces, but they were all smiling.

"It's the movie – it was very moving..." Mindy tried to explain as she wiped away her tears.

I walked in and picked up the DVD case from the table.

"Okay: 'My Little Pony: Equestria Girls'?" I enquired.

"Yeah, Dave – it was awesome!" Chloe replied, blushing slightly.

Danny looked appalled and refused to enter the living room; I just shook my head and walked out.

"Come on, Danny – let's go do something *manly*!"

Two days later ***Monday afternoon***

Glenview

We had built what could only be described as a 'nest' for our fearless, but very pregnant, canine companion.

She had been living in her 'nest' for the past couple of weeks, down in the basement. All the kids thought it was awesome that there were going to be puppies; I was excited too. Sophia was perfectly healthy and the vet was very pleased with her progress.

Today was the day...

..._..._...

Sophia was lying on her side and something told me that the puppies were coming, and that was when her waters broke. I felt sorry for Sophia who seemed to be very uncomfortable and she was panting steadily. All three kids were there to watch, plus Megan – poor Sophia, she had no privacy. How would *I* feel if I had half a dozen people watching *me* giving birth!

During the wait, Sophia got up and moved around quite a few times and we all kept encouraging the uncomfortable dog. She was much more than family to us, and we hated seeing her in so much discomfort. Then it truly began, as a pained expression passed across Sophia's face and she raised her upper hind leg.

"What's happening?" Anne-Marie demanded, sounding worried.

That was when something dark began to appear from between Sophia's hind legs. I had never seen anything like it before and I was mesmerized as I watched.

"Ewww!" Stephanie exclaimed.

The first pup appeared and it was covered in a thin membrane which Sophia chewed at and then ripped open before she licked the pup clean, eating the membrane as she went. The pup squealed as its fur was rubbed up the wrong way and I saw enormous smiles grow on the kids' faces and I was surprised to feel tears in my eyes. I was so used to taking lives that I was not used to seeing new lives come into the world.

Dave reached over and checked the pup.

"It's a Megan – sorry, a bitch!" Dave chuckled, ignoring Megan's not very amused glance.

Soon after, the next pup appeared – there was some blood too, which Dave cleared up. Sophia got to work on the 'sack' that enclosed the little pup.

"Is she eating the pup?" Anne-Marie asked.

"No, that's the umbilical cord – Sophia's chewing it off. See, she's washing the pup now and the first one is feeding."

"It's so disgusting..."

"You would have been a mess too, soon after *you* arrived in this world," I reminded Megan who grimaced at the thought.

Five hours later, it was all over.

We had received seven pups in total before Sophia was finished: five females and two males. All seven were healthy and they were happily squeaking and feeding. Sophia was *much* relieved for it all to be over and she dozed quite a lot, despite the pups pawing incessantly at her underside.

"Well done, girl, well done!" I said, stroking her gently as she rested.

..._...

A little over an hour later, Sophia decided to take herself upstairs and I went with her and then took her outside where she made use of the garden's facilities. After that she seemed to be enjoying the fresh air after all those hours of labour. While that was happening, Dave and Stephanie were taking the opportunity to swap the soiled bedding of the 'nest' for clean stuff.

We returned to the basement to find seven little bundles lying in the 'nest', squealing and cuddling up together; they looked so sweet! Sophia stepped in amongst them and went from pup to pup checking each one out and giving each one a gently lick to reassure them that Mom was back. She laid down on her side, somewhat reluctantly, and the seven squealing bundles quickly dived in for some more of Mom's milk.

Stephanie and I gently stroked Sophia who looked very happy; a new Mom.

The following morning Tuesday

By the time the kids had left for school, the pups had all gained names.

Once I had returned from dropping the kids off, I explained the names to Sophia. Each pup wore a string collar in a different colour for identification purposes. Dave and I lined up the seven pups before their mother.

"Okay, Sophia, from the left. We have Hercules, he has the blue collar. Then we have Kiara – she has the *purple* collar. The bitch with the orange collar, is Hope and the pink one is Josie. The brown collared dog is Razor while the remaining two bitches with grey and yellow collars are Layla and Piper."

Sophia barked approvingly at each name.

..._...

Once the pups were around 2 months old, they would begin their training. Each would gain a vigilante name, as well as their normal name. They would be taught to be loyal and to obey without question. In return we would gain their respect and we would take charge – this would involve extra training on our part; humans communicate verbally, dogs do not, they read body language and react accordingly. We would reinforce their acceptance of good behaviour and also punish where necessary – each animal would be very different and would have to be treated accordingly. They would all need a lot of attention and a lot of exercise. As such, once they were old enough to be separated from their mother, we would rotate them through The Farm where there was plenty of space and barking dogs being trained would not upset the neighbours.

Each dog would be trained to be a vigilante, much as their mother was – and yes, they might learn similar skills to 'Schwanz!' The training would take over a year and more likely eighteen months to complete.

..._...

Everybody wanted one!

Not to mention that some had actually laid claim to the pups too. I wanted one, of course – I fancied Kiara, hence the purple collar. Megan also wanted one, as did Anne-Marie, Danny and Stephanie. Marty was considering having one as well. Ultimately, all of the pups would need a home and I didn't mind the idea of keeping one or two with us, maybe

a boy and a girl, and finding homes for the other five.

That evening

"How sweet!" Paige squealed on seeing the seven pups lined up as if on parade.

"Cute little buggers," Marcus commented with a smile.

"You two are officially doggy grandparents!" Dave laughed.

"Just what I always wanted!" Marcus growled.

"I have a feeling that Megan is angling for one; she tidied her room before school this morning and emptied the dishwasher without being asked..." Paige commented.

"... She also helped make dinner *and* offered to take out the garbage!" Marcus added.

I laughed.

..._...

Half an hour after Paige and Marcus had left, we received another pair of visitors.

"I hear that Chicago has a new batch of vigilantes!"

"Vicious they are, too," I replied with a smirk.

"Oh my God, Hank – they are so fucking adorable!" Trudy Platt announced.

"I'm quaking in my boots!" Hank Voight laughed as he gazed down at the seven little squeaking bundles.

"Give 'em time, Hank..."

For now, all the pups were almost completely black, although there were some tan-points on the lower legs, cheeks, eyebrows and under the tail root. We would need to wait for a few months to see how the colour schemes would work out, but both the mother and the father were pure-bred, so we expected the pups to follow suit into the usual Alsatian/German Shepherd colour scheme of black and tan.

I loved them; they were so adorable and they would make *awesome* vigilantes...

***Chapter 246*: Nightmare**

Two days later
Thursday

Chloe and I hijacked Mrs Edwards when she came into D-JAK that evening with her two daughters.

"We heard about Lauren's attack – we're *very* sorry about what happened," I began, once we had sat down in my office with a coffee each.

"It *has* been a very tough couple of weeks, but she has a lot of friends to help her, both at home and at school. However, I think she needs more..."

"That is why we asked you in here – I think that we *can* offer your daughter more... A challenge as a distraction from what happened to her. We can also teach her to defend herself to a high level."

"That would be good."

"We can also offer your daughter a lot more, besides," Chloe added before changing the target. "You were in the Army, I believe."

"Yes – having Lauren cut short my career. I was a Chief Warrant Officer 2 in Armament Systems Maintenance."

"What do you think about the vigilantes that currently operate in the city?" I asked tentatively.

Emily Edwards' eyes seemed to light up at that question.

"You mean: do I believe in what you two do for the city when you are out at night?" I asked, watching for a reaction from the two young women sitting before me on the couch.

There was no outward reaction; the two girls would have made awesome poker players!

"I am behind what you do, one hundred percent," I went on. "You are offering to make my daughter a member of your team?"

Again, no outward reaction, so I continued.

"I believe that Lauren would be overjoyed by your offer – however, there would be non-negotiable conditions. Lizzie does *not* get involved – she does not even *know* about her sister being a vigilante. Lauren will be fully trained *before* she goes out on operations. Also, I want to offer *my* services..."

"You are very astute, Mrs Edwards..." Mindy commented.

"Emily, please."

"Emily – we could definitely make use of your talents – Chloe, here, well she breaks weapons on a regular basis..."

"I can believe that..." Emily commented as she chuckled at Chloe's hurt expression. "Does my daughter have a name?"

"Yes, she does: Nightmare..."

"I like that. Me?"

"Welcome aboard, Athena!"

The following evening
Friday

"Where are we going, Mom?"

"Mindy is taking us on a little visit, Lauren."

Lauren did not seem to believe her Mother's reply – but it was the truth and she had no choice but to accept it. Her younger sister, Lizzie, was spending time with Megan and Curtis, while we headed towards southeast Chicago. Lauren began to smell a rat as I turned into a very grotty looking salvage yard before then turning sharply into a rusty looking warehouse.

The girl actually screamed as I drove directly at a concrete wall which sank out of sight in a blink of an eye and we began to descend sharply into the ground. Lauren span around in the backseat to see the concrete and steel barrier rising upwards to close off the primary vehicle access ramp to Safehouse F.

..._...

"What is going on?"

Lauren received no reply; I was keeping silent, but her Mother was stunned into silence as we kept turning and turning, dropping down and down before we finally burst out into the bright lights of Safehouse F and the large armoured door rapidly lowered into place and locked.

Emily and I climbed out of the XJR and I opened the rear door for Lauren.

"Come on!" I chuckled.

The stunned teenager climbed out of the car and just stared around her, unable to talk. I led her through the glass partition and onto the mat where she just spun around trying to see everything at once. Emily just turned slowly taking it all in.

Then Lauren found her voice and she turned towards me, her eyes narrowing with suspicion.

..._...

"You're *her!*"

"Yes, Lauren, she is..."

Lauren span around to face a smirking Chloe.

"You!"

"Hello, *Nightmare*," Chloe replied with a friendly smile.

"Nightmare?"

"Your new name – if you want it..." I said in reply.

Lauren turned to her Mom in disbelief.

"Mindy wants you to be part of her team – why she would want that, I have absolutely no idea!"

Lauren scowled.

"Shall we get a coffee, Emily," Paige suggested walking up. The two women knew each other from D-JAK and I smirked as Emily scowled at Paige.

"It all becomes so clear!" Emily laughed as she took in Joshua and Dave standing above us on the walkway along with Hailee and a grinning Stephanie.

Safehouse F

My brain was struggling; I was overloaded as my mind could not process everything that I was seeing before me.

I recognised Mindy... I recognised Chloe, Dave, Paige, Josh, Hailee and Stephanie... They were all vigilantes... Oh my God! I turned to Chloe.

"That was *you* on my fire escape!"

"Yes, it was; you enjoyed the photos, I assume..."

"I can't believe that you are all superheroes and I've been spending time with you guys..."

I turned to Mindy.

"You..."

Then to Dave as he came down the steel staircase beside us.

"You picked me up out of the snow; you took me to the hospital... You *both* saved my life... Thank you..."

"You're a special young lady and you deserve more from life than what those bastards did to you..."

I smiled at the confused girl as she struggled to make sense of everything around her. I put an arm around the kid's shoulders to reassure her.

"Fancy a tour, Lauren?"

"With Hit Girl?" Lauren replied hopefully and I laughed.

"With Hit Girl."

While Lauren was talking with Chloe upstairs, I headed down to the Command Centre at the behest of an eager Marty.

"I've found her – she was buried in those files that Miranda brought us after we acquired short ass..." Marty began.

"Marty, I would *hate* to have to hurt you..." Stephanie growled. Marty winked at the girl as he continued.

"... The description matches a girl who went by the name of 'Foxtail' and here she is..."

Marty brought up a screen with an image of a young girl about ten-years-old and her vital statistics which appeared more up to date than the photo.

...+...

Codename: Foxtail

Sex: Female

Height: 164cm

Hair Colour: Dark Brown

Eye Colour: Blue

Date of Birth: April 27th 2001

Scores

Weapons Training: 98%

Martial Arts: 87%

Surveillance: 92%

Counter-Surveillance: 91%

Field Skills: 88%

Notes

Noted skill with accents and physical agility.

STATUS: PLACED INTO ACTIVE SERVICE

DATE: August 8th 2015

...+...

"The bitch shares my fucking birthday!" Stephanie grouched – I had noticed that too.

"She's highly skilled," I commented.

"And I'm not?" Stephanie bristled.

"Stephanie, I have no complaints with what you can do and you *have* proved yourself; you have *nothing* to prove to me or anybody, understand..."

"Yes, Mum..."

"I think you're awesome, Steph!" Marty said, ruffling Stephanie's hair.

Normally, she hated *anybody* doing that – apart from Dave, but instead she just smiled and went slightly pink in the cheeks. It was good to finally have some information that we could act upon, especially if it would help keep our team alive.

"Okay, Lauren – we need to have a little talk and we may touch on some not so happy subjects, so please bear with us," I said calmly as Lauren sat in the briefing room while Chloe, Josh and Dave sat beside me. "You know us all, in one way or another. You go to the same school as Chloe and Josh – which brings us onto the harsher side of life as a vigilante."

"We have let you into a secret, a large secret..." Chloe said, taking over smoothly. "By letting you into our secret, we have put ourselves at risk – one word from you in the wrong place and you will put many lives at risk... It is no stretch to consider that given a choice of one person dying or many – you can understand the obvious choice."

Lauren went a little white.

"I understand and I can promise you that I will never say a word to *anybody*..."

"Not even to your sister, Lizzie... You will *never* discuss us, or anything to do with Fusion when at home – understand?"

"I do..."

"Your Mom knows about us and she understands the need for secrecy. From this point on – you will *never* use our vigilante names when we are *not* in costume and conversely you will never use our real names when we *are* in costume. I know this is a lot for a thirteen-year-old to take in, but we have both been there, Josh and I, and it *can* be done."

"We will support you and we will help you," I went on. "Everybody in Fusion has a unique background and some of us have very traumatic backgrounds that brought us into Fusion. You will learn this as time goes on and you meet everybody properly. Most of the faces that you will see around you will seem familiar, but you have only seen one side of us all."

"If you have any questions or problems, you can talk to any of us at any time. Fusion is a family and we support one another in whichever way we can... There are many more rules to learn and we *will* come down on you hard when you break them and you *will* break them. We will always explain where you went wrong and we will guide you as long as you are willing to accept that guidance. Some..."

I looked directly at Chloe.

"*Some* chose to ignore guidance and advice, going their own way – they *may* choose to embarrass themselves and tell you their stories; if they do, learn from them as they have. You will be starting out at the bottom and working your way up – there is a lot for you to learn before you find yourself out on the streets of Chicago. You still wanting to join us?"

Lauren smiled.

"Just try and stop me!"

Chapter 247: The British Sector

The next morning *Saturday*

As we had discussed, before Christmas, Stephanie was getting her own room.

I was allowing her to decorate the room as she saw fit – within reason of course! Joshua was helping her, so I had given Joshua permission to use his 'emergency' credit card – whether that was a good idea...

Couriers had been delivering boxes all week and Joshua had threatened me with grievous bodily harm if I went anywhere near *any* of the boxes *or* Stephanie's new bedroom! I had complained bitterly and I had pointed out quite reasonably I thought, that *her* 'new room' was in *my* goddamn house!

"I want it to be a bloody surprise, Mum, so like it or fucking lump it!" Stephanie had said simply before slamming her new bedroom door in my face.

"Finally – a bitch that stands up to the queen bitch!" Dave chuckled as he headed downstairs with a smirking Danny. I glared after them.

..._...

Joshua and Stephanie spent all weekend working in the room from six in the morning to almost midnight. I was seriously annoyed at not being allowed into a part of my *own* house, but I let it slide.

For the moment...

On Saturday morning, I had walked past the bedroom and I had heard Stephanie yelling at Joshua: "Hey, asshole, I'm a fucking girl and I have the cunt to prove it; so fucking live with it!"

"Whatever you say!" Had been Joshua's very defensive response.

..._...

Later that same afternoon, Chloe and I had been downstairs in the kitchen when we had both heard a loud yell and we ran upstairs to find Joshua on the landing, literally. He was on his knees with his hands clasped somewhere delicate and Stephanie was standing beside him trying, in vain I might add, to look innocent; she avoided our eyes as we looked questioningly at her.

At first, Chloe was glaring angrily, but then her eyes softened and she started giggling at her boyfriend's rather painful predicament!

"Laugh it up, bitch – you're back to two fingers tonight!" Josh groaned between clenched teeth.

Chloe stopped laughing, but only for a few seconds.

"I'm sorry, Josh..."

"Like fuck, you are!" Josh complained as he rolled onto his back still grasping his obviously bruised manhood.

"It was an accident..." Stephanie began.

"Yeah, *sure!*" I chuckled as I headed back down the stairs followed by an unconvinced Chloe.

..._...

"You think those two are, you know... At it?"

Chloe looked at me and thought for a moment.

"Come on – Steph is *far* too young and Joshua knows that if he even *points* his dick at another *anything*, I'm gonna

go Bobbitt on him which would also be the least of his worries!"

"Just asking..."

Sunday morning

Chloe and Josh had arrived early – before six, just as they had on Saturday morning.

Stephanie was already up and she was waiting impatiently for Josh to show up. The young girl did *not* look amused by his arrival.

"What time do you call this, cunt?" She demanded.

"Oh-five-fifty-eight!" He replied tiredly.

"*Not* good enough!" Stephanie replied without a hint of humour. "Move it – or I'll take the lash to you..."

Josh grimaced apologetically at Chloe before being dragged into the bedroom by Stephanie who slammed the door. Chloe and I were left staring at each other.

"I wonder if she really *does* have a lash," Chloe murmured as we both went downstairs for some breakfast.

..._...

We were soon joined by a very tired Anne-Marie.

"They're making too much noise..." She complained.

"Sorry – maybe allowing them free reign was *not* such a good idea..."

"Stephanie needs her space," Chloe reminded me.

"I know – but something tells me that I've just lost a chunk of my house!"

..._...

At lunchtime, I placed a plate of beef sandwiches and some cans of Coke outside the bedroom door and knocked. I heard furious scrabbling from the other side of the door and then it flew open a few inches.

"What?" Stephanie demanded.

"Food!" I replied with a grin.

"Oh, thanks..."

The door was slammed in my face as soon as the sandwiches and Cokes had vanished inside.

That afternoon

"Hello ladies!"

I looked around the kitchen and then back at Chloe.

"No ladies here, Josh!" I quipped.

"Too true – anyway, girls – m'lady upstairs, well, she demands your presence, Mindy."

"Demands?" I enquired.

"Sorry, Mindy..." Josh replied.

I got up, followed by Chloe.

"Sorry, beautiful, but it's Mindy only..."

"I know when I'm not wanted!" Chloe replied with a smile.

..._...

Joshua led me upstairs to Stephanie's new bedroom.

"Okay, my homicidal American friend, you are now allowed to visit..." Josh said with a flourish as he pulled off a white sheet that had been covering the doorway for two days. "... The British Sector!"

The door now had two signs affixed to the outside:

**YOU ARE LEAVING
THE AMERICAN SECTOR**

And more worryingly, under a Union Flag:

**YOU ARE NOW ENTERING
THE BRITISH SECTOR**

Josh then pushed open the bedroom door allowing me my very first look at Stephanie's new domain (or sector).

"So, my house now has a Cold War Era British Sector?" I enquired.

"Yes, it does..." A smirking Stephanie replied. "... British laws begin at the threshold and the US Constitution ends, full stop!"

"The British have invaded and taken control..." Josh quipped as he saw my expression after Stephanie's pronouncement. "... We'll work on the rest of the house, over time!"

"Like hell, you will!" I replied as I ran my eyes over the rest of the room.

"Insurrection sucks, huh!" Stephanie smirked as I rolled my eyes at the obvious dig towards the American Revolution against the British.

I turned my attention back to the room.

..._...

The walls of the room had been tastefully painted in lilac, while the ceiling was a very pleasant sky blue. The carpet was the same cream colour and had not been changed. To my immediate left, past the walk-in closet, there was a new, and enormous, king-size bed against the wall with a Union Flag quilt, and pillows to match – they were taking the British theme thing just a tad too far I thought!

In the large bay window before me, were a pair of comfortable looking chairs and a low table on which sat a lamp and Steph's new Samsung tablet that she had been given for Christmas. Over against the far wall beyond the bed, was a desk with several shelves above. On the desk, was a brand new laptop (and her school homework) and around the room were several strategically placed wireless speakers. Stephanie had a liking for 1980s music and currently a track I actually recognised was playing: Tubthumping by Chumbawamba:

*I get knocked down
But I get up again
You're never gonna keep me down
I get knocked down
But I get up again
You're never gonna keep me down*

*Pissing the night away
Pissing the night away
He drinks a whiskey drink
He drinks a vodka drink
He drinks a lager drink
He drinks a cider drink*

*He sings the songs that remind him
Of the good times
He sings the songs that remind him
Of the better times*

*Oh, Danny Boy
Danny Boy*

I walked around the bedroom checking out the selection of British themed pictures and posters that adorned the walls, plus one or two of Rainbow Dash. Overall, I had to admit that I was very impressed by what the two of them had accomplished in just the one weekend.

..._...

"Well done, Steph – I *am* impressed, you too, Josh."

Stephanie was beaming with pride at the praise and Josh seemed pleased too.

"What are you looking for?" Stephanie queried as she saw me checking out the walls again.

"A picture of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second!" I chuckled.

Stephanie scowled.

"We didn't want to go *too* far!" Josh explained.

"That bed is enormous, Steph – we might actually lose you in it!"

"Cool, huh?" Stephanie replied and then she came over and hugged me around the waist. "Thanks, Mindy – you don't know what this means to me, letting me have my very own space..."

I could see the tears spilling over and down my daughter's cheeks.

"I do, Steph, I do..."

Then the track changed and I cringed...

"Jason fucking Donovan and Kylie fucking Minogue!"

It was time to go!

..._...

I went to leave and that was when I saw the inside of the door.

On the back of the door were two signs. Firstly, under a Union Flag:

**END OF BRITISH SECTOR
DO NOT PASS THIS POINT**

And then beneath that:

**YOU ARE ENTERING THE AMERICAN SECTOR
ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE**

"Oh, very fucking funny!" I muttered.

That Night

I was out on my own – well, sort of...

My Fusion Honda CRF250L was red over blue and at the rear it bore the registration plate: **PSYCH**. I had nagged and nagged (to the point that I thought Mindy might actually punch my lights out) to be allowed out on the machine and *finally* Mindy had given in – I had also wanted to be 'alone'. Therefore, as a result, I was cruising down the street

while Shadow rode two blocks over and parallel to my direction of travel. Jackal was also on the prowl within a mile or so of me – and of course my overprotective mother was watching from Safehouse F!

..._...

I was on the lookout for trouble and to be honest, I was not as focussed on my surroundings as I should have been; I was too excited at being out on my motorcycle and out on my own as the vigilante Psyche. I may not have been concentrating, but I quickly slammed on my brakes at the sight of a man being assaulted on the pavement outside a 7-11. I parked beside the curb and dismounted, removing my helmet before taking control of the situation.

"Okay, you fucking cunts!" I growled and the two youths turned away from their human punch bag.

The idiots had been so intent on their attack that they had neither seen nor heard my approach – their loss, my gain! I drew my Sais from the tops of my boots and approached.

..._...

"Aren't you a little short to be a vigilante?" One of the youths laughed sarcastically causing the other one to chuckle as the man who was being hit struggled back to his feet.

The other cunt kicked him back down again, "We aren't finished with *you* yet!"

That just made me angrier, "I may be short; but I can take you two fuckers on, *any day or night!*"

I flicked a Sai and it flew through the air, striking the cunt who had kicked the man down, in the left shoulder. He went down, a hand to his wound and he yelled out in pain.

Safehouse F

"She seems to be doing well..." Shadow commented.

The image on the large screen was coming from the HD camera mounted on the front of Shadow's Suzuki V-Strom and it showed Psyche's performance from Shadow's hidden location a few dozen yards up the street.

"She could be doing better..." I growled. "She never checked in to say she was taking on those two idiots..."

"Go easy on her, Hit Girl!" Shadow replied as she continued to watch over the younger vigilante out on the street.

Southern Chicago

I followed my Sai in and flipped the first cunt onto his back before he could react.

My boot pushed down on his neck, hard enough to stop him breathing which scared him enough not to move.

"You need help, sir?" I asked the cunt's victim.

"I'm fine, thank you."

The man got to his feet, wiping blood from his face as I glared down at the cunt beneath my foot, the tip of my other Sai resting on his forehead. I stepped back and ordered him to flip over onto his stomach. I zip-tied his hands behind him before kicking him, accidentally on purpose, in the side as I stepped over him.

I yanked my Sai out of his colleague's shoulder, wiped it off on the cunt's top and returned both Sai's to their slots in my boots.

"You might want to get that looked at – but for now..."

I yanked him down onto his face and zip-tied his hands behind him so he matched his pal. Then, as the adrenalin rush began to ease, I had a sudden and unwelcome thought: oops; I had not checked in...

"Ha!, Psyche – I need somebody to pick up two idiots at my location..."

"Better bloody late than bloody never..." Hit Girl growled back.

"Sorry..." I began.

"Don't apologise – just get out there, Psyche!"

..._...

"I'm rolling..." Shadow called as she watched Psyche pull on her helmet and mount her motorcycle.

Once Psyche had started the engine of her Honda and moved off, Shadow vanished down an alleyway.

I turned right and cruised up South Marshall Boulevard towards Douglas Park.

Something caught my attention, soon after I passed beneath the railway lines. It was a black motorcycle; I could not recognise the make or model but it was larger than mine and being ridden by a female dressed from head to toe in black. The rider wore a full-face black helmet and she stuck up the middle finger of her right hand as she cut me up.

As I followed South Sacramento Drive up the east side of Douglas Park, I saw red and gave chase – which in hindsight was probably *not* the best plan!

..._...

The black rider veered off to the right and onto the pavement towards the Flower Hall just before the junction of South Sacramento Drive and West Ogden Avenue and that was when everything went bad – very bad. Something in the back of my mind, a little voice kept telling me to just ride away, but I ignored it – however, I did check in, at least I tried to...

"Hal, contact...!"

The rider ahead of me slammed on her brakes and stopped broadside, directly in front of me. I tried to avoid her but between being distracted by calling in to Hal and surprise at the manoeuvre, I fucked up my braking, I skidded and that forced me to dive off my motorcycle just before it careered into a tree with a resounding crash. I rolled across the grass and came to a halt lying on my back. I was bruised, I knew that, but otherwise I seemed intact – then I heard movement and pulled off my helmet just as I saw a face appear above me.

Actually not a face, as all but the eyes was obscured by a ninja-style mask.

..._...

"Well, well, well – Stephanie Walker, we finally meet in person. You've actually not done half bad for the scratty little kid who cried every night for fucking months keeping us all awake and who most of us expected to be a worthless reject!"

It was Foxtail!

She was trying to bait me – okay, I cried a lot when they first took me, who wouldn't! She was relishing in the fact that she had caught her prey and that she was about to kill me. She knew all about me, only she had no idea what I knew about *her*...

She had a weapon pointed at me – my trained mind recognised it as a SIG of some sort. I ignored it while I rapidly arranged my thoughts before responding to the girl standing above me.

"Well hello, strange black girl – or should I call you: *Foxtail* – it is so good to finally meet you!"

I saw the eyes go wide as my comment struck home.

What the hell?

How could she know who I was? So much for having the upper hand... Psyche took advantage of my shock and before I recovered, the pistol was pushed away and a boot took me in the groin; the bitch fought dirty which made something, deep in my memories, resurface. I had a good few inches on the girl so I was determined to win – the easy option would have been a stabbing move or using a pistol, however, it was obvious that the girl had full body armour which would change how I fought and eventually killed the girl.

Yes, I had known the girl – in as much as we had known anybody that we trained with – we had been encouraged to see the other kids as competitors which meant that there had been very few, if any, friendships. I had remembered Stephanie Walker – she had been small and she had been teased mercilessly by the other kids for being British, for being small, and for crying all the time. I had enjoyed making the girl cry; it had made me feel good inside at the time...

"This ain't the fucking showers and I ain't a push over like that girl you killed..."

***Chapter 248*: The First Kill**

Southern Chicago

Foxtail fell over backwards, after my kick and I quickly sprang back to my feet.

Her comment had caught me out and it had brought back a flood of unwelcome memories...

...+...

October 2013

It had only been a month since I had been kidnapped.

My memories of what had occurred were fuzzy – probably something to do with the drugs that they forced me to take. I hated being apart from my family and somehow I had a feeling that I was never going to see them again. I was seven-years-old and I was *very* scared – I was not alone; I was surrounded by dozens of other kids in a similar predicament. Some of the kids were my age, some older and a few of the bigger kids were at least twelve. We were kept very busy during the day which never gave me the time to think about my family or my new situation, which I suppose was part of the idea. At night, though, I never felt more alone – the other girls were nasty and they seemed to enjoy making me cry and scream at them.

I had nobody and none of the adult instructors cared much about what was going on – I was just told to 'toughen up' and to 'stop bitching, bitch' among other, not so nice, comments. There was one particular girl, she was about eleven or twelve and she seemed to *really* enjoy tormenting me, until one morning when I just snapped.

...+...

March 2014

It was soon after I had turned eight; I had been at the facility for about seven months. The continued torment over the past six months or so had pushed me to a state where I was *not* going to take any more and that *bitch* was going to pay for everything that she had done to me. She had humiliated me, she had bullied me and she had tormented me just that one time too many...

That morning I had woken up and I had heard her voice – she had been talking about *me*, as usual... Some other girls were laughing at her comments and looking over at me as I climbed out of bed. A little while later, we were in the showers, as usual. The showers were arranged in groups of six in a rectangular cubicle with two showers on each wall and a large opening at the other. There were four such cubicles that backed onto each other in the centre of the bathroom. Around the outer walls were arranged toilet stalls and sinks.

Each morning was busy as thirty or forty girls used the toilets, washed and showered before going for breakfast. It was a fairly tight schedule and woe betide *anybody* who was late to classes! I had only ever been late just the once – never, ever, again...

...+...

As I pulled off the t-shirt and shorts which I slept in and hung up my towel for my shower, I heard a voice calling out to me.

"Hey, Walker! Ready for another psyche session?"

I glared at the grinning twelve-year-old girl as she stood under the running shower. I headed into the cubicle and found my own shower – I had reluctantly got used to being naked in front of others, months before.

"Leave me alone, Newton..."

"Or fucking what, you scrawny little British twat?"

I snapped and the next thing I knew; there was blood swirling in the water towards the drain in the centre of the tiled cubicle floor as I pulled back my arm to smash my fist into her face again. I must have just launched myself at the other girl, but I never got the chance for another strike as the bitch drove her own fist into my left side. I fell down to

the tiles in agony. As I pushed my wet hair out of my eyes, I stared up at the other girl, ignoring the fact that we were both very naked and I rose to my feet – a little shakily, but I managed it. There was surprise on many of the faces around me; I was the 'snivelling brat' who everybody expected to fail miserably.

There was a lot of shock on Newton's face too as I got back to my feet. She had expected me to stay down to avoid another beating, but no – I had taken my *last* beating from her...

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I took advantage of her surprise and drove my right hand into her kidney and my left into her chest – I heard a rib snap and the other girl screamed in pain. I may have been 'scrawny', but I was building up muscle and I was eating correctly, as an instructor had advised me. I was much stronger than I had been – much stronger and Newton seemed to have overlooked that little fact.

The girl was even more shocked, but her training soon kicked in and she reacted, kicking me away from her and I fell back against some other girls who cushioned my fall. They pushed me back to my feet, eager to let the fight play out. Needless to say, none of the girls in that place were even remotely normal – they all lusted for blood and fighting was just a normal part of our lives.

We were now surrounded by girls, watching the fighting as if watching a pair of naked girls fighting was perfectly normal. I landed a nice punch on Newton's jaw and more blood appeared to join the rest. The sight and smell of the blood seemed to energise me and I kept hitting and hitting, ignoring the punches and kicks that were returned to my own body. I was focussed on my target – as I had been taught. As a way to bury my loneliness and the constant longing for my family, I had got stuck into my new studies.

I had never thought that I would actually be able to *use* any of the skills that they were teaching me – but there I was, beating the crap out of a girl four years older than myself.

...+...

The instructors had taught us to fight in any way that would win – so I took that to heart as I punched the girl in her breasts and in her abdomen; I knew the bitch would be sore as she was on her period. *Advantage, advantage, advantage – look for any advantage*, the instructor had drilled into us. I had no similar targets for her, plus I was a *lot* shorter and I had learnt to dodge much earlier than I had learnt to fight back.

I was going to win – or I was going to die trying...

There was a fight going on – it was that British slut, Walker, and another girl, Newton.

I was very annoyed to find that the fight was over by the time I reached the bathroom and fought my way through the mass of other girls baying at the fight. I reached the entrance to the shower cubicle just in time to see the end result.

Through the swirling, dissipating steam, I could make out two forms on the far side of the cubicle and copious amounts of blood swirling across the tiles and into the drain. One form was a prone girl and it was obvious that she was *never* going to move again – the side of her head was caved in... Above the naked dead girl, stood another girl.

...+...

The eight-year-old girl was naked and covered in blood, her bare chest was heaving with the exertion and her face was contorted with rage, tears spilling down her cheeks. She stood with her hands on what passed for her hips and she glared at us all. I saw no emotion in the grey-blue eyes where fear usually resided – instead, I saw the familiar gaze of a killer; it was the young girl's first kill.

"Who's fucking next?" She growled angrily.

The crowd rapidly diminished as three instructors appeared and gaped at the scene they found before them. So, the British twat had sharp teeth and she *obviously* knew how to use them! I actually gained a little respect for the girl – just a little... Walker was lucky that the facility we were in actually rewarded that kind of behaviour... In any other school in the world, you kill another pupil and you're history – here, you kill another pupil in a fit of rage and they'll fucking promote you!

...+...

One of the key targets for any kid at the facility was to gain their identity; their codename – it was a rite of passage. I had gained mine: 'Foxtail' when I was ten and I had successfully completed my Phase 2 training. That little bitch, she had barely begun *her* Phase 2 training and she had gained hers: 'Psyche', they called her. That was the reward for her killing that girl, four years her senior.

Not surprisingly, Psyche was left alone after *that* little episode. Nobody liked her – that was life – but she had earned some respect, and to be honest, nobody wanted to die at her hands, either!

...+...

January 2016

As I sprang back to my feet, I got the distinct impression that my throw-away comment had confused the girl – good; her loss!

The park was dark, apart from a few dim lights scattered around the paths. We were also very much alone as we began to fight.

I was quite a bit out of my league, so I would have to fight dirty to compete with Foxtail's size and strength advantage – not to mention her increased skill level. Again, that voice was there and it was telling me that I should not be fighting Foxtail; I was being stupid... I drew my Sais and noticed that Foxtail had some teeth of her own!

Her 'teeth' were about sixteen or so inches in length with a blade length of just under 12-inches. The matching pair of butterfly swords glinted in the light of the nearest street lamp. The blades were highly polished and they possessed a wicked curved Turkish/Kukri clip-point to them. Both blades were drawn from beneath the back of her jacket and I could see her eyes sparkling as she brought the twin blades up before her.

We circled each other looking for an opportunity to strike. I noticed that we were both moving away from our motorcycles – mine *appeared* intact, so that was not a major issue, but I really needed to try and escape. Everything that the CIA had taught me and everything that Mindy had quite literally hammered into me on sword fights flew through my mind.

Foxtail attacked and I fended off the first blade with my left Sai as the other blade came around towards my right side. I raised my arm, missed with the Sai and felt the blade strike my armour – it hurt, but it did not penetrate. I heard a brief cry of disgust from Foxtail; presumably, because I wasn't cut in half!

I soon found out that Foxtail was wearing her own body armour when I managed to strike her in the side with the point of a Sai, which obviously ruled out a quick stab to the chest! I was certain that Foxtail was going to aim for my head and neck; well, I was going to do the same...

"That all you got, Foxy girl?" I jeered.

Safehouse F

"What is she doing at the park?" Hal demanded as she looked at me.

"Psyche – check in!" I called.

There was no response...

"Fuck it! Hal, bring up VOX for Psyche..."

I could hear the distinctive sound of metal on metal clashing – what the hell was Psyche involved with? Then I heard her voice.

"*That all you got, Foxy girl?*"

..._...

I was stunned – *Psyche was fighting Foxtail!*

Ignoring protocol, I reached over Hal's shoulder and hit the panic symbol by Psyche's name on the touch screen that

sat before Hal. Immediately, an alarm went off in the Safehouse and in the visors of Shadow and Jackal, a warning symbol appeared with Psyche's name and exact location including directions.

I just hoped that we would be in time.

Southern Chicago

I punched Foxtail hard in the face and then again in the chest.

"Psyche – help is on the way!" I heard Hit Girl say over the comms.

They knew what was happening and I also knew that I was probably in shit...

"This is Shadow – I'm closing on Psyche's position; twenty seconds on South Sacramento Drive..."

"Break... Jackal is thirty seconds out on West Ogden..."

Foxtail was down on one knee, her butterfly swords held tightly in her fists, she was only down for a moment as she glared directly at me.

"You're braver than I thought, young one..."

Foxtail looked away as the sounds of two motorcycles turning into the park came to both our ears. I took a second to look in the direction of the approaching sounds to see Shadow and Jackal heading towards me – when I turned back, Foxtail was running towards her motorcycle, but I chose not to pursue.

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Shadow skidded to a halt beside me while Jackal headed after Foxtail.

"You okay?" Shadow demanded.

"Stupid question!" I retorted angrily as I jumped on behind Shadow and we followed Jackal.

Several gunshots ripped out from Foxtail as she mounted her motorcycle and I saw Jackal return fire from his FN Five-seveN pistol. Foxtail accelerated away and Jackal kept an eye open while I checked out my motorcycle which I righted with Shadow's assistance.

All seemed in order, so I pulled on my helmet and we headed back to the Safehouse.

Safehouse F

I was so fucking angry and I was very grateful for Dave being only yards away.

Shadow pulled up with Psyche behind her. Jackal pulled up last and all three dismounted, removing their helmets. Shadow must have seen my expression as she turned to Psyche.

"You might be safer keeping the helmet on..." she said without a hint of humour and I saw Psyche flinch.

"Leave us..." I growled as I stood on the mat and everybody fled leaving me, Dave and Psyche alone.

Psyche began to remove her mask.

"Leave it," I said, struggling not to shout and Psyche did so. "Come here!"

Psyche did not move – but she looked directly at me.

"Get your fucking ass here – *right now!*"

Psyche moved forwards hesitantly.

"You fucked up, tonight – you broke *my* rules and you put *yourself* at fucking risk..."

As soon as Psyche was in arms reach, I grabbed hold of her armour and flung her through the air. The young vigilante screamed as she hit the mat, coming instantly back to her feet.

"I forgot alright, I forgot to check in..."

"A mistake that could have got you killed..."

"It won't happen again..."

"Damn right it won't!"

I had never seen Mindy that angry before and a recent comment of Dave's crept into my mind: *"The only times that I have seen Mindy beside herself with anger has been when someone she really cares about has been hurt or put at risk."*

"Why did you fight Foxtail?"

"I didn't realise it was her until we were already fighting..."

That was a very lame excuse and I could tell by Mindy's expression that she had come to the same conclusion.

"Brings us back to earlier – if you had checked in the moment you saw her..."

"I said, I was sorry..."

"Sorry, won't keep you alive!"

"Go get changed, Steph and we'll go home..." Dave said, resting a hand on my shoulder.

***Chapter 249*: Reaction**

Early Monday morning

Glenview

I could not sleep.

It was the first night in my new bed, which was not helping. Not only that, I had also pissed off Mindy. The ride back in the car had been quiet and subdued – Mindy had not said a word as she drove. However, once back home she had taken me upstairs to my new bedroom and helped me into a hot bath. My body ached and I was covered in bruises, which thankfully were the worst of my injuries.

Despite Mindy helping me wash and then helping me get into bed afterwards, she was obviously still mad at me. We had talked a little, but I sensed that Mindy was just happy I was still alive and that was a feeling that I was growing to enjoy. It had been years since anybody had cared about me, in any way.

After Mindy had gone to bed, I had just stared at the ceiling and considered Mindy's final comment as she had left the room.

"We all make mistakes – just learn from them, okay?"

I *hated* to make mistakes – I was better than that, or so I thought!

Later that morning

"My God! *What* is that smell?"

I ignored my little sister and continued eating my toast. I was feeling annoyed with myself and the last thing I wanted was a seven-year-old getting on my nerves.

"Why do you like toast so much? It's dry and kinda tasteless... What's that black stuff on it?" Anne-Marie persisted.

I nudged the jar towards the ever-inquisitive girl. She seized it and read the label...

"Yeast extract? What the hell is yeast extract?"

"Something that I will use to wash out your mouth, if you use bad language, young lady!"

"Sorry, Mom!"

"Mindy calls it 'gun grease'," I admitted with a smirk.

"There's nothing wrong with Marmite – try some..." Mindy replied.

Anne-Marie tentatively reached for the small piece of toast that I held out to her. She took a bite and then I heard Mindy sniggering as Anne-Marie's face screwed up and she spat the toast out onto the kitchen side before running over to the sink and sticking her mouth under the running tap.

I burst out laughing and saw my little sister's wet face going very red. Finally, she turned off the water and turned around, water having soaked the front of her t-shirt.

"Very funny – you both tried to poison me! Stop laughing; it's *not* funny!"

I couldn't reply; I was laughing too hard and it hurt... Mindy tried to reply, but she was crying with laughter and finally, Anne-Marie simply stormed off and we heard her stamping her way up the stairs. Once we had both stopped laughing and pulled ourselves together, Mindy smiled at me.

"We all make mistakes, Steph, even me and I shouldn't have shouted at you last night. We still friends?" Mindy asked.

"No – you're my Mum, which is so much better..." I replied, finishing off my toast and Marmite.

..._...

"What's up with her?" Danny asked as he entered the kitchen and watched his sister storm out and up the stairs.

"Stephanie tried to 'poison' her with Marmite," Mindy laughed.

"Cool – I like Marmite; Josh gave me some the other day and it wasn't too bad."

"Chloe will really hate you!" I warned him.

That was when I had a thought – Chloe!

"I need to go out, Mindy – can you give me lift?"

South Cottage Grove

After Mindy had dropped me off, I walked upstairs and knocked on the door.

"Steph!" Chloe exclaimed as she opened the door.

"I need to talk – can we?"

"Of course, come in."

I saw Joshua and felt uncomfortable. Joshua, though, was his usual perceptive self.

"Chloe, I need to pop out for about an hour, see you both later..."

I smiled a thank you as he headed out the door, he waved it off. Chloe handed me a Pepsi Max and we sat down on the couch.

"What's up?"

"I feel like I've let Mindy down and..."

"Well, you've come to the right place, Steph; I've fucked things up more times than I care to remember – Mindy even kicked me out of Fusion, once..."

"Woah, when did that happen?" I asked, a little shocked.

"A little over a year ago, it was November 2014 and I was fourteen-years-old. I thought a lot of myself back then and thought that being the great Shadow meant I could do anything and that I was all but invincible..."

"That notion vanished fast when Josh threw himself in front of me, taking three bullets, two of which passed straight through him and then into my right shoulder – you've seen the scars. That was Ralph D'Amico – he shot me with my own pistol and that really pissed me off and left me baying for his blood. The bastard also took my pistol – that pistol was very special to me; Dave and Mindy gave it to me for my fourteenth birthday.

"Well, we began to have some trouble with a pair of vigilantes that had just shown up in Chicago. Turned out they were British – you'll meet them at some stage, Cameron and Natasha; you'll like 'em. I made the decision to go out on my own, one Thursday night, turned out to be the worst decision that I had made to that point and it was also the first time that I was actually scared of Mindy and what she might do to me. The two British vigilantes somehow got the drop on me and I awoke in their 'Safehouse', my mask had been removed and I was tied up."

"Wow – you were fucking stupid!" I commented.

Chloe blushed and nodded.

"That's an understatement! I knew I was in deep shit and I had no idea how to escape, but I eventually got out of my bindings with the help of a knife that I kept hidden in my combat suit – even Mindy never knew I carried it. They knocked me out again! Then we had company in the building we were in – it was an old building awaiting demolition. It was *him*..."

"Ralph D'Amico?"

"Yeah – I was angry, scared, and a whole host of other emotions. Remember, I didn't have the luxury of your training, nor Mindy's – I was a stupid fourteen-year-old wannabe and I was about to die, and I knew it... I heard his voice and it scared to my core – I persuaded Cameron and Natasha to let me go and give me back my mask. I was never so happy to hear Mindy's voice – she didn't bollock me, she just told me to focus and finish the mission.

"To cut a long story short, we escaped, but so did D'Amico. Fusion had arrived to cut off his escape on the ground. He ran back into the building to get to the roof and a helicopter. That was when I made a few more mistakes. I bolted off after D'Amico – I never stopped to get extra ammo for my P90 and when Hit Girl told me to stop, I told her to 'fuck off!'"

I gasped and Chloe looked embarrassed.

"I ignored all radio calls and ran after D'Amico with Hit Girl hot on my heels. By the time she caught up with me, I was pinned down on the roof with no ammo left... Hit Girl kept the helicopter at bay and I managed to chop off D'Amico's arm and retrieve my pistol, but he escaped. Fact was, if I had taken extra ammunition, he may not have escaped and I would not have almost lost my arm a few months later..."

"Your arm?"

"D'Amico captured me and tried to cut my arm off with a circular saw – the blade had cut through my combat suit and was cutting into my skin when Jackal destroyed the power distribution board. After D'Amico escaped, Mindy told me she didn't want me around and sent me home for good. I had never felt so low, or ashamed. I got hell from my Mom and Josh refused to talk to me for a week."

"Your Mom's scary!" I commented honestly.

"Yeah – tell me about it! Dave then cooked up a plan to get me and Mindy together – we made up and it was all history. Mindy and I have something special between us. Other than Dave, I am the only other person who can control Mindy. I don't know why, but we connect on some level. When Dave found Mindy in Chicago, after she escaped New York – she was all but feral in her behaviour. Only Dave and I seem to be able to keep her 'normal', if there ever is anything normal about Hit Girl – you are the same and I think Josh and Dave are your people who keep you 'normal'."

"I'm sorry if I..."

"Stephanie, Mindy has a saying: 'talk like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch' and it hurts! I trust you with Josh – besides Josh is a tit man and you ain't got anything for him to play with. You're still young Steph and I wish I had the training you had, just not the experiences – you never completed your training, so you will be expected to make mistakes. Hit Girl makes loads of 'em – and you are only nine, so enjoy your childhood while you can."

"Thanks, Chloe."

"Anytime, Steph – I will always be here for you, if you need me. Josh too, he really cares about you – maybe because you like Marmite! Mindy has high standards and we all struggle to keep up with them, but those standards keep us all alive. Mindy rants like a bitch on heat, but all she wants is for us all to come back alive. Besides – she's your Mom and she really cares about you, so expect her to go overboard when you put yourself at unnecessary risk."

"Hello, girls – all done?" Josh asked as he came into the living room.

"Yeah, all good, thanks, Josh."

"Anytime, Steph, anytime."

One week later
Saturday

With them both being female, I might normally have put off their stroppy behaviour to 'time of the month' type stuff.

However, both girls were years away from any of that shit and they both actually had good reasons for being irritable, cantankerous (nice word), grumpy, sulky, uncooperative, generally unhelpful and argumentative (another nice word). All of those moods were fairly standard for Mindy and she was generally demonstrating at least one of them on most days – but rarely all at once!

For the past week, both Anne-Marie and Stephanie had been going out of their way to cause trouble and even Mindy was getting annoyed. Danny and Sophia kept well out of the way of both girls for their own personal safety!

For Anne-Marie, it was the experience of her kidnapping coming back to the fore. For Stephanie, it had been the revelations of Bourne and her scrap with Foxtail.

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On the plus side, the puppies were now heading on for two weeks old and their eyes and ears had opened. Kiara had been first at the beginning of the week, followed by her siblings, with Josie being the last on Thursday afternoon.

It was another landmark in their young lives.

That night

I was awoken by sobbing.

I immediately sat upright in bed and turned on the bedside light. There were two very miserable looking girls standing beside the bed and it was evident that both of them had been crying, although Anne-Marie was still crying. I grabbed hold of Stephanie and swung her over to the middle of the bed where she climbed in between Dave and me while Anne-Marie snuggled in beside me.

"Okay, who's gonna tell me what's going on?"

"Anne-Marie had a bad dream," Stephanie began. "She came through and climbed into bed with me; she was crying her heart out and was very scared. She eventually calmed down and we both fell asleep... Are bad dreams contagious?"

"Not that I know of..."

"Well, I awoke with a fright, all cold and clammy..."

"She screamed, and it woke me up..." Anne-Marie chimed in.

"We were both crying and scared, so we came down to find you..." Stephanie finished and she sounded a little embarrassed.

"What were the dreams about?" Dave asked gently.

"For me, it was Foxtail and the CIA..." Stephanie replied, cuddling into Dave.

"I saw myself back on that island and Foxtail was there, but none of you were there and my Daddy was there and..."

Anne-Marie began to cry again, so I hugged her until she calmed down. Finally, she looked up at me and smiled.

"You said that you would never keep secrets, when you brought me and Danny to Chicago. I know that you had to keep Hit Girl, Kick-Ass and Fusion from us; I understand that, but I have a question and I want you to tell me the truth."

"Always," I replied with a smile.

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"I now know that you were both in Gotham to destroy the gangs there. I remember Fusion operating and putting down the criminals. I remember when you both came to visit our Daddy and you talked about stuff... Did... Did you get my Daddy killed?"

"Before I get to that, let me tell you something. I used to play the 'what if' game for years and Dave still catches me doing it even now... Don't get sucked into it; it will eat you up inside. I would ask myself if I had helped my Daddy die – what if I had got there just a minute sooner? What if I had shot quicker? What if...?"

"I had the same questions about events in my life..." Dave cut in. "My Dad might be alive if I had made a different decision, but decisions get made and we have to live with them. Yes, your Daddy worked for some bad people. We

were targeting those bad people. He tried to help us; he knew the risks and that was why he made Mindy and I promise to take care of you if the worst happened."

"The worst happened. Maybe, if Josh and Dave had gotten to you a few minutes earlier..." I explained. "I regret what happened to your Daddy and what you lost. On the other side of the coin, I will never regret taking you and Danny on – Stephanie's another question entirely, however!"

"Funny, very funny, Mum!" Stephanie laughed.

Anne-Marie laughed too.

"In answer to your question – yes, we put you and your Daddy at risk. It was unavoidable and I can't stop you from holding that against us." I said.

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Anne-Marie pulled herself out from under the duvet and climbed on top of me, staring into my eyes.

"I am going to say this only once and you had better remember it, Mom – I do *not* hold it against you and neither does Danny. I just needed to hear your version and I respect you for telling me the truth."

I smiled at my daughter.

"There's more to you than meets the eye, girl!"

"I know – fear it..."

Stephanie seized Anne-Marie around the waist and dragged her off me.

"Little runt!" She growled.

***Chapter 250*: At Risk**

***The following morning
Sunday***

The Farm

"That really hurt!"

"That was *quite* spectacular, sis!" My brother laughed.

I felt a large pair of hands seize me around the waist, hauling me out of the mud where I had been lying face down after coming off my new motorcycle. The laughter still rang in my ears! The same hands span me around and then wiped the mud off my visor.

"Hi. This is supposed to be a motorcycle lesson, *not* a flying lesson!" Dave quipped.

"It got away from me and then..."

I felt tears of frustration in my eyes, but then I felt Dave's reassuring arms as they wrapped around me. I loved hugs; they always made me feel better. I hated to be laughed at, but I always seemed to screw things up; two wheels were definitely harder than four!

Dave looked into my eyes.

"Take your time – I say that to Mindy every now and then, not that it makes any difference."

I saw the smile on my daughter's face – there were still a couple of gaps where teeth had not grown in yet. She was just like Mindy – full speed ahead and damn the torpedoes! I lifted the pink Honda CRF70F motorcycle out of the mud where it had lain on its side. The engine was still ticking over, so I helped Anne-Marie back onto the machine and she sped off to join her brother who was riding around the field on his own, identical, blue Honda.

I turned as I heard the sound of motorcycles approaching.

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Mindy appeared on her KTM 690 Enduro R dirt bike, she was covered in mud, as was the rider following behind. Stephanie rode her yellow Honda CRF125F motorcycle which was as dirty as my eldest daughter's mouth. They pulled up beside me and cut their engines.

"You both seem to have had fun – is there any mud left in the state of Michigan?"

"It was just awesome!" Stephanie said with an enormous grin on her face.

The same grin was duplicated on Mindy's face.

"How are they doing?" She asked, turning her head to watch the twins.

"Well – one of them has been in the mud more than on the saddle..."

"Not a surprise!" Mindy chuckled.

While Dave and Mindy talked, I looked over at my brother and sister.

Not surprisingly, my sister was covered in mud, from head to toe, while my brother only had mud where it had splashed up from the tyres. Anne-Marie would never learn! Mindy had taken me on an off-road ride, as I could ride a bike without any problems, thank you very much! It had been challenging, but I had survived everything that Mindy had thrown at me, including a lot of mud!

"My God!" Chuckled Jack Bay as he walked over.

"I had fun, Uncle Jack – it was awesome..."

"Glad to hear you having fun, Stephanie, not bad for a nine-year-old."

"I'm almost ten, Uncle Jack!"

"Yes, you are, young lady..."

I was very proud of what Mindy and Dave were doing.

They had three awesome kids and I knew that both Damon and Kathleen would be so proud – Dave's parents too, I was certain. I was very aware of the circumstances that had occurred in Gotham and had resulted in the orphaning of Anne-Marie and Daniel. They were both wonderful kids and I greatly enjoyed having them over. Stephanie was something else entirely.

The nine-year-old was another Mindy – the young girl's childhood had been ripped apart, through no fault of her own. Looking at the short, thinly built young girl with flowing blonde hair to below her shoulders, you would see her for what she was – a happy girl enjoying life. It was only when you looked into her grey-blue eyes that you saw death looking back at you. Mindy had explained exactly what the girl was capable of, including a description of her actions on Buck island during the rescue of Anne-Marie. Stephanie was able to kill without any thought – just as Mindy could. It was not that the girl scared me, but what she represented did.

Mindy had been very disturbed by Anne-Marie taking a life on that island. At the time, she had not thought much about it, but in the clear light of day, she regretted allowing Anne-Marie to kill that man. I was amazed how strong the seven-year-old was, considering what she had suffered. She was always smiling and laughing as were the other two kids. Daniel was the only innocent in that family, but I was not there to judge.

Fusion were a key part of order in the City of Chicago as they assisted the Chicago Police Department. Fusion had saved many lives over the years that they had been in the city – they had also taken many too.

***Three days later
Wednesday morning***

Glenview

"Come on – you're going to be late for school!"

"Yes, Mom!"

I was giggling as we played with Razor and Kiara – both were trying to walk around, but they kept falling over! They were the first of the pups to actually succeed at standing on four legs for more than a few seconds. We all spent many hours laughing as the seven pups attempted to navigate the 'nest' on all four paws. I was sure that Sophia was amused too, as on several occasions I saw her purposely knock a pup over and then look all innocent!

"Move!" Came the yell down the stairs.

"Come on, Anne-Marie, time to go before Mum goes all Hit Girl on us!"

That afternoon

I took the normal shortcut that I always did, down the alleyway – only this time, I had Anne-Marie with me.

Mom would meet us at the usual place, just as we always did after school. Megan was in detention and Danny was at an afterschool club, so it was just the two of us. Normally, if it was just me, I would take the alleyway, but never with Anne-Marie. Only, today we were late and Mum *hated it* when we were late.

"Come on, Anne-Marie!"

"I've got shorter legs than you!"

"Well, move them faster..."

"Not helping..."

I chuckled and slowed my pace – which was lucky or I might never have seen the flash of light to my left as somebody jumped down from a fire escape, blocking our route. It was the worst possible place to meet *her* and I was *not* alone, nor was I in my armour.

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"Who is it, Steph?" Anne-Marie asked and my heart sank.

"Thank you, kid, for identifying my mark and confirming her identity for me... The hair was a nice touch, Walker!"

"Walker?" Anne-Marie echoed.

I ignored my sister's confusion – if she couldn't remember the name I had before I became a Lizewski, then tough.

"Foxtail!" I growled, dumping my school bag and shoving Anne-Marie behind me.

I had no idea what was happening, but I had heard Mom and Stephanie using that name: Foxtail.

I also knew that the name was bad news and that she was *not* there for our health! Then something Megan had said the other day came to mind – shelter – I needed shelter, I looked around and saw a dumpster; I dived behind it and reached into my school bag, grabbing my cell.

I remembered the lecture from Marty barely a week before.

...+...

"Right you two, these are special phones – do *not* lose them!"

"Cool!" Danny had muttered.

"On the main screen is a red icon – see it? Press it and hold it for five seconds and an app will appear; you will have ten seconds to press that orange button before an alert is sent out from the phone. That alert will go out to Fusion and help will be on its way – okay?"

"Yeah..." I had replied, never expecting to actually use the feature...

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I activated the cell with my fingerprint and held my finger down on the red icon. Five seconds later a black screen appeared with a single orange button that had a countdown.

I shoved the phone into my pants and prayed.

"Two bitches for the price of one – hope you enjoyed what life you've had, little girl!"

Foxtail was sneering at my sister, who I was glad to see had retreated behind a dumpster, but her head was sticking out!

"Don't you *dare* threaten her, you fucking bitch!" I declared as forcefully as possible – burying my fears as I gauged my moment.

My heart sank even further as Foxtail drew what appeared to be her signature weapon. The twin butterfly swords reflected what light there was in the alleyway. I was unarmed, but I remembered my training and my eyes darted around me searching...

With Anne-Marie out of the way, I was free to act and I dove forwards the moment Foxtail moved toward me and rolled beneath the twin blades, reaching for the item I had seen on the ground. I came back to my feet and swung the two-foot piece of aluminium scaffolding at Foxtail's legs, missing but causing her to lose her focus and jump over me.

I was not going to make it easy for her – no bloody way!

"Where the *hell* are they?"

"They're not late yet!" Paige laughed.

"I *hate* waiting..."

"I *hate* it when you're on your period – talk about bitchy...!"

Paige was cut off by my cell. I picked it up, stared at the screen for a moment and then I suddenly felt cold, very cold – it was happening again...

"Mindy? What is it?" Paige demanded in a worried tone.

"Anne-Marie!" I replied simply as I sent the position of the alert to the satnav in the Jag.

I burned rubber as I accelerated away.

As I watched from behind the smelly dumpster, I saw Stephanie fight the bigger girl.

Stephanie had a length of metal pole and she was able to fend off the blows from the two swords that the other girl wielded. I knew it could not last and I was fairly certain who the loser was going to be...

Something caught my eye off to one side. Just across from me and a few feet back from the fight, I saw something glinting – it was in a small alcove. I took a chance when Foxtail was facing the other way and ran toward it.

I was curious – so sue me!

This was *not* going to end well.

I caught sight of Anne-Marie running back down the alleyway but then vanishing – what was she up to? Foxtail had not seen her, so I continued fighting. I was tired from a day at school and not ready for a fight against the odds...

"You fight well for somebody that never completed Phase 2," Foxtail commented.

"Better than somebody who completed Phase 2!" I replied with a smirk as I flipped backwards, just missing a blade by an inch.

I left the alcove, just as I heard running feet from up the alleyway and I saw Megan charging down the alleyway, a pistol in her right hand. Megan pushed me roughly out of the way, brought up the pistol and fired off three rapid shots, none of which came close, but that seemed to be the point.

I felt relief surge through me.

The gunshots had come out of nowhere, but I hoped that they were friendly.

I dove to the ground, clearing myself from the shooter's line of fire. Three more bullets flew past and I heard Foxtail scream and then a thud as she landed on the ground followed by the clatter of her swords landing beside her.

I crawled towards Anne-Marie and looked up at Megan who had a small pistol in her hands pointed downrange.

"You okay?" She demanded.

"I'm fine – you okay, Anne-Marie?"

"Yeah!" She replied indignantly.

Then there was the sound of two more sets of feet pounding down the alleyway from the opposite direction and I looked behind Megan to see Mindy and Paige come to a halt, each with a pistol raised.

"What happened?" Mindy asked.

"It was *her*..." I started to explain, pointing at where Foxtail had fallen.

Or rather, where Foxtail *had* fallen... She was gone, along with her swords.

..._...

We had just reached the XJR when I noticed Anne-Marie behaving strangely.

"What's up?" I asked. "It's all over, thanks to Megan..."

Megan grinned and I hugged my little sister.

"I did something bad..."

"Huh?" Mum asked.

"I saw something in the alleyway, in a kind of alcove..."

That was when I heard a motorcycle engine start and then move away at speed.

"You found Foxtail's motorcycle?" I asked gently.

"Maybe..."

"Fuck!" Megan exclaimed. "Why didn't you say when we were back down the alleyway?"

"I'm sorry..."

Anne-Marie was almost in tears at the rebuke.

"Sorry, Anne-Marie," Megan said calmly with a grin. "Tell us what you did."

"I lost my cell – I jammed it under the saddle on the motorcycle..."

"Fucking genius!" I exclaimed, clapping my sister on the back.

I looked up at Mum.

"Can we?" I asked.

"Hell yes!" Mindy replied, grabbing her cell.

West Ridge

I was watching Anne-Marie's cell going north at sixty-five, only, all the others were barely moving.

Something was not right – my cell rang – it was the boss!

"Battle Guy – I have Rogue for you..."

Huh?

"Battle Guy," Rogue announced. "Track my phone – it's currently on Foxtail's motorcycle."

Awesome!

"Yes, ma'am!" I chuckled in reply. "I've got her – she's as good as tracked, boss!"

"Hit Girl says I need a new phone – sorry..." Rogue finished.

"On its way, Rogue, Battle Guy out!"

"Thanks, Battle Guy!" Hit Girl said.

"Is...?"

"Everybody is fine, thanks for asking."

"Is everything okay?" Kim asked.

"It is now..."

The following afternoon Thursday

As usual, I dumped my school bag and ran down the stairs to check on the seven new hounds.

The walking attempts had coincided with tails beginning to wag and the two boys, Hercules and Razor beginning to play fight, with Kiara and Piper being the main targets. I noticed that Josie could hold her own against the two boys, which was good.

"Anne-Marie!" Came the below from upstairs. "Homework before puppies!"

"Yes, Dad!" I yelled back and said goodbye to each pup in turn.

The pups were now allocated.

Kiara was to be mine and Dave's. Hope belonged to Marty and Kim. Josie's home would be with Hailee. Layla had been adopted by Abby. Megan had Piper, while Stephanie had Razor, which left Hercules for Chloe and Joshua. Anne-Marie and Danny were happy to keep Sophia as their dog.

I now had a training regimen to put together for the seven handfuls.

***Chapter 251*: The Black Bag Job**

Thursday evening

South Wabash Avenue and East Adams Street

"Have you no shame, girl?"

"I'm hungry..."

"You eat too many of those and you won't fit your suit!"

"Fuck you, Trojan!" Wildcat laughed as she dug into her quarter-pounder.

It was dark and very cold, so Wildcat had decided to pay a quick visit to the nearby McDonalds intending to get a coffee, but instead she got food! Couldn't blame her, but for a vigilante to be stuffing her face with a cheeseburger...

"Wildcat finished stuffing her ample gob, yet?"

"Negative, Psyche – she's still cramming it in!" I replied – Psyche was on duty at Safehouse F in the Control Centre.

There was a muffled 'fuck you' from Wildcat as she battled to swallow her mouthful.

"It is remarkably peaceful, though..." I chuckled.

"Look you two assholes – Psyche, I'm gonna kick your limey *arse* and as for you, Trojan..."

The middle-aged woman rose from her seat as the train pulled into Adams/Wabash station, just as it did every night on her way back from work.

As soon as it stopped, the doors opened and she stepped out onto the platform. The woman was the only person on the platform at that time of night. She hated it when she was alone; she felt extremely vulnerable, just as any woman might – it was not the best place to be at night...

Then my heart skipped a beat as two men walked up the stairs leading from the street – I turned toward the other set of stairs, but two more men blocked my exit. There was a click as a knife was unsheathed – I began to shake as fear coursed through me.

The man with the knife – seemingly the leader – approached me, just my luck to be mugged. But then, everything changed very quickly...

..._...

The man behind the leader – he seemed to fly backwards and I heard him crashing down the steel stairs. There, standing on the side of the stairs was a Chicago Vigilante – she was short and she wore body armour with a mottled brown effect. She smirked as she jumped down onto the stairs. The leader span around, his eyes wide. The other two men moved closer to support their leader, however they both yelled out in pain as both had their legs kicked out from under them. One man had a pistol placed to his forehead, the other the point of a large sword to his neck.

Their attacker was another short vigilante – in a suit made up of greens and browns. The woman recognised him as the vigilante known as Trojan. The leader dropped his knife and raised his hands as Wildcat came up the stairs. She was much shorter than the woman had expected – younger too.

"Knees!" She growled and the leader sank to the steel walkway.

The woman was shocked, but awed, when Wildcat deployed the claws from the gauntlet on her right hand. She placed the razor sharp tips against the man's neck.

"You interrupted my burger..." she growled. "I was enjoying that burger, too..."

Her partner looked over to the woman.

"You okay?" He asked.

"They never had a chance to do anything... Thanks."

"No problem, ma'am."

West Columbia

"Stop right there, young lady!"

"Gimme a break! I just put down two cunts and I..."

"Dollar – jar!" Marcus growled.

"Your bedroom is a tip – it had better be done before you leave for school in the morning, or you are grounded from *everything!*"

"Mom!"

"Get to it, Megan..."

"Out that door, I'm a respected and *feared* vigilante – in here? No respect!" I growled as I dug into my pocket and pulled out a dollar bill.

I tried to add it to the overflowing jar on the kitchen side – Marcus was using a one-gallon jar which he had jokingly said was bigger than what Mindy had used and should be plenty... I turned to Mom and Marcus.

"You're gonna need a bigger jar..." I grinned cheekily.

"She's worse than Mindy..." Marcus growled, throwing his hands into the air. "I never thought I'd ever hear myself say that about anybody..."

The following morning Friday

1714 West Grace Street

The young woman strode down the street and stopped outside the apartment block.

She casually examined the building before walking down the alleyway to the east and equally casually glanced up at the apartment on the 3rd (top) floor of the southeast corner of the apartment block.

Six minutes later, the woman entered apartment 3E.

Apartment 3E

"Nice!"

"You in?"

"Leon is in, Hit Girl!"

"Any trouble getting in?"

"The alarm was state-of-the-art, as I would expect for a CIA-based Safehouse, but I've had some experience with them – besides you said that you wanted her to know we had visited."

"Yes, I did – have fun!"

..._...

The kitchen/living room was combined. There was a nice red couch and arm chair, with a square table and four chairs

in the corner with nice views. The kitchen had a small balcony facing the south and was well equipped. It was obviously the home of a young woman – it was tidy, but there were also signs that the woman was a teenager. There were several dirty dishes piled in the sink, a typical sign of teenage laziness.

There were no photos in the living room – that was out of place. People always had at least one picture of family or friends... I hit the jackpot in the master bedroom. Hidden behind a panel in the back of a built-in wardrobe, was a small cardboard box. Nothing significant, just a few photos and keepsakes. One photo stood out, it showed a small girl – maybe eight-years-old – with her parents. She was smiling and cuddling her father – an obvious daddy's girl.

I felt sick to my stomach when I thought about Stephanie, and now this little girl, traumatised into becoming killers – Foxtail, like Stephanie, had been an innocent little girl when she had been taken. She obviously felt for her loss – going against established protocols by keeping artefacts from her past life in evidence.

Maybe that meant something.

..._...

I checked every drawer and cupboard that I could find. She had good taste in clothes and along with some school uniforms, I found clothes that were obviously intended to make the girl seem older than she really was. There was also evidence of her being in the 9th grade, which would make her about fourteen, rather than the sixteen that Stephanie had estimated.

The bathroom was clean and relatively tidy – the girl was on her period, evidenced by the contents of the rubbish bin. There was the usual kit, toothbrush, toothpaste – condoms? It was an unsealed pack; one was missing... Under the sink, I also found evidence that she probably did not have a steady boyfriend, not to mention some spare batteries.

She lived alone, that was also obvious.

..._...

I headed downstairs to the basement – the apartment had allocated storage according to Marty's checks. I found a large steel lockbox – it was fairly obvious what required *that* kind of storage! I looked out back and found Anne-Marie's phone, exactly where she had left it. My eyes went wide at the sight of her wheels.

The motorcycle was all-black, just as Stephanie had reported. The BMW R 1200 GS Triple Black was one mean machine. On the back of the machine, on either side, was a standard aluminium pannier, both of which were empty.

I was jealous!

That afternoon

West Irving Park Road

"Why are we sitting in a car, on a stake out, on our day off?"

"Because we have orders, Sam, and the lady who gave the orders is scary!"

"Chicken!"

"You try saying no to a homicidal teenager!" Paul Murphy laughed.

"Hold on! Target is exiting the building and heading east along West Irving Park – now turning south down North Leavitt towards West Byron."

West Byron Street

"Target has turned east onto West Byron..."

The Iceberg White Ducati Multistrada moved off from the curb and headed east. Cathy Bennett smiled as she got a good look at the young girl walking down the street. Despite her normal reservations about kids getting hurt, that bitch had tried to kill Stephanie and Anne-Marie.

"Enjoy your visitor tonight, bitch!" Cathy muttered as she turned her motorcycle right onto North Hoyne Avenue.

North Lincoln Avenue

"Target is heading southeast on North Lincoln..."

I studied the girl, her face especially, as she walked toward me and then past me – I pictured that face when seen through a sniper scope.

"She doesn't seem all that special, does she?"

"No, Mathilda – she does not, but she is a clear and present danger," Mindy replied as I dropped the gearbox of my BMW X3 into gear and moved off, northeast.

"The circle of life... Fancy a coffee?"

West Grace Street

The Ford Focus was uncomfortable, but I only had to tolerate it for another few minutes. I turned east and saw my target as she passed beneath the 'L'.

"Target is almost home..."

"Thanks, Dave – we'll take it from here..."

I watched as the blue Ford stopped and parked up, fifty yards short of Foxtail's apartment. I ignored Paige as I drove past. Beside her sat Cathy; she had parked her Ducati up a side street and would stay with Paige.

They were in a dangerous location, so close to Foxtail's home.

North Ravenswood Avenue

"You did well!"

"Thank you."

We were parked up outside a commercial building and listening to the bugs that Mathilda had left in Foxtail's apartment. We heard her enter and turn on the TV – a music channel by the sound of it. Then we heard an exclamation.

"*What the fuck?*"

"She must have found the cup of coffee I made myself!" Mathilda said with a chuckle.

"*Some fuck's been in here!*"

Apartment 3E

I was infuriated!

Not only did I have to abandon the fight, yesterday, I had now had my home violated – was it Fusion? They were supporting that fucking Walker girl... How could I fail to kill a fucking nine-year-old? How the fuck did they find my apartment...?

..._...

Fifteen minutes later, I was seething...

On the table before me was a cell phone – no longer functioning! I had also found four bugs – two had been obvious finds and decoys, the other two had been more skilfully hidden, but I had found them.

"I'll fucking kill the lot of them!"

What did it all mean? Was I now being targeted? I would have expected to find myself dead if I were...

North Ravenswood Avenue

"I'll fucking kill the lot of them!"

"She found the decoys!"

"All four – very good – I'm hungry and I have some things to do before tonight's fun!"

"I'll drop you off on the way."

That night

Apartment 3E

I could not sleep.

I was sitting in the armchair, dozing, the suppressed pistol in my lap within easy reach. The clock on the wall said it was a few minutes to midnight and I was very tired. The lights were all off and the blinds were down, that would keep a sniper from tracking me. Every door was locked tight, but I suddenly had a strange feeling and a tingling at the back of my neck.

"Good evening, Foxtail..."

I swear I jumped a mile! I raised the pistol towards the voice and my eyes went wide as my heart skipped a beat – it was *her*...

Hit Girl was in my apartment, only feet away. She emerged from the darkness into the glow from the TV – I had rarely known fear, but now I was way beyond that. While I was good at what I did – I was not in Hit Girl's league, not by a long shot. I could make out the twin pistols, the twin Katana blades, the Tanto...

Talk about being out classed!

The girl was scared.

I liked that – I could sense the fear and it inspired me. The girl raised her pistol and emptied the magazine into my armour – the nine-millimetre slugs compressed and dropped to the floor, all fifteen of them. I must have shaken the assassin to the core as she fell backwards over the arm of the chair onto the floor, but she rapidly stood back up again.

She moved backwards and I knew why as she span around, seizing her butterfly swords from the windowsill. Mathilda had found them, but I had told her to leave them in place – I wanted a fair fight.

Had it all been a setup – meeting Walker the previous afternoon?

Hit Girl was here to kill me, but she obviously wanted to drag it out – she wanted a fight. I would not let her down; I could not win – but I would fight as well as I could. I brandished my twin blades – Hit Girl smirked as she stepped closer and drew her own twin blades – only they were not Katana swords, but the shorter variant, Wakizashi, which were about a foot shorter and much more useful for a fight in an apartment!

"Are you ready to die, little girl?" She taunted her smirk broadening.

"Are you?" I replied, rather lamely I thought

"Yes, I am – let's fight, Foxtail!"

Her blades moved swiftly and I took the full force of the attack on both of my own swords. Hit Girl nodded her

approval – what the fuck was this? I pushed her back, much easier than I thought I could... I drove in with both swords, putting everything into the strikes. Hit Girl parried every one, leaving me panting for breath, but I dug deep as the adrenaline flowed – I needed everything that I could give.

I would give everything I had.

She was good.

I hated to destroy her, but it was her or Stephanie and there was no argument with that limited choice and I had made my decision. Okay, I was a bitch, I enjoyed a good fight – I hated for the fight to end and I also enjoyed a good tease too...

I twisted and allowed one of her swords to strike my chest – it hurt, but did not penetrate. I saw her smile spread, but then falter as I pushed back at her.

I pushed the attack and I drove the point of my Wakizashi into her chest...

Thank God for my armour!

The blade did *not* penetrate, but I saw how angry Hit Girl was – I had struck her; she had given me the strike to tease me. No wonder she had the reputation as a bitch... I was fully aware that my training had been based on her – she had been killing since she was about five or six according to legend and yes, Hit Girl was a legend in her own time.

To be honest, I felt honoured to be fighting her, honoured that she saw me as a worthy adversary – she could have sent any of her underlings to kill me. Or she could have shot me dead in my chair. Then it happened...

She parried away my swords, one at a time, with such force that I lost my grip on first one and then the other – I was disarmed and helpless. She pushed me up against the wall and I felt tears of frustration build up in my eyes; I had failed and I was going to die as a consequence.

I felt the Tanto as it was pressed against my neck. I looked ahead of me and stared into her eyes – I saw nothing but death.

Hit Girl represented death as much as the Grim Reaper did – only I was more scared of Hit Girl.

It was the endgame.

One gentle push of the razor sharp blade that I held to her neck and Foxtail would be no more. I did not even know her real name – nor did I care. I saw the fear etched on her face, something I had seen many times – it was routine, they always showed fear at the end.

I felt no emotion as I stared into her blue eyes...

***Chapter 252*: Endgame**

Friday night

Apartment 3E

I felt no emotion as I stared into her blue eyes.

Her face joined the others etched in my memory, all the others that I had killed. Many died without ever knowing who, or why. Some died as they stared into my eyes and me into theirs. Foxtail was one of those and I examined those eyes, relishing the fear and then I stopped...

What are you doing, Mindy?

Kill her!

No...

Kill her!

I had seen something in those eyes – I had seen the scared fourteen-year-old girl beneath all that Foxtail training. Underneath, I had been the same – a scared little girl, forced into a life of killing. It was not her fault, just as it was not Stephanie's fault. Somebody else had made both young girls into what they were, just as my Daddy had made me what I was...

Kill her!

No...

I would let her live – maybe, just maybe, we could...

"It's your lucky day, Foxtail..."

I slumped to the floor and I sobbed.

I was soaked in sweat and I hurt where her sword had struck me. I could not believe that I was still alive – she *had* me, yet she had let me go, Hit Girl had let me live... Why?

I still had a mission...

Had it been a warning to stay away from the Walker girl?

But I had no choice; I had a mission... The Walker girl had to die.

They would kill *me*, if I did not kill her...

Safehouse F

"What the *fuck* happened?"

Stephanie was raging and I knew why. What had happened at that apartment? Hit Girl had left and she was on her way back, only we could hear Foxtail moving around her apartment – she was still sobbing.

"What happened, Dave?" Stephanie demanded, her rage building.

"I don't know, Stephanie – you know as much as I do!"

..._...

Hit Girl never said a word as she headed back to the Safehouse. We tracked her motorcycle – something was wrong; she was obeying all speed limits and traffic regulations! Finally, she rode into the Safehouse and parked her Ducati.

She passed through the armoured shield and I could tell by her body language that she was pissed.

Her helmet and mask were thrown across the mat as she went. Stephanie ran out of the Control Centre to confront her.

"What are you doing? Why is that bitch still alive? Do you not care about her trying to kill me? Have you gone fucking soft?"

I expected Mindy to fly for Stephanie – *nobody* spoke to Mindy like that! Mindy's face was full of confusion, but she smiled at Stephanie, who did *not* smile back.

"Come on you soft fuck, say something!"

"I couldn't kill her..."

Stephanie was astonished.

"*You couldn't kill her?*" Stephanie echoed.

"She did not deserve to die..."

"Explain that to me – I seem to have missed something here!" Stephanie raged.

Mindy sat down on the mat and looked directly at Stephanie, who sat down in front of Mindy.

"She deserves to die as much as I do, as much as you do. She did not choose to become an assassin and neither did you, and nor did I. I saw something in her eyes – I saw you, I saw myself..."

..._...

I walked over and sat down next to Mindy. Stephanie seemed to be cooling down and trying to make sense of what Mindy was saying.

"I suppose that makes some sort of sense..." Stephanie said calmly, then her eyes lit up. "You want to turn her?"

"I do – if we can..."

"I can live with that – assuming she doesn't kill me before we turn her!"

Mindy laughed and so did Stephanie. We all got up and Mindy headed for the armoury, but then she turned and kicked Stephanie across the mat where she landed in a heap with a scream.

"What the fuck?" The annoyed girl yelled.

"Just to show you that I've *not* gone *soft*, oh daughter of mine!"

"That bloody well hurt, *Mum!*"

Glenview

"What did you do *this* time?"

"I told Mum that I thought she had gone soft..." I replied to my little sister as I passed her bedroom door, rubbing my bruises.

"Idiot!"

I laughed as I headed for my room.

The next day

Saturday morning

We awoke late.

"Sorry for shouting at you, Mum."

"It's okay; I deserved it."

"No, you did not – I should have shown more respect for you..."

"Did Chloe ever tell you about a certain phrase of mine?"

Stephanie smiled sweetly.

"You slap me, I slap you back, twice as hard – err, Mum!"

"That's my girl!"

Apartment 3E

I was glad I did not have to go to school.

My mind was still reeling from my close shave. I had woken up on the living room floor, surrounded by ejected casings from my SIG. It had taken me a moment to realise what had happened, but then I saw my SIG, the slide locked back and my two swords.

Hit Girl!

Why had she left me alive? I had pondered that for the thirty minutes I had spent in the shower, but I felt no better as I dried myself and pulled on some clothes. My mind was completely screwed up. Until I had gotten involved with fucking Fusion, I had been focused and in full control – now? What would I say to my handler – he was coming by that night... The CIA did not take failure lightly – we were all but disposable as their pawns.

What a choice: die at the hands of Hit Girl, or the CIA!

Saturday afternoon

Glenview

Our visitor had arrived.

"Cassie!"

The poor girl, she was mobbed by the three kids almost the moment she stepped through the front door. I smiled as I waded through and pulled the kids out of the way, giving Cassie a hug of my own.

"You ready for this?" I asked.

"Apprehensive, but looking forward to it..."

Safehouse F

"Fusion, meet Nemesis!"

The combat suit was full body and no skin was visible although Cassie's ample feminine curves were obvious through the armour. Her overall suit was a very dark grey, however, the armour from the top of her thighs down to her knees was a dull yellow, as was the armour that covered her shoulders and upper arms. The upper chest and back armour were dark grey. The armour that covered her head and neck was also dark grey while the mask that covered all but her jaw was a dull yellow. Her gauntlets were dark grey with dull yellow armour that extended up her lower arms to the elbow. Her boots were lightweight, but had armoured soles and came up to her knees, they were dark grey.

On her right thigh was a holster for an FN Five-seveN Mk2 pistol. On the outer side of her left boot was an 18-inch Tanto with a yellow cotton Tsuka-ito, with grey ray-skin in a dark grey Saya. On her back, angled over to the right

shoulder was a 42-inch Katana with the same yellow cotton Tsuka-ito, with grey ray-skin in a dark grey Saya. Around her waist was a utility belt in dark blue that carried communications and ammunition.

Now she was out in the open, we would see what she could do... Who knew that Cassie had a thing for sharp blades and had been training with swords since she was eight!

The blades clashed as the two vigilantes attacked each other.

It was a spectacle to behold!

Nemesis was about four inches shorter than Hit Girl, but that did not seem to be a problem as Nemesis moved fast and she kept moving. The rapid movement stopped her becoming a target for Hit Girl, who seemed annoyed – at least that was what her body language indicated.

It was a surprise to see somebody who could actually keep up with Hit Girl, at least where swords were concerned. Nemesis had been holding out on us – apparently she had been into Martial Arts for about eleven years and she knew a lot of powerful disciplines.

I was expecting a very annoyed wife when all was done!

I could do this – I could take her!

Maybe that would be a bit ambitious, but I was going to see how far I could go... I loved to fight with swords – there was something about them that inspired me. Hit Girl was not amused and I took great joy in raising her temper.

"You're good – I'll give you that!" Hit Girl growled only inches from my face, her blade forcing me backwards.

I smiled at the compliment, but Hit Girl's verbal sparring was not over.

"Only I'm better..."

With that, I was kicked backwards and I fell into a heap on the mat. I had only moments to react, so I rolled sideways, only narrowly missing the descending Katana blade. I swung my blade up and caught Hit Girl's lower arm, causing her to let go the grip on her sword. Hit Girl was not allowing me even a glimmer of success over her – she kicked out, catching me in the side of my head.

I saw stars for a moment before I felt myself being hauled to my feet and hurled across the mat. I was very sore, but I was not about to give up...

"What is it with you goddamn Brits; you never know when to quit!"

"Well – if we behaved like you slovenly yanks, we would never have built the largest empire in history covering almost a quarter of the Earth... We stop for no man – you take us on, we fight to the bitter end, whatever *that* may be!"

I had no immediate comeback to that and I was also annoyed to hear two other Brits loudly cheering on their compatriot! I had no desire to start another American war with Great Britain, so I just went back to what I did best – I fought.

..._...

Nemesis was tiring and I knew that she could not go on much longer. She had stamina, tonnes of it, but she also needed to learn when to quit... Who was I to talk? I would fight myself to a standstill if Kick-Ass would let me! It was time to finish.

"Sorry, Nemesis, but I know that you won't quit voluntarily, so..."

I executed a high spinning kick, sending Nemesis across the mat, her sword skittering in the opposite direction. I ran over and pulled off my mask to signify the end of the fight. I helped Nemesis back to her feet. As she pulled off her mask, I saw that the young woman was soaked in sweat. I was about to shout for some water when Stephanie appeared.

"Well done, Nemesis – you reminded this traitorous yank that we British can *still* punch above our weight!"

The grinning girl handed Cassie a bottle of cold water and took her mask off her before fetching the discarded Katana.

That night

Safehouse F

Foxtail had a visitor and he was *not* happy!

"Hit Girl was here?"

The man was agitated.

"You have well and truly fucked up, Foxtail – I'm gonna have to report this up the line and you know the possible consequences..."

"Yes, I do..."

..._...

"That sounded bad!" I commented, gazing over at Abby.

"Yeah, Marty!"

"We need to accelerate things before the CIA takes her out..."

"Any ideas, Mindy?"

"I'm gonna go chat with Jason."

Safehouse Q Chatham Road

I pulled up the drive and walked up to the front door.

Before I could knock, it flew open.

"Mindy!"

"Nicky!"

I followed Nicky into the living room. Jason was on the couch watching a movie.

"Hello, Mindy – got a problem?"

"Yeah," I said as I sat down beside Jason on the couch. "Would the CIA terminate Foxtail for not completing her mission?"

"It's the CIA – anything is possible..."

"Foxtail just got warned by her handler – I paid her a visit last night, but I couldn't destroy her..."

"You want to turn her?" Nicky asked.

"Is it possible?"

"It worked for Stephanie, but she was only part way through her training... Foxtail? I don't know, to be honest," Jason replied.

The next morning Sunday

Stephanie did not seem happy.

When I awoke that morning, I found her pounding from one end of the pool to another. She was determined and she was *not* stopping. I walked back to my room and changed into my swimsuit. I returned to the pool and Stephanie was still at it. I dived in and easily caught up to the young girl as she swam.

"Anything I can help with?" I called over as I swam parallel to her.

Stephanie slowed down and stopped before moving into the shallow water and standing up. She turned to face me as she fought to control her breathing and there was concern on her face.

"How many more kids are there out there – kids like me and Foxtail? That training centre was full of kids, of all ages. We might be able to rescue Foxtail, but what about the rest?"

"We're gonna take down the whole damn lot, Steph, I promise you that."

"I don't think Foxtail is going to listen – I don't think she's going to turn, Mindy; I know the training that she went through. I never completed mine, which made it easier for me to leave it behind – she may still have to die."

"I spoke with Jason and Nicky, last night. You could be the key to turning Foxtail – *if* you think you can handle it. If she can't be turned, you can put a bullet between her eyes, personally."

"Nice image, Mum, thanks!"

***Two days later
Tuesday morning***

"They are so sweet!"

"That one is mine, Razor – he's able to walk properly now, as can Piper, Kiara, Hope and Hercules... Sophia – stop knocking your pups over!"

"Does she do that a lot?" Cassie asked with a laugh.

"Ever since they started to try and walk – she thinks it's funny!"

"You're very lucky, Steph."

"I know."

***Three days later
Friday Night***

Apartment 3E

It was my last chance.

If I failed, I would die, one way or another. Did it scare me? Not really, it had been part of our training; we were conditioned to accept failure and to just fight harder to the end. I would not disappoint; I would fight to the bitter end.

So much for Saoirse Doherty!

***Chapter 253*: Turning Foxtail**

Friday night

Southern Chicago

I had found her!

There she was – a female vigilante standing just several feet away and it was *the* one that I so desperately needed to kill. In hindsight, it was *so* obviously a trap... She turned as I approached – she smiled at me. I had to admit, she looked slightly ridiculous in that getup – was I jealous? Get a fucking grip, Foxtail!

I fired off three shots and she went down – no nines for Psyche, .40-calibre only! I heard a muffled scream of pain, but then nothing... Had I killed her? Part of me wished no... *What!* I kept my pistol pointed as I approached – there was nobody else in evidence. Psyche was not moving, but then as I leant over to check her pulse, I remembered the electric shock gizmo and hesitated.

Then, to my surprise, her eyes opened.

..._...

"You wearing a vest?" She asked with a grimace of pain.

"Yes..." I replied without thinking.

"Good!"

Three gunshots rang out and I felt three sharp pains in my chest, followed by another sharp pain as I crashed to the ground. I found myself on my back and I struggled to stand back up, but I managed it and I felt shaky, then I felt an arm snaking around my neck. I found myself in a choke hold... My training told me to break out of the hold and to kill my assailant, only the man – it felt like a man – held me too tightly and I could not execute the required breakout.

"Don't struggle..." The man said quietly into my ear as consciousness began to fade. "It is *not* your fault..."

Three hours later

Where the hell was I?

It was dark – I remembered shooting that bitch and then... *She shot me!* I cried out as I felt my chest; it hurt! I remembered being put down, but nothing after that. I heard movement close by where I lay and a light came on – it was dim and was not intended to dazzle. Then a voice spoke; it was a young voice.

"I was almost like you..."

It was a girl's voice; a young girl and I instantly recognised the accent, too. I felt rage building – yet again, I had failed...

"I know, *Walker* – I know your training and I've seen you in action, more than once... What are you hoping to achieve here?"

"I want to help you..."

That was unexpected... or was it?

"*Why* would you want to help *me* and why would I want to accept *your* help?" I paused. "What am I doing here?"

"You passed out and you must have been tired; you stayed asleep – you snore by the way; I'd forgotten about that..."

"It's been a stressful couple of days!" I growled in reply. *Sarcastic bitch!*

..._...

I saw the shape move into the light – it was her, it was Stephanie Walker – my nemesis, only I should have been hers... She was not wearing her ridiculous body armour, just ordinary jeans and a t-shirt. The girl was full of surprises, but why did that make me feel better? She had made no overt attempt to threaten me – she wasn't even carrying a weapon. Her expression was neutral, maybe... *No!*

"No... It's not happening, bitch!"

She smiled... God, I hated that girl! Why couldn't she just die, like a good little girl!

"Come with me..." she said slowly.

The girl held out her hand to me and I realised that I was lying in a bed. My jacket and body armour were gone, along with my weapons. I was wearing my t-shirt and pants, but no boots.

"We took your armour and weapons..." Walker went on. "Think yourself lucky; I was all but naked when I woke up in that bed!"

I swung my legs off the bed and faced the girl. For a moment, I considered attacking, but what was the point... Was I capitulating?

I slid off the bed and stood up, looking down at the girl who I had tormented for years and then tried to kill. She looked up at me, her expression still neutral – no gloating over her having captured me. Her hand was still extended out towards me.

"Lead the way, Psyche..."

..._...

I followed Psyche out into a passageway.

There was only one way to go – to the right. At the end of the corridor was another door, we passed through it and I found myself in a kind of vestibule.

The door I had just passed through had a sign: 'Medical Center'. To my left was another door that read: 'Power/Generator/Pyro Store'. That door also had the usual 'DANGER – ELECTRIC SHOCK WARNING' type signs, plus a palm scanner for access. To my right was another door that had large bolts on the outside of it; the sign read: 'Interrogation & Holding'.

Ominous! Why was I not in there?

The other doors seemed to lead to couple of storerooms and all had palm scanners beside them. The final wall, farther to my right, was mostly glass and through the glass, I could see a Martial Arts training centre. Even more important, I could see Jō-staffs and other potentially lethal weapons in a rack off to one side. However, the glass door was locked with a palm scanner too!

All that was left were some steel stairs that led upwards.

..._...

Psyche made for the stairs and I followed.

As I emerged into what appeared to be a large cavern, I stopped dead. I was roughly mid-way down the cavern. Behind me was there was a large vehicle-sized steel door and some large vehicles. I instantly recognised Iron Hide, not to mention the pair of Ducati Panigale motorcycles, one in blue and the other a purple colour and a larger motorcycle in black, yellow and green. They were parked behind an eight-foot tall armoured glass shield that ran across the available width of the forty-foot wide cavern and there was a large six-foot figure '1' on it. The top of the shield was angled over at forty-five degrees away from me, to prevent anybody climbing the structure from the far side. The floor of the 'cavern' was ribbed steel and concrete and it felt rough under my feet as I only wore my socks.

Beside me was a large training mat and in front of me, at the end of the cavern and over to the left was a glass-enclosed room that housed computer equipment and large flat screens. It was obviously a Command Centre. Immediately beside the Command Centre was an external steel staircase leading up.

The staircase provided access to a walkway, which ran around the central section of the cavern and provided access

to a number of rooms on the second level. There was another steel staircase, which came down behind me. The walkway itself, was about ten feet off the ground and ringed with a steel and glass barrier that rose to a level of three and a half feet and the walkway itself was made of steel, but appeared to have a foam rubber covering. There were various doors visible, that led off the walkway into rooms, with unknown purposes. The ceiling and some of the walls had foam rubber sections that I presumed were designed to reduce the echo in the cavernous room.

..._...

Psyche turned to face me.

Gathered around her were several others, all masked – I recognised Shadow, Jackal, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass. They had arrayed themselves behind the girl – an obvious statement. There was another man, I had seen him before somewhere but I could not remember where. This was some kind of intervention, that was obvious.

"Look at us two sorry bitches," Psyche said, indicating herself and then me. "Look at what they make you give... Do you really want to be a cold-blooded killer, or do you want to make something of *your* life?"

What was she saying? It was my life, only I had no alternative, but...

"Join us..." Psyche continued and I saw genuine concern in her eyes.

"I can't..."

"There's no such word..."

"You're all killers – just as much as I am... What makes *you* all so different?"

..._...

I saw Hit Girl, herself, step forward (I flinched involuntarily) and she put an arm around Psyche's shoulders, then she spoke – but not in her usual electronically enhanced voice, but with the voice of a normal young woman.

"The difference, Foxtail, is that we only kill when we have no other choice – we don't kill just because someone has ordered us to kill. I used to be just like you, and so did Stephanie here – if we can change, then so can you... The program was based on *me* – so I should know the limits of what you can and cannot do..."

The man stepped forwards.

"You are part of a CIA scheme that was beyond immoral – I should now; I was part of another very similar hare-brained scheme," the man explained then waved at the people around him. "These people are killers, that is an accurate description, but in my short time with them I have seen them use their skills for good and they have one thing that you, me, Psyche and Hit Girl lacked initially, they have morality, unlike those CIA bastards."

"My name is Stephanie Lizewski – do you have a better name than 'Foxtail'?"

"I do," the teenage girl replied in her thick Irish accent.

"Well?" Stephanie persisted.

"Saoirse, Saoirse Doherty – bit of a mouthful, so my friends just call me 'SD'..."

"Does that mean that we can call you 'SD'?"

SD smiled for the first time and I took that as a 'yes'.

"Will I ever have to kill again?" She asked.

"Only if *you* want to – *nobody* will force you... I choose to kill, or I choose not to kill."

"Why, Stephanie?"

"Huh?"

"Why are you doing this for me? I used to make your life a living hell – even *after* you killed that girl in the shower..."

"You killed a girl in a shower?" Hit Girl enquired with a tone of intrigue.

"I'll tell you later..." Steph replied still looking at Saoirse. "Everybody deserves a second chance – I got mine here and while I am still damaged, I can now put my special skills to some good and I already have. Not that long ago, I saved the life of somebody very special to me – without my special skills, I would not have been able to do that and that person would have died."

"I can't change on my own..."

"You will *never* be alone, Saoirse, *not* if you don't want to be."

I had read about what Fusion stood for, but I had been told it was all bullshit – I now had to make a choice.

Who did I believe?

The CIA?

Stephanie?

Hit Girl pulled off her mask, as did Shadow, Jackal and Kick-Ass. I would be putting my life into the hands of a nine-year-old that I hated and had tried to kill on three occasions. I would also be putting my life into the hands of a woman who had tried to kill me only the night before. My only other option? Go on the run from the CIA... In retrospect, what did I have to lose.

"Hit Girl, Psyche – I place my life into your hands..."

That night

Glennview

"This is really weird!"

"I know what you mean; I've been in your shoes," I replied encouragingly.

"Guys, this is Saoirse and she will be staying with us for a day or two..."

"This another nut job, like Stephanie?" Anne-Marie enquired with a dubious smile.

"What have I told you? That is *not* polite!" Mindy growled. "The CIA may want to kill her."

"Sorry – good to meet you. I'm Anne-Marie and this is my brother, Danny. Stephanie is our big sister."

"Actually, Anne-Marie, I *am* a nut job, just like Stephanie," Saoirse admitted with a small grin.

"Saoirse, can you and Stephanie sleep in the same room without killing each other?" Mindy enquired, with a serious tone.

SD smiled for the first time that night.

"What's the point in trying to kill her – I've tried everything – plus I've seen her kill and I'd rather not be on the receiving end of that!"

..._...

"Stephanie?"

"Yeah?"

I looked up to see SD sitting on the chair by the window, pulling off her boots and socks.

"I apologise for everything I ever did to you. I've never known anybody show so much bravery, courage and compassion – even towards an enemy like me... I was a wimp at your age – worse than you were – and to be honest, I was jealous of you and that was why I hated you so much."

"It's in the past, SD – let's just look to the future."

"Okay... We sleeping in the same bed?"

"Yeah – just don't get any ideas; I know we used to share the showers, but just keep your hands to yourself!"

"You're so full of yourself, Brit!"

"I know... Sorry about the bruised tits!"

"If you actually had any, I'd return the favour..."

Bitch!

**Early hours
Saturday morning**

1714 West Grace Street

Lieutenant Matthew Casey turned away from the blaze.

It was almost out, but it had taken a lot of skill, especially as it had been on the top floor. Men had also been put at risk searching what had turned out to be an empty apartment. He saw two cops walking towards him and recognised them both.

"Morning, guys!"

"Morning, Lieutenant," Murphy and Fellowes responded together. "Arson?"

"Yeah – apartment 3E – nobody inside, though. Looked like a phosphorus grenade was thrown in after somebody kicked in the door. Damn lucky no other apartments were put at risk."

"Shit!" Murphy growled. "I need to make a phone call."

Glenview

I walked up the stairs to wake the girls.

Both girls were sleeping soundly when I entered 'The British Sector'. I shook Stephanie's shoulder and then that of Saoirse. Both girls were instantly awake – Saoirse had a knife in her hand and held towards my throat.

"Really!" I growled.

"Sorry..." Saoirse apologised.

I sat down on Saoirse's side of the bed.

"It looks like the CIA has noticed your failure," I said quietly. "They torched your apartment – I'm sorry."

Saoirse looked pained and then resigned as she lay back down and closed her eyes. I looked over at Stephanie who just grimaced and lay back down too.

Sunday night

**Central Intelligence Agency
Langley**

"Sir, we have an alarm at CIA Station, Chicago..."

"What now?" Vossen demanded as he swung his legs off the couch in his office.

..._...

A young female face appeared on the screen, staring directly at the security camera, she smiled.

"Sir – I want to tender my resignation from your sick experiment, effective immediately!" The soft Irish lilt said politely.

"I concur..." Another voice stated – that one electronically altered. "It is time for CIA Station, Chicago to cease trading..."

"You burn mine – I burn yours!"

As Vossen watched, Hit Girl and Foxtail proceeded to attach devices to all of the electronic equipment in the room before they both turned back to the screen.

"We'll be seeing you very soon, good buddy!" Hit Girl growled before both girls ran from the room.

"Get an EOD team in there..."

Before he could finish his sentence the screen went white and the connection was lost. The view changed to a shot of the outside of the building. There was a person standing outside the building – that person, dressed in a red and blue armoured suit, *waved* at the camera!

She then raised her right hand followed by her middle finger and she smiled. Vossen's temper was about to go nuclear and his face was scarlet with rage. Psyche raised what was obviously a detonator with her left hand and used the middle finger of her other hand to press the button. The image vanished...

"Sir – CIA Station, Chicago has just gone offline..."

Vossen did not trust himself to speak, he just stormed out of the room.

Monday evening

Glenview

"Saoirse – this was recovered from your apartment – yes, we found it when your apartment was searched the other day."

Saoirse looked at me and I saw tears in her eyes as she opened the small cardboard box and stared at the intact photos inside. I had asked Fellowes to retrieve the box before anybody else found it.

"Why didn't you kill me?" Saoirse asked.

"A very good question, Saoirse..."

"I was taught to kill without hesitation, just as you and Steph were... When I was about your age, I learnt to control my instincts and I learnt to *not* kill. It was not easy and it went against everything I knew."

"Will I be able to learn that?"

"I hope so – Stephanie has proved herself a capable killer. I've seen her kill mercenaries without breaking sweat – eight in one night... She's still learning, but she's young. I'll help you as much as I can, but ultimately it is down to you. You fight well – one assassin to another..."

Saoirse blushed.

My entire life was gone.

Had it been a sign? Everything that I had been since 'graduating' was gone, all I had were the clothes that I stood up in and a small cardboard box of memories. Memories of a past life that no longer existed. Mindy had been really nice, and she had taken me shopping that morning for clothes and everything.

I felt weird having somebody to do things for me and help me. I had spent the past couple of years on my own, living as if I were an adult. I was struggling to get used to being with other people, people who genuinely wanted to help me. Stephanie was a case in point – we were mortal enemies, at least we had been...

I could tell by her eyes that she resented me, but I felt that she resented me for what I represented. I represented her past, something that she was struggling herself to put behind her. I was determined to put it all behind me too – if that brat could do it, then so could I! I owed Stephanie – she had saved me from death at best, or a life of unending pain at worst.

..._...

"What ya doing?"

I looked up to see a grinning Stephanie emerge from the bathroom. She was *always* grinning!

"Hi..."

Stephanie studied me for a moment before joining me on the bed where I sat cross-legged in just an overlarge t-shirt.

"It's a lot to get used to, I know – I'm still trying to cope with it all. I want to help you, but you have to let me... I know we're mortal enemies, but we need each other. Despite our past history, we're the same – almost. You spent longer in that shithole than me, so it'll be worse for you..."

"Thanks, Steph – you're a good kid and I know we've had our disagreements and it would be nice to have a friend..."

"I'm your friend and I always will be, SD."

..._...

"You two, okay?"

It was Mindy, sticking her head around the door.

"Yeah, thanks."

Mindy came in and sat on the bed beside Stephanie.

"I've been meaning to ask, Steph – and maybe Saoirse can help... About that girl – in the shower..."

I saw Stephanie blush and look uncomfortable for a moment. Obviously, Mindy knew nothing about that event! Stephanie looked over at me.

"Mindy doesn't know about what went on in that place – I've not told her yet."

"Sorry if I..."

"No, SD – it needed to come out... Mindy knows that I killed my parents and my little brother, but she has yet to learn about my first hand-to-hand kill..."

I couldn't resist chipping in.

"It was an awesome sight. I was there, but I missed the actual fight. By the time I got to the showers and pushed through the crowds, I saw two people in the showers – one was dead, her head caved in and the other was standing butt naked, with tears streaming down her face and blood on her body. Steph was only eight at the time, but she had beaten a twelve-year-old girl to death, right there in the showers.

"It was the other girl's fault – she had been Steph's biggest tormentor, other than me, and she pushed Steph a little too far. We were all stunned with what had happened; the little British brat, who cried every damn night keeping us all awake and whom we expected to fail miserably, actually had teeth! Not only was she commended for her actions – she gained her coveted codename: psyche.

"That pissed a lot of people off – she was too young for a codename, but the powers that be liked what she did. That attack and killing also gave her some breathing space and she used it to excel in everything that she did. I hated to admit it at the time, but I was impressed with her resolve and how she progressed after that. I had spoken with some other girls about the actual fight and as I understood it – it had been violent; Stephanie went completely wild."

Stephanie was now blushing and staring down at her bare feet.

"I've seen Stephanie fight and when she goes wild, she sure goes wild!" Mindy commented.

"Wow..."

I turned to see two faces at the door. Both were stunned by what they had just heard. It was Anne-Marie who had spoken.

"You went through a lot, Steph," she said quietly. "But you're not a bad person – I know that."

..._...

"Mindy – err, could I ask you a personal question?" Saoirse asked.

"Of course – always..."

"Me and the short, skinny, Brit here," Saoirse went on, ignoring Stephanie's scowl, "were trained in your image – how did you become who you are?"

"Okay," I replied, getting comfortable on the bed and I waved Annie-Marie and Danny to join us.

Once the three girls and the boy were comfortable on the bed, I began the story of my life.

"It all started with my Daddy – he was a cop in New York and a very successful one. He was so successful that he was framed by Frank D'Amico for a crime that he did not commit. He was ultimately thrown in prison and my mother suffered, not being able to cope - she was pregnant with me and she eventually took her own life. I was saved, but she died. I went to live with my Daddy's partner, Marcus, who brought me up for the next five years.

"I don't remember much from that early age, but I was a girly girl who liked pink dresses and My Little Pony... Actually, My Little Pony stayed with me... Anyway, when I was five, Daddy was released from prison and I went to live with him. The first few months were difficult, but fun. Then Daddy began to subvert and corrupt me - it was all a game, a game of superheroes. I had no way of seeing through it all, I loved the purple suit and the pink utility belt - the rest was just a game. By my sixth birthday, I had killed three men. I actually enjoyed it... I truly became Hit Girl – that is, I grew a dark side that became difficult to control.

"The next four years were spent building up everything that we could find about Frank D'Amico. We used torture and any interrogation method that got us the information we needed to complete our mission. The mission was to take down D'Amico and his entire organisation. I became more and more ruthless as time went on. Then a new vigilante came onto the streets when I was eleven."

"That would be me!" Dave said as he sat down on the bed beside me.

"Yeah – the dick in a wetsuit; you seen the 'I'm Kick-Ass!' video?"

"Yes – it was fun to watch..." Saoirse commented.

"Not so fun to experience..." Dave commented.

"Turned out that was Kick-Ass 2.0 – Dave's first trip out was about as successful as the Titanic's first voyage, and it almost ended up the same way too! But I won't dwell on that... Somehow, Frank D'Amico thought it was Kick-Ass going after his pushers – as if! Then Kick-Ass and I met, at some shitty apartment belonging to a dick called Rasul."

"I got to see Hit Girl in action for the very first time. I was amazed – appalled – scared – almost physically sick at what I was witnessing. But she was good – a dozen people died within two minutes – and the bitch smiled as she was doing it. Turned out she was showing off to me..."

"I had a small crush on the idiot... Well, things went to shit and Kick-Ass accidentally betrayed me and Daddy – *not* his fault! I managed to rescue Kick-Ass, but not Big Daddy. Kick-Ass helped me avenge him and we both took down Frank D'Amico. Kick-Ass blew his ass out the window with a goddamn bazooka, would you believe."

"A bazooka!" Saoirse and Stephanie exclaimed together.

"It was one hell of an entrance I can tell you – didn't see much of it as I was all but out cold. He saved my life and I revealed my true identity to him. I have never regretted that day... Anyway, its bedtime – I'll cover 'Hit Girl and Kick-Ass – part 2', another night."

Tuesday night

Washington D.C.

I had never been in the Capital before – the visit to collect Curtis after his parents died did not really count.

There was an event happening and Dave and Mindy Lizewski had been invited. So had a *good* friend of ours...

..._...

"Oops! Terribly sorry, old chap!"

"Who the hell let goddamn kids in here?" Vossen complained as the teenage boy accidentally bumped into him.

"Tell me about it!" The slim blond-haired young woman stated. "Damn menace – they should all be institutionalised if you ask me."

"I can only agree, Miss...?"

"Williams, Mindy Williams..."

I enjoyed my chat with the cunt, it helped me get a good feel for my enemy.

Meanwhile, there was somebody else I needed to speak with and she was just finishing up with a tall gentleman.

"Good evening, you must be Deputy Director Landy," I began.

"Pamela Landy, yes..."

"Mindy Lizewski – we have a mutual acquaintance and I believe we can assist one another..."

"Is that so?" Landy replied cautiously. "Who is this acquaintance?"

"Four – fifteen – seventy-one..."

Landy paled for a second before regaining her composure.

"I see – is he well?" She asked.

"He is – he mentioned that you could be trusted..."

"I should be flattered – what is this about?"

"A greying piece of shit that looks remarkably like that gentleman across the room," I replied, sending a casual glance over at Noah Vossen.

Landy smiled and nodded.

"A very apt description, Mrs Lizewski, I feel dirty just sharing the same room as him."

"I will be in touch..." she finished, shaking my hand before walking away.

That was a strange encounter!

I looked down at my right hand; there was something in it... The card was purple, with two embossed letters. The girl was putting a lot of trust in me, exposing herself like that. However, if Jason Bourne was vouching for her...

I was looking forward to my next meeting, especially if Noah Vossen had pissed off Hit Girl!

After he got home, Vossen emptied out his pockets as he usually did.

"What?" He muttered as a small card appeared from his jacket pocket.

He picked up the card and his face went white as he felt the two embossed letters on the purple card... She had been there – she had been so close to him... Why hadn't she killed him?

Vossen was shaking at the thought of what might have occurred.

***Chapter 254*: Abigail**

February 17th, 2016
Wednesday

The puppies were now four weeks old!

All seven were walking around relatively normally and we had introduced them to some soft food which was very amusing as it took several attempts for most of them to eat the meat – Layla was having none of it and it was a couple of days before she joined her siblings. It was also a difficult time for Sophia as most of the pups now had a full set of teeth. It was very obvious that Sophia was not keen to have that many sets of teeth anywhere near her nipples – I knew what she was feeling as I often had to warn Dave about *his* teeth quite often!

I had to admit, I was very pleased not to have had to breast-feed anything.

That night

Western Chicago

"Hey, Jackal – over here!"

My partner for the night strolled over and I pointed down at the body I had found. He took a moment to examine the body.

"Awesome tattoo on her neck," Jackal commented.

The woman had a spider-web tattoo on the left side of her neck, which showed beneath her long black hair.

"Is that a dog collar?" I asked.

"Looks like it, munchkin – you should be familiar with those!"

I felt myself blushing – would that dog collar thing ever go away?

"Look, *Jack*, my name is *Wildcat* – not fucking 'munchkin'!" I growled.

"A girl gets boobs and she gets an attitude thrown in!"

"You wanna restart puberty?" I growled, deploying the claws on my left gauntlet, and the fucker laughed. I got no fucking respect!

..._...

The woman had long black hair, currently in two pigtails. She was dressed all in black, and apart from the dog collar, she also wore cool wristbands that bore skull and crossbones motifs. The woman was lying on the floor of the alley and she looked to have been knocked out, with a blow to the head.

Something told me *not* to just call an ambulance.

I found her purse and dug through a load of crap, before finding some ID. The woman's name was Abigail Sciuto and apparently, she worked for the Federal Government, specifically as a Forensic Scientist for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. I pulled out her cell phone, it was locked, but I inserted a special device that Battle Guy had provided into the USB connection and the phone unlocked after a twenty-second pause.

I found the most dialled number – it said one word: 'Gibbs'.

Washington D.C.

The cell rang.

It was late, so the man was tempted to ignore it as he watched his black and white western on the old television set,

but on checking the name on the screen, he accepted the call.

"Abby!"

"Afraid not!" A strange voice replied. "Are you Gibbs?"

"I'm Gibbs; what are you doing with that phone?"

"I've just found the phone's owner – she's currently unconscious and lying in an alleyway in Chicago."

"Chicago?"

"Chicago."

"Who are you?" NCIS Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs asked.

"My name is Jackal!"

***Early the following morning
Thursday***

Washington Navy Yard

"Hey, Boss – it's a bit late!" NCIS Special Agent Anthony 'Tony' DiNozzo moaned.

"Abby is in trouble – we're on our way to Chicago..."

"Chicago?" NCIS Special Agent Timothy 'Tim' McGee echoed.

"Is there an echo in here?" Special Agent Gibbs complained.

"No, Boss," Special Agent DiNozzo replied. "And here is the final member of our little team..."

"Sorry – traffic!" NCIS Special Agent Ellie Bishop replied.

"At one in the morning, Bishop?" Special Agent Gibbs enquired. "Grab your gear – wheels up in fifty."

That same time

Chicago

My head hurt!

I remembered venturing into a bar near the south side of Chicago, I had been looking for tattoos and I had found one – at least I had thought so... Ow, my head hurt... I sat up and looked around me. At first I thought hospital; there was a lot of activity and I saw a woman facing away from me who wore a white doctor's coat. The hospital image rapidly vanished once I stood up, ignoring the pain in my head. There, standing a few feet away was a Chicago Vigilante in full body armour – she wore blue.

A name popped into my head: Shadow.

..._...

"Well, this ain't no hospital!" I commented.

"No – you are at the Fusion HQ, Miss Sciuto," Shadow growled.

They knew my name!

"You're awake!" The white-coated doctor, commented.

The doctor was wearing a mask of her own, white, in colour scheme. It covered her full face, so I could not see anything, but I was certain that she would be smiling.

"You, would be Medic!" I stated.

"You, would be right," Medic replied.

"Am I a prisoner?"

"No – we found you lying unconscious, well Jackal and Wildcat did... They decided to bring you back here..." Medic advised. "Jackal also called your Boss – a guy called..."

"Gibbs!" I filled in.

..._...

I walked unimpeded over towards a guard rail and I was stunned by what I saw below me. To my right, I saw a glass-enclosed facility that looked way more advanced than MTAC back in Washington. Behind the glass, I could see four people – all wore masks. One wore purple – that had to be the intrepid vigilante, Hit Girl. Another wore green and yellow – Kick-Ass!

Was I a fan of those vigilantes? A little, yeah! They did good, despite being criminals and mass murderers.

"What are you doing in Chicago?"

I looked over at Hit Girl as I drank my Caf-Pow – apparently Hal and Battle Guy had a thing for it too!

"I wasn't supposed to have come up for another day, but I decided to travel up early – you know, see the sights. I got antsy and wanted to start working on the case – a bad habit of mine..."

"You have some intriguing body-art and as for the collar..."

"Thanks..." I replied.

"Why don't you come downstairs and meet Hit Girl – she would like to know what NCIS is up to..." Shadow requested, although I sensed that it was not actually a request, but I was not being forced either.

Falls Church, Virginia

Warrant Officer Jennifer 'Jen' Coates entered the office of the Judge Advocate General for the United States Navy.

It was empty and it had been cleared, pending the arrival of the new JAG. Her Boss was due any moment. It had been many years coming, but well worth the wait. She was to run the office that she had once served as a lowly Petty Officer. So many years and so many happy and sad moments since that time she had been caught stealing and thrown in the Brig at Christmas. If it hadn't been for one man...

That same man now almost flew in the door.

"Morning, Coates!"

"Morning, Admiral!"

Rear Admiral Harmon 'Harm' Rabb, Junior, Judge Advocate General's Corps, United States Navy, took his seat behind the capacious desk and smiled up at Coates.

"It's good to be back, eh, Coates."

Ten years as the Force Judge Advocate, Naval Forces Europe in London, had served them both well. It had also served his new Executive Officer well, too. Colonel Sarah 'Mac' MacKenzie, Judge Advocate General's Corps, United States Marine Corps, was very pleased with herself as she entered the office and sat down across from her husband. Despite marriage, 'Mac' had retained her maiden name for professional reasons, but she was still very proud to be Mrs Harmon Rabb.

..._...

Within minutes, two more Naval Officers entered the office and one stood at attention facing the two senior officers.

Twenty-seven-year-old, Lieutenant Mathilda 'Mattie' Grace Rabb, United States Navy, was fresh off the boat – literally. She had departed the *USS Ronald Reagan* less than two days earlier and had then flown across the Pacific and the US from Yokosuka, Japan. She was a qualified F/A-18F Super Hornet pilot and she had been serving with VFA-2 aboard the *Reagan*.

The other officer was another JAG old hand and very familiar with the office and desk before him. Lieutenant-Commander Bud Roberts, Junior, Judge Advocate General's Corps, United States Navy, sat down alongside the Colonel.

"Mattie!" Harm announced with a laugh. "At ease, for the love of God!"

..._...

After a few minutes small-talk, there was a knock on the door and a yeoman whispered into Coates' ear.

Admiral Rabb raised an eyebrow at Coates' expression and was eager to find out what had caused the confused expression.

"You have a call, Admiral – a Mindy Lizewski..."

Admiral Rabb did not miss a beat, sweeping up the phone as it rang.

"Mindy! Long time, girl – congratulations on your marriage..."

"Thank you, Harm. I believe similar congratulations are in order, Admiral Rabb!"

"Thank you, Mindy – I never thought I would achieve Captain's rank, let alone gain a flag! Anyway – your call..."

"What can you tell me about a man called Leroy Jethro Gibbs of NCIS?"

A wave of painful memories swept through my mind.

...+...

"So, what makes you think that I would be involved in any other way than professionally with Lieutenant Singer?"

"You're more comfortable asking questions than you are answering them, huh?"

"I guess I'm not used to being a suspect."

"Suspect? Who said you were a suspect? Have I read you your Article 31 rights?"

"No, you haven't. Which means you're playing a very risky game, Gunny."

"I'm not smart enough to play risky games with a lawyer of your calibre, Rabb."

"That's 'Commander Rabb' or 'Commander', or 'Sir', Gunny. I believe, as a reservist, you're still technically in the Marine Corps."

"I am an NCIS Special Agent, and I don't have to salute you, or 'sir' you, or give you any military courtesy. But you know that. So who's playing the games here?"

...+...

"How long you been doing this, Gibbs?"

"Nineteen years."

"Can you tell somebody's lying by looking them in the eye."

"I can."

"Well, look into mine. Ask me. Ask me!"

"Would you kill for your brother?"

...+...

"Gibbs? Now there's a painful name from the past... He tried to pin a murder on me, many years ago – he's sound, though. You can trust him – he has his own rules, much like you do and I suppose as I do, at least that's what my wife keeps telling me. I'll vouch for him – you have any issues, get him to call me and I'll vouch for you."

"Thank you, Admiral – give my regards to Mac and Jen. Hope to see you, if you're ever up our way."

Later that afternoon

It was a risk, but I had decided to help NCIS.

Abby had given me a description of those I was looking for and also their cell numbers, so finding them had not been especially hard. They had booked into a Ramada on the 1600 block, northwest of the O'Hare airport. I had watched them leave in two rented Dodge Chargers.

They were relatively easy to follow as they moved around the city. They were obviously searching for their colleague. As darkness began to fall, I decided to put them out of their misery.

..._...

The car with Gibbs and DiNozzo in pulled up near to Columbus Park – the other car was several miles away to the east. Both Federal Agents split up and began to examine the area. I knew that Gibbs was Marine, so I had to be careful.

Once DiNozzo was far enough away, I closed on Special Agent Gibbs.

"I wondered how long it would take before one of you guys found us," Gibbs drawled.

"Don't move!"

"I had no intention of moving – Hit Girl!"

I kept my pistol aimed.

"You have somebody that belongs to me."

"Yes... Sort of..."

"You will release her, or so help me God, I'll..."

"Slight problem – we're not exactly holding her..."

"Then where is she?"

"She won't leave!" I replied.

Special Agent Gibbs laughed.

"That's Abby!"

Gibbs had called back DiNozzo and then called the other car to meet them. That was when I was joined by Petra in Hound. In the rearmost seats were Wildcat and Trojan. Out of professional courtesy, I allowed the four Federal Agents to retain their firearms, but I passed out blindfolds.

"Non-negotiable!" I commented before holding out a Faraday bag for their cell phones.

We drove to Safehouse F, via a circuitous route to put them off our exact destination, but finally pulled into the rubbish strewn warehouse that led to the main pedestrian entrance of the Safehouse. We dropped them off and then drove off, but not before pointing out the open elevator.

By the time we had parked within the Safehouse, they were in the catchment area.

Safehouse F

"Nice bunker!" Special Agent DiNozzo exclaimed.

"Thank you..." I replied. "Please leave your firearms on the shelf before you... All of them – knives too."

Once the NCIS Agents were disarmed, I allowed them out of the catchment area and into the Safehouse where Gibbs was jumped upon by Miss Sciuto.

"Gibbs! You got to see it – this place is so awesome!"

"All in good time, Abby!"

..._...

I knew what NCIS was looking for, so I put out a request to my snouts – I wanted to hear about a raven tattoo.

"Thank you, for helping us, Hit Girl," Gibbs said.

"A good friend of mine, Admiral Rabb, said that I could trust you..."

Gibbs looked a little bit shocked and so did DiNozzo.

"He did?" Gibbs enquired.

"I gather you two have a history, but Harm seemed to respect you – therefore, so do I.

Gibbs was able to persuade Abby to leave the Safehouse – there was a struggle with Special Agent McGee when he saw Marty's setup in the Control Centre, but we said he could come back another day...

Two days later Saturday morning

We were at D-JAK, just the two of us.

"Let's try this again, shall we?"

"I didn't put up much of a fight the last time..." Saoirse said dejectedly

"Jeez, don't go all sentimental on me!" I retorted. "I want to see what you can *do*, personally."

"Didn't *she* tell you how I fought?"

I grinned, fiendishly.

"*She* said you fought like a pussy..."

Saoirse frowned and sent a strong kick in my direction as I baited her into action. It was the first time that we had fought, since that night a week ago. To be honest, Saoirse seemed a little scared of me and generally she had been trying to avoid me all week, but I had had enough of that and had dragged her down town. Maybe it was something to do with my almost killing her...

"Come on! You're no bloody use to me if you can't damn well fight... Okay, I almost killed you – get over it – the British short-ass was right; you *are* a fucking pussy!"

Ouch! That kick of hers connected, and it hurt... Time to see how far I could push her before she snapped... I kicked back and forced Saoirse across the mat. I kept pushing, I tripped her and she fell hard onto her back. I gave her no space, pushing forward and kicking her in the side as she quickly scrambled to her feet. I never let her catch a breath, spinning her and throwing her hard towards the wall, but she flipped over backwards and came at me, anger growing in her eyes.

She went for my neck, trying to incapacitate me, but I dodged just in time – when pushed, she was good! Maybe, by almost killing her, I had damaged her confidence...

"Fucking worthless pussy!" I growled as I dodged again. "Did I break a nail?"

"Fuck you, Hit Girl..."

Saoirse flew at me in a fit of rage and caught me around the neck, pulling me down to the floor where she began to kick and punch me – it hurt too. I let her punch me for a minute before I flipped her over onto her back and pinned her down to the mat, my right forearm across her throat. I was hurting her as I pushed down, but that was the point. I could see fear growing in her blue eyes, just the same as the other night and she froze instead of fighting back...

"Fucking wimp!" I growled.

"Get the fuck off her!"

The angry voice had been unexpected as I had no idea anybody else was in D-JAK!

I then felt a sharp kick to my right side which drove me sideways and I hit the mat hard with somebody on top of me. That somebody punched me in the side of head and for a moment I saw stars, but quickly shook them away. I knew who had attacked me and I suspected why, too. I kicked the girl off me and sent her flying onto the mat.

"What are you doing here, Stephanie?" I asked as I lay on the mat, breathing heavily.

..._...

"I knew you'd take things too far – push her till she snapped!" Stephanie growled, putting herself between me and Saoirse.

Saoirse rose to a sitting position and looked shocked by the turn of events.

"You protecting her, Stephanie?" I asked gently.

"Damn right...!"

"I don't need protection from a little cry-baby, thanks..." Saoirse cut in, but she smirked at Stephanie who laughed.

The three of us went into the kitchen and I handed Saoirse some water, grabbing one for myself and a Coke for Stephanie.

"I'm sorry it I pushed you too far, Saoirse – I was worried about you..."

"I needed it. You scared me, last week and I was scared to be in the same room as you – I felt like you might..."

"Kill you?"

"Yes – but I know you wouldn't – unless I provoked you..."

"You fight really well – don't let a bully like me stop you fighting like you are able to – turn your fear to good use, turn it against your enemy..."

"You are no longer my enemy, Mindy, and neither are you, Stephanie..."

That afternoon

Glenview

My worries about Anne-Marie and her fascinations with everything vigilante appeared to be valid.

On that Saturday afternoon, I walked past the girl's bedroom and I stopped dead at what I was hearing through the barely open door.

"Try it again..." Stephanie insisted.

"Show's over motherfuckers!" Anne-Marie growled.

What the fuck?

"No – like this... Show's over motherfuckers!" Stephanie growled in a much better imitation of the younger me – but with a British accent, which sounded kinda weird.

"Show's over motherfuckers!" Anne-Marie growled again – that time better.

My curiosity overflowed and I pushed open the door. There, standing in front of the full length mirror of the sliding wardrobe door were the two girls, about a foot apart and each was standing sideways, facing away from me and each with their right arm raised and with a pistol aimed at the mirror. Beside the two girls was a laptop with a freeze frame displayed on the screen – me about to shoot out the camera in the burnt out building.

"Show's over motherfuckers!" I growled.

"Damn, that was realistic..." Stephanie said spinning around. "Oops; busted!"

"What the hell are you two doing with pistols – *real pistols*?" I demanded, glaring at Stephanie.

"I wanted to add to the realism – I keep them under my mattress; you know, just in case..."

I seized the pistol from Anne-Marie's hand and noticed that there was no magazine in the butt of the Heckler and Koch USP Compact pistol. I was still madder than hell and the younger girl shrank before my glare. I turned to Stephanie.

"I'll talk to *you* later..."

I hauled Anne-Marie out of the bedroom and down the stairs.

..._...

I paused at the bottom of the stairs and spun Anne-Marie around to face me.

"You ever swear like that again; you'll be eating soap for the next year! You *ever* touch a gun without the express permission of *me* or Dave, then you will really be sorry..."

"It wasn't even loaded..."

"Who said you could talk?"

Anne-Marie's expression was stormy and she glared back as viciously as she could. I grabbed her arm and dragged the girl downstairs and into the basement.

"Stand there and *do not* move..."

I walked over to the Armoury, err Panic Room, punched in a code and pulled open the heavy steel door. Once inside, I pulled a Glock 26 off the wall, ejecting the empty magazine. I double-checked that the magazine was indeed empty before selecting a small cardboard box containing ten 9-millimetre rounds. I triple checked the markings on the box and the rounds themselves before loading all ten into the magazine.

I walked back out to the basement, pulling back the slide and walking over to Anne-Marie who rather than looking worried, was seething with rage. I glared at her for a moment before moving into her personal space, a mere foot away from her – I leant down to her level.

"You think you're ready to become a vigilante... Hit me!"

The young girl just stared up at me – I slapped her. The slap was nowhere near as hard as that which I had used on Dave, but it still stung. She glared and I could see her struggling not to cry. Her small fists flexed as she struggled with her emotions and I could see the anger building inside her.

"Hit me!"

Slap!

Her face was red both with my slaps and her emotions.

"You're just a little girl, a scared little girl!"

"I am not!"

With that shout, Anne-Marie rammed her fist, full force, into my chest. It barely hurt, but Anne-Marie had put all her emotions into it.

"You are *not* ready!" I shouted back, emptying all ten rounds rapidly, five either side of the screaming cowering girl.

"I hate her!"

I studied my little sister for a moment. I had heard the gunfire from the basement and was keen to know what had taken place.

"Tell me what happened."

"She is doing everything possible to stop me becoming a vigilante – she's horrible to me..."

Anne-Marie was *very* angry – worse than I had ever seen her! She explained everything that had happened and I began to smirk as it all came out.

"So – you think Mum is trying to prevent you becoming a vigilante by not training you?"

"She tried to kill me!"

I shook my head and gave my little sister a very patronising look.

"The meanest, most vindictive vigilante the world has ever seen, *tried* to kill a seven-year-old girl and *failed*! Think about that for a moment... That same person who refuses to train you, just taught you to take every emotion you had and turn it into a solid punch. She tried to kill you with blanks, Anne-Marie – blanks!"

"How...?"

"I recognised the sound – they are very different to live rounds, trust me."

"I'm an idiot, aren't I?"

"You're young is what you are. Get your coat – we're going for a walk..."

..._...

"What are we doing?"

It was the tenth time that she had asked and she was getting increasingly annoyed *and* annoying! We had walked a carefully planned route. Despite what Anne-Marie thought, both she and her brother had been receiving training almost since the day they both found out about Fusion.

"Tell me about the man who just passed us – don't look..."

"It wasn't a man, it was a woman and she had blonde hair and was on her cell..."

"Is anybody following us?"

I grinned as I saw Anne-Marie glance sideways into the glass front of a shop.

"Not that I can see... Woah, hold on... What did I just do?"

"It's called counter-surveillance and we've been training going you and Danny for weeks."

"Who?"

"Me, Megan, Dave, Mindy, Chloe, Josh... Just because we didn't tell you, does not mean we weren't testing you each

and every day since we got home from our pleasure cruise in the Caribbean."

"Every day?"

"Why do you think you knew to look out for things when we were attacked by SD?"

"Sorry... I need to apologise to Mom, don't I?"

"Without question!"

"Anybody ever tell you that you talk funny?"

"I could say the same thing about you..."

"Hey...! By the way – we're being stalked..."

"Who by?"

"Hi, kids!"

"Saw you a few minutes back, Mom!"

Two days later
Monday evening

Turned out we had another vigilante in town!

She was called 'Raven', apparently and as I kept track of what went on in New York City, I also knew that she originated from there... What was a New York City vigilante doing in Chicago? I suppose I could ask myself the *same* question!

As if that wasn't enough on top of everything else!

***Chapter 255*: Ruffled Raven**

*This Chapter is the continuation of **Curse of the Raven, Chapter 10...***

***The following morning
Wednesday***

North Central Chicago

I was astride my Alpine White BMW R1200-GS Adventure, but dressed in a dark-blue set of motorcycle leathers with a black full face helmet.

I had watched from a block away as my target emerged from the warehouse before she walked the half mile to the nearest main road and hailed a yellow cab. I had followed that cab, from a distance, relying on Abby tracking the cab's GPS. I wanted to meet Raven and attempt to figure out what she was...

I had no idea what shit-storm I was about to cause.

..._...

After an hour, the cab pulled over and the girl climbed out after paying her fare. She must have been hungry as she headed directly into the McDonald's twenty yards away on the 600 block of North Clark Street. I parked up, removed my helmet and entered, finding myself standing four people behind her in the queue.

Morgan ordered a cheeseburger, large fries and a large Coke – hungry, as I thought. I watched her sit down at a table by the window and start to eat. I ordered the same and headed for the same table.

"May I join you, Morgan?"

I saw the weirdest expression ever as the girl studied my face – but she nodded and I sat down facing her. She was still scrutinising my face.

"I know you..."

"You do?" I asked a little surprised.

"New York – a little over two years ago... Grand Central Parkway..."

..._...

I froze, a cold feeling shooting up my spine – I reached for my concealed pistol. Then comprehension dawned on Morgan's face and she suddenly went very white and she dropped her cheeseburger to the table.

"You're here to kill me?" She asked quietly.

I blinked hard at that.

"If you believe me to be who I think you do – then you know that would not be true. From one New York vigilante to another – let's be friends..."

I stood up, leaving the shocked girl to her food – I left mine, along with something else.

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

I was still shaking as the young blonde girl walked out the door without giving me another look. It had taken me only a minute to recognise her – it was Hit Girl! I remembered vividly that day in September 2013 – the girl on the van, what was her name?

Mindy – Mindy Macready.

I finally saw the envelope on the table – *she* had left it. I opened it – inside was a photo; it was the photo of a tattoo –

a raven tattoo. But not just any raven tattoo...

It was the one.

That night

"You sure about this?"

"Yes, Dave – I am... I know, we never go out alone; but this time I must and I saw something in that girl's eyes – she's safe. Only problem is, I see that same look that Chloe gets when she's after something – right before she fucks things up!"

Dave looked resigned to my actions – despite that fact that I knew he was unhappy; I knew my husband – so I had no need to worry.

..._...

I was out on my Panigale, cruising the Chicago streets. I knew where Raven was – we had planted a tracker on her motorcycle the other night. I had argued with Special Agent Gibbs, earlier that day. I knew that Raven wanted to get revenge, and I knew that she needed the closure. Gibbs understood, but he didn't want an investigation that might implicate his team, should things go wrong. Nor, could NCIS just walk away, leaving a murderer in the hands of vigilante justice.

We had agreed to disagree – for the moment!

Thirty minutes into my solo ride, I was annoyed to have my silence interrupted by a radio call from Hal.

"Worm would like an audience with your purpleness!" Hal said with a barely concealed snigger.

"Where is he?" I growled – then paused as a destination flashed up on the inside of my visor. "Oh, never mind!"

I ignored the laughter back at the Safehouse as I turned right, onto 50th Avenue and headed north. I then turned down an alley, just south of West 22nd Street.

There was Worm...

Stop shaking, she won't harm you... Bullshit!

Damn, she's got nice curves – she'd kill you out of hand for thinking that if she knew... Why do I risk my life seeing her? Because you are under her protection – nobody dares touch you, you dick! She didn't even climb off her purple Ducati – she just sat there, the engine idling smoothly.

She turned her head to follow my approach. I kept my hands visible at all times – I knew how the game was played, and I knew that Hit Girl liked her little games...

"Hi, Boss!" I tried.

No movement, just the blank stare of the helmet. I couldn't help it, but my eyes focussed on the pistol that hung on her left hip, the razor-sharp throwing knives on the same thigh – such lovely thighs. The twin swords on her back – I had seen her in action... I knew of men who had died at her own hands. Nobody knew her age, some said twelve – some said in her twenties. Me? I went with late teens.

Many played the game; was she blonde, brunette, red-haired? We spent many hours discussing Hit girl. I had a bet in place that she shaved her... Not that we would ever find out – pity... There were other bets: 'Hit Girl and Kick-Ass were shagging', 'Wildcat was their offspring', 'Kick-Ass was fucking Shadow', 'Petra and Mist were an item'. Unfortunately, so far, there had been no confirmations nor denials.

For some strange reason, we just could not find anybody brave enough to go up to Shadow and ask her if she was being poked by Kick-Ass!

..._...

"You had something for me?"

She growled – sent a shiver down my spine! Don't ask...

"You lookin' for the raven tattoo?"

The silence could have meant anything... To me though, it meant continue or die!

"He's here – in Chicago, I mean – he has a thing for killing, more particularly, he has a hard-on for killing Marines..."

"I hate to say it..." Hit Girl growled. "... But you done good, Worm..."

Thank God!

Hit Girl kicked her motorcycle into gear.

"There's more!" I called out.

The blank look and silence meant 'get to it – or else...'

"He's been seen working at the CTA place on 54th Avenue..."

Hit Girl nodded and threw me something before speeding off. It was a roll of bills – it was a roll of singles! But then I smiled, only the top five were dollar bills; the remaining twelve were Benjamins!

She did love her little jokes!

The night was still young, so I thought that I might just enjoy myself for a minute or two...

I hit the McDonald's on West Cermak Road, which caused a bit of a stir, I can tell you... It was not every day that a fully-armed vigilante walked in and calmly queued for a quarter-pounder with cheese! I tried to be nonchalant about the whole thing – maybe it was the pistols, blades and swords – or it could have been the laughter back at the Command Centre, whatever it was, I felt a little uncomfortable...

"Welcome to McDonald's, err... Hit Girl..."

"Quarter-pounder with cheese..."

"Would you like fries with that?"

"Yeah... I'll take a Dr Pepper too, please."

"Will you be eating in?"

"Yeah, why not..."

..._...

Surprisingly quickly, I had my tray and I sat down in a distant corner – not that it made a difference... I was being watched, actually 'stalked' was probably more like it! Despite it being after eight at night, there were still some kids in the restaurant. One, a few inches short of four-foot and with short blonde hair, was watching me and she was steadily getting closer. I was half way through my burger when a little face appeared beside my table.

"May I help you, little lady?"

"Are you the real, Hit Girl?" She demanded.

"How could you tell?" I countered.

"I don't know..."

"Well, I 'ain't gonna kill anybody in here!"

Just then, there was a lot of shouting and several youths poured into the restaurant, shouting and swearing. I placed

my burger down on the table and glared at the youths.

"You dare disturb these diners *or* me..." I growled loudly, leaving the rest unsaid, but very clear.

All seven stopped dead and went very silent and very white.

"Time to leave – wrong place..." One said and they all bolted for the door.

I lifted my burger back up for another bite.

"You're the real Hit Girl, all right!" The girl stated loudly.

Just for some peace and quiet, I gave her one of my cards.

"Mommy, mommy, look what Hit Girl gave me..."

..._...

"Please tell me you did *not* just give a little girl one of those damn cards..." Kick-Ass growled from the Safehouse.

"Am I that obvious?"

"I'm afraid so..."

"Why do I put up with your shit?"

"Because nobody gets you off better..."

It suddenly felt very hot under my mask and the laughter over the comms was *not* helping! I finished my burger, fries and Dr Pepper, then waved goodbye to my fans... I had barely pulled on my helmet, when I saw the indicator showing where Raven was – she was not far off.

Time for some more fun!

I turned left out of the McDonald's before heading east along West Cermak Road.

There was a tense moment as I drove past the Cicero Police Department – they were not as pro-vigilante as the CPD, but I just received the odd nod from the cops present. At South Cicero Avenue, I made a right turn, heading south. Raven was stationary, only a short distance ahead, on West Ogden Avenue. Half a mile later, I took a right and then another right onto West Ogden Avenue. That was when the whole evening went to shit...

I could see Raven – she was off her motorcycle and standing in the road, just before the junction with West 25th Place and West 26th Street. She had her pistol out and aimed at a man on the ground. As far as I could tell, she had hauled the man out of his car and he was lying on his back, arguing with the New York vigilante.

Then I saw the flash followed by the sound of the crack as Raven shot the man in the head.

Safehouse F

"Holy fuck!"

Battle Guy suddenly sat up straighter as he saw the blatant murder before him. The full colour, high-definition image was being sent directly from the camera on the front of Hit Girl's Ducati Panigale motorcycle.

"Snuff film!" Psyche commented.

"*Nobody* kills in my City!" Hit Girl growled.

As we watched, the car – a yellow Mustang – bolted forwards with the rear wheels spinning on the blacktop before gripping and sending the car down West 26th Street at speed. Raven seemed oblivious to anything around her and she did not seem to have seen Hit Girl as she swung herself smoothly onto her Yamaha Super Ténéré.

She took off after the Mustang. For a moment the camera wobbled as Hit Girl applied power and the Panigale shot

forwards in pursuit, rapidly passing through 20mph, 30mph, 40mph and on to 70mph.

"What the fuck is going on?" Psyche enquired.

"No idea, kid, but I'm sending their position to Kick-Ass and his team..." Battle Guy replied.

West 26th Street

The Mustang was snaking through traffic with Raven glued to its ass...

I hoped the kid was good, otherwise she was going to die at the speeds that we were riding. What was so important about that dead man? Who was he and who was in that Mustang?

"Battle Guy – get Rhino up to find out who that dead guy is..."

"Psyche's talking to him now..."

All covered as usual! I had to concentrate on avoiding obstacles – I had to stop her before she killed herself and... Oh fuck! I almost T-boned a bus at the junction of South Pulaski Road... I lost precious time as I was forced to come to a snatch clenching stop before accelerating away again. At least I had no need to keep the bitch in sight – the tracker provided her position for me.

The only good thing to say for the entire chase was that West 26th Street was very straight... We raced for three miles before the road angled from its easterly course towards northeast and became South Blue Island Avenue at South Western Avenue. By that time, I was level with Raven and I tried to wave her down, but she ignored me, or she just plain did not see me. She seemed very intent on finishing the chase.

..._...

I was getting more and more concerned by the chase – hey I loved speed too, but I was *not* stupid! By this time, the CPD had become involved and a car tried to head off the Mustang, but it was smashed off to one side by the driver. As I flashed past, I was glad to see that the two officers were unhurt.

The South Ashland Avenue junction with West Cermak Road and South Blue Island Avenue was a five-point junction and busy at most times of the day. The Mustang driver leant on his horn and swerved through the traffic attracting similar horn blasts from the other drivers. He narrowly avoided colliding with a CTA bus and was forced onto the grounds of Juarez High School, where he took off through the park heading for West 21st Street.

Raven weaved in between the cars and I tried to cut her off, but she turned and looked directly at me, but then accelerated away.

"I'm gonna fucking kill her!" I growled.

"Let's just try and find out what's goin' on first..." Kick-Ass cut in quite reasonably.

"The way she's going she'll kill *herself*, Hit Girl..." Battle Guy reasoned.

The Mustang blazed out of the park and straight over West 21st Street narrowly avoiding passing cars. Raven slowed, as did I, as we continued up South Blue Island Avenue in a north-easterly direction.

..._...

At West 18th Street, Raven's luck began to run out as she swerved and skidded into the side of a CTA bus, but she seemed uninjured and she continued her pursuit after the bus had moved out of the way. The Mustang's luck also seemed to running out as it was driving slower than before and I could see steam coming from under the bonnet and there was an oil trail on the road – which I was doing my best to avoid.

Raven was close to the Mustang's tail and I was close behind her as we blazed under the railroad at West 16th Street. The sound of our exhausts echoed and reverberated around as we shot through the underpass. On the other side, I received a warning.

"District 12 has a stop-stick deployed ahead of you!" Battle Guy called.

The District 12 Headquarters was approaching on the left and I could see flashing blue lights as the Mustang approached. I saw the cop with the stop-stick and he caught the Mustang on the front left tyre by the looks of things. The same cop rapidly pulled the stop-stick out of the way when he recognised me approaching and he waved... he had also pulled it away before Raven was caught.

..._...

Everything in my brain kept saying: 'Danger, Hit Girl, Danger!' For once, I was going to listen to my own instincts before the wrong people died.

"Standby for lights out!" I called, seeing that both Jackal and Shadow were in place.

As expected the Mustang turned right onto West Roosevelt Road, losing speed as it struggled to steer with one destroyed tyre. We were approaching the 'University of Illinois at Chicago' campus when I accelerated ahead of Raven and cut in front, forcing her to slam on her brakes. Jackal and Shadow moved to box her in.

"Lights out!" I growled and several miles away a button was pushed at the Safehouse.

What the fuck was she playing at?

She cut me up! Two more motorcycles appeared and every time I swerved to get around Hit Girl and her purple motorcycle, I was blocked by Jackal or Shadow. Then all of a sudden the dash before me cut out and then the engine began to surge and cough before dying and nothing happened when I hit the starter. I coasted to a stop on the median of West Roosevelt Road – *it was them* – they fucking did this!

"What the fuck did you do?" I yelled, pulling out my pistol and pointing it directly at Hit Girl.

She did not even look at me, she just looked at Jackal.

"Sort your bitch out!"

With that, Hit Girl was gone in a squeal of rubber and I turned my pistol on Shadow.

..._...

I climbed off my motorcycle and placed it onto its stand. Jackal and Shadow did the same.

"Cut it the fuck out!" Shadow growled and she ripped the pistol from my hands. "You'll get it back when you learn to behave and grow the fuck up!"

"Fuck you!" I retorted.

I was beyond angry – this fucking *Fusion* had lost me my fucking trail! I reached for my sword.

"Don't..." Jackal said with a shake of his canine head.

I punched him, hard in the chest and he almost fell backwards but he braced himself. That was when Shadow flipped me over and I crashed to the ground on my back.

"Hey, Raven – calm the *fuck* down..." She hissed.

Jackal made to help me up, but I ignored his offered hand.

"Stay the *fuck* away from me, Jackal – why the *hell* should I trust you?"

..._...

I saw Jackal hang his head for a moment and then he reached up to the base of his mask before speaking again, only this time the electronically altered voice was gone.

"Because... Because, I'm somebody who cares for you... I know who you are Raven; I have for a while now..."

Joshua! I stared at him for a moment before replying. He knew who I was – no big deal and he had given away his own identity to help me. I reached out with my gloved hand and allowed him to pull me to my feet.

Just then, Shadow came into my line of sight and I studied the slim figure in the combat suit – it had to be Chloe.

The Mustang had managed to travel another two-thirds of a mile before expiring.

I found the car at the side of the street, near to the South Branch of Chicago River. I stopped and parked my Ducati, removing my helmet. A large man appeared from the Mustang. He seemed pissed some reason!

"Who the *fuck* are you and why is Raven after you?" I growled angrily.

"How would I know – she killed my partner..."

"You are coming with me – dead or alive, but preferably alive; I like to play with my food before I kill it..."

"Fuck that!" The man said loudly.

He turned to run, but his jaw came into contact with a very ridged gauntlet.

"Oops!" Kick-Ass commented as he gazed down at the unconscious man.

"Is my motorcycle fucked?"

"Nah..." Jackal replied. "It'll be back to normal in a few minutes."

He was right – within five minutes the engine was running as if nothing had happened.

"Neat trick!" I growled as I pulled on my helmet.

Shadow and Jackal did the same. My mind was reeling as I considered what had just happened. I had lost that man, but I had discovered a big secret. What would my Aunt and Uncle say? Maybe, they would not have to know...

"Okay," Jackal said as he started the engine on his Triumph motorcycle. "Time to see inside your Safehouse – you leading, or am I?"

"I'll lead!"

A half hour later

Raven Nest

I led the two vigilantes into the warehouse and parked alongside the RV.

I saw my Uncle appear with a pump-action shotgun in his hands and aim the weapon directly at Jackal. I quickly stood directly in the line of fire and raised my hands. My Uncle looked pissed, but he lowered the weapon.

"You had better have a damn good reason for this..."

"I do," I said as I pulled off my helmet, wig and domino mask.

My Uncle's eyes went wide as I exposed my identity to the two vigilantes who after a moment's hesitation did the same, removing their own helmets and masks. Aunt Em appeared beside her husband with obvious concern etched into her expression.

"Uncle John, Aunt Em – please meet Joshua and Chloe..."

"*That* Joshua?" Aunt Em enquired.

"Yes, the Joshua from New York..."

"The one you used to talk about in your sleep?" Aunt Em persisted.

"Yes – that one – can we change the subject, *please*?"

"You are Shadow and Jackal," Uncle John stated.

"We are – Marcus said that we could trust you both," Josh said conversationally.

..._...

After handshakes were exchanged, I took a moment to examine the *Fusion* body armour up close, including the weapons.

"You two are awesome vigilantes..." I commented and I was surprised to see Chloe blush.

"I don't know about *awesome*..." She muttered.

"Mr Newton, our boss has invited you to bring your, err..."

"... *Raven Nest*..." I interjected and Chloe chuckled.

"... *Raven Nest*, to a more secure location. We should leave it for another half-hour and then move out – can you pack up that quickly?" Josh finished.

"Yes, we can."

***Chapter 256*: Raven Resolute**

Wednesday Night

Safehouse D

The large door slid shut behind us as we followed the two motorcycles into the darkness.

For a moment, I felt panic rising, but I pushed the feeling down – I trusted Josh explicitly. After a short pause, the lights came up and I immediately recognised the enormous bulk of *Titan* and several other vehicles including a big-rig and a trailer. I also recognised two people standing beside another armoured vehicle – neither were wearing body armour, but they were both very familiar. I climbed down from *Raven Nest* and walked forward, conscious of the enormous form of Kick-Ass standing off to one side, a wicked looking assault rifle in his hands.

"Hello, Mindy – good to see you again," I said receiving a smile in return before turning to the man beside her. "You too, Mr Williams."

"Call me Marcus, Morgan."

"Christ!" Uncle John said as he walked over to his friend. "This kind of explains a few things..."

"A lot to take in, John – you too, Emily."

"Thank you for protecting our wayward girl," Aunt Em said.

"Oh, I'm used to wayward girls!" Marcus chuckled and I saw Mindy scowl.

Kick-Ass lowered his rifle and he removed his mask.

"Dave, Dave Lizewski," he said as he held out his hand. "Otherwise known as Kick-Ass!"

I saw Mindy roll her eyes and mutter, "Dumbass".

"Morgan, Morgan Hella – otherwise known as Red Raven."

I took his hand and shook it.

I found myself being led down a long corridor.

My Aunt and Uncle were back with Marcus and I was following Mindy, Dave, Josh and Chloe. I had no idea where I was going, but I had been told to bring my mask. Finally, we emerged into a corridor beside an elevator.

"Welcome to Safehouse F, Morgan!" Josh said as a door released and we passed into a glass enclosure.

"Oh, wow..." Was all I could say.

Chloe placed her hand against a glass panel and a glass door clicked opened. I walked through into a large area that had been literally cut from the rock beneath Chicago. I took in everything I could but struggled with information overload. Then I found Mindy in my face; the smile was gone – she looked pissed.

"Now the touchy-feely happy moment is over, I want to kick your fucking ass!"

With that, Mindy seized my arm and all but dragged me up some steel stairs. It never occurred to me to struggle, or to reach for my weapons.

Mindy was Hit Girl – I had no defence against her!

..._...

I was pulled along a catwalk and thrown onto a couch in a large open room.

"Where the fuck, do you get off killing in *my* city?"

It was not quite a yell, but it was still scary – especially as I was being yelled at by somebody with no obvious weapons on show, while I was fully armed and in body armour.

"I held out a hand of friendship to you, but then you tore up Chicago and shot a man dead!"

"He refused to answer my questions..."

"You mean you lost control of the situation?" Mindy asked, calming down slightly.

"Yeah..."

"You could have killed yourself, too. How's your arm – I saw you collide with that bus?"

"Bruised – I've not had a chance to check it yet..."

"There's a bathroom over there, go check yourself out and then we can talk about that cunt you were chasing."

"Did you get him?" I asked excitedly.

"Go sort yourself out and then I'll bring you up to date..."

..._...

When I emerged from the bathroom, I found Chloe waiting for me.

"You okay?" She asked with a tone of genuine concern.

"Just some wicked bruising, but I've had worse!"

"Hit Girl wants us down below..." Chloe advised ominously as she pulled on her mask.

I did the same and followed her, noticing for the first time a very young girl, maybe eight or nine, watching me. What was a little girl doing in the Safehouse? I also noticed that the girl had a small pistol in a holster clipped to the belt of her jeans. I was watched all the way down the first set of stairs and then again as we went down another set of stairs.

"Don't mind her – she's British!" Shadow commented as if it explained everything...

We passed a large glazed in exercise area and then passed through a door with an ominous sign: '**Interrogation and Holding**'.

Raven went for the door handle, but I caught her and waved her to the side.

"No weapons inside – leave it all in a locker," I advised, pointing at several large lockers mounted outside the door.

I stowed my own weapons, as Raven stowed hers. Next, I placed my hand on the adjacent scanner, the door released and I waved Raven inside.

..._...

Raven stopped dead as I closed the door behind her.

"You got him!" She growled.

On the far side of the room was a small six-foot by ten-foot cell. The cell had a concrete bed built into the wall on one side, a steel toilet and a steel sink. The front of the cell was formed by steel bars, with a door to the left which was locked. The door could only be released from the Control Centre.

"Oh, great, it's the little girl!" The man growled from the other side of the bars.

"Shut the fuck up, cunt!" Hit Girl growled and the man went silent.

"Raven – meet Harry Stewart."

"I don't wanna meet him – I wanna kill him..." Raven hissed.

"All in good time, my dear Raven," Hit Girl replied. "All in good time..."

"Let's start things right," Hit Girl began. "You are going to answer some questions..."

"Fuck you, bitches!" Stewart growled "That is precisely what I am gonna do to each and every one of you three – I'm gonna fuck you till you fucking eyes pop out and then..."

"Original, very original..." Hit Girl drawled, cutting him off.

Then Stewart spa through the bars, his effluent landing on Hit Girl's armoured chest. Hit Girl just looked up at the camera, nodded, and there was a dull click from the door to the cell, which slid open soundlessly.

..._...

Before the man could react, Hit Girl reached in and using her considerable strength, she dragged the man out and smacked his head down hard on the top of the wooden table outside of the cell. The unfortunate man yelled out in pain. Hit Girl leant down so her mouth was only inches from his left ear.

"You listen and you listen good. Answer the questions, and I won't kill you. Don't answer the questions..."

Harry Stewart screamed as Hit Girl drove a small throwing knife through the back of his hand into the top of the table.

"Let me tell you a story..." Shadow began. "There was a twelve-year-old-girl and she was tucked up safely in her bed at home. That night, some bad men broke in and they attacked her parents before trying to rape that little girl. However, that little girl was very, very brave and she fought back..."

I felt a little embarrassed by Shadow's comments, but I was pleased that she approved of what I had done all those years previously. I hated recalling that night, but I could understand Shadow's reasons for bringing it up.

"... She killed a man, but two others escaped – do you want to stand in the way of that girl's revenge for her dead parents?"

The man thought through his pain and I saw fear in his eyes. I had recognised it the moment Shadow had mentioned the two that had escaped – *he* was the second man.

I moved towards the man and he flinched.

***The following morning
Thursday***

North Park Elementary School

"Miss Lizewski!"

Huh, what?

"Miss Lizewski, are you on the same planet as the rest of us?"

There were giggles from some of the other fourth-grade girls and I could see some exaggerated eye-rolling from the boys.

"Err, yes, miss."

I scowled at the boys – they irked me! I also felt myself blushing in response to the giggling.

"I hope I am not boring you, young lady..."

"Steph, is *not* a lady, miss," a boy called out with a snigger, triggering some general laughter.

"Thank you, Mister Evans!"

"Yes – thanks, Jackson!" I growled.

Later that day, I sat down in the lunch room just as I had done at noon each day for the previous six weeks, since I had started at the school.

Fourth grade was boring, at least I thought so, which meant that my mind tended to drift off and it tried to fill itself with something much more exciting. I preferred to run through the intricacies of taking a Glock pistol to pieces rather than the Distributive Property of Multiplication in Maths – I, like Joshua, refused to call it 'Math'!

I was soon joined by four other kids – they seemed to have gravitated toward me over the past couple of weeks, no idea why. Each was in my grade and I quickly saw them as my friends.

I glared at Jackson Evans; a slim ten-year-old brown-haired boy.

"I *can* be a lady, thank you very much, Jackson!"

"I was only kidding, Steph..."

"We're still trying to figure you out, girl," nine-year-old Alison 'Ali' Johns commented.

"Figure what out?" I enquired.

"You're a British kid in an American city – you're an oddity," Ali explained.

"Okay... Oh, hi Megan," I called out as Megan walked past with her friends – she nodded and smiled at me.

"You know her?" Craig James asked.

"She's my Aunt," I explained to the blond-haired kid.

"Wow – she's violent; you know that, don't you?" Katherine 'Katy' Evans asked.

"Yes – I do," I laughed. "But, what can I say..."

"I've seen you with that girl, the one in second grade who keeps getting into fights – what's her name?" Ali asked.

I laughed.

"That would be Anne-Marie – she's my little sister and she has a twin – Danny."

"You're nice, Steph – just a little strange!" Jackson commented and I smiled.

"Jeez – just tell him you fancy him, Steph..."

"What?" I growled at Anne-Marie as she walked past. "Second graders are not allowed in this part of the lunch room – so get!"

Anne-Marie smirked as she walked away.

"She says your name in her sleep, *Jackson!*" She called out as she then ran back to her table.

Safehouse D
Raven Nest

I paced backwards and forwards and I had done since I had woken up that morning.

"Problem?"

I turned to see Mindy coming towards me from the direction of the tunnel that led to Safehouse F. I was alone – my Aunt and Uncle were with Marcus and a guy called Jack Bay. My mind was troubled – between my information and that of Mindy, I had captured the second man and we knew where the killer of my parents was.

I wanted to kill them both, but a part of me said that I should hand them both over to Special Agent Gibbs.

"What do I do, Mindy – my heart says kill them both..."

"I know this one – your brain says hand them over to justice; a difficult choice and one that I have fought with many times over the years."

"So...?"

Mindy sighed.

"I can't make the decision for you, Morgan – that is for you to decide... I know, it's a lot for a sixteen-year-old girl to cope with," Mindy replied after a minute's thought. "I had to make these decisions on my own, after my Daddy died; I had nobody else – at least until Dave appeared on the scene."

"Thanks for nothing!" I groused with a forced smile.

***The following morning
Friday***

Glenview

"You sure about this, Steph?"

"Yeah, Mum – I want to fit in..."

"If you say so – it's up to you."

"Oh – this is good..." Anne-Marie laughed as she entered the kitchen. "What are you wearing?"

"A skirt – what about it?" I responded, feeling a little shy. "I'm a girl..."

I was wearing a navy blue skirt that fell to just below my knees, plus tights of the same colour.

"I keep forgetting that..." Anne-Marie commented. "It's only when I see you in the shower that I notice you are, in fact, a girl!"

"Get back to your cereal, you terrible tike!" Mindy laughed as I blushed.

Anne-Marie did just that.

"I bet *Jackson* will like the skirt..." Danny cut in and I felt my face explode into flames and I tried to hide my face from Dave and Mindy.

"Tell us *more*, Stephanie," Dave chuckled.

I scowled.

"He's a boy in my class – and we are *just* friends..."

"So were Mindy and I..." Dave chuckled.

"I will kick your little bottom so hard, Anne-Marie!"

Safehouse F

"Where's Marty?"

"He's in the Data Core, next door," Abby commented.

I headed through to Safehouse E and meandered through the corridors and then down two levels until I reached a steel door. I placed the palm of my right hand onto an adjacent scanner and the door released. I found myself facing a glass door beyond which was a mass of flickering lights and my master technology expert. He released the lock on the glass door and I entered the Fusion Data Core.

On my left were several racks, all loaded with servers and storage devices. This was the Primary Data Core – we had three others. The Secondary Data Core was in New York, the Tertiary Data Core was in Gotham, while the fourth was

in the UK. Marty and Abby called them, Alfa, Bravo, Charlie and Delta respectively.

To the right, Marty had a large work area. All around him were new servers and a multitude of spare parts, including some items awaiting repair. However, directly ahead lay a steel cage, within which Marty was currently working. You entered via a mesh 'air lock'. The cage was designed to prevent all signals from any devices getting out to the outside world. That would be very difficult as we were over a hundred feet below tonnes of rock, steel and concrete, but we took no chance's!

"Having fun?" I asked.

"Rebuilding the RAID array was *not* easy, but the hard drives we seized from the CIA Safehouse should provide us with some decent intelligence – once decrypted of course."

That evening

Glenview

"I hate her!"

"Hate who, honey?" Dave asked.

"Her!"

I turned to see Stephanie pointing at Anne-Marie who froze, her eyes wide at Stephanie's expression of loathing. Anne-Marie looked like the proverbial rabbit in the headlights. What could the girl have done to her sister?

"The bitch humiliated me – in front of my friends. I am never wearing this damn skirt again!"

"If you hate her so much, kill her..." I suggested, smirking at Dave who just shook his head slowly.

"What!" Anne-Marie exclaimed as she dropped her school bag and bolted for the stairs.

Stephanie calmed down and looked up at me. She smiled before she spoke.

"That was nasty – you know that I would *never* hurt that girl..." she began then stopped. "... Oh very good – love the psychology there..."

"Just scare her a bit – but don't go too far... The skirt suits you; don't let the little scamp get to you," I advised.

..._...

I found her in her bedroom.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"What do you think I *should* do to you?"

Anne-Marie was squirming and looked worried.

"I'm sorry – I couldn't help it... You know I have a cruel streak and I saw you blushing when Jackson commented on how he liked your skirt..."

"You will be very sorry," I replied, doing my best to suppress a smile.

Now, the girl looked scared – I could not do it...

"Just fucking with you... I know you didn't mean it and I know that you know I would never hurt you."

"You do look good in the skirt, Steph – I mean that."

"But you still have to pay for humiliating me..."

By the time I reached the top of the stairs, I heard laughter.

I found Anne-Marie being tickled by her big sister and Stephanie was relentless. Danny had been attracted by the noise and he was laughing as his twin wriggled and screamed on the floor. He did not have his twin sister's cruel streak, but he enjoyed seeing her suffering in ways that would not hurt her.

Life in the Lizewski household was never dull!

***Chapter 257*: Advance Preview**

Coming this April (hopefully) or maybe May...

To an internet connection near you...

A new story from the *Forsaken* universe...

T-H-E

F-U-S-I-O-N

U-L-T-I-M-A-T-U-M

Synopsis: *Stephanie, aka Psyche, was part of a US Government experiment, codenamed Urban Predator. The aim of the experiment was to produce assassins and educate them from a very young age. The experiment was compromised and ultimately abandoned, leaving the last two victims alone to deal with their altered minds. One of the victims was Miranda Swedlow, aka Night-Bitch, aka Aurora. She knew that only one person could help her and that person was Dave Lizewski, aka Kick-Ass. On hearing about Stephanie and her lost childhood, Mindy Lizewski, aka Hit Girl, began another crusade, this time to destroy those responsible for destroying yet another young girl's childhood.*

Experience 30+ chapters of non-stop Fusion fun, Hit Girl fury and Kick-Ass action...

...+..._...+..._...+...

...as Fusion travel to the UK...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Alexander Cartwright. You fought his team the other day – just got facial recognition on him. Turns out the guy is on Mindy's watch list..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"I can't go into detail . . . I need to brief you in person . . . I'm coming to see you..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

With that, I ran over the bridge and elbowed the first man in the face – he carried what looked suspiciously like a four-foot long fence post!

...+..._...+..._...+...

"No more?" Jackal enquired enthusiastically.

"Wait until the pubs turn out, then you'll have plenty..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Eight against twenty-seven – hardly seems fair . . . for them."

...+..._...+..._...+...

I quickly severed both hands on the up-swing and stabbed him through the heart with my Tanto. I turned to take down the third man, but he was already falling – strangely his head seemed to hover before following the rest of his body.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...the situation quickly escalates...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Waterloo Station, south entrance, thirty minutes..."

"Who is this?"

"They call me Hit Girl..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"We're safe, Dad . . . Mindy's driving..."

"Do I hear sirens? Are you being chased?"

"Not exactly... Mindy's driving a Police car and we're doing fifty towards Marylebone and Paddington with blues and twos..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

The pair of red-painted BMW X5 Police SUVs appeared out of nowhere, just as we reached a fairly clear section of road, both SUVs heading directly towards us.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...and then after a member of their team is kidnapped...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"I don't know who you are, I don't know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills, skills I have acquired over a very long career. Skills that make me a nightmare for people like you. If you let the girl go now, that'll be the end of it. I will not look for you; I will not pursue you. But if you don't, I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you."

...+..._...+..._...+...

...they travel to continental Europe where they meet new vigilantes...

...+..._...+..._...+...

As of 2016, real vigilantes existed in Chicago, New York City, Gotham and Star City. As for Europe, there was a new vigilante organisation growing in Scotland, while on the main continent, there was just one known real vigilante – and she was in Paris...

"Bonne soirée, Hit Girl!"

I turned slowly to see a slim figure crouched on the rooftop, not twenty feet away. I smiled on recognising one of the very few other, serious, vigilantes that operated in the world.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...and tour (actually, fight across) Europe, beginning with France...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"You hungry, Steph?"

"Hell, yeah!"

"Killing gives you an appetite, doesn't it?"

...+..._...+..._...+...

The Audi RS6 executed a perfect power slide as it hit the Place Charles de Gaulle that encircled the Arc de Triomphe. The red RS3 promptly followed suit, determined not to be out-done. But before the blue RS3 could follow, an unmarked grey Citroen C5 with blue lights appeared.

...+..._...+..._...+...

We came around a corner and found eight French National Police RAID Officers and they instantly raised their rifles toward us.

"Arrêtez! Levez vos mains!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

...they race to recover their kidnapped colleague...

...+..._...+..._...+...

The girl hung from the ceiling in the centre of the room. Her once beautiful, naked body, all five-feet-seven-inches of it, was now covered in bruises and blood from head to toe. She was unconscious, her long brown hair hanging free, her skin covered in sweat from her ordeal. The room stank, from the pool of urine at the young girl's feet as well as from the sweat and blood.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...before it is too late...

...+..._...+..._...+...

The man held up a piece of copper rod, about two-foot-long and two inches in diameter with a wooden handle. There was a length of electrical cable attached to the rod and it seemed very obvious where the rod was going to be inserted.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...no limits are set to finding her...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"We need some questions answered. You cooperate and we all go home – you don't cooperate; I get to have some fun. So please, don't cooperate..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

The drill span up to speed and rapidly cut through the flesh of the man's thigh. He screamed, as the blood streamed from the wound and there was a grating noise as the drill bit found the bone and easily cut through and continued until the chuck was half an inch from the man's bruised skin.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Now, what many people don't know is that it takes skill to electrocute somebody, where only pain is inflicted, but not death. Well, not immediately anyway..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

...the team visit other countries: Germany...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Dad?"

"Yeah, honey?"

"Why is Mom smirking like that – it's scaring me..."

Mindy began to put her foot down . . . she held it there. We flashed past a blue Audi RS3 as we approached 152 kilometres-per-hour. We were rapidly passing 200kph and advancing on 250kph . . . I studied the fuel gauge as we slowed.

"After that gas guzzling exercise, we had better stop for gas, sweetheart, or we're walking!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

It was red from hood to trunk and it somehow made a Mustang look like a Model-T Ford in comparison. The car had a 6.2-litre supercharged V8 engine and could rocket past 155 mph, reaching sixty in 4.2 seconds. Sitting on black 20-inch alloy wheels, I was getting wet just staring at the subtle curves and muscular shape of the hood and flared wheel arches...

...+..._...+..._...+...

...Switzerland and Italy...

...+..._...+..._...+...

Stephanie screamed as several bullets struck her chest. I pulled out my pistol and emptied the magazine into the man as he came towards us. As the man fell to the tarmac, I switched out the empty magazine for a loaded one and turned to Stephanie who was writhing in pain.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"You're forgetting who your mother is!" I chuckled.

Mindy walked over to the RS3, calmly opened the passenger door and pulled the pins from a pair of grenades before dumping both of them inside the car. She casually closed the door, locked the RS3, walked around to the other side of the RS6 and calmly climbed in.

"Better move, Dave!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Orange juice for the lady, and a medium-dry vodka Martini for myself, shaken – not stirred..."

"You must be Mindy; Harm was nowhere near the mark when he told me how beautiful you are . . . Deputy Director Clayton Webb . . . Mindy Lizewski, please meet MI6's best agent..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

Abby was standing astride a man.

"You want to assimilate my data?" She yelled as she drew her pistol. "Assimilate this!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

...Fusion goes back to sea...

...+..._...+..._...+...

Chloe watched the large yacht departing with their prey.

The yacht was huge!

"We'll catch 'em..." Mindy said confidently.

"You know, Mindy, if we're gonna be chasing that thing – you're gonna need a bigger boat!"

Mindy smirked and Chloe groaned, "What have you done...?"

As if on cue, Mindy turned seaward and Chloe stared as a behemoth came around the headland at speed. Within two minutes, it had passed through the breakwater and was soon backing down hard as it spun and slowly came alongside the dock.

"No fucking way!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

Once free of the shore, we increased speed to thirty-five knots . . . the pursuit had begun...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Okay, people – this is not a pleasure cruise . . . I want you all familiar with this vessel, her electronic systems and her weapons systems..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

Stephanie and Megan screamed as they flew backwards and fell the ten feet to the water.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Get the fuck off me!" I growled. "What's going on?"

I tried to scramble towards the door as Dave responded.

"Damned if I know, but I think we're sinking!"

..+..._...+..._...+...

The forward M134 mini-guns ripped out... After several bursts there was a large explosion...

..+..._...+..._...+...

...reinforcements are required...

...+..._...+..._...+...

I saw four people advancing towards me down the sidewalk.

"Mindy!" Curtis called out and he hugged me tightly.

"Hi, Mindy," Morgan said with a grin.

"How's the family?" I asked the third person.

"Doing well, Mindy," Kim replied, giving me a hug.

The fourth person seemed much more apprehensive.

"Hi, SD – welcome to Gibraltar."

...+..._...+..._...+...

Leaning against the glacier white Clio RenaultSport, was a stunning young woman. Her hair was black, with pale blue highlights and hung loosely across her shoulders.

"Nice!" Joshua commented.

"The car or the French tart?" Chloe enquired with menace in her tone.

"The car – definitely the car..."

"Bonjour mes amis!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

...there is tragedy...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"I'm so sorry Mindy – she was thrown... Her neck's broken."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Grenade!"

Trojan's yell caused all heads to turn in his direction. The explosive device flew through the air. Trojan was moving, running hard towards Wildcat – he shoved her out of the way hard, sending her rolling across the road.

...+..._...+..._...+...

My gaze fixed on the point of the blade, but then his left hand came up and he punched me in the right breast. The pain was immense and I screamed out and struggled to breathe. He followed up with a punch to my stomach, which caused me to struggle to breathe and I coughed for a few minutes before the pain and sensation went away.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Yes, she'll be fine."

"She saved our lives, didn't she...?"

"Yes, she did – I am very proud of her."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Why?"

"I had to protect you..."

"No – you can't die..."

"It happens and you know that..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

Mindy and Dave stopped at what was obviously a fresh grave. I froze as I saw the gravestone.

"When did...? How did...?"

"After she died, I used my contacts to have her body recovered and repatriated."

"Thank you."

...+..._...+..._...+...

...there is happiness...

...+..._...+..._...+...

I was being carried and as I looked up, opening my eyes I suddenly became overcome with relief as I recognised Kick-Ass. The dam broke and I sobbed, tears streaming down my face and my body wracked with pain as I sobbed. They had come for me – Fusion had come for me. I pushed my face into his armoured chest, savouring the comfort.

...+..._...+..._...+...

I felt immense relief as two of the four most important people in my life climbed down from the bullet-riddled vehicle. I ran forwards and grasped both of them into an enormous hug, gripping them tightly. I felt two more people joining the hug, which seemed to go on for ever.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...there is pleasure...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"In the past three weeks, I've had sex in six countries..."

...+..._...+..._...+...

...there is revenge...

...+..._...+..._...+...

Both girls were out of control, and I knew it – but I did nothing to stop them. They needed the outlet and they needed the closure. The woman looked towards me for help, but I just stared at her, showing no emotion, except maybe hate. There were still the sounds of sporadic gunfire in the corridors as the final few were routed.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"You made me kill my family..." Stephanie growled angrily, her face contorted and red with rage.

...+..._...+..._...+...

...there is closure...

...+..._...+..._...+...

"You made me what I am... You made me a killer... Now, I am going to kill you... Poetic, isn't it!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

...Hit Girl, Kick-Ass, and Fusion race to take down the worst criminal scum, as that very same criminal scum try desperately to defend themselves and take down Fusion while keeping the furious and vengeful Hit Girl and her lethal team at arm's length.

Coming soon...

A new story from the Forsaken universe...

T-H-E

F-U-S-I-O-N

U-L-T-I-M-A-T-U-M

**Chapter quantity and content is subject to change at the Author's whim! Quotes are not necessarily in order and may be out of context.*

***Chapter 258*: Vigilante Elementary School**

Author's Note: *Hope you liked the 'Advance Preview'!*

The next morning

Saturday

Glenview

"What the *fuck*, is 'The Fusion Ultimatum'?"

"Damned if I know, Steph!"

"We going on a trip to Europe, Dave?"

"Sure looks like it..."

"Mindy drives a Police Car – that sounds dangerous!"

"Hey! I'm a good driver..."

"Ooh – somebody gets kidnapped; doesn't say who, though... There's a French vigilante?"

"Don't look at me, Steph – I don't write this shit; probably some British nut!"

"Torture and Abby gets pissed – awesome!"

"Our daughter is a tad violent, Dave!"

"Ha – point proven; you hit high speed and scare the shit out of Anne-Marie..."

"Oh dear, Steph – you seem to be in for a *lot* of pain!" Mindy retorted with a smirk.

"Unlike you, Hit Wimp, I can take it... Another boat?"

"Yacht, Steph, get it right," Dave corrected his daughter.

"*Mega-yacht* – get it right - *Dave!*" Mindy insisted.

"Sorry, Mum! Looks like you sink us, too... On no, somebody dies; maybe more than one... You have a *lot* of sex – let me be the first to say: *ewww!*"

"You get revenge..."

"Where?"

"France, I think..."

"No – in the story..."

"Down there, near the end... probably around Chapter 30 or so."

"Cool – I can live with revenge . . . and closure – I like the sound of that."

"Sounds a lot of fun..."

"Sounds expensive, Mindy..."

"Always the voice of defiance, Dave – we've got Stephanie's swear jar..."

"Fucking bitch!"

"Stephanie! Dollar, jar..."

. . . and back to the real story . . .

Saturday morning

Safehouse F

I glared at the three youngsters who stood defiantly before me – two seven-year-olds and a thirteen-year-old.

We were standing in the armoury at the Safehouse. I smiled over at my new trainer before speaking.

"Welcome to Vigilante Elementary School!" I began. "I am going to leave you three in the very capable hands of my new instructor – you *will* follow all her instructions, *to the letter!* Any violations and you will *not* be allowed to train... All three of you will start at the bottom and work your way up, understand?"

"Yes, Mindy," Nightmare replied.

"Yes, Mom," Ravage added.

"Yes, Hit Girl!" The other one offered.

"I'll pass you over to your instructor, then – they are all yours, Foxtail!"

The fourteen-year-old girl was perfect for the task. She had an enormous amount of knowledge stashed away in her head and I had three fresh minds that needed filling. I wanted to show Saoirse that I trusted her and what better way to do that, than placing her in charge of my very own kids!

..._...

"Okay, shitheads – time for some work! Nightmare, Rogue and Ravage – forget any pre-conceptions you may have had about becoming a vigilante, an assassin, or some superhero. I will teach you the easy way and if that doesn't work – then it will be the hard way and you *won't* like the hard way. Hit Girl says that as long as you can walk and breathe when it is time for you little kiddies to go home, any other injuries are allowed!"

"What?" Rogue exclaimed.

"Rogue – one lap of the Safehouse – I did not say you could talk!"

Rogue did not move.

"Maybe two laps will remind you to keep your big trap *shut* and to *follow orders!*"

"Mom!"

I smirked and walked out of the armoury, ignoring Anne-Marie.

"Three laps..." Came Saoirse's Irish lilt.

"Jeez!"

My daughter ran past, throwing a dirty look over her shoulder, directly at me – I stuck out my tongue and laughed.

..._...

"You sure you want people like Saoirse and me training those three?" Stephanie asked as I climbed the steel steps. "Our training methods may be a little severe..."

"You forget, I had you training with real bombs next door and butt naked!" I reminded Stephanie as we both watched Anne-Marie on her second lap around the Safehouse. She was being jeered by those on the mat – Megan, Curtis and Tommy.

"Put that finger away and do a fourth lap!" I called down to my youngest daughter and grinned at the scowl which formed on her face.

"So, how did the first morning go?" I asked the three kids.

"I don't really know – I spent most of the morning doing laps around the goddamn Safehouse!" Rogue growled.

"I know," I replied with an evil smirk. "Sixteen wasn't it?"

"Fifteen!"

"Well, you still have one more to do then..."

Rogue was learning fast, as she said nothing but just turned around dejectedly and began jogging around the Safehouse.

"Ravage managed two laps and Nightmare managed six," Foxtail reported.

"Anybody ready to quit?" I enquired.

"No chance!" Nightmare replied and I could see fire burning in her eyes – good.

"I'll let you know..." Ravage added.

After lunch, they had another session.

Anne-Marie had calmed down and was not misbehaving so much. I was impressed by Saoirse and her teaching; she was very good at it. I took a moment to sit in on the lesson that she was giving in the briefing room.

A not-very-amused Joshua was standing before the three younger kids. Megan and Stephanie were smirking at the back of the room and giggling quietly as Saoirse lectured away, using Joshua for her demonstrations.

"... There are certain points on the body – both male and female – which you can use as targets: the groin..."

Even I laughed when Saoirse smacked her hand against Joshua's crotch – without warning!

"... Works with the girls too... Stand up you damn idiot! The kneecap can be stomped on, or kicked sideways to disable the legs..."

Joshua was kicked, gently, in the side of his left knee, causing him to sink to the carpet. I saw him grimacing, but he gamely continued to play the game. Stephanie and Megan were almost unable to control their laughter, which was also getting louder.

"... Punch here..."

Joshua was struck in the armpit and he yelled out in pain.

"... Hit the nose..."

"Fuck off, bitch!" Joshua growled, fending off the inbound punch.

"You can also slap the ears..." Josh growled, slapping Saoirse around her ears, which then provoked a swift response.

"A quick strike into the adam's apple is debilitating too..." Saoirse added with a grin as Josh coughed gently and rubbed his throat. "Poke out the eyes – very painful... The instep of the foot and toes are also good targets..."

Saoirse grabbed Joshua's left leg, again without warning and he fell to the carpet with a thud and a foul stream of oaths. I was certain that Megan and Stephanie were going to piss themselves by this point, they were laughing so hard.

Mind you, I was a little more concerned with controlling my own bladder as I laughed.

I had not had such a fun day in a long time.

I was grateful to Mindy for giving me the chance and being placed in charge of training her kids had not gone

unnoticed. Rogue was just that – rogue! She submitted to her punishments though and I knew from experience that she would always cause trouble, never mind; I had plenty of punishments available. Mindy had told me to be harsh, not soft – they had to learn that what they were getting into was both dangerous and unforgiving.

Stephanie and I had talked about how far we could go – Stephanie had simply suggested no visible bruising!

Joshua was a laugh and he had gamely volunteered to be humiliated by me, but as I understood it, that was what the Brit was like. Were all Brits nuts? Stephanie and Megan had been a minor distraction, pissing themselves with laughter, but I had managed to ignore them – even Mindy had laughed at Joshua's antics!

"I need the bathroom!" Megan yelled out and jumped off the chair before she ran towards the bathroom on the other side of the Safehouse – she giggled most of the way over there!

"Me, too!" Stephanie added and followed Megan.

It was a very different atmosphere than I was used to – even school had been strict. I was able to learn to laugh again, something I had not done much of for many months. They were all friendly towards me, despite knowing what I had almost done to Stephanie and Anne-Marie. After a private conversation with my former enemy, Stephanie had confided in me that she also had been stunned by how welcome she had been made by everybody.

I had a feeling that I would be happy working with *Fusion*.

"I'm sorry about this – it's kind of tradition in Fusion!"

"What is?" Foxtail enquired, looking up at Dave as he handed her an armoured vest.

"I don't like the look of this..." Nightmare added.

"Mom would never hurt us!" Anne-Marie smiled.

"I don't know about that..." Danny commented. "Why are you grinning, big sister?"

"This is gonna be fun!" Stephanie growled as she helped Danny and Anne-Marie with their armoured vests.

"You're gonna love it!" Mindy growled as she walked out of the armoury, her hands behind her back.

She strode out and faced off against the four kids.

"I'd love to say that I hated doing this, but I would be lying!"

With that, Mindy revealed her hands and the pair of .38-calibre pistols they held. She rattled off four rapid shots, two from each hand and the air was punctuated by four gunshots, followed closely by four screams and then four thuds.

"That was evil!" Saoirse laughed as she rubbed her chest.

"It was fun!" Lauren added.

"I hate you so much right now..." Anne-Marie growled as she sat up, rubbing her own chest.

"Awesome!" Danny said with a smile. "Again!"

That evening

Glenview

"I hate to do this, Stephanie, but it is for the good of everybody, as well as yourself."

"It's not fair; everything was going so well, and I thought you loved me!"

"That is why it must be done... I know it will be hard, very hard, believe me, I know."

"It's fucking child abuse!"

"I'd go so far as to agree that while you *are* a child, you are *not* a *normal* child – believe me, I know, I was nine once – and therefore different rules apply to you."

"That isn't fair... But well-reasoned – damn it..."

"Life is not fair, live with it!" Mindy persisted.

"Okay... I'll do it, if only for a peaceful life..."

"We'll ignore your most recent outbursts... But from now on, it'll cost you a dollar – two for the compound ones..."
Dave added.

My life would *never* be the same, I thought, as I glared at the jar on the kitchen side. Why the cunt-fuck did I need a goddamn mother-fucking swear jar, anyway?

Bollocks to it!

"You know, Dave, what she's thinking *right now* would probably add twenty bucks to the jar..." Mindy chuckled to Dave.

I was tempted to respond, but I decided that my limited cash flow would not allow it.

"Night, sis!"

"I hate her!" Anne-Marie growled from under her quilt.

You could always tell when she was in a bad mood, because she would hide under her quilt with just a small opening for her eyes.

"She's just teaching you to follow instructions..."

"Maybe, but I still hate her!"

I ignored her and headed for my bedroom.

"Anne-Marie hates you, SD..."

Saoirse chuckled.

The following morning ***Sunday***

"If nothing else, she's gonna be very fit!"

I did not reply, but chuckled to myself as a certain young girl began yet another lap of the Safehouse. Marty grinned and shook his head as he headed back to the Control Centre. It was Stephanie's turn to take charge and I had to admit, she seemed to know what she was doing...

"Quit the little girl giggling – you are here to learn some serious shit, Rogue. If you're too much of a fucking pussy to cope with that, then you can just fuck off..."

"Hey... You can't talk to me like that!"

Anne-Marie was smirking, which seemed to touch a nerve with Stephanie who strode toward her younger sister, who quickly realised that she may have gone too far... Stephanie grabbed her sister by the t-shirt and lifted her off the mat – Stephanie had strong arms, despite her limited stature.

"I'm trying to keep you alive, you little fuck!" She growled. "If you can't handle it, then being a vigilante ain't for you, kiddie... Six laps."

Stephanie dropped Anne-Marie who began to run around the Safehouse, this time with tears of humiliation streaming down her cheeks.

"Faster!" Stephanie called nastily.

..._...

During the break, I found Stephanie brooding in the galley and I knew why.

"You did nothing wrong, Steph."

"I hated doing it, but I knew that it had to be done, Mindy..."

"I know."

"She hates me..."

"Probably."

"She's avoiding me..."

"Probably – meet me in the Command Centre in a few minutes..."

..._...

I found Anne-Marie sulking over by the shield. I held out a hand to her, but she ignored me.

"Come on – we need to talk..."

"Why?"

"Come with me..."

"I'm not talking to that bitch."

I gave up and just picked the girl up – she struggled furiously, but I pinned her and carried her to the Command Centre where Abby released the door for me.

"What's *she* doing here?" Anne-Marie spat when she saw Stephanie.

"Go ahead, Stephanie."

"I won't apologise for how I treated you, Anne-Marie – not if it will keep you alive. You know what I was. You know what SD was. I know how the game is played and it is *not* a game... People die. People get hurt. You want to be a part of what we do – you have to take the good with the bad. Pussy footing around will *not* keep you alive. I love you and that is why I am being so harsh. You go out there unprepared..."

Stephanie stopped and I could see tears in her eyes. Anne-Marie noticed them too and I saw her expression soften and she looked ashamed by her behaviour.

"Sorry, Steph. Sorry, Mom."

"It's not your fault, Anne-Marie – you're not even eight yet. This is a lot to take in for anybody and you are very young."

"But so were you!"

"So I know what I'm talking about and so does Stephanie."

It had finally struck home.

That afternoon

Glenview

My cell rang – it was Trudy Platt.

"Hi, Trudy!"

There was a pause.

"Mindy, you have a problem..."

**Chicago Police Department
District 21**

I walked in the main entrance and I saw Sergeant Trudy Platt behind the desk – she nodded to her left, behind me.

I turned to come face to face with two very familiar young girls – both were handcuffed to the bench by their right hands. I turned back to Trudy with a confused expression on my face.

"Assaulting a Police Officer and interfering with an arrest."

"Which one?"

"Both charges, for both of 'em," Trudy replied.

"Mindy! Good of you to come down..."

I turned to come face to face with Hank Voight – he did not look very happy.

"What have Chloe and Megan done, now?" I asked.

"They tried to prevent the arrest of another girl..."

I instantly went on guard...

"Not Stephanie..."

I saw Chloe grimace.

"What's going on? Why wasn't I contacted? Where is she?" I was raging.

"The FBI and ATF are interested in her – it seems she's done something very bad..."

"What could she have done?" I demanded. "She's nine-years-old!"

"We have witnesses that have her purchasing weapons – illegal weapons."

"Can I see her?"

..._...

Hank led me to the holding area where I found Stephanie sitting quietly in a cell. She looked upset, but she was not crying. She jumped up as I came into view.

"Mindy!"

"What's going on, Stephanie?"

"I've been framed – it was *not* me."

I believed her – I had no reason not to.

"Is this the mother?" A new voice asked.

I turned to see two people walking towards Hank and me. One, a man, wore a trench coat. The other, a woman, wore a smart jacket. They both showed their credentials as they approached.

"Special Agent Fornell, FBI."

"Special Agent Keates, ATF."

"Mindy Lizewski, Mother of Stephanie Lizewski."

"Lieutenant Hank Voight, CPD – now we've all been introduced, let's get down to business and *you* can tell us *why* you are chasing a nine-year-old girl!"

"I could ask the same thing, Tobias..."

"Gibbs? What are *you* doing in Chicago?"

***Chapter 259*: Sadness**

Sunday Evening

Chicago Police Department District 21

"Okay – it's obvious that the little girl has been framed... She obviously couldn't operate a gun, let alone have contacts to go buy a dozen of 'em."

"Hey, old guy, I am *not* little!"

"Who are you calling *old*?" Special Agent Fornell growled as Special Agent Gibbs smirked.

"For the sake of argument; Fornell – you aren't old, Miss Lizewski – you ain't little," Special Agent Gibbs chuckled before he turned to Voight. "Can the girl get bail?"

"Of course," Lieutenant Voight confirmed and he waved for the cell to be opened.

Stephanie ran straight out and gave me a hug.

Glenview

"So you finally made it to jail . . . not surprised, really."

"Hey, it was *not* my fucking..."

"Stop it, you two – Anne-Marie, leave your sister alone; she's done nothing wrong!" I growled, making my point very clear and the younger girl flinched, then ran for the stairs.

I then turned on the other two girls who physically stepped backwards away from me.

"As for you two... I applaud you both for wanting to protect the nine-year-old gunrunner..."

"Hey!" Stephanie exclaimed indignantly.

I ignored her.

"You two know better than to attack the Police . . . yes?"

"Yes, Mindy – I'm sorry," Chloe said and she did not look sorry.

"We just reacted," Megan explained. "Sorry..."

"You're both lucky that we have friends at the 21st and I hate to think what Marcus is gonna say when he finds out that his daughter was arrested for attacking a cop..."

Megan grimaced at the thought of her impending fate.

Ramada Hotel

"What you got, Abbs?" Special Agent Gibbs asked as he looked into his laptop's camera.

"The video is an obvious fake . . . but I think you already knew that – somebody put together a remarkably good scam. It was almost impossible to identify the gaps between frames, but impossible is what I do and if I can save an innocent life..."

"Abby!"

"Sorry, Gibbs – it's a classic frame up; no more, no less."

"Thanks, Abby."

"Abby seems happy, now she's back in her lab, in Washington," Special Agent DiNozzo commented.

"Forgot to mention, DiNozzo – I saw a friend of yours, earlier, Special Agent Keates, ATF; ring a bell?"

DiNozzo frowned at the name and there was a brief look of pain which came and went surprisingly quickly.

"Not funny, Boss..."

Safehouse F

"What you got, Abby?" I asked as I entered the Command Centre.

"The video is a fake . . . but I think you already knew that – somebody put together a remarkably good edit. It had almost unidentifiable gaps between frames, but I'm Hal – nothing gets past me!"

"You better be careful girl, or your head and ego won't *both* fit in the elevator!" I laughed.

"It has to be your friends."

"My friends – the fucking CIA are *not* my friends!"

"Hey, just winding up Hit Girl..."

"Not a wise idea, Hal!"

"You're just a big softy at heart..."

"Moving on..." I growled as I watched the video again as it was the core piece of evidence. "Stop it, right there..."

I recognised Stephanie, but she seemed younger, from way before Dave had found her. The CIA had obviously used footage from some previous mission or something. However, what had caught my eye was a later scene, after the key section – there were a pair of young kids and the way they stood and carried themselves reminded me of two other kids – Stephanie and Saoirse...

Then it occurred to me – why was the scene in there anyway?

Oh, shit!

"Abby – get me the locations on Stephanie and Saoirse..."

Abby tapped away and then two dots appeared on the large screen as the map of Chicago zoomed in to a part of the City, close to the Naval Pier.

"Did the girls see this?"

"Yeah – they were both down here, earlier, and then they took off..."

"Oh, shit!" Abby groaned as realisation hit her.

"Who's close?"

"Dave and Kim are just down the road..."

"Scramble them!" I yelled as I ran to get suited up.

Navy Pier

We were both off the reservation – well off the reservation.

Nobody knew where we were, and I was well outside the usual bounds set out for me by Dave and Mindy. Saoirse, of course, had no bounds but Mindy would still be pissed with her. We had both agreed to go after the two kids – what

we would do with them when we found them, we had not decided. It would depend on how they both reacted.

We had split up and we were searching the area; the video clip was a plant and it most probably a trap, but I wanted to see an end to the crap that had been the last few years of my life.

..._...

I noticed SD heading back towards me and she tipped her head to her left, indicating that she had seen something. I followed the nod and saw two kids talking – only to my trained eyes, they were not ordinary kids; they were *Urban Predator*. The boy was about a year or so older than me, maybe eleven. The girl was a little older, maybe twelve. Both were dark haired and could easily pass as siblings, which was probably the idea.

To a normal person, they were just normal kids having a day out by the Lake – however, to a pair of CIA trained assassins, they were a pair of CIA trained assassins...

..._...

As easily as we had identified them, they would have identified us just as easily, too. There was not much point in continuing with the charade, so I moved towards them.

"Hi, I'm Stephanie – you looking for me?"

"Brazen bitch, isn't she," The girl said with a grin as she approached me.

The boy kept a distance from his partner; their training was good – but so was my own.

"So, how is this going to play out?"

The girl smirked.

"Catch us – if you think you can?"

"Huh?"

The two kids took off running, heading west away from the pier. I looked over at Saoirse, who just shrugged and we both bolted after them.

..._...

They were fast, too.

We were a dozen or so yards behind them as they ran. They took a left underneath Lower North Lake Shore Drive. After crossing the water and running another hundred odd yards, both kids jumped over the railing into Dusable Park.

"In for a penny, in for a pound..." I commented to Saoirse as I followed.

I dropped a dozen feet onto the grass below and I was quickly joined by Saoirse a moment later. We all drew our pistols at the same time. The two ex-products of *Urban Predator* faced the two active products. It was a no-win situation between us four youngsters as four pistols were in play. The only outcome was mutually assured destruction. Maybe there could be another outcome...

"Look at us," Saoirse said, indicating herself, Stephanie and them. "Look at what they make you give... Do you really want to be a cold-blooded killer, or do you want to make something of *your* life?"

"Talk about a rip off!" Stephanie growled.

"Hey – it worked on me, right?" Saoirse replied.

I noticed a change to the boy's eyes first – he was listening and taking in what was being said. I could almost hear the cogs whirring in his brain.

"We have no choice but to obey."

"He's right," the girl added.

"No – look at us, we're free," I stated.

The boy smiled and pointed his pistol at the ground. As the boy began to lower his pistol, the girl did the same – there was hope growing in their eyes. It was working – not only had I freed Saoirse, but I had rescued two more from those bastards...

Out of nowhere, there was the crack of a gunshot; the boy's head exploded. Another crack and the girl's head exploded and I felt wetness on my face. Everything seemed to slow down as Saoirse reacted first, throwing me into cover. I saw the two almost headless young bodies drop to the ground.

I could feel myself screaming, but I heard nothing.

I could hear the bullets striking the ground around our cover as I quickly came back to reality.

Saoirse was returning fire with her pistol, aiming high toward the top of a building, but she was well out of range. I heard the squeal of brakes as *Hound* screeched to a halt beside us. I heard feet running and heavy gunfire as Kick-Ass fired off his H&K MG5 A2 machinegun toward the sniper. I felt hands seize me very roughly under my arms and then throw me into the backseat of *Hound* – almost immediately, Saoirse was thrown on top of me and Kick-Ass climbed into the front passenger seat. I looked past Saoirse to see a pissed off looking Hit Girl climbing in.

"Go!" She growled at Hawk, who was driving.

Safehouse F

The trip back had been almost silent and we were both dragged out of *Hound* and then almost thrown onto the mat.

I knew the look – Hit Girl was almost speechless with rage. For a moment I almost laughed at the thought that the last time I was in so much shit, Foxtail had been involved then, too. Almost – if I had laughed, Hit Girl would have probably ripped my head off right there and then!

"I am not going to say anything right now – let's move on and I hope you both learnt something from today," Hit Girl said quietly before she stalked off toward the armoury.

"I thought my life was about to end..." Saoirse commented and I could see her shaking.

"So did I," I replied.

The following morning Monday

Glenview

Nobody said a word to either of us over breakfast, so we just ate and got ready for school.

Neither of us had slept well, my mind kept replaying the boy's head coming apart. I had spent quite a while in the shower, cleaning off the girl's blood from my face and it had been in my hair too. Were Saoirse and me going to be the only survivors of Urban Predator?

It was going to be a difficult day.

That night

Glenview

As I did each night, I went to check on the kids.

Danny was fast asleep, sprawled across the bed as he usually was. I tucked him back under his duvet before I walked through the bathroom and into Anne-Marie's room. The young girl was asleep, tucked deep down under her duvet, only the top of her hair was visible. Her breathing was steady and she was safe, so I moved on.

Across the landing, I pushed open the door to the girl's room.

"Stephanie!" I growled.

The young girl was asleep at her desk, her head resting on her arms on top of piles of books and paper. Some of the books were her math – sorry maths – homework and the rest were various books on firearms. I had warned her about burning the candle from both ends – but it was partially my fault.

When she was not running around protecting the streets of Chicago as Psyche, she was busy with several other activities. There was training; at the house, at D-JAK or at Safehouse F. There was also her training of the newer potential vigilantes, namely Danny, Anne-Marie and Lauren. Finally, there was her school homework. The girl was simply exhausted and no matter what I said, she would still push herself to get everything done – like me, she would never allow anything to get the better of her. I knew from bitter experience what it was like to push yourself till you collapsed.

I turned around to find the other girl, this one teenaged. Saoirse was asleep on the bed, books and paper beside her. She was the same as Stephanie – she would push herself all day long. She had her 9th grade homework to do, as well as her training for *Fusion*.

The girls were in their pyjamas, which for both was just an overlarge t-shirt. I cleared away the books and paper from the bed and carefully shifted Saoirse under the duvet. She was obviously tired as she did nothing more than moan as I moved her. If it were me being moved, I would have leapt up and attempted to strangle the person moving me! Next, I manoeuvred Stephanie into the bed too. She opened her eyes for a moment and smiled at me.

"Night, mum..."

Then her eyes closed again.

The next evening
Tuesday

54th and Cermack

He was tired.

It had been a very long day, which had dulled his senses and he never noticed the Police cruiser until it was too late. The lights came on, followed by the siren, so he slowed. Then all hell broke loose as vehicles seemed to appear from every direction.

Everybody was yelling and he heard half the alphabet being shouted at him.

"CPD!"

"FBI!"

"ATF!"

"NCIS!"

He was hauled out of his car by two plain-clothed Federal Agents with 'NCIS' on their body armour.

"What's going on?"

"Hank Myers, you are under arrest..." Special Agent DiNozzo replied and continued with the Miranda rights.

"I've done nothing..."

"Murder – multiple counts..." Special Agent Gibbs commented.

"More murder – across state lines..." Special Agent Fornell added.

"We also have a case of a dozen M4 Assault Rifles..." Special Agent Keates finished.

"I know nothing about any guns..." Myers bleated.

"Gotcha! You never denied the murders..." Special Agent DiNozzo commented.

Glenview

Morgan, along with her Aunt Emily and Uncle John, were over for dinner when my cell rang.

"Special Agent Gibbs . . . you have news?" I growled.

"We have him."

"That's very good to know. May we see him?"

"Yes, you and Miss Hella, or should I say, Raven, can see him if you promise not to kill him."

I was silent for a moment. I had expected Gibbs to work out the connection – how much more had he worked out? After a brief talk about a time and place, I dropped the call and saw Morgan looking at me expectantly.

"Raven and Hit Girl have an appointment," I said simply.

Chicago Police Department District 21

I was nervous.

I had never expected the day to arrive when I would have to actually confront the man who killed my parents and who had almost killed me. I was going into the room as Morgan Hella, not as Raven; I wanted him to see my face. Mindy would be with me as Hit Girl. I had promised not to kill the man and as such, I was unarmed.

Hit Girl pulled open the door and I went in. Then man looked up at me. I froze as that night played again in my mind and I saw him again, I saw my parents...

"You fucking bastard," I growled.

The man grinned.

"So you are the girl I missed..."

"I'll be right back..." Special Agent Gibbs said as he walked out of the room and the man's smile vanished as the door click shut.

Fifteen minutes later

"I miss something?" Special Agent Gibbs asked as he came through the door and took in the man's swollen and bloody face.

"He slipped," I said as innocently as I could.

"Fair enough."

The man was more scared than he had ever been in his life.

"You said they would not kill me..."

"I did – they will not kill you," Special Agent Gibbs confirmed with a grin. "I said nothing about roughing you up a bit..."

***Chapter 260*: Foxtail the Vigilante**

Tuesday night

I was having difficulty getting my mind in order.

I was in the enormous Jaguar that Mindy drove and we were on our way back to her place. My mind reeled with the events that had closed off the most horrific part of my life.

"It feels weird doesn't it?"

"Huh?"

"Your purpose for being who you are – that purpose is taken away from you once you complete your mission."

"You been there?" I asked.

"I became Hit Girl to avenge the death of my Mom. Then my Daddy was killed and I almost died avenging him. But, with help, I killed that bastard who had fucked up my life. Then I had a void; my reason for being was gone. I stopped being Hit Girl for a while and looking back, I regret that now."

"I only became Raven because of what happened to me – now it is in the past, maybe I can stop being Raven now..."

"Is that what you want?"

"I don't know..."

"Talk to Stephanie and Saoirse, they are in a similar position – their reason for being is gone too."

"Thanks, Mindy, and thank you for putting up with my shit. I owe you, big time."

"Anytime, Morgan."

The following afternoon

Safehouse F

I picked up Stephanie and Saoirse from school and took them directly to the Safehouse.

There was plenty to do, as I wanted to talk with Morgan among other things. The past few days had been hectic. I had almost lost Stephanie and SD to the CIA, yet again. At least Morgan had some closure; I knew what that was like.

While I went to see Morgan, I sent Saoirse with Stephanie who would show her new friend, Foxtail's new combat suit.

Once in the bedroom, I turned to SD.

"Strip!"

SD smirked at me.

"I never knew you were like that, Stephanie!"

I scowled and glared, feeling my face warming up.

"Do you want a slap?" I demanded. "Because I *will* slap you, *so hard*... Strip to your underwear – *now!*"

SD started to laugh.

"What's so fucking funny, Foxtail?"

"I've never known so much attitude come from such a small package..."

"I prefer: compact, if you don't mind..."

"Whatever!" I laughed as I began to pull off my clothes.

I felt strange when I pulled on the combat suit, piece by piece, as Stephanie handed the items to me.

The suit was comfortable and not as heavy as I had thought that it might be. I quite liked the colour scheme too, not to mention the weapons. Normally, when I had fought, I only wore a Kevlar vest and maybe a mask, but nothing as hi-tech as the combat suit that I was now pulling on. The suit also gave me a sense of belonging – I was to be part of something.

"I've been advised by those with tits that wearing a comfortable sports bra and a t-shirt is best."

I smirked and laughed at Stephanie's expression as she spoke.

"Sorry, Steph – couldn't resist!"

"Cheap shot, Foxy..."

"Stop calling me that..."

"Whatever you say . . . Foxy!"

"Little brat, I ought a..."

"Yeah, yeah – I can handle a bitch like you..."

"One day, we'll have a proper fight, just you and me..."

"Bring it on, Foxy...!"

The little bitch bolted out the door.

I heard giggling and I turned to see Stephanie running out of the bedroom.

I laughed – what had she done? My question was answered very quickly.

"I'll fucking kill you!" Foxtail yelled after the rapidly retreating Psyche.

"What's up, Foxtail?" I asked.

"She has a big mouth and I want to shut it . . . firmly!"

"You'll have to take a ticket on that one... How does it feel?"

"Awesome – very comfortable and my swords sit perfectly – I like the pistols, too, thanks."

"Thought you might – you seemed like a Beretta kind of girl."

I had bought the girl a pair of Beretta Px4 Storm Compact Type G pistols in .40-calibre Smith & Wesson. I had seen her shooting with .40-calibre rounds in a Glock and she was very good; she could also handle the extra fire-power too.

One of the nice things about being a vigilante *and* having your older daughter being a vigilante, was that you could kick her fucking *arse*!

It was not often that we sparred together – physically at least. There was a nine-year age gap for a start, not to mention more than a few inches and pounds! However, she was a trained assassin, so I did not pull my punches as she most definitely did *not* pull hers!

Joshua was taking bets on how long the fight would last.

The times on the board varied from ten seconds to eight minutes – I'd bet on under two... They were good, but eight minutes? Fuck off!

"Vigilantes – standby!" Dave shouted.

I was standing in the centre of the mat facing the briefing room and I was enjoying all the attention. At the far end of the mat to my left, stood Psyche in her full combat suit. At the opposite end of the mat, to my right, stood Foxtail, in her new combat suit. The dark browns and light orange highlights looked good on her slim teenage figure.

"Jackal – standby on the clock!" Dave continued.

I allowed my body to steady itself . . . I closed my eyes and listened for my two eager opponents.

"Three – two – one..."

A whistle blew and I heard the pounding of two pairs of boots and then silence. It was very obvious that they had both taken off, flying in for a kick – I took a deep breath, measuring the distances and then I back flipped out of the way, leaving the two younger vigilantes to collide on the mat.

"Thirty seconds gone!"

I didn't rest or pause, nor did I give either of them a chance to recover. I reached out and seized both vigilantes by the arms and flipped them over. Psyche caught herself and landed lightly but Foxtail lost her footing and she sprawled onto the mat in a very undignified manner. I kicked her hard in the stomach, causing her to double up in pain. Psyche yelled out angrily and I caught her leg as it flew in towards my head and I proceeded to dump her on top of her former enemy, face down. To keep her down, I drove a fist into her kidney followed up by a foot between her legs – she screamed out in pain.

"Stop the clock!" I yelled and then looked up at Joshua.

"Ninety-seven seconds – Hit Girl wins!"

***The next afternoon
Thursday***

Glenview

"Hi, Morgan – come in."

"Thanks, Mindy – is Saoirse about?"

"Upstairs," Stephanie cut in as she came down the stairs and then headed into the kitchen.

I headed up the stairs, turned left to follow the passageway and then turned right into 'The British Sector' – I loved the sign! I could hear music playing – Meat Loaf: Modern Girl; I liked Meat Loaf. I pushed open the door and was shocked to find Saoirse on the bed, sobbing her heart out into a pillow. Maybe she hated Meat Loaf... I walked closer and she looked up at me.

"Go away . . . please..."

That was not the usual, eat shit and die, Foxtail – it was just a normal, very upset, fourteen-year-old girl.

"What's going on, SD?"

"Leave me..."

"Not happening – we're friends, aren't we?" I asked, pulling the girl up into a sitting position and hugging her tightly.

"I remember them..."

Huh?

"Who?"

"I killed them both... Then I forgot about them..."

"What are you talking about, girl – you ain't making sense."

"I killed my parents – I remember now, a bullet in each head – an easy shot, simple, just a gentle squeeze of the trigger – once, twice..."

"Oh, fuck!" Came a voice from the door – it was Stephanie.

"She's rambling – I found her sobbing into her pillow..."

"She's remembering shit from soon after she was taken – she went through eight years of conditioning... I've been remembering horrible shit over the past several weeks and she has a lot more crap to remember than I do," Stephanie explained with a pained expression on her face.

"It was their favourite song..."

Stephanie looked up at me and scowled.

"The fucking song – it triggered a buried memory... Look after her; I need to tell Mindy."

"Go – I'll keep her safe."

"Mindy!"

I turned as I heard footsteps pounding down the stairs – she may have been compact, but she had a heavy foot fall.

"Mindy – it's SD..."

I ran past Stephanie and up the stairs, going straight to the bedroom. There I found Saoirse in tears, being cuddled by Morgan.

"The music set her off," Stephanie said as she caught up.

"I'm sorry," Saoirse apologised. "It was the memories; they were a shock to me – I had completely blanked out their murder."

"It's okay – the same thing happened to Stephanie one night; she had total recall of the event and it really scared her too – Anne-Marie too as she witnessed it."

"You are not alone, SD – you have friends now; friends that care for you," Stephanie said and I saw Saoirse smile.

"I'll help you, SD – I have demons in my life too, all of which resurfaced over the past few weeks as I hunted that bastard. I can relate and . . ."

". . . I know you're needing a home, SD – would you come live with me?" I asked slowly.

"You don't want me – I'm..."

"... A killer? Damaged?" I laughed. "That makes two of us..."

"I..."

"We can help each other and you'd have to put up with a very bossy older sister..."

Saoirse smiled for a moment.

"You'd have to put up with a pretty annoying younger sister."

"I could always kick your fucking ass!"

"You could always try!"

Friday night

Safehouse F Command Centre

"What is this?"

"Mindy! Just in time for the first viewing of something very special..."

I was not buying it!

"Will I want to kill you after I have watched it?"

Marty considered the question for a moment before smirking.

"Probably..."

He reached over and pressed a button. The enormous screen flickered and an image appeared – it was in black and white, but otherwise it was good quality. I recognised it instantly and Dave's eyes went wide. Both our memories flew back six years, five months and eight days . . . not that I was counting... There was no sound, which made it all the creepier – but I could remember every damn word...

...+...

"*You okay sweetheart?*"

"*I, err, I lost my mommy and daddy...*"

"*She lost her mommy and daddy... You want to use my cell phone...mmm? Now, can you remember the number?*"

Bang! Bang! Bang! Four men were dead – well almost – Bang!

...+...

"Fucking hell!" Chloe exclaimed for most present. "You put down four men with three bullets!"

"You cold fucking bitch!" Josh added in awe.

"She's really cute!" Erika commented.

"Really?" Abby retorted. "Four men dead with four shots and you think she's *cute*?"

"I like the kilt, what can I say?"

All eyes turned to me and Dave. I said nothing, but I felt *really* uncomfortable.

"With no power comes no responsibility – except that wasn't true..." Dave muttered. "Kick-Ass came into his own that night..."

The screen flickered and changed just as the younger Mindy swiped a card in the elevator. Then she started to strip...

"Wow!" Curtis commented as first the kilt dropped to the floor revealing my rather plain pink knickers.

I began to blush and considered getting Marty to stop the video when I remembered something...

On the video, I stopped unbuttoning my blouse and I stared up at the camera. I was seen to scowl and then pick up my pistol and put a bullet into the camera.

Curtis looked very annoyed...

..._...

The screen flickered and changed; it was another lobby – an elevator in the centre of the wall and two men. The doors slid open and...

"Bloody hell!" Stephanie said in awe as the rope dart flew.

It was over in just seconds and three men lay on the floor, very dead.

"Fuck she could move..." Chloe commented unnecessarily.

"She still can, Shadow!" I growled.

The camera view was not good, but you could just make out the eleven-year-old Hit Girl as she took cover behind the stand, hiding from the approaching men, her pistols raised. Then she burst out, firing the first pistol and she vanished from sight.

"My God that girl is hot!" Curtis said.

"Hey!" Megan growled.

"Thanks, Curtis!" My face was burning with what, pride?

"Stay away, kid – she's mine!" Dave quipped.

I was unhappy about the video – I thought it had all been wiped. There was very little evidence of Hit Girl's existence before *that night*, except for many corpses of course, but that video showed me unmasked and killing...

"The pigtails make you look so sweet, Mindy..." Josh chuckled.

"I had a thing for them, back then..." I replied quietly.

"She may look cute, but Mindy back then – well, she was wild!" Dave cautioned.

"Hey, Megan – how about you in pigtails and a sexy kilt?"

"Curtis... Maybe, we'll see..." Megan replied with a grin.

I groaned.

"Where the fuck did you get it?" I demanded, turning back to Marty.

"Short version – Damon's online backup expired and I grabbed the data before it was dumped. There's more... The NYPD disposed of some old evidence and luckily for us, this was sent to Marcus and he passed it onto me..."

"A teddy bear?" Chloe enquired.

"Not *that* thing?" Dave groaned.

***Chapter 261*: Puppy Training**

Author's Note: *Please be warned that this chapter includes smut and behaviour that should be seen as indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a very dubious, unseemly or suggestive nature – oh, yeah!*

March 5th, 2016
Saturday

It was about six weeks since the puppies were born and the training had begun.

We were also able to identify the pecking order in the 'nest'. Kiara, my bitch, appeared to be the leader, followed by Razor – Stephanie's dog. The runt of the litter appeared to be Piper, but not by much. All seven pups were firm friends and while they would play fight and there were regular yelps of pain, they would never hurt each other. Each animal had begun the bonding with their owner and their siblings early on and they all knew who they belonged to. They also accepted everybody else and knew who was part of their family and who was not.

We had also worked out their vigilante names.

Kiara was Loki, Hope was Dart, Josie was Kes, Layla was Ardent, Piper was Siren, Hercules was Sampson and Razor was Blade. The pups were encouraged to wear a mask, just as their mother did – that bit was relatively easy; when the pups saw their mother wearing *her* armoured mask, they followed suit. It took a while for them to get comfortable with the mask in place and to stop chewing each other's mask, but we got there – eventually!

I had to admit it was a lot of fun training the pups and everybody was taking part – even grumpy Marcus. We had also begun to expose the young pups to the outside world, other animals and the noises associated with the real world. They learnt to ride in the back of an SUV too, without too much travel sickness. We acclimatised them to sharp bangs and firecrackers long before we would start moving onto blanks and then real bullets.

Sophia herself was proving to be a hard task master and she often told the pups off with a simple growl, a bark, or a sharp swat with a paw. Once or twice she had waded into a play fight to break things up and all of the pups respected their mother and they *never* 'spoke' back. They all knew the meaning of 'NO' and 'GOOD' plus the consequences associated with misbehaving. The pups were 'kids', so they *did* misbehave, just as human kids did – so they also got punished for misbehaving.

There was also much fun with toilet training them!

That afternoon

Glenview

"Hi, kids!"

Dave, Danny and I had just returned from walking seven pups and their mother – what a task! It was like trying to herd cats – each pup constantly found something 'exciting' to go and look at, usually in the opposite direction of the others... At least once a giggling Danny had been overrun by excited canine's that tried to lick him to death and he had to be rescued by Sophia who would wade in and seize each pup by the scruff of the neck.

"Hi, Mom..." Anne-Marie replied.

I noticed that she was grinning fit to burst.

"You got something to say?" I enquired.

"Steph owes her jar twelve bucks..."

Stephanie glared at her traitorous younger sister before she strode forwards and then whispered something into Anne-Marie's ear.

"Better make that *sixteen* bucks!" Anne-Marie added, her eyes wide in shock as her big sister blushed and scowled.

"Can I write an IOU?"

"You just got your weekly allowance of nine dollars, plus a ten-dollar bonus – so you should have plenty."

"But, I wanted to..."

"Well, you'll just have to manage with the remaining three dollars..."

Anne-Marie was smirking and the cruel streak in her actually enjoyed seeing her sister get into trouble. Stephanie had noticed and she turned on her sister.

"You're a dirty little rat!" She growled.

"Mom!"

"What?" I asked innocently – Anne-Marie was not the only one with a cruel streak. "She never swore and she's actually perfectly accurate – to be honest, and fair – I think that Steph should pay the original twelve and *you*, should pay the remaining four!"

"WHAT?"

"Yeah, tell-tale-tit!" Stephanie laughed.

That evening

The Home of Abigail Hunt

It had to happen sometime.

When I had arrived home that afternoon, after school, I had found Mom looking really pissed and by 'pissed', I mean 'grounded for life' type pissed... It only took seconds to figure out why as I cast my eyes across the kitchen side. On the kitchen side were three *very* incriminating items: a custom Glock 19 Gen4 pistol in nine-millimetre, a six-inch carbon-fibre knife . . . and a mask... Mom had obviously been searching!

"I can explain *everything*..." I tried.

"Abigail Elizabeth Hunt, you are in *big* trouble – what can you *possibly* say that can explain these items?"

The truth was always the best...

"I'm a secret vigilante and I work for *Fusion*..."

Mom cut me off.

"*Fusion* – as in Kick-Ass and Hit Girl?" Mom laughed derisively. "Pull the other one; it's got bells on!"

"Honest – I go by 'Hal' – that's my identity with *Fusion*. I promise you – all that time you thought I was with friends; I've been supporting *Fusion* in their activities. I wasn't in New York, last year – I was in Gotham and I... I killed for the first time."

Mom studied my expression and I had a thought that she was beginning to believe me...

"Not buying it – I think I'm going to have to hand these into the Police..."

"No!" I almost screamed. "I'll call the Police..."

..._...

A very long and uncomfortable thirty-five minutes later, there was a knock on the door. Mom went to open it.

"Evening, ma'am – Sergeants Fellowes and Murphy – could you show us what you say that you found in your daughter's bedroom?"

Mom showed them the pistol, knife and mask.

"I see... Could you and your daughter come with us, please?"

..._...

Mom seemed worried, but I was not – obviously. Paul scooped up the offending items with a wink in my direction. I smiled as we were both led out of the house and then into a waiting unmarked SUV.

Forty minutes later, we turned into Safehouse D.

"Where are we? What is this?"

Mom was panicking as we drove through the doors into the darkness and then the doors closed behind us and the lights came on.

"Oh my God!" Mom exclaimed as Titan, Iron Hide and Hound came into view, closely followed by Hit Girl, Shadow and Medic.

..._...

"It's safe Mom," I promise.

"Good evening . . . Hal!" Hit Girl growled in a tone that showed she was not angry.

That was a relief, to say the least; I had expected Mindy to be really pissed.

"Hi, Mrs Hunt!" Shadow said cheerfully – she was *not* using her voice modulator.

Mom's expression changed to major confusion.

"Chloe?" Mom enquired – Mom had known Chloe ever since we had first met, over two years before.

Shadow removed her mask.

"Yes, it's Chloe!" Chloe replied with a smile.

"Does your mother know, Chloe?"

"Yes, Vera – she does..."

Mom was completely stunned as Cathy pulled off her own mask. She was followed by Hit Girl reaching up and removing her own mask. I turned to see Paul and Sam smirking as Mindy came into view.

"Mindy Lizewski, is Hit Girl?"

"Yes, Mrs Hunt, and your daughter is my tech wizard; she goes by the name: Hal."

"My... My daughter is a vigilante?"

"Yes, your daughter is a very brave and talented vigilante."

"How long?"

"Over two years, Mom..."

"Ever since she rumbled *me*..." Chloe admitted with an embarrassed grin.

Mindy walked over and she put her arm around my shoulders. I felt tense and a little ashamed.

"Don't worry about it, Abby, it had to happen one day; to be honest I'm surprised that it took this long – besides, we vetted your Mom a *long* time ago..."

The Home of Abigail Hunt

I was feeling decidedly uncomfortable as we returned home.

"You have some good friends, honey."

"Yes, Mom, I do."

"You say that you've killed..."

"Two men, in Gotham – we had to bail out of our Command Van; they had destroyed the rear axle. I scrambled out of the escape hatch in the roof and jumped down to the ground. Two men came around Lucille; I dropped them both with a double-tap to each chest..."

"Lucille?"

"That was our Command Van – before we destroyed her..."

"I'm proud of you, honey. You Chicago Vigilantes are all heroes and you do so much good in this city."

I felt myself blushing furiously.

"Thanks, Mom."

***The following evening
Sunday***

***Glenview
The living room***

We had the house to ourselves.

Marcus had picked up the three kids earlier that afternoon – brave soul that he was! We had a lot planned; just for the two of us...

"Are you ready for me, Dave?"

Her tone was silky and seductive, so I turned to look and I couldn't say anything as Mindy leant tantalisingly against the door frame. Every ounce of blood flowed south and within seconds, I was ready for launch. She was dressed in just a white cotton shirt, one of mine, and nothing else – I could see *everything* through the soft cotton. She walked over to the fireplace then stood and looked out of the windows. I went over to my wife, stood behind her and began running my hands up her silky soft thighs.

As my hands moved up to her waist, the shirt moved upwards as Mindy pushed back against me, rubbing her soft, curved buttocks into my very hard, straight... The buttons came undone and the shirt existed only around her neck as I gently kissed my way across her left shoulder blade and over to her neck. Her nipples were hard, pointy and her breathing was growing laboured as she savoured every touch on her sensitive and perfect skin.

I continued to kiss her neck as my hands wandered from around her thighs to her waist and then across her stomach and down through her soft, but thick, pubic hair. I was in my own world, one where only me and Mindy existed – the whole house could have exploded around us and we would never have noticed...

Mindy's curves and her skin felt like an aphrodisiac beneath my fingers. I was playing her like a musical instrument; each touch of a finger elicited a groan, or a whisper, or just increased breathing. I enjoyed the sweet smell of her soft blonde hair as it moved across my face. She turned her head to the left, to kiss me, as my hands moved up to her small, but firm breasts with their very sensitive nipples that caused Mindy to gasp as my fingers gently toyed with the tips in passing.

Her full lips touched mine and they felt charged with electricity as I kissed my wife back, enjoying the sweet taste of her as she melted into me. Her eyes were closed as she sank into the nether world of erogenous stimulation as I gently caressed every erogenous zone I could get my hands on – the external ones at any rate...

The kitchen

"Oh, fuck me – they're fucking *at it*, literally!"

"Oh, my...!" Chloe acknowledged her hand over her mouth.

We had come over to say hello, knowing that the kids were elsewhere. Despite us being overt nymphomaniacs, it had never actually occurred to us that Dave and Mindy might be... Dave was caressing Mindy who was all but naked in the living room. They both seemed oblivious to us as we stood in the kitchen unable to draw our eyes away from the scene before us. Then I saw Mindy turn toward us so we both dived flat on the floor, but we still stared into the living room. The lights were off in both rooms but there was minor lighting from the library above the living room and it spilled over and down into the living room where it illuminated Mindy's pale skin.

I had never witnessed anybody behaving like Dave and Mindy were. The love emanating between them was obvious and it was also intoxicating. I crawled over to Chloe; she was lying on her stomach, gazing intently at the goings on in the living room. Chloe was wearing joggers which I seized around the waist and yanked down to her ankles. She giggled as her slightly damp knickers quickly joined the trousers – she kicked them and her trainers off as I ran my hands up her long legs to her waist.

Chloe's thighs were strong and muscular, thanks to her training and I loved them. Her backside was just as strong and I ran my hands over and then around her waist, she willingly lifted her pelvic region so that I could run the tips of my fingers through her soft pubic hair. I quickly wriggled out of my trousers and underwear, rolling Chloe onto her back and pushing her top further up her chest. I roughly pushed Chloe's bra upwards so her compact breasts became available and I teased the two very prominent nipples causing my girlfriend to giggle and her breathing to catch and increase at each touch.

I became oblivious to everything around me as I caressed Chloe's perfect body.

The living room

Finally, she turned to me and wrapped her hands around my neck, her tantalisingly beautiful body, naked but for the loose shirt; she kissed me and I kissed her back, her right leg rose up my body and I seized hold of it, pulling her in close, feeling the warmth emanating from her crotch as if I was leaning against a fiery furnace.

Damn, if I wasn't feeling the heat building up in my groin – I pushed Mindy backwards and I kicked off my shoes as Mindy attacked my belt with barely concealed gusto, quickly followed by my trousers and then my shorts. Her soft skin against my aching cock felt like heaven as we continued to kiss. The wetness that I could feel told me that she was very ready for what was to come next.

..._...

We moved out of the living room and into the foyer and by the time we had reached the curved staircase, we were both completely naked. I loved the touch of Mindy's hardened nipples on my chest as I rubbed up against her. She was moaning each time I touched a sensitive area and I could tell that she was getting desperate.

"Oh, God . . . I need you . . . fucking fuck me!"

Mindy pulled me backwards – you can guess with what – then she lay back on the fourth step up and I lowered myself onto her and then moved inside my wife. She was hot, in every possible way; a nuclear explosion could have been no hotter. I felt her warmth and her moisture as I pushed in deeply; I felt her opening for me and she groaned loudly as I slid inside as smoothly as a .50-calibre round slid into a Browning's well-oiled breech . . . damn, I was starting to think like Mindy!

I was locked and loaded, so I thrust and thrust, oblivious to everything going on around me.

The foyer

The stairs kind of dug into my butt, but I did not care as bolt after bolt of sensation coursed through my body every time that my husband thrust himself inside me, touching every erogenous point as he went.

I had never felt anything like it. I felt loved – oh, my God, I felt loved. My body tingled all over and I loved it. His hands moved gently, but firmly and purposefully, over my *very* sensitive nipples which caused my breath to hitch each time they were touched and I struggled to breathe as my clit was trapped between our pelvic bones which caused an unending burst of sheer unbearable ecstasy.

I screamed and I screamed. The rush made all my senses hyper-active; around me I heard noises – I could hear Sophia barking and I could have sworn that I could hear another scream – maybe it was just me? Who gave a fucking shit... My legs locked as the orgasm came full force and I continued to scream through the overpowering surge of sheer exhilaration as Dave filled me up with his searing fluid.

..._...

I whimpered as Dave pulled out of me and I felt unbelievably empty all of a sudden. Dave was panting as he fell back against the wall. We both lay there for several minutes before I finally thought that I was able to move.

"I need a fucking drink..." I growled and struggled to my feet.

I felt Dave's strong arms pulling me up and I felt a little weird and unsteady, but I wrapped an arm around Dave and he supported me as we made our way back into the living room and on towards the kitchen.

"What the fuck?"

There were clothes scattered on the floor around the arch from the living room. I recognised the knickers – Chloe! I hit the light switch and saw two pairs of legs vanish behind the kitchen counter.

"Come out!" I growled.

Chloe and Joshua stood up and I saw that they were both very naked, as were we.

"Sorry," Chloe began. "We came over to see you guys and well, you seemed busy, so we..."

I laughed.

"Did you have fun?" I asked.

"Fuck, yeah!" Chloe giggled.

"Well, that's all that matters..." I replied and grabbed some towels from a pile by the door to the swimming pool.

We sat in the kitchen and enjoyed a coffee.

Mindy and Dave showed no embarrassment whatsoever at having been seen fucking by us. We were friends and that was all that mattered.

"You ready for more?" I teased Josh.

"I don't know..." Josh replied as he finished his coffee.

I do not know what came over me, but I stood up and dropped my towel.

"Does this help...?"

Josh's eyes told me that it did help! Then Mindy shocked me...

"What about you, got any of that hot Kick-Ass juice left?"

Dave's eyes went wide as his wife dropped her own towel. Dave and Josh exchanged a look and both just shrugged before dropping their own towels – both were very, very ready for more...

***Chapter 262*: The Bully**

***The following morning
Monday***

***Glenview
The kitchen***

"Oh – my – God!" Stephanie groaned.

"I have a bad feeling about this..." Anne-Marie added.

"Is that a pair of knickers on the kitchen floor?" Danny enquired.

"A bra over there..." Paige commented with a grimace.

"Those clothes scattered about the kitchen belong to Chloe," Stephanie said.

"I think we should run away!" Megan growled, fearful of what else might be discovered.

They all turned as Sophia appeared at the top of the stairs to the basement. She lay down and whined, covering her eyes with her paws – even the dog was freaked out!

"What's this?" Danny asked as he inspected some gloop that dripped from one of the steps on the stairs.

Megan's eyes went wide and she looked like she wanted to be sick.

"*Don't touch it!*" She warned.

"Found 'em!" Anne-Marie shouted.

The master suite

"Okay..." Paige commented as we entered Dave and Mindy's room to find four people asleep in the enormous bed.

There was movement and Chloe sat up from between Joshua and Mindy. She was topless, but she rapidly pulled the duvet up to cover herself when she discovered that she had an audience.

"Err, morning, Paige, err, kids!" She said as she blushed furiously and nudged Mindy who was asleep on her front, but it was obvious that she was topless too.

"Fuck off Chloe – I'm fucked out..." Mindy growled, but then she looked up and followed Chloe's furtive glance towards the foot of the bed.

"Oh great!" She growled.

"We'll just leave you all to get showered and dressed," Paige said delicately and she pushed the four eager-eyed kids out of the bedroom.

"Well, *that* was embarrassing!" Chloe commented.

"Ya think!" I groaned – poking Dave hard in the ribs as Chloe did the same with Joshua.

"I need a shower," Dave groaned as he regained consciousness.

"I'm first!" I yelled, jumping out of the bed and I ran naked into the bathroom.

Not surprisingly, an equally naked Chloe soon joined me in the shower and we quickly cleaned ourselves off.

"That was a fun night..." Chloe said with a laugh and a quick giggle.

"It was a first, I can say..." I replied with a devious smile.

We had enjoyed a *great* night together.

A short while later...

The kitchen

"Morning, kids!"

"Hi, Mom!" Danny and Anne-Marie said as they ran over for a hug.

"It's disgusting, that's what it is!" Stephanie growled as she reluctantly gave me a hug.

"Sorry, Paige – we kinda got carried away last night, and..."

"Don't apologise for being human, Mindy – Marcus and I have fun when Megan's away too..."

"Ewww... I did *not* want to hear that!" Megan exclaimed looking horrified.

"Me neither – how long now?" I enquired, ignoring my little sister's horrified expression.

"Eight to ten weeks left – I hope!" Paige commented, running a hand over her very visible bump.

"You still 'have fun' even with *that* in the way?" I asked, winking at the horrified Megan.

"Oh yeah; I was still having sex until about a week before Megan was born..."

"I... Yuck... Ewww... I'm going to check on Piper!" Megan growled and the girl ran out of the kitchen.

Later that day

Lake View High School

It was a normal Monday, but boy was it gonna be a doozy, as my Dad would put it.

Life was normal for me – well, as normal as it ever got for the twelve-year-old son of a CPD cop. I also kept a secret; one of the most awesome secrets ever. Forget Roswell, or who shot JFK, I knew a much better secret; I knew the secret identity of Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, not to mention many others. It killed me not to be able to tell anyone but I knew the consequences of that, besides I had integrity.

Bradley Murphy was doing well, I thought.

..._...

I was dragged out of my reverie by the sounds of crying. In the next corridor, down beside some lockers, I found a girl sobbing her heart out. I paused and then my heart skipped a beat – it was Lauren Edwards; I had fancied her ever since I had started at the school. The girl had had a particularly turbulent couple of months, if the rumours were right. I knelt down beside the girl.

"Lauren?"

She looked up at me from red eyes and her beautiful looks were marred by the tears that streamed down her cheeks.

"Hi, err, Brad isn't it?"

"Yeah."

Wow, she actually knew my name! She was in eighth grade while I was only in seventh...

"What happened?"

"I'm a fucking slut..."

What?

"Woah, there – no you are not, Lauren..."

"She said that I was a slut for allowing it to happen..."

"That's rubbish, and you know it."

We were interrupted by another voice.

"He's usually full of shit, but for once he's speaking the truth, Lauren."

I turned to see Chloe standing directly behind me – damn; that girl could move like a shadow.

"Who was it?" I persisted.

"That Grant bitch..."

I saw anger in Chloe's face and I knew what that meant. Chloe was a tenth-grader and guys in seventh grade rarely even *talked* to girls three grades higher.

"Chloe, I know what you're thinking – you can't..."

She turned and glared at me.

"You little fuck; you do *not* tell *me* what to do..."

"I didn't mean it like that, honest."

"Sorry, Brad – me and that Grant bitch have a history – but no. While I would like nothing more than to punch that fucking lesbian in the..." Chloe calmed down slightly. "I think that Lauren should have a go..."

"What can she do?"

"She's spent time at D-JAK, Brad; she can look after herself.

"If you're sure, Chloe – I trust you, but Lauren's not like you..."

"You'd be surprised!" Chloe replied with a wink.

I thought back over a year to that fateful Friday night in February.

She had landed a fair few punches on me as her minions had pinned me to the wall of a cinema. Those punches had hurt, brushing me badly and putting me out of action. I never did get my own back on her, but Joshua had considered killing her once he had found out what had happened. I had been saved by Kyle that night.

Now, she was getting her claws into somebody else and that had to stop. The only reason that the bitch was still breathing was because I was better than her and I knew when not to kill – if only the ugly snapdragon knew how close she had come... Lauren had to face her; it was the only way for Lauren to get past her problems.

While I supported Lauren; I would never want to be in her shoes.

"Where are you going?"

Chloe just stalked off – I checked my watch; Juno Grant would probably still be in lunch. I grabbed Lauren off the floor and we both ran after Chloe, towards the dining room. What exactly did the devious Chloe have in mind? I was actually glad that Chloe was not going to do the need...

If she did, then there was going to be a blood bath and Chloe would be exposed as Shadow.

The dining room

I knew trouble when I saw it

I nudged Josh and pointed over to the doors that led into the dining room.

"Oh, fuck!" Josh groaned.

We had both recognised the expression on Chloe's face, not to mention the force that she had used on the doors – she was going to kill, literally. She made a bee-line for the table, two over – it was not a great leap of intelligence to figure out that Juno Grant was her target.

"Kyle – we gotta stop her..." Josh warned.

It was a strange relationship really; I had dated Chloe for a while, before Josh had come onto the scene. Then I had stepped back once I had seen where Chloe's true feelings lay. Despite that, Josh and I were firm friends and we both enjoyed teasing the hell out of Chloe; an act, which while potentially very dangerous, was great fun!

However, we both knew the girl intimately, including her expressions and we both knew what she was capable of when she was angry.

Something was happening.

I went to the same school as Chloe and Josh – although they were both in tenth grade, but I was only in the ninth. My first day at the school had been daunting to say the least... Something new, meant something dangerous – at least it did to me; a new environment needed checking and all my senses operated automatically as I walked into the school. Chloe had offered to come in with me, but I had politely declined the kind offer; I had to manage on my own.

My eyes took in the cliques and the bullies, the jocks and the geeks – the usual groups found in the average high school. I kinda wished somebody would try to rip off my dinner money, but no, the school had little problems with bullying; certain people had stamped that out... My previous school had been very similar, but it had been much more rigid, which was why the CIA had chosen it for me.

My eyes also took in the entrances and exits... Places where I could hide in an emergency... Locations of alternative weapons... I couldn't stop myself; it was an automatic impulse, wherever I went.

At least I would know other kids at the school; mind you there was also Lauren in eighth grade, too. That felt a little strange, considering that I was training her to become a vigilante... I saw Lauren enter the dining room and I saw the tears on her face. She was being helped by a boy that I recognised from the seventh grade.

I had seen Chloe storm into the dining room and I had read her eyes – she was on a mission and somebody was about to get hurt – badly. I saw Josh jump up from his own seat along with another boy that I was acquainted with, Kyle. That kind confirmed my suspicions.

I decided to get closer so I could help my friends.

..._...

"SD!"

It was Lauren and she sank into my arms, sobbing. I looked at the boy, begging for an explanation.

"Somebody accused her of asking to be . . . you know..."

Naturally, I knew all about Lauren – and what had happened to her. I was incensed that somebody would use that against her.

"Who?"

"Juno Grant – Chloe's about to kill her..."

I had no idea who the boy was, but I sensed that he knew more than he was letting on – did he know about Chloe being Shadow? He used the word 'kill' like he knew that she *could* actually kill the girl. As I watched, I saw Josh and Kyle intercept Chloe. Oh, shit – she floored Kyle as he tried to restrain her! The Grant girl jumped up from her seat and tried to escape; I saw the fear in her eyes as she backed away.

Then Lauren pulled out of my arms and she bolted forwards. The Grant girl had backed away *towards* Lauren . . . I smiled – it was a fucking setup! Lauren struck Grant in the cheek with her right fist causing the older girl to crash into another table. Another boy jumped up – this one an eleventh-grader. I saw some resemblance to the girl – a big brother? Oh, wow – Chloe flattened him, too. Josh was trying to grab hold of his girlfriend, but she kept pushing away from him as she guarded Lauren's back.

I moved towards Lauren and Chloe.

..._...

As I got there, Lauren smacked Juno Grant hard across the face. The thirteen-year-old girl then seized the fifteen-year-old girl by the jaw and she stared into her eyes. Lauren was no longer crying, nor was she shaking, she was ice-cold.

"Don't – you – ever fuck with me again; you hear me, bitch?"

Juno just stared at Lauren – her face red and beginning to swell from the onslaught. She was angry, but I detected a trace of fear – and that trace was growing. I heard movement from my right and I turned to see two large girls pushing through the other kids – I had a feeling that they usually protected their boss. As they passed by me, both girls... How should I put it...? They banged heads and hit the floor rather hard... I noticed a boy from tenth-grade watching me; he smiled and nodded approvingly – I blushed, much to my annoyance and turned back to Lauren.

"You fucking hear me!" Lauren growled "Or are you deaf as well as fucking retarded?"

Lauren slapped Juno hard across the face. Like most bullies, Juno had very quickly had enough.

"I hear you..." She muttered.

"Louder – so your friends can hear you..."

Juno scowled as she raised her voice.

"I will not fuck with you, anymore... I'm sorry..."

The fifteen-year-old girl was suitably humiliated at the hands of a girl two-years her junior. Lauren released the girl and let her fall to the floor of the dining room. Then she turned and walked out of the dining room to a round of applause from the other kids. Chloe made to kick Juno in the side, but I looked at Josh and we both seized an arm and pulled her back, which was not easy... Josh used his considerable strength to hold her while I put my mouth to her ear.

"Are you fucking stupid? Stop this, now!"

Chloe growled as she looked at me – but she nodded.

"You going to behave?" A very pissed off Josh demanded.

"Yeah, sorry."

Later that afternoon

Cathy was *not* happy!

Neither was Lauren's mother. Both had been called in to see the school Principal as their respective daughters had punched two boys' and one girl's lights out! I went with Cathy for moral support. There, I found two rather annoyed looking teenagers. I vividly remembered one of my very own visits to the Principal at the school in New York – Marcus had been very angry and I had been a grumpy bitch – much as Chloe was at that moment.

It was obvious that both girls were guilty as hell – they both kept their heads down and neither looked up when we arrived. Isaac was there also – thankfully. I had received a call from Joshua who had explained everything that had happened. It had all been in defence of Lauren – at least it had started out that way, but somebody had lit Chloe's fuse and there was no putting *that* out!

I had also learnt that Lauren had a fuse too – and a vicious streak...

..._...

They both escaped with a suspension – two weeks for Chloe, but only a week for Lauren. Chloe was also grounded for four weeks and Lauren for two. Their mothers were both incensed at their daughters' behaviour, however, they did allow for the reasons if not the actual actions. As both mothers worked; I offered to monitor both girls at the Safehouse during the day. I saw Chloe grimace at that suggestion, but Cathy smirked and Lauren looked a little worried.

That night

Safehouse F

"Kind of nice to see some others doing that for a change," Anne-Marie chuckled.

Down below, two girls were on their eighteenth lap of the Safehouse. For Chloe it was the ultimate humiliation, considering that she was the number three operative in *Fusion* and therefore a senior member. Now, she was being punished along with our newest member. There was no room for *Fusion* members to operate on their own and I was not happy with Chloe allowing Lauren to get involved, but I understood the reasons.

So, as far as Chloe was concerned, I was punishing her for not having better judgement concerning Lauren, but a brief humiliation for her was good enough for me. For Lauren, she needed to learn to control her temper, especially in public. Rape had a lot of stigma attached and others saw it differently, with not everybody showing compassion. I also had a sharp word with Saoirse as she had been involved to some extent and she had not stopped Lauren from attacking the other girl.

I intended keeping an eye on Lauren; Nightmare was working out just fine.

***Chapter 263*: The Bear**

***One week later
Monday***

Safehouse F

My life sucked!

Mom was not happy with my behaviour, nor with my 'the end justifies the means' argument! I was only obtaining justice for my friend. Mom did remind me that most of my solo 'hare-brained' schemes tended to go awry, which in that case had left Kyle with a bruised cheek . . . I was mortified!

Anyway, Kyle had forgiven me, considering the situation, and his bruises were healing. As for Joshua... I was pulled out of my worries by Mindy.

"What's wrong Chloe?"

"I haven't had sex in a fucking week!"

"Oh?" I looked over at Josh who said nothing.

"Josh says that sex is a privilege and should be earned!" Chloe growled, glaring at her boyfriend.

I held up the first two fingers of my right hand.

"My fucking fingers just aren't cutting it!"

"That was more information than we needed!" Dave grinned. "Why?"

Chloe looked acutely embarrassed and shook her head.

"I'm not saying..."

"She needs to learn some responsibility!" Josh commented.

"How long?" I asked.

"Maybe six months..." Josh replied.

"SIX MONTHS!" Chloe yelled. "You said *two weeks*, you fucking bastard!"

I noticed Joshua's grin behind Chloe's back as she stalked off to the armoury and I laughed.

..._...

There was one more entry that closed off the Juno Grant incident. When Chloe, Lauren et al had left her, Juno Grant had been hurt, but conscious. Somehow, on her route to the nurse's office she had managed to pick up quite a few more bruises and lose consciousness. In my own personal, expert opinion, the bruises and loss of consciousness may have been related to her 'falling' the stairs. Nobody claimed ownership of her new injuries, but Lauren did report seeing a big smile on Brad Murphy's face...

On a lighter note, the pups were now eight-weeks-old and *full* of life.

The training was going well and they could all 'sit', 'lay down' and 'stay' as requested. Although there were some mutinies amongst the trainees. Kiara and Piper were on strike! They insisted on rolling onto their backs and whining every time that we asked them to do something. However, once their mother caught onto what they were doing, they were soon sulking after a major tongue lashing from Sophia.

Have you ever seen a German Shepherd puppy sulking after being told off by its mother? It is the sweetest goddamn thing ever and that was the hardest part of training them – their cuteness! We all had to be hard on them to teach them, but it was so difficult; however, their discipline would keep them alive when they were fully trained.

That Night

Safehouse F

"So, what's with the damn bear?"

"It's one of those Nanny-Cam things – just don't ask what Frank D'Amico had on it before what we're about to watch. I'm pretty certain that Mindy has never seen this," Marty explained. "She also refused to pre-watch it, so..."

"Okay, thanks," Megan said.

I was nervous – Marty had said that it showed Daddy in action... Dave was sitting beside me and he held my hand. Megan was on the other side of me, next to Chloe. Josh sat behind me with Marty and Abby.

...+...

The video began – six men were standing in a warehouse and weapons were evident. Then one man received a phone call and the other men moved off to take up positions. We were left watching the one man... Then I jumped – I recognised Big Daddy as he cut the man's throat before he turned and kicked another man off his feet. Big Daddy held his Beretta in his hand ready to fire.

Another man made to attack him, but he was put down very quickly and stabbed in the chest for his trouble. Daddy fired several shots at the other men, taking bullets on his armour but shrugging them off. He used another man as a shield before punching him in the face and throwing him aside and into another man with a shotgun.

Daddy blasted his way up the staircase and shot another man before smashing the glass on a door and throwing in a grenade. He took cover as the grenade exploded before jumping back down to the main floor, taking out another man in the process. He took the man's shotgun and proceeded to kill him. Then came the destruction as Daddy used grenades and flares to set fire to the warehouse.

...+...

Everybody was looking at me as the video stopped. I smiled, ignoring the tears that ran down my cheeks.

"Your Daddy was fucking awesome, Mindy!" Megan announced as she hugged me.

"I agree," Josh added.

"Yeah, definitely," Chloe agreed.

"Is there more?" Dave asked.

Marty hesitated.

"Marty!" Dave growled.

"I don't think we wanna see it – for Mindy's sake..."

"Marty, just fucking play it," I growled.

...+...

The video began again – I braced up as I recognised Frank D'Amico's office in his penthouse. There was the bastard himself. Then that big guy walked in with the bazooka.

"A bazooka...? Okay!"

"We had a deal, Dad, we had a fucking deal that I would get you the guy who did it and all I'm asking is that you let Kick-Ass go; he didn't do anything wrong..."

"Chris, you gotta look at this from my point of view, okay – I gotta send a public service message to the people out there that being a super-hero is bad for your health and the big motherfucker? Nobody knows who he is..."

"Yeah, but that's not fair..."

"Life's not fair, kid – get over it..."

"What are you going to do to them?"

"You really want to be a part of my business?"

"Yeah?"

"Then sit down, shut up and watch."

...+...

"I removed a lot of dead space and worthless shit," Marty advised before the video flickered back to life. "Thought the bazooka was important..."

...+...

We were back in his office – all seemed peaceful. Then there was a single gunshot and Frank D'Amico scrambled for a piece and hid behind his desk with his worthless son. The big guy was at the door, a pistol in his hand. I knew what was happening outside in the corridor...

There was the sound of many gunshots and then silence... Then came panicked voices...

"Holy fuck, everybody's dead!"

Then Frank D'Amico sent the big guy to see if I was dead – the guy went somewhat reluctantly. There was the sound of many more gunshots... Then the big guy reappeared.

"It's only me boss – everything's under control..."

There was more gunfire... The big guy moved towards the bazooka...

"Under... Under control?" Chris D'Amico exclaimed. "You're grabbing a fucking bazooka, you dumbass!"

The big guy left the office... Lots of gunfire...

...+...

"Only my girl could cause so much shit and carnage!" Dave quipped as he squeezed my hand.

I could vividly remember every moment as I scrambled to stay alive as bullet after bullet punched through the kitchen and showered me with glass and God knew what.

...+...

Then there was a moment's silence before I heard the very distinctive roar of miniguns... Kick-Ass was coming to my rescue... Then silence again...

"That is one weird sounding bazooka – Stu!"

The door burst open and I appeared... Frank D'Amico tried to shoot me, but I took the Beretta out of his hand...

"Fuck!"

Then Kick-Ass made his entrance.

...+...

"Awesome entrance, Kick-Ass!" Chloe exclaimed.

"Yeah – you two look really pissed..." Megan added.

"You look very short, Mindy..." Josh finished.

...+...

"Get him!" Frank D'Amico growled to his son.

Chris D'Amico seemed very reluctant to fight Kick-Ass, but he went anyway. As I watched, we moved closer together, Frank D'Amico and I.

"Playtimes over, kid!"

"I never, play..."

"Oh, really..."

He spun around and he kicked me...

...+...

"Holy fuck!" Megan exclaimed as I went down.

...+...

D'Amico went to stamp on my head, but he missed... I jumped up and then over the corner of his desk, D'Amico chasing after me. I ran up the wall and flipped over backwards landing on the floor behind Frank. I jumped at him as he turned and began to punch him in the face – I bit him and he flung me against the shelves... I smacked him with a whiskey decanter in the side of his face. He threw me and I landed on the floor where I grabbed a letter opener and stabbed D'Amico.

Then came my downfall as he swung me upwards and then back down onto his desk so hard that the legs that supported the desk collapsed, and the shock paralysed me for a moment. I could hear myself as I struggled in pain.

...+...

"Oh my God!" Chloe muttered, her hand over her mouth in shock. Megan said nothing, but a hand was over her mouth too and her eyes had gone very wide.

Dave was holding me tightly and I was shaking.

...+...

Then D'Amico started to punch me.

"Ruin my business, huh?"

Smack!

"Kill every fucking guy on my payroll?"

Smack!

Frank D'Amico walked around to get his Beretta.

...+...

"Oh, Mindy – I..." Megan was almost speechless.

"That fucking bastard..." Abby breathed as she spoke for the first time.

I could remember the pain; it had been intense and I had not been able to move – I had thought that I was about to die, that I had failed to avenge my Daddy.

...+...

D'Amico walked back around to me...

"God, I wish I had a son like you..."

He pulled back the slide on his Beretta and released it as he stood over me. He aimed right between my eyes...

"Time for a family reunion!"

...+...

There was a collective intake of breath from everybody present; except of course for me and Dave. It was fairly obvious that I was not going to die... However, we had been there – I smiled and looked up at Dave; I knew what was coming...

...+...

"Hey, why don't you pick on someone your own size?"

It was Kick-Ass – I felt myself sobbing as he spoke and levelled the fucking bazooka at Frank D'Amico. Then Kick-Ass pulled the trigger and Frank D'Amico was no more... I saw my attempts to sit up and I remembered the pain. Kick-Ass dumped the spent bazooka and went over to my prone form.

"You okay?"

I could just make out my reply.

"Yeah..."

"Time to go home..." Kick-Ass said as he picked me up and carried me out the window.

I heard the roar of the jetpack's exhaust and the video ended just as Chris D'Amico ran in holding a Katana in his hand.

...+...

"Fuck, Dave – you really know how to make a fucking entrance!" Marty exclaimed as I hugged my saviour tightly.

I looked over to see tears on the faces of Chloe, Megan and Abby; I was crying too.

***Two days later
Wednesday Night***

Safehouse F

It was time for two of our number to meet another.

There were people aware of Fusion, but who were not a *part of Fusion*, if that made any sense. Brad Murphy was one of them and I really wanted to know about Juno and her 'little accident'! Brad had no idea that Saoirse and Lauren were part of *Fusion* and neither were the girls aware that Brad was fully aware of *Fusion* and our secret identities.

Therefore, I had arranged for both girls to arrive at the Safehouse, about a half hour after Brad.

..._...

I brought both girls upstairs into the Briefing Room, where both froze on seeing who was sitting there, enjoying a can of Pepsi Max.

"Hi, Lauren. Hi, SD!"

"Brad?" Lauren demanded.

"Mindy?" Saoirse asked.

"It's okay, girls; Brad has been aware of *Fusion* for a while now. Brad, please meet Foxtail and Nightmare – girls, please meet Rapier..."

"Thank you for helping me the other day, Brad..." Lauren commented, blushing a cute shade of pink.

"I had a vibe that you knew something," Saoirse added.

"Hey, why are called, SD, SD?"

Saoirse laughed.

"My proper name is spelt like this..." Saoirse explained as she bragged a marker pen and wrote her name 'Saoirse Doherty' on the white board.

"Jeez," Brad commented. "How the bloody hell are you supposed to pronounce that!"

"Try it..." Saoirse challenged.

"Say-oh-err..."

Brad tailed off looking embarrassed as Lauren burst out laughing and Saoirse rolled her eyes.

"My friends decided a long time ago to call me 'SD' to make things simpler. It's pronounced Saoirse, as in 'sir-sha' – like 'inertia'."

"Can I call you SD?" Brad asked carefully.

"Of course."

"So, Brad," I asked. "What happened to Juno...?"

Brad tried to look innocent but I saw through it instantly.

"Nobody is gonna judge you," Saoirse prompted.

"I thought that Juno got off too easily – no offence, Nightmare, but I thought she needed a bigger reminder not to fuck with you... I was passing the west stairs as she was heading down them . . . I kind of nudged her..."

Lauren laughed and then looked a little tongue-tied as she sat down beside Brad. I looked pointedly at SD and indicated it was time to leave. She smirked and we both headed to the Galley.

***Chapter 264*: Eight**

The following week Tuesday night

Getting the twins to bed had been a goddamned nightmare!

They were just too excited and I couldn't exactly blame them – the next day was to be a very special day for them both. Dave and I had spent a lot of time considering gifts for them both, but we had both come back to one very simple gift for each of them.

Plus, one slightly larger gift, each.

The next morning Wednesday

The dynamic duo was up at dawn!

We were way ahead of them, though and we were waiting as they pounded down the stairs like a herd of marauding elephants and surged into the living room. Behind them came a rather tired looking Stephanie.

"They woke me up!" She grumbled as the young girl dropped onto the couch and curled up into a ball.

"Happy birthday, kids!" Dave announced.

"We getting presents?" Danny asked casually.

"I've forgotten... How old are you two?" I asked innocently.

"Eight!" Anne-Marie retorted as she raised her voice. "We – are – EIGHT!"

"Oh – right..." I laughed. "Sit down, both of you."

Danny and Anne-Marie sat down on the couch rather roughly and ignored their big sister, Stephanie, who tried in vain to get back to sleep.

"You get your normal presents, this afternoon, after school – but these presents..." Dave indicated the four wrapped presents that I had just placed on the table. "These presents are very special and under *no* circumstances should they be discussed outside of *Fusion* – understand?"

"Yes, Dad..." The twins responded seriously.

..._...

I handed each child a small present each to unwrap. They were identical, with almost identical contents. The paper did not last long and soon the dozing Stephanie was covered in torn wrapping paper. Each child then held a small polished wooden box and both seemed a little apprehensive about opening the box.

"What?" I asked. "Open them already!"

Anne-Marie looked over at her brother and they both opened the boxes together.

"Wow!" Danny exclaimed.

"Awesome..." Anne-Marie added as she brought out the contents of her box.

It was a pattern called Pink Raindrop and the aluminium 4.25-inch handles in Pink Raindrop satin finish, enclosed a 3.25-inch hollow-grind, clip-point, steel blade. Anne-Marie looked stunned as she skilfully flipped the knife open.

"Okay, what is the proper name for that?" I asked.

"Balisong!" Anne-Marie announced.

"Otherwise known as...?" I asked Danny as he flipped open his own Blue Raindrop satin finish Balisong.

"A Butterfly knife!" He replied eagerly.

"You each hold a Bear Song IV Balisong – they are sharp and very deadly, so *please* be careful! You've both been shown how to use one of those and I want you both to train with those blades..." I began.

"... Only they will *never* leave this house without *our* express permission!" Dave finished.

"Open the other presents!" A now very wide-awake Stephanie insisted having abandoned all hope of getting back to sleep and having fought out from under the wrapping paper.

..._...

The other two presents were much larger and much heavier.

Stephanie seemed more excited than the twins and as the paper was ripped off; she looked up at me in surprise – she had recognised what was rapidly being revealed from under the wrapping paper. Even if the twins had not. Anne-Marie finished first and she frowned at what she found before her.

"Walt... Walter?" She tried, reading the markings on the top of the case.

"Walther..." Stephanie corrected from behind Anne-Marie.

The now eight-year-old young girl carefully opened the black resin case. I think she actually stopped breathing for a moment, her mouth hung open in shock and surprise.

"Fuck me!" Stephanie exclaimed as she saw the contents of both Anne-Marie's and Danny's cases.

..._...

I raised an eyebrow at Stephanie's profanity and the girl blushed, but I let it slide. Inside each box was a...

"Walther P22 Black in .22 long rifle calibre..." Stephanie lectured unable to restrain herself. "Polymer frame with diecast zinc slide. Two drop safeties and firing pin block. Integrated laser sight on a standard Picatinny rail. Weighs about seventeen ounces and has a magazine capacity of ten rounds."

"Thanks, Steph – very accurate!"

Stephanie smiled at the praise. Both pistols had the frame coloured to match the handles on the Balisong knives. The twins were stunned at what they held before them.

"Those are yours – same rules as the knives. Stephanie and Saoirse will teach you both to use them correctly and safely."

Both twins jumped up and hugged Dave and me *very* tightly.

..._...

"Give 'em mine..." Stephanie suggested.

I pulled out two more packages and passed them over to the twins, who attacked them excitedly.

"Cool – thanks, Steph!" Anne-Marie exclaimed.

With a swift flick of her wrist, she extended the 16-inch expandable baton from inside the pink rubber handle. The black, anodised steel baton would hurt anybody who was struck. Danny flicked open his own, keeping a secure grip on the blue rubber handle.

"I like it Steph, thanks."

Stephanie now blushed as her younger siblings hugged *her* and they both gave her a kiss.

Saoirse came over that night.

She had requested a chat with Anne-Marie – I knew what it was about, too.

"Hi, kid!" Saoirse said cheerfully.

"Hi, SD!" Anne-Marie replied.

"It wasn't Hit Girl that brought me down. It wasn't Psyche, either. It was you."

Anne-Marie looked apprehensively towards me. I smiled reassuringly.

"You were really brave, placing your cell phone under the saddle of my motorcycle."

Anne-Marie blushed with the compliment.

"Without you, Anne-Marie – Hit Girl would never have found me..."

"I'm sorry..."

"Don't be – I'm glad to be away from that; believe me!" Saoirse confirmed. "I want to reward your courage – Stephanie told me what happened to you in the Caribbean... You're gonna make a damn good vigilante – over time."

"Assuming I don't spend my days running around the damn Safehouse!" Anne-Marie replied sourly with a cheeky smirk.

"Rogue suits you!" Saoirse commented as she passed over a package.

..._...

It was long and thin.

Inside was a polished mahogany case with brass fittings.

"Wow!" Anne-Marie breathed as she lifted the wooden lid.

Inside were two identical butterfly swords. They were full tang and the blade made up 12-inches of the overall 17-inch length. The blades were highly polished and intended for chopping and stabbing. The grip or quillion was designed for easy reverse grip or flipping. The fuller, or blood-groove, was deep and would prove very useful.

"I'll personally train you to use those – they are as good as my own, maybe better..."

Anne-Marie did not know what to say and neither did I... I knew that Saoirse was giving Anne-Marie some swords, but I had *not* expected anything so special.

..._...

"They're amazing, Saoirse, thank you..." I said for the dumb-struck girl.

"They are both very special kids and Anne-Marie shows maturity beyond her tender years – at times..." Saoirse commented.

"Thank you."

***Three days later
Saturday afternoon***

Safehouse F

It was strange seeing two eight-year-olds, each with a pistol on their right hip.

Anne-Marie had actually developed a swagger to go with her pistol! They had driven Dave, me *and* Stephanie up the wall since Wednesday morning. Both of them wanted to use their new weapons as soon as possible – which to them meant right at that moment!

First came the pistols. Between Stephanie and Saoirse, both Anne-Marie and Danny learnt their pistols inside and

out. Before they were allowed to fire them, they had to learn to strip and reassemble them, how to cope with a jam and how to operate the safety features.

Anne-Marie got cocky and ended up going for a run around the Safehouse; she only had to do two laps, but that was enough to keep her trap shut.

..._...

Two hours later, the twins were in the range and we started with Anne-Marie – well, she did have some shooting experience, after all. Stephanie stood slightly behind and to the left of her sister.

"Spread your legs – wider . . . raise the pistol, holding it in both hands. Now, keep that position..."

I felt like I was back on Buck Island.

I felt scared all over again as I wrapped my small hands around the butt of the small pistol – small it may have been, but the Walther P22 was still large in my hands. I was shaking from head to toe at the thought of the power that I held in my hands. Instead of there being a live man as my target, there was only a paper target two dozen feet away. My sister gently whispered encouraging words into my ear as her slightly larger hands helped to brace the pistol.

"Breathe in and out, in and out. Keep calm, both eyes open, aim the pistol at your target – centre mass – the chest is good..."

Unbidden, I saw an image of that man's eyes which had been wide with fear. What had shocked me back then, was that I had actually *enjoyed* the man's fear; I had been in control, instead of him – *he* had been at *my* mercy. Steph's gentle whispering continued as I focussed on my target.

"When you are ready, gently squeeze the trigger, again and again... All five rounds."

I focussed along the top of the weapon, keeping both eyes open. Then, as my breathing became slow and regular, I gently squeezed the trigger. The pistol jerked in my hand. My brain registered a flash, followed by a large bang and some smoke. I squeezed again, and again, and again – five times I squeezed before the slide locked back on the empty magazine.

"Don't move!" I was warned by Stephanie. "Safety on!"

I flipped the lever at the rear of the pistol downwards as instructed.

"Eject the magazine!"

I pressed the magazine catch and the magazine dropped free onto the counter.

"Check the pistol is clear!"

I kept the pistol pointed down the range and checked that the chamber was empty.

"Pistol is clear!" I reported.

"Check your magazine!"

Holding the pistol with one hand, I visually checked my magazine – it was empty.

"Clear the action!"

I inserted the empty magazine, thumbed forward the slide release and then, with Steph's help, I held the hammer and lightly squeezed the trigger and lowered the hammer forwards. The pistol was now safe.

"Action cleared!" I reported as I placed the pistol down onto the counter.

I turned to see several smiling faces and broke into a smile myself.

"Well done, Rogue!" Stephanie announced.

"Very good!" Mom added.

We took a break for some food and sat in the galley talking.

Saoirse was talking to the twins.

"Your mother has a reputation – a reputation that she has earned..." She said. "When I knew that I was going to face her; I had been so scared... Now, you can learn from your mother and gain a reputation like she has. There is an advantage to having a reputation; people don't want to fuck with you..."

"Wise words, kid!" Chloe commented.

..._...

True to her word, Saoirse began to teach Anne-Marie how to use the Butterfly Swords. Initially they remained in their covers as they were beyond lethal. As I watched, my daughter was taught to draw the swords from inverted scabbards on her back and bring them up into a fighting stance. She repeated the movements dozens of times until Saoirse was happy that Anne-Marie could do it in her sleep.

While that was happening, Danny was shooting and I had to admit, he was good. He could hold the pistol better and control it without too much outside assistance.

That night

The kids were happy but tired.

It had been great to be able to go out and just be a family for a change. Then, as per my usual luck, the night had started to go all to shit!

"Well, well – you look like you'd have a nice fat wallet!"

"I am going to warn you just once – don't go there!" Dave growled as the three men blocked our progress down the sidewalk.

I looked sideways at my husband and I winked, then I looked down at the kids – Stephanie was already moving a few steps away from me to give herself space to fight. Anne-Marie and Danny looked a little scared but they too braced up, game for some action.

The men took no notice of the warning and stepped forwards – they saw an easy mark... Their cockiness only lasted a few seconds as one of them laid a hand on my arm – he hit the sidewalk two seconds later and his nose exploded sending blood all over the place.

The other two hesitated, but they must have decided that my actions were a fluke... Then it all went to hell as Stephanie dove forwards and kicked a man in the leg. Dave punched out at the bigger of the two men and they fought while I defended the twins from the other man. They must have had a watcher as I saw another man appear and I was forced to leave the twins as the man brought out a pistol.

I caught his arm as it came up and disarmed him in a second – the pistol fell to the sidewalk – I struck the man in the throat and he went down, but kicked out and I went down beside him. As I got back to my feet, I took in the scene before me.

Three men were down and out. Stephanie was rubbing her left upper arm, but Dave was ready to explode. Then I saw what he was looking at. The other man had hold of Anne-Marie; an arm wrapped around her waist and the pistol to her head. Danny was behind Dave. I pushed down my anger and yes, I pushed down the fear. I spoke directly to my daughter, ignoring the man.

"Now, honey, don't be scared – just think it through and use what we taught you the other week," I said carefully and encouragingly.

I was scared, but I knew that I could get out of the situation.

The other week's training jumped into my mind and I worked out a plan of action. My arms were trying to pry the man's arm away from me, but I stopped; I was far too small and weak to move his arm but instead, I had skills!

Without warning, I flung my head back hard and it collided with something that made the man cry out in pain. At the same time, I dug my hand into the waistband of my skirt and pulled out my birthday present – I flicked open the ultra-sharp blade in a single fluid and smooth movement and drove the 3.25-inch blade into his side – not surprisingly, he dropped me and I spun around, then kicked him in the face as he reached for my Balisong which stuck out from his side.

The man bellowed and he tried to get back up, so I punched him in the nose.

"Stay the fuck down, bastard!" I yelled as the man fell back, blood pouring from his smashed nose.

"What have I told you about your language, Anne-Marie – that'll cost you two bucks for swearing in public!" Dad exclaimed as I reached down for my Balisong.

"WHAT!" I responded as I cleaned off my blade and after I had flicked the knife closed again, I stowed it back in the waistband of my skirt.

"Back to the car – move young lady!" Mom said sternly.

My life sucked!

"Yes, Mom!"

"Very good, Rogue, well done!" Dad whispered into my ear and I grinned with pride.

We left the four men on the sidewalk and continued with our evening as if nothing had happened.

***Chapter 265*: Storm Clouds Building - Part I**

Four days later
Wednesday evening

New York City

Access to executive jets had its benefits!

It had been seven years, but there we were, back to where it had all begun. Only this time, we were *not* happy with just roof-jumping – we wanted the *full* experience and we had received a tip that the same fucked up apartment was in use again...

I looked up at the building; it was the same, just shittier. I went in, climbed the stairs, just as I had all those years before and I strode confidently up to the corridor, only this time, I was in full body armour – no dorky wetsuit; I was a professional! Was every door guard a fat bastard? The current one was white, but he still looked like a dick. As I turned into the corridor and strode towards Rasul's old apartment, the guard moved away from the apartment door and he tried to pull out his pistol, but it jammed on his belt.

"You shouldn't be here – you stay in Chicago!" The man tried – completely shocked by my experience – before he hit the ground, mere seconds after my fist connected with his jaw.

"Doorman down – standby, my love!"

I kicked in the door – demolished, might have been a better description – and I made my way *through* the inner door, literally – it splintered as my body armour absorbed the impact.

"Knock, knock!"

There were five people present and collectively they all began to shit themselves as they dropped their drug paraphernalia and dived for their weapons. There was an explosion of glass as the window exploded behind them and *she* made her entrance, driving her bō-staff through one cunt's back and out his chest. Only, it didn't scare the shit out of me, not anymore; now I loved it! The body fell and there she was, in all her glory – Hit Girl herself. Only, this time, she was taller and she had tits . . . but her mouth was just as foul...

"Okay, you cunts; let's see what you can do now... Eeny . . . meeny . . . miny . . . mo..."

And it kicked off...

Oh, fuck, I was *energised*!

It felt like coming back home – damn I missed my bō-staff – I took the man's leg off below the knee and span onto the next man, driving my blade in and then I span again and drove the blade downwards and into the recently disabled man on the floor – he screamed. All my movements flowed, just as Daddy had taught me; not one step or muscle movement was wasted.

More men appeared at the doorway, they stepped over the downed doorman and around the wrecked doors...

"What the fuck?"

The face of one exploded as my husband drove his fist backwards into the unfortunate man's face. The other men attacked and I sat back to watch Kick-Ass go to work. A man made for me as I sat on the couch – he held a machete in his hand, I jumped up and separated my blades, spinning them around.

"So, you wanna play..."

For some reason, the man suddenly had second thoughts, but before he could move I had pinned him to the wall with a blade. I turned and looked around – nobody was alive but us.

"Hey, dude..." I began and then I turned as the bathroom door opened; the muzzle of a MAC-10 appeared.

"Hey, I've *not* got one of those – at least not here!"

I was about to dive for the ground when I saw something zip into the bathroom and then a man fell forward onto the floor and dropped the sub-machine gun; his body was twitching. I looked up at Kick-Ass as he lowered his weapon, disconnecting the thin wires.

"Ah, dude, that is one *awesome* looking Taser!"

Kick-Ass chuckled as he inserted a fresh cartridge.

"This place is smaller than I remember..."

"You were like ten and just a little bit shorter," he laughed as he turned for the door.

"Hey, green asshole, can't use the front door now..." I said as I hauled out my blade from the pinned corpse and allowed it to drop to the floor without a second glance. "Love you Daddy – nice shot by the way..."

We made our way out the window, up the fire escape and onto the rooftop.

"Wait, wait, wait..." I called out and she stopped on the rooftop before turning, a smirk on her face.

"What?"

"Who are you?"

She rolled her eyes before responding.

"Me? I'm Hit Girl . . . and I fucking love you, Kick-Ass – come on!"

She turned and she ran for the edge of the roof; I followed, my feet digging in as I ran hard after my wife. We leapt into the air together and we each made a perfect landing, just feet apart and then came up to our feet. Hit Girl turned to me and she stood on her tip-toes to kiss me – I returned the kiss.

The burnt-out shell was still there; the weapons mounts on the walls were still in evidence, but the weapons were long gone.

Kick-Ass held me tight as we stood in the centre of the room. I could see my Daddy, in my mind, as he planned his revenge on Frank D'Amico. Then that fateful night, six and a half years ago, when Daddy and I had left the Safehouse to go help Kick-Ass – Daddy for the very last time...

"I know – a lot of bad shit happened that night, but Chris is dead; he paid for what he did to your Dad and to you."

"That bastard shot me – *three fucking times!*"

"You still hanging onto that?" Kick-Ass chuckled. "Let it go! Let it go!"

"Oh, please – don't use those words; all I hear from that girl every day is: 'Let it go! Let it go! Can't hold it back anymore – Let it go! Let it go! Turn away and slam the door, I don't care, what they're going to say, let the storm rage on – the cold never bothered me anyway...' What?"

Kick-Ass was laughing.

"It's just a little bit weird hearing Hit Girl sing a song from Frozen!"

"I can't get the damn song out of my head..."

The sun was bright as it rose over the horizon.

I turned to Kick-Ass and smiled.

"The rest of my life began right here; I broke one of Daddy's biggest rules – and I half expected him to haunt me for doing it, but I have never regretted it – never!"

"I have – once or twice..."

"WHAT!"

"Just kidding, beautiful..."

We were interrupted by a text message.

"Kent Avenue – I'm waiting!"

"Impatient, bitch..." Mindy commented as she looked around my shoulder at the message.

"Let's see what a little birdy's nest looks like..." I chuckled.

..._...

Fifteen minutes later, we pulled into a very non-descript looking building.

"You call this a *nest*!" I laughed as the door closed behind us.

"Funny, Kick-Ass!" A scowling Morgan replied. "Your clothes are in that room, over there. I'm just packing the last of my weapons..."

"The Courier will be by in about three hours," Mindy advised as she pulled off her mask.

"What were you guys up to?" Morgan asked.

"I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you..." I replied deadpan.

Morgan chuckled.

"Coffee?"

"Yeah, please – we had some time to kill, so we err, killed..." Mindy replied without a trace of guilt.

"Did they deserve it?" The fifteen-year-old girl asked.

"Definitely!"

"Cool!"

Kent Avenue

Half an hour later, I was showered and changed – I was back to Mindy Lizewski.

I walked out of the bathroom and into the Safehouse's gun-room. It had been mostly stripped and Dave was loading the final few weapons into crates. Morgan was busy gathering up magazines and other smaller items.

"I'm going for a drive."

"Behave!" Dave called over and I smiled my innocent smile in reply. "Not buying it..."

"It's broad daylight – I'm not some raging, psychotic, homicidal maniac, you know!"

As I climbed into the hired Range Rover, I ignored the laughter coming from Dave and Morgan.

Brooklyn

The day had started slowly, but I had a feeling we'd get a good mark soon.

"Can we go home; we've been out all night and I need some fucking sleep!"

"Quit the fucking moaning – all fucking night, you fucking moan!"

"Come on – we made two kays, last night..."

"One more score and then we can... Oh, look at this – rich bitch coming up!"

"Huh . . . oh, yeah – nice wheels; hundred-eighty kay easy..."

"Oh, fuck – welcome back to New York, Mindy!"

The two idiots stepped out into the street and one raised a shotgun – a rather rough-looking Beretta over and under. I loved Brooklyn and while it would have been better to stick to the main streets, I was more used to sticking to the shadows. I could have just mowed the dumb asses down, but instead, I was in a good mood and I wanted to have some fun with those bozzos. I stopped and pretended to look worried. I was not armed, per se...

The one with the shotgun remained ahead, while his colleague pulled a pistol and walked around to beside my door, his pistol raised.

"Hands where we can see 'em, lady..."

Both my hands were already on the top of the steering wheel – I rolled my eyes and raised them into the air.

"Open the door and step out . . . slowly..."

I followed instructions, like a good girl and I stood in the street, my hands raised either side of my head. The one with the shotgun moved closer and he kept the weapon aimed at my head. His pal proceeded to frisk me – as he moved up my legs, I saw him smirk – enough was enough...

My left knee struck the idiot in the side of the head and he sprawled onto the blacktop. His partner came closer and quick as a flash I wrenched the shotgun out of hands and took the butt of it across the man's face – he went down with a yell of pain.

The other man was getting back up and he brought his pistol to bear...

"Stay the fuck down, cunt!" I growled as I kicked him in the side of the head and he crashed to the ground and moved no longer.

Well, that had been fun!

Kent Avenue

By the time I returned, all was packed and I could see Dave and Morgan talking as I pulled up.

Dave peered in at me and he groaned.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing!" I replied indignantly.

"Yeah..."

"It was only a pair of carjackers – they're still alive..."

"Can't leave her alone for a minute!" Dave chuckled.

Morgan grinned and nodded approvingly.

Two days later April 1st, Friday morning

Chicago Glenview

"I will kill you both in your sleep..." Stephanie growled in a very menacing tone as she entered the kitchen.

I just burst out laughing; her expression was just . . . so precious!

"I might join you..." Anne-Marie added as she joined her elder sister and Dave burst out laughing, unable to contain it anymore.

Both girls had used the shower in the changing rooms beside the pool... Now they were both standing in the kitchen wrapped only in a towel each and their skin was now tinted a light blue... It had been Dave's idea, while it had been me that had actually added the blueberry Kool-Aid to the shower heads.

"It brings out your eyes, Steph," Saoirse laughed.

"Fuck you and the horse you rode in on; 'cause I'm gonna shoot *it* too!" Stephanie hissed as she pushed past us all, closely followed by a furious Anne-Marie.

"Awesome!" Danny laughed as he watched his sisters run up the stairs.

*This storyline continues four days later in **Chapter 1: The Chase Begins of The Fusion Ultimatum.***

***Chapter 266*: Storm Clouds Building - Part II**

This is the continuation of the storyline from Chapter 1: The Chase Begins of The Fusion Ultimatum.

April 11th 2016
Monday morning

Glen Oak Drive

Something was going on; I could tell.

There was a lot of packing happening, which had started on the Saturday afternoon after Mindy had received a video call from some people in the United Kingdom, actually Scotland – was that part of the United Kingdom?

The day was special for a couple of reasons, as well as for being sad. First the happy things. It was Morgan's birthday; she had just turned sixteen – mind you, my own birthday was only two short weeks hence; I would be fifteen. That morning was to be my first day moving in with Morgan as her younger sister. I would have a home for the first time since... I would also have parents – well guardians – and a family.

..._...

At that moment, I stood in my new bedroom at Glen Oak Drive. I had the corner bedroom on the second floor. Morgan had the next bedroom and we had a shared bathroom between our two bedrooms. Morgan's Aunt and Uncle, they had the bedroom at the far end of the floor. Morgan and Stephanie had helped me to decorate the room – I had been very impressed by what Stephanie had accomplished with her own bedroom.

"Looks good," Stephanie commented.

Then the sad thing; I had noticed that Stephanie had been different, ever since it had been announced that I would be taken in by John and Emily Newton.

"Hey, kid – I'm moving a short walk away; it's barely a third of a mile by road..."

"It's not that . . . well, it is – I'm glad that you have a family; just as I have . . . I'm being silly..."

"No, Steph, you're just being human – maybe that's why you were able to keep your mind through all that conditioning; you're more in touch with your humanity than the rest of us..."

"Thanks – I'll miss you, even it does mean that I have my bed to myself..."

"We can still have sleepovers," I suggested and smiled at Stephanie's reaction.

That night

Glenview

"What's going on, Mindy?"

"Sit down, SD, next to Steph, and then we can talk."

I frowned – Mindy rarely called me 'SD' and only when there was trouble. Stephanie had noticed too... Mindy sat down across from us and beside her, sat Dave. I trusted Dave and I always felt safe in his presence.

"*Fusion* is going on a trip, well some of it is – to Stephanie's home turf, so to speak..."

"England?" I interrupted.

"Yes – we're headed for the UK; Scotland first and then England... Maybe further afield in Europe, but that depends on where the intel takes us."

"Considering that you're talking to me and Steph, I assume this involves *Urban Predator*," I stated.

"That would be a 'yes'," Dave replied.

"Are we going?" Stephanie asked.

"You are – but Saoirse is staying..."

"Hey! I have every..." I responded angrily.

"Saoirse – this has nothing to do with you, directly – you just haven't properly trained with us yet and this operation won't be a good place to start..."

"So you and your vigilantes are going to attack *Urban Predator* and leave *me* on the fucking side lines?"

I was raging, but I could see how unhappy Dave and Mindy were about what they were telling us, and I could tell that they had expected my outburst.

"We need to keep some forces in reserve, here in Chicago – something could blow up right here while we are gone. I need somebody capable to be here – we will bring you over for the final act, Saoirse, I promise you that."

For a moment, I saw it all as a giant smokescreen, but I had learnt that Mindy did not do that; she said exactly what she meant – even if it was a little insulting at times...

"I trust you, Mindy – I have no reason not to... I apologise for my outburst; it was out of line."

"I want you to keep training Lauren, please, as much as possible. When we get back, I want to get her suited up and out for a trial mission – but only if you say that she is ready. Please keep an eye out for her at school, if possible."

"Marty will be in charge of Fusion, until we get back. You will have Kim, Cathy, Curtis and Sophia to keep you company at the Safehouse," Dave added. "The pups will also need walking, too!"

"Oh great; seven sets of sharp teeth!" Saoirse laughed.

Four days later
Friday night

We were finally there.

It was time to jet off to wherever Mindy had in mind. Was I worried about what lay ahead? Of course, I was... Was I going to let it get to me? No . . . but I was leaving some very special people behind; would I ever see them again? Would I be able to see the mission through to the end? The end . . . the total destruction of the *Urban Predator* organisation and all those who had built it...

I would not let Mindy down. I would not let myself down. I would not let Saoirse down. I would not let Miranda down – wherever she was...

I looked up at my friend – the girl who had tried three times to kill me – as she spoke.

"Take care – I mean that..."

"You taking a shine to me, SD?"

Saoirse grinned and her cheeks went slightly pink.

"There are not many people who can really appreciate what I have been through – but you are one of them, Stephanie... A few weeks ago, I would have loved nothing less than to see your broken corpse torn to pieces as it lay bleeding in the street..."

"Nice image, thanks!"

Saoirse laughed.

"You have a heart, Steph, and right now I'm glad it's still beating..."

"You're being sappy, Saoirse – I'll survive; I survived the CIA's best, didn't I?"

Saoirse laughed and then she gave me a brief hug.

"Knock 'em dead!"

"Oh, I will – I *never* miss..."

I felt something inside me. Saoirse was right, we needed each other and now I was leaving my friend before flying thirty-six-hundred-miles across a giant puddle called the Atlantic Ocean.

"I'll keep any eye on her for you, Stephanie – have no fear," Morgan offered, correctly interpreting my expression.

"You do that, Morgan..."

As I looked around the Safehouse, I started to get a funny feeling.

When we had left for Gotham, I had been excited and I had looked forward to what lay before us all – now, I was what . . . scared? Wildcat was never scared . . . but that wasn't exactly true; Gotham had been a big wake-up experience for me and I had learnt that I had limitations – what eleven-year-old did not.

Josh said that that I had 'matured' and at first, I had thought that he was taking the piss out of me, but then I realised that he was speaking the truth. Mom had agreed when I had asked her about it. She said that it had nothing to do with growing boobs and hair in strange places; it was a mental thing and she agreed with Josh that my mind was maturing just as quickly as my body.

That 'maturity', as they put it, it told me that we were all heading into mortal danger and there was every possibility that some of us may never return at worst, or be badly wounded at best. I hoped it was just my inexperienced mind working overtime. Yes, Wildcat was inexperienced; she still had a lot to learn. I watched my new partner constantly; Psyche may have been almost two years younger than me, but she had many more years of experience over me.

I respected her for that, and as I watched her hug Saoirse and Morgan, I hoped that what we did over there would bring some closure to both her and Saoirse. They were both products of the organisation that we were about to destroy and we had to be successful; there was no other option.

..._...

I was rapidly hauled out of my thoughts as two large black hands seized me and dragged me over to my big sister where we were both grabbed and held tightly.

"You two come back alive and in one piece, okay?"

"Yes, Marcus – we promise..." We both replied together.

Marcus' expression was one of concern.

"We need Hit Girl and Wildcat back, you hear – so control your antics and look after each other. Megan, you look after this nut-job of a sister and do what you can to prevent her from doing anything stupid..."

"Mindy, you look after this nut-job of a sister and do what you can to prevent her from doing anything stupid..."

We both laughed at that, but the laughter faded quickly. Marcus was very concerned, as was Mom who stood beside him. I hugged her next while Mindy hugged Marcus. Everybody was saying their goodbyes as if they were to be the last. It was like we were going off to war . . . maybe we were.

Would I see my Mom again?

*This storyline continues in **Chapter 2: Crossing The Pond of The Fusion Ultimatum.***

***Chapter 267*: A New Hope and A New Beginning**

Author's Note: *This chapter, and the following chapters, will operate in parallel with my story **The Fusion Ultimatum** and events will cross-over between the two stories.*

**Saturday 16th April
Afternoon**

Safehouse F

I felt lonely.

They had all gone flying off across the Atlantic Ocean and the Safehouse felt empty without the usual laughter and the sounds of sparring. I missed Stephanie and her crude sense of humour. I missed Megan's foul mouth, too, not to mention her funny antics. I missed Dave and Mindy; they made me feel safe. I also hated the fact that I had been sidelined while they all faced mortal danger.

I was fully aware of why I had been left behind; I had an important task ahead of me. That task was currently rubbing her arm where I had just kicked her.

"You've got to move quicker – much quicker. I need to see more *nightmare* and less *wet dream*..."

Lauren did not like that comment, nor the analogy, and her face darkened; I could see the anger – good, good...

"Good! Use your aggressive feelings, girl. Let the hate flow through you. Feel the anger, feel the hate..."

Lauren's expression changed and she smirked at me imitation.

"Darth Sidious, you ain't," she growled.

"They ain't half bad, are they?"

Curtis and Tommy leant on the steel rail and gazed down at the fight beneath them.

"Tommy, don't tell Megan this, but I love to watch girls fight, especially ones with nice boobs..."

"I have to agree with you... I just hope Stephanie gets tits like your Megan..."

"You fancy her, don't you?"

Tommy's blush answered the question.

"She's like ten, Tommy, and *you* are twelve..."

"So what; she'll get boobs in time and the other shit. I like her character, the way she talks – maybe it's 'cause she's English, I don't know. I just think she's an awesome girl . . . not to mention that she is able to stand up to me when we spar."

An hour later

"So, Lauren, what do you want your combat suit to look like?" Tommy asked.

"It has to be cool!"

"We need just a *bit* more info..." Curtis laughed.

"What colours do you like?" I asked.

"I like purple..."

"Taken..."

"I know that, Tommy..."

"How about something like this?"

I passed over a few pieces of material to Lauren.

"What pattern is that – tiger stripes?"

"No – that would be urban camouflage. Which colours do you like?"

"That one and that one..."

"Teal and dark grey? Nice choices... Next, the firearms..."

Arrayed before me was a stunning selection of pistols.

They varied from small ones to enormous ones, with various sizes in between. SD finished laying them out and a relieved Curtis was able to flex his aching arms after he had lugged two dozen pistols up from the armoury.

"Why couldn't we have just done this in the armoury?" He asked.

"We could have..." SD replied. "You should have mentioned that earlier..."

Curtis scowled.

"Okay..." SD replied. "No offence, Lauren, but you have small hands, so we are probably best going with a compact Glock or maybe a SIG . . . a Beretta might be good too..."

"That one looks awesome..."

"No way; that's a .45 – way too big..."

"Why is it hear then?"

"I was just jerking Curtis' chain!"

"You're taking the fuckers back to the armoury, SD!" Curtis growled.

Sunday 17th April
The following morning

Glen Oak Drive

"I've never been on a motorcycle before..."

"You'll love it, Lauren..."

The BMW motorcycle that had been provided by the CIA was long gone, but I loved motorcycles so much that I had obtained a new one – this time, though, it was not a BMW it was a KTM 1190 Adventure R in blue metallic... I had found Lauren a helmet and some leathers so that we could go for a ride.

"Keep a tight grip around my waist – I'm gonna go easy and ride slowly so that you can see how I manoeuvre the machine."

"Okay..."

The thirteen-year-old girl was nervous, but I could easily understand why. I could remember my own first time on a motorcycle – I had been about eight and I was on a small scrambler with my Dad watching... It was only a dim memory, buried under years of *Urban Predator* shit, but I could still see it... It had been about a month before I had been taken – snap out of it, Saoirse!

I drove down the street, slowly and then turned gently into the next road on the left.

Two hours later

The Farm

I climbed off the KTM and turned to help Lauren off the back.

She pulled off her helmet and I laughed, I couldn't help it – the girl was grinning like there was no tomorrow. I had taken her for a high-speed run up the I-94 towards The Farm. The giggles that had emanated over the comms had been disconcerting, but I was glad that the girl had enjoyed herself.

"Hi, girls!"

I waved at Jack Bay as he walked over to us. I had been introduced to the man only the week before. He was a *very* senior cop, which had concerned me, but Mindy had told me that he knew all about *Fusion* and that he supported us. I had never been to The Farm, so it was a first for me and Lauren, both.

Jack took us into the kitchen first and he gave us both some Coke.

"This thing is a pain to carry..."

Lauren dumped the SIG Sauer P230 Compact pistol onto the kitchen side. Jack laughed.

"I'm getting her used to carrying a concealed weapon – she only got it yesterday afternoon," I explained.

"It may save your life, one day, young lady; if you're gonna be a vigilante," Jack cautioned.

I noticed Lauren go a little pale; the thirteen-year-old girl was still struggling to cope with the changes in her life. She had never even handled a gun before a couple of weeks ago and now she was being trained to kill.

"Can she shoot it?"

"She's managed to get a few bullets in the vague direction of the target..." I teased.

"They all *hit* the target I'll have you know!" Lauren retorted indignantly.

An hour later

"Stop laughing!"

I couldn't see a thing; my visor was covered in mud and for some reason it felt really hot inside the helmet. SD was laughing her head off and it was embarrassing, to say the least. I knew that my butt would be sticking up in the air and that was probably what SD was laughing at...

"I'm sorry, Lauren, but that was one *awesome* dive you took..."

"Not funny – just help me up, would ya?"

I felt a pair of hands on my waist and I was pulled back onto my knees. I lifted my head and then I screamed as a whole load of water cascaded over me – but at least I could see! I saw Jack standing a few feet away with a large empty bucket.

"Thanks, Jack!"

"Get back on that motorcycle, young lady – keep on learnin'," Jack advised.

I grinned and climbed back onto the now rather muddy Honda that SD was holding ready for me. I could do it, I could ride that motorcycle; I was *not* going to let Mindy down, not after everything that she and Dave had done for me.

Two days later

Tuesday 19th April
Early morning

West Ridge

"What's that?"

"An alarm, honey, go back to sleep."

Marty gazed at the clock – two AM! He swung his legs around and onto the floor before he stood up, a little shakily – he had only been in bed two hours. I rubbed his tired eyes and picked up his tablet. After a few minutes' perusal he grimaced.

"We're being hacked – no more than usual, just the usual DoS attacks – but something looks hinky about one particular attack; it's forceful and is doing more than just being annoying..."

"In English, geek!" A tired Kim groaned.

"Somebody is making a concerted effort to get in; they know they have something – but probably not what – I need to find out if it's dangerous."

"I'll put the coffee on."

Whoever was hacking us; they weren't doing too much to cover their trail, which could mean a trap, or just a stupid hacker...

I was able to track down their IP address relatively easily. It had taken a while and it had involved several leaps around the country, but we had finally returned to Chicago. To be honest, I was more than a little surprised by the turn of events; I had expected to find the source of the hack in some disreputable Chinese University for example.

The hacking was quite complex, which indicated somebody highly skilled and possibly even a nation state which was why Chicago was not even on my list for potential sources of the hack.

That night

Lincolnwood

After we had gathered the team at the Safehouse, and left Matty in some very capable hands, we had then left the Safehouse in *Hound*.

As we approached the address, I began to get a strange feeling – something irked me. We were in a very good neighbourhood, with large houses and expensive cars parked on the driveways. I detected that my wife was a little unnerved too as we pulled up and stopped a couple of dozen yards from the target property. It was a large house, with five bedrooms, according to the schematics. Added information that I had obtained showed that there was also an advanced computer capability within the property as there were a pair of fibre data connections to the property, both of high bandwidth.

There were lights on downstairs in the house and also in two of the upstairs rooms. In the driveway were a pair of SUVs; a large Jeep and a BMW X3. Whomever lived there had money. According to the records held by Chicago and various other computer systems, Mr and Mrs Dade were both well paid members of the IT community and they both worked in the centre of Chicago as IT Managers. They had two teenage children, a boy and a girl.

They did *not* exactly fit the expected form of the 'hackers' that we were looking for...

..._...

Heat scans of the property had showed two people downstairs in the living room, but five in the rearmost bedroom, upstairs.

"You guys getting this?" Hawk asked.

"Yeah, Hawk – we have your image..." Trojan replied from the Safehouse.

"Sure that's the place?" Foxtail enquired from beside Trojan.

"That's where the IP address is registered..." I reminded them. "Murphy, Fellowes – you guys ready?"

"Aren't we always?" Murphy replied.

"Finished your doughnuts?" Hawk chuckled.

"Funny, coming from you!" Fellowes shot back good-naturedly.

"I'd like to go on record as saying that I did *not* stuff my face with doughnuts when on patrol..."

"Let's focus – Murphy, Fellowes; time for you two to do your thing."

As we watched, the unmarked CPD SUV pulled up outside the target property and we moved *Hound* up a dozen yards behind. Murphy and Fellowes climbed out and headed towards the front door of the house while Hawk and I headed around the rear of the property.

..._...

At the rear of the property was a large grassed backyard. The back of the building had a pair of balconies on the second floor – one of which had five people in the room beyond it.

"Let's move, my precious..."

"Move it, Geek!"

We both climbed up to the balcony and took up position on either side of the windows. There was a single door into the bedroom. We paused and listened.

We could hear voices – kids' voices...

***Chapter 268*: Hackers**

Author's Note: Please be warned that this chapter includes a small amount of smut and behaviour that could be seen as very indecent and salacious, including words or insinuations of a dubious, unseemly or suggestive nature.

This chapter is in line with Chapters 4 to 13 of **The Fusion Ultimatum**.

Tuesday 19th April
That night

Lincolnwood

Downstairs

"Good evening ma'am – I am Sergeant Fellowes, CPD and this is my colleague Sergeant Murphy..."

"What is this about, officers?" Mrs Dade enquired, concern evident in her voice.

"Who is it, honey?" A man's voice called from behind Mrs Dade.

"The Police."

"What?"

Mr Dade soon joined his wife and they invited us into the house.

"We have had a report of a hacking incident from this address, Mr and Mrs Dade," I began.

Upstairs

The door to the balcony was unlocked and the handle turned both easily and quietly.

The bedroom was large, with a pair of single beds, a large desk and the usual accoutrements that you might find in the bedroom of a teenage kid. The desk was the centre of attention, both for the five kids and for us. On that desk were a pair of twenty-three-inch computer monitors and beside them, a large Dell PC.

Of the five kids, two were girls and all were in their night attire. Nobody had made note of our entry and as our Heckler & Koch G36C assault rifles covered the kids, they continued chattering away as one of their number, a girl with black hair, typed away on the keyboard.

There was no way that *Fusion* was being hacked by a bunch of teenage geeks!

..._...

One of the boys happened to turn around; maybe he had felt the draft from the open doorway...

"Wow!"

Not the response that we had expected... All five sets of eyes turned to face us and they all went very wide.

"You're Hawk!" One of the boys blurted out as his eyes fell on my wife.

"You're Battle Guy!" The girl at the computer said in obvious awe.

"Hey!" Hawk growled. "Eyes up here – my face is *not* down there..."

The boy quickly moved his eyes from my wife's butt, but he paused at her chest before looking at her masked face. Damn... It was like looking at myself half a dozen or more years earlier!

"Ewww – Geeks!" Hawk wailed and she drew some dirty grins from the three boys.

..._...

"What would *Fusion* be doing in my bedroom?" The girl at the keyboard demanded as she stood up.

"You are one lucky hussy, Libby!" The other girl moaned.

Libby Dade was thirteen and tall for her age – I got the distinct impression that she was the leader of the small group of teenage hackers.

"Your IP address was used to hack into a firewall at our datacentre," I explained and we were instantly hit by a wall of indignant denials.

"We would never do that..."

"Hack into *Fusion*? No way!"

"That would be an awesomely dumb thing to do..."

"A quick way to be on Hit Girl's shit list!"

"Not cool..."

I looked over at Hawk; she just shrugged.

Libby sat back down at her computer and she opened up a command window before she commenced some rapid typing.

"Found it!" She declared after a couple of minutes. "There's an entry in the routing table – it takes incoming packets, rewrites their source and then sends them out again..."

"That might explain why you're being used... We need to..."

"Yeah – we should be able to use the logs to recreate the original packet headers..."

Libby pounded away at her keyboard – then she stopped typing for a moment and looked up at Battle Guy.

"What do you think – maybe another function or two..."

"Yeah – you could..."

"Like this?"

"Yeah; change that to a constant..."

"Is that better?"

"Yeah – compile it and let's see what the result is."

..._...

"You two geeks finished, yet?" I demanded.

"Almost – this program should track back the IP address..." Battle Guy replied.

"So – who are you friends, Libby?"

"This is my brother, Jesse – he uses the handle, Bloodwing. These are our friends, Kate Bradford – aka Psychotic Savage, Laurence Gray – aka Jolly Ox and Peter Savage – aka Atomic Machine. I, of course, am Poison Princess."

"Nice!" I commented sarcastically before turning to the comms. "Mist – you can move out..."

"Copy that – somebody's back in town and I've got an urge..."

I laughed and Battle Guy cringed.

..._...

"What the hell is going on in here?"

I turned to see Mr Dade standing in the doorway with his wife directly behind him. They were both followed by Murphy and Fellowes.

"We're helping *Fusion*, Dad – what does it look like!" Libby replied tartly.

"Elizabeth Dade, don't talk to your father like that!" Mrs Dade responded sharply.

Libby rolled her eyes.

"Less of the attitude, young lady!" Mr Dade added.

"She's telling the truth, Mr and Mrs Dade," I explained. "We tracked an attack to this property, but it appears that somebody is using them as the fall guy – we need your daughter's help to track them down.

"So you just broke into my daughter's bedroom?"

"You could try locking your doors?" Battle Guy hinted as he tipped his head towards the door that led outside to the balcony.

"What have we told you about that door, Elizabeth!"

"Sorry, Dad..."

Mrs Dade looked at her husband and shrugged.

"It's not like they're hacking the planet or a major corporation..." She mused.

"Yeah – things have moved on a bit since our day, Burn – like mother, like daughter."

"You got it there, Crash."

"It'll take a while for the back trace to run – we should have something tomorrow," Libby commented.

Later that night, across the city

Erika sat back onto her bare heels, her dark cherry nipples glistened with the saliva that coated them. She looked hungrily at Toni and kissed her on the lips, her tongue forced its way inside and Erika savoured the sweet taste of her friend. Toni pushed Erika back, away from her. Erika took a deep breath as Toni's hands touched her very hard and very sensitive nipples.

"I love your face, Erika, and I love the taste, but . . . don't take it the wrong way, but it's not your face I wanna see, nor are those the lips that I want to stick my tongue between..."

"You *bad* girl, Toni..." Erika groaned as she laid down on the ground, her head between Toni's legs.

Erika looked directly upwards into the very moist crotch of her girlfriend as Toni came down onto her knees and then laid down on top of her lover. Toni began to gently lick the shaven vulva before her and she yelped as she felt a tongue penetrate her own moist folds and two hands grasped her firm buttocks.

'Damn!' Toni's mind screamed. 'My girl's on form tonight!'

"God, I've missed you, Toni," Erika groaned as she took a breath from her munching.

"I was only gone five days..."

"Still, I missed you..."

Toni yelped as Erika's tongue began to work its way up her labia.

Wednesday 20th April

Glen Oak Drive

I crept across the landing, pushed open the door to the dark bedroom and stealthily slid inside – the bed was still occupied and the occupant was snoring.

I walked slowly past the bed and deftly pulled the curtains open to allow the morning sunlight to flood in. The sun quickly spread across the room and then directly into the face of the black haired girl who was still fast asleep. The girl grimaced and squinted as she slowly opened her dark blue eyes – she glared up at me.

"What do *you* want?"

"Time for little birdies to get up..."

"For your information, little sister, a raven is *not* a *little* birdie..."

"Still, it's time to stretch your wings and soar around the corner..."

"Enough with the bird metaphors, SD – I'm gettin' up, okay?"

"Yay!"

Forty-minutes later

Sunset Ridge Road

"You could have at least let me have a bigger breakfast..."

"Oh, Morgan, quit your moaning!"

"I... Oh never mind – let's get this over and done with..."

"Here we are, Burr Oak Drive – let's get those little fur balls."

A further forty-minutes later

Sunset Ridge Road

We had to rely on Sophia to help us sort out the pups as they were *very* excited.

It took twenty minutes to get them leashed and out onto the road – it was exhausting too.

"Josie, heel... Piper, *this* side of the damn light pole!"

"Razor – get your nose out of that bin... Kiara!"

Hope yelped as Kiara nipped her butt – Sophia rewarded Kiara with a paw that sent her flying, at least as far as the leash would allow. Layla and Hercules were actually behaving themselves for the moment.

"Razor – nose out of Piper's butt..."

Why did I sign up for this!

"This is so awesome!" Morgan giggled as she sat on the pavement and allowed Hercules to lick her face.

"Glad you're enjoying yourself..."

Safehouse F

"This is perfect – those kids did *very* well..."

"Your little geek pals came through?" Kim grinned.

"Yes, beautiful, they did – we have a target IP address – only there is still a lot more work to be done to find an exact location, but the location is *not* in the continental United States."

Indian Knoll Road

There was a knock on the door.

I answered it to find Marcus and Cathy. They both looked very grave – Hailee, something had happened to my daughter...

"No, please, no..."

"Vicky, Hailee has gone missing – she is alive; Mindy spoke with her – but we have no idea where she is..."

"My God..."

Friday 22nd April

Indian Knoll Road

When the phone rang, I was too scared to answer it.

But I pulled myself together and lifted the receiver.

"Vicky – it's Mindy . . . we've got her back..."

"Is she okay?"

"One or two bruises, nothing more..."

"Mindy, you can't lie worth a damn..."

"She's gonna be hurting for a long while, but she's alive, Vicky."

"Thank you for calling me, Mindy."

"We are all looking after her and she'll not be going out for a while..."

"She'll go bananas!"

"Tell me about it..." I replied.

Sunday 24th April

Safehouse F

Mindy and Stephanie were in trouble.

They thought that they had escaped their pursuers, but no, somehow the CIA had tracked them to *Mâcon*.

"Oh fuck!" Mindy exclaimed over the open comms.

We all heard the gunfire – AR-16 my brain told me – and then the wrenching of tortured metal as something hit something else. Then I heard the distinctive sound of bullets piercing glass and then a scream... I began to panic and I grabbed hold of Morgan for support – Stephanie had been hurt, maybe she had been killed...

Goddammit, I was crying!

Saoirse's hands gripped me tightly; she was strong and it was borderline painful.

Her face was a mask of horror and worry. Again the link to that other girl whom Saoirse had tried valiantly to kill in cold blood. I was shocked to see the tears, but I knew that hearing and not understanding what was going on was sheer torture for her.

I was going to be a good big sister and stay by her side.

Later that day

When Saoirse finally put down the phone her face was wet with tears but she was smiling.

"She's okay, just banged up a bit."

"I'm glad to hear it, SD, I really am."

"Thank you for staying with me, Morgan."

Tuesday 26th April

Glen Oak Drive

"So, what are you so damn happy about?"

I looked over at Morgan and I blushed.

"I found a boyfriend..."

"Which creep is it?"

"Ethan... Ethan Anderson..."

"Ethan Anderson!"

"He's cute..."

"He's a sophomore..."

"So..."

"Jeez, Saoirse... You fucked yet?"

The angry scowl told me otherwise!

I knew that Saoirse was not a virgin, but she was obviously biding her time. Ethan Anderson was a nice guy and I knew that he was a friend of Chloe and Josh, however, as far as I knew he was not aware of Fusion. Oh, well, it was up to her who she was seeing – as long as she stayed away from Mike...

I also knew that she was a little upset. Tomorrow was to be her fifteenth birthday – it was also to be Stephanie's tenth birthday. I knew that those two had a bond; I knew a lot of the story, but not everything. Mindy had told me that they had once been mortal enemies and that Saoirse had actually tried to kill Stephanie on three separate occasions.

Mindy and I had talked about tomorrow and I had made sure that Saoirse would *not* be alone.

***Chapter 269*: The Phoenix At Sunset**

Author's Note: *This chapter is in line with Chapters 14 to 16 of The Fusion Ultimatum.*

The following morning
Wednesday, 27th April 2016

I was awoken by a violent beeping sound – it was insistent.

The clock beside my bed said six in the morning. I buried my face into the pillow and groaned – but the beeping just got louder. I crawled out of bed and logged onto my laptop. I came awake almost instantly when I saw who it was.

"Happy Birthday, SD!"

It was a grinning Stephanie. I felt myself grinning too, despite the early hour.

"Hi, Steph – Happy Birthday to you, too!"

"Your hair sucks..."

"You just woke me up, bitch – it's not long after six in the goddamn morning!"

I could not be angry with her; I was actually over the moon that she had called.

"Where are you?"

"Innsbruck – that's in..."

"I know: Austria."

"It's really good to see you, SD..."

"You too, Steph . . . how's your bruising?"

"Despite Mindy's driving, I'm fine – it's mostly gone now..."

"You don't sound right..."

"You remember I mentioned Miranda?"

"Yeah, I do."

"She's dead."

Stephanie's voice was cold and devoid of all emotion. I knew that it was her way of keeping it together; it had nothing to do with her feeling, it was just her training.

"I'm so sorry, Steph."

"I'll get over it..."

"We'll talk about it next time we're together, okay?"

"Promise?"

"What are friends for?"

"Take care, SD!"

"Stay safe, Stephanie."

Later that morning

Safehouse F

I had no idea what was going on, but the atmosphere in the Safehouse was distinctly chilly and I was not referring to the air-conditioning either.

Everybody was concentrating on their tasks and supporting those in Europe. Marty had mentioned that reinforcements may be required, but not who might be going. In the meantime, I was trying to maintain Lauren's training regimen.

"Come on, Lauren, concentrate... The diameter of the bore in a Glock 22 is...?"

"Forty waffles..."

"Huh?" The girl was *not* concentrating. "What is Aiki-Jō?"

Lauren smiled.

"Aiki-Jō is the name given to the set of martial art pancakes practiced with a Jō..."

I blinked and stuck a finger in my left ear – had I heard her right?

"Who were Hit Girl and Kick-Ass fighting when they first joined forces?"

I hope she doesn't say Frank doughnut!

"Err, that would be Cereal D'Amico. Easy, or what!"

"Or what..." I muttered. "I've never heard answers so wrong . . . and so breakfast-related!"

Lauren's stomach rumbled quite audibly.

"Did you skip breakfast, this morning?"

"Maybe..."

Two days later ***Friday Night***

Safehouse F

It was time for Lauren to learn how the Command Centre operated when operatives were out on the streets of Chicago.

Marty had spent an hour taking the young vigilante through all the systems and how we kept track of who were out in Chicago. The screens displayed location, status of the operatives and even the fuel load on their transport. Every Safehouse was listed along with their status.

"Why is Safehouse K greyed out?" Lauren asked.

"The CIA blew it up and it's currently being rebuilt."

"Oh."

"What's down there, in Safehouse W?"

Marty chuckled.

"That, Lauren, would be the *Vigilante*."

Marty punched some keys and the schematic of a sleek-hulled sports-yacht appeared on one of the screens.

"Wow!" I breathed and I had to admit, I was overawed by what Dave and Mindy had built.

"What is *that*?" I demanded as she pointed at the left-hand screen in the Control Centre.

I looked up at the indicated screen.

"That's something different..." Marty commented.

It was not easy to see on the image from the camera, but the colours stood out if nothing else.

"Nice colour scheme," I commented.

Marty chuckled as he directed Foxtail and Raven towards Chicago's newest whatever.

Junction of 64th and 50th

"What do you think?"

I looked over at my big sister. Despite the fact that she *was* my *big* sister, she knew that Foxtail was *way* more skilled than Raven ever was. Raven slowed her motorcycle and we stopped just behind the small crowd that had formed near the garish . . . what the hell was she? We climbed off the Yamaha Super Ténéré and moved closer. Several people moved out of our way as we approached – it was obvious to all that we were *Fusion*, even if we *were* new on the streets of Chicago.

..._...

She was clad from neck to ankle in a figure hugging suit that accentuated her slim but very feminine body. The usual key points of vulnerability were protected with extra armour for the joints and the chest while the young woman's hands were encased in slim gauntlets and her feet in lightweight, knee-length, high-heeled boots. Overall, the suit was black, with the boots and the backs of the gauntlets highlighted in purple pizzazz – a lighter, almost pink, shade of purple.

Above the neck, the woman's head was encased in a mask that covered all but her mouth and lower jaw. The mask was the same purple pizzazz, while the long wig that extended more than halfway down her back was primarily a venetian red, with lemon yellow highlights. On either thigh, she carried an eighteen-inch Tanto, each with a twelve-inch blade. Mounted over each Tanto was a holster from which a SIG Sauer SP2022 pistol in nine-millimetre calibre peeked out. On her back she carried a double-bladed ninja sword staff.

Behind her stood a beautiful Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R in a dark red with neon orange highlights to the wheel rims and frame. The machine matched her flamboyant image to a T. She noticed us in the crowd.

"Ah, the mighty *Fusion* arrives..."

I just stood there, my arms folded across my chest. Raven took up an equally non-threatening position with her hands on her hips.

"I think it is time to introduce myself . . . I, am Sunset Phoenix," she said with a flourish.

Raven began to slow-clap.

"Welcome to Chicago, Sunset Phoenix..." She replied. "You here to cause us trouble?"

"Only time will tell, Raven . . . who is your little friend?"

I bristled at that!

"I, am Foxtail..."

"Nice – anyway..."

There was the roar of a powerful motorcycle engine and a Honda Fireblade Black Edition appeared behind the so-called Sunset Phoenix. Medic came to a rapid halt, dismounted and stood with her arms folded; she glared disapprovingly at the garish newcomer. My attention was momentarily taken by the awesome set of wheels – Medic was going through a mid-life crisis; I was certain of it...

Sunset looked at Medic for a moment, before she continued to speak.

"Welcome, *Medic* – nice wheels – get used to seeing me around, *Fusion*, we're gonna get to know each other so well..."

"Is that so?" Raven stated rhetorically.

"My time is up; a girl is very busy on Friday night..."

With that, the flamboyant vigilante swung a long leg over her Kawasaki and started the engine before pulling on a pink and black helmet. Then with a completely unnecessary amount of power, she sped off leaving a pungent smell of burnt rubber.

"Fucking lunatic!" Raven commented under her breath.

The crowd being to disperse and once they were mostly gone, we remounted our machines and the three of us headed off for a coffee.

Across Chicago

Sunset Phoenix slowed her Kawasaki and she pressed the button on a small remote.

A roller-shutter to her right opened and she turned her motorcycle into the concrete structure and then down a curved ramp that descended into the depths. After she had descended about forty feet, she entered a large cavernous concrete room which immediately erupted into light as she came off the ramp. Behind her, a steel door slid shut, closing off the ramp. She stopped her motorcycle in a space between two other motorcycles and killed the engine.

Off came the pink and black helmet which Sunset then placed gently onto a rack beside several other helmets after she had climbed off her motorcycle. She walked over towards a steel door set into the concrete, punched a code into an adjacent keypad and as the door clicked open, she vanished through it.

Forty minutes later, a young woman, with below shoulder-length light brown hair and brown eyes walked out of the same door. She walked over to a competition orange Shelby GT350 Mustang and climbed in. She pressed a button on the car's dashboard and the steel door covering the ramp slid to one side. With a roar the car accelerated up the ramp and out onto the streets of Chicago.

Saturday, 30th April 2016

Apparently, Stephanie and the others were in Germany – how did I know?

The wall to wall news coverage of a 'high-speed shootout at the Nürburgring' and 'carnage on the roads of Germany' gave me a small hint. There was no direct reference to *Fusion*, however, Mindy seemed to have her own ways of leaving trails of mass-destruction behind her as she went. It was really close as to what caused more mayhem and destruction: Hit Girl on a mission or a nuclear bomb...

I understood that Captain Williams was on the verge of a nervous breakdown; not surprising really when you considered what he had to put up with. As for Paige; she was struggling no end when you considered that she looked like she had just swallowed a whole water melon – people weren't kidding when they referred to pregnant women as beached whales. I was also struggling to work out how something so big could come out of somewhere that was actually relatively small... Note to self: *never* get pregnant!

Anyway, Foxtail had work to do – I was packing as apparently, I had been drafted to fight in Mindy's little war in Europe. I was not the only person packing; three others were packing their kit too. One of them was very eager to get into the action, wherever and whatever that might be.

Safehouse F

I picked up the phone almost absent-mindedly.

"6281," I offered.

"My name is Akuma and I work for a mutual friend..."

"I have no idea what you are talking about," I replied smoothly.

The caller had a strong French accent so I began to have an idea about what the caller was about to say.

"Miraculous."

A simple word but it was also a code challenge.

"Bonjour, Akuma – I am Battle Guy, how can I help you?"

***Chapter 270*: Emergence**

Author's Note: *This chapter is the beginning of the post-Fusion Ultimatum storyline. We will see some new faces and will see some old friends return too. This new storyline will contain plenty of action and violence. We will see Fusion face their toughest foes yet as they are put through their paces in their home city. As well as the violence, there will be heartache and there will be sorrow . . . there will also be death – not to mention a real shocker later on...*

My name is Adam Stockdale and I live with my paternal cousin, Adora.

Our lives were torn apart by the brutal murder of our parents at my home, one dark and stormy night, in 2011. My cousin and I, then spent the next two and a half years of our lives in comas brought on by our injuries that were sustained during the attack. A few days before our fifteenth birthday, we both awoke into a new and scary world. We were taken in by a friend of the family, Duncan Adams and his wife, Katelyn. Both of whom had stayed at our bedsides for the preceding two years.

It was Katelyn, who had broken the news to us both that we had been orphans for the past two years of our lives. Our new lives had begun, in a very different country in a very different part of the world. Once the initial sadness and horror had passed, we had both grown angry, bitter, and spiteful towards the outside world despite the love and care that we both received in copious amounts.

Under the guidance of Duncan and Katelyn, we gained new skills which we were told might help us to come to terms with our new lives – something to vent our anger on. We had put all our efforts into bettering ourselves at school – we had two whole years to catch up on – and we held a deep-seated hatred for the people that we believed were behind the deaths of our parents and the near deaths of ourselves.

Unknown to us, we were being secretly trained by Duncan and Katelyn – they had a background of which we were completely oblivious. Our plan had been to go after those who had destroyed our lives, ourselves. However, to do that, we would need money. We had been left a large amount of money by our respective parents, however, it was all tied up in a trust fund that neither of us could access until we reached our eighteenth birthdays. When that day came, we had both vowed to start actively planning to avenge our parents.

As cousins, we were very close. Our fathers had been brothers – twins in fact. They had been born together – they had even married together – they had also died together. In a quirk of biological fate, our mothers had both gone into labour on the same day and we had both been born within a minute of one another.

Then, after three years, 2016 had finally dawned and a month later, we had turned eighteen.

February 1st, 2016

On that day, as well as gaining access to a huge fortune, we were also given the keys to our former homes.

My family had lived to the northeast of a big city in North America while Adora's family had lived near a large lake to the north of the same city. We both returned to the United States of America with our adoptive family and we landed at Chicago O'Hare International Airport. It was only when Adora and I arrived at my former home that a big secret was unveiled. Duncan and Katelyn had been planning and building ever since we had both regained consciousness, three years previously.

Even though we had not been able to access our trust funds to start building our future, Duncan and Katelyn had transformed more than one part of my home that I had never known had even existed. There followed three months of intensive training to get used to our new equipment. It was a bit weird, just the two of us living in a nine-bedroom mansion but it had given us the space and privacy that we had craved to figure out our new lives.

Therefore, at the beginning of May, with our new skills and our new equipment, we soon found ourselves out on the dark streets of Chicago in search of assistance for our quest of retribution.

..._...

Despite us having worn our armoured suits before, somehow it felt different wearing them that night. We were going into harm's way, although it had been suggested to us that we try to avoid any trouble for our first few nights out on the town.

We each wore near identical suits – Adora's was black from head to toe and matched her Yamaha MT-10 motorcycle. Mine was black but it had vivid blue highlights that matched my own Yamaha MT-10 motorcycle's colour scheme. On each hip, we carried a SIG Sauer P2022 Threaded Barrel pistol and around our waists a utility belt that held communications equipment, spare magazines, medical supplies and some other equipment. On our left and right thighs, we carried three titanium throwing knives. A large combat knife lived on our left calves.

Our principal weapon was an Oneida Kestrel compound bow which we carried on a mount just forward of the motorcycle handlebars; on our backs we carried a slim quiver of arrows. The motorcycles also carried a heavier weapon in the form of a SIG Sauer MPX-K submachine gun plus several magazines.

Sunday, 1st May 2016

We were complete unknowns in the city and unlike the pink whatever that had recently appeared on the streets of Chicago only the previous week, we wanted to keep a low profile for as long as possible. Mind you, as far as we could tell, there had been no sign of Hit Girl, nor of any of the senior members of *Fusion* for a good couple of weeks. There had, however, been some interesting news reports from Europe...

Our weapons tended to blend in with our suits in darkness which made us seem like just any other pair of youngsters out for an evening ride. We had spent some of the past weeks combing the city and learning the streets and alleyways. We knew that until we were trusted, we might actually be hunted by *Fusion*, the CPD and God only knew who else. With that in mind, we had scouted out escape routes and studied places where we could hideout if needs be.

We had trained well, but we had not seen any actual 'action', so we needed to be careful and for the moment, there were only the two of us.

..._...

There was one other complication that I had not mentioned. Duncan and Katelyn had two kids: Paul and Rose who were eleven and nine respectively. Those two had absolutely no idea what myself and my cousin were now doing – apparently, the two kids had no idea that their own parents had a rather violent history.

That night, our first night out in Chicago as Apollo and Artemis, Paul called me on my mobile...

"Hi, Paul."

"Where are you? Are you out somewhere; you sound muffled?"

"I'm in Chicago with my cousin, why?"

"Just wanted to see if you wanted to come get me and we could go get a pizza..."

"Not tonight, Paul – got things to do. Gotta go, kid..."

"Bye, Adam."

That was all I needed! I was trying to concentrate on the night's plan but instead I was being distracted by an eleven-year-old who wanted pizza...

Coming out of a coma had been hard, not to mention the distressing news which had followed us coming back to life.

When we had been hurt, we had both been twelve. As for the events that had taken our parents from us, we could remember very little – we were advised that the traumatic memories would come back over time; neither of us were in *any* rush to regain those memories for obvious reasons...

Suddenly awaking to find yourselves aged fifteen after going to sleep as a twelve-year-old was weird, to be honest. During our comas, both my cousin and I had sailed through puberty for one and our bodies were very different from when we had previously seen them. We had actually taken the opportunity to examine each other to find out the changes...

...+...

"You've actually got a dick..." Adora noticed with a smirk.

"Thanks!" I replied sarcastically and I felt myself reddening on my cheeks. "You've actually got some tits..."

"Touché, mon ami!" Adora laughed. "My tits are huge!"

"Oh, no..." I moaned as I looked down at myself.

Adora was the first 'real' girl that I had actually seen naked and my brain had noticed...

"Nice, cuz, real nice..."

Adora was blushing as I bit my lip and closed my eyes, not that it made any difference as something just got harder.

...+...

I had to admit that after *that* episode I thought I'd never hear the end of it but then something much worse happened to Adora a week or two later. I had gone looking for my cousin one morning and I had found her in her bathroom, crouched down and with several fingers up herself.

...+...

"Err, I'll leave you alone..." I muttered as I turned to leave.

"I'm on my goddamn period, you dick, and I can't figure out these damn things..."

It was only then that I noticed the three or four bullet-shaped objects on the bathroom floor.

"Oh – I'm still leaving; ewww..."

"Thanks, asshole!" Adora growled. "I've never done this before – I barely had pubes before all this happened..."

...+...

Needless to say, neither of us had spoken about me getting a rise out of my cousin, nor about Adora's tampon problems...

South Clark Street and East 16th Street

We began to attract some unwanted attention by the time we reached South Clark Street and East 16th Street.

As we passed under the railroad tracks, northbound, we found ourselves with an escort. It was that pink whatever from the other night. Despite her garish colour scheme – Adora liked the purple pizzazz – she had a great body and an awesome taste in motorcycles.

We had no desire to be associated with her as she was a complete unknown and I had registered *Fusion's* reaction to her, which had been full of disdain. We accelerated but she kept pace with us as we roared through the tunnel beneath the West Roosevelt Road junction. We took a left at West Polk Street and crossed beneath the railroad tracks still with the purple pizzazz following us.

We stopped in the park beside the canal and we both turned to our new 'friend'.

..._...

"You must be Sunset Phoenix."

"Oh, new vigilantes – cool!"

"Why are you following us?"

"I was curious..."

"Well?" Artemis growled. "Is your curiosity satisfied?"

"Not really. What do you call yourselves?"

"We are not ready to reveal that information; not yet," I replied.

"But we'll let you know," Artemis added.

By her tone, I noticed that my cousin had taken an instant dislike to Sunset Phoenix.

"Okay; I know when I'm not welcome – see ya, wouldn't want to be ya!"

With that, Sunset Phoenix started her engine and accelerated away.

At the end of our 'eventful' night, we headed for East Monroe Street.

There, our families owned a condo. South Wabash Street which crossed East Monroe beside our building also bore the 'L' and as we passed beneath Madison/Wabash station, we peeled off into an alleyway where we quickly pulled off our weapons and stowed them in a previously cached holdall. In went our masks and out came a pair of dark leather jackets. The building had originally been selected by our families for the anonymity that it offered.

That anonymity allowed us to ride our motorcycles down into the subterranean parking lot and park them in a private container-type storage area. Our weapons were left with the motorcycles under lock and key before we made sure that the container was secure and we headed for one of the four elevators that serviced our floor.

We rocketed up to the 71st floor where our condo took up the entire floor.

Later that night

Winnetka

The Shelby GT530 Mustang turned left off Winnetka Road into the drive of a large property.

The gates slowly swung open as the driver pressed a button in the car. She pulled the car around and stopped directly in front of the stone steps that led up to the front door. Summer Frasier walked up to the door, unlocked it and walked straight inside before she closed and locked the door behind her.

After walking through to the kitchen and making herself a coffee, she headed downstairs into the basement. There she walked toward what she called her Resource Room. The door was steel and had a combination lock beside it.

She entered an eight-digit code and passed through the door which closed and locked itself behind her.

It had been seven years.

It had taken the lives of my parents and it had consumed me. It had made me what I was at that moment. I had intended to do good, to ensure that nobody else suffered the way my family had. But then, in the middle of December 2015, I had received a package delivered by an anonymous courier.

That package had contained a file. On opening the cover of the file, I was shocked by what I found.

..._...

There were three colour photos.

I recognised the girl in each photo, even though I had not seen her since around the time that the first photo had been taken. The girl was eight-years-old in the first photo, maybe ten in the second, and maybe twelve in the final photo.

Beneath the photos was a heavily redacted form. In between the blacked out portions I recognised the name: **KARA NEWTON** and then in another box: **FRASIER**. The date of birth was instantly recognisable: **JUNE 18TH 2001**. I hated the next box – **DATE OF DEATH: 12TH OCTOBER 2014**. There was a red stamp in the top right corner: **DECEASED**.

Somehow, it gave me closure – at least I knew what had happened to her all those years ago. She had lived another

four years after she had gone missing and I had no idea what she had been doing during those years. I perused the next pages with shaking hands. There were multiple full-colour, glossy photos. They were horrible. They depicted a naked girl of around twelve-years-old. She lay on a coroner's table and one side of her head was visibly broken.

Even in death, I recognised the face.

Below the photos was a report, most of which was black out, I zeroed onto one piece of information, one phrase that contained a name: **KILLED BY STEPHANIE WALKER**. Finally, there were more photos – this time of a girl with long-blond hair. Then some un-redacted information which detailed one Stephanie Walker. I again zeroed onto some critical information: **LAST KNOWN LOCATION: CHICAGO (SEE FUSION)**.

My sister would be avenged.

***Chapter 271*: Upcoming Forsaken**

Forsaken will be back in action, very soon. But for now, some upcoming **Forsaken**.

Please be advised that some of what you see below may not actually appear in the story, or may be changed considerably. Most of the below will be out of context (on purpose) and not necessarily in the right order. Also, the below spans approximately 80 chapters, so you may not see certain sections for quite a while.

...+...

I heard the sound of the explosions – four in all. I grabbed Anne-Marie and dragged her to the floor as the glass from the windows exploded into the room

...+...

Without any further hesitation, Megan reached forward and she pushed a button on the console.

"Hound, Sentinel, this is Wildcat – we have explosions, move in and assess the situation," she ordered smoothly as she took charge. "Petra – keep an eye on the situation here; Leon, let's gear up – we're taking Brute!"

Despite her tender age, Wildcat was the ranking Fusion operator present in the Safehouse that night.

...+...

The ten-year-old girl instantly braced up as the knife embedded itself an inch or two into the archway, a mere three inches from her left ear.

...+...

"What the hell is that racket?" Office Pete Howser exclaimed as his voice was all but drowned out by the sound of many powerful motorcycle engines.

...+...

It had been almost six months since her kidnap and attack – I refused to say that word; it scared me. Lauren had cried most nights for over a week after it had happened. I had tried to help her but Lauren would hug me on some occasions and on others, she would push me away – at times violently.

...+...

That had also been around the time that Chloe had been mysteriously wounded. Her explanation had been that she was mugged – bullshit! I would love to see the mugger that could better her – that girl could fight!

...+...

The thirteen-year-old girl grinned sheepishly as she grabbed her mask and we headed downstairs to the armoury. There, the young vigilante drew a SIG Sauer P239 Tactical pistol in 9-millimetre calibre and a 7-inch combat knife. After checking the weapons over, she picked up her utility belt and inserted the pistol into the holster on her right hip and the knife into the scabbard on her left thigh.

...+...

"Too much?" Foxtail asked as she dropped the man's body to the ground.

"It was great up until the point where you near enough ripped his damned head off!"

...+...

"Well, hello, Hit Girl..."

"What the fuck are you?"

"I – am – FEAR..."

...+...

"Oh, dear," FEAR laughed. "Did the little kitty's claws fail?"

...+...

"Why is everybody determined to kill me?" Psyche growled dejectedly.

"I'm not..." Wildcat replied supportively.

"She did – three fucking times – no offence..." Psyche said as she indicated Foxtail.

"None taken!" Foxtail growled back.

"Well, you do have a certain effect on people..." Kick-Ass chuckled.

"Not helping!"

...+...

"Woah, they're butt naked!" Wildcat commented inappropriately.

...+...

I just figured it all out – it was like a bright flash of light inside my head as everything became remarkably clear. Should I say something to her; would she kill me?

...+...

"I can't – she'd kill me..."

"Stop talking crap – what have you done?"

"I know who Shadow really is..."

...+...

There were noises all around us as we sat on bare concrete, the hood scared me even more. The only good thing was that I could feel Riley's hand as she gripped mine tightly. My face was wet with tears and I had been crying ever since we had been abducted. I had lost track of time but it didn't feel all that long since we had arrived where we had arrived.

...+...

This time the boots were dark grey with . . . with purple highlights... I was going to die.

...+...

"As most of you know, Paige has been lugging something around inside her, for the past nine months. Please raise your glasses to the newest member of our little community."

...+...

Saoirse went bright red and her eyes almost popped out of their sockets. Then she turned on Stephanie.

"Can't you keep your big gob shut?"

...+...

Stephanie instantly realised her mistake and tried to correct her error but to no avail as for about the third time that afternoon, she hit the mat.

...+...

"Does she get on well with her siblings?"

"Oh, yes," I replied as another image of Psyche appeared in my mind. "She'd kill for them..."

"Metaphorically speaking, of course..."

"Of course..."

...+...

"This one is a definite call for help: 'Fusion: Discord in trouble. Need extraction ASAP.'"

...+...

"Still – that was a very private moment..."

"Private?" Stephanie demanded incredulously.

"You ate each other out in front of two hundred people!"

...+...

My life was bothering me. We seemed to lurch from one crisis to another . . .

...+...

"You know, one problem with having Hit Girl as your mother, it gives new emphasis to that common expression: 'Mom's gonna kill you'..."

So I'm just gonna come out and say it: Mom's gonna kill you!"

...+...

"I had no choice – it just came out..." The wretched Stephanie replied.

"She tried to pull out my fingernails with pliers!"

...+...

I had never touched a real live girl before, let alone removed the bra of one – I was just glad it wasn't a real bra; I had no idea how they worked...

...+...

I knew what Marcus would have been thinking and I might have been on the same page to some extent. Marcus would have shot the man; I would have cut his balls off...

...+...

It was a pointless question as three kids suddenly exploded with joy as we walked to the car. It was a perfect day and I felt happier than I had in a long time. Maybe things were settling down and we could all enjoy life as a family – well, as a vigilante family.

...+...

However, that was not what had caught my attention; it was the spreading crimson stain that threatened to inundate...

...+...

"Thunder! Thunder! Thunder!"

The 'Thunder' codeword was reserved for a direct threat to Fusion and there was a special set of arrangements to be actioned when that codeword was triggered.

...+...

"Senior staff will go to Safehouse Zulu. We maintain a force here at Safehouse F and we send personnel to Safehouse W."

...+...

"Time to go..." Marcus announced as he drew his pistol.

...+...

"Stats are dropping..."

"No breath sounds on the left . . . no pulse; coding . . . milligram of epi..."

...+...

...blood-soaked clothing was in a pile on the floor along with several bloody wound dressings and bandages. I could hear some of what was being said and none of it sounded good.

...+...

"Welcome to Zulu!" Marty announced with a flourish.

...+...

For the first time in a real long time, I was scared.

...+...

I ran into the Command Centre and Abby looked upset.

"Shadow's been injured – she's on the way back in with Jackal..."

...+...

As Josh touched Mindy's arm he suddenly found himself on his knees as Mindy twisted his hand savagely and pinned him.

...+...

"Then let's go see Apollo and Artemis – I want to talk to those two..."

"Mindy," Dave cautioned. "Talk first, mutilate later. If they're guilty..."

...+...

Her paintwork gleamed as if it had only just been applied, which in all accuracy, it just had.

...+...

"Ocean Vigilante, you have a clear range for missile firing on bearing of two-four-zero..."

I turned from the chart and spoke to the helmsman.

"Helm, new course, one-seven-two, maintain eighteen knots."

"New course, one-seven-two," Hailee acknowledged.

I reached for the phone and pressed the button for ship-wide.

"All hands remain aft of the bridge and standby for missile launch..."

We were closed up at action stations and everybody was wearing a lifejacket and anti-flash hood with gauntlets.

Joshua turned a key from 'SAFE' to 'PERMIT' and a klaxon sounded. His finger hovered over a pulsing orange button.

"Missile one – shoot!" I ordered.

...+...

"Help me..."

"After what you have done?" I responded, coldly.

"She will kill me..."

"Maybe I should help her."

"I'll do anything..."

...+...

Titan was buried under tons of masonry and the last I saw of Foxtail was her motorcycle as it spun across the blacktop and smashed into a parked car.

...+...

"I am Stormtide – were you sent to kill me?"

I laughed. "No, I came to rescue you."

...+...

"You gotta help him – he is alone, please."

"Help who?"

"Rage – they'll kill him."

...+...

There were four kids to get up, showered, and dressed before breakfast.

...+...

She launched herself at Mindy and the younger girl shoved the older girl backwards so her mentor fell over and then she proceeded to punch Mindy in the face.

...+...

"I will not fight you... I know that you won't believe me, but I did not do it because I am cold hearted; I did it out of love – out of love for you."

...+...

"Damn; it's like fucking Baghdad!"

...+...

Wildcat, Hawk and Raven were using their armour and shields to protect the paramedics and their patients as they worked.

...+...

An RPG powered in and struck a bullet-riddled patrol car.

The car exploded and sent red hot shrapnel in all directions.

...+...

Raven screamed as the shrapnel dug into her armoured back and rapidly burnt through the armour.

...+...

Out of the blue, the 12.7x55-mm STs-130VPS 76-gram bullet cut its way through the air at over 300 metres-per-second. It tore through the armour like it was nothing and the lifeless body dropped.

...+...

'If you are reading this letter, then I am dead.'

...+...

***Chapter 272*: Shit Storm - Part I**

This is the continuation of the storyline from Chapter 29: Closure of The Fusion Ultimatum.

Wednesday, 11th May, 2016

Chicago, United States of America

We taxied into the cavernous hanger owned by Wayne Enterprises.

The main doors were closed and then the stairs lowered at the port side, forward hatch. There was a welcoming committee arrayed before us. Hailee made her way over to her Mother and I saw Hailee grimace with pain as she was hugged.

"What happened, Hailee?" Vicky demanded.

"Everything..." the poor girl replied before she burst into tears.

I saw Cathy looking at me.

"It was bad; let's just leave it at that for now," I suggested and the happiness quickly returned as everybody left the jet.

Cathy hugged Chloe and Curtis tightly; I could see the tears of both mother and daughter. Cathy had no idea, yet, what had happened to Curtis and I was not all that keen on telling her that her nephew had almost died.

Many of the team had grown in stature and maturity during our trip around Europe. Everybody had been hurt in some way and some had suffered serious injuries. But, we had all made it home in more or less one piece *and* with the mission completed successfully.

I was happy to leave it at that.

Two days later

Friday, 13th May

Maple and Ash Restaurant

8 West Maple Street, Chicago

I had hoped for some quiet time to cool down after our European 'vacation'.

It was Dave's twenty-third Birthday, so we had gone out for dinner – no expense spared. We had wanted to keep it intimate, so it was just Dave, myself, Stephanie, Anne-Marie, Danny, Chloe, Josh, Abby, Marty and Kim. Therefore, the ten of us met up outside the restaurant at seven that night.

"Hi, guys!" Kim exclaimed as she hugged the kids. "You look very smart, tonight, kids."

"Hi, Kim," the kids replied. "Thanks."

Stephanie and Anne-Marie blushed while Danny smiled sweetly. You'd never believe that just seventy-two or so hours previously, Anne-Marie and Danny had been fighting for their lives in a foreign country, 3,000 miles away. A few hours later, we had almost lost Stephanie. Seeing her now, clean and tidy – *and* in a dress, just like any other ten-year-old girl, it was difficult to see her as the girl in body armour with blood all over her face, hair, and body armour. However, she was the very same girl who had been rescued by Dave who then went to town on her attacker and killed him. Chloe and Josh, along with Kim had fought valiantly themselves, often two or more to one.

Marty and Abby had co-ordinated all the required support that had kept us all safe and informed during the complex assault. Apart from Stephanie, Anne-Marie, and Danny, the senior staff of *Fusion* were all represented that night. The next senior person in the Fusion hierarchy would be Hailee and then young Megan – in fact, she was in charge at the Safehouse at that moment. I grimaced at whether I would ever see my Safehouse in one piece again... I trusted Megan explicitly – well, to a point. She had a fiery temper and she had (inadvertently, apparently) shoved one of my senior staff off the roof of an eight-storey building!

Considering that most of us were covered in bruises, we had all opted for anything but bare legs. Stephanie and Anne-Marie wore thick tights, while the older girls wore long skirts – I hated wearing tights of any description; I left those to the more feminine around, such as Superman!

..._...

We were led inside by the maître d' and shown to our table on the third floor. The place was enormous and very smart. Neither Danny, Anne-Marie, nor Stephanie, had been in such a place before and their eyes went wide at the splendour that surrounded us. However, all three enjoyed the attention!

For the starter, we all ate a king crab salad each. Four weeks of fighting and near-death experiences could give you one hell of an appetite! For the main course, the boys went to town. Dave and Josh each ordered the \$145, 'Eisenhower' 40-ounce+ steak. Anne-Marie was not amused about them eating 'Eisenhower', but Joshua insisted that she would not mind... Marty was not to be outdone and he went for the 22-ounce Ribeye.

'Greedy gits!' Chloe breathed.

She went and ordered the 'Bone in Cowgirl' steak which weighed in at a more decent 16-ounces – Stephanie thought the name was outrageously funny. I scowled and ignored Chloe's smile in Joshua's direction. The three kids chose to share an enormous \$175, 'Roasted Seafood Tower'. That just left the three 'civilised' ladies. We ordered an enormous pile of Alaskan King Crab Legs, each.

..._...

There was a lot of munching, and not a lot of talking – except of course for Anne-Marie. We had only been back in the US, a few days. I still worried about what might have been as I gazed around at all the happy, smiling faces. I noticed Chloe giving me 'a look' – she knew what was going through my mind, so I just smiled and stuck my tongue out at my best friend.

Josh and Dave were operating a conveyor belt of enormous chunks of beef into their mouths – the steaks were fucking enormous. To be honest, they were ridiculous! I liked steak, just as much as any red-blooded American, only I ate them in smaller sizes.

"You two are gonna be in the bog for a week," Stephanie observed halfway through the meal.

"Trust you to lower the tone of the conversation," Abby laughed and Stephanie grinned.

By the end of the main course, I was surprised and annoyed, to find that both Dave and Josh had almost finished their half-cows and they were overtaking *me*!

..._...

It was approaching nine o'clock when it happened.

We had finished our main course and we were well into our dessert when the restaurant shook - violently.

"What the...?" Chloe asked with a worried expression on her face.

Then I heard the sound of the explosions – four in all. I grabbed hold of Anne-Marie and I dragged her to the floor just as the glass from the windows exploded into the restaurant. I saw that Chloe had grabbed Danny while Dave covered Stephanie. Marty, not surprisingly, had protected Kim and I saw that Joshua had sheltered Abby.

There was screaming and yelling from other diners as the glass fell all around us.

Safehouse F

Hailee bolted up from her seat in the Control Centre.

The screen before her had automatically zoomed into a part of Chicago and an alarm had sounded throughout the Safehouse. She was rapidly joined by Mathilda and Megan who ran in from where they had been exercising on the mat.

"There's been some explosions in North State Street..." Hailee explained as she examined the map.

"Oh, shit – that's right where Mindy and Dave are, with the others!" She exclaimed.

Without any further hesitation, Megan reached forward and she pushed a button on the console before her.

"*Hound*, *Sentinel*, this is *Wildcat* – explosions, North State Street – move in and assess the situation, prepare to extract the team," she ordered smoothly as she took charge. "Petra – keep an eye on the situation; Leon, let's gear up – we're taking *Brute*!"

Despite her tender age, *Wildcat* was the ranking *Fusion* operator present in the Safehouse, Hailee being on reduced duties.

"Wow..." Hailee chuckled. "She's a bossy bitch!"

Megan glared at Hailee.

"Move!" She growled as she ran out the door.

"Yes, ma'am!" Mathilda replied as she ran after the eleven-year-old vigilante.

Oak Street Beach

With so many senior *Fusion* members congregating in one place, it had been deemed prudent to provide overwatch – you know, just in case.

The two armoured GMC Yukon Denali SUVs had been parked up beside the beach until the order from *Wildcat* had come in. *Sentinel* had Mist behind the wheel and seated beside her was Foxtail, with Raven in the back. *Hound* was being driven by Medic and seated beside her was Splinter, with Trojan seated behind them.

As soon as *Wildcat* had declared the alert, everybody braced up and began to look around for danger.

Maple and Ash Restaurant

The shouting and screaming was still around us.

No more glass was falling and as far as I could tell, the building that we were in, was still intact. I looked over at Dave and he tilted his head towards the door. I nodded, just as my cell began to vibrate in one of several pockets that were hidden in the dress which I wore.

"Hello, dear, you destroyed my Safehouse yet?"

"I'll pretend you never said that and kill you later," *Wildcat* responded.

"You enjoying the big chair...?"

"Yes, and I hate to burst your bubble, but there's been four explosions – you might have heard them," *Wildcat* cut in dryly.

"One or two, or four..."

"I've ordered *Sentinel* and *Hound* to readiness and I'm heading out in *Brute* with Leon."

"See what you can do to help, but *do not* extract us until we call."

"Copy that. Stay safe."

"You're doing good."

"Always the tone of surprise!"

I disconnected the call and dropped the phone back into its secret pocket. I grabbed Anne-Marie and climbed to my feet, a hand close to my hidden pistol. Dave led us all towards the exit where there was the expected hoard of people desperate to escape.

Unlike most, *our* party was calm and collected.

Outside, there was pandemonium.

Glass was everywhere and I could see lots of injuries caused by flying glass. Strangely, I could see no more damage than shattered glass. I had expected to see downed buildings or something. Maybe that was just my overactive imagination. Megan had said that there had been four explosions, but there was little damage. Whomsoever had detonated the bombs – assuming they *were* bombs – had obviously taken the effort to minimise damage. In my mind, the bombs – and I was certain that they had been bombs – had been for psychological value.

Chicago was under attack.

Dave turned to me as we headed away from the restaurant to where we had parked our cars.

"Your mind is working away, I can see it," he commented with concern in his voice.

He knew me too damn well.

"Chicago is under attack, Dave. Again. Why does this shit keep happening?"

"It keeps happening because there are bad people in the world. That is why we do what we do. We *will* protect this city," Dave replied.

"From who? We need to find out who is doing this before somebody ends up with something much worse than just glass cuts."

"We'll just have to wait and see what the CPD find out."

Glenview

I kept quiet, the whole ride home.

The kids kept quiet too. They had sensed my mood and they had each been scared by the night's events.

"I'm sorry, I've not been very sociable, guys."

"Don't worry, Mum," Stephanie offered. "We know how you react to attacks on this city and we're with you every step along the way."

"Yeah, we're *Fusion*," Danny agreed. "Together, whatever."

Anne-Marie actually looked surprised by her twin's comment but then she nodded approvingly.

"I think he just about covered it."

The following morning Saturday

Glenview

"Mom..."

"Mom..."

"Mom..."

"WHAT!"

"I'm hungry..."

"Anne-Marie... You are trying my patience! Okay . . . plates are there . . . bread is there . . . the fridge is over there . . .

get a knife out of the goddamn drawer over there..."

Anne-Marie glared up at me.

"You thought I would make you a damn sandwich, or maybe you want me to cook..."

"No thanks, Mom; I'll make myself a sandwich. I have school on Monday and I *don't* want food poisoning..."

I heard a noise from behind me and I turned to see Stephanie giggling away in the archway to the living room. I smoothly swept up a knife from the kitchen side and the ten-year-old girl instantly braced up as the knife embedded itself an inch or two into the archway, a mere three inches from her left ear.

"I think I hear Dave calling me..." Stephanie muttered as she fled.

The seven bundles of fluff were now four months old.

However, they were no longer the cute little bundles of fluff – they were gangly legged canine's bent on attacking each other and having fun. Their training was going very well and they were very well behaved – well, as much as any kid, really! Sophia still thought nothing of striking them with a paw or tearing a strip off them with her bark or growl. The pups thoroughly respected their mother, and for good reason; she was hard on them and more than once her bark had caused a young pup to lose control of its bladder.

Saoirse and Morgan had been very happy to quit their dog-walking job – something about hyperactive canines. All the dogs had been very pleased to see their owners after almost a month and there had been lots of laughter and some happy tears.

I also got the impression that Sophia was itching to get back out onto the streets.

That evening

Safehouse F

Everybody was wearing their new, 'on duty' uniforms.

These were dark grey and lined with multiple layers of lightweight Kevlar. The pants were of a military design with quick-release straps for attaching holsters, pouches, and the like. Light-weight, light-grey, desert boots were worn as footwear. *Fusion* t-shirts, complete with logo on the right chest, were available in white, purple, and dark blue. For normal wear, a high neck long-sleeve top was worn. On the right-hand-side, at the top of the neck, rank insignia was worn.

Whilst ranks had existed on *Fusion* for a while, it was the first time that we had actually worn insignia. There were many reasons, but the main was that we seemed to be working more with external agencies, so a visible rank structure would be of use. As such, we could go out in the field in the 'on duty' uniforms – each set of pants had a pocket reserved for a full-face mask. We had opted to go for the standard US military insignia, but with different names.

Dave and I each wore a single silver star and carried the rank of Master. Marty was our lone Commander and wore a silver eagle. Chloe, Joshua and Cathy were Sub-Commanders and they each wore a silver oak leaf. A gold oak leaf was worn by Erika, Hailee, Abby, and Kim as Senior Operators. Megan, Saoirse, and Morgan were Operators and they wore twin, vertical silver bars. The junior Operators were Curtis, Tommy, and Stephanie. They each wore a single, vertical silver bar. Our three Trainee Operators, Lauren, Anne-Marie, and Danny, wore a single inverted yellow stripe.

That night, though, that was about to change.

"I hope everybody is well rested and ready for action. It seems that a long rest is not on the cards. After the past month, I cannot force any of you to go back into action so soon – Chloe, slap me and so help me God..."

Chloe raised her hands defensively and smiled.

"I know you will all volunteer no matter what, but I had to put the offer on the table. Anyway... Trojan, get you sorry

ass out here."

Curtis looked a little concerned as Megan shoved him to his feet and he walked towards me.

"This young man here, put many of us older vigilantes to shame. While in Gibraltar, he selflessly put himself between a grenade and Wildcat. That act cannot go unrewarded – although I am sure Wildcat showed her appreciation back at the Safehouse..."

Everybody laughed as both Megan and Curtis blushed a deep purple. Abby came up and held out a small box to me. I took it. Without another word, I removed the single vertical bar on Curtis's collar and replaced it with the twin vertical bars from the small box.

"Trojan is now an Operator and I think Megan is very happy that Curtis is in one piece, especially certain parts..."

"Yep, all there and all working – I checked..."

Megan paused and clamped her hand over her mouth as she realised what she had just said in front of everybody. Her face went a very pleasant shade of bright red and she edged behind Saoirse to hide her embarrassment.

There were cheers and applause for the freshly promoted vigilante. Once that had died down, I turned to Abby.

"Somebody else also went above and beyond. She showed that she is somebody to be reckoned with and as a result, Hal is being prompted as well."

Abby looked stunned and more than a little embarrassed as Chloe stood up and handed me a small box very similar to that which Abby had handed me for Curtis. I removed the gold oak leaf from her collar and attached the silver oak leaf of Sub-Commander in its place.

After another round of cheering and applause, we all broke up and went off to our relevant duties.

"How come you made Operator?" Stephanie demanded as she looked up at her friend's collar.

"Phase 3, bitch!" Saoirse replied smugly as she held up three fingers.

"Phase 2, bitch!" Stephanie responded as she stuck two fingers up, in the shape of a V-sign, at Saoirse.

"Funny..." Saoirse growled back. "Right, time to get back to training, pal, let's go."

"Nightmare, Rogue, Ravage!" Stephanie yelled out as she headed onto the mat.

I smiled as I watched the three Trainee Operators make their way onto the mat. The uniforms suited them. Lauren was fairly tall and with the uniform she looked very smart. The twins looked cute, as they usually did.

"Thanks, Mindy."

I turned to see Abby standing beside me.

"You earned it, Abby. Without everything that you did..."

"I know."

Sunday morning

Lower Wacker Drive

If *Fusion* had wanted to make a high-profile return to the city of Chicago, then they had most definitely picked the right place.

"What the hell is that racket?" Office Pete Howser exclaimed as his voice was all but drowned out by the sound of many powerful motorcycle engines.

As he turned to stare at the . . . motorcycle motorcade – that was the only way to describe it – the first motorcycle, a purple Ducati 1200 Panigale R, came past, alongside a black and green Ducati Diavel Carbon. The two motorcycles

were ridden by Hit Girl and Kick-Ass respectively. Behind them, came two more motorcycles in tandem, the nearest, a Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R, was tan in colour. The furthest machine was a Ducati Superbike 899 Panigale in dark blue and the rider was the stunning female vigilante known as Shadow, while her partner Jackal rode the tan Kawasaki beside her.

The next group was generally made up of the younger vigilantes. Three identical machines, although with different colour schemes, rode side by side. The Ducati Hypermotard SP machines, all with silver frames were being ridden by the vigilantes known as Wildcat, Trojan and Splinter. Their machines were, respectively, brown, silver and black with silver trim. Behind them was a much smaller machine, with an equally smaller vigilante who was actually the shortest in the group. That vigilante was Psyche, and she rode on her red over blue Honda CRF250L motorcycle.

Behind her came several other machines. Petra rode her graphite black Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade motorcycle alongside Mist on her Ducati Streetfighter 848 in black with light blue highlights. Two more motorcycles completed the motorcade: The Honda Fireblade Black Edition was under the command of Medic and behind her came Raven on her Yamaha Super Ténéré with Foxtail on the back.

"Put that away, before you hurt yourself," Officer Howser ordered his much younger partner.

The younger officer sheepishly holstered his pistol.

A short distance ahead, the traffic had ground to a halt and the *Fusion* motorcade changed formation into single-file.

"Mommy, Mommy!"

"What honey?" The mother replied. "I'm on the phone..."

Both kids had their eyes glued to the rear window as an awesome sight bore down on them. Then came the roar as twelve motorcycles roared past only inches away.

"Wow..."

"Awesome... Mommy – I just saw vigilantes..."

"That's nice, dear..."

Fusion was home!

***Chapter 273*: Shit Storm - Part II**

The following morning
Monday, May 16th

Glenview

It was another morning on Planet Lizewski.

I came awake and looked over at the clock beside the bed.

05:59:57 . . . 05:59:58 . . . 05:59:59 . . . 06:00:00

It was time to move. I threw back the duvet and swung my legs out of the otherwise empty bed. I made my way over to the bathroom where the shower was raging. I studied the silhouette through the steamed up glass.

"Morning, sexy wife!" I called out as I emptied my bladder.

"Morning, stud!" came the reply from the shower.

As my naked wife slipped out of the shower, I slipped in – with a brief kiss on the lips and a gentle touch of her soft, damp skin.

..._...

By the time I returned to the bedroom, Mindy was dressed and putting her hair up into her customary ponytail. I preferred her blonde hair down, but I knew that Mindy hated it like that and it often got in the way.

"I'm off to sort out the mutts," Mindy said as she headed out the door.

Within a minute, I heard excited yapping, plus a booming bark from Sophia as Mindy entered the basement.

Once dressed, I headed upstairs where my first stop was the 'British Sector'.

As I descended into the basement, I was met by several barks and excited yaps.

Sophia added her own deep-bass bark to the others. I was really pleased to be back around the dogs; I loved them all very much. When we got back from Europe, we discovered that we had gained a lodger. Marcus had tried to explain it, but I gather the conversation between Marcus and Paige had gone something like this:

...+...

"So, what do we do with it?"

"Not much we can do – Sophia will tear apart anybody who goes near it."

"It is kinda funny?"

"Marcus, what will Mindy say?"

"Mindy's nuts enough to go along with it."

"I have to agree with that – it looks so sweet..."

"Is it a boy or a girl?"

"We have no idea as Sophia is being so overprotective."

"Let me try..."

Tentatively, Marcus reached out and patted Sophia on the head. Sophia licked his hand. Marcus moved his hand towards the new acquisition that lay curled up between Sophia's front legs. There was a tense moment when Sophia

moved her snout down and sniffed at both the fur ball and Marcus's hand. Marcus continued to move his hand until it touched the soft, ginger fur and a head appeared. Two yellow eyes looked up at Marcus and the small mouth opened as a small mew was emitted.

"It's a boy," Marcus commented as he turned the kitten belly up.

The tiny feline had appeared a week or so previously. Sophia had taken custody of the little kitten and if a pup or a human went anywhere near it, they were growled at. The pups were mystified by the little ball of ginger fluff that their mother was apparently protecting from them. The kitten was only a few weeks old but it had learnt that nothing could hurt it – it seemed to enjoy hissing at the pups as they walked past.

"Bet he'll be given some ridiculous name..." Marcus groused as the kitten hissed at him and he placed it back down on the ground where Sophia proceeded to lick the kitten. "...Wildcat is taken, obviously..."

"...And so is Lynx..." Paige added with a grin. "Anyhow, did I hear you call Mindy a nut?"

"Well, she is a nut – and so is Megan."

"I have to agree with you there; Megan and Mindy are both nutty as a fruitcake with extra nuts!"

...+...

So, yeah, we had a kitten to look after.

I would also like to go on record as stating that I am *not* nutty as a fruitcake – and neither is my little sister. We may have a slightly different outlook on life to other people, but that just makes us unique. Marcus has other ideas about our 'differing outlook', but let's not go there.

Anyway, back to the kitten. Stephanie and Anne-Marie had instantly fallen in love with it. Even Danny had admitted it was cute. We had finally agreed on a name, after many appalling choices. Nobody liked my first choice: Shotgun. I had shot down any name that was related, even remotely, to a Disney Princess, or a Star Wars character. I knelt down to gently stroke the ginger kitten and the pair of yellow beacons looked up at me.

"Morning, Horatio, hungry?"

I poured out a good measure of kitty milk and Horatio dived into action. The pups knew not to touch the kitten's milk – Razor had already experienced the displeasure of his mother and he had served as a ready example to the others.

I carefully pushed open the door – no trip wires, I was pleased to see. My eldest daughter had been known to rig up an M81 Claymore when she was in a bad mood...

It was just possible to make out the spread of blonde hair on the pillow but very little else. Now, just like my wife, I was very careful about waking a psychotic killer. Waking either Mindy or Stephanie from a deep sleep and finding a knife, gun, or both shoved in my face, was getting a little bit old. Instead, I just yanked off the duvet and stood well back.

The viper uncurled herself, stretched, and I saw an eye open, then she smiled – I was safe.

"Morning!" Stephanie exclaimed as she jumped out of bed.

"Morning to you too, Steph."

Before I had made it to the door, Stephanie had pulled off the overlarge t-shirt that she slept in and then completely naked, she had headed for her bathroom. I was annoyed to see the obvious bruising still readily visible on her body. The girl would heal, just as Mindy always did after a beating.

...-...

I headed across the hall to where I found Anne-Marie grinning at me from under her duvet.

"Time to get up, kiddo."

"Morning, Dad!"

"Morning, Dad!" came another voice and I turned to see Danny peer in from the bathroom.

"Morning to both of you – hurry up and get washed, breakfast will be ready soon."

With that, I headed back downstairs to start cooking.

Thirty minutes later

"How is it that you can talk non-stop from the moment you sit down to eat to the moment that you get up again, and somehow the food still gets inside you?" Stephanie demanded of her younger sister as she dug into a stack of pancakes.

"It's a gift..." was the muffled response.

"She's been doing it from an early age," Danny explained.

"Where does she put it all – there's more meat on a spare rib!"

"You're one to talk, Stephanie," Mindy interjected. "You eat almost as much as Dave does and *you* are thin as a rake."

"It's a gift..." Stephanie replied with a wink at her younger sibling.

Later that morning North Park Elementary School

The place was buzzing about a certain show of force in the city, the evening before.

It made the morning immensely difficult, especially as four of us at the school had actually been a part of that 'show of force'. I had spent twenty minutes with Megan, Curtis and Tommy, mid-morning and they had all felt the same. At lunchtime, it only got worse...

"You saw those kids in that procession," Craig was saying. "It must be so awesome to be a vigilante on Hit Girl's crew – they're not much older than us..."

"It must be hard to keep something like that a secret," Ali mused. "Just think, it could be somebody in this lunch room..."

I grimaced at that...

"Take that Wildcat – she's awesome," Katy commented. "I'd do anything to be her..."

"You'd make a good vigilante, Steph," Jackson commented with a sly grin over towards me.

"Me?"

"Yeah – you have a fiery temper and I'd love to see you in a figure-hugging suit..."

There was general laughter and some giggles at that comment; I just felt my face warming up. Talk about being close to the mark!

"You just want to see Stephanie in skin-tight leather..." Katy giggled.

"So?" Jackson retorted innocently.

"I am so out of here!" I growled as I jumped up and ran out of the lunch room past a dour looking Lizzie Edwards.

I was worried about my big sister.

It had been almost six months since her kidnap and attack – I refused to say the true word for what had happened to her; it scared me. Lauren had cried most nights for over a week after it had happened. I had tried to help her but Lauren would hug me on some occasions and on others, she would push me away – sometimes violently.

I knew my sister was troubled. Mom just told me to give her space and to be there for when she needed me. I hated seeing and hearing her cry at night; that really hurt. Then, two weeks after the attack, she had suddenly seemed a lot happier. Strangely, she had stopped her pursuit of everything '*Fusion*'. Maybe that had had something to do with the visit from Hit Girl, soon after the attack, Lauren would not elaborate on what happened when she had vanished that evening.

Lauren spent as much time as possible at D-JAK as well as time somewhere else with Mom. Neither of them would tell me where they went but Lauren had gained some extra bruises on her body, so I assumed that she had just been getting some extra time in at D-JAK.

Another problem was her change in character.

..._...

Lauren had always been outgoing and full of life. She always smiled and laughed. Since the attack, she had turned shy, especially around boys. I knew that she had faced torment from other kids at school about the attack – they blamed her for *allowing* herself to be raped. How they could do that, I had no idea. It was in no way my sister's fault and I could not comprehend what it must have felt like to be attacked like that.

The only people to have *ever* seen me naked were my Mom and my sister. I knew from Lauren's previous experience, back when she was kidnapped before Christmas, that she had been stripped to her underwear – she had told me that she had found that extremely embarrassing – but to be stripped *naked* by strange men and then...

I shuddered at the thought and I involuntarily squeezed my legs together.

Lake View High School

There was love in the air at the high school.

Our usual group of eight had grown to ten as we all gathered for lunch. As well as Josh and Chloe, there was Abby and Kyle, Ethan and Mike and then Riley and me. We had, over the past month, gained two more girls: Morgan and Saoirse – a weird name with an appalling spelling! I had begun to notice something: while Josh and Chloe were busy running their hands over each other's bodies, Ethan and Saoirse were busy eyeing each other up. No real issue, only Saoirse was a freshman, while the rest of us were sophomores although I had to admit that the girl had a very full figure and she looked older than she actually was.

Me? I was simply content to spend my time with Riley... I snapped out of my thoughts as somebody called my name.

"Avery!"

"Yeah? Sorry, Chloe..."

"You coming over for our girl's night on Friday?"

"Yeah, course."

I liked Chloe; she had been my best friend, other than Riley of course, for as long as she had been in Chicago. The girl was a bit of an enigma to be honest. I really liked her and we had enjoyed some stimulating sleep-overs over the past couple of years. Chloe was not scared about experimenting and neither was I for that matter...

Chloe had been upset for many months about losing her boyfriend, who had then miraculously reappeared out of thin air, *alive*, about eighteen months ago. He was every bit as hot as Chloe had described him to be. That had also been around the time that Chloe had been mysteriously wounded. *Her* explanation had been that she was mugged – bullshit! I would love to see the mugger that could better Chloe Bennett.

That girl could fight!

That night

South Kedzie Avenue

Maybe it was not really the *best* way for Nightmare to be exposed to the nastier side of Chicago.

We were out cruising on my new wheels. Mindy had given me free reign to get *any* machine that I wanted and after it had spent a couple of weeks in Gotham, it had arrived only the previous afternoon. Apparently, I had been a complete pain in the arse until tonight as I was so excited!

The Aprilia Caponord 1200 Rally motorcycle was painted in a colour-shifting paint that shifted between brown and orange depending on the light and point of view. The nose and tail of the machine was painted with a chrome-effect. At the back, on either side, were a pair of black and chrome-effect panniers which carried a strategic collection of equipment.

Most importantly, at the back, was the licence plate, which read: **FOXTAIL**.

Earlier that evening

Safehouse F

"Will you, *please*, calm down?"

"I'm sorry, SD – I'm just so nervous."

"That's to be expected, Lauren – let me do your hair; you're making a hash of it..."

Lauren was way beyond nervous – not her fault but it *was* about to be her first night out as Nightmare. She was so nervous that she was unable to put her long, light brown hair up so that it would fit under her mask.

"Thank you, SD..."

"Lauren, if I didn't help you, it would be sometime next week before we were actually ready..."

The thirteen-year-old girl grinned sheepishly as she grabbed her mask and we headed downstairs to the armoury. There, the young vigilante drew a SIG Sauer P239 Tactical pistol in 9-millimetre calibre and a 7-inch combat knife. After checking the weapons over, she picked up her utility belt and inserted the pistol into the holster on her right hip and the knife into the scabbard on her left thigh.

I double-checked every pouch on her belt, including her communications equipment. Lauren had spent a couple of hours that afternoon ensuring that her equipment worked and that it was all accounted for.

Finally, the mask was pulled on and Nightmare stood in all her glory. Her combat suit was of an urban camouflage design, with a tiger-stripe design in teal and dark grey.

Southern Chicago

Foxtail with Nightmare

It was just the two of us.

Mindy and I had discussed where might be best – Mindy had suggested dropping Nightmare in at the deep end. We had to know how Nightmare would react to what usually went on in Chicago after dark – if she could not hack it, then she would be finished as a vigilante before she even got started. It was cruel but I could see where Mindy was coming from; it was pointless putting effort into training somebody who could not get over what had happened to her.

Therefore, I was searching for a *certain* type of criminal...

..._...

We headed north and then in an easterly direction where my thoughts were interrupted by a voice in my ear.

"You cum all over your new wheels, yet?"

"Go fuck yourself, Psyche!"

"Now, what could I use?" Psyche mused. "What about that shiny new dildo in your locker with extra-strength batteries?"

"Stay out of my fucking locker, you Phase 2 reject!"

"Well, you could have set a more difficult combination than your *Predator* identification number."

"Where the fuck did you get that from?"

"From your CIA ID card."

"Same question."

"Found it."

"It was *in* my fucking locker!"

There was a pause as the ten-year-old considered the rather fucked-up circular argument that she had just created for herself.

"I'm gonna have to get back to you on that, Foxtail..."

"When we get back, I am going to take you into a very dark room..."

"I never knew you liked me in *that* way, Foxy..."

I was getting seriously pissed and Nightmare's giggling was *not* helping. But before I could respond, I heard a muffled slap and...

"That fucking hurt!" Psyche growled and then another voice came up on the circuit.

"Problem taken care of, Foxtail."

It was Mist, and she must have just slapped Psyche. I refocussed on where I was riding and Nightmare soon calmed down. I had to admit, Psyche *had* broken the tension for Nightmare – at *my* expense!

I had no idea where Foxtail was taking me, but the scenery did not look very appealing.

Maybe they were testing me. You know, see how I reacted to whatever we might come across. I should have known that Hit Girl could be devious. In fact, I knew she was. Foxtail was too. I knew some of her background and what I had heard, scared me. However, I trusted her.

I was dragged from my thoughts as we came to a very rapid stop beside a large expanse of open and very dark waste ground. I thought that it must have been a factory at some stage. Foxtail pulled off her helmet and brought up one finger of her left hand to her lips. I kept silent as I pulled off my own helmet and carefully slipped off the motorcycle. Foxtail followed, leaning her machine onto its stand. If I had not been armed and wearing body-armor, I might have started to panic. Foxtail headed off into the darkness and then she paused. She tapped her left ear and then drew her beautiful swords. I listened and I heard a voice. It was a man and he was goading somebody. I braced up as I heard a weak scream.

We moved forwards carefully as the ground was uneven and there was plenty of rubble strewn around. It felt weird, being out in my combat suit. I had a feeling of being invincible. I knew that was wrong but I felt so alive as we headed into the darkness, into the unknown.

..._...

My eyes had adjusted to the darkness and I could make out a shape on the ground. As we came closer, I saw that it was more than one shape. One shape was on top of the other. I instantly knew what was happening.

I froze.

Nothing I tried could make my limbs move.

I shook my head – it was to be expected.

The man had not noticed our approach, nor the frozen vigilante, I thought dryly. I moved forwards and the first the

man knew of our presence was the feel of cold steel beneath his throat. He began to move.

"Don't..." I growled. "Nightmare!"

There was no response. She had to handle this or...

"Nightmare!"

"Right, yes . . . I'm here, Foxtail."

I heard her boots on the concrete as she approached.

"Take out your knife."

The young girl did so. I pushed up gently on my sword and the man began to stand. His pants were around his ankles and his cock stuck out, still partially erect. The woman beneath him had passed out, but she was still breathing. She also had her pants around her ankles and with her knees spread wide apart, it was obvious where the man had stuck his cock.

I saw Nightmare stare down at the man's waist and what stuck out there. I saw her shoulders begin to heave as the anger built within her. She was overcoming her initial horror at the scene before her. She took a step back and returned her blade to its scabbard. Oh, dear, she was bottling it.

But I was wrong.

She pulled her SIG Sauer P320 Compact pistol from her holster and stepped towards the man.

I felt anger like I had never felt before.

Initially, I had felt horror at the sight before me. Horrible visions flashed through my mind. I had been in that poor woman's position. I had felt that man force himself into me. I had... I pushed the thoughts out of mind – well, most of them. I saw the man's dick, drooping. He had to be punished. I could not let him do such a thing again. I could not let the fucking animal even breed. I pulled back the slide on my pistol and I then walked right up to the man.

"You sicken me. You will never hurt another woman as long as I walk on this earth. Your line will end here and now. You have a family?"

The man slowly shook his head.

"Good."

"Holy shit!"

After the crack of the pistol shot came the scream as the man tried to stem the blood which poured from his crotch. I could not believe it. Nightmare just blew the fucking cunt's cock off! One second, cock, the next second, no cock. The man sagged to his knees and he fell backwards while his unearthly scream echoed around the area.

The woman was beginning to stir. I called in a request for an ambulance and we waited for them to arrive. The man passed out quite quickly from loss of blood. By the time the ambulance arrived, the woman was sitting up and I had helped her pull her panties and pants back up.

The Paramedic approached and looked at the man, then at the sobbing woman.

"Was it him?" She asked simply.

I nodded.

"We will see to the woman first – he bleeds out before we get to him, tough," she told her subordinate.

We left the scene but hung about for a few minutes until the CPD arrived to secure the area.

Before we moved off, I spoke with Nightmare.

"You okay?"

"Yeah."

"We can call it a night..."

"No. I have to do this."

"Good girl."

***Chapter 274*: FEAR**

Monday, May 16th

***Douglas Park
Foxtail with Nightmare***

I had taken Nightmare away from the rape scene and towards some much nicer scenery.

It was dark, but the area was reasonably well lit. I parked my Aprilia in some trees and after we had removed our helmets, we went for a walk into the park. Our presence was soon noticed and we received some cheery hellos.

"Excuse me?"

I turned to see a girl of about my own age, with another girl and a boy.

"You, are Foxtail, I think . . . but I have no idea who you are."

"Yes, I am Foxtail."

"My name is Nightmare."

"Cool!" the girl replied. "I love the suit."

"Thanks," Nightmare mumbled in reply.

I grinned. Neither of us was used to the fans part of being in *Fusion*. Nightmare even less so. It felt strange having been a part of the CIA and thus encouraged to keep out of sight and not to stand out. I had to admit that I enjoyed being popular. Saoirse did not enjoy publicity, but Foxtail loved it!

..._...

Rather annoyingly, the pleasant night was destroyed as some drunken yobs drifted into the park. They were definitely intending to cause trouble. We covered the retreat of the sensible kids who had, up until that point, been enjoying a pleasant evening. I brought my arm up to ward off a flying beer bottle that had been aimed at a screaming girl as she ran for cover.

It was not a place for swords, so I pulled out an extendible billy club. The first pair were so drunk I could easily sweep their feet out from under them and they went down, laughing. The next pair were not as drunk but they were rather annoyed at their colleagues being put down. I knew full well that it would be useless trying to reason with a pair of angry drunks, so I did what I could to put them down without hurting them too much.

..._...

It was Nightmare that yelled out a warning and saved me from more than a little embarrassment. Taking advantage of the distraction that the drunken youths posed, several ne'er-do-wells approached through the darkness until they were in a position to attack.

I barely registered the weapon that was being pointed at my skull and I just reacted. The combat knife flew straight and true into the man's face. My mind clocked the weapon that the unfortunate individual had been carrying and a name popped into my mind: Qīngxíng Chōngfēng Qiāng, 2005 – quite literally: Light Assault Gun, 2005. The QCQ-05 was quite rare outside of mainland China. I filed away that little piece of information for later.

Nightmare continued to cover the escaping civilians as they ran. There was the rasp of machine gun fire and the screaming started in earnest. It was no most decidedly the time and place for swords. I drew them both and I slashed open the first stomach and once again, I relished the smell of freshly split blood. I faced off against a pair of cunts – they were of oriental decent, which would explain the Chinese weaponry, and they seemed pissed.

"Sǐle, biǎo zi!" one of the men spat. *{Die, bitch!}*

I was a little taken aback – it was most impolite; I was not ready to die, nor was I a bitch!

"Lái ba. Xiànzài shì shíhòu mǎnzú nǐ de zǔzōng!" I shot back, which actually seemed to knock the two men for six – I

aced Chinese! *{Bring it on. It's time for you to meet your ancestors!}*

Before the cunts could recover from their surprise, I launched my attack. The first lost his left arm, just above the elbow. The second brought up his Dao (a kind of sword with a broad blade) and he was able to fend off my first strike, but not the follow up with my other blade. He fell as the blood erupted from his severed carotid artery.

The remaining cunt seemed to have a change of heart and he shot at me with his pistol, a Chinese Type 77, my mind told me. He tripped which sent his bullet wide of its intended mark. I ran forwards, reached down and grabbed the man by the head. I lifted him up slightly before I twisted his head savagely.

Nightmare screamed.

"Too much?" I asked as I dropped the man's body to the ground.

"It was great up until the point where you near enough ripped his damned head off!"

I gave her a sardonic look and smiled.

"Too violent for you? Less than an hour ago, you blew a guy's dick off!"

"That was different..."

As we ran back to our ride, I swept up the QCQ-05 sub-machine gun.

Wednesday, May 18th

Safehouse F

It was time for me to get out into the City of Chicago and reacquaint myself with the changes which had occurred while I had been in Europe.

Most importantly, I wanted to meet the new vigilantes and try to figure out what they were about. There was the female one, Sunset Phoenix, in her dazzling costume, and then there was the new duo who had appeared on the streets but had otherwise kept to the shadows. I was also more than a little worried by the 'gift' which Foxtail had brought me on Monday night.

The bitch just walked up to me in the galley and dumped the sub-machine gun onto the table! I was more than a little annoyed, but I understood the significance of the weapon instantly. I thanked the girl with a few choice words and while she and Lauren changed, I listened to what had occurred that night. I was impressed with Lauren, and with Saoirse's tactics for training Nightmare.

That night, I geared up with Erika and Megan for the night's activities. The three of us were quite speedy with our armour so that we could leave Saoirse and Stephanie to their decidedly animated discussion on locker privacy and the use of insecure lock combinations.

Those two were always bitching at each other, but the two of them were like sisters and they would never hurt one another – well, not seriously at least.

..._...

I checked in with the Command Centre and the three of us signed out for the night. Wildcat's motorcycle was down for the night, so she would ride with Mist on her Streetfighter 848. I was overjoyed as I swung my left leg over my pride and joy. The purple Panigale Superbike felt like home between my legs.

"Hit Girl is up."

"Mist is up."

"Wildcat is up."

"Good hunting, girls," Battle Guy acknowledged as the large vehicle access door opened.

Hit Girl with Mist and Wildcat

Apart from some friendly waves and beeping horns, we didn't find much in the first hour.

But then things began to warm up nicely. We were on South Archer Avenue and headed northeast when something caught my eye just as we crossed South Looms Street. I slammed on my brakes and came to a smoky halt, much to the enjoyment of some young boys on the street corner. Mist did the same and she followed me as I turned around and accelerated up West Fuller Street. We passed under the Stevenson Expressway and the railroad before we emerged into a quiet residential neighbourhood.

Up ahead, I saw a flash of pink vanish around a bend in the road. We followed but instead of finding the expected Sunset Phoenix, we found something *completely* different and very new. As I pulled up on my purple Ducati Panigale, Mist nodded to one side where there sat a large and very powerful motorcycle in metallic black and plasma blue.

..._...

The Kawasaki Z1000SX Tourer had been customised but it was otherwise easily recognisable as a beautiful piece of engineering. I pulled off my helmet and climbed off the Ducati as did Mist and Wildcat who was on the back of her Streetfighter.

We moved towards the Kawasaki just as a shape appeared out of the shadows.

"Well, hello, Hit Girl..."

The person who emerged from the shadows wore armour, just as we did. They were armed too. As they came closer, I identified the armoured individual as being female.

"What the *fuck* are you?" I asked with obvious and intended disdain in my tone.

"I – am – FEAR..."

Three simple words.

"What?"

"I am here to fuck up your life, Hit Girl."

"Forgive me if I don't shit myself..."

"You think you can fight me, right here, right now?" FEAR demanded. "Without your little friends..."

"*I'll* fuck her up!" Wildcat yelled.

FEAR turned towards the ever fearless younger vigilante.

"Control yourself, Wildcat; I'll be trimming *your* claws, next..."

"Bring it on..."

I raised my hand and Wildcat fell silent.

"What she said..." I growled.

FEAR reached over her left shoulder with her right hand and removed her melee weapon. The war sword was a little over three feet in length, with the blade being a little under two feet. It was a lethal weapon and from what I could see, she knew how to wield it.

I drew my own twin Katanas.

Mist with Wildcat

The two women attacked each other and Wildcat wisely jumped out of the way before she was trampled.

Hit Girl's black, dark grey, and purple armour complemented FEAR's black and red armour and it proved easy to track

each of the women as they span. Their swords clashed in the darkness. We tried not to watch. Our job was to keep a good lookout out for anybody who might make an attempt to take advantage of the fight. Wildcat seethed over her cold put down. I soothed her with some words that I hoped might help. Otherwise, I prepared my Sai and chain whip for action and I advised Wildcat to do the same with her own weapons.

..._...

Hit Girl appeared to have no issues with fighting a woman a few inches taller than herself, as well as one that was bulkier. The war sword was also a heavier weapon, but Hit Girl had state of the art swords, herself, and they stood up to the abuse from the larger weapon quite well. I enjoyed watching sword play and it was rare for me to see two obvious professionals duelling it out. It was even rarer to see Hit Girl facing off against somebody who could fight almost as well as she could.

I kept an eye on the fight, the surrounding area, and of course, Wildcat. The tetchy eleven-year-old vigilante paced from side to side, her Wakizashi in her right hand and every now and then, she would deploy and retract the claws in her left gauntlet.

"Easy, young one," I said quietly. "It will be your turn, soon enough."

Wildcat just growled in response to my comment.

..._...

As was usual, Hit Girl used her agility to stay one step beyond the sharp tip of the war sword; jumping and flipping as required. FEAR, or whatever she called herself, was just as agile and she sidestepped or jumped out of the way of Hit Girl's twin Katana blades. The clang of steel upon steel had brought a small audience of Chicagoans from the nearby residential neighbourhood. Naturally, they yelled their support for Hit Girl.

FEAR did not seem to like that but she continued to fight as the duel moved steadily towards where Wildcat and I were waiting.

Hit Girl

The new girl in town certainly knew how to fight and we seemed to be fairly evenly matched.

I hated having an audience, but I could tolerate it. We both paused for a few seconds and circled each other as we caught our breaths.

"You having fun, yet?" I growled at the armour clad woman. She smiled from beneath her cowl-style mask.

"I suppose. Fighting the famous Hit Girl *is* a bit of a thrill. Mind you, I thought that she would have been better..."

"I'm not at my best, right now . . . or you would already be a corpse," I retorted evenly. "However, if you want me at 100%, I'm sure that I can ramp it up."

While we talked, I noticed Wildcat move closer, with Mist only a short distance behind. Wildcat took a swipe at FEAR with the claws of her left gauntlet . . . but to my surprise, they did little more than scratch FEAR's armour. Wildcat seemed stunned at the first ever failure of her claws.

"Oh, dear," FEAR laughed. "Did the little kitty's claws fail?"

..._...

FEAR struck out at the stunned vigilante and Wildcat received an armoured gauntlet to the head which sent her spinning to the ground. I moved in to cover the fallen Wildcat and I struck with both of my blades. One was blocked while the other connected with FEAR's armour on her shoulder. She grunted with the impact but she did not seem to be hurt in any way. I fought back what was probably the same feeling that Wildcat had had when her claws had failed to penetrate the bitch's armour.

Said bitch had obviously done her homework and she had been able to obtain armour that our weapons could not easily penetrate. There was a resounding crack as Mist's chain whip struck FEAR's armour near her left shoulder and the bitch lost her balance for a moment before she steadied herself and turned towards her attacker.

Mist struck again as an infuriated Wildcat struck with her Wakizashi.

Wildcat

I was livid and I was *not* about to let FEAR leave.

I wanted her hide and I was going to nail it to the proverbial barn door. I was incensed at the apparent failure of my claws. While Hit Girl attacked from one side and Mist pulled her whip back, I lunged at FEAR. I launched myself into the air where I struck her square in the upper back with the soles of both boots. At the same time as she fell forwards, I struck out with my Wakizashi and saw blood erupt from her left lower leg. FEAR turned her fall into a forward roll and she quickly regained her feet. She took the opportunity to very quickly disengage from the fight and she ran for her motorcycle.

"Let her go," Hit Girl ordered.

We did just that and the crowd exploded into cheers.

Forty minutes later

Safehouse F

Megan/Wildcat

Mindy did not look happy when she removed her mask.

However, she turned to me as I removed my own mask and she smiled.

"Well done, you did well," Mindy looked over at Erika. "You too, Erika."

"Loved the curtsy, Megan!" Erika chuckled.

"I had an audience..."

Joshua came running up to help us with our equipment. He smirked at Megan as he helped her remove her sword.

"That curtsy was very elegant, Megan. I thought only little girls and ladies curtsied. Surprised you even knew how."

"Oh, Megan used to do the cutest curtsies when she was little," Paige commented from the walkway.

"I *am* a girl; you know..."

"Yeah, those beautiful tits kinda give you away," Curtis laughed and there was much laughter at Megan's expense.

"Flattery is a girl's best friend..." Megan grinned before she gave Curtis a deep kiss.

"Was that a tongue?" Stephanie demanded of nobody in particular.

The next morning Thursday, 19th May

The home of Avery Lee

Holy fuck!

I just figured it all out – it was like a bright flash of light inside my head as everything became remarkably clear. Along with the revelation also came questions – disturbing questions.

Should I say something to her?

Would she kill me?

I could not wait to get to school...

Later that morning

Lake View High School

It took a while for me to get the nerve to ask.

"Chloe?"

"Yeah, Avery."

"We've been friends a long time, right?"

"Of course; the best."

"Would you ever, you know, hurt me?"

Chloe looked up from her magazine with confusion on her face and I bit my lip.

"Can we go somewhere a little more private..."

Chloe nodded and we walked outside where we found a quiet corner.

"I know what you are . . . please don't kill me." I said the last bit quickly.

Chloe blinked at me and raised an eyebrow.

"I have no idea *what* you are talking about..."

I leaned in close and whispered into her ear.

"I can't believe that I've slept with Shadow!"

It had to happen someday.

"For God's sake, Avery! You didn't sleep with me – we just played . . . we were barely thirteen, for fuck's sake."

"So . . . so you admit it?"

"I can neither confirm nor deny said accusation..."

"Horseshit, Chloe! I knew that was you at the bank and since..."

That was when Chloe scared the living daylights out of me . . . she *growled*.

"You say anything to anybody and a lot of people may die – including you... You understand me, Scout!"

I knew that Scout Avery Lee *hated* her given first name and by the fact that I had invoked it I hoped I would show how serious I was.

"Don't *ever* call me that!" she hissed angrily.

"Then I'd better not catch you calling me Shadow, *ever* – period!"

I trusted Avery, I had to – although her mouth tended to get her into trouble at times. As per protocol, I notified Mindy that somebody had figured out Shadow's secret identity.

That evening

Western Chicago

Hit Girl

After our little run in with FEAR, I was back out on the streets.

I wanted payback and so did my little friend.

"I am *not* little!" Wildcat had growled as Jackal had passed over her helmet.

It had been a while since it had just been Hit Girl and Wildcat. The younger vigilante was astride her Ducati Hypermotard SP and surprisingly, she was keeping very quiet. I knew that the young girl still silently seethed over her failed attack with her claws the previous evening. I had tried to assuage her worries but to no avail.

We stopped at a convenient doughnut shop and we chatted with the occupants of two CPD cruisers while they whiled away their nightshift. The CPD enjoyed chatting with *Fusion*, especially the younger members and they were very complimentary about Wildcat. I could tell by her stance that she was embarrassed but obviously thankful for her mask.

..._...

It was while we were there that we hit pay dirt. I saw pink! We both dived after the garishly clad vigilante – at least I assumed that she was a vigilante.

She was a fast runner but her suit and the hair which was primarily red with yellow highlights easily gave away her position in the semi-darkness. She ran towards a cheap motel a hundred yards or so away at the other end of the block. We both ran after the pink woman and easily kept pace with her. We followed her up a flight of stairs and she dived through a partially open door.

Wildcat paused at the door and we both went in together. It was a seedy hotel room of the sort that cockroaches would steer well clear of. A man was on the floor where Sunset Phoenix had obviously knocked him as she had burst through his door. She was just a couple of feet away as we both launched ourselves at her.

Our momentum rolled us backwards and into the wall behind her.

..._...

The wall exploded and the three of us fell into the next apartment.

I looked up to see two people on a bed – a man and a woman...

"Woah, they're butt naked!" Wildcat commented inappropriately.

"Sorry – chasing . . . err – criminals..." I mumbled as I averted my eyes and I made for the window where a pair of pink boots were vanishing.

"That is one *enormous* di..."

"Move it Wildcat!" I ordered as I seized the mesmerised *Fusion* Operator and dragged her to the window. "Get that man's dick out of your mind."

"Where else should I stick it?" Wildcat retorted as she climbed out of the window.

"You might just be a bit young for that, Wildcat!" I laughed as we landed on the fire escape beyond the window.

"That is *not* what I meant!" A flustered Wildcat replied.

Wildcat

I jumped the last half a dozen steps of the fire escape and then we both ran after the retreating Sunset Phoenix.

Despite my failure against the previous evening's adversary, Sunset fucking Phoenix was going down – period! I did not think much of her garish colour scheme. The purple pizzazz was waaaay over the top – honestly... I was not sure what the hair reminded me of, but there was something and I could not quite grasp it in my mind.

I did, however, approve of the Tanto she carried on each thigh. The bitch could do with losing a few pounds off of those too... On her back was a lethal looking double-bladed ninja sword staff which, assuming the bitch could handle

it, would be a dangerous object to fight against. I struggled to figure out how old the girl was.

In my mind, she did not seem old enough to be an adult – mid to late teens I assumed.

Sunset Phoenix

They were closing on me and as I took another look behind me, I fell.

As I clambered back to my feet, I was kicked backwards and I fell onto my back. Why I had been trying to run away from Hit Girl and Wildcat, I had no idea! We were in a dark alleyway and all I could really make out were the eyes that bored into my soul. The shorter of the two had dull green eyes while the taller had dull purple ones. Seeing just the eyes and the almost invisible outline of their armour freaked me out and I began to panic.

It took all my will power to force that panic down inside me.

Hit Girl with Wildcat

I could almost smell the fear that emanated from the fallen pink object before me.

There was defiance there. I could read her body language easily enough. I still had no idea if she was friend or foe. I took a chance.

"You really think that you can take me?"

"Of course," came the brazenly indignant reply.

I almost laughed out loud but I had to give her kudos for the courage she was showing.

"Aw, come on – I don't mean to brag or to boast, but I'm a six course meal and, well . . . you're just burnt toast."

The look I received in response to my proclamation was *not* friendly!

"Be off with you. Stay out of our business and I will leave you alone. Do you understand?" I growled.

"Yes, Hit Girl, I understand."

The next day Friday, 20th May

Lake View High School

"Why are you so giggly all of a sudden, Avery?" Riley enquired. "You and Chloe been fucking again?"

"We never fucked and you know that as *you* were there..." Avery retorted.

"Just kidding... Anyway, who are you fangirling over? You look like you just met your hero..."

Avery bit her lip and Riley scowled.

"Spill!" Riley ordered.

"I can't – she'd kill me..."

"Stop talking crap – what have you done?"

"I know who Shadow really is..."

"Bullshit!"

"We *both* know her..."

Riley's eyes went wide.

"You mean..."

"Uh, huh..."

"Holy, shit!"

"I know..."

"Does she know you know?"

"She does..."

That afternoon

"It's so awesome..." Avery stated.

"Tell me about it – *we know Shadow...*" Riley replied with a barely concealed squeal. "What... Sssh – here she comes!"

Riley and Avery tried to look innocent but failed. All day they had done their best to avoid Chloe with the feeblest of excuses.

"What is it with you two, today?" Chloe demanded.

"Nothing!" Avery replied a little too quickly.

That evening

West 18th Street

"I think we've pissed off Chloe – you think she knows I told you?"

"Dunno," Riley replied uneasily.

"Well, we're about to find out when we get to D-JAK..."

"She won't be there; she'll be at the big D-JAK – going to the old one to avoid her is just lame..."

Neither teen noticed the black panel van with the open side door as it cruised down the street. Neither teen noticed the two hooded people who followed them down the street until it was too late and they found themselves being grabbed and shoved into the passing van which then accelerated away.

The last thing that both girls saw were the hoods as they were pulled over their heads.

***Chapter 275*: Meeting Shadow**

Friday, 20th May

An unknown location

Avery

I was shaking and I was very scared.

There were noises all around us as we sat on cold, bare concrete. The presence of the hood scared me even more. The only good thing was that I could feel Riley's hand as she gripped mine tightly. My face was wet with tears and I had been crying ever since we had been abducted. I had completely lost track of time but it didn't feel all that long since we had arrived wherever it was that we were at.

Then I froze as I heard footsteps and voices – only they weren't real voices; they were electronic and they scared me. Okay, lots of things scared me; I was a wimp! The hood was suddenly whipped off my head and I shut my eyes tight as bright lights hurt my eyes.

"What, are we going to do with you?" A voice growled.

I could not speak; I was so scared. Then my eyes began to focus and I could make out movement as somebody stepped into the light. The boots were dark blue with slate grey highlights and they were *very* familiar...

"You worked out my secret identity but you did not stop – you told Riley there. *Who else did you tell?*"

That last bit was full of malice.

"Nobody . . . I promise." I sobbed hard barely able to speak.

"*Who else did you tell?*" Shadow repeated with a growl that *really* scared me and I began to shake violently as another form entered the light.

This time, the boots were dark grey with . . . with purple highlights. I was going to die.

"*Nobody* – please . . . Don't kill us . . . please. I couldn't help it."

Riley

I was as scared as Avery sounded.

It took me a moment to adjust to the bright lights as the hood was yanked off. I knew who was in the dark blue suit – it was our best friend. The other one was Hit Girl and she had a reputation. I just shook with fear and I kept my eyes down as much as I could. Then I saw Shadow's feet come closer and she knelt down before me.

"Please..." I begged.

I felt the rough surface of a glove as fingers took hold of my chin and lifted it upwards. The mask was gone and in its place was the face of my best friend. My chin was in her left hand and Avery's was in her right. Chloe looked at us both and then she smiled – I felt so relieved...

"Avery, Riley – you are my best friends and I would never hurt either of you. Both of you have just entered the world of the vigilante. The door to that world only goes one way. The world has strict rules which govern our behaviour and strict rules that govern how we must protect ourselves. We wear these masks, not just to protect our own identity, but to protect the identity of those we love.

"In this case; that applies to the both of you. By hiding my identity, I protect you both from others who would harm you to get at me. I know what you both think of my world – it is not the fairy tale that you to believe it is. People die, and yes, I have killed many times. That fact may change how you both see me and it may also change our relationship . . . but this is me."

Hit Girl moved over to us and she smiled from behind her mask.

"Chloe is very serious about what she does and she is also very serious about protecting her friends who exist in the vigilante world. I am sure that you both know my reputation and how much thought I put into threats against me, my people, or my organisation. I have never killed a child, so don't give me an excuse to start..."

"Stand up, both of you," Chloe said and she pulled us both to our feet.

Hit Girl

Both of the girls looked very scared and that was the point.

I hated to do it and I was certain that Chloe did too. I had known Chloe for a long time but the two girls had known Chloe longer. It was Avery who lifted the mood at Safehouse D.

"Chloe – I think I pissed myself..." the unfortunate girl admitted.

Riley laughed out loud and so did Chloe, much to Avery's embarrassed consternation. Then Riley stopped.

"Oh – my – God..." She stammered. "Joshua!"

"Nobody ever said you were stupid, Riley..." Chloe commented, dryly.

The two of us then melted away into the darkness.

Twenty minutes later

An SUV pulled into the Safehouse and stopped beside the confused teens.

"Hi, girls!"

"Hi, Dr Bennett," Avery responded with a little surprise.

"There's a towel on the seat for you to sit on..." Dr Bennett offered and Avery blushed.

"Where are we going?" Riley asked.

"I've spoken with your mothers and you're spending the weekend with Chloe," Dr Bennett replied.

Once the SUV was in motion, Riley spoke.

"Dr Bennett...?"

"Yes, Riley – I know all about my wayward daughter..."

Half an hour later

South Cottage Grove Apartment 202

"Hi, girls!"

"Hi, Josh," Riley offered shyly.

"Hi – I need a shower; Chloe?" Avery asked.

"Go," Chloe replied.

I raised an eyebrow.

"I scared her a bit too much..." Chloe elaborated and she looked uncomfortable.

..._...

It turned out that Riley needed some freshening up too, so Chloe went to sort the two girls out while I 'chilled' with our other guest and ordered in some pizza. Almost half an hour later, the three girls reappeared in oversized T-shirts. I peeked under Chloe's and smirked...

"Abby!" Avery blurted out as she noticed the other person on the couch.

"I've come to join the weekend's fun," Abby replied with a smile. "Hope Chloe didn't scare you with our little stunt..."

"Huh?" Riley enquired.

"It was Josh and me who shoved you into that van..." Abby admitted.

"You're a part of *Fusion*?" Riley demanded.

"I'm Hal..."

"Have you, I mean..."

"Yes, Avery, I have killed people..."

"Oh – my – God!" Riley replied with her hand over her mouth.

"I can't believe that we are both sitting in an apartment and eating pizza with Shadow, Jackal, and Hal!" Avery breathed and then she stopped and took a deep breath. "Chloe, about earlier; we both love you and we think that what you do is so awesome and I know that you only kill when necessary – are we still best friends?"

"You are both in my apartment wearing nothing but one of my T-shirts – what do you think, silly bitch?" Chloe growled rhetorically.

"Err, Chloe..."

"Yes, Riley..."

"I know that you were injured a couple of summers ago and then Josh suddenly came onto the scene..."

I smiled. The questions were expected but how far should I take the answers? Joshua grimaced at the thought of what was going to come out, but both Avery and Riley looked very excited about what was soon to be revealed.

"Okay, just the one story before bed..."

***The next morning
Saturday, 21st May***

Indian Knoll Road

It had been a traumatic week, all in all.

Since my return from Europe, I had spent most of the time curled up on a bed, or on a couch, crying. Dr Bennett had made a thorough examination of my injuries, which had shocked my mother to the core. I had insisted that Mom remain with me for the examination and she had burst into tears at the sight of so many bruises. Dr Bennett controlled her emotions better, but she was still obviously mad at what she saw.

Mindy and Chloe had forced me onto reduced duties which basically meant that I was restricted to Safehouse F until I was fully healed. Neither girl was willing to take any chances with my health – I both hated and loved them for their decision. While in Europe, I had been able to push any thoughts of my attack and injuries to the back of my mind so that I could focus on the mission. Now that we were back in Chicago, I had no mission and nothing much to distract me from my body.

The first weekend back, I had stood in front of a full-length mirror for almost an hour as I had studied every square inch of my naked body. It was really the first opportunity that I had had to check myself over properly. I was stunned by what was still visible, weeks down the line. Dr Bennett had assured me that my body would heal one hundred percent. It was my mind that worried me. Would my mind fully recover from my experiences? I tried to explain what

had occurred to Mom, but it was not easy and I found most of it incredibly humiliating to recount.

I had never cried as much as I had in the past week and I found that single fact *totally* depressing.

That afternoon

South Cottage Grove Apartment 202

We rarely got visitors of any sort, in our little apartment, let alone the one who stood outside our front door at that moment.

She had never come to visit us before; we tended not to get on all that well. Therefore, I was quite surprised when I answered the door to find Megan standing there and the eleven-year-old girl was looking rather awkward.

"Hi, Megan – come in."

"Thanks, Chloe. I'm not disturbing you? I heard that you had visitors."

Very polite – very unlike Megan, I thought. The younger girl followed me through into the living room.

"No – they've nipped out with Josh."

Megan seemed relieved.

"Nice place you have here, Chloe."

My mind went into overdrive – something was very wrong.

"Thanks, I think – why are you being so, err, un-Megan?"

"I need to talk, and well, after Mindy and Dave, it's you that I feel closest to..."

"Me?" I was astounded.

"I know that I wind you up and I make trouble for you, but you're a big sister to me and I look up to you. When I get older, I hope I can be like you; fearless and unstoppable."

Megan wanted to be like me? That was one hell of a compliment. I had never known.

"What's brought this on...?" I asked as I pointed Megan to the couch

"That last mission . . . it scared the hell out of me. Once, I thought that we were all invincible – then I was stabbed three times as a consequence of doing something stupid. Then I was wounded in Gotham. Even then, I still saw us as being able to battle through anything, but over the past month, many of my closest friends have been hurt. Hailee was beaten really badly; I saw her body in Italy and it looked horrible – she had suffered so badly. Stephanie was hurt too. Then Abby was put at risk and almost killed. The final straw was Curtis..."

I knew how she felt; I hated to see my friends hurt and seeing my cousin lying on the ground, not breathing...

"I was so scared of losing him..."

She broke down in tears. I sat down beside her and hugged the girl. I knew how she felt; I had been so scared of losing him too.

As I walked in the door, I heard talking and I instantly recognised the voice.

I had just been out with Avery and Riley to get some shopping. The two of them were a couple of blocks away picking out some pizza for tea. I dumped the bags onto the kitchen side and then I went into the living room. To say that I was stunned by the sight before me was an understatement. Seeing the two of them hugging was like seeing Palpatine hugging Yoda. However, I could see that something was troubling the both of them, so I dived into the kitchen and returned ten minutes later carrying three steaming cups of hot chocolate with marshmallows.

"Hit Girl's cure for anything!" I offered as I sat down.

Megan looked distinctly embarrassed. She hated anybody to see her cry. I could see tears on Chloe's face too.

"Curtis?"

Both girls nodded.

"It was a tough month," I admitted.

..._...

"I love you both and I'm sorry I'm such a bitch," Megan offered.

"Just be yourself, Megan," I replied. "That's why we love you."

"I hate to admit it, but Josh is right. I've always been impressed by your outgoing attitude, Megan. You never let anything get the better of you and you have courage that I wish I had at your age. You are way better than me when it comes to acrobatics and yes, I am jealous of your skills at times."

Megan looked dumbfounded.

"You – jealous of me?"

"I may be the amazing Shadow, but there are some things which you are much better at. I know we've had our differences. I know you once shoved me off the roof of a building..."

"I did *not* mean to do that!" Megan exclaimed.

"I know," I finished.

D-JAK Prime

As I watched my daughter assist Chloe with the class, I felt all sorts of emotions.

Megan had refused to speak about what had happened to her in Europe. I was overjoyed that she had returned without any new holes, as was Marcus. However, I had seen Hailee and I knew that bad things had occurred. Whatever had occurred had also brought Chloe and Megan closer together. They had always been a team within *Fusion*, but the two of them had never quite got on. Megan had been a perpetual thorn in Chloe's side.

It was good to see them both getting along and joking with each other but I so wanted to know what was troubling my little girl. Mindy had been just as tight-lipped, but that was nothing new. Cathy had tried to get information out of her daughter. Chloe had refused to say anything about events in Europe, other than that Megan would come forward when she was ready.

I smiled as my daughter looked over towards me. She seemed happy. I just hoped that she would not do anything stupid and survive till her twelfth birthday which was only a few months away. At least I had had Marcus. We were both in the same boat. But for the moment, I had a new child to think about. The enormous load that I had been lugging around for nine months was all but ready to appear in the next few days.

Megan had arrived a few days late – nothing unusual there. Marcus and I both knew the sex of the baby, but we had decided to keep it a secret from Mindy and Megan, as well as everybody else. We had a name too and we hoped that it would be accepted. I was very uncomfortable and very keen to have my body back with only one person in it. Baby Megan had been a handful – much as she was as a pre-teen.

Ow! That was another kick – I was certain that the little person inside me was listening to the classes and trying out a few of the movements inside my womb.

*This storyline continues in **Chapter 30: Epilogue of The Fusion Ultimatum...***

***Chapter 276*: Party Time**

This is the continuation of the storyline from Chapter 30: Epilogue of The Fusion Ultimatum.

Sunday, 22nd May, 2016

That night

Glenview

Dave and I sat cuddled up together on the couch in the living room.

One of our favourite movies was just about to start when Stephanie came into the room from the direction of the stairs. She walked directly towards us and then she pushed herself in between Dave and me. She pulled her legs up and cuddled into Dave – her favourite place. Then she began to cry.

I looked over at Dave who just shrugged.

"You okay?" I asked.

"You two are the most special people that I have in this world. You've taken in a broken girl who had lost her parents, her brother, and her mentor. You then turned her into somebody with both a purpose and a future. You both give your love without any thought of return. What you did for Miranda was beautiful and I can never repay either of you for your love and kindness. All I can do in return is to try and be a good daughter to you both plus a good sister to the two nightmares upstairs."

I hugged Stephanie tightly and then dried her tears.

"You're a lovely girl, Steph. You deserve to have a nice life after all the crap that you've endured. My life was not good until Dave arrived and with him by my side, life has got so much better. I am very happy to be able to pass on some of that happiness to somebody else."

Stephanie looked up at me and smiled.

"Thanks, Mum."

We were disturbed by a yell from the door.

"She's in here!"

Danny waited for his sister and then they both ran and jumped onto the couch. Anne-Marie took up her place on the other side of Dave and Danny squirmed in next to me. The movie began at that moment.

"What are we watching?" Danny asked.

"A sci-fi movie," Dave replied.

"Is it scary?" Anne-Marie wondered.

"Not really," I chipped in.

"What's it called?" Stephanie wanted to know.

"Aliens..." I replied with an enormous grin.

Monday, 23rd May

Evening

Lincolnwood

I was not one to leave people unrewarded.

With a small amount of pre-planning, I made a surprise visit to the hackers of *Synthesis*. Naturally, they had no idea that I was about to make my entrance that Monday night. Battle Guy was with me, as was Hal – she insisted on coming. Murphy and Fellowes arrived a minute or two before we did so as not to worry Mr and Mrs Dade. Mind you, who wouldn't be worried about a blood-thirsty vigilante paying a visit to their home.

"Good evening," I offered as I entered the house.

"Welcome, err, Hit Girl."

It was a normal Monday evening for us all.

The five of us were happily pounding away on our laptops when the door to my bedroom opened. I expected it to be Mom. It was a female alright, but...

"Holy fuck!" I spat out as I saw who now stood in my bedroom.

Each of the three masked individuals wore an almost identical dark grey uniform. The female to the left wore a silver oak leaf on her collar. The man on the right, a silver eagle. The woman in the centre had a single silver star on her collar. Her mask was trimmed in purple – she was Hit Girl. The other female, her mask trimmed in a pale blue, was slim and I had no idea who she was. The man wore a mask trimmed in dark blue and I knew that he would be Battle Guy.

"Are you, Hal?" Jesse asked in awe as he ran his eyes over the unknown female.

"Yes, I am Hal."

I saw the lower jaws of Peter and Laurence almost hit the floor at that proclamation. I knew exactly what the three of them got up to in bed each night and who was in their minds while they did it – ewww!

..._...

"You must be Libby Dade, the leader of this rabble," Hit Girl enquired and I nodded. "And the rest of you must be *Synthesis*."

"We are!" the others almost yelled.

"Thank you all for your assistance. While I was a little surprised to find that *Fusion* had a team of hackers, I was very pleased with what you all accomplished."

"We're just glad we could help," Kate offered meekly.

I could not believe that we were talking with the famous Hit Girl, right there in my fucking bedroom!

They all seemed genuine enough – young, but I could not hold that against any of them!

The bedroom was large and nicely decorated. My eyes locked onto one poster.

"Oh for..." I growled as I took in the six-foot by four-foot, glossy poster that showed yours truly in France, the middle finger of my left hand raised. I had to admit, it was an awesome poster and actually better than the SOMF one.

"Marker!"

A black marker pen was instantly thrust at me and I went over to the poster and I signed it: *Hit Girl*. The grins from the kids were very rewarding.

"Can we get one of those posters," Hal asked.

"Anything you want, Hal..." Jesse Dade fawned and I saw his sister roll her eyes in exasperation.

"Battle Guy?" I prompted.

Battle Guy dived out of the room for a moment.

I was enjoying the attention from the boys. I had had no idea that I had a fan base of any kind. It was a little bit creepy, but all in all . . . I loved it! Battle Guy returned with five large boxes in his arms. He gently placed them on the floor at the foot of Libby's bed. Each of the laptops had cost well over \$3,000 and were among the best that money could buy. All five of the geeks just stared at the laptops as they instantly recognised the high-end electronics.

"Awesome..." Libby Dade whispered as she picked up one of the boxed laptops and she seemed to be in a daze as she sat back down on her bed.

"We customised them a bit – but I'm sure you guys can do the rest..." I said as they all began to open their new equipment.

"Holy crap!" Jesse breathed. "It's got *everything!*"

"They're bullet resistant too," I advised them. "Kevlar in the lid, carbon fibre case..."

Next, we handed out a Sony Z5 Android phone to each of them. Battle Guy demonstrated how to call for help if required.

"You guys are now a part of *Fusion*. That means you get our protection. Over time, we might let you in on more of our secrets, but for now, if you need us, you know where to find us," Hit Girl advised the enthralled kids. "I hope that I do not have to go into any detail concerning secrecy..."

"No way – our lips are sealed," Libby responded instantly. "Right, guys...?"

"Definitely."

"Of course."

"Goes without saying."

"That would be awesomely stupid!"

"Remember," Hit Girl growled. "You hack me..."

"We know," Kate muttered. "You'll eviscerate us and eat our guts in a sandwich."

"Actually, I prefer a good barbeque," the arch-vigilante laughed.

"God!" Hit Girl moaned as we climbed back into Hound. "Teenage geeks are so annoying!"

"According to Kick-Ass, you used to be pretty annoying, too," Battle Guy pointed out as he started the SUV.

"I was not!" Hit Girl replied defensively. "Well . . . maybe a little."

"Shadow used to find me really annoying at times," I admitted.

"Geeks like to be annoying," Battle Guy acknowledged.

"Don't I know it!" Hit Girl chuckled.

A few days later
Saturday, 28th May
Early afternoon

Glen View

It was party time again and not a minute too soon...

Everybody was exhausted and we needed to unwind. I decided to open the party up not just *Fusion* but for many of our friends too. Literally tonnes of food and drink had been delivered from an outside caterer. Most of the kids had arrived and they were upstairs changing for the pool. Dave was on patrol up there to ensure that the girls stayed in Stephanie's bedroom and the boys stayed in Danny's bedroom while they changed.

The first down the stairs was Chloe with her best friends, Abby, Avery, and Riley – Chloe had gone with a surprisingly discrete, one-piece swimsuit – maybe she remembered what Stephanie had done it her, back in London – as had Riley and Abby, but Avery had worn a daring two-piece bikini that did not actually cover very much at all. They were quickly followed by a younger group of giggling girls in the form of Megan with her best friend Nikki, Stephanie, Anne-Marie, Lauren with her sister Lizzie, and Stephanie's friends: Katherine and Alison. Another group followed which consisted of Joshua with his best friends, Mike and Ethan. Then came Kyle and Tommy, followed by Curtis with his best friends, Jake and Zach. Finally, there was Saoirse, Morgan, Cameron Fellowes, Brad Murphy and Stephanie's other friends, Craig and Jackson.

As if twenty-six teens and pre-teens was not enough, we also had the adults: Hailee, Mathilda, Marty and Kim with Matty, Marcus and Paige, Abby's mother Vera, Emily, the mother of Lauren and Lizzie, Tony and Shannon, and of course, Isaac Swanson. We were also joined by Fellowes and Murphy with their wives.

I was very nervous as I walked over to the side of the pool where the two boys stood talking.

The one on the right saw me as I approached and he whispered something to the other boy who blushed as his friend swam away.

"Hi, Brad."

"Hi, Lauren – you okay?"

"Yes, thanks..."

"Nice, err, costume..."

I felt my face getting very hot and my nervousness increased. Brad had really helped me get past the people who had seen me as tainted by what I had gone through. Brad had been there for me, even when I had burst into tears . . . and he had let me cry on his shoulder. Brad also had a very nice . . . body – *did I just think that?*

"Thanks for being there for me Brad – I've never really had the chance to say that..."

"No sweat, Lauren – I was just glad to be able to help..."

Crap! The conversation wasn't going very far, was it?

I edged closer to him and I felt my heart beating harder against my chest. Brad seemed much more nervous than I was if that were actually possible. I tentatively leaned forwards and kissed him on the lips – just once, and very quickly. Brad grinned sheepishly and I struggled not to giggle with embarrassment as I looked around and I found Megan and Stephanie staring back at me. They were both smiling, in a nice way, and they nodded to me before they turned away.

We both stood there, not talking until Brad reached out and he took my hand.

"They make a cute couple," Rachel Murphy commented from the far side of the pool.

"Your son has been a big help to Lauren," Emily Edwards replied.

"Brad can be very sensitive at times. He's not said much but he's really taken by Lauren – to be honest, she's his first real girlfriend. But I've warned him that if he hurts Lauren in any way..."

"Lauren hasn't had a real boyfriend yet; she's barely out of the 'boys, ewww' stage. I'm pleased that she has somebody to talk to and somebody who cares about her, despite..."

"A horrible thing to happen to a girl of any age."

There was a splash beside me as Megan appeared from under the water.

"Hi, lover boy," Megan said to Brad.

I noticed Brad running his eyes over Megan's curvaceous swimsuit-clad body and I scowled as that green-eyed

monster reared up inside of me.

"Bradley – your eyes should be on *me*; not on her..."

Oh, my God, I could not believe that I had just said that!

"Jealous, much!" Megan grinned as she vanished back under the water and then reappeared a few yards away to annoy Chloe.

I had somehow joined an amazing group of people. They all cared for each other and no matter what they were always there when you needed them. They would also give you space when you needed it too.

"Hiya, Brad," my little sister called out. "Lauren's been talking about *all* week."

"I have not!" I blustered as I glared at Lizzie. "Go find your own boyfriend."

"Lauren's got a boyfriend! Lauren's got a boyfriend!" Lizzie sang as she swam away.

"Sorry about her," I muttered.

"She's not said anything that isn't true," Brad laughed as I felt myself going red again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, plus rabid kids!" Dave called out over all the noise. "Mindy and Megan would like a word."

I stood up and faced everybody as the noise died down and everybody looked over in our direction. Admittedly, the younger males had no problem looking in our direction as Megan stood beside me in just her swimsuit.

"As most of you know, Paige has been lugging something around inside her for the past nine months. Finally, Megan and I have great pleasure in welcoming our little brother to the world... Please raise your glasses to the newest member of our little community: Damon Williams."

Paige raised up the not-yet-a-week-old baby boy and everybody cheered and raised their glasses to the new child. Marcus himself looked very pleased with himself.

"Just one more thing..." I called out. "I kind of said that I would not announce this, but today is also Paige's birthday, so Happy Birthday *Mom!*"

More cheering erupted as Paige glared at me.

Later that afternoon

The British Sector

The four kids had got bored in the pool, so they had retreated upstairs to chat amongst themselves.

Initially, Lauren had been targeted for some light-hearted teasing about her and Brad, but the conversation had then moved onto what might happen beyond Lauren and Brad just kissing. Stephanie had come up with a few, rather crude, suggestions.

"You seem very well clued up for a ten-year-old, Stephanie..." Lauren commented and Stephanie blushed slightly as she looked around to see that the door to her bedroom was firmly shut.

"Sex education was a key part of Phase 1 training and the basics were taught – I knew what was what by the time I was eight and a half. The idea was that once we became operational as teenagers, we could use sex as a weapon – to compromise people for instance. Well, during Phase 2 they went into a bit more detail about not just basic sexual intercourse, but other sexual positions and methods..."

"Awesome!" Megan grinned.

"By Phase 3, they had moved from theory to practical applications... I picked up a lot, considering that I shared a dormitory with gobby teenagers who liked to talk about what they were doing with their bits when the lights were out... I never witnessed one, but there were live demonstrations by two unfortunate Phase 3 students to show what they

had learned and to demonstrate the correct use of their bodies on each other..."

"That sounds creepy," Lauren commented.

..._...

At that point, the door opened and Saoirse slunk in with Morgan.

"Shut the door!" Tommy hissed and Morgan did so before she joined the others on the bed.

"What are you all talking about?" Saoirse asked.

"Sex," Megan stated simply.

"Oh..."

"SD?" Tommy asked.

"Yes, Tommy."

"You were Phase 3, right?"

"Yes, I was – I completed *my* training..." Saoirse replied as she threw a smirk in Stephanie's direction and not realising the trap that she had just dropped herself into.

"Does that mean that you witnessed one of the live sex demos that Steph just told us about?" Tommy persisted.

Saoirse went bright red and her eyes almost popped out of their sockets. Then she turned on Stephanie.

"Can't you keep your big gob shut?"

"They asked..." Stephanie replied apologetically as she realised her error; she had no desire to humiliate her friend.

"Well?" Megan pushed.

SD grimaced and she rolled her eyes, but her face remained flushed.

"Yes, I was at one of the 'demos' as you called it, Tommy. We all hated them and we dreaded being picked, but by then we were all well used to being naked in front of others, but to engage in a sex act before an audience of our peers was something else entirely!"

..._...

Saoirse hesitated for a moment, but then reluctantly she pushed on.

"A girl was called out – Sarah, I think her name was... She had no choice but to go up on stage where she was immediately ordered to strip – nobody disobeyed direct orders, *nobody*... The girl was naked within sixty seconds; she just stood there and hoped that she was going to be having sex with a boy – you never knew until the partner was picked. Then it happened; *my* name was called out!"

"You!" Stephanie blurted out.

Saoirse looked incredibly embarrassed at her revelation but she took a deep breath and responded to Stephanie's exclamation.

"Yes, I, Foxtail have had mad, passionate, lesbian sex, live on stage in front of hundreds – you happy now?"

"Not really; but I'm still listening..." Stephanie replied with an eager smirk.

"I felt so embarrassed as I walked down to the stage..."

"Embarrassed? You?" Megan inquired. "I thought your kind were into that sort of thing..."

Both Stephanie and Saoirse turned on Megan and gave her some very cold glares. Cold enough that Megan actually flinched slightly.

"For your information, Kitty-Kat, I was only thirteen. I had only had proper boobs for a year and just two weeks previously, I had finished off the indignities of my first ever period... It was just my luck for nature to intervene during a shower one afternoon – it was like that scene from Carrie. Only, I knew what was happening to my body; although, some clever bitches hammed it up and threw pads and tampons at me.

"It was not all that uncommon for girls to have their first periods in the shower but they all got laughed at; we were bitches and trained to be that way. Nobody showed you any compassion, so you showed nobody else compassion; everybody just bitched at each other and some poor girl bleeding all over the showers was fair game. Mind you, Stephanie found a very unique solution to that and found another way to dump some blood in the shower!"

..._...

It was Stephanie's turn to blush furiously but Saoirse continued.

"Getting back to the stage: everybody was cheering for us both – most of them were perverts; what teenagers aren't? Sarah was bright red from her hair line right down to her tits, by the time I got on stage. I was immediately ordered to strip, and I did so, without any hesitation. It felt weird removing your bra and knickers in front of hundreds of other teenagers but there I was, naked on stage with another equally naked girl and I was shaking like a leaf. We had sex – so much that I lost track of everything and we both passed out and awoke to find ourselves in our own beds, fast asleep."

"We want details, girl!" Lauren called out which surprised everyone.

Saoirse swore under her breath.

"According to the others who were there that afternoon, we began with foreplay – I could remember that bit 'cause I was feeling humiliated and I was shaking – we kissed and played with each other's tits and also down below . . . as we both became aroused, our nervousness seemed to fall away and we both sunk into our little show. That was when I started to lose track of everything that happened – apparently, Sarah went down on me before I then returned the favour and before we knew it, we had a full 69 on stage... I was so spent afterwards that I couldn't touch my clit for a week!"

"Wow!" Tommy growled as he sat there, his hands down his pants.

"That was awesome!" Stephanie added and Lauren nodded enthusiastically.

"Ewww!" Megan commented with a grimace.

Morgan just sat there with a thoughtful expression on her face.

***Chapter 277*: Family Time**

Two days later
Monday, May 30th

North Park Elementary School

"It was really awesome – her swimsuit was perfect."

"We noticed you staring at her all afternoon, Jackson," Ali commented with a roll of her eyes.

"He was lucky he was in the pool, nobody noticed the drooling!" Craig.

"I was *not* drooling!"

"Yes, you were," Katy reminded the blushing boy. "Your eyes were fixed on Stephanie's chest and other places."

"I..."

"Shh!" Craig hissed. "She's here..."

Stephanie sat down at her desk and glared at Jackson.

"Not . . . one . . . word!" she ordered.

"He loved your swimsuit – couldn't stop talking about it," Katy laughed.

"He wanted to know what you looked like out of it..." Craig said.

"You what!" Stephanie growled at Jackson.

"Stephanie enjoyed you watching her, Jackson," Anne-Marie commented loudly as she walked past the open door to the classroom.

Stephanie's eyes went wide and her face exploded into a deep pink hue.

"You're dead, girl!" Stephanie yelled after the giggling eight-year-old as she bolted.

That same time ***Lake View High School***

"Ethan, you were a fucking animal on Saturday," Mike Taylor pointed out to his friend.

"I was *not*!"

"Come on, Ethan, you had your hands all over Saoirse," Morgan reminded the almost sixteen-year-old.

"She wasn't exactly complaining," Ethan threw back.

"She's a junior, too," Chloe commented.

"Was there any part of her body you *didn't* touch?" Avery asked.

"Yeah," Ethan replied as his face turned very red. "She said, and I quote, 'touch my snatch and I break your fucking fingers'."

Everybody laughed at that.

"Any comments on her body?" Riley enquired with a grin.

"Her boobs are bigger than yours," Ethan replied.

"Hey!" Riley retorted in an annoyed tone.

"Don't feel bad, Riley," Chloe offered. "Everybody's boobs are bigger than yours!"

There was more laughter and Riley scowled.

Chicago University

"You waiting for her again, cuz?"

"Yeah – I'll catch you later, Adora."

I hoped she would be there... The wait was worth it as the all black 2015 Kawasaki Ninja 1000 ABS swept into the parking lot. It came to a swift halt a few yards from where I stood. The lady astride the beautiful machine swung an equally beautiful leg over the frame and she removed her helmet. She shook out her below shoulder-length brown hair and stuffed her helmet into the right-hand pannier.

"Hi," I offered as she walked past me.

"Hi, yourself."

She smiled.

"I'm Adam Stockdale."

"Hailee Richards."

That afternoon

D-JAK

We were having some down time and I was spending some quality time down at D-JAK Prime.

It was great just to be able to work through my aches and pains with some Taekwondo or some Aikido. As was usual when I performed, I had an audience. Okay, my Gi was showing off my curves and there were several teenage boys who tried to get a good look at my nether regions. A few back flips usually had some of the older boys drooling...

"You are so awful, Mindy!" Paige laughed as she enjoyed a day of freedom while Cathy was looking after little Damon.

"It brings in the custom..." I reasoned as I drank some cold water.

"Mommy, mommy!"

I turned to see Anne-Marie running towards me; her face lit up with an enormous smile.

"I did it!"

I waited patiently for the rest of the explanation – it was like waiting for a grenade to explode...

"I did my first backflip!"

"Wow!" I replied and I was genuinely impressed.

I knew from personal experience how hard a backflip was to do. I was physically dragged by the eight-year-old over to the corner where I found Hailee and Saoirse. They both grinned at me and I stood to one side while Anne-Marie took up position on the mat and she looked over at me; I nodded and she took a deep breath...

The young girl was very flexible and she demonstrated this by performing a passable standing backflip in which she cleared the mat and only her feet touched down again. I clapped and so did many of the watching parents. Anne-Marie went pink and bowed to everybody. Then she turned to me.

"Your turn, Mom..."

She knew I found it really difficult to turn down a challenge and I had also warned her about getting me to show off my

Hit Girl skills in public while I was Mindy Lizewski. Nevertheless, I had performed my patented backflip at D-JAK before. I decided to add something more to the movement and I did something that I had not done in many years. I took off at a run, directly at the wall and with a perfectly timed jump followed by two steady paces, I ran *up* the wall and flipped over backwards before I performed an added twist and landed back on my feet to face the astonished Anne-Marie.

Behind my stunned daughter, several of my male fans broke into raging cheers and I felt my face get very warm.

"Not bad, girl!" Saoirse commented and Hailee nodded her own approval.

Not to be outdone, my two black belt instructors began a routine to show off their own fighting skills as they tried to outdo each other and put the other down hard. The boys and girls loved it and so did the parents, especially the few dads present...

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Anne-Marie, with the assistance of her big sister, showed off what else she had learnt over her months at D-JAK. Stephanie walked towards her younger sister, a soft plastic training knife in her right hand. As she came closer to Anne-Marie, the younger girl took up a fighting stance and when Stephanie made to 'stab' her sister, Anne-Marie expertly disarmed the bigger girl and we all heard the air forced out of Stephanie's lungs when she hit the mat. The sprightly Anne-Marie bowed and curtsied to the cheering watchers – she loved the attention. She then proceeded to put her brother down as he picked up the same knife and tried to attack his sister while she was busy with her adoring crowd.

Stephanie had, meantime, jumped back to her feet and she made her way towards Chloe who was talking to several kids about self-protection techniques. Stephanie's approach was perfect but Chloe had developed an awesome sixth sense that made Shadow a considerably more dangerous opponent. There in D-JAK, though, she would not kill her assailant but still, Stephanie found herself landing flat on her face as Chloe deftly kicked the younger girl's feet out from under her and without missing a beat, she went back to her instruction.

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Stephanie was not beaten – she rarely was.

"I need a volunteer," she called out as she studied some of the kids that had come in for a look. "Anybody think they can take me?"

The challenge was taken up by a tall girl with long blonde hair. She wore a blouse, loose jeans and sneakers.

"Who are you?" Stephanie asked.

"My name is Kelly..."

"Age?"

"Seventeen..."

I watched as Stephanie grinned. They both took up a fighting stance – the girl obviously had some skills and I saw her eyes focus on Stephanie. Quick as a flash, Stephanie moved and put the much older girl down on the mat with her knee across Kelly's throat.

"Not bad . . . but you've left yourself open..." Kelly said as she twisted and wrapped her leg around Stephanie's neck.

Stephanie instantly realised her mistake and tried to correct her error but to no avail as for about the third time that afternoon, she hit the mat rather hard.

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I noticed a tall woman who watched Kelly intently; she seemed far too young to be the girl's mother, she was about my age – a sister maybe? I walked over to her.

"Your sister?"

"Yes, Kelly is my younger sister. My name is Katrina, Katrina Wright."

The woman had long, flowing black hair and she had piercing eyes that seemed to radiate superiority as she looked down at me.

"Mindy, Mindy Lizewski," I said as I offered my hand.

"Good to meet you, Mindy Lizewski."

"Your sister is skilled. Where did she learn?"

"From me. Our parents died some time ago and I have taught her to be self-reliant."

"I applaud you for that decision," I replied.

"If you'll excuse us, we have another appointment..."

"We look forward to seeing you both again, sometime."

I watched as the two young women left. For some reason which I could not explain, I felt a nagging worry about the elder one.

That night

Glenview

"Why is it," Dave enquired of his eldest daughter as he observed the food around her mouth, "no matter what you eat, you still manage to get a good deal of it on your face and even some down your front?"

"I don't..." Stephanie began.

"Maybe we should have her eat naked – then we can just throw her in the bath rather than having to try and get the stains out of her clothes," Mindy suggested.

Stephanie scowled – Anne-Marie and Danny laughed.

"Little Lady doesn't like that idea," Dave chuckled.

"I am *not* little..." Stephanie retorted.

"...Nor a lady," Danny added.

"Good one, Danny!" Anne-Marie laughed.

While Stephanie glared at her younger siblings, Dave attacked her with a wet-wipe. Stephanie fought but Dave was stronger and two seconds later, Dave released a now much cleaner-faced Stephanie.

"Well," Anne-Marie teased, "that must have been humiliating for you."

"Well," Dave threw in, "you're about to find out just *how* humiliating."

Dave then attacked Anne-Marie's face with another wet-wipe. When he had finished the much cleaner Anne-Marie glowered at Stephanie who just glowered back.

"Dad, may I have a wipe too, please?"

"Of course, Daniel," Dave replied as he passed a fresh one over.

The two girls looked up at Dave and then at Danny while their mouths hung open.

"What?" Danny asked. "I'm old enough to wipe my own face . . . unlike you two little girls."

The looks Danny received were anything but friendly.

There was one downside to the puppies being house-trained.

We allowed them to wander around the house while we were home and that meant that I could be sitting on the toilet taking a pee when a muzzle would appear around the door – and *not* the muzzle that I was used to, either. The muzzle was usually furry and belonged to a rather ungainly young pup which tended to be Kiara or Razor. I had no real problem with them coming to visit – they would just sit there and stare, tongues hanging out – but I hated to have an audience while I peed.

More than once I had found no toilet paper on the holder and then subsequently discovered miles of it running around the house – that had usually resulted in a major telling off for the unfortunate culprit who was usually found half-buried in Andrex. If it were Razor, then Stephanie gained the unenviable job of putting the toilet paper *back* onto the roll – which usually resulted in Razor sulking even more because Stephanie would glower at him for the rest of the day!

It was also getting annoyingly regular to be taking a shower and then to find yourself with a pup or two at your feet, enjoying the rushing water; they all loved water and none of them would pass up any chance to get wet. Once, I had ended up with all seven in the shower with me, which was a squeeze, even in our giant shower! Effort was made to dissuade them as they grew, but they were very mischievous, especially Kiara who appeared to be the ring leader of any uprising.

It was almost time for the relevant pups to go to their respective homes. Hope would go to Marty and Kim. Josie would join Hailee. Piper would annoy Megan. Hercules would join Chloe and Joshua in their apartment – maybe they might just need a bigger place. Layla would make her home with Abby.

That would just leave us with four pets: Sophia, Kiara, Razor, and Horatio.

Later that night

"You playing with your pussy, again?"

"I find it relaxing," Mindy replied with a grin at the innuendo as her finger moved gently and rhythmically.

"I like stroking pussies, too."

"This one is softer and he purrs really loudly."

"He's got sharp claws, too."

"Only when he wants to play – or you make him mad."

"Well, I prefer my pussies to be moist..."

Mindy picked up Horatio and headed out of the living room.

"Time for little man to go to bed and then you can play with my other pussy."

Tuesday, May 31st Evening

Central Chicago

"You two have fun now. I'll be back about eight-thirty."

"Thanks, Dad," Brad called out as he helped his date out of the Jeep SUV.

"Your Dad's nice."

"Thanks, Lauren."

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Two hours later, the two kids came out of the cinema hand-in-hand. They had enjoyed pizza and a movie. It was very close to the time when Brad's father would arrive to collect them and take them home. It had been a first for them both and very special to boot. Brad leant in and gave Lauren a swift peck on the cheek. Lauren blushed and she was about to return the sentiment when somebody shouted from very close by.

"What the bloody hell are you doing with my daughter?"

The yell came out of nowhere and Brad spun around very confused. He was instantly accosted by an angry looking man who pushed him back against the wall of the cinema. Lauren's eyes went wide for a moment before they narrowed.

"What do *want*, Dad?" she demanded.

"I want to know what the fuck you are doing with a *boy*? You're still thirteen, right?"

"You don't even know how old I am!" Lauren thundered back derisively. "Why can't you just stay out of my life?"

"You and Lizzie are my daughters and I care..."

"Care!" Lauren retorted angrily. "You don't *care* about us, or Mom."

"Well, she ain't exactly doing a good job if she lets you run around like a common hussy."

Brad jumped in to defend Lauren.

"Don't talk about Lauren like that."

Bill Edwards turned on the almost-thirteen-year-old boy and he raised his right hand...

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The next few seconds were a blur for the man as his world seemed to rotate and then he found the hard concrete of the ground rushing towards him. He screamed in pain as his face hit the concrete and as he rolled onto his back, he looked up into the very angry face of his teenage daughter.

"What the hell?" he spat out as he got back to his feet a little shakily.

He had not taken more than two steps when he again hit concrete. Only it was the wall of the cinema as Bill Edwards felt cold steel on his left wrist as it was yanked behind him. He felt the same cold steel on his right wrist as he was secured and pushed down to the ground.

A very angry Sergeant Paul Murphy glared down at the man with blood on his face.

***Chicago Police Department
District 21
Chicago***

Sergeant Trudy Platt looked up as Murphy entered the precinct with a perp in cuffs.

"Thought it was your night off, Paul?" she queried as she took in the two kids, one of whom was Murphy's teenage son.

"Took my son and his girl to the movies – this asshole interfered," Paul explained.

"Was all that blood you, Paul?"

"It was me," the young girl replied. "He's my father and he went to hit Brad."

"Lauren put him down like he was nothing!" Brad commented.

"He is nothing – nothing to me," Lauren growled angrily.

***The following morning
Wednesday, June 1st***

North Park Elementary School

The door to the classroom burst open.

It was Jackson. Stephanie was about to comment about being disturbed during recess when she saw Jackson's worried expression.

"Steph, some quick – it's your sister!"

Stephanie bolted up from her seat and she left a confused Katy and Ali in her wake as she ran out of the room. She was quickly joined by an anxious-faced Megan. Jackson led them both to a classroom on the first floor and he stopped just inside the door. They had heard the crying and muted screams as they approached the classroom. The source was Anne-Marie and she lay on the floor in obvious pain. Tears streamed down her face as a teacher inspected her left arm which for some reason did not look right.

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Stephanie and Megan both zeroed in on a young boy of eight who looked very guilty.

The boy also looked *very* scared as the two girls, both of whom were not just older but well-known for their tendency towards violence, moved towards him. He had hurt their sister/aunt and he knew that he was in *big* trouble. They were rapidly intercepted by Danny who stopped them in their vengeful tracks.

"Not his fault!" Danny said quickly. "Silly bitch was messing about and she fell – her fault, one hundred percent."

Megan did not look convinced, but neither she nor Stephanie continued their advance on the unfortunate boy.

An hour later

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"Nothing bad, Mindy," Cathy offered soothingly.

"What were you doing?" Mindy demanded of her youngest daughter.

Anne-Marie knew that she was in trouble and she just stared at the floor as Cathy studied the X-Rays of her left forearm. The arm was very painful but nowhere near as painful as it had been an hour previously. The painkillers had taken care of that.

"Well?"

"I fell."

"Doing what?"

"Nothing."

"Do you think I enjoy receiving phone calls from Principals saying that my child has been hurt?" Mindy's tone dictated the correct answer.

"No."

"Tell me the truth."

"I was showing off," the eight-year-old muttered as she sobbed.

"I can't hear you."

"I was showing off and I tried a cartwheel. It worked fine the first time, but then I misjudged it and I fell against the teacher's desk..."

The sobbing then got worse and Mindy finally relented as she hugged the distraught little girl.

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"It's a simple fracture and we can realign it easily. A cast will keep it secure until it heals fully. She's young, Mindy, so don't worry about any future problems."

"How long?"

"Could be six weeks in total – say three in the cast and then three weeks for the arm to regain its strength."

Once the arm was aligned securely, Cathy wrapped several layers of soft cotton over the lower arm. A little extra padding was applied around the thumb and then the outer layers were added. This was pink-coloured fibreglass and it was applied from just below the elbow all the way past the thumb to the knuckles of Anne-Marie's left hand. A thick cloth was wrapped around the cast to assist with the setting of the fibreglass.

Half an hour later, Anne-Marie was ready to leave the hospital.

***Chapter 278*: The Master Bedroom**

Author's Note: *Due to popular demand, this chapter has one very unique theme. Therefore, please be warned that this chapter consists almost entirely of smut and behaviour that should be seen as indecent and salacious. This will include words or insinuations of a dubious, unseemly, or downright suggestive nature. You have been warned...*

Wednesday, June 1st, 2016
That evening

Glenview

The Kitchen

"Dave, you seen Sophia's spare collar? You know, the one I've been threatening Megan with."

"No, not since Chloe was here the other day... Oh, dear!"

I picked up my cell and dialled Chloe. She picked up, but all I heard was giggling. Then I froze as I heard Joshua's voice in the background.

"Here, girl, come on – there's a good bitch..."

Then I was certain I heard Chloe go 'woof'. I quickly killed the call and I felt really freaked the hell out. I put the phone down carefully and I walked away giving it a nasty scowl.

"Did she have it?" Dave asked with a grin.

"Let's just say that I think those two will be doing it doggy style tonight... Don't you get any ideas, either!"

"I never said a word – although you *are* the world's biggest bitch!"

"I am aren't I!" I laughed.

"Who's doing what, 'doggy style'?"

I put my head in my hands and I groaned. Why did they always overhear weird shit that I could not possibly explain?

"Err . . . nothing, Anne-Marie."

Dave just laughed – asshole!

An hour later

The Master Bedroom

"That's it – the twins are asleep and Stephanie's got her head buried in some internet shit."

"Just us?"

"Just you, me, and way too many clothes..." Mindy replied with a lustful grin.

Dave scooped Mindy up and she giggled as she wrapped her arms around the neck of her husband. Dave carried her over to the bed and he threw his wife, none too gently, onto the capacious bed where she issued a little scream as she landed and bounced a few times. She began to laugh as Dave crawled onto the bed and then astride Mindy's legs. He leant down and kissed his wife on the lips. He felt her tongue push between his lips and he enjoyed the tingling sensation on his lips.

Mindy moaned as she pulled him closer.

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After almost two minutes, the couple came apart only slightly breathless. Dave slid backwards and reached behind him. He tickled Mindy's bare left foot – she giggled and she tried to pull her leg away but Dave held it firm.

"No!" she giggled.

Mindy was perfectly capable of getting out of Dave's grasp only she enjoyed being manipulated by her husband. She also didn't mind a little torture, nor a little pain.

"Dave – please..." she giggled as she writhed in vain.

"Oh, I've barely started, my love."

Dave attacked the belt buckle on Mindy's belt and he yanked the leather article out and then threw it across the room.

The Foyer

Stephanie was thirsty and a little hungry, so she headed down to the kitchen.

As she walked across the foyer en route for the kitchen, she heard loud giggling coming from the master bedroom over to her right. She grimaced at the thought of what was going on and she quickened her pace towards the kitchen.

Once there, she riffled through the fridge until she found what she was looking for: a large tub of strawberry yoghurt. She grabbed a spoon from a drawer, poured some milk into a large glass and she then headed back towards the stairs. The ten-year-old-girl jumped as something heavy hit the door to the master bedroom from the inside.

"Dirty fuckers!" Stephanie muttered as she ran up the stairs.

The Master Bedroom

Dave popped the buttons on Mindy's jeans.

Mindy made no attempt to prevent it. She just lay back on the bed and closed her eyes. She knew what was to come and the preceding foreplay was very important to the whole sexual encounter. Dave gently eased the jeans down her perfectly smooth thighs and revealed the dark purple panties beneath. He bent down and began to kiss the inner side of the thighs. Despite the knowledge that there was still a single layer of cotton covering her most intimate parts, just having her husband's mouth so tantalisingly close was almost unbearable.

Mindy moaned as Dave's tongue gently caressed the soft skin inside her thighs. Her skin tingled at his touch and mere inches away from that erotic touch, she could feel additional tingling in her labia as her vulva began to prepare itself for what was to come (pun intended).

Sometimes the sex was quick but still very satisfying.

At least once a month, where possible, Dave would go all out and he would torture me for what felt like hours. He would bring me to the brink of an orgasm, only to stop dead. I would feel so frustrated but I also enjoyed it. I so wanted my man inside of me. I so wanted him to touch every special part of me from my nipples to my clit.

Dave knew exactly what made me purr. He could make me moan and groan at a single touch. He could have me thrashing around like I was being electrocuted. He could have me pleading for the release of an orgasm. Some would probably have seen it as cruel, how Dave treated me as he withheld that all important orgasm, but I was Hit Girl, I enjoyed the torture . . . and believe me, the orgasm when it finally came; it was to die for.

I felt that frustration right then at that moment as Dave teased my inner thighs with his tongue and his lips. I so wanted those lips and that tongue on my labia and my clit, but both were still covered. I felt damp where it mattered and I could see the bulge in my man's pants – he looked decidedly uncomfortable. So, while he moved up my body to where he caressed my breasts through my blouse and my bra, I reached down and pulled open the buttons on his jeans. I reached in and pulled him out. The heat that his cock emitted was beaten only by the heat that I felt between my own legs.

I heard Dave moan as my fingers ran over the tip of his member and he trembled at my touch. I could play the game just as well as he could.

The jeans slid down Mindy's long, muscular legs.

Mindy's legs were perfectly smooth as she hated any hint of hair anywhere but on her head and vulva – she flatly refused to shave 'down there' although she did trim to keep things neat and orderly. The jeans followed the belt and Mindy squirmed as Dave ran his hands the full length of her legs from her feet all the way to her...

"God, this teasing's killing me!" Mindy moaned.

"It'll be well worth the wait, beautiful," Dave replied.

"It fucking better be!"

Dave ran his fingers over the purple panties. Mindy stiffened as his fingers caressed her labia. The panties were damp to the touch – a very good sign that Mindy was responding to Dave's gentle ministrations.

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Tenderly, Dave pushed his fingers into the waistband of the purple panties either side of the slim waist. Mindy's skin was soft and she moaned at his touch. Slowly, he pulled the panties down, inch by tantalising inch. Mindy's dark pubic hair appeared follicle by follicle. Her more intimate secrets were hidden behind the thick, dark covering of hair on her vulva.

Dave pulled the panties all the way down the legs that seemed to go on for miles and miles. Once the rather damp, purple garment had passed both feet, it was sent after the belt and the jeans. Mindy now only wore a blouse and her bra – nothing else.

Dave gently spread her legs – Mindy made no effort to stop him.

Mindy was now wide open and very ready for my favourite part.

I could see the look of yearning on her face and I knew that she was struggling to hold out. I gently went back to licking her thighs but closer to her vulva. I would get close, so close that I could feel her pubic hair on my cheek but I would then pull back and Mindy would moan, groan, or even growl, in response. As I licked the sensitive place where her legs joined her pelvic region, she began to squirm slightly. Then I gently blew into her pubic hair and she shuddered from head to toe.

"Oh, God..." she muttered as the anticipation grew.

I moved in closer and I ran my lips over the slit that ran vertically between her labia. Mindy groaned as the arousal built within her. Mindy's hips bucked as she tried in vain to get me closer to her pleasure centre. I kissed her directly on the lips – the lower lips. I began gentle but only for a minute before I began to kiss her harder and harder in the same intimate location.

"Get the fuck in there!"

I pushed my tongue in between her labia and I tasted the sweetness of my wife – she was very, very, ready. I ran my tongue up and down her labia before I pushed in deeper as I gently eased Mindy's legs further apart. My tongue dug in as far as it would go and Mindy moaned. Her hands were balled up into fists which would pound the bed either side of her.

After a few more minutes, I decided to see how ready Mindy *really* was.

Dave was skilfully bringing my arousal to a peak.

I knew what that would mean and I was not to be disappointed, so to speak. Dave pulled away from my snatch and he looked up at me with an enormous grin. I noticed that he was still very hard and I licked my lips in eager anticipation of wrapping my lips around him. Then I yelped!

Dave had just licked my blood-engorged clit. The touch had sent a sharp shock through my body – and I loved it! Dave flicked his tongue repeatedly against the tip of my clit and my legs shuddered each time. I could do nothing to prevent it; I was beginning to lose control over my body as Dave continued to play me like a musical instrument.

Then it just got worse, or should that be better – oh, God, it was so much better...

Dave gently took Mindy's clit into his mouth and he gently sucked her closer to an earth-shattering orgasm.

As he sucked, Dave cast a wary eye up at his partner and he acknowledged the expression on her face. The expression was one of extreme ecstasy and her eyes were tightly closed, her head was thrust deep into the pillow. There was a definite curve to her back as she fought against the sensations that threatened her sanity.

Then Dave promptly began to suck harder and Mindy groaned, moaned, and rambled.

"Wow . . . oh, God . . . ooohh . . . bloody heeeell . . . ahhh . . . amazing . . . I'm gonna die!"

Dave began to ease off gently as Mindy bucked and thrashed, but then he felt some sharp nails digging through his t-shirt and a dangerous voice growled out a command.

"Stop, and I *will* fucking kill you."

Dave did his best to keep connected to the clit in his mouth despite the violent gyrations of Mindy's pelvic region.

The British Sector

I was tired, so as soon as I had finished the yoghurt and the glass of milk, I crawled under my duvet and closed my eyes.

Then I groaned. It had begun, just as I had expected it to. The screaming was getting louder and louder. I felt embarrassed by the screaming as I had a very good idea about what was causing it. They had these extended 'sequences' every few weeks and after the last one I had intended to get ear plugs, only I never knew which night they would *do* their 'thing'. God, it freaked me out! I dragged the duvet over my head and I did my best to block out the offensive noise from down the stairs.

Maybe I could get soundproofing for my room...

The Master Bedroom

Mindy was curled up in a very tight ball as she fought through the sensations that ripped through her body.

Dave sat close by in case he was needed but he otherwise kept out of the way. Finally, Mindy uncurled herself and she stretched out on the bed. As she lay on her back, she breathed heavily as she struggled to contain the arousal in her body. Dave teased his wife as he ran his hand over her vulva. She bit her bottom lip and moaned as he purposefully ran his fingers across her now-hooded clit.

"*That* is out of bounds for a while!" Mindy scolded as she giggled and came up onto her knees before her sitting husband. "I think we need to get you out of those clothes..."

With that, Mindy proceeded to pull Dave's T-shirt off over his head – she threw it in the vague general direction of the bathroom. She took a moment to take in the curves of his chest and his ripped stomach. His biceps bulged as he changed his position on the bed and knelt up before his wife. For about the millionth time, Mindy thanked fate for giving her Dave Lizewski in that apartment all those years before.

Dave kissed his wife as he carefully undid each and every button on her mauve blouse. Once all were clear, he eased the silky garment off his wife's equally silky smooth shoulders. Mindy shuddered at the touch of her husband's hands. Every square-inch of skin was still tender after her first orgasm of the evening.

Tenderly, Dave reached behind his wife's back with his right hand and with a swift twist of his fingers, her bra was released and Mindy shrugged it off and allowed it to fall to the bed between them. She was now completely naked and her body shone with the sweat of her earlier exertions. As far as Dave was concerned, she was the most beautiful thing that he had ever seen. Mindy could see that her husband was pleased with what he saw as his member began to throb in eager anticipation of the next step.

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Mindy moved so she was sitting cross-legged. Nothing was hidden and she enjoyed her husband's very appreciative stares as he took in all of her body. Mindy worked quickly. Dave's belt joined her own within seconds and the jeans, along with the shorts were shoved down to his knees. Mindy moaned at the sight before her – Dave moaned too with his own reciprocal sight. Dave was as hard as he ever got and as she always did, she took a moment to wonder how the hell something so huge could actually fit inside of her.

He fitted alright and very snuggly too.

It was something that I enjoyed immensely.

I knew that some females hated it while some saw it as an act that was demeaning to women. Me? I was in full control and *nobody* forced me to do *anything* against my will. I willingly moved closer and tentatively gave Dave a lick – he shuddered at my touch. Dave could play me, but I could play him too, just as well. While I played, I felt a hand gently cupping my right breast followed by a thumb which rubbed the nipple... My heart was pounding harder only a few inches away from that same nipple and my breathing hitched at every twitch of that thumb.

I gently rubbed Dave's cock with my right hand and fondled his balls with the other. It had always occurred to me that I was very much in control as I held his most prized of bodily organs. No matter how macho a man was, having his balls in one hand and his penis in the other would always ensure instant and absolute obedience. I had no thoughts of harming Dave – his cock and his balls were just as important to me as they were to him!

I could tell by Dave's breathing and the fact that his eyes were closed that he was enjoying every second. His right hand still manipulated my nipple in a very precise and measured manner. To be honest, I had no idea who was going to cum first, him or me. I was fresh from a body wrenching orgasm but my nipples were connected directly to my snatch and...

"Oh, fuck!" I growled.

I took Dave into my mouth and ran my tongue around the tip – salty; I loved it. He was very warm and I could feel him tense up as I moved my lips up and down his shaft in a rhythmic fashion. As I built up the motion and heard Dave moaning above me, I released his balls and I began to play with my clit. I so needed to cum and I knew that Dave was mere seconds away from an explosive finish.

I was not to be disappointed.

Dave could not hold it any longer.

He might have had severed nerve endings all over his body which assisted his alter ego, Kick-Ass, but those nerve endings in his penis were very much intact and fully functional. Having such a hot girl sucking on his dick and fingering herself while she did so, all while he fondled her nipple was just too much. He tried his best to hold it but he could not.

..._...

Mindy struggled to simultaneously gag and absorb the impending orgasm. Dave's semen struck the back of her throat and it burned like hell. Mindy let go of her clit as she released Dave and sank to the bed. She swallowed the contents of her mouth as some of the sticky substance oozed from between her lips. Her knees were pulled up to her chest and she braced herself as the orgasm struck full force. Dave collapsed onto the bed beside his wife and he wrapped his hands around her naked shaking body.

They both lay there for a while as they came down from their joint orgasm. They enjoyed each other's warmth and the tender touch of skin on skin. Mindy still had her eyes closed but her body had eased and she now relaxed as Dave held her in his muscular arms.

"I love you, Dave."

"I love you two, my little pit viper."

Mindy giggled and she twisted her body around to face Dave.

"Still perky, I see..." Dave murmured as he gently teased an erect nipple with his finger. Mindy breathed in deeply and held her breath for a few seconds as the sensations coursed through her body.

"So are you..." Mindy replied as she reached down and gently caressed Dave's dick. The fleshy appendage rapidly grew in size in response to Mindy's hand and returned to its hard state. Dave kissed his wife on the neck, then nibbled her left earlobe. Mindy giggled at the seductive touch and she squirmed, but Dave held her firm.

Dave enjoyed the feeling of Mindy's breasts against his chest. They were very soft, as was most of Mindy's body. He ran a hand from her shoulder down to her firm buttock and squeezed. Mindy shuddered. Dave then slapped her playfully on the same buttock. The slap was loud and Mindy squealed at the slap. Then she purred.

"Again..."

Dave brought his hand down a little harder and Mindy groaned at the pain but she stared into her husband's loving blue eyes and she smiled. She had never felt more loved. All her worries and cares seemed to melt away as she sank into Dave's warm embrace, his rock hard cock nuzzled into her stomach as her hard but sensitive nipples burrowed into his awesomely curved chest.

..._...

After several minutes passed, Mindy had had enough – she wanted some more action. She roughly pushed Dave onto his back and she took up position astride his stomach. She eased her pelvic region backwards until she felt the tip of Dave's penis touching her very tender labia. Taking a short breath, she pushed back further and she gasped as Dave entered her. Gently she began to ride her partner while Dave reached up to caress the soft skin of her breasts and tease the erect nipples that stood out from the deep pink areola that surrounded the tender tips.

Mindy knew that she would not last long. She had not fully recovered from either of her previous orgasms and everything was still very tender. She did not dare touch her clit – that would have been like setting off a nuclear weapon inside of her – despite the fact that it was as hard as it ever got. Mindy teased Dave and herself by allowing him to slip in and out from between her labia – she found the feeling both erotic and tantalising.

Dave was not exactly complaining either as he lay back and watched Mindy's breasts jiggle as she rode his pelvic region. Mindy was like a cowgirl in a rodeo and she was riding him with the biggest smile that he had seen in a long time. They did not usually use that method of sex, but Dave knew that Mindy liked to be on top from time to time. She also enjoyed experiencing new and exciting sexual positions. The girl was sex crazed, that was the only way to describe it.

..._...

Ever since her very first time, on her sixteenth birthday, she had been all but insatiable. Mindy loved to feel hands other than her own on her body. Ever since puberty had begun to change her body, Mindy had 'explored' herself. However, she found that self-gratification never seemed to fulfil the urges that she felt after she had been out killing. It was only when Dave came on the scene and she found out that having another's hands roaming across her body was the biggest turn on ever.

Nobody, other than Dave, had ever laid hands on her body by her sixteenth birthday. She had never before experienced a full-on orgasm such as that which Dave had caused the very first time that he had touched her naked body in that hotel room. As far as Mindy was concerned at that moment, she was in sexual heaven. Between her legs, she had the most handsome being that she had ever laid eyes on. The man never ran out of love for her and she in return loved him more and more every day.

She owed everything to Dave. The guy had saved her from herself that night at the D'Amico penthouse. Dave had kept her sane during school and he had saved her life by following her all the way to Chicago and rescuing her from certain death. He either stayed with her because he loved her, or he was just fucking nuts! It was obvious which was his choice and he made sure that Mindy knew that he loved her without question.

As far as Dave was concerned, he was the luckiest man on earth. His cock was, right at that moment, lodged inside the cunt of the most dangerous female on the planet, if not the most dangerous being in the entire Solar System. He himself had been transformed from a laughed at comic-book hero wannabe, into a vigilante who was feared just as much as Hit Girl.

He was truly a man and he was determined to ensure that Mindy felt like the woman she was.

Mindy screamed as a wave of euphoria coursed through her and the orgasm hit like a tsunami after a volcanic

eruption.

Indeed, something was erupting inside that tight tunnel which led towards her cervix. She could feel his pulsing and the hot fluid as it coated her insides. Dave moaned as he ejaculated his load inside of her and Mindy soon collapsed on top of her husband. She tensed as he slipped out of her and they both breathed heavily for a minute or two before either of them could speak coherently.

"I am fucked!" Mindy stated simply before she giggled.

"You and me, both," Dave added.

The following morning

"You dirty bastards!"

"Sorry if we kept you up, last night, Steph."

"Mindy, you are *not* fucking sorry..." Stephanie moaned. "Not one *fucking* bit!"

"Just trying to be nice."

"It's disgusting – at your age, you should know better."

"Our age? You trying to say that we are old?"

"Yes."

"Stephanie – for your information, I was your age just eight years ago."

"Eight years is a long time – it's eighty-percent of my goddamn life."

***Chapter 279*: Shadow Play**

Thursday, June 2nd, 2016
That evening

Safehouse F

I hated to leave my little girl when she was hurt but Dave was with her and she was safely tucked up in bed when I left.

As I climbed out of the XJR, I noticed something new affixed to the glass barricade. I moved forwards and began to read the sign. I felt my anger rise as I read but then it subsided as I began to laugh.

"You funny fuckers!" I yelled out.

"Problem, Boss?" Abby asked from beside the open section of the barricade.

"Ha!!"

"See Marty..."

What had irked me so much? Marty had erected a warning sign – a sign warning everybody about *Hit Girl!*

...+...

Fusion Management would like to make all visitors to Safehouse F aware of the following.

By continuing past this point, you indicate that you have read, understood, and agreed to the below and that you are fully aware that you may be at risk of:

Attack, mutilation, dismemberment, emasculation, torture, flaying, disembowelling, evisceration, decapitation, stabbing, or being shot without warning.

Possible weaponry in use may include explosive devices, projectiles (which can include, but may not be limited to: arrows, crossbow bolts, air gun pellets, bullets, shot, cannon balls, BBs, shrapnel, lasers, napalm, torpedoes, ICBMs, knives, stones, bricks, spit-wads, spears, javelins etc.) or emissions of electromagnetic radiation (such as radio waves, microwaves, infra-red radiation, visible light, invisible light, UV, X-rays, Alpha, Beta and Gamma rays, neutrons, neutrinos, positrons, N-rays etc.).

To significantly reduce the risks of exposure to, or injury from, any of the above, please ensure that Hit Girl has been suitably restrained before entry.

Please also be advised that while in the Safehouse, The Fusion Management cannot be held responsible for any injuries caused by any of the following:

Normal wear and tear, misuse, accident, lightning, flood, hail storm, tornado, tsunami, volcanic eruption, avalanche, earthquake or tremor, hurricane, solar activity, meteorite strike, nearby supernova and other Acts of God, Hit Girl, neglect, damage from improper or unauthorised use, incorrect line voltage, unauthorised repair, improper installation, typographical errors, broken antennae or marred cabinet, missing or altered serial numbers, electromagnetic radiation from nuclear blasts, microwave ovens or mobile phones, Hit Girl, sonic boom vibrations, ionising radiation, visitor or operator adjustments that are not covered in this list, and incidents owing to an airplane crash, ship sinking or taking on water, motor vehicle crashing, dropping of the item, falling rocks, leaky roof, Hit Girl, broken glass, disk failure, accidental file deletions, mud slides, forest fire, riots or other civil unrest, acts of terrorism or war, whether declared or not, Hit Girl, explosive devices or projectiles (which can include, but may not be limited to, arrows, crossbow bolts, air gun pellets, bullets, shot, cannon balls, BBs, shrapnel, lasers, napalm, torpedoes, ICBMs, or emissions of electromagnetic radiation such as radio waves, microwaves, infra-red radiation, visible light, invisible light, UV, X-rays, Alpha, Beta and Gamma rays, neutrons, neutrinos, positrons, N-rays, knives, stones, bricks, spit-wads, spears, javelins etc.); other restrictions may apply.

...+...

I was annoyed, but I knew that it was only meant in jest – at least I hoped so...

Either way, I changed into my combat suit and drew my weapons from the armoury. My partner for the evening was Shadow. We were both riding our Panigale Superbikes and it was not long before we broke out into the fresh night air and we headed east into Chicago.

I needed some action, something to get my teeth into.

East McFetridge Drive

I had no idea why we were there, only Battle Guy had been following Chicago's newest vigilantes.

As we rode east, we found nothing much to attract our attention or our wrath, which was a little disappointing, to say the least. I knew that Shadow was just as keen for some action as I was. She had not been out much since our return from Europe, so she was eager for anything that they could find. Just as I thought the night might be a bust, we found them.

The two vigilantes were engaged in a fist fight with what looked like some drunks. There were three men and a woman. Everyone appeared decidedly inebriated. On closer inspection, I saw two prone forms on the ground – the two kids were two up and going strong. Neither used their weapons; it was just a good old fist fight. Neither of the two vigilantes appeared to have noticed our arrival, and I had no desire to interrupt their fight nor to show them up. Instead, Shadows and I checked out the two motorcycles parked up a few yards away.

Others *had* noticed our arrival and they looked on in awe as we ignored all the looks and the flashing cameras. I was very impressed with their motorcycles – very cutting edge. Their combat suits matched their machines which seemed to work really well. They were both very well armed as you might expect for a vigilante. We parked our motorcycles beside theirs, dismounted, and then removed our helmets.

While we examined their motorcycles, the entire evening changed.

Hit Girl

"Well, hello, Hit Girl!" Sunset Phoenix offered in way of greeting. "I see you've brought your Shadow."

I considered kicking the fuck out of the pink menace but I had an audience and to attack somebody who – so far – had not shown ill will towards anybody would, I decided, not be too good for my image... Yes, I was concerned about my image, what girl wasn't!

"Hello, Sunny – can we be of assistance?"

"Nah, just distracting you."

I spun around just in time to see a group of men racing towards the young vigilantes whose attention was still very much on the drunks. I turned to yell at Sunset Phoenix, but she was gone.

"Fuck!" I growled.

Shadow

"Goddamn, bitch!" I added as I bolted forwards to intercept the men.

The men were armed with large batons and they looked like they meant business. The bottom half of their faces were covered with masks and they wore black gloves on their hands. Three headed towards the male vigilante known as Apollo and two towards the female vigilante known as Artemis. The remaining three spread out to cover their colleagues.

"Apollo, Artemis – check your six!" I yelled as I closed. My way was blocked by one of the men.

He swung his baton towards me and I dove to avoid the end which on closer inspection was barbed. My bō-staff clashed with the baton as I rose to my feet – the man was strong and his eyes sparkled. He obviously thought that I might be a push over – he was thinking with his balls and not his brain. Not a surprise with most men, even my own.

While I had the attentions of one idiot, Hit Girl was attacking the other two.

Two miles to the east

Jackal

"Jackal, Hal. Hit Girl and Shadow have contact and may require assistance."

"Copy that. I'm on my way to rescue two beautiful ladies."

I caught the laugh as Hal dropped the connection. My girl was in trouble so I accelerated down the street and headed towards the Lake. Plenty of heads turned as I sped past. Despite our seemingly overt activities in the city, we were still a sight that people were surprised to see on the streets. As I approached the scene of the action, I was surprised to see an audience cheering on *Fusion* and the other guys.

Hit Girl was fighting two large men – no surprise. My girl was attacking another man a few yards away from Hit Girl. Five men were attacking the two new vigilantes. They both seemed to be struggling under the onslaught, so I headed in that direction first. I stayed on my Tiger and as I rode past the vigilante called Apollo, I kicked out and sent one of his attackers flying into a street light. The man remained on the ground after he fell.

I parked my motorcycle beside the others and joined the fray.

Shadow

I almost laughed out loud as Jackal dodged the body which I had flung in his vague direction. The unconscious man crumpled to the street.

"Hey! What did I do to deserve that?" he growled.

"Nothing..."

"Bloody women!"

"Be nice, or you'll join him."

"In your dreams, Shadow!"

"When you two have finished your lovers' tiff, could you actually do some work?" Hit Girl grouched as she floored the second of the two men she had been fighting. He joined his colleague on the ground.

"Yes, ma'am, Hit Girl!" Jackal replied sincerely.

I chuckled and ran beside him towards Artemis.

Artemis

Things had got *slightly* out of hand.

The drunks had been easy, but then out of nowhere I had heard our names being yelled and I had turned to see a large group of men heading directly at us both. I also saw Hit Girl and Shadow heading in our direction. When had they arrived? Situational awareness was *not* our forte – we would need to work on that. The two *Fusion* members were blocked by more men.

I braced myself for the onslaught as two men made directly for me – three headed for my cousin. I quickly realised that I was out-matched. Each man had a long baton with what appeared to be a barbed tip. I dodged one, but felt the other strike my butt – it stung. I kicked backwards and sent one man flying but he regained his feet very quickly.

Okay, things had got *wildly* out of hand!

Apollo

We were both in the fight of our lives.

How they hell had we managed to let things go so bad and so sodding quickly. I could tell from my cousin's voice that she was getting stressed and I knew that stress could lead to mistakes. I was not far off, to be honest with myself. The three men that I was fighting were very good. It was time to extricate ourselves and make our escape. I broke out of the fight with a swift kick to one masked opponents face. He yelled out in pain and I bolted for our motorcycles.

I made it and just had time to seize my bow from the motorcycle and nock an arrow as two men ran towards me.

Jackal

Why was everybody throwing bodies in my direction!

The male vigilante had just shot an arrow into one of the black-clad men and the body had narrowly missed me as it had fallen backwards with an arrow embedded firmly in the forehead.

"Nice!" I commented as I flipped a knife into the other cunt's back and he fell inches away from the overwhelmed vigilante.

"Thank you, err, Jackal."

"No problem, Apollo."

I turned and ran after Shadow. She was pursuing another man who had decided it was better to run. Hit Girl was also in pursuit of her own man. Before I could close on Hit Girl, a third man made to intercept me but he seemed to have second thoughts as he got closer and he bolted after his colleagues with me a few feet behind.

Hit Girl

We were headed down past the docks when the men made a sharp left towards the docks.

We chased them down onto the piers. As we ran, I noticed the sign – 'PIER E' – I groaned as we ran past and between the boats moored on either side. I had a feeling that the bastards either had no idea where they were headed, or they had a boat waiting for them. Either way, they were going down.

Numerous boat owners poked their heads out to see what was going on, only to rapidly vanish the moment that they caught sight of little old purple me.

The men skidded to a halt, suddenly aware that they had taken a wrong turn.

There, right ahead of them at the end of the dock lay a large, sixty-five-foot yacht in white and light grey. They turned to find themselves faced with three very angry vigilantes. The vigilantes went at the men.

"What sick person would call a boat, 'Salty Swallow!'" Jackal demanded, his statement dripping sarcasm as he smacked one cunt's head against a convenient cleat.

"I have no idea..." Hit Girl growled back.

She angrily punched out another cunt's lights.

"They gotta be a bit fucked up!" Shadow laughed as she dodged a kick and shoved her man hard against the hull of the yacht.

"Careful, bitch!"

The tone of the growl was ominous. Shadow grimaced and she dragged the man further down the dock before she pounded him into unconsciousness. Hit Girl walked up to Shadow and she stopped with her face just inches away from that of her lieutenant.

"If there is a single goddamn mark on that hull in the morning, you are polishing the whole goddamn boat from stem to stern!"

Shadow grinned.

That night

Glen Oak Drive

"You seemed to be having the time of your life, last Saturday."

"Give it a rest, Morgan," Saoirse replied firmly.

"Ethan seemed *very* hungry – I saw a few marks on your neck and you've been wearing high-necked tops since Sunday morning."

"Ethan's nice... He likes me."

"He sure *liked* squeezing your boobs – but then you seemed to like it too..." Morgan laughed.

"Why are you torturing your poor little sister?"

"Just looking out for my *little* sister."

"Okay," Saoirse admitted reluctantly as her face went very red. "He was rather good with his hands..."

The next evening Friday, June 3rd

Safehouse F

The CPD Lab had got back about the bombings.

It had taken a lot longer than expected due to what they had discovered. The forensic guys had found plenty of explosive residue which was not a surprise. But what was a surprise, was that the explosive residue had been extremely difficult to identify. They had been unable to find the expected chemical marker or taggant. Since 1988, almost all explosives carried a marker to aid in the identification of explosive batches. The lack of a marker had actually aided in the identification of the explosives. The explosive was identified as Semtex, a Czechoslovakian explosive much-favoured in the past by terrorists.

To be honest, Daddy had favoured Semtex and I still did to some extent. It could be used over a better range of temperatures than other plastic explosives and it was also waterproof. There was another problem with the detected explosive – it was old. All plastic explosives and most other explosives had a 'shelf life'. Past a certain duration from date of manufacture the explosive would start to deteriorate. The effects could vary from the explosive becoming unstable and prone to accidental explosion, to not detonating when required.

The forensic guys had identified that the explosion could have been much worse, however, they also hinted at the precision that had gone into the siting of the explosives. No major damage was caused, just plenty of broken windows and shock value from the sound. In my own mind I had come to the conclusion that somebody had been trying to send a signal, a warning.

But warning of what?

The Briefing Room

Megan did not seem overly happy as Saoirse led her into the Briefing Room.

"We'll go easy on you," Stephanie offered.

"No," Megan replied forcefully. "They need to learn."

Saoirse turned to face the three Trainee Operators and she glared at each of them. Lauren looked worried, as did Danny. Anne-Marie seemed uncertain of how to react.

"Okay," Saoirse began. "*Fusion* is a paramilitary organisation – what does that mean?"

The two eight-year-olds and the thirteen-year-old all looked blank.

"Your sodding education is shit!" Saoirse growled. "A paramilitary organisation is an organisation that is organised along the lines of a military force. Can you give me an example of that?"

Lauren brightened her expression as she replied.

"We have rank?"

"Well done, Nightmare!"

Lauren blushed but she smiled hugely as Anne-Marie clapped her on the back.

"Yes, we each wear rank on our uniforms. You three are Trainee Operators, Stephanie is a Junior Operator, while Megan and I are Operators. Those ranks create a structure of who gives orders and who obeys them *without question*. Why do we have a well-defined structure?"

This time Danny spoke up.

"Somebody has to make the decisions, otherwise nothing would get done."

"Very good, Ravage."

"Who is in charge of *Fusion*, right up at the top?"

"Mom!" Anne-Marie exclaimed happily with a smile in my direction. I rolled my eyes and tried to hide my smirk.

"What about Dad?" Saoirse pushed.

"He *always* does what Mom says," Anne-Marie replied.

"Always?"

"Yep."

"Why?"

"I heard him say that he likes Mom to be on top."

My mouth dropped open and I felt really hot all of a sudden. Stephanie groaned and Megan laughed.

"More information than I was looking for, Rogue, but thanks," Saoirse said quickly with a smirk in my direction. "Back to the lesson... Okay. We need a defined-structure to give clear orders. What might happen if somebody disobeyed orders?"

"They might get hurt a bit?" Lauren ventured.

"Exactly. Wildcat, if you please..."

Saoirse stepped back and she allowed Megan to step forwards. Megan was wearing a blue *Fusion* t-shirt and a pair of shorts. She held out her left arm with the inside of her elbow showing. Plainly visible to all was a pale white scar. She showed it to each of the trainees. Then, she proceeded to lift up her t-shirt and she showed them another pale white scar to the left of her belly-button. Finally, she pushed down the left side of her shorts to reveal yet another pale white scar on her left thigh.

"What were those?" Anne-Marie asked. She sounded worried – a sentiment seemingly shared by the other two kids.

"Those scars are the direct result of what happens when somebody disobey orders," Megan said with all seriousness. She then pressed play on a remote control and sounds could be heard from the speakers in the briefing room.

...+...

'She's running!' It was the voice of Hit Girl.

There was a short pause during which some scuffling could be heard.

'Stop!' It was Wildcat.

'Wildcat, no!' Hit Girl again.

Several gunshots were heard, then a short scream – the scream of a young girl. Megan went very pale. Another pause.

'Wildcat is down!'

...+...

"That was almost exactly one year ago," I explained as I stepped forwards. "I held the unconscious Wildcat in the back of Beast as we sped back here. Blood soaked her clothing and she had three knives embedded just where you saw those scars."

"So that was what you meant about waking up in that bed in the Medical Center," Stephanie said quietly.

"Yeah," Megan replied. She had looked pained during the entire playback. She looked ashamed too.

Chloe walked into the briefing room.

"Mindy said Megan's recording would be enough. I disagree, so here's mine."

With that she grabbed the remote from Megan and punched in a number. More sounds played.

...+...

'You!' It was a man's voice.

'Yeah, and you have something of mine, you bastard!' It was Shadow.

'Come and fucking get it!' The man's voice again.

'You D'Amico's are fucking scum and you are the last of that line of evil villainy!' Shadow again.

A short pause with sounds of action.

'Kick-Ass, D'Amico has run back towards the apartment block, with three of his men.' Hit Girl.

Another pause, and then the voice of Hit Girl.

'Shadow, stop!'

'No, I'm gonna get that bastard!' Shadow replied angrily.

'Wait for me. You can't take him alone.'

'Fuck you, Hit Girl! He shot me and almost killed him... I want the bastard!'

'Shadow...'

'Shadow...'

Finally, after a short gap, there was a scream. A girl's scream.

...+...

Lauren and Stephanie had their hands over their mouths in stunned disbelief. Saoirse was wide-eyed and so were the twins. Chloe looked over at me soberly and I smiled back at her. I vividly remembered the events that followed.

"Any questions on obeying orders?" Saoirse enquired of the very sober trainees.

There were none.

The following afternoon
Saturday, June 4th

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

I hated hospitals at the best of times.

I also hated to see kids in hospital. Only this time, it was my team that had put them there. Or more precisely it was the morose teenager walking alongside of me down the long corridor. I knew that my best friend had had no choice at the time but she still hated herself for having had to put the two girls down.

I trained my operators to know the best places to strike on the human body to put an opponent down quickly and permanently. Chloe had used that training to help her avoid anything vital. She had done her very best not to mortally wound them both and thankfully for all concerned, she had succeeded. We paused outside the private room in the east wing and I turned to Chloe.

"Chloe, they have no idea that we were even there. They are both alive and that is all that matters."

"I suppose..."

..._...

I pushed open the door and we both walked into the room. There were two beds evident and they were placed side by side with a two-foot gap in between. In each bed lay a girl – at first glance, it appeared as if the same girl lay in each bed, but I knew better. They were twins.

"Good afternoon, my name is Mindy and this is Chloe. We represent the Central Intelligence Agency," I said as we both offered our CIA credentials.

Yes, Chloe and I were official CIA Contractors as were other members of Fusion. The identity cards had arrived the previous week. In the case of the two girls, it would allow us to talk with them without exposing ourselves as *Fusion*.

"Okay," the girl on the left offered dubiously.

"Sky, isn't it?" I enquired and the girl nodded.

"Which makes you, Christina," I said looking at the other girl.

"I prefer Chrissy, if you don't mind."

"Okay, Chrissy. We are not the part of the CIA who did this to you."

"It was that *Fusion* bitch that did this to us," Chrissy commented savagely. "Not the CIA."

I felt Chloe tense up and I rested a hand on her arm.

"That *Fusion* 'bitch', as you call her, did everything that she could to stop you both without killing you. Would you have preferred to have died?" I demanded.

Sky looked at her sister before she replied.

"No . . . of course not. We just want a chance to get our lives back."

"I know. That is why we are here. You were both with *Urban Predator* for many years. It will be difficult to get used to life in the real world, but that is what we want to help you with. As I understand it, you will both need another couple of weeks in the hospital and then we can move you to somewhere a little more comfortable for the rest of recuperation."

"What will happen to us?" Chrissy asked.

"Once you are both deemed one-hundred percent fit, then whatever you want."

"We can go anywhere?" Sky pushed.

"Within reason. You are both almost sixteen, so you would still need adult supervision. We'll figure something out for that in due course."

"Thank you. We were kinda thinking that we had been abandoned," Sky commented.

"You are not alone. Any problems, you give me a call."

That evening

Safehouse F

"Nightmare, Rogue, Ravage! Front and centre!"

None of the kids had any idea about what was about to happen, so naturally they looked very worried as they approached the notoriously unpredictable Hit Girl. She smiled at them as they stood before her in an attempt to put them at ease. She raised her right hand and fanned out three dark blue access cards. All three kids smiled at the sight of those cards. They were finally getting their much coveted access cards. To that point, none of them had been able to go very far within the Safehouse without escort.

"Let's begin with the most infuriating one of the three," Hit Girl began and Rogue smiled enormously. "Rogue. While you are still very much a Trainee Operator, Foxtail, Psyche, and the Senior Staff have all had a lapse of sanity and they have decided that you deserve your own access card. It won't get you very far, but at least it should stop your persistent nagging."

Rogue grinned and her face went pink with embarrassment as Hit Girl pushed the access card into the young girl's shaking hand and everybody cheered. Once the noise had died down, Hit Girl turned to Ravage.

"Congratulations, Ravage. Despite the antics of your sister, you have excelled in everything that Foxtail and Psyche have thrown at you. You kept a level head in France, despite your having never been in such a situation before. Well done, Ravage."

Another wave of applause accompanied the access card as Ravage beamed his happiness around the room. Then, as silence once again descended on the room, Hit Girl turned her attention to the taller and older Trainee Operator.

"What are we going to do about you, young lady?" Hit Girl mused. "You've accomplished much since you've been with us, Nightmare."

Nightmare seemed very unsure of herself and she looked a little worried as Hit Girl handed her the blue card. Nightmare looked down at the card and then she frowned.

"Is there a problem, Nightmare?" Hit Girl enquired gently.

"Why is my card different?"

"Athena, might you step forward and advise your daughter as to why her card is different."

Athena, otherwise known as Nightmare's mother, stepped forwards with a big grin on her face. She stopped beside Hit Girl and then smirked at her worried daughter.

"You seem to have made waves, Nightmare. You seem to have impressed Foxtail *and* Psyche – no easy feat, I understand. You are being promoted to *Senior* Trainee Operator."

Nightmare looked stunned at the news. Athena proceeded to remove the inverted 'V' insignia from her daughter's collar and she replaced it with a single vertical brass bar which matched that on her access card.

***Chapter 280*: The Silos**

Saturday, June 4th, 2016
That Night

Up until that point in my life, I had never actually laid hands on the body of a naked girl, at least not the more private parts.

Now, I was standing completely naked and facing another equally naked thirteen-year-old. She was about the same height as me, with a similar figure. Neither of us had much to see on our bodies; our breasts were minimal, to say the least, and down below there was only a sparse amount of dark pubic hair.

Sarah seemed very nervous and I assumed I must have looked the same but we both knew that neither of us had any choice in what we were about to do. Tentatively, I reached out and touched her stomach – Sarah almost jumped back but she smiled – her skin was silky smooth and very soft to the touch. Sarah reached out with her own hand and she touched my left nipple – it was *my* turn to jump; nobody had *ever* touched me there.

I heard approving murmurs from the rapt audience to my left.

I allowed the sensations to wash over me and I moved my hand up *her* body to *her* left nipple and I gently caressed the tip with my thumb and forefinger – Sarah groaned and she let out a barely stifled moan.

Glen Oak Drive

I came awake with a start from a decidedly lurid dream.

As I lay there and walked my way through what I could remember of the dream, my hands wandered and I found that my knickers were soaked. I always thought that it was only boys who had wet dreams but there I was: I had had a dream and I was most definitely very wet...

I began to play with myself and I found that I was very aroused, which explained certain things. Then I heard my door open and somebody pad across the carpet – the silhouette was familiar. I yanked my hand out of my knickers and I sat up in the bed.

"SD?"

"Morgan?"

"I heard you scream out and thought that something might be wrong," my big sister explained as she sat on the end of my bed.

"It was a nightmare..."

"Like hell it was!" Morgan retorted. "That was *not* a scared scream – more like an 'I've just had the time of my life' scream."

"Christ!" I growled. "I was dreaming about Sarah and our whatever together..."

"SD..."

"What is it, Morgan?"

"You've been with a boy, yes?"

"Yeah, I'm no virgin."

"What's it like...?"

"Huh – you've never been with a boy?" I asked a bit surprised.

"Well, you know about what happened when I was twelve..."

"Yes, you told me..."

I had never paid much attention to it but it now started to fit in. Morgan never changed in front of anybody and I had never seen her in anything less than fully clothed.

"I want to be able to . . . you know..."

"Lie with a boy and have sex?"

"Yeah..."

Morgan's voice trailed off into an embarrassed silence.

"You want me to help?" I asked.

"I know this is asking a lot but could you help me . . . get used to..."

"You want me to have sex with you?" I asked, slightly incredulous.

"Not exactly; just help me be comfortable with my body...?"

I thought about it and came to a decision.

"Okay – go close the door and you'd better lock it..."

Morgan did so and she walked back over to the bed. I was able to see her by the light of the moon that filtered in through the windows.

"Just stand there and close your eyes..."

Morgan was wearing pyjamas as usual – me, I just wore an overlarge T-shirt and knickers. I sat on the edge of the bed and I gently pulled Morgan towards me – she was so nervous that she was shaking. I gently lifted up her pyjama top and raised it up her body.

"You're gonna have to lift your arms..."

"Sorry..."

I stood to remove the pyjama top and sat back down again. Morgan covered her breasts with her arms. I coughed and she shyly moved her arms back to her sides. Morgan had a pair of nicely formed breasts, probably a B-cup and her nipples were sticking out from the dark areolas that surrounded them.

Next, I pulled down her pyjama pants and let them fall to the floor where Morgan stepped out of them. The only item that remained on her body were her knickers. I gently eased them down and they followed the pyjama pants. I stopped in surprise once her pubic hair was revealed.

"Morgan – do you dye your hair?" I asked as I noticed the blonde pubic hair which was the total opposite to that on her head.

"Err, yeah, I do – I started doing it when I was eleven; I was going through a strange time and after the attack..."

"You'd look better as a blonde you know..."

"You sure?"

Morgan did not sound too convinced.

"What have you got to lose?" I countered reasonably.

..._...

I reached up and with a single finger-tip, I touched her left nipple... She jumped a fucking mile and then she giggled as she quickly regained her composure. I tried not to laugh.

"This is ridiculous – I'm standing here in your bedroom stark naked and..."

"Hold on..."

I quickly pulled my T-shirt over my head and shoved my still damp knickers to the floor. I wrapped my arms around Morgan and I hugged her.

"That better?" I asked tentatively and I felt her warmth engulf me as she noticeably relaxed – slightly.

"Your nipples are poking me..." Morgan commented with another giggle.

Then she shocked me as she kissed me on the lips. In the darkness, I had no need to see that she was blushing; I could feel the heat which emanated from her face as she bit her lip. How far was I going to take this? How far did Morgan *want* to take this? Oh well, she had allowed me to strip her naked; maybe, metaphorically, I was stripping her of her inhibitions too...

I kept my eyes locked on Morgan's and I moved away enough for me to look down at her breasts as her nipples touched my own. We both seemed to shudder together as if an electric charge had just flowed through us. I wondered if she was turned on by what we were doing – instead of asking her, I reached down and placed a finger against her labia and gently pushed through.

Morgan squealed and I felt her thighs instinctively come together but then she relaxed as I moved my finger through the thoroughly damp pubic hair and up to her clit... She jumped again and I heard another squeal. Okay, Morgan was a squealer!

Morgan was obviously getting into the spirit of things as she pushed me backwards and we both landed in a giggling heap on the bed.

Sunday, June 5th

"I've come to a conclusion," Morgan said to her Aunt and Uncle the next morning.

"Oh, yeah," Saoirse added. "That word, come, is very accurate!"

Morgan blushed red and glared at Saoirse who just smirked back at her elder sister. Morgan ignored Saoirse and continued.

"I'm ditching this hair and going back to my natural colour. I also want to change my 'other name'."

"What brought this on?" her Uncle asked.

"Saoirse. She showed me that I needed to leave the past in the past."

"So that was what all the squealing was about," Emily Newton chuckled and both teenagers blushed wildly.

City of Joliet

Thirty miles, south-west of Chicago

Everybody wore a mask.

But it was not a free for all – every masked person wore the same mask and the same body armour. Each man and woman in the space wore a light grey body armour that covered their head and face. Additional panels covered the upper chest, upper arms and back. Similar armour covered the lower arms while lighter armour covered the lower torso, thighs, knees, and the lower legs.

Various pistols were visible on the thighs of each warrior, each of large calibre. Many pouches were mounted for additional magazines. No heavy weapons were present but they all carried at least one knife mounted on a belt or on an ankle.

Before them stood a woman clad in very different armour. She waved one of her minions forwards. It was her way of maintaining her fitness and fighting skills as well as ensuring that her minions were fighting fit themselves. Her minions had learnt long ago that when they were fighting the boss, they had to fight the boss – there was no alternative. FEAR instilled fear within her own warriors and she maintained this by ensuring that she remained in full control of each of them.

They were a mixture of men and women; many of whom ex-military from around the world. There were ex-members of the British Army, US Army, Russian Army amongst many others. The number of warriors currently numbered sixty-five and the number was growing every day as more signed up to the mini-army that FEAR was assembling.

The army had just one, not so simple task: the downfall of *Fusion*.

That night

The night began like any other night, only it would not end as peacefully as many had before it.

It began with a routine call to the CPD. A woman was missing and she had last been seen near the abandoned silos off of I-55. Two CPD units were dispatched and the four officers began to search the darkened site. Unbeknownst to them, they were headed into an ambush. It had all been very carefully planned and executed with precision. Across the city at the very same time, SWAT was careering through north-eastern Chicago towards an armed disturbance pertaining to masked men.

Fusion were out on the streets, just as they were on most nights. Wildcat and Jackal were to the south of Chicago. Psyche and Hawk were out in *Hound*, to the west of the city. Shadow and Foxtail were entertaining the male population of northern Chicago. Hal and Raven were on duty at Safehouse F with Medic while Mist and Petra were in reserve. Hit Girl was at Safehouse K with Nightmare. Kick-Ass was on roving patrol in *Brute* with Splinter and Trojan.

The terrible tikes were with Marcus and Paige for the evening while Marty was with little Matty.

Safehouse K

"Wow!"

"Nice isn't it," Hit Girl replied to her Senior Trainee Operator.

"It looks almost new."

"It is – the fucking CIA blew the place up a few months back."

"Oh."

"Now – it's better than ever! Would you like a tour, Nightmare?"

"Yes, please, Hit Girl!"

Damen Silos

The ambush was sprung on the unsuspecting police officers.

Gunshots began to echo around the abandoned concrete structures as the police officers dove for cover and reported in. None of the officers were targeted directly but their rides were quickly disabled to prevent their escape. It did not take long for the upper echelons of the Chicago Police Department to discover that SWAT was miles away and they were in no position to break away any time soon.

Anyway, the disturbance seemed minor so more officers were sent...

Safehouse F

Hal studied the police radio band which was automatically transcribed on the left side of her screen.

Certain words and phrases were flagged by the computer:

'Officers pinned down'

'SWAT unavailable'

'Additional support sent but pinned down too'

"Fusion, stand to!" Hal ordered over the master voice circuit.

Raven looked over.

"Trouble?"

"Looking like it."

Raven checked the large screen with the map before she continued.

"Send in Jackal and his sidekick. Best notify her purpleness that she might be needed. Put Mist and Petra on standby."

"Good call!" Hal replied as she began to send out orders.

Safehouse K Lower Level

Hit Girl with Nightmare

Nightmare braced up as the radio call came in and she looked over at Hit Girl.

Hit Girl lowered her cup of coffee and pondered the information before she came to a decision.

"Let's go for a ride."

With that, the two vigilantes pulled on their masks and headed up to where Hit Girl's Panigale sat with two helmets on the seat. Nightmare grinned as she grabbed her helmet. Sixty seconds later the Panigale was accelerating up South Iron Street. Their route was displayed on the inside of their visors and the information included speed. Nightmare gripped Hit Girl's waist tighter as they passed sixty-miles-per-hour.

Hit Girl just laughed as she felt the arms tighten around her slim waist and she twisted the throttle open a bit more.

Safehouse F

"Speed freak is out of her cage..."

"She's never obeyed a speed limit in her life; why start now?" Hal chuckled in response before studying the changing symbols on the large map displayed on the screen. "Jackal and Wildcat are two minutes out. Kick-Ass and the boys are sixty seconds behind them heading south."

"We're ready," Mist called from the door with Petra peering over her shoulder.

"We'll let Jackal decide if reinforcements are required."

I-55

I noticed two headlights blazing behind me and then seconds later, two motorcycles roared past.

Jackal and Wildcat!

Something was going down. I floored the accelerator and followed close behind. I also thumbed the steering wheel controls and selected 'Tony's Pizzeria' from the saved contacts.

"Tony's Pizzeria, how may I help you this fine night?"

"Funny!" I growled as I recognised Abby's voice. "What's going down?"

"Firefight at Damon Silos – no idea how big it's gonna get; intel is zero."

"I've just been buzzed by the Kitty and her friend. I'm close behind. I'll find a position for overwatch."

"Copy that, Mathilda."

Damen Silos

Jackal with Wildcat

"Oh, wow!" Wildcat commented as she slithered to a halt a dozen yards or so from the four CPD units that blocked the access road from the overpass on South Damen Avenue. More blue flashing lights could be seen about 350 yards down 29th Street where the CPD had blocked off the street. Additional wrecked units along 29th Street showed what happened to anything which approached the abandoned silos.

"Not good..." Jackal added as he dismounted and pulled out his P90 from the rear of his Tiger 800 XCA. Beside him, Wildcat pulled out a SIG Sauer MPX-K sub-machine gun from the rear of her own Ducati.

They both studied the muzzle flashes which appeared to light up the silos in many places. They took in the six disabled CPD vehicles and the officers desperately trying to not get shot. The officers were responding to the gunfire with pistols and shotguns but they had to be low on ammunition. Both motorcycles were pointed at the action so that Hal could use their high-definition cameras to study the scene.

"We need backup!" Jackal commented as they both headed towards the action.

The officers blocking the road all stood back as the armoured vigilantes strode past.

Damen Silos

Atop the main tower

"Boss – *Fusion* have arrived and are inbound."

"Perfect!" came the reply over the radio.

Overwatch

Leon

The location sucked.

I was atop the display board adjacent to South Damen Avenue. About the only good news was that I was less than four-hundred yards from the battle zone – best description for it! Part of the site was blocked from my vision by the main tower, but I could readily see the trapped officers in my night-vision scope.

Something did not seem right. Nobody was making any attempt to go after the officers. It was like the dozen officers were being herded into position – why?

West Columbia

"Fuck me!"

"Anne-Marie!"

"Sorry, Paige."

"For an eight-year-old girl to come out with that is very bad. *Five* dollars."

"*WHAT!*"

"*Six* dollars for complaining."

"Sis – shut your trap!" Danny advised.

"Good advice!" Marcus chuckled as the young girl stuck her tongue out at her brother who just grinned.

"So, little one, what's got *your* panties in a twist?" Paige inquired.

"They're on the TV."

Marcus took one look at the screen and he dove for his phone. Paige grimaced as she saw her eleven-year-old daughter clad in her combat suit running beside Jackal, a submachine gun in her hands. Marcus was losing his temper on the phone.

"I said let me know about anything important – I think a goddamn firefight is classified as important, don't you?"

Paige pitied the poor individual being chewed out by her husband.

Damen Silos

Hit Girl with Nightmare

I was stunned as I came along 29th Street from the east.

Ahead of us was an array of blue flashing lights and strobes. The brief flashes as bullets erupted from muzzles. The silos were an imposing structure with the main tower which at fifteen stories was quite a size. It was the tallest structure for quite a distance and as I studied it, I got a really bad feeling about the site.

"*Fusion*, Overwatch: take evasive action! Jackal, Wildcat, stay close to cover."

"Hit Girl!" Nightmare almost yelled from behind me. "We have enemy coming from the left."

I looked to my left and I felt myself going cold.

"It's a trap!" I yelled.

South Blue Island Avenue and West 19th Street

It had been a tiring evening and Ambulance 51 was a little over half a mile from Firehouse 51.

"I need a coffee and just a second to rest my aching feet," Paramedic Sylvie Brett announced to her colleague Jimmy Borrelli.

"A coffee would really..."

"Firehouse 51, Ambulance 61. Gun battle underway. Damen and 29th"

"You gotta be kiddin' me!" Sylvie yelled as she hit the lights and siren while Jimmy cranked the large Ford truck around to head back the way they had come.

Overwatch

Leon

It was a worst case scenario.

Nothing could have prepared me for it. It was a classic ambush in every sense. From the ground south of the silos a dozen shapes arose. They must have been covered in heat-deadening blankets as my thermal scope had not seen them hiding. More came from beneath the underpass below South Damen Avenue just as *Hound* passed through the police cordon.

"Hit Girl, a dozen coming from the south. Maybe ten coming from the west."

..._...

The unknown assailants' strategy suddenly changed dramatically.

Gunfire was now raining down on the even dozen CPD officers who were pinned down behind their bullet-riddled patrol vehicles. First one, then another, then another. Three were down and screaming out in agony.

Ambulance 61 which had been waiting patiently at the top of the road now headed in with *Hound* providing escort. '61' skidded to a halt after barely a hundred yards as the front tyres were shredded by bullets fired from a medium-calibre machine gun mounted high up on the silos. The crew bailed out at the urging of Hawk and Psyche. The two paramedics, Sylvie and Jimmy, grabbed what they could of their equipment and they quickly scrambled into the armoured body shell of *Hound*.

Hawk stomped on the gas and *Hound* accelerated backwards away from the carnage.

Safehouse D

A klaxon sounded three times and the coarse sound reverberated around the Safehouse followed by the sound of Hal's voice over a set of speakers.

"All operators! Scramble! Scramble! Scramble!"

***Chapter 281*: Ambush of FEAR**

Sunday, June 5th, 2016

The Edwards Apartment

"Mom! It's Fusion again!"

Emily Edwards rushed through from the kitchen in response to Lizzie's yell. She went very pale as she took in the 'breaking news' announcement on the TV.

She readily recognised her eldest child diving for cover as men seemed to appear out of nowhere and open fire on Hit Girl and Nightmare – it was very clearly an ambush.

"Lizzie – you're going next door to stay with Mrs Taylor. I need to go out."

"Mom?"

"Get your stuff together – move!"

Lizzie was more than a little stunned by her mother's behaviour but she followed instructions and ran upstairs to grab her 'stuff'.

Safehouse D

With the sound of the klaxon and Hal's announcement still echoing around the cavernous subterranean facility, Raven, Petra, Mist, and Medic ran for their transports.

Medic and Petra dived aboard *Titan* while Raven and Mist climbed inside *Iron Hide*. Both armoured vehicles accelerated out of the Safehouse and then headed east. Their occupants were desperate to get on site in time to help their comrades in arms.

Everything had gone to shit so fast.

Damen Silos

Hit Girl and Nightmare

We were in shit – again!

I yelled to Nightmare to dive to her right and I followed. I cringed at the sound of my Panigale crashing to the blacktop but we had more important problems. Bullets flew in our direction and I felt more than one bullet strike my armour. Nightmare screamed out in pain as bullets struck her own armour. It was the first battle for Nightmare and it was *far* too soon for the young vigilante. I pushed her down behind the Panigale and I began to send .40-calibre bullets towards the advancing attackers from the south.

I heard the sharp cracks of a P90 and the duller cracks of a nine-millimetre MPX. Jackal and Wildcat were engaging the attackers coming from the west.

Overwatch ***Leon***

I steadied my rifle and controlled my breathing.

As I squeezed the trigger, a large calibre bullet struck the billboard a few inches to my right. I rolled to my left and scanned the only high point, looking for a sniper – I saw nothing.

"Leon is compromised – they have a counter-sniper!"

It wasn't exactly difficult to find me – I was occupying the only high point, other than the silos for quite a distance. I

was just lucky that their sniper was shit! I quickly packed up my kit and then scrambled down the billboard back to the ground. My SUV was parked a hundred yards away but I was seen almost the instant I hit the ground.

I drew my Beretta and opened fire the moment my prone body hit the ground.

Shadow with Foxtail

We had both been miles away when the call had come in.

Foxtail had been showing some teenage boys her curves – okay, I had allowed them to study mine too. Josh said I was an attention seeker. Maybe he was right about that. Either way, we had both been cheered as we had remounted our machines and headed southwest at speed.

The display in our visors showed *Fusion* converging on a single point in Chicago. We could hear the radio chatter as our friends were engaging some unknown enemy. We were all veterans but I knew that one of our number out that night, was not.

I worried about Nightmare.

Nightmare with Hit Girl

I had never been more frightened.

Not even during the Amber Alert and not even during the rape. Having bullets fly all around me *and hit me* – they were really, really, painful despite the combat suit. Hit Girl was doing her best to defend us both but that was not right. I was a vigilante too.

I pushed myself out from under Hit Girl and I drew my SIG Sauer pistol. Hit Girl moved away from me so we created two targets and we both advanced a few yards apart. I had thought that I was a good shot but my bullets did not seem to be doing anything. Then I realised the problem – they were wearing armour. I adjusted my aim and fired centre mass and kept firing. The man I was targeting went down under the onslaught and I quickly swapped out my magazine.

Hit Girl dropped two more before they got too close and I found myself standing side-by-side with Hit Girl against nine men.

"Remember – keep control of your surroundings. You have the skills you need."

Hit Girl's words were soothing, despite the fact that I was fucking terrified. I prayed that I wouldn't embarrass myself. The first target came at me – faceless behind the armour. I ducked the first punch and then dodged away from the kick which followed. I kicked out and struck the man in the armoured left thigh. He barely felt my strike as he struck me in the left shoulder with his lower arm. I went down but as I went, I grabbed a hold of his armour and took him down with me.

He must have been shocked as he fell. I only had a small window to push my attack which I did.

Leon

Cops on South Damen Avenue were shooting down at the men and I was soon able to scramble back to my SUV under the covering fire.

I had to find a highpoint – a *real* high, highpoint and as I accelerated out, I noticed a flashing red light, many feet in the air about a kilometre or so to the east. I pushed the needle way past eighty as I took turns on two wheels.

I skidded to a halt beside my destination, gathered my equipment and I began to climb.

Foxtail with Shadow

It was a full-scale battle.

The enemy appeared formidable and they were clad in body armour from head to toe. As we came up 29th, I noticed a fight underway to our left. Hit Girl and Nightmare. They were up to their necks in it. I saw Nightmare go down with one of the armour-clad attackers and two others making directly for the thirteen-year-old vigilante. I jumped the curb on my Aprilia Caponord and dived off the machine as it cannoned into the two men. I rolled and came back up instantly, a pistol in each hand. Both cunts were double-tapped to the head and I ran over to Nightmare.

I had to pull the girl off the corpse. She had stabbed the man in the neck beneath his face mask – and she had continued to stab him.

"He's dead, Nightmare – take some of that anger and dish it out on the other cunts," I advised the angry girl. Nightmare nodded and she ran beside me as we made for another pair of cunts.

Shadow joined up with Hit Girl and the pair went hand-to-hand in close quarters combat.

South Damen

As *Iron Hide* pulled up at the CPD roadblock, it was waved through and then met by Kick-Ass who immediately jumped up into the flatbed where he spun up the mini-gun.

Splinter, Trojan, Psyche, and Medic loaded medical supplies into *Titan*. Along with the two paramedics, Hawk drove the armoured truck towards the action with Kick-Ass, on the back of *Iron Hide* providing covering fire with the mini-gun as Mist drove. Raven and Petra provided reconnaissance of the area looking for any more ambushes.

Titan came under fire almost immediately, despite Kick-Ass sending a stream of bullets towards the twinkling muzzle flashes.

Titan

I was silently shitting myself.

We were both wearing body armour provided by the CPD but I was still worried despite our heavily armed escort. At least three members of the escort were kids – that was obvious. I tried to focus on the task ahead. There were wounded officers awaiting our medical help. Having '61' blasted out from under us had been one hell of a shock – even in Chicago. It was not unknown for emergency vehicles to come under fire, but this was just ridiculous!

I screamed as we bounced over something with a bang and more and more bullets struck the side of the monster truck. I looked over at my partner, Jimmy – he looked scared too.

"Twenty seconds!" came a shout from the front.

I closed my eyes and I took a deep breath as we entered the silo site and the gunfire became more intense. I felt a hand on mine and I looked up to see a young girl grinning at me from behind her mask.

"Stick with us – you'll be fine."

I looked to my other side and I saw another kid, this one a boy, with an armoured shield held ready. Jimmy had his own escort and he looked very apprehensive as the truck swung to the left and then lurched to a stop. The rear hatch was opened and the noise and stench of battle entered our armoured citadel.

Wildcat with Jackal

I was scared.

Anybody would be – expect maybe for Hit Girl and Psyche; they just weren't wired right. I was very glad to have Jackal close by. I always felt safe with him close to me. Mind you, with all the bullets flying in every which direction, it was only a matter of time. We had done our best to cover the stranded CPD officers but three were in a bad way and my back was bruised to fuck with crawling to help one of the wounded officers. The bullets had rained down during the few seconds that I had been out in the open.

"*Titan* inbound – thirty seconds..."

You could hear the enormous diesel engine as the truck sped towards us. Then the diesel was drowned out by the chainsaw sound of Kick-Ass' M134 mini-gun on *Iron Hide*. The stream of bullets was aimed upwards at the tops of the silos which was where most the gunmen were located. Naturally, Kick-Ass drew much of the fire which spared *Titan* and its precious cargo.

Titan slithered to a halt in the mud and the rear hatch opened. First out was Psyche and Trojan with a paramedic close behind. They each dived down into cover and made for the nearest wounded officer. Next out were Splinter and Hawk, followed by another paramedic and Medic. Each vigilante had a ballistic shield to provide cover for the paramedics as they worked.

It was not easy for the three medics to work in the appalling conditions but there was no choice. I heard a loud supersonic crack, then another, followed by two bodies which dropped from the top of the silos.

"Overwatch is back in play!"

Overwatch Leon

The climb had been a killer, but there I was, almost three hundred feet in the air.

The tower crane was in the perfect position for me to rain lead down on the bastards. I had to support the medical evacuation of the wounded personnel and then we could get down to what *Fusion* did best.

"Not bad," Medic commented over the comms. "Kind of reminds me of that old song: 'It's Raining Men!'"

The Silos

"You're showing your age, ma'am!" Sylvie laughed as she finished patching up the last officer.

Medic chuckled and advised Hal that they were ready to move. Sylvie and Jimmy each took hold of an injured officer while Hawk grabbed the third. As Sylvie followed last, Medic caught sight of movement and turned to face an armour-clad man. Sylvie froze as the man brought his pistol up and three loud bangs rang out.

..._...

The man fell to the ground as Medic lowered her own pistol.

"Let's move people!"

Once the injured were aboard *Titan* with the paramedics, the other officers were brought in behind the shields and armour of the vigilantes. Unsurprisingly, they were all mightily relieved to be in relative safety. Once the last person was aboard *Titan*, Hawk pulled away.

Splinter, Psyche, Jackal, and Wildcat remained behind ready for the main assault.

Hit Girl with Shadow

The men were almost gone as we put down the last few with coordinated strikes.

As well as fighting our own targets, we had to provide cover for Nightmare – the attack was way beyond anything that she was prepared for. Foxtail was using our attacks to disengage herself and Nightmare but between them they still managed to put down three more men. Next, we had to join up with the rest of the team so that we could form a coordinated attack on the silos.

"CPD is clear!"

I was never so happy to hear those words from Hal. I had heard the roar of *Titan's* engine. It meant that all non-combatants were out of the combat zone and presumably safe.

Nightmare with Foxtail

I had never been so scared, but I had never felt so alive.

Adrenalin coursed through me and I wasted no time thinking about whom I might have killed. My knife dripped blood as I slashed at anything that came within reach. Foxtail had her beautiful butterfly swords out and she used them to devastating effect. Her fighting style was . . . ferocious, I suppose. The men did not seem to stand a chance as she dissected them the moment they came within reach. I felt a yearning to be as good as her – one day.

Those men had wanted to hurt me; they had wanted to kill me. They deserved no quarter and I gave them none.

Hit Girl

With the first attack thwarted, we joined up with Jackal, Wildcat, Psyche, and Splinter.

I was very pleased to see that they were all still alive. Everyone was tired, but they still had plenty of fight left in them. Psyche gave me a very reassuring smile as I studied each one of them for injuries. Just as I hoped that we might just have a simple assault up the silos, Wildcat yelled out a warning. There was a roar of sound as more cunts came out from the base of the silos yelling at the tops of their voices. Another roar and *more* cunts came from the left where a corrugated iron shed had kept them out of sight.

FEAR, it seemed, had more fun laid on for us.

..._...

Kick-Ass was occupied with his monster gun as he kept the heavy weapons sited on the silos off us. Leon was dropping cunts that she could target, but most were now out of her range of vision.

"Wildcat, Psyche, Splinter, Foxtail – standby to advance under covering fire. Shadow, Jackal – provide covering fire. Nightmare, watch our backs."

"Advance!" I yelled out and I surged forwards with the three girls and Splinter. It was chaos as we each used our pistols to drop targets and then attempted to dodge the incoming fire from pistols and submachine guns.

Shadow and Jackal sent controlled bursts from their P90s into the maelstrom of cunts to our left and ahead.

Foxtail with Wildcat, Psyche, and Splinter

I smiled as I caught sight of the red and blue Psyche as she dodged bullets and ran headlong towards the enemy.

The girl was totally fearless. Despite having had very different training, Wildcat appeared just as fearless. I knew that once we closed the range she would relish drawing blood with her claws. Splinter was something different. He had been trained in a similar manner to us *Predators*. However, from what I had heard – we had had it easy! His ordeal had been horrible. But he had skills; he could shoot the dick off a gnat at twenty yards. Within *Fusion*, he was one of the few that I was not able to easily beat on a regular basis during sparring.

It did not take us long to empty our pistols, dropping several of the enemy. We holstered our pistols and drew our melee weapons. Claws, Sai, Ninja-To, and Butterfly Swords. Hit Girl was over to our left, covering us from the flanking manoeuvre. She waded in with her twin Wakizashi Swords.

Foxtail had come home. Home was fighting. Home was blood. Home was death.

Overwatch Leon

I kept up fire on those who occupied the tower at the top of the silos.

I would also keep watch on the lower zone to see if I could take out a target or two. On my regular cycle, I was stunned as Kick-Ass was struck by several large calibre rounds and he was knocked off the back of *Iron Hide*. I saw him land in the mud beside the truck and roll into cover. With relief, *Titan* roared back into the fight. Hawk stomped on the brakes and the eight-tonne truck slithered to a halt in the mud field a short distance behind *Iron Hide*. Petra dived out of the right-hand rear door, a tube on her shoulder and a control unit in her hands. Raven provided covering fire with her H&K G46C assault rifle from the main roof hatch as her colleague dived for cover behind *Iron Hide*.

Petra took a moment to aim her control unit upwards towards the top of the silos. She fixed the sights onto the machinegun nest at the southern portion of the tower. Seconds later, she yelled out a warning.

"Fire in the hole!" I heard over the comms.

Raven ducked as Petra squeezed the firing trigger and the FGM-148 Javelin missile exited its launch tube and powered upwards towards the top of the tower. It struck barely a second later. The warhead exploded and sections of reinforced concrete came crashing down, along with three men and a tripod-mounted machine gun.

Kick-Ass picked himself up and he climbed back aboard *Iron Hide*. His stance showed his anger as he opened fire again.

Hit Girl

Things weren't exactly going bad, but they weren't exactly going good either – however, that was when we shined.

The current cunts were of a higher calibre than those which we had fought earlier in the evening. FEAR was toying with us and that worried me. Had I misjudged her? What freakish activities might she have planned for my team? I absentmindedly slashed a cunt across the waist and then quickly jumped to my right to avoid the rushing flood of steaming bloody entrails and bodily fluids. I was jerked back to the moment as I heard a scream over to my left.

I turned to see Wildcat being attacked by upwards of five cunts. Two of them had hold of the eleven-years-old vigilante's right arm to prevent that set of lethal claws from catching any of them. Two more, women by the looks of things, were punching her and narrowly avoiding her other set of claws with which she was lashing out at anything close by.

"Let me the fuck go, you bastards . . . I'll fucking cut you to pieces and feed you to your cock-sucking, ass-stabbing pussy friends... I'll ram my claws up your dripping cunts, you fucking lesbian whore bitches!"

I had to give points to Wildcat for creative insults! Mere feet away, Psyche was battling to free her aunt. While Wildcat and Psyche were strong, agile, and highly skilled, they both had an Achilles heel – their size. Psyche was especially vulnerable as she weighed next to nothing and the cunts had obviously figured that out. Psyche had been lifted off the ground and then bodily thrown through the air – but not before she had stabbed out and left a Sai embedded in the side of some unfortunate cunt's head.

I ran towards Psyche – I wanted to help them both but I had to choose. I knew that Wildcat would understand.

Splinter

I had heard some laughter as I had advanced on the enemy – it had been directed at me.

That laughter soon vanished when I separated some legs. I ignored the bullets that struck my armour and pushed on. My limited stature assisted me in stabbing upwards, beneath their armour. Evisceration was the name of the game as I dumped dozens of feet of intestines onto the ground. A sharp stab into the armpit had proved successful too.

I heard a scream and I looked up to see Wildcat being singled out. Then Psyche was actually *thrown* by a pair of cunts. I had no idea where she had landed, but I ran after her. En route, I saw the familiar hilt of a Sai embedded in the head of a fallen corpse. With some doing, I yanked it out and stuck it into my utility belt. I caught up with Hit Girl who was going after Psyche.

"Go for Wildcat; I'll get Psyche!" I yelled out and Hit Girl nodded as she dived into the maelstrom.

Shadow with Jackal and Nightmare

It was getting more and more difficult to fire on the pervading army in case we hit our own people.

All we could do was take out what we could and watch for anybody making for our own side. Nightmare suddenly yelled out and she pointed into the melee. I saw Wildcat surrounded by hoards of the enemy. I smirked as I heard her epithets which she spat out to all who were listening.

"Bloody hell!" Jackal breathed as we both saw Psyche physically thrown quite a few feet before the girl crashed down

into the advancing cunts.

"Oh, God!" Nightmare exclaimed in horror.

Splinter

I was determined to get to my friend.

She was one of the very few people who could understand what I had gone through. There were a couple of years between us, but I could relate to Stephanie and she to me, or so it seemed. I slashed my way through the armoured men and women until I saw some red and blue down low.

I found Psyche on the ground; two guys were kicking her – at least until I chopped their backbones in two just above the tailbone. Both men fell and I dropped to the ground beside my friend. I quickly ran my hands over her combat suit, checking for injuries.

"Hey! Hands off the merchandise – you're getting a bit personal there, boy; those parts are private for a reason!"

I laughed as Psyche sat up and got to her feet. I handed her the Sai from my belt.

"Here. Next time, try not to lose it."

"Thanks, pal... Get down!"

Psyche drew a pistol and she double-tapped the man who had tried to come up behind me. I rolled to my right and sent a throwing knife at the next target. The blade entered at the base of the man's jaw and severed his carotid artery. He sank to the ground as blood spattered all around him.

"Nice!" Psyche growled as she ran back into the action.

Wildcat

I could not believe what was happening to me.

The bastards held one arm and some bitches were kicking and punching the fuck out of me. One of them had a foot on my other arm. I struggled and swore at the bastards – but to no avail. As the punches rained down, I began to feel the faint tinges of fear but I pushed them down deep. I was Wildcat; I did not feel fear. I had never felt so helpless, not even when I had been taken with Joshua.

"*Fusion*, Wildcat – I need some help here!"

"Hey, little kitty – I'll be with you in a few cunts time."

I laughed at Hit Girl's comment.

"You fuckers are so gonna get it!" I growled.

"Oh, yeah? You're just a fucked up psychotic wretch," one of the women growled back.

"She's not the psychotic one – that would be me."

I tilted my head around and grinned as I saw the vigilante that matched the voice. The woman never had a chance to react as the sharp tip of a Wakizashi appeared out of her throat. Her colleague turned but another, identical blade hacked her down.

"You want to fuck with my team?" Hit Girl growled at the three men who had literally dropped me to the ground. "You fuck with me."

I stood up and rammed my right fist in the stomach of the man to my left. My claws plunged through his armour and as I pulled my claws out, he fell to his knees before he collapsed to the ground. A head rolled onto the ground beside the man. I was so incensed by my treatment that I grabbed hold of the head by the helmet and smashed it into the face of another cunt. If he was surprised at being attacked by the severed head of his colleague, he did not show it.

The head proved to be an excellent weapon, if a heavy weapon – I'd never realised a head weighed so much!

Hit Girl

Wildcat was safe and so was Psyche.

The teamwork was like second nature to all. As I rejoined the action alongside my sister, we were joined by Psyche and Splinter who seemed to be marking Psyche and protecting her back. The boy was very protective of my daughter; not that I was complaining. It was hard work but the cunts were losing cohesion and despite command and control from the silos, their attack was coming apart.

Had they stayed together, we might have struggled, but now they were breaking into smaller groups they were easy prey for Jackal and Shadow with their P90s and it seemed, Nightmare, who had acquired a P90 herself and she was taking pot-shots as she guarded the two senior operators. A little further over, Foxtail was in her own world. From what I could see, the cunts were giving her and her swords and wide birth so she had to chase after them.

..._...

I looked upwards, towards the top of the silos. There she was. Her black and red armour was visible against the grey background. It was a fleeting glance as something exploded but at least I was certain that she was there.

It was time to move the fight to *her* doorstep.

I broke off from the action and I made my way towards the base of the main silos and the tower.

"Can I come?"

It was Nightmare. After a moment's thought, I nodded.

"In *Iron Hide*, mounted behind the passenger seat, you will find a black and purple backpack with a harness; bring it."

Nightmare ran off, jumping over dead and wounded as she went. Petra came up to me with Nightmare close behind.

"We're ready," Petra announced.

"Let's go, girls!"

..._...

The route to the roof of the silos was not an easy one and it involved going via the basement – no idea why! Hal was guiding us while Battle Guy provided support for the rest. Almost every step was an effort as we made our way down stone staircases and onto steel walkways. It was dark and we relied on our NVGs to assist us in identifying our targets.

I went first with Nightmare behind while Petra took up the rear. We each had pistols out and raised, searching for targets. The left sector was for me, the right for Petra while Nightmare had the centre. I was impressed when then younger girl never hesitated when a target came into her sector. I figured that it was only the adrenalin and focus that was keeping the girl going.

After dropping several cunts, we reached the main stairway to the tower roof. It was a steel staircase and we would be easy targets as we made our way up almost ten stories – yes ten, the rest of the way would be up an external steel staircase!

..._...

"Pop smoke! Pop Strobes!"

Petra and Nightmare pulled the pins on two smoke grenades. Purple smoke gushed out to fill the staircase. Both girls then threw two spherical objects which landed on the next landing. Both devices began to emit ultra-bright strobing effects. Combined with the smoke, it would be impossible for anybody above to see where we were as we advanced.

"Shields!"

We each pulled a shield off our backs and held it above us as we prepared ourselves to run the gauntlet.

***Chapter 282*: Atop The Silos**

Sunday, June 5th, 2016

The Damen Silos

Nightmare with Hit Girl and Petra

We began our dash to the top of the silos.

Bullets pinged off our shields as we climbed the steel stairs. I had thought I was quite fit – at least after the times I had spent running around the goddamn Safehouse. Now, I was tiring and holding a heavy shield above my head while climbing stairs at the rush was no easy task.

"You can do it."

"Keep it going."

"Just think you're on a leisurely workout."

Petra's comments were a big help and they kept me focused on the task at hand: climbing the stairs and ignoring the bullets pelting down on us.

..._...

We reached the tenth floor and excited onto a broad gallery which stretched over the silos. Before emerging from the smoke, we had each rolled a pair of grenades ahead of us. After the six crumps, we followed, spitting death from our pistols as we went. The screams of dying men and women soon faded as the smoke began to dissipate. I glanced out of an unglazed window and was stunned by the view and the sight of the fighting beneath us.

"Time to go up, Nightmare," Hit Girl chuckled. "You okay?"

"Scared shitless, but yeah – let's finish this."

"Kick-Ass! You ready?" Hit Girl called.

"Yes, my queen – I'm always ready; you tell me when you want me to let rip."

I saw the smirk on Hit Girl's face and I felt myself blushing at the innuendo. I knew from the plan that Kick-Ass and *Iron Hide* had relocated to cover our ascent up the western face of the tower. We headed out onto a very rickety set of steel steps. I had never suffered from vertigo, but right at that moment, I felt twinges of fear as I looked out and down.

"Kick-Ass! Let rip!" Hit Girl ordered.

Hit Girl

The mini-gun let rip and we began our climb.

We had four sets of steps to climb and then eight feet of vertical ladder. It did not help that there were missing steps and a two hundred foot drop to instant death awaiting us if we slipped. Several bullets screamed past us as we climbed. Two cunts came down the steps towards us. I punched the first between the legs and threw him off the tower. The next cunt kicked out, missed my head, overbalanced and then quickly joined his pal below.

"Fucking doofus!" Nightmare yelled after the second cunt as he fell past.

I laughed as we continued to the final staging point at the top of the final flight of steel steps. I stopped just below the top and then lobbed a pair of grenades into the space at the top of the tower.

"Fire in the hole!" I yelled.

As the grenades exploded, I bolted for the vertical steel ladder to take me the final eight feet onto the roof of the

tower.

..._...

The top of the tower was about 1,700 square feet and very exposed. There was a breeze blowing which just added to the danger. Nobody had bothered with a safety rail around the rooftop which I thought would make things fun. I lobbed a pair of grenades and awaited the double crump as both exploded.

I heard screaming and poked my head over the rooftop again. I could see nobody moving and no sign of FEAR as I climbed onto the roof and was soon flanked by Nightmare and Petra. Then I saw movement, at the far end of the rooftop behind the remains of a ventilator. Three shapes arose and we each brought our SIG SAUER MPX-K submachine guns around.

The centre shape was FEAR and she had an armoured henchman to either side.

..._...

"Well, hello," FEAR called out.

"This is the end for you," I yelled back.

"I don't think so, Hit Girl."

With that comment, FEAR ran at me. I ran forwards firing off a magazine of nine-millimetre rounds. FEAR battered them away and ignored the sting of each bullet. I should have carried something bigger! I saw the two henchmen go down under a hail of bullets from Nightmare and Petra.

Obviously, FEAR spent less on *their* body armour.

Nightmare

I was stunned that Hit Girl was going to fight it out in a space that was only slightly larger than the sparring mat at Safehouse F.

If Hit Girl misjudged, she would go down – and I meant *down*! They collided and both fell down onto the loose gravelly surface of the roof. Hit Girl kicked FEAR away and she received a return punch into her left thigh which obviously stung but did not incapacitate her in any way. I wondered if I should help Hit Girl but I felt the reassuring hand of Petra on my arm and I just watched.

"Overwatch does *not* have a shot. Repeat: Overwatch does *not* have a shot!"

It was up to Hit Girl to end it, one way or another. The fight was rapid as both armoured individuals span, kicked, and punched each other. It was fairly obvious that both were evenly matched but while I could care less about FEAR diving over the edge, I prayed that Hit Girl would not take any of her notoriously dangerous risks.

That was when FEAR must have decided to bug out as she dived for the far end of the roof, seized a rope, attached it to a carabiner on her belt and then dived off the end of the tower.

"Fuck!" I yelled.

"The bitch is coming down, fast!" Hit Girl called out over the comms. "Hit Girl is airborne!"

"What the hell?" I yelled out as Hit Girl sprinted for the far end of the roof, clipped a rope onto the same mounting as FEAR and then . . . *HOLY FUCK!*

The mad bitch *dived* off the fucking end of the tower!

Kick-Ass

From the back of *Iron Hide*, I saw my partner; the most important thing in my life, dive off the top of the two-hundred-foot plus tower.

My heart almost stopped for a moment as she plummeted towards the ground until the large purple ram-air parachute billowed out above her. Seconds later, she touched down softly and dumped her parachute. Foxtail and Psyche were there to back her up as she landed and they gunned down several cunts who were protecting their leader as she completed her fast-rope down the side of the main tower.

I was very relieved that she had survived the jump – fucking crazy purple bitch!

Psyche with Foxtail

I was stunned – she would get a piece of my mind later for doing something so blatantly dangerous and so *bloody* stupid!

Nonetheless, I protected her as she landed and dumped her parachute. I liked the colour choice; not really a surprise to be honest! Foxtail was there to back me up and I knew that I could rely on her one hundred percent. We had FEAR on the run and we were going to get her and end her, one way or another.

Hit Girl glanced down at me and nodded before she bolted after FEAR with myself and Foxtail in pursuit.

Hit Girl

FEAR ran northeast between the two silos with six of her men.

Beyond the silos was a grassy area and the three of us pursued FEAR and her men. Psyche went down on one knee and levelled her MPX-K and dropped two of FEAR's men. As Psyche ran forwards, Foxtail repeated her friend's feat and dropped two more with her own MPX-K. The odds were now even and, I believed, very much in our favour.

"FEAR is mine. Nobody touches her. Understood?"

"Understood, Hit Girl!" both girls responded as they split up and they each headed for one of FEAR's underlings.

..._...

FEAR stopped and she turned to face me.

"I bet you *hate* having a rival..."

"Hit Girl *has* no rival. I am the Queen Vigilante and I am the Protector of this city. You are nothing but an insignificant piece of shit on the heel of my boot. I destroyed your army tonight; I am now going to destroy *you*."

"Wishful thinking, Hit Girl. I am going to be around for a lot longer than you want. I can drag this out for months, or even years. By the time I'm finished, you will be *begging* me to help you die."

"Kill her!" Psyche growled.

"Do I need to teach *you* a lesson too, young one?" FEAR chuckled.

"Fuck you!" Psyche responded.

"What she said," I added.

..._...

During the verbal sparring, Foxtail and Psyche had closed on FEAR's men. Foxtail struck first, attacking her man and the fighting began. FEAR did not seem to care that she was on the verge of defeat. Her morale appeared high and her skills were just as good as they ever were. The War Sword was out and I attacked with my Katanas.

Cold steel clanged on cold steel.

Safehouse F

The fight was on the big screen.

A news crew had been able to get themselves close and into a good enough position to catch the fight on film. The fight was being broadcast live on most news channels as well as being beamed across the world.

Paige, Marcus, Marty, and Abby looked on stunned at the fast-moving action.

Central Chicago

Seventeen-year-old Kelly Wright looked up from her homework to see a 'breaking news' banner appear on the TV and then some amazing footage.

At the bottom of the screen was the usual scrolling text: '*... Hit Girl is currently engaged in a sword fight with FEAR, the latest super-criminal to make Chicago their home. The fight began...*' which continued on with the story of the night's action.

Kelly scowled at the images. While she was no stranger to violence, she abhorred the sort which FEAR seemed to enjoy inflicting on innocent people.

"Kill the bitch, Hit Girl!" she growled at the screen as she saw Hit Girl strike FEAR with her swords.

Wayne Manor Gotham

"Bruce!"

"What?" Bruce demanded as he ran into the kitchen.

"Chicago," Selina said as she pointed to the TV. "Go, Mindy!"

Hit Girl had just backflipped away from FEAR who was advancing on her. FEAR closed but Hit Girl kicked out and FEAR doubled over for a moment before she struck Hit Girl hard with the hilt of her enormous sword.

"Crap!" Bruce growled, incensed by FEAR's attack.

"Too bloody right, Master Bruce!" Alfred Pennyworth added.

Stirling United Kingdom

It was very late, actually early morning, but I had been unable to sleep.

I was on my way downstairs when I felt a hand on my arm.

"Quick!" my brother ordered as he dragged me towards his bedroom.

"Cam!"

"Look!" my brother persisted as he pointed at his widescreen TV.

"Holy shit!" I breathed.

I saw Psyche viciously beating the living daylights out of some man who wore body armour – not that the armour was helping him much. I grinned at the sight of Foxtail as she did the same to another unfortunate individual. You messed with Foxtail and Psyche; you would be very lucky to survive!

"Go Fusion!" Cameron yelled.

The Damen Silos

Psyche with Foxtail

Hit Girl was all business.

It was not often that I got to see a professional fight another professional. After having eviscerated my cunt – *you fucking know 'which' cunt I mean* – I found myself studying the movements of both Hit Girl *and* FEAR. Both were experts and I could learn much from watching them both.

"I wish we had popcorn," Foxtail commented as she came up beside me.

"Time and a place, Foxy!"

As I watched, FEAR backed away from Hit Girl, but she misjudged where she was going in the darkness and she fell off the remains of a wall. The drop was about eight to ten feet but FEAR was back on her feet in a few seconds. Hit Girl easily jumped down and she made for the hapless FEAR where they both went back to exchanging blows. I had a distinct feeling that the end was nigh for FEAR.

..._...

The show went on as Hit Girl dosed out her special and unique kind of punishment as only she could. I was proud to be a part of what Hit Girl represented.

Hit Girl span around, her left leg horizontal to the ground. She caught FEAR around the head and the woman fell backwards but she was able to keep her feet but only so that Hit Girl could kick her hard in the upper chest. FEAR staggered backwards and she teetered on the edge of the dock for just a moment before Hit Girl gave another swift and potent kick. The armour-clad anti-vigilante flew backwards into the darkness and there was a massive splash. Hit Girl ran forwards and shone her flashlight over the disturbed water.

There was no sign of FEAR.

An hour later

Safehouse F

Marcus, Paige, and Emily, along with the twins, were there to assist the exhausted and battle weary vigilantes into the Safehouse.

Almost to a vigilante, they struggled to remove their heavy armour and weaponry. Emily, in her role as *Fusion* armourer, retrieved utility belts, melee weapons, and firearms. She paused at her daughter and took in the blood-stained body armour and the bloody knife. Saoirse nodded grimly at Emily's unspoken question – yes, her daughter had killed. Marcus and Paige assisted with the removal of armour and boots while Cathy went from person to person checking for injuries.

As far as the kids were concerned, each was helped out of all their equipment and they were then guided towards a suitable spot in the briefing room where they were each provided with a pillow and a blanket by one of the twins. Each youngster was asleep within seconds of their heads hitting the pillows. The teenagers and adults drifted to the bunks once the kids were asleep.

Mindy was the very last to head for bed, but only when she was happy that each and every member of her team had been taken care of.

"At least nobody was hurt," Cathy mused.

Marcus took a moment to look around at the sleeping kids in the Briefing Room. There was his step-daughter, Megan. She was fast asleep and she looked just like any other eleven-year-old girl might when asleep. There was his granddaughter, Stephanie. She was angelic when asleep too. On the floor beside her were his other grandchildren, Danny and Anne-Marie. The twins had worked tirelessly to help the returning vigilantes and Marcus was as proud of them as he was of every one of his children and grandchildren.

"No and I am very thankful for that."

"A lot of bruises and their muscles will hurt like hell come the morning, but they are all used to that."

"They were all amazing. The CPD are extremely thankful for *Fusion's* help. I have a feeling that Hit Girl's speeding will be ignored for a few months!"

Cathy chuckled. She took a moment to look over at Curtis, fast asleep a few feet away from Megan. She was so proud of her nephew and her daughter.

The following morning
Monday, 6th June

Safehouse F

It was the smell of fresh coffee and cooking bacon that did it.

Slowly and in dribs and drabs, the tired vigilantes made their way towards the Galley. The first through the door were Stephanie and Megan. Both girls wore nothing more than the underwear in which they had slept. Both headed for a table and plonked themselves down in two adjacent chairs. Both girls then fell against each other on the table and went back to sleep.

"If I had not known what those two had been doing, last night, I'd have said they both looked cute," Paige commented.

"I know what you mean," Cathy replied with a chuckle.

Both women then laughed as one of the elder vigilantes appeared. Chloe grimaced as she entered the galley and sat down heavily next to Megan.

"You look rough!" Marcus chuckled as he placed two mugs of coffee and a mug of tea down before the three girls.

"Tea, thanks, Marcus," Stephanie muttered as she took a sip.

..._...

Mindy and Dave were next. Mindy was clad in just a sport's bra and knickers, as were Chloe and Megan. Dave wore joggers and a t-shirt. He gratefully received two mugs of steaming coffee and guided Mindy over to a seat at an empty table. He pushed aside the long blonde hair that covered her face and handed her a mug of coffee.

"You know, there's gotta be a joke here," Joshua commented as he saw all the half-naked females in the galley. "Got no energy for a joke though... Need some of that bacon!"

..._...

Within another ten minutes, all had appeared in various stages of undress and had sat down to breakfast. Most sported vicious bruises on their bodies but all were happy. After finishing her mug of coffee and taking more than a few bites out of her plate of bacon, Mindy stood up before everybody.

"Sorry about the lack of clothing but I could not be fucked to put anything else on!" Mindy began to general laughter.

"*I'm* not complaining," Dave quipped as Mindy blushed pink and laughter rang out in the galley.

"Well done!" Mindy continued. "You all fought better than anybody could have hoped. You all fought as a team and there was not a single fuck up. All of you went way beyond your normal comfort zones. I want to single out Nightmare, for extra praise. Last night went way beyond anything that I wanted you to experience at this point in your training, but you performed just as well as, if not better than, the more experienced vigilantes of *Fusion*. I know that you are going to have questions . . . certain feelings, after last night. We are all here for you."

Lauren blushed red and sank low in her seat as everybody clapped and cheered the thirteen-year-old. Emily smiled broadly as she looked with immense pride at her eldest daughter.

"It's time to take some time off, people. We all need to recover from our bruises and strained muscles. Enjoy a well-earned break and a peaceful holiday. Thank you, all of you. That's it – I need to pee!"

With that, Mindy vanished out of the door to more laughter from those in the galley.

Later that morning

"Fucking hell, Megan!"

"Huh?"

"Your back . . . it's black and blue."

"Is it *that* bad?"

"Yes, it is," Stephanie commented as she studied her aunt's back.

Megan was in the shower while Stephanie was brushing her teeth. Stephanie just wore her knickers, having already taken her shower just before Megan.

"You spoken with Lauren, yet?" Megan asked as she stepped out of the shower.

"No – been looking to pick the right moment," Stephanie replied as she pulled on a *Fusion* t-shirt and shorts.

"Well," Megan went on. "I think we should go look for her."

Once Megan had pulled on a sports bra and shorts, she and Stephanie headed out towards the galley. They found Tommy first.

"You seen Lauren?" Stephanie asked with a slight blush.

"I think I saw her heading down to Zero," he replied with a grin.

"Thanks," Megan replied with a smirk in Stephanie's direction.

..._...

Both girls headed down the steps and then down again to Level Zero. The lights were off in the Exercise Room which was strange – they were usually on dim when nobody was in there – somebody had turned them off. Megan placed her hand on the reader and the door released.

"Hey, Steph. Why does Santa Claus have such a big sack?"

"I don't know."

"He only comes once a year!"

Stephanie laughed out loud.

"Why does Dr Pepper come in a bottle?" Stephanie asked.

"No idea, Steph."

"Because his wife died!"

Megan laughed. There was also a giggle from somewhere in the darkness.

"Got another one," Stephanie said quickly. "What do you call the useless piece of skin on a dick?"

Megan groaned before she replied. "The man!"

"Okay, guys!" Lauren called out from the darkness and Megan hit the lights.

"You liked that?" Megan asked.

"Yes, thanks," Lauren replied with a grin, her cheeks colouring up.

..._...

"Your first battle, eh?" Stephanie said as she correctly understood the underlying anxiety in Lauren.

"Yeah..."

"You killed," Stephanie went on as she read Lauren's eyes.

"I did – but they deserved it. I tried to keep count... I'm scared of what I've done."

With that, Lauren began to cry – her eyes were red showing that it was not the first time. Megan and Stephanie sat down either side of the girl and held her while she cried. After a few minutes, Lauren had calmed down enough for Stephanie to talk to her.

"We've both been there, Lauren. Me, when I was eight, and Megan when she was ten. Mindy was right, it was way too early for you to be out there – but you did very well; you surprised the fuck out of me."

"Thanks," Lauren replied with the beginnings of a smile. "That's high praise from a *Predator*."

Stephanie grinned as Saoirse entered the Exercise Room.

"Hi. I was concerned about Lauren and I came to talk . . . I see it's already happened," she commented as she sat down on the floor in front of Lauren. "I'm sorry you had to go through last night. You did really well, though – only it was way too early for you, but you earned your stripes girl and that's a *Predator* talking."

"We are all here for you, Lauren," Megan reassured the elder girl.

A good shower had made me feel a lot better.

As I set foot out of my bedroom and made my way towards the galley, I heard a none too pleasant tone of voice call me.

"I want a word with you!"

I turned to see a very pissed off looking Stephanie advancing on me.

"Hi, Steph."

"Since when did Hit Girl take on bloody base jumping?"

Stephanie was furious and she pushed me into the bathroom before she locked the door behind her.

"I always wanted to do it."

"Of all the idiotic things that I have seen in my short life, that took the fucking biscuit! You could have died or been badly injured. I'm on my second mother, right now – I don't want to move onto a third, thank you very much! Nobody had the faintest fucking idea that you were going to do that. Did Dave know? You almost gave Lauren and Hailee a goddamn heart attack!"

"Dave knew. I've had a chute stowed in each vehicle 'just in case' and, well, it came in handy. I'm not apologising Stephanie. I am Hit Girl, whether you like it or not."

"I'll take that as an apology and I accept it. Please don't do anything like that again . . . I don't want to lose you, Mum."

***The following evening
Tuesday, June 7th***

Glenview

"Steph, what are you doing?"

"I'm answering an email."

"You're sitting there, naked!"

"I was on my way to the shower when my laptop pinged. It's an email from Cassie. I think they might be coming over very soon. Anyway – I've got a towel here."

"Still weird," Anne-Marie commented dryly. "Those bruises look horrible, Steph. I wish I could have been there with

you."

Stephanie scowled.

"The silos were bad, Rogue. I'm glad you weren't there – you are *not* ready for any of that shit. To be honest, I don't think I was either."

"Stephanie, you remember what happened the last time you talked like a sap?"

"Punch me and I punch back," Stephanie grinned.

"I thought that I'd left all this madness back in Gotham. Now Chicago is tearing itself apart."

"I find it hard to take, when people run in circles it's a very, very, mad world."

"Sounds like a line from a song."

"It is – we'll make it better, Anne-Marie."

***Chapter 283*: At Rest**

Three days later
Friday, June 10th, 2016

The kids came out of school on the dot.

Could not think *why* they were so excited!

"You guys ready?"

"Yeah!" Megan declared happily.

"We going aboard that boat with the dirty name, now?" Anne-Marie asked.

"Yep," I replied happily.

Half an hour later

Burnham Harbor

"Can't you change the name; it's disgusting now I know what it means."

"It's bad luck to change the name of a boat," I explained to Anne-Marie. "Anyway, we have two other boats with us this time."

"What are they called?" Stephanie inquired. "USS Dripping Fanny and USS Cum Stain?"

Joshua laughed raucously. "Good one, Steph!" he said approvingly.

"No," I growled with a very unamused tone. "When I called the yacht, *Salty Swallow*, the youngest person aboard was the foul-mouthed Megan Wilson."

"You called!" Megan announced from a few yards down the dock.

"Am I going to survive this trip?" Anne-Marie demanded.

"Of course, why?"

"Well . . . on the first boat trip, I was seasick. The second, I was kidnapped. On the third boat trip, we were struck by missiles and almost blown up and sunk. Do ya see a pattern building here?"

I grinned.

"You were rescued the second time and you survived the other trips, too. Hey, you're with me!"

"Yeah..." Anne-Marie mused as she headed up the gangway. "I'm so dead."

It took a while for everything to be stowed correctly and for most to change out of their school uniforms into something a little more comfortable.

"What are you looking for?"

I had just spent several minutes watching Anne-Marie and Danny as they had searched every square inch of the main deck.

"Hidden weapons, missiles, explosives – that kind of thing," the not so innocent young-girl replied nonchalantly as if searching a boat for hidden weapons, missiles, and explosives was a perfectly normal occurrence.

"You'll *never* find them!"

"Is that a challenge?" the young girl asked with a broad grin.

"Just don't blow us all up if you *do* find anything."

"Can't promise that..."

I laughed as she vanished below followed by her brother; it was all one big adventure to those two. Our crew consisted of eight: myself, Dave, Danny, Anne-Marie, Josh, Chloe, Stephanie, and Lauren. We were going to have *the* most amazing time together. During the last cruise, we had headed up the west coast of Lake Michigan so this time, we were going up the east side of the lake.

Our first port of call would be Michigan City, a gentle thirty-two nautical-mile cruise to the southeast.

17:00

It was a totally awesome feeling as I pressed the starter buttons and the twin diesel engines thundered to life.

The view from the flying bridge of the *Salty Swallow* was just perfect as Dave and Joshua released the lines and we got underway on thrusters. Two slips away, another yacht was casting off her moorings. I pressed the button for the horn and sent a blast out across the marina. A hand was raised from the retracted roof of the Sea Ray 470 Sundancer with the pure white hull and dark blue horizontal stripe. The *Sea Hunter* was Marcus' wedding present and he had been itching to get out in her. With him, for the cruise were Paige, little Damon, Vicky, and Hailee. They all needed family vacations as did everybody.

In the next slip, was the other yacht of our little squadron. The *Hurricane* belonged to the Bennett family. She was another Sea Ray product, a 510 Fly. Her crew was made up of Ryan, Cathy, Curtis, Megan, Saoirse, and Morgan. I had a feeling that Ryan and Curtis were going to be a little outnumbered!

I sincerely hoped that Megan was not going to embarrass herself too badly but then, it was Megan.

Salty Swallow

Position: 41.85° N 87.6063° W

Course: 101°, Speed: 12 knots

As we headed east into the lake, the four girls aboard *Salty Swallow* stretched out on the sun pads.

In the bow was Chloe in her dark blue, two-piece bikini that covered . . . well – not very much, really. Not that Joshua seemed to mind what was being revealed for him as he sat on the bow seat with a large glass of ice-cold Coke. His eyes roamed almost constantly across his girlfriend's perfectly toned physique while she lay on her back and enjoyed the warm sun as it blazed down upon her. Chloe's breasts may not have been all that big but as far as Joshua was concerned, he was perfectly satisfied by the mounds on his partner's chest.

On the sun pad, immediately forward of the control station where I sat, the other three girls were laid out. A few feet in front of me was Lauren. She wore a very pink bikini and she sat drinking iced-tea through a straw from a large glass. It was her first time out on a boat and she was thoroughly enjoying herself. Across to starboard, on the other side of the sun pad, Anne-Marie and Stephanie lay in the sun. Both wore one-piece costumes – Stephanie's was a dark green and her sister's costume was a very appealing purple.

I, myself, wore a purple bikini with dark blue shorts. Dave and Danny wore yellow swim-shorts as they sat aft on the sundeck playing cards at the table and drinking Coke. Anne-Marie sat gazing over the bow and lapping up the sights and the sun while her elder sister lay on her back and dozed in the sun. Anne-Marie looked a little strange as she still wore the cast on her left forearm, it only having been a little over a week since her injury.

..._...

Thirty yards to starboard, *Hurricane* cruised on a parallel course.

On her bow sun pad lay a very scantily clad Saoirse and slightly more covered up, Morgan. Both girls lay on their fronts to allow their backs to tan evenly. Up on the sundeck, Ryan was at the wheel while a bikini-top-and-shorts-clad Cathy lounged on the adjacent seat to port. Curtis and Megan were down below in the cockpit at the stern of the yacht. Curtis wore a pair of grey swim shorts while Megan wore a very revealing and very daring green bikini that her

mother did *not* approve of but since Paige was on another boat, Megan had chanced it.

Despite Megan only being within a few of months of turning twelve, her body was very much that of a developing young woman with feminine curves appearing in all the right places and she often attracted the glances of much older boys.

Thirty yards to port on an identical course was *Sea Hunter*.

Sea Hunter

"There's not enough material in that damn bikini to make a headband!" Paige growled to her friend.

"She's growing up, Paige, and she has a boyfriend to impress," Vicky challenged."

"It's taking me a little time to get used to her body changing so fast. Not all that long ago she was my little girl – now she's turning into a young woman with all the fixtures and fittings."

"Curtis sure likes the 'fixtures and fittings'!" Hailee laughed, much to Paige and her mother's displeasure.

"At that age, you did not even have any boobs, and if a boy so much as *looked* in your direction, you'd blush bright red and run away," Vicky countered with a nasty grin.

"That's low..." Hailee growled back.

Paige and Vicky were reclining on the bow sun pads in two-piece bikinis while Hailee, in a one-piece swimsuit, leaned against the port rail. Little Damon was nestled between the two adults. Marcus was at the helm and he was having the time of his life as the forty-seven-foot yacht cut through the waves like Hit Girl cut through ninjas.

Salty Swallow

To allow secure communications between each vessel, an encrypted communications channel was available via specially fitted equipment.

It was over this equipment that the day's fun began.

"Is it just me," the radio at the sundeck control station squawked, *"or is Stephanie's chest not as flat as it used to be?"*

I laughed and looked over to starboard. I could make out somebody with a large pair of binoculars pointed in our direction. Stephanie propped herself up on her elbows and she glared back at the other boat. She also turned a little bit pink as she turned onto her front and ignored the jibe from Curtis.

"Nice butt, too!" Curtis added and Stephanie screamed her humiliation and displeasure into the sun pad.

There was laughter from everybody in earshot of the radio much to the ten-year-old girl's chagrin. The radio came to life again.

"On pain of death, I have been directed to say that Megan has a much nicer butt . . . She also has much nicer tits and she yelps when you touch..."

The radio was cut off mid-sentence. However, the outraged exclamations from the eleven-year-old girl on the other boat could be easily heard across the open water between the two vessels. Next on the radio, came the voice of that eleven-year-old's mother.

"I have no idea who that girl is but suffice to say, she's a brazen hussy!"

Megan's yelling at Curtis stopped abruptly as she came onto the radio.

"Brazen and proud of it, Mom!"

'Finally – peace and quiet!' Stephanie thought as she shoved her shorts and knickers to the floor then sat down and began to pee her life away.

Stephanie growled to herself as somebody knocked on the door.

"Occupied!" Stephanie yelled.

The knocking continued. Stephanie grimaced.

"Anne-Marie, fuck off!"

The knocking stopped and there was a short pause.

"How'd you know it was me?"

"Who the fuck else would follow me to the damn toilet and annoy the fuck out of me?"

"Good reasoning."

"Can I wee in peace, now?"

"Nah – it's my job."

"Job?" Stephanie queried.

"My *job* is to annoy the hell outta my big sister."

"Can't you take a day off?"

"Nah – 24-7."

Stephanie closed her eyes for a moment to compose herself.

"There are days when becoming a big sister to you seems like a very bad idea..."

"Nah – you love me to bits."

"Anne-Marie – please go away."

"Okay..."

"Thank you."

"Don't forget to wipe!" The eight-year-old yelled as she ran giggling up the gangway to the main salon. The resultant torrent of verbal abuse from the toilet was audible to those two decks above.

..._...

"Where is she?" Stephanie demanded as she stormed up onto the sun deck.

Danny smirked.

"She's on the port sun pad," he whispered conspiratorially.

Stephanie grabbed a large glass from the small kitchen and she quickly filled it with chilled water from the fridge. Mindy chuckled as her eldest daughter tip-toed past her. Mindy could see a massive flaw in Stephanie's plan but once a bitch, always a bitch so Mindy kept quiet.

Stephanie launched the ice-cold contents of the glass over the port sun pad and there was a very loud piercing scream.

..._...

A very, very annoyed Lauren jumped up from the sun pad and the teenager glared at the very guilty younger girl who held a large and very empty glass in her right hand.

"Oh, shit!" Stephanie began. "I'm so sorry, Lauren." The angry ten-year-old turned towards the sound of snickering that came from the starboard sun pad and then to her younger brother. "You... Don't tell me – 'it's your job!'"

Danny nodded with an outrageous grin on his face. Stephanie looked over at Mindy for some help.

"Leave me out of it," the veteran vigilante muttered.

"Mum – wouldn't you find things so much easier with only one child in the house? Those two are dead meat once I think up some creative way to kill them." Stephanie turned back to Lauren. "I am really so very sorry, Lauren."

"Don't be, Steph. I'm a big girl; I can handle it," Lauren laughed but then she turned serious as she glared towards the twins who now stood by the gangway which led below. "However, should you need any help disposing of the bodies, you just let me know."

The twins fled as fast as their legs would take them.

Position: 41.7348° N 86.9247° W

Michigan City

We arrived off Michigan City at just before eight that evening.

Forty minutes later, we were tied up in the Outer Basin. *Salty Swallow* was at the tip of a pier while the other two yachts were moored just across the pier from us. Everybody gathered aboard *Salty Swallow* for dinner. It was a beautiful evening, so the bow sunshade was rigged while Paige, Cathy, and Lauren looked after the cooking.

Dinner was an awesome array of steaks, burgers, sausages, corn on the cob, and salad. With twenty people, things were crowded aboard so we each grabbed a plate, loaded it up, and went to find somewhere to sit. I found myself on the bow, under the sunshade. I was the first there, so took the starboard seat facing forwards. It was a lovely view over the harbour. I was soon joined by Chloe, Saoirse, Morgan, and Hailee.

..._...

"Your hair looks really good, Morgan," I commented.

The sixteen-year-old no longer had her usual black hair. She had removed the dye and had allowed her hair to go back to its natural blonde state.

"Thank you," the blushing Morgan responded.

"I think you look much better," Megan suggested as she came down to join us.

"I feel better, to be honest."

"You a natural blonde?" Megan enquired.

"Yes, she is," Saoirse commented with a smirk and Morgan blushed.

I quickly steered the conversation away to protect Morgan's modesty.

"You seem to be handling things well, Lauren."

"I am. This is fabulous, Mindy. You have all been so kind to me, despite what I have been through."

"All of us have had bad things happen in our lives, even the dirty Kitty at the end there, and it helps bond us all together."

Megan stopped dead in the act of licking mayonnaise off the end of her sausage and she smirked wickedly before she seductively pushed the sausage into her mouth. Lauren began to giggle uncontrollably, closely followed by Chloe and Saoirse.

"She's very multitalented, isn't she?" Morgan commented which then had me laughing.

Meanwhile...

Anne-Marie was working her way through her corn on the cob like an old typewriter and she was making quite a mess

thanks to the copious amounts of butter that she had spread on the cob.

"She's like a machine," Danny commented in disgust as he swallowed a chunk of steak and then selected another suitable chunk for his fork.

"She's a growing girl," Stephanie commented. "She's got to be able to feed that massive gob of hers so she can talk shit."

"That's one," Dave chuckled.

"We're on holiday," Stephanie growled. "Can't the goddamn jar take one too?"

"That's two," Marcus muttered as Stephanie scowled and went back to her sausages.

"This is just perfect, eh, Ryan?" Dave commented as he heard the girls giggling and laughing on the bow and he looked up at the stars.

"Sure beats the last cruise!" I laughed.

"That still freaks me out," Stephanie commented between mouthfuls as Paige breast-fed little Damon.

"It's a perfectly natural thing to do," Cathy commented. "Chloe and Curtis were both breastfed."

"Just what I needed to hear!" Curtis complained.

"I have to agree with you there, pal," Joshua grimaced.

"So, you've never sucked on a nipple, then?" Ryan asked innocently and Joshua went very red.

"I never said that..."

"Chloe complained of very sore nipples at her last medical," Cathy commented and Anne-Marie almost choked on her corn as everybody roared with laughter.

"I get carried away..." Joshua tried.

"I have to admit that I do, too," Ryan conceded as he smirked at his pink-cheeked wife.

"This conversation is getting very creepy," Curtis growled.

"Megan said that you're a tit man," Joshua teased.

Curtis went red and took another bite of his steak.

"Can we *please* change the topic of conversation," Stephanie begged.

"Mindy gets sore nipples, too," Dave added which had Marcus almost choking on his own steak.

"You are all disgusting fuckers!" Stephanie growled as she grabbed her plate and glass of coke before she headed below followed by floods of laughter.

..._...

"Hi, Steph!"

"Hi, Mum."

"Problem?"

"Those disgusting fuckers keep talking about tits... Ewww, Megan, you are just as disgusting. You're supposed to eat the damn sausage *not* play with it!"

"Oh, Stephanie, stop being so . . . British!" Chloe laughed.

"Just because I have good manners and you Yanks – well you have no idea of the definition of the word 'manners'!"

Stephanie growled good-naturedly.

"Well, young lady," Chloe drawled in an appalling attempt at a British accent. "Us Yanks may be uncouth and ill-mannered, but at least we know how to have fun!"

"One is still able to have fun, *without* resorting to vulgar conversation and inappropriate behaviour," Stephanie retorted with a raised eyebrow.

Megan burst out laughing at Stephanie's deadpan expression.

"I have to agree with the Brit," Chloe acknowledged. "I have only ever seen Stephanie flustered, just the once and she had a damn good excuse for being flustered."

"I remember," Mindy commented with a nod. "The Willis Tower."

"What happened there?" Lauren asked.

"I'd like to hear about that, too," Saoirse added and there was a nod from Morgan."

"I'd rather not go into it – but Mindy could tell you."

"It was Psyche's first night out..."

"Mindy was like a damn mother hen!" Megan interrupted with a laugh.

"I was concerned for the girl is all," Mindy groused before she continued relating the events of that Sunday night before the previous Christmas. "By ten-thirty that night, Psyche was dangling over ninety stories above the city of Chicago. The night had gone well and I had witnessed Psyche in action for the first time – she was good, if a bit cold."

"I had gone after our target, Anthony Genovese," Stephanie interjected. "I ran after him, onto the roof of the 90th floor. He kicked me away from him and I stumbled over some rails. I plunged over the side of the tower. I screamed in terror."

Stephanie looked very uncomfortable as Mindy continued."

"I saw what was about to happen and I dived after Psyche. I was able to grab hold of her utility belt and I was lucky that Shadow grabbed my legs, or we might both have perished on the sidewalk ninety stories below. Kick-Ass supervised an operation to rescue us both with ropes. Stephanie was very shocked by her near miss. It was the first time that I really felt for the girl and I made the decision to keep her with me."

"Do you regret that decision?" Chloe asked.

"Every fucking minute!" Mindy laughed as Stephanie scowled.

***Chapter 284*: Drugs**

*The following morning
Saturday, June 11, 2016*

*Position: 41.96° N 86.7941° W
Course: 025°, Speed: 10 knots*

Hurricane

"Do *you* think I should get one?" Morgan mused.

"What?" Saoirse replied.

"A tattoo, like your fox."

"It's painful," Saoirse warned her big sister.

"If you can take it, then so can I."

"What'll your Aunt say?"

"I'm old enough to make my own decisions about my own body. I need a change. The old Morgan Hella went with the black hair. I want to reinvent myself – I've begun that; only I want more."

"Fair enough – but I am *not* going behind your Aunt's back."

Sea Hunter

The morning was hot, just like the previous one.

The past year and a half had been a learning experience – to put it mildly! We had gone from having lost almost everything to cruising around Lake Michigan on a luxury yacht. I had been introduced to a fabulous young woman who was instrumental in giving myself and my daughter a new start in life. Months later, I had discovered that Mindy Macready was not your average young woman. I discovered that my boss was in fact, the notorious vigilante known as Hit Girl.

My daughter had taken to Mindy in no time and she could care less about her hero being a murderous vigilante. Megan worshipped the very ground that Hit Girl walked upon. Hit Girl was invincible as far as Megan was concerned. Somehow, the bullet wounds that Mindy had received never seemed to count! Our entry into the world of the Chicago Vigilante had been amazing and we had met some really wonderful people.

On the negative side, my daughter was involved with a boy – at ten-years-old! My daughter had also been wounded, more than once, so the boy issue was relatively minor in comparison. On the positive side, I had found a husband. Marcus Williams was a ruggedly handsome man who carried handcuffs and a pistol for his day job. The handcuffs also came in handy for the nighttime shift... *That* thought brought me back to Megan and that boy.

I had nothing against Curtis – he was a well-behaved and well-mannered child. I had no problem with him spending time with my daughter – they had hit it off right from the get go. Ever since their trip to Gotham, they had become closer and by closer, I meant that the boy had both seen my daughter naked *and* he had explored my daughter's naked body. Just as she had his, I believed.

So, what did I think about having my boss as my step-daughter? No problem, Mindy was a fabulous young woman and I loved her as a daughter. I was often concerned about what my two daughters got up to at night but I knew that I could trust Mindy – although trusting Megan was a stretch. She had always been a headstrong girl and always a struggle to control once she got some idea in her head. Somehow, Megan had gone from being a normal, but fiery, little girl to a nearly twelve-year-old vigilante that adult hardened criminals would run from for fear of being impaled on her super-sharp claws.

Megan loved to be Wildcat just as Mindy loved to be Hit Girl. Marcus and I had spoken at length about our wayward daughters. We both supported them one-hundred percent and I knew that Marcus loved Mindy more than anything

else on the planet and I was happy with that. Marcus also loved Megan too. Now, I had another child – he was called Damon and he was a handful! Megan could kill a man with about as much compunction as any other person might swat a fly. But, you ask her to change a diaper and she runs a mile!

Mindy was not a lot better and it didn't help that Marcus would remind his eldest daughter that he had changed *her* diapers, some years before. As I lay on the foredeck of our yacht, my young son snoozing beneath a sunshade, I was the happiest woman on the planet. Apparently, so was my daughter! Megan was prancing about in a bikini so small that she might as well have been naked – not that Curtis was complaining.

Not one bit.

It hurt, seeing my daughter as she lay in the sun.

Her body still showed the signs of her beating. She still awoke at night, screaming. Hailee was now a very different eighteen-year-old girl to that which had left for Europe a few short weeks previously. I only knew a little of what had happened to her in France. Mindy had given me an idea of what they had seen on discovering my daughter. She had been hanging by her wrists . . . naked. She had been beaten, she had been tortured, she had been electrocuted.

I had seen the resultant cuts and bruises on her return to Chicago. At first, I had been horrified; every inch of her previously perfect body had been targeted and abused. As far as I knew, my daughter had not been raped. Hailee insisted that she was still a virgin – I doubted that (as far as France was concerned, at least), but I let it lie – at least for the moment.

I knew that Hailee was seeing another boy – some kid at the university. Hailee refused to say much and she avoided the subject as much as possible. As far as safe sex was concerned, I had always ensured that condoms were available and with the help of Cathy, I had given her the options for other forms of contraception.

Hailee was a very strong-willed young woman and I had always known that her life as a vigilante would be dangerous but alone, she could have been killed. At least she had friends and a team to rely on which I hoped would keep her alive for many decades to come. There were times that I felt our mother-daughter relationship to be strained but I knew that Hailee loved me as much as I loved her.

"Mom!"

"Yes, sweetie."

"I know what's going through your mind," Hailee said pointedly. "I'm okay – I am not facing this alone, and neither are you."

"Come on, Vicky," Marcus ordered. "The young lady is right – neither of you are alone."

I smiled and conceded defeat – it was a holiday after all!

Early afternoon

***Position: 42.1234° N 86.5003° W
Three miles off Benton Harbor***

For lunch, the three yachts were rafted together with *Salty Swallow* in the centre and *Hurricane* to starboard. While everybody dug into sandwiches and iced drinks, the conversation got very salty indeed!

"Nothing embarrasses or shocks me anymore," Chloe commented to Hailee as both munched their sandwiches.

Joshua grinned impishly, from a few yards away.

"Hey, Chloe!" he called.

"Yeah?"

"Fancy a fuck?"

Chloe's eyes almost popped out onto the deck and her face went pink and then moved steadily towards red before

stopping at a pinky-red tinge. Everybody laughed at Chloe's discomfort.

"Would love one of those blow-jobs like the one last night," Josh called over and Chloe's mouth dropped open. "Not now, Chloe – later on!"

Chloe's mouth clamped tight shut.

"She must get that from you, dear," Ryan muttered to Cathy who almost choked on her iced tea as her face went crimson.

"That shut Chloe's big mouth!" Megan laughed not realising the trap she had set for herself.

"Megan?"

"Huh?" Megan replied as she turned to Curtis.

"You fancy a finger tonight?"

"Shit!" Megan growled in embarrassment.

"No, not there – a finger between those lips of yours," Curtis called back and the laughter increased while Megan fanned her very warm face.

"You wild kitty, you!" Paige laughed as her daughter wished for the deck to open up and swallow her.

"They're being disgusting again," Anne-Marie commented.

"Yeah – too salty for my ears, too," Stephanie growled as she glared at the older kids.

"I love it!" Danny grinned.

As I watched and listened to the crude banter, I realised how lucky I was to have found myself in such good company.

Maybe being kidnapped and held in a basement with the other kids was fate bringing Lauren Edwards into contact with *Fusion*. Maybe I had been destined to get caught taking photos – not that I would have ever hoped to be raped. I owed *Fusion* for my life on more than one occasion. Yes, they were coarse. Yes, they were extreme in the way they protected Chicago. Yes, they were killers. But then so was I.

I had embraced the life and I had killed without conscious thought. I never realised it, that night at the silos, but I just followed my training and I survived the night without injury – a few bruises, but that was part of the game. Only it was not a game, or was it? Was there anything wrong with seeing the killing as a game?

Everybody else seemed to enjoy what they did and they relished killing. I knew that Stephanie and Mindy were different to the others, Saoirse too, but Megan was ruthless when she was Wildcat and operated without quarter. Now I had tasted life as Nightmare, I wanted more, much more. I never wanted it to end. I wanted to learn everything that I could so that I could emulate Shadow.

Or ultimately, Hit Girl.

Just about everybody was in the water, swimming.

The 'adults' were relaxing in the Main Salon with a cool drink in the blissfully cool air-conditioning while the 'kids' splashed around in the equally cool water near to the rafted yachts.

"I think they have all matured a lot in the past few months and they carry themselves with an air of well-earned dignity," Ryan commented to mutual agreement.

"Chloe has grown up a lot. She keeps herself out of trouble and away from behaviour beneath her age and status," Paige added.

Just then, there was some loud giggling and the doors flew open at the after end of the Main Salon and two girls ran into the space. They rapidly skidded to a halt with a joint, "Eeep!" as they saw the assembled adults. Both girls were

already pink in the face but they both went very red and then they ran the length of the Main Salon to the gangway which led below deck.

"I withdraw my recent statement," Ryan grinned.

"Me too," Paige added with a laugh.

"Don't know about you three, but I had no idea who those two naked girls were – I feel very sorry for their parents, though!" Cathy chuckled.

"Fucking, fucked up, super hero club!" Marcus growled good-naturedly.

"Well, that was fucked up!" Megan grinned as she slammed the cabin door.

"That really got the blood flowing!" Chloe giggled as she lay on her bed.

"Just because we're both naked, Chloe, does not mean that I want to . . . you know . . ."

Megan lapsed into silence and Chloe laughed. Megan felt a little uncomfortable as Chloe sat up without making any effort to cover herself.

"I love you, Megan, but not like that and you are way too young!" Chloe commented with a grin.

Megan looked very relieved.

"You have a wonderful body, Megan, and one which I would have killed for at your age; I bet Curtis loves *that* playground!"

Megan blushed at the compliment and was about to reply when there was a knocking from the overhead skylight. Curtis and Danny were grinning down at the two girls.

"You two gonna make out, or what?" Curtis demanded.

..._...

Megan would never know what possessed her to do it, but she jumped forwards and landed on top of Chloe before giving her a kiss on the lips. The shocked fifteen-year-old was too stunned to resist and she just lay there as Megan kissed her.

"What the fuck was that?" Chloe demanded as Megan pulled her lips away.

"Dunno – thought I'd tease the boys," Megan responded with a worried expression.

"Spur of the moment – those lips were good; Curtis is very lucky."

Megan grinned as she grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her body. Chloe did the same and reached up to close the blind over the skylight.

"That was so *hot!*" Curtis yelled.

"Chloe, Megan – that was awesome!" Curtis blurted out as he and Joshua entered the Main Salon.

Both girls were clad in towels as they both returned to the open space and both were distinctly embarrassed by their impromptu naked dash and 'romp'. The girls ignored their parents' presence and instead, they enjoyed Curtis' compliments on their actions. Curtis handed Megan her bikini and smiled hugely.

"Did you enjoy that, Curtis?" Megan asked coyly.

"Hell, yeah!"

"Did you get a hard-on?"

"Oh, yeah!"

Megan stepped forwards and without a thought to the audience, she plunged her right hand inside Curtis' shorts.

"He's hard," Megan confirmed with a smirk. "Very hard!"

"And I thought Chloe was the dirty one!" Joshua commented.

"Chloe, may we?" Megan asked with a nod at the gangway below.

"Of course, our stateroom is all yours," Chloe replied with a grin.

"Come, Curtis – time to come . . ." Megan announced as she dropped the towel and the bikini to the deck and dragged Curtis below.

"What was that you called your daughter, the other day, Paige?" Chloe enquired. "A brazen hussy?"

"Clearly, it was a major understatement," Paige commented dryly as the four adults laughed.

"Give me that!" Chloe growled as she seized her own bikini from Joshua's hand.

That evening

Position: 43.0542° N 86.2998° W

At anchor, two nautical miles due west of Grand Haven

Salty Swallow

"Mindy?"

"What's up, Lauren?"

"There's something out there."

Mindy scooped up a night-scope and peered in the direction of the thirteen-year-old's pointing finger. There was a boat, a few miles distant. It showed on the radar, as a medium sized vessel. What was odd about it was the lack of lighting and no navigation lights. Mindy grinned.

"Fancy a nighttime reconnaissance?"

Lauren's face lit up.

..._...

"Seriously!"

Dave's reaction was not exactly unexpected. Mindy simply gave her husband a kiss and ignored Lauren's grimaces.

"It's just reconnaissance, Dave."

Dave was not convinced but he knew that there was no point pushing the fact so he nodded reluctantly.

"You keep an open channel, understand me?"

"Yes, hunky husband!"

"I feel ill!" Lauren groaned as she headed aft from the control station.

Always Wet

Lauren was *not* amused by the name!

"Stupid question, but are you both armed?" Dave asked.

Mindy pressed a hidden release and a cover popped off beside the helm of the rigid inflatable boat. Four MPX-K

submachine gun butts were visible along with six Glock pistol butts. Mindy closed the cover. Lauren pulled up her top to reveal the butt of a small SIG Sauer P320 Compact pistol in the waistband of her shorts.

"Atta girl!" Mindy laughed.

"Lauren, you are really, really, starting to worry me!" Dave complained half-heartedly.

"I had a brilliant role-model," the thirteen-year-old commented with a glance at Mindy.

"There are times when Mindy is *not* the correct role-model," Dave commented.

"Humph!" Mindy growled.

"Get going, you pirates!" Dave chuckled. Inside he was very worried but there was not a great deal that he could do about it.

"This is not going to end well," Joshua commented as he joined Dave at the rail.

"I have faith in Mindy," Chloe added as she followed the receding RIB through a night scope.

Something was *not* right about the boat that was hove to, about seven nautical miles north-north-west of Grand Haven.

The boat was large, but mainly unlit. The navigation lights were not visible, although there was illumination around the aft of the boat and where there appeared to be activity of some kind. Now, I thought, what sort of people preferred to operate at night and keep to the shadows? The easy answer: Me! Well, other than me, it would be criminals.

As we approached within a mile of the craft, I cut the engine which allowed us to drift in silently towards the vessel.

"Mindy? I have a bad feeling about this."

"You might just be right, Lauren."

"You love this, don't you?"

"Going into the unknown?" Mindy replied. "Yes, I do."

"I like it too."

"Let's see what we can find out without being seen."

..._...

At a closer range, the vessel appeared to be a tug with a towering mast on top of which was a small structure – presumably a raised bridge. She was not a new vessel, not by any means but she had a very business-like appearance. Size wise, she was twice the length of the *Salty Swallow* and of maybe 300 tonnes displacement. The name was not visible on the vessel's stern – it appeared to be covered over which was yet another sign of nefarious activity.

On the open afterdeck, there was a lot of activity and as the RIB drifted closer, Mindy and Lauren were able to make out another, smaller, craft beyond the tug. It appeared to be a low profile workboat and cargo was being moved from the rear deck of the tug to the workboat's after deck. The packages were large and cuboid in shape. The contents of the packages were definitely not dense as a single man was able to handle each package with apparent ease.

"Drugs!" Lauren breathed before Mindy could say it.

"Oh, yeah!" Mindy replied.

"You going to go after them?"

"Maybe."

"How about we notify the authorities?"

"Where's the fun in that?" came Mindy's indignant reply.

"No wonder Dave's going grey!" Lauren laughed.

The Tug

Aboard the tug, four members of the eight-person crew were busy unloading the illegal cargo. Of the rest, one, a woman, was on the bridge on watch, a man was on the raised bridge, forty-five feet in the air, and two men were down in the engine room.

The Captain strode backwards and forwards on her bridge, eager to get underway and back to legal endeavours. Though being boarded by law enforcement was a rare occurrence, it was a constant threat. Apprehension by the Coasties with a large quantity of illegal marijuana aboard would spell the end to both her career and that of her crew.

"Captain! I have something – port quarter!"

The terse report over the intercom from the raised bridge was very unwelcome. The Captain swept up a set of binoculars and she ran out onto the port bridge wing where she aimed them towards the stern and over to port. There was definitely, something in the water – but what? The Captain's eyes went wide as she identified it as a RIB. Was it the US Coastguard or the DEA? She leant over the stern rail of the bridge wing.

"Let's get a goddamn move on!" she yelled.

"Last few, Captain!" came the response from the stern deck.

Forty-two minutes later

Salty Swallow

Dave's head snapped around as the single gunshot carried over the still waters of Lake Michigan.

He grabbed up the secure radio, but before he could press the 'transmit' key, he heard Mindy's voice through the speaker.

"Calm down, Dave – they missed!"

..._...

Four minutes later, *Always Wet* pulled up to the stern platform and Lauren threw over the painter.

"Find anything?" Dave inquired as Lauren stepped aboard.

Lauren grinned and the young girl looked over towards Mindy who was expressionless.

"Pretty boring, really," Lauren replied.

"I'll bet!" Dave growled as he scrutinised his wife's expression.

The following morning

Salty Swallow

Marcus was not a happy man when he came aboard for breakfast. Ryan looked grim, also. Both men walked up to Mindy and looked down at her.

"What did you do?" Marcus asked and Mindy scowled.

"Why is it that when something goes to shit, everybody thinks that I've got something to do with it?" Mindy demanded.

"Well, if it wasn't you, then it must have been Lauren," Chloe said casually; a twinkle in her eye.

Lauren raised her hands defensively.

"I'm only partially responsible – maybe five . . . ten percent . . ."

Mindy growled.

"Twenty-five?"

Mindy cleared her throat in an exaggerated fashion.

"Fifty-fifty?"

"I'll go along with that," Mindy conceded.

"The Coastguard found a boat, drifting, not a mile from us, early this morning," Ryan commented. "Eight people were aboard – three were dead; two shot and one, err, mutilated."

"They needed a little persuasion to spill their guts," Mindy replied and Lauren nodded.

"That last guy sure spilled his guts!" Marcus growled. "Did we mention the hundreds of thousands of dollars of Marijuana?"

"Is that what it was?" Mindy replied with an attempt at innocence.

"Innocence is *not* your strong suit, Mindy!"

"Okay!" Mindy growled. "We caught them shipping drugs – we boarded and questioned them. No harm, no foul."

"Mindy, honey – your idea of 'no harm, no foul' differs greatly from that of every other human being on the planet," Marcus said slowly.

Mindy just shrugged and Lauren smiled sweetly.

"It was a dark and not so stormy night," Mindy began.

"I saw something strange out on the water, so Mindy and I went to investigate," Lauren put in.

"Piracy?" Marcus inquired.

"Not exactly," Mindy replied tartly.

...+...

The tug had departed, heading in a north-westerly direction at six knots leaving the smaller vessel to search for the intruding RIB and its occupants.

"There it is – a few dozen yards off to starboard!" the Mate yelled to the Captain.

"Stop engines," the Captain ordered his helmsman.

The *Lakes Lynes* lost way quickly once the propeller was stopped and the sixty-five-foot vessel drifted to a halt. A couple of yards away, the RIB rocked in the larger vessel's bow wave. The Captain looked down into the RIB and he saw two shapes lying on the bottom boards of the RIB as it was swept past and then grappled by two men near to the stern.

"Get aboard and see who they are – see if they are alive. If they are – ensure that they are not!"

...-...

Two men jumped down into the 4.3-metre Avon Seasport Jet 430. The RIB was able to carry eight people comfortably but for the moment, only two were present. Both appeared to be female – one was very young. For some reason, their heads appeared to be covered, but that may have just been a trick of the darkness. As the first man laid a hand on the shoulder of the young girl in the bow, he felt a movement. He pulled the shoulder around and in the light of his flashlight, he saw that the girl wore a mask which covered her entire head. The mask was dark grey and trimmed in teal. His focus was on the mask and he never saw the fist as it struck his left temple.

The man in the stern was in the act of examining the woman near the helm. He missed the assault on his crewmate but he turned as he heard a splash when the man went overboard. Suddenly, his vision went hazy and he fell towards the bow and then darkness enveloped him.

..._...

Hit Girl jumped up and in two bounds, she reached up and grasped a short Jacobs ladder before racing up and over the bulwark. A man attracted to the splash found himself face to face with an apparition that arose before him. He tried to yell out, but instead he found himself kicked to the deck. He barely registered another shape slipping over the bulwark as he lost consciousness.

"Nightmare – starboard!"

The youngster dove for the starboard side of the bridge structure and made for the bridge hatch. Hit Girl did the same to port. As she approached the hatch, Hit Girl could make out the red-infused bridge and two forms – one at the wheel, to starboard and one nervously looking ahead out the bridge windows to port. As she passed through the port hatch, the closest man turned and his eyes went wide as he took in the slim, masked form that strode towards him.

"What the hell are you doing on my vessel?" the Captain demanded.

"Bringing hell down upon you!" Hit Girl growled.

"Stop!" the helmsman called as he raised a large pistol and aimed it at Hit Girl's chest.

"You should have fired, not hesitated," she growled.

The helmsman never saw the shadow emerge from the darkness at the starboard hatch, but he felt the arm as it wrapped around his neck and then the hand at the base of his skull as he was flipped over and thrown to the deck. He dropped the pistol and yelled out in agony as his right arm was wrenched up his back.

..._...

After a thorough search, eight men were lined up on the after deck, on their knees. The man in the water had been retrieved and he knelt on the steel deck dripping water. Of the rest, all had regained consciousness – at least enough to be interrogated. Hit Girl walked along the front of the eight crew and enjoyed the glares and angry looks. She could see it in their eyes, despite their obvious overt defiance; it was their – fear! They at least had an idea about who was pacing before them, even if they had not recognised the purple trim to the woman's mask.

Nightmare stood to one side and monitored the mean and covered Hit Girl as she began her interrogation. The thirteen-year-old was pumped full of adrenalin, and she was amazed at how the night's events had unfolded. She was partnered with Hit Girl, again; it was a dream come true. Hit Girl walked behind the men and then stopped behind the Captain, the third man from the port side.

"You are the Captain. You are responsible for that shit, below," Hit Girl growled.

"We have nothing below . . ." the Captain tried before Hit Girl whipped him hard with the muzzle of her pistol.

"Humour me – what is it?"

"Marijuana – for personal, medical use," another man growled.

"You must get through a lot!" Hit Girl growled back as she stepped behind the man who had spoken. "Only, I was *not* born yesterday . . ."

With that, Hit Girl shot the man in the back of the head.

***Chapter 285*: The Tug**

Saturday, June 11, 2016

Position: 43.0542° N 86.2998° W

At anchor, two nautical miles due west of Grand Haven

Salty Swallow

"You shot the man?"

"Yes, Marcus, I did – you wanna hear the rest of the story?"

"Sorry, Mindy! The floor is yours . . ."

Mindy took a deep breath and she continued with the tale.

...+...

With one man dead – shot in cold blood before them – the remaining seven crew members appeared to find their tongues.

Yes, it was Marijuana.

Yes, they had offloaded it from a tug that had brought in the cargo from Canada.

Yes, the drugs were destined for the United States of America.

Yes, the drugs were to be split with a portion going to Detroit, another portion to Chicago, and the rest to Philadelphia.

Apparently, the drugs were all paid for, too. Hit Girl wanted more, but the men began to clam up.

"Let me," Nightmare hissed at Hit Girl.

Hit Girl pondered that for a moment before she waved Nightmare before the crew.

..._...

Nightmare may have appeared slight in her appearance, but her electronically enhanced voice struck fear into the crew.

"I am Nightmare. I am *your* nightmare. I want to know the name of that tug," Nightmare said before she paused for effect. "I want to know *NOW!*"

The raised voice shook the men but they just glared at the young vigilante. Nightmare stepped towards a large man, two down from the corpse with the destroyed head. She pulled a very sharp, seven-inch blade from the back of her pants. Hit Girl grinned behind her mask as Nightmare brought it before the man's eyes.

"I like knives; they speak to me. This one wants to cut you. Only, I like to cut things *off* . . . a few weeks back I cut the penis off a rapist; I enjoyed it. I think I want to cut your dick off – assuming it isn't fucking tiny!"

Nightmare backed up her comment by holding the thumb and forefinger of her left hand about an inch apart. The man's rage was building and Hit Girl could tell that he was about to explode.

"Talk to me, cunt – or my blade talks to that pathetically tiny piece of flesh between your legs that you call a dick."

The man never moved but he scowled even deeper and I was about to intervene when Nightmare defused him – in quite a spectacular way! The man never expected it but he grunted as the blade plunged into his stomach and Nightmare heaved the blade to her right allowing copious amounts of intestine to spill out onto the deck.

"Well, he sure spilled his guts!" Nightmare laughed and Hit Girl winced.

The man did not die quickly but he was allowed to suffer as he thrashed around on the deck covering his mates in his

still hot blood.

"*Voyager* . . . she's called the *Voyager* . . . for the love of God!" a man yelled out

Another man lunged towards Nightmare but he fell to the deck where he scrambled in the darkness before he turned and aimed a pistol at Nightmare. He fired off a round, just before Hit Girl shot him in the head with her suppressed Glock.

Hit Girl triggered her radio: "Calm down, Dave – they missed!"

...+...

"We secured the remainder and left them for the Coastguard," Mindy finished.

"It was my best night ever!" Lauren added with a huge grin.

Mindy noticed Stephanie's smile change to a scowl – the same with Saoirse. Nobody else appeared to have noticed anything wrong so Mindy kept quiet and she gently shook her head at the two girls.

"I have to admit that it's not exactly fair that you two get to have all the fun while we're sleeping," Saoirse commented with a grin.

"You snooze you lose!" Mindy replied snarkily and Saoirse scowled.

Saoirse and Stephanie descended on Mindy after breakfast that morning.

"We got the impression that you wanted to talk," Stephanie announced.

"Thanks, girls – yes, I do."

The three girls descended to Mindy's comfortable stateroom and once Mindy had closed the door, Saoirse spoke.

"You're worried about Lauren."

It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes, last night was exceptional and I saw a few things that concerned me. If it had been Megan, or either of you two, then it would have not been fairly normal . . ."

Stephanie grinned before she turned serious.

"Why us?" Stephanie asked. "Wouldn't you be better talking to Dave, Chloe, or Josh?"

Mindy looked directly at each girl in turn as she replied.

"I value your experience, girls. You both have unique knowledge and experiences that are unique within *Fusion*. I don't envy you those experiences, but I do value them."

"Talk about surreal!" Saoirse commented.

"Surreal?" Mindy queried.

"I'm still getting used to being close to the 'Main Enemy'," the fifteen-year-old replied. Having the famous Hit Girl value me, is still something very novel."

"I must admit, I agree with you," Stephanie commented. "I'm okay with it, but it has taken a while. Oh, SD? Please be careful – my Mum has an ego problem!"

"I do *not*!" Mindy growled without malice.

Stephanie just rolled her eyes in response.

"Saoirse, I know we began on rocky ground with you trying to kill a little girl that I cared about . . ."

"Less of the little!" Stephanie cut in.

"Young girl!" Mindy retorted. "You are a valued member of my team. Every person in *Fusion* plays to their strengths. You are one of my strengths and I will use your uniquely special skills when I believe they are needed – just like now."

"Thanks, Mindy. It's been a rough few months but I'm glad I made the change. Without you, Steph, and Morgan . . . you've all helped me cope with changing my life and as far as I am concerned, being shot in the chest by Steph was the best thing ever!"

"Does that mean I can do it again?" Stephanie enquired with an evil smirk.

"Just you fucking try it, bitch!" Saoirse replied with a friendly scowl.

"Back to Lauren," Mindy announced bringing the conversation back on track.

"She seems to enjoy being partnered with you, Hit Girl," Saoirse commented.

"Who wouldn't!"

Saoirse laughed and put her hand to her mouth to prevent any further amusement which might annoy Mindy.

"What's *that* about?"

"Stephanie said you had an ego, but wow!" Saoirse replied as she struggled not to laugh.

Stephanie laughed at Mindy's sour expression.

..._...

"So," Mindy said, pulling them all back to the original conversation. "You both saw it and understood it – spill!"

Stephanie turned serious and she looked over at her older counterpart before she spoke.

"She sees this as a big game. That girl's been through a lot and I think she's struggling to cope with it all. Her behaviour is extreme and she has a hatred for men. That in itself is not unexpected when you consider her past experiences," Stephanie replied. "Her father's a dick. She was kidnapped and humiliated by men. Then she was raped by a pair of arseholes. There is a pattern."

"I see myself, when I was younger," Mindy said. "That scares me. Daddy used to make a game of being Hit Girl; it was his way of training me . . . well, brainwashing me. I loved putting on the costume – what five-year-old girl wouldn't – it transformed me into somebody else and you could do anything in a game without worrying about the consequences. I never thought twice about what I did and looking back . . ."

"I know," Stephanie said as she looked up at her adoptive mother. "By the time you realise what they've done to you . . ."

"It's too late," Saoirse finished darkly.

"Nightmare has a problem. I won't keep her off the next mission – she'll want to see this through – but when we return to Chicago, I want to keep a close eye on her."

"We can do that," Saoirse commented with a glance at Stephanie who nodded her acceptance.

Later that morning

Salty Swallow

They were underway again, and heading north.

Dave and Mindy were sitting in the Main Salon. They were both in conversation with a grinning man on the large screen TV.

"Okay – looks like we have AIS for a tug around that position, but no other boat. The AIS is for the *Voyager* – she's

Canadian registered; 293 gross tonnes, built in 1962, eight crew."

"Thanks, Marty."

"It is impossible for you to go anywhere, Mrs Lizewski!" Marty commented dryly. "The list of places you've visited and which are now off limits is growing by the day . . ."

"Funny!" Mindy growled as Dave laughed raucously.

"See you soon, guys – try not to cause an international incident with Canada!"

One deck above . . .

"*What* are you wearing?"

"Shorts . . ."

"Definitely the right word for them," Anne-Marie replied pointedly.

"So, they show my legs; big deal."

"Since when did you flaunt everything?" Dave chipped in as he came up the gangway from the deck below – the shorts *were* very short and they showed off every inch of Stephanie's long legs and muscular thighs.

"Since she streaked around the pool in London," Danny laughed.

Stephanie scowled and her face turned pink at the memory.

"I thought she was wearing a new swimsuit – she was almost completely scarlet," Anne-Marie laughed.

"I was embarrassed . . ." Stephanie growled as she advanced on the younger girl. "I am so going to hurt you."

Dave expected his daughter to run for safety, only she stayed absolutely still and she just smiled up at her big sister. Then the eight-year-old fluttered her eyebrows. Stephanie stopped her advance and her expression of anger changed to one of confusion.

"What's with the stupid look?" Stephanie enquired of her sister.

"You'd never hurt me; you love me too much."

"Where'd you get that idea from?"

"You risked your life to save my ass a few months back."

Stephanie deflated and she grinned.

"She annoys the hell out of me but I love her to bits," Stephanie complained bitterly and the cheeky eight-year-old grinned enormously as she hugged her big sister.

By four that afternoon, Mindy's plans were complete.

The three yachts had headed northwards at over twenty knots. They were closing steadily on the tug which was still moving on a northerly heading at a much more sedate six knots. There were several hours to kill before any action got underway, so everybody relaxed for a while. An hour later, the tug dropped anchor a half-mile off Ludington.

Each yacht dropped anchor off Pentwater, about ten nautical miles to the south. We rafted up for dinner and the relaxation seemed to turn X-rated.

Joshua looked around the Main Salon and he focussed on a boy and girl kissing like there was to be no tomorrow.

To be honest, with all the dubious activity aboard over the past day or so, Joshua decided that Mindy had picked the perfect name for her first yacht!

"Hey, Megan! You enjoy your 'salty swallow', yesterday?"

Megan glared daggers at Joshua but she smirked without a word and then went back to kissing a pink-faced Curtis. Even Anne-Marie, who detested the vessel's name, laughed. As was usual, Joshua had control of the music on board. He fiddled with the remote and selected a track. A decent beat came through the high-end speakers.

*Looking in your eyes I see a paradise
This world that I've found
Is too good to be true
Standing here beside you
Want so much to give you
This love in my heart that I'm feeling for you*

*Let 'em say we're crazy, I don't care about that
Put your hand in my hand baby
Don't ever look back
Let the world around us just fall apart
Baby we can make it if we're heart to heart*

*And we can build this dream together
Standing strong forever
Nothing's gonna stop us now
And if this world runs out of lovers
We'll still have each other
Nothing's gonna stop us
Nothing's gonna stop us now*

Megan looked up and grinned and began to mouth the words to Curtis who made a good attempt at responding. Even the adults were getting in on it and smooching together: Ryan and Cathy, Marcus and Paige, Dave and Mindy. Mind you, Mindy kept glaring at Marcus as he kissed Paige, Megan didn't care what her mother was up to, she was way too busy. Joshua selected another track and the smooching just got worse as Chloe sunk her lips onto his.

*There's a calm surrender to the rush of day
When the heat of the rolling world can be turned away
An enchanted moment and it sees me through
It's enough for this restless warrior just to be with you*

*And can you feel the love tonight? It is where we are
It's enough for this wide-eyed wanderer that we got this far
And can you feel the love tonight? How it's laid to rest
It's enough to make kings and vagabonds believe the very best*

Sunday, June 12, 2016

02:00

**Position: 43.9423° N 86.5116° W
Two nautical miles due west of Ludington**

Always Stealthy

The tender had assumed a new name to go along with its new colour scheme.

A custom-made, radar absorbent, camouflage cover had been fitted which turned the tender black with duck egg blue splodges. A Minimi machine-gun was even mounted on the bow. Five were aboard for the assault. Jackal was the coxswain at the helm with Psyche beside him. Forward of the helm was Wildcat with Nightmare. In the bow was Foxtail. The commander for the night was Wildcat.

Four nautical miles astern, *Salty Swallow* cruised at eighteen knots, keeping easy pace with her tender.

Voyager

The 120-foot, blue and white tug was rocking at a single anchor.

A single all-round white light was visible atop the main mast above the raised bridge. A dull red light was visible through the windows of the 01-deck bridge. Nobody was visible anywhere on deck as the tender drew close and approached the stern. Several portholes were illuminated on the main deck and music could be heard coming from an open watertight hatch on the same deck.

The stern had the lowest freeboard for boarding.

"Standby!" Wildcat growled and four affirmative responses were heard just as the bow of the tender kissed the *Voyager's* stern. "Away boarders!"

..._...

Foxtail, the tender's painter in her left hand, jumped onto the rubbing strake which ran around the tug's hull and she swung over the bulwark onto the after deck. Quickly, she secured the tender to a stanchion and took up a position where she could cover the port side of the tug as the other three members of the boarding team followed her example and landed on the deck before spreading out.

Wildcat and Psyche headed to the starboard side of the vessel while Foxtail and Nightmare made their way forward up the port side. Jackal remained in the tender on watch and less than a foot from the Minimi.

"Foxtrot, this is Alpha, boarding team is aboard."

"Foxtrot copies," came the voice of Hal from Safehouse F in Chicago.

Battle Guy and Hal were providing overwatch for the operation. Aboard *Salty Swallow*, many ears listened to the audio and many eyes watched the video from a camera aboard the tender, *Always Stealthy*.

Wildcat and Psyche

"When was the last time we paired off?"

"Now is not the time, Psyche!"

"Humour me?"

"To be honest, I have no idea – but I like to fight alongside you."

"Cool!"

Psyche indicated the ladder up to the bridge deck and she covered Wildcat as the older girl climbed up to the next deck before she followed. They both approached the starboard bridge door which was closed. Wildcat peered through the glass in the door and saw nobody. She pulled open the door and Psyche dived in.

"Bridge clear!" Psyche announced.

The two vigilantes left via the port bridge door and while Wildcat covered her, Psyche scampered up a vertical ladder to the upper conning position. The position was clear so Psyche continued upwards to the raised bridge which was also clear.

"Upper decks are clear!" Psyche reported as she descended back to the bridge deck to re-join Wildcat.

Foxtail and Nightmare

With the upper decks of the tug clear, they knew that they faced eight people below decks.

That was a strategic nightmare. Assaulting an enormous luxury yacht with large open areas and wide passageways was a relative breeze. The *Voyager* was over fifty years old and the corridors would be tight to manoeuvre through with weapons drawn. That meant some different tactics would be required.

Foxtail entered the superstructure first via the open hatchway and she was followed by Nightmare. Both had

suppressed pistols raised before them.

Wildcat and Psyche

Psyche carefully moved down a ladder from inside the bridge into the deck below.

Voices could be heard coming from a compartment to the left. They both paused and Psyche took up a position to assault the compartment. Wildcat dived forwards and with Psyche covering her, she burst through the hatch.

The two men in the compartment were talking together as they watched a movie on a bulkhead mounted television set that looked almost as old as the tug. Both men jumped up and reached for concealed weapons. The first yelled out in agony as he was pistol-whipped by Wildcat and he fell backwards against a steel bulkhead. The next man, towering over six-feet tall, grinned as he found himself facing off against a slightly-built, four-foot-six midget in a semi-armoured suit and mask.

"Is this what pirates look like now?" he chuckled as he feinted left and then struck Psyche in the chest with his right fist.

Psyche yelled out in pain as she went down. She scrambled back to her feet and rammed a Sai into the man's right thigh. The man bellowed in pain but then went silent as Wildcat shot him in the heart.

"Fucking douche!" Psyche growled as she retrieved her Sai.

Foxtail and Nightmare

"You two having fun?"

"Always!" Psyche reported as she and Wildcat joined up with their colleagues. "Oh, shit!"

An alarm began to sound and they all heard pounding feet. Wildcat pulled Psyche to the deck as a man appeared at the far end of the corridor with a submachine gun in his hand and he sent a dozen rounds in their direction. Nightmare shoved Foxtail into an adjacent compartment and landed on top of the older girl.

"You heavy, bitch!" Foxtail complained as she shoved Nightmare off her.

"Contact!" Foxtail radioed.

Salty Swallow

"Contact!"

"I think things have gone to crap," Mindy commented unnecessarily.

"*We have everything under control . . .*" Wildcat radioed.

"*Yeah, right!*" Psyche cut in.

Mindy raised her night glasses and she focussed on the tug about two miles distant. She could make out Jackal in the tender and the flashes of gunfire on the tugs after deck, then the Minimi on the tender burst into life.

"Fast boat, inbound from the east – thirty-one knots – heading directly for the *Voyager!*" Ryan advised as he studied the state of the art radar aboard Mindy's yacht.

Wildcat with Psyche

Fucking shit intelligence!

There were way more than eight crew on board the damn tug. How did we know? Well, I had killed two, Psyche another two and we were fighting at least four while the other two were fighting about six. My Math came to at least fourteen men and we had not seen the captain yet; she was understood to be a woman.

It was every vigilante for themselves as we fought hand to hand in the contorted passageways. One thing in our favour was our physical size. The goons we faced were all men six-foot tall and about the same across. We had space to manoeuvre while they had very little available to them. Nonetheless, the team was fighting well, including our junior member, Nightmare.

I believed everything to be under control – my niece, it seemed, thought otherwise!

Foxtail with Nightmare

The fighting spilled out on deck just as I heard the tugs engines rumble to life.

I burst out of the starboard side main deck hatch and immediately, I came under fire from aft which I dutifully returned. Nightmare ran ahead, her pistol spitting fire and I followed, sending bullets back into the tug's superstructure. Something was badly wrong; there should only have been eight crew aboard and now there seemed to be well over a dozen, heading on for twenty. At least things couldn't get any worse . . .

"Alpha, this is Foxtrot. You have a fast-moving watercraft closing at thirty knots with unknown intentions; however, I don't think they're delivering pizza!"

It had just got worse and Hit Girl trying to be funny was not exactly helping.

Jackal

What a surprise; one of our operations had just gone to fuck!

I had to be careful where I aimed the Minimi so as not to cut down any of the girls – I decided that they might be a little put out by that act and they would probably come back to haunt me. The tug's diesel engine was thundering to life and I knew that I would have to cast off within minutes or face getting swamped.

I watched Wildcat burst out of the port hatch and after killing a man, she headed forward and then upwards to the bridge. She was followed by the ever-present Psyche. Both girls were dashing about with the energy of the ubiquitous Duracell Bunny but with the vicious streak of Rambo. It was hard to imagine the two female vigilantes as two normal-looking pre-teen girls who had been sunbathing and giggling earlier that afternoon.

I was quickly snapped back to reality as I heard the roaring of high-performance marine engines coming from the east.

The Voyager Bridge

Wildcat dove onto the bridge with Psyche close behind.

Psyche sent one of her Sais the length of the bridge and a submachine gun toting asshole died. The coxswain quickly followed as Wildcat put a bullet into his skull.

"Stop the fucking boat!" Wildcat ordered the Captain.

"Fuck you . . ."

Wildcat punched the woman hard in the face smashing her nose. The Captain screamed out in pain but she quickly regained her composure and she pulled back on the throttle till 'STOP' was selected.

"Now – who are your friends out there?" Wildcat demanded.

"Fuck you!"

"I really hate hurting people, you know," Wildcat went on. "But for druggies like you? Well, you ain't people!"

With that proclamation, the Captain screamed as a bullet blew her right knee-cap apart and she sank to the deck in agony.

"I hope you fucking . . ."

"Wrong answer!"

Another bullet later and another destroyed knee-cap sent waves of agony coursing through the Captain who writhed on the deck.

"I have six more rounds remaining – where'd you like 'em? I like to give people some choice in how I mutilate them. I see myself as an equal opportunity vigilante!"

Jackal

That girl was fucking nuts!

With the tug rapidly losing way, the immediate problem was resolved. However, the next problem was rapidly coming into sight. For a moment, I considered that the incoming craft might be a friendly but that thought rapidly vanished as a stream of gunfire was emitted from a machine gun aboard the vessel. I returned fire with short bursts while the team took cover behind the bulwarks and out of my line of fire.

The fast boat decided the fire was too heavy and they attempted a high-speed turn but the fuckers misjudged it and two men went over the side as they turned. I laughed – who wouldn't. The fast boat began to accelerate away but had only made it about a hundred yards when I caught a flash of orange out the corner of my left eye.

A second or two later the fast boat blossomed into a fiery cloud as it exploded.

Salty Swallow

"That was way cool!" Anne-Marie exploded.

"Thought you'd enjoy that," Mindy laughed as she lowered the Javelin control console to the foredeck.

"I love the smell of explosives in the night!" Anne-Marie quipped.

"We need to have words about what movies your mother lets you watch," Marcus commented dryly.

"All we need now are some marshmallows on very long sticks," Anne-Marie added.

"This is all *your* fault!" Marcus growled as he looked over at a grinning Mindy. "Like mother like daughter!"

We took the tender aboard and left the scene at speed before following a large looping course that brought us back to the other yachts from a very different heading.

There were the usual bruises, but nothing major and everybody was very tired. While we slept, the US Coastguard were up all night as they tried to figure out what had happened a few miles off the coast. Needless to say, if the USCG came to visit later that morning, all evidence would be long gone.

***Chapter 286*: The Abbott Sisters**

Sunday, 12th June, 2016

11:00

Position: 43.7515° N 87.5508° W
Six nautical miles due east of Sheboygan

Salty Swallow

The next morning found us well away from anything illegal.

We were on the way home and the crews had got mixed up for the final few hours. I found Megan and Stephanie on the bow talking.

"Hi, girls!"

"Hi, Mom."

"Hi, Sis."

"Last night, Steph mentioned something about Wildcat 'going wild' . . ."

"Did you really have to use air quotes?" Megan groaned.

I shrugged in response and sat down. Stephanie and I both looked at Megan.

"All right! I was interrogating the bitch – you know, tell me what I want to know or I blow apart your limbs."

I raised an eyebrow at my daughter and she just shrugged noncommittedly.

"She was strong-willed and very brave – I'll give her that – but I needed answers. I blew apart her knees and had just destroyed an elbow when some cunt went and blew up the inbound fast boat."

"That was Anne-Marie – not bad for an eight-year-old with a broken arm," I commented.

"I suppose," Megan responded. "The Captain proved superfluous to my needs . . ."

"So, she put a bullet in the remaining elbow and then one in each lung. The woman drowned in her own blood – it was quite cool to watch," Stephanie cut in with a big grin.

"It was cool," Megan agreed.

I chuckled at the two evil bitches.

Somebody was missing . . . Stephanie . . . oh, and Saoirse.

Those two Urban Princesses could be up to anything! I headed below and made my way through the main salon and then below again to the staterooms and cabins. I heard sounds coming from the starboard side cabin. I knocked on the cabin door but I heard nothing other than what sounded like . . . sobbing? That was totally out of character so I had to be wrong. I pushed open the door to find two young girls sitting on one bunk crying their eyes out as they held hands.

"Sorry – I'll leave you two alone . . ."

"No," Stephanie called out quickly and I gently closed the door behind me and sat on the opposite bunk.

"Mindy, please stay – we're just relieving some rather nasty parts of our lives," Saoirse explained.

"You remember what happened to me at Christmas?" Stephanie asked.

I well remembered that night when Stephanie had told me and Dave about how she had killed her parents and brother. I nodded at Stephanie without a smile.

"Back in Toulouse, SD and I came across a similar room and . . . well, SD had never remembered what she did. She went to pieces on me and I thought she was going to lose it, just as I did that night. She's my best friend and I said I would take her through what happened."

"I never realised that I had done that," Saoirse explained as the tears flowed. "Murdered my own parents . . . I knew that we *Predators* were really bad people . . ."

Saoirse began to cry even harder. Stephanie held her hand firmly as her friend cried and she also cried. I felt so bad for them both. They had endured so much and been treated so badly. *Urban Predator* may have been over but it was in no way gone. The trauma would always be there, just as mine was.

"Saoirse . . . you are not bad anymore. You took a bullet for my daughter . . . that means a lot in Hit Girl's book. I owe you for that, no matter what your past actions."

Saoirse smiled through her tears.

"Both of you have done so much for me and without you both I would never have found people who loved and cared for me. I even have a sister – a sister who's a nutcase for sure; but you can't have everything, I suppose."

"We may not know what the future holds. But hear us when we say that our past does not define us. 'Cause our past is not today."

"Very nice, Stephanie," I commented. "Did you just paraphrase a My Little Pony song?"

"Maybe . . ."

"It fitted," Saoirse commented with a grin at Stephanie. "Besides, Sunset Shimmer rocks!"

"You *Predators* are so fucking strange!" I growled as I left the cabin.

All I could hear was laughing and giggling as I headed up a deck.

16:00

It was nearing late afternoon when we approached our docks at the Burnham Harbor Marina.

Thirty minutes later we were each tied up and all engines had been shut down. Marcus appeared weary from his trip but he smiled across the dock at us. Paige and little Damon were also very happy and I was glad that we could all have some good family fun. I did not spend as much time as I wanted with my little brother but Paige had forced him on me the previous afternoon. Maybe I was worried about hurting such a little thing. I was, after all, more used to breaking things than being gentle!

I suppose gaining kids at seven and nine had been a challenge but at least they fed themselves (usually), washed themselves (with a little persuasion) and they used the bathroom without incident. They also took knocks in their stride which helped. I also hated seeing Paige breast feeding – gave me the creeps for some reason. As I watched, Anne-Marie walked down the gangway slowly and then she tentatively placed a foot on the dock followed by the other one. Then . . . she began to cheer!

"I survived a boat trip with my Mom!" she yelled triumphantly. "I'm alive!"

Everybody laughed.

"Not funny!" I growled but, as was usual, nobody appeared to be listening to me.

The following morning Monday, 13th June

Glenview

The normal (abnormal to some) logistical nightmare of preparing three kids for school was underway.

I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Danny was just sitting down to his cereal when I heard yelling and screaming from upstairs. Then the noise came closer.

"Stephanie! Give me back my bag!"

The two girls burst into the kitchen with Stephanie holding a dark purple backpack over her head well out of her sister's reach.

"Say please," Stephanie advised.

"Give me my back . . . now, before I fucking . . ."

"Anne-Marie!" I said sharply and the girl froze. "Jar!"

I glared at Stephanie who smiled sweetly before she returned the backpack to her sister. Anne-Marie walked over to the jar and then turned to look at me.

"I've no money left."

"Then make out an IOU."

Anne-Marie muttered something under her breath as she tore the top sheet off the pad located beside the swear jar.

"I still can't believe you had a swear jar IOU pad printed up," Stephanie laughed. "It even has our names on it – including yours . . ."

I scowled.

"That was Dave – he had the printer alter it," I replied somewhat reluctantly.

Stephanie laughed as she grabbed herself a bowl from the cupboard. Then a loud bark was heard and a few seconds later a ginger ball of fluff flew into the kitchen and executed a perfect four-paw power slide on the stone floor before coming to rest beside my left foot. The ginger ball was hissing and spitting as Razor skidded to a very rapid halt in front of me. Kiara peered inquisitively around the doorframe.

"What have I told you about chasing Horatio?" I lectured Razor. "Last time, he scratched you."

Razor whined and gave Horatio a big lick. Horatio meowed and then rubbed up against Razor's left paw. The kitten then began to purr – loudly. Stephanie glared at her dog. Razor walked over and licked her hand in apology for his actions. Horatio followed him. The two were the best of friends, despite their antics together. Horatio's favourite sleeping location was cuddled up with the five-month-old German Shepherd.

Kiara just shook her head in disgust, wandered over to her bowl and took a noisy gulp of water.

***Two days later
Wednesday, 15th June***

North Park Elementary School

Stephanie was smiling, as always, and Danny was chatting to his friends as he came out of school. A certain eight-year-old girl, though, did *not* look happy!

"What's with sourpuss?" I asked.

Danny laughed.

"She got into trouble, today – *lots* of trouble."

I groaned.

"Do I need to see the Principal?"

"Nah!" Danny replied. "She just has a tonne of homework to catch up on."

"No swords. No Rogue." I directed once we were in the Jaguar. "Until the homework is completed."

"What? That's not fair!"

"Who makes the rules?"

"Dave?"

"Quit while you're ahead, would be my advice," Stephanie chipped in wisely.

That night

Safehouse F

"What's with misery guts," Joshua asked as he noticed Anne-Marie sitting in a corner of the galley with piles of books.

"She has mounds of homework to catch up on – her fault for getting behind," Stephanie replied.

Anne-Marie raised a single finger into the air and Joshua chuckled.

"Get back to your work, young lady!" Cathy growled from the kitchen. "You're lucky Mindy allowed you to change into uniform, despite you not actually doing anything other than your homework."

Anne-Marie grimaced and pouted at the rebuke but she went back to her homework.

"What are you grinning like a Cheshire Wildcat for, Megan?"

"Vengeance!" Stephanie grinned.

"Yes, you mad bitches; Vengeance will be here in a few days," Hit Girl growled in exasperation.

"We want Vengeance! We want Vengeance!" Both girls chanted to general amusement.

"Fucking mad bitches!" the exasperated vigilante yelled as she headed into the armoury for peace and quiet.

"Focus, Nightmare!" Foxtail growled as Hit Girl stormed off into the armoury.

Foxtail smirked but she turned back to her two charges: Nightmare and Ravage. They were each practicing with Ninja-To blades. A few yards away, Shadow and Mist were sparring. Despite the seven-year age difference, Mist held her own as she was taller than Shadow which gave her a slight edge.

Splinter and Trojan were heading to the lower level along with Psyche and Wildcat. They were each wearing shorts and t-shirts for some intensive sparring on the mat in the Exercise Room. Splinter was teaching Wildcat and Trojan the art of unconventional fighting. Psyche was already skilled but she was happy to learn anything new that Splinter may have picked up in his time with the Russians. Psyche wanted to be 'bad-ass' in every way possible, despite her tender age. The veteran *Predator* was very aware that she had never completed her training so she was determined to catch up with her best friend Saoirse.

And then overtake her.

An hour later

Hit Girl and Battle Guy had just returned from Safehouse E.

While Battle Guy headed back to his Command Center, Hit Girl decided to check on the kids below decks. She veered past Shadow and Mist who were still at it, sweat flying as both young women span across the mat. Foxtail was pointing out various factors that related to each of the women's unique fighting styles. One of the key training methods within *Fusion* was encouraging each member to develop their own way of fighting. As well as allowing each person to fight in a way which matched their size, abilities, and weapons, it also kept potential enemies guessing and

made attacking *Fusion* a decidedly iffy proposition.

As she reached the bottom of the steel steps, Hit Girl could see four very active individuals engaged in a fight 'to the death' – well, to exhaustion if nothing else. Wildcat was just picking herself up off the mat. Her face was very red and sweat poured from the eleven-year-old. The twelve-year-old Splinter was smirking as he limbered up to reattack Wildcat. The ten-year-old Psyche was terrorising the almost twelve-year-old Trojan. As was usual, Psyche's clothing was soaked; she always went to one-hundred-and-ten percent when fighting, even when simply sparring. Trojan was maturing fast and he had strength in his arms and legs plus a weight and height advantage over the diminutive Psyche.

To get past that advantage, Psyche had her more advanced skill set. Trojan was very keen to learn anything which might make him a deadlier adversary in combat. After he had boy literally dived to Wildcat's rescue in Gibraltar and almost died, his kudos had leapt within *Fusion*. Together with his partner, Wildcat, he was a force to be reckoned with and Hit Girl would fight alongside him any day, just as she would with any member of *Fusion*.

Nobody got a free ride. Everybody earned their spurs in *Fusion*. In most cases, they earned them the hard way, in combat, against overriding odds. The fight at the Chicago Silos had shown the world what *Fusion* could accomplish against the most extreme odds. Some sites on the internet were even ranking *Fusion* among the world's elite special forces – now that was an accolade worth fighting for but Hit Girl would never put her organisation above the brave men and women who kept entire countries safe; *Fusion* only had a city to keep safe.

..._...

As Hit Girl entered the Exercise Room, she smiled at Wildcat's excessively vulgar language which was almost equally matched by the insults streaming from the ten-year-old's sewer of a mouth. The fighting was hard and I noticed a bruise on Megan's upper right arm. Trojan smiled in my direction but Psyche was ready and she took advantage of his momentary lapse of concentration and threw him down to the mat.

"Fucking bitch!" he breathed as he jumped straight back up and went for the younger girl but as he came close to Splinter he nudged his friend on the back.

The two boys swapped places and Psyche found herself facing off with Splinter while Wildcat smirked at her boyfriend. Trojan had long ago got over his aversion to hitting his girlfriend and he had no qualms in hitting her where it hurt! Conversely, Wildcat would rarely go near his lower regions – except, of course, when they were in bed . . . together.

Splinter towered over Psyche and he *did* have real muscle. He could snap Psyche in two if he so wished and Psyche knew it. Splinter would also fight dirty. He rarely fought dirty with his friends in case he hurt them. He reserved it mainly for Hit Girl, Psyche, and Foxtail. They were trained for it while the others were still learning.

From Hit Girl's point of view, she enjoyed watching the two expert streetfighters scrap. The fighting often got very wild and a referee was usually required to prevent serious injury.

..._...

Splinter and Psyche circled each other, neither taking their eyes off one another's eyes for even a second.

Both searched for a tell-tale which would telegraph their opponents next move. Both streetfighters were so advanced that neither could possibly guess which move or action might be selected from potentially hundreds.

"Make your move, dunderhead!" Psyche suggested.

"I'd say 'ladies first', but you are no fucking lady!" Splinter retorted.

"Okay, pussies first, eh, Splinter . . ."

"Off you go, then . . . or are you scared I might hurt the little girl?"

"The only scared bitch here, is you. Потеряли свои яички?"

"My testicles are fine, thanks. How are yours?"

"Hanging low, bitch!" Psyche chuckled as she drove forwards a fraction of a second before Splinter.

Psyche twisted and slid along the mat taking Splinter's feet from under him . . . only he was ready and he dived into a roll before coming back up behind Psyche. She scowled but quickly flipped over backwards and kicked Splinter in the chest – at least that was her plan. Splinter caught one ankle and then grabbed hold of Psyche's waistband and flung her across the mat where she crashed into Wildcat and both fell into a heap in the corner.

"Time out!" Hit Girl announced as Psyche pushed Wildcat off to one side. She was seething with anger.

"Go fuck yourself, ref – that fucker's going down!" Psyche growled and her gunmetal-blue eyes flashed dangerously.

Hit Girl just shrugged and she stood back, her hands raised in a 'have it your own way' position.

"Назад для получения дополнительной, маленькая девочка?" Splinter chuckled. *{'Back for more, little girl?'}*

"Я возьму все, что вы можете блюдо, вы чертовски киску!" Psyche retorted with venom in her voice. *{'I'll take whatever you can dish out, you fucking pussy!'}*

Psyche was pissed and that would probably be her downfall – possibly.

..._...

Wildcat was not happy as she watched her niece throw herself around the mat. She knew that Psyche never backed down and not against a boy. Splinter was provoking Psyche and Wildcat was worried that Psyche might take things too far. Psyche and Splinter were fairly evenly matched. Psyche had the advantage of better training, but Splinter had strength and brawn on his side. Both were also known to go too far in sparring.

Wildcat took a moment to glare at Hit Girl who just shrugged – 'what?'. Hit Girl should have stopped the fight, but no, she *had* to let it play out and somebody was going to get hurt . . . Wildcat looked over at Foxtail somewhat pointedly. Foxtail grimaced but otherwise did nothing to stop the fight. The hand to hand fighting was getting more and more advanced as the minutes passed. Both fighters were getting very close to exhaustion and that meant they would go to any lengths to end the fight.

Psyche allowed herself to be flipped over but she fainted and Splinter found himself in her 'kill zone' and he knew it.

"Sayonara, motherfucker!" Psyche growled as she kneed Splinter in the balls and followed through with a punch to the stomach.

Splinter went down, not knowing where to put his hands. He was breathing through the pain but he stayed down.

"Потеряли свои яички?" Psyche chuckled. *{'How're your testicles?'}*

"They . . . sore . . . ouch!" Splinter grimaced in response as Psyche helped him up off the mat and over to a chair where she handed him an icepack with a big smirk on her face.

The following morning
Thursday, 16th June

North Park Elementary School

Anne-Marie was in a big rush that morning.

She was late – gossiping with her friends and she scrambled to sort out her books at her locker. She pulled all her homework out of her bag and thrust it into her locker to be sorted later. Several items fell to the floor which she quickly swept up and stuffed into her locker before she slammed it shut and locked it.

She ran off to her first lesson of the day.

Later that morning

"You think it's real?"

"No idea . . ."

"It *can't* be real."

"But what if it *is* real?"

"If it is real then it means that somebody in this school is a member of *Fusion*."

"That would be so cool!"

"I've never heard of this one, though. Maybe it is a fake ID . . ."

"A new vigilante, maybe?"

"Let's see it again . . ."

The card was a dark blue all over and it was the normal size for an ID card. At the bottom left was a QR code. Above that, there was an inverted stripe like that worn by a Private First Class in the US Marine Corps. Over to the right and taking up most of the right half of the card was the easily recognisable symbol used by *Fusion*. To the right of that was a code: 'SC01'. Above the symbol was another code: 'FUSION-887436-9862-AHIU'. Finally, at the bottom right was a single word: 'ROGUE'.

"Where'd you say you found it?"

"By the lockers."

"What do we do with it?"

"I have no idea."

A little over five weeks previously

Toulouse, France

It was time to end it. Shadow kicked out and she caught the blonde girl in the left thigh; she staggered and Shadow brought the razor-sharp tip of her *bō*-staff around and she rammed the blade into the girl's chest, just below her left lung. The girl froze in shock at the invasion of her body and she dropped her weapon. It clattered to the floor as the girl quickly sank to her knees, her eyes wide with the pain as Shadow pulled her blade out and rammed the other end of the *bō*-staff into the red-haired girl's side.

That girl fell beside her fellow *Predator* in a pool of blood.

The Present

Friday, 17th June

Safehouse Q Chatham Road

No matter how much she tried, Chloe struggled to maintain a neutral expression around the girls who had just left the hospital that morning.

The guilt that she felt every time she saw them was palpable. Chloe had no idea if the girls had noticed her guilt and that just made things worse. Finally, it was Sky that voiced Chloe's worst fear that Friday afternoon.

"It was you, wasn't it?"

"Me, what?" Chloe asked defensively and way too obviously.

"You are Shadow; you did this," Sky said as she pulled up her t-shirt and exposed the slightly off vertical scar that was prominently visible on her left side and which was about six inches in length.

"Why would you think that?"

"Oh, come on! Neither you, Chloe, nor us are *that* stupid. We can almost touch the guilt that you're feeling and every day, since that day we met in the hospital, we see the remorse in your expressions."

"I did not want to do it . . . only, I had no choice."

Tears began to pour down Chloe's cheeks. Sky smiled and sat down beside Chloe, an arm around the distraught fifteen-year-old's shoulder. She was joined by her twin sister, Christina.

"We've had many weeks to think about what happened, ever since that night in France, and we've come to the only sensible conclusion: you had *no* other choice."

Chloe looked up at the two girls and smiled.

"Really?"

Sky looked up at Mindy who nodded.

"Chloe – I told you," Mindy explained. "Nobody blames you; there was nothing else that you could have done. These girls have forgiven you; you have given them a new life."

The twins now sported near identical long dark brown hair. Sky had been the one to sport fiery-red hair that day and her sister, Christina had had the blonde hair. The dye had been removed during their lengthy stay in hospital and they were both happy to remain their natural colour.

"So," Christina began. "What sort of new life can we expect?"

Mindy smiled at the two fifteen-year-olds knowing that they had already worked out that if Chloe was Shadow, then I would have to be . . .

"That is entirely up to you both."

"Considering our lack of any other skills, would we join *you*, Hit Girl, and your *Fusion*?" Sky asked with a grin.

"Only if you wanted."

"I, for one, aren't all that keen on Chicago . . ." Christina ventured.

"The place sucks," Sky admitted and Chloe laughed.

"Anywhere in particular?" Mindy asked tentatively.

"We have some ideas."

That evening

Glenview

"*What* are you watching?"

Anne-Marie was sprawled on the living room floor and the eight-year-old barely looked up from the TV.

"Dance Moms."

"What?"

"It's awesome!" Anne-Marie squealed. "You'd love it."

"You'd never get *me* dancing in next to nothing . . . like that – it's indecent!"

"You've worn a lot less!" Anne-Marie reminded her sister who blushed involuntarily.

"That is *so* not me," Stephanie persisted.

"Stranger things have happened," Anne-Marie commented with a giggle.

***Chapter 287*: Vengeance**

This is the continuation from Chapter 6: All Is Revealed of Vengeance.

Friday, 17th June, 2016

That night

Safehouse Q – Chatham Road, Glenview

After the fight, it was time for everybody to get some sleep ready for a big day on Saturday.

Apart from Natasha and Cameron pretending to not want to share a room together, and the three girls not wanting to sleep, everybody was finally settled down! The house was large and had five bedrooms. The youngsters were all very excited about everything that they had seen and heard over the previous few hours; their lives had changed in a very dramatic fashion.

The adults were all very tired and they were desperate for sleep, even if the overtired kids were not!

The following morning

Saturday, 18th June

Safehouse Q

Despite the previous late night and the intercontinental travelling, the three girls were full of energy when they awoke.

The adults, though, were not . . .

"Harper – if you want to live to see your tenth birthday, then you shall do an immediate about-turn and take your little friends out of this bedroom," Keira said calmly.

"What are you going to do?" Harper sneered.

Keira dug her hand beneath her pillow and produced a bright yellow device.

"A Taser!" Naomi exclaimed.

"That is so low!" Kaitlin added as she noticed that the Taser was the latest X3 model which could Taser three subjects before it required a reload.

"You win . . ." Harper hissed as she backed out of the bedroom with her friends. "For now!"

Later that morning

"Morning, guys!"

"Morning, Mindy – fancy some bacon and eggs?" Cameron asked.

"Don't worry – I ain't cooking!" Natasha commented dryly.

"Got enough for another five?" Dave enquired as he followed his wife into the Safehouse.

"Plenty, Dave," Cameron confirmed.

"Sarah, Keira, girls," Mindy said. "Please meet my other children, Anne-Marie and Danny."

Stephanie pointed each one out in turn to the three girls.

"I think they can tell us apart, doofus!" Anne-Marie growled as she said hello to Harper, Naomi, and Kaitlin. "You are all *Predators*?"

"Yes, we are," Naomi confirmed. "Are you two vigilantes . . . like Stephanie?"

"Kind of – still in training," Danny replied with a grin. "I'm Ravage, and my sister is Rogue."

"Nice!" Kaitlin commented.

"Does that mean we get cool names?" Harper asked with an excited grin.

"You do," Natasha advised the three girls. "Harper will be Polaris. Naomi will be Prowl. We considered something to do with destruction for Kaitlin . . ."

Kaitlin gave Natasha a 'we are *not* amused' glare and Natasha laughed.

"Kaitlin will be Glide."

"Cool!" Naomi grinned as she looked at her grinning cousin and the very pleased Harper.

..._...

After breakfast – the second that morning for Stephanie, Anne-Marie, and Danny – the kids ran off to 'play' together although Natasha decided to 'supervise' and prevent any intended or unintended destruction of building or body.

Mindy and Keira sat down in the living room.

"Why am I here?" Keira asked.

Mindy looked over from the other couch.

"You're a pilot, I understand."

"Yes. I fly naval helicopters."

"What are you qualified in?"

"I have been current in the Lynx HMA.8, the Wildcat HMA.2, and the Seaking HAS.6 – at least I was, until they got rid of them. I transitioned into the Merlin HM.2 helicopter and that is what I am presently current in."

"So you can fly almost any helicopter, from the smallest to the larger ones?"

"Yes."

"Could you fly either of these?"

Mindy passed over two photos.

"In a heartbeat," Keira replied with an approving expression but then her eyes narrowed. "Is this a job interview?"

"You want the job?" Mindy replied. "You've seen what *Fusion* and *Vengeance* do."

Keira turned as Harper came into the living room and she sat down next to her big sister. Harper looked imploringly up at Keira with irresistible puppy-dog eyes – one of the nine-year-olds little tricks – until Keira finally shrugged and smiled down at her sister.

"In for a penny, in for a pound."

Harper almost screamed with joy and she hugged her big sister.

"Would I get a cool name?" Keira asked as she winced with the strength of Harper's hug.

Mindy said nothing but she simply handed over a white-bordered, black woven patch with Velcro on the back. Keira recognised it instantly. It was very much like the patch worn on her own Royal Navy flight suit but instead of it reading 'ROYAL NAVY' and 'KEIRA SHARP' above and below the 'wings', it read 'VENGEANCE' and 'SCORPION'.

"But I can't fight – not hand to hand," Keira said dejectedly.

"I'll teach you, sis," Harper offered as she looked at the insignia in awe. "Give me a few weeks and you'll be able to kill a man with a single finger!"

Early that afternoon

Safehouse F

"Keira?"

"Yes, Naomi."

"It's Harper – she won't stop crying."

Keira got up from the couch in the Briefing Room and she followed Naomi around the walkways to a bedroom which Harper had occupied. Harper was sitting on the bed and her head was in her hands. She was sobbing. Beside her sat a worried looking Kaitlin.

Keira walked over and she sat down beside her sister.

"What's she crying for?"

"We don't know. She won't tell us."

"Okay – thanks, girls. Please leave us."

Once the door was shut, Keira pulled Harper's hands away from her face. Keira was shocked to see that they were real tears and there were a lot of them.

"Talk to me, Harper."

"I was really happy that you wanted to become a vigilante and join us, but then . . . on the ride over here, I started thinking. I realised that I was going to be the cause of you giving up the best thing in your life. I know that you love the Royal Navy and it was your biggest ambition to become an officer and then a helicopter pilot. Now I've destroyed it all for you."

Harper sobbed even harder and sank into Keira for comfort. Keira hugged her distraught sister tightly until the tears eased. Then she turned the nine-year-old's head upwards to look into her dark brown eyes. Keira gently smoothed away the remaining tears and smiled. Harper smiled back.

"The best thing in the entire world happened a few weeks back. You know what that was? It was something much better than becoming an officer. Much better than getting my wings. It was finding out that my little sister was alive. I cared for nothing else other than you. I will admit, it shocked the hell out of me to find out what you had become, but I didn't care. I had my Harper back. The Harper that I loved for so many years. You being born was the best thing ever. You are all I have and all I want, Harper."

"I love you, Keira."

"So, no more tears?"

Harper shook her head and looked a little sheepish.

"I love you too, Harper."

As I sat there hugging my sister, my mind drifted back to the final hours of my torture. It was both the scariest moment of my life and my happiest.

The day that Hit Girl had burst into Dormitory A and begun our wild ride to freedom would forever be seared into my memory. I could remember it like it was yesterday. Twelve of us had been herded into the dormitory by six guards. Nobody had told us anything. We could hear explosions and gunfire. Then those same explosions and gunfire had come closer and closer . . . until . . . the door to the dormitory was smashed open.

I actually felt a stab of fear as five very well-armed people burst in.

..._...

Nobody said anything for a whole minute as the atmosphere grew very tense.

If anybody opened fire, there would be a bloodbath. The guards seemed very jumpy but the invaders were rock solid and focussed. Each wore an identical dark grey uniform with integrated body armour, however, each suit had different coloured markings. I instantly recognised the insignia worn on the upper left chest of each suit – it was *Fusion*.

One of the shorter ones stepped forwards. She (I thought it looked like a she) had blue and red markings on her suit. The girl was short and thin which made me think that she was not much older than about ten-years-old. She looked directly at us kids as she spoke in a weird, electronically enhanced voice.

"Phase 1?" She asked as she looked directly at the younger kids, and they nodded.

"Phase 2?" She asked as she looked at us, the older kids, and we nodded. "I was Phase 2 – at least I was before I was terminated. You might have heard of me; I go by the name: *Psyche*."

There was a collective intake of breath as most of the kids, including me, recognised the name. There were also some scowls and quite a few muttered words – I heard 'traitor' and 'rat', among others. I had heard of *Psyche*. She was a Phase 2 *Predator* who had killed another *Predator* in a shower, apparently. Then the girl had apparently gone rogue.

"I saw the light; I am free – I kill when *Psyche* says to kill. *Nobody*, tells me to kill – not even Hit Girl; we are equals..."

A taller armoured individual stepped forwards; she had purple markings on her suit and it was pretty obvious who she was supposed to be.

"I am Hit Girl."

She paused for a few seconds to let that sink in.

"I see that you know my name . . ."

"How do we know it is really you?" I called out. It was too good to be true.

"Well, I could show you my Driver's Licence, but I didn't bring it with me. So, you'll just have to trust me – besides who else would have the balls to take on the CIA?"

There was a chuckle or too at that remark and I laughed too. We all began to whisper amongst ourselves and the guards were getting more jittery. We agreed to make a stand and fight – we had to; it was our only chance of a remotely normal life. We moved so that the Phase 2 kids were closer to the guards. The invaders took our cue and they distracted the guards as we moved.

..._...

I found myself behind a tall man, maybe six feet tall. I was on point and all were watching me for the cue to attack. I reached up and without warning, I wrenched the man's neck around. In the following scuffle his body took a while to hit the floor. Two minutes later, the guards were no more. We just stood there with absolutely no idea what to do next. I had just killed a man in a second without conscious thought on the matter. Had I done right? I damned well hoped so. It had been a first for us all. I was brought out of my thoughts as Hit Girl spoke again.

"You did well; very well – you all have my respect!" she assured us and her tone, while electronic, appeared genuine. To receive a compliment from somebody as famous as Hit Girl . . . well, I felt good inside and it pushed some of my reservations to one side.

"Seize a weapon," the traitorous *Psyche* ordered and almost immediately ten of us were armed – I grabbed up a pistol from the hand of a dead guard.

..._...

After that, everything else was a blur until French Police appeared and we were disarmed and taken away. We were kept separated as we were interviewed – I called it interrogated – by French and British security services. I was stripped, showered, medically inspected, and then dressed again in new clothes. I was provided with paperwork which identified who I was. Somehow, they knew who I really was – they knew that I was not Harper Brown. I had

forgotten what my birth name was and I was surprised to be told that I was born Harper Sharp.

I was also surprised to be told that I had an older sister who would take care of me. Nobody would tell me what had happened to my parents and I eventually gave up asking. I had not recognised Keira for who she was and it had taken a day or two to remember her as Keira showed me photos of us growing up together.

Strangely, I was *not* shown any photos of our parents.

Safehouse F ***The Armoury***

"One more thing, Mindy . . ." Keira asked as they headed into the Armoury.

"Oh?" Mindy enquired.

"The swearing – what can I do about it?"

"Yeah – me too," Cassie added with a glare at the three girls.

There was laughter as Harper, Naomi, and Kaitlin blushed. Mindy grinned.

"I have a perfect solution for that – in fact, I can personally vouch for its effectiveness."

"Oh, you three have had it!" Stephanie growled. "You all get pocket money?"

"When we're good," Kaitlin muttered grudgingly.

"Well, say goodbye to it," Stephanie warned in a slightly disgusted tone.

Mindy had vanished but she soon returned with a large tin in her hands. The tin jangled and clinked. Stephanie scowled at it and she backed away like it was something evil.

"The swear jar!" Mindy said proudly. "Rakes in hundreds a month, guaranteed. I keep one everywhere Stephanie goes. Marty is working on one that can take cards."

"Don't forget that *you* lost four-hundred and eighty bucks last month across various jars, mother dearest," Stephanie reminded Mindy with a sly grin.

"I like to set a good example," Mindy retorted sourly.

..._...

Everybody gathered around the large central steel table in the Armoury. The three girls stood at one side with Stephanie to their right and Cassie to their left. Mindy was opposite them, with Chloe beside her. Keira and Sarah stood together beside Chloe.

"Okay, girls. Don't worry about the questions. I just want to find out what you know and what you can do. Last night, we saw that you can all handle the hand-to-hand aspects; now for the firearms."

Mindy placed a pistol down before Harper.

"Beretta PX4 Storm," the young girl commented.

Another pistol was placed before Naomi.

"FN Five-seveN Mk2," Naomi yawned.

Mindy smirked at Kaitlin as she placed one before her. Kaitlin rolled her eyes.

"That the best you've got? A SIG Sauer P238 in Desert?"

Chloe chuckled. Mindy laughed.

"Which pistols did you prefer to shoot with, girls?"

"S&W M&P 22 Compact," Kaitlin offered.

Chloe walked over to the rack of pistols and selected a black pistol which replaced the P238.

"SIG Sauer P938 BRG," Naomi responded.

Chloe again walked over to the rack and she retrieved the mentioned pistol and swapped it for the FN.

"SIG Sauer P238 Combat," was Harper's selection.

Once Chloe had swapped the PX4 for the P238, Mindy instructed the girls to pick up their allocated weapons. Chloe, Stephanie, and Mindy watched very closely as each girl picked up the pistol, ejected the magazine, pulled back the slide and visually checked the breech before releasing the slide, reinserting the empty magazine and clearing the action.

"Thank you, girls, that was very well done. If any one of you had not cleared your weapon, I would have taken it from you and you would not touch a weapon until suitably trained."

The three girls smiled at the praise.

"Now, follow me to the range. Naomi, stay with Stephanie. Kaitlin, you're with Chloe. Harper, with me. Take your pistols with you."

The Range

"Okay, girls. I assume you each know how to behave with live ammunition on a range?"

"Yes, Mindy," the three girls replied together.

The demeanour of the three girls had changed dramatically once the firearms had come into play; they were all business and there had been no messing about or giggling. Joshua placed a box of the correct ammunition beside the first three firing points and the girls each placed their pistols down in front of them.

"I am the Range Safety Officer. Headsets on, please," Joshua ordered and everybody present picked up a set of ear defenders.

The headsets had built-in communications allowing everybody to converse despite the anticipated background noise.

"Girls, load your magazine with five rounds each, please. Do *not* insert the magazine. Raise your right hand once ready."

Within thirty seconds, three hands were raised in the air. There had been no rushing as each girl had carefully loaded five rounds into their previously ejected magazines.

"Err, Mindy?" Harper piped up. "Who's the guy on the target?"

Each target was a full colour, full scale, face on body form.

"Oh, that's a good friend of mine – Dave and I find that him being the target improves our aim. His name was Frank D'Amico."

"Oh – was he a bad guy?" Naomi asked.

"The worst," Mindy stated.

"Dead?" Kaitlin asked.

"Yes."

"Did you kill him?"

"No. Dave did – with a bazooka."

Three young heads and one older one snapped around and said in unison, "A *bazooka*?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Ladies, please insert your magazine, keeping your weapon pointed down range at all times and ensure that you are using the fitted safety devices," Joshua intoned as he watched the girls intently. "Five rounds . . . in your own time . . . commence firing!"

..._...

Each girl took up their preferred firing stance with their pistols pointed down the range. Naomi appeared to favour 'The Fighting Stance', while her younger cousin used the simpler 'Weaver Stance'. Harper stood facing the wall to her left, her right arm elevated horizontally and her right hand pointing at the target, her feet wide apart. She expertly controlled the recoil as she aimed and squeezed off five shots before the slide of her pistol locked back on an empty magazine. The two cousins were equally expert, although Kaitlin was a way behind the older girls but the quality of her shooting was high.

"Cease firing! Clear all weapons!" Joshua ordered and the girls did exactly that, clearing their weapons and placing them down in front of them with their hands in clear sight.

The targets came down the range on runners and stopped before each firer. Mindy walked behind each girl and checked the target. Kaitlin's shots were spaced out but all five were on the target and had scored.

"Well done, Kaitlin, we need to work on your spacing."

Next, was Naomi. Her target grouping was closer together and accurate. All five rounds were in the target's chest area.

"Nice grouping, Naomi."

Harper was last. Mindy grinned as she saw all five rounds, tightly grouped . . . in the man's groin.

"Nasty!" Joshua commented and everybody laughed.

"You appear to have issues, Harper, but your shooting is spot on!" Mindy commented as the girl blushed.

Mindy allowed the girls to shoot for another half-hour. The girls enjoyed themselves greatly and both Keira and Sarah got in a few magazines each. Both were qualified on pistols as per their Royal Navy training. The two Royal Navy officers were both trained in the use of the Glock 17 Gen4 pistol and both shot with the Glock very well.

One all were finished on the range, everybody retired to the Galley for some much-needed sustenance.

The Galley

"Why do the girls revere you so much, Stephanie?"

The ten-year-old looked up at Keira and smiled darkly.

"When I was eight, I killed a twelve-year-old girl in the shower. We were both naked at the time. She attacked *me* – so I killed her. The establishment rewarded me by giving me my codename early. Then I kind of left the program – I was marked as a traitor and marked for death. Saoirse? She was intended to be my nemesis. She tried to kill me three times. How she failed, I will *never* know?"

"You were too good for me, Steph," Saoirse chipped in.

"You're friends?" Keira asked slightly incredulously.

"We have to be. There's not many like us – Naomi, Kaitlin, and Harper; they have each other and I have Saoirse. Behind Mum and Dad, and my brother and sister, she's the most important person in my life."

Saoirse blushed at the compliment.

"I'm struggling to understand what all you girls went through. I just can't imagine the hardships . . ." Keira said with a pained expression.

"Thanks to Mindy and her team, that is all history. We can try and get back to a normal life. Only, that isn't possible. We are all damaged and we all have certain . . . urges, I suppose . . . that need to be fulfilled," Stephanie explained. "Being a vigilante helps to focus our skills down the correct track; using those skills for good, rather than for bad as was originally intended."

"I understand that Harper will never go back to the way she used to be before. But are there any chances of her going crazy; I understand Kaitlin went a little bit nuts one evening, back in Scotland."

Kaitlin growled and scowled as Cassie laughed.

"That's one way to put it!" she replied. "Kaitlin, just like the other girls, needed an outlet for her pent-up energy and rage. We never realised until Kaitlin wrecked that Police BMW. That was why we looked to arrange this visit. We had hoped that the girls could lead normal-ish lives, but that did not seem to be on the books, so we decided to show them *Vengeance* and *Fusion*."

"This is a kind of interview, I suppose," Mindy said as she looked at the three girls and Keira. "From what I have seen, so far, you three are perfect. But . . ."

"But?" Kaitlin asked.

"It is voluntary. Nobody can force any of you to risk your lives as vigilantes. However, there are rules to being a *Vengeance* or *Fusion* vigilante. You break the rules, or you ignore them, people die. Do you understand that?"

The three girls nodded seriously.

"How about some fun?" Mindy finished.

***Chapter 288*: The Bunker**

Saturday, 18th June
Mid-afternoon

Safehouse F

As the three girls filed out and headed down to the mat, I was talking with Keira when I was interrupted by a voice.

"Mommy!"

I looked up in surprise to see it was Stephanie – she was faking an appalling American accent. I knew that she was perfectly capable of producing a very convincing accent when required – she would often mimic Anne-Marie, much to the younger girl's annoyance.

"Could we have a *Predator* sleep over, please?"

"That sounds like a disaster waiting to happen!" I commented.

Stephanie grinned.

"I want to spend some time with the girls."

"Only 'cause they worship Psyche!" Saoirse commented.

"They do not!"

"Stephanie, your head has swelled along with your ego, ever since they arrived."

"It has not!"

"Stephanie, I know you. I know everything about you," Saoirse went on. "I know that you love the attention . . . you know something, Steph? You are so much like Mindy that you really could be her daughter."

Stephanie beamed with pride at the compliment and I had to admit that I was beaming too.

The Mat

"What 'fun' are we going to have?" Naomi asked.

"I suppose you could all try out my new *Fusion* Training Centre," I mused.

"What's that?" Stephanie asked in surprise.

"Something that the senior staff have been cooking up," Mindy commented with a sly grin towards Chloe.

"Where is it?" Stephanie continued.

"Saoirse will show you."

"She knows and I don't?" Stephanie bristled.

"I wanted it to be a surprise, Steph," I replied evenly.

"Phase 3!" Saoirse reminded her tetchy friend and the younger girls all snickered.

"One of these days, SD . . ." Stephanie warned and the older Predator just smirked.

"Steph, please take the three Brits with you. Get them changed and equipped for their baptism of fire," I ordered.

Stephanie smiled and she led the girls over to the changing rooms where she found Lauren and Megan awaiting them.

"Okay, girls," Megan announced. "Strip out of them clothes and we'll dress you for battle."

..._...

Forty minutes later, the four *Predators* reappeared from the changing rooms.

Each of the four girls was equipped with a flak jacket, integrated communications, an ASP, and a pistol loaded with blank rounds plus several spare magazines. The three younger girls each wore a plain mask while Stephanie wore her own, *Psyche*, mask.

The girls were led across the Safehouse towards the opposite corner, then through the shield and into the Engineering Store. They passed through a large steel hatchway and then down a long concrete corridor.

"Where, are we being taken?" Kaitlin asked.

"I dread to think," Stephanie complained.

Finally, they were stopped before a hatch and they found Abby waiting for them. She opened the hatch and waved them through.

"Welcome!" Abby grinned. "Welcome to Hit Girl's House of Horrors!"

Fusion Training Center

Beyond the hatch, they found a large space with a comfortable seating and a briefing area.

Mindy was there to greet them.

"Please sit down, girls, and you can remove your masks – you too, Steph. Harper, you will be team leader with Stephanie as your number two. Stephanie will stop you if anything dangerous occurs and you will defer to her in that situation, *is that understood?*"

"Yes, Mindy."

"I do so hate having to dispose of bodies . . ."

Kaitlin grinned.

"Who are we fighting and what is the mission?" she asked.

"This is not training," Mindy replied. "This is just to see what you can really do as a team. Show off your skills, if you like. Kaitlin, I know that you are younger and less experienced so defer to the other girls and enjoy yourself. I will not tell you what is ahead – I want to see how you respond to the unexpected. You will be attacked; I can promise you that. Now go and have some fun, girls!"

..._...

The four girls pulled on their masks and Mindy pointed them towards a red hatchway. Just before they passed through the door, Stephanie pulled the three girls to one side.

"A word of warning to each of you. Remember who set this place up and who is pulling the strings."

"It's just for fun, isn't it?" Kaitlin asked innocently.

Stephanie laughed sardonically.

"Hit Girl's idea of fun is very different than what even us *Predators* see as fun!" Stephanie pointed out.

"Such as . . ." Naomi hinted.

"Live bombs during training, for one . . . I also ended up stark naked during one little episode . . ."

"You gotta tell us *that* story!" Harper chuckled.

"If we're still alive after Hit Girl's had her fun, then I'll tell you tonight."

Harper breathed in deeply before she gave her first order of the day.

"Form up – keep in touch and cover each other's backs. Prowl, take point."

The four girls pulled out their pistols and stood in line with Prowl at the front of the line, Polaris behind, followed by Glide, and then Psyche. Prowl heaved open the door and the four girls moved into the dark void that was Hit Girl's personal hell . . .

Fusion Training Center Control Room

Once the four girls had vanished through the red hatch, Keira, Sarah, and Chloe appeared.

"Come and see what a *Predator* can really do, Keira. Sarah, come and see your sister in action."

Mindy led them through a secured hatch which required a swipe card to open. Inside was a large room with an array of large monitors. Abby was seated at a control console off to the right-hand side of the room.

"The training zone is spread over two levels and eighteen compartments. Every compartment is different depending on the scenario. We can have darkness, dazzling light, heat, cold . . . even rain. There are trap-doors, concealed hatch, hidden passageways. 'Enemy' can appear and disappear at will and we can raise hell wherever we wish," Mindy explained. "We call it 'The Bunker'."

"Is it dangerous?" Sarah asked as she watched the four girls moving through almost total darkness on a screen before her.

"Oh, yes – most definitely," Mindy replied with an evil grin.

Sarah grimaced, as did Keira.

The Bunker

"I don't like this . . ."

"Where's your fucking balls, Glide?" Polaris growled.

"I left them in my locker," Glide replied and Prowl giggled.

"Focus, people!" Psyche suggested.

The corridor they were in was a hundred yards long and bathed in dull green illumination. They kept a good eye ahead and behind, especially Psyche; she knew how much of an evil bitch Hit Girl was . . .

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The four girls ran for their lives as the three loud bangs were set off a few yards behind them filling the corridor with an opaque smoke. At the end of the corridor, to their left, they found a large steel hatch which was partially open. Ahead was a concrete wall. Prowl raised her left hand which was clenched in a fist – 'STOP!'. The other three girls stopped while Psyche covered their rear with her pistol pointing into the smoke which worked its way towards them. Prowl examined the hatch carefully for any sign of trip wires or explosives. Prowl turned to Polaris and nodded that all was clear. Polaris passed that all was clear and they began to move through the hatch.

First Prowl, then Polaris were through. Just as Glide put a foot through, Prowl screamed out as somebody grabbed her left arm and yanked her into the shadows.

Polaris turned towards her friend and yelled out a warning to the rest of her team.

A shape came out of the darkness towards her and Polaris simply squeezed the trigger of her pistol twice and the 'shape' dropped to the ground. In the flashes of her gunshots, Prowl could be seen on the floor clambering back to her feet.

"You okay?" Polaris asked as she kicked the 'dead' body and elicited a yell of pain.

"I'm still alive no thanks to fuck face down there!" Prowl retorted as she purposefully stepped on the same 'dead' body.

Fusion Training Center Control Room

"I'd stay down a bit longer, Jackal!"

"Not fucking funny, Hit Bitch – I'm gonna kill that fucking Polaris!" Jackal growled with humour in his voice.

"Yay!" Keira grinned as he sister rapidly took charge of the team and formed them back up again.

"First blood to Polaris," Hal announced from the console.

As Keira watched the screens, the four *Predators* moved deeper into the facility. The first door to the left was locked but they paused as they found a set of double doors blocking their progress forward.

"Hold position, Petra!" Hit Girl ordered with a smirk. "They're just on the other side of the door . . ."

"What's Psyche found?" Sarah asked as the vigilante picked something up off the ground. "Is that s shotgun?"

"Mossberg 400 Tactical – Chainsaw," Hit Girl advised. "Should take the hinges off if she's careful. Only two breaching rounds are loaded."

"Did you just say breaching rounds?" Petra demanded.

"I'd keep that pretty little head down, Petra!" Hal suggested as Psyche raised the shotgun and blew out the top hinge and then did the same to the lower hinge.

The heavy door fell on top of Petra who yelled obscenities to anybody who would listen, "I fucking hate you, Hit Girl!"

Prowl led the team onwards as Psyche dropped the empty shotgun beside the hapless Petra.

The Bunker

The lights in the corridor flickered in an apparently random sequence of flashes.

The corridor was long and dark in places. While Prowl kept an eye open on the forbidding corridor ahead, Polaris turned her attentions to the next set of double doors to the left. The doors were partially ajar and the nine-year-old took her time to peer through into the room beyond. It was a dormitory with about ten beds, five to a side. The lights flickered just as they were in the corridor outside.

"I go in, followed by Psyche and Glide," Polaris ordered and she received nods in response.

Polaris turned back to the trapped Petra who was playing 'dead'. Polaris spied a pair of flashbangs on the vigilante's belt which she quickly appropriated. She was not falling for another of Hit Girl's traps . . .

"Fire in the hole!" Polaris hissed as she pulled a pin and threw one of the elongated canisters into the dormitory. Everybody turned away and hid their eyes.

There was a loud bang and a bright flash of white light.

"Go!"

Polaris pushed through the doors followed by Psyche and Glide. As they passed the second pair of beds, the first pair seemed to rise into the air as they were thrown to one side and two dark forms stepped out and span a pair of wooden jō-staffs around in a decidedly disconcerting manner.

..._...

Polaris deployed her ASP and immediately went on the offensive attacking the form to her left. Psyche and Glide both

followed suit with their own ASPs. They attacked the girl to the right just as a yell was heard in the corridor outside and Prowl was attacked by another armoured form armed with a bokken. All four Predators were fighting as hard as they could to defeat the unexpected attacks that had come out of the darkness.

Out in the corridor, alone, Prowl felt no fear as she deployed her ASP and fended off the attack from the unknown form. To Prowl, it was business, as she took in her attacker's movements and examined her skill level. The attacker was not a professional fighter by any means, maybe an early-level Phase 1 equivalent. Prowl quickly gauged her attacker and thrust forwards.

Back in the dormitory, Glide was having the time of her life. So what, if her attacker was over a foot taller than her and armed with a five-foot weapon longer than she was tall; she used her speed and agility to attack with the ASP and more than once she heard a yell of pain from the attacker. Psyche dodged around the fleeting Glide to strike against the unknown assailant. Psyche was *not* happy; who were these two, they were not members of *Fusion*. Where'd the bloody hell did they come from; 1-800-rent-a-vigilante? Whatever . . . they were going down!

Polaris was letting everything out as she fought her attacker single-handed. Her ASP flashed in the lights and struck hard and with meaning. Polaris ducked to avoid the equally painful jō-staff as it was wielded with extreme skill. Who the heck was the person behind the jō-staff; they were damn good! The fight was turning in Polaris' favour but then, out of nowhere, there was a flash of light and smoke spread throughout the dormitory.

"Sound off!" Polaris ordered.

"Prowl intact and out of contact!"

"Glide intact and out of contact!"

"Psyche confused but out of contact . . ."

As the smoke dissipated the Predators were very much alone.

Fusion Training Center Control Room

"This fucking sucks!" Glide yelled out.

"Little girls had enough, yet?" Hit Girl said calmly into the microphone.

"Just wait till I get my hands on you, you fucking . . ." Glide began before Prowl put a hand over the younger girl's mouth.

"Eat this, Hit Girl!" Polaris growled as she raised a single finger into the air. "I'm going to enjoy shoving this ASP up your tight dripping . . ."

"Time to move!" Psyche suggested loudly and the four girls ran out of the dormitory.

"Colourful . . ." Keira mused as Hit Girl laughed out loud.

"Now for the good part, Sarah . . ." Hit Girl mused. "The *Predator's* Nemesis awaits them . . ."

..._...

The four girls moved together down the corridor into the darkness; their pistols raised before them, the ASPs stowed.

"Come hither, little *Predators* . . . I'm going to slice you and I'm going to fuck you up . . ."

A dark shadow emerged into the light ahead. The light reflected on the dull yellow highlights while the dark grey armour blended into the darkness. The girls began to open fire with their pistols but the armoured assassin simply flipped sideways into a doorway. The girls feverishly reloaded and they each turned their attentions to a door on their right. The room was in darkness.

"Come hither, little *Predators* . . . I'm gonna make you run . . . I'm gonna show how fucking useless you pussy *Predators* are . . ."

Glide bolted forwards as the anger surged within her.

"No!" Polaris yelled out but to no avail.

The remaining members of the team ran after their comrade-in-arms; they had no choice.

..._...

It all began to go wrong – for the *Predators* . . .

Glide was kicked down and she fell backwards into some chairs as Nemesis emerged from the darkness. She yelled out, shocked that she had been put down so easily. Prowl covered for Glide as Psyche pulled the fallen *Predator* to her feet. Prowl kicked and punched for all she was worth. Hardly any strikes got through. The longer arms of Nemesis allowed her to strike but keep the younger girls at arms-length. Nemesis barely noticed Polaris outflanking her to the right, an ASP raised in each hand.

Nemesis kicked Prowl away and she drew a long, thin, bokken from her back. Polaris struck with both ASPs and Nemesis skilfully deflected the nine-year-old Phase 2 *Predator*. Psyche joined the action and attacked with her own ASP. Nemesis drew a shorter bokken from her left boot and fended off the strike before she kicked Polaris into Psyche and both went down hard and collided with a group of tables and chairs. Prowl and Glide came in hard and together, they worked as a team, attacking and dodging as they jumped over the tables and chairs, using them to good effect as they went.

Prowl heaved a chair at Nemesis who smashed it to one side with her armoured gauntlet. Glide made a good effort to distract Nemesis while Prowl went in hard and fast striking at Nemesis in every way that she could. The nine-year-old landed strike after strike on the nineteen-year-old vigilante as Glide kept moving in and out of Nemesis' reach. Then Nemesis struck out and she kicked Prowl and Glide to the floor. Polaris and Psyche came in for an attack which Nemesis dodged . . . and then she was gone only to be replaced by a hissing voice from the corridor.

"Oh, little *Predators* . . . the bitch has arrived to bring about the endgame . . ."

The Bunker

Psyche groaned – it *had* to be Hit Girl!

Polaris reassembled her team and after a brief check for injuries, they moved off but they paused at the door to the passageway. Prowl used a mirror from her jacket to peer down the passageway to the right. A single shape was visible.

"The little *Predators* are scared . . ." the electronically enhanced voice taunted.

"Fuck this!" Polaris growled. "Everybody ready?"

"Let's get the fucking bitch!" Glide responded.

"Ready?" Psyche enquired.

"Let's do it!" Prowl finished.

Fusion Training Center Control Room

The four girls exploded out of the doorway mere seconds after Polaris threw the remaining flash-bang into the passageway.

Once the camera had readjusted from the bright flash, the *Predators* were seen to be advancing on the single armoured vigilante who stood alone in the corridor. The individual was not tall and she had her arms crossed over her chest with the armoured gauntlets resting on her shoulder-blades. Hal manipulated the lighting in the corridor to illuminate the upper half of the vigilante's body. There was a brief flash as the bright lights reflected off two triple sets of lethal-looking claws which deployed from either gauntlet.

"Fuck!" Psyche was heard to growl. "*Wildcat!*"

"Isn't that dangerous – her using those claws?" Sarah asked with a worried voice.

"Nah," Hal responded. "Wildcat is using her training gauntlets – not that the other girls have any idea; they're brand new!"

Wildcat stood her ground as the *Predators* advanced.

Polaris

I was a little scared.

Wildcat had a reputation. Good or bad? That depended on whether or not you were her friend or an enemy. Those claws looked lethal and I was surprised that Hit Girl allowed them to be used in training – but Psyche had warned us of Hit Girl's 'training' ideas.

"Psyche – take Glide and attack from the left. Prowl and I will come from the right."

"Copy that!" came the three responses.

"Time for some kitty behaviour training!" I growled out loud as I approached.

"Time for little pussy *Predators* to be put in their fucking places before they hurt themselves!" Wildcat taunted.

With a yell, I bolted forwards and jumped to the right. I planted my right foot onto the corridor wall and pushed off. I swung past Wildcat and took my ASP across her left shoulder blade. Prowl struck her ASP into Wildcat's left lower arm as she moved her claws to intercept. Simultaneously, Psyche and Glide attacked from the left. Glide used her small size to slide between Wildcat's legs and strike from the rear with her ASP. She struck the insides of both thighs plus an additional swipe at a more sensitive region.

Wildcat yelled out – not from pain; she was sufficiently armoured where it mattered but she was incensed that the littlest *Predator* would attack her snatch.

Psyche

"Good shot, Glide!" I yelled out as I saw the third strike hit home.

The kitty was not amused and the language was bordering on that which would make Hit Girl blush. I took my ASP across Wildcat's right shoulder blade and kicked my knee into her right side. The lethal claws whipped past my eyes as Wildcat struck out at me but then her right elbow shoved me into the wall and I collapsed to the ground.

I heard a scream and I saw Glide kicked to one side and then a double scream as Prowl landed on top of Glide. I ran to pull the two girls back to their feet as Polaris covered but she was quickly flipped over onto her back and brought down hard. We moved away to regroup while Wildcat just stood her ground and watched.

I nodded at Polaris, Prowl, and Glide. We all ran forwards with Polaris and me in front. We had just started to run towards Wildcat when to my surprise, Wildcat began to charge *us!*

Glide

Wildcat was charging and I had a feeling that she was pissed – might have been something to do with me taking the ASP across her twat . . . just maybe.

Polaris and Psyche were just feet from the charging Wildcat when the feline vigilante dived over us all – I was stunned and my awe pretty much killed me as Wildcat grabbed me and 'blew my brains out across the corridor' with her pistol.

"*Glide is dead!*" came a voice from the Control Room.

"Fuck!" I growled as I 'played dead'.

Prowl

My cousin had just been killed and I outlived her by about forty-five seconds as Wildcat took the claws of her left hand across my throat.

I thought I was a gonna for real, but the claws were a tough rubber and not their usual titanium. Nonetheless, I 'died'.

"Prowl is dead!"

Fusion Training Center Control Room

"Two down, two to go . . .," Hit Girl chuckled.

As Sarah and Keira watched the screens in stunned silence, Wildcat expertly backflipped away from Psyche and Polaris.

"Her signature move," Hit Girl commented.

"Nice!" Keira replied.

Before either Psyche or Polaris could respond, two dark shapes emerged from nowhere and the throats of both *Predators* were 'cut' from behind.

"Thank you – the training session is over," Hit Girl called over the comms. "All *Predators* please report back to the start."

..._...

Psyche and Polaris felt the 'knives' removed from their necks and they turned to find an empty corridor.

"What the fuck?" Polaris growled.

"Told you this place was fucking nuts!" Psyche chuckled.

"It was fun . . ." Glide commented.

"I'm gonna be sore in a few hours . . ." Prowl added.

A minute later, the four *Predators* stood in the darkness near to the start of The Bunker and they pulled off their masks. There were four bright flashes and then four gunshots rang out and the four girls fell backwards onto the floor. They all sat up rubbing their chests and looking very annoyed. Mindy, Keira, Sarah, and Cassie, all lowered their pistols and smirked at the girls.

"That was for the annoying behaviour on the plane!" Keira commented with a smile for her sister.

"Not fair!" Harper muttered as she glared daggers at her big sister.

"What have I ever done to any of you?" Kaitlin pouted as she stood up.

"You opened your mouth!" Naomi laughed. "That was fun . . . can we do it again?"

"I hate you, Mum!" Stephanie growled from the floor.

"I did nothing," Mindy said sweetly and Stephanie scowled.

Bang!

Stephanie yelled out as another bullet hit her armour. Mindy casually blew away the muzzle smoke from her pistol.

..._...

As the four girls were helped to their feet, two more individuals entered the room. Both were tall and masked. They wore dark grey body armour and each had a pistol in a holster plus a wooden jō-staff in their left hands. The two new

arrivals pulled off their masks to reveal the smirking faces of two near identical teenaged girls.

"Everybody, please meet Sky and Chrissy, otherwise known as Venom and Bane," Mindy explained. "Venom and Bane were both Phase 3 *Predators*."

"Hi," the four girls said together.

"Hi – you all fought well," Sky offered with a friendly smile.

"Well fought, Psyche; we've heard a lot about you," Chrissy smiled.

"Well fought the both of you," Stephanie replied with a grin. "Where'd you both come from, anyway?"

"A story for later, Steph," Mindy replied. "Let's get cleaned up and we can debrief over some food."

"I'm starving!" Harper complained.

"What's new!" Keira grunted.

***Chapter 289*: The Killing Room**

Saturday, 18th June, 2016
Early evening

Safehouse F
The Changing Room

"That was fun, but this bruise sucks!" Kaitlin moaned as she examined her chest while she enjoyed the soothing hot water of the shower.

"I've got two of the sodding things!" Stephanie chipped in from another shower.

"No pain no gain," Harper offered reasonably from her shower.

"I'll agree with that," Naomi agreed as she washed the shampoo from her hair and looked down at her own bruised chest.

"I think you all did very well," Megan commented as she got changed out of her combat suit. "I hope I didn't hurt any of you . . ."

"We're fine," Stephanie replied with a chuckle. "Us *Predators* are tougher than you think."

"Damn straight!" Kaitlin agreed and everybody laughed.

"Well done, girls!" Mindy announced as everybody gathered for the debrief.

The three *Vengeance* girls appeared very happy with themselves, as was the lone *Fusion* girl. Seated behind them, Megan, Chrissy, Sky, Cassie, and Hailee all smirked.

"The four of you got your asses kicked but we were unfair in our methods. Did you each learn something, today?"

"We learnt that you're a conniving bitch!" Harper announced.

"Harper!" Keira growled.

"Sorry," Harper offered.

"Don't be," Mindy replied with a laugh. "I am what I am!"

"Tell me about it!" Stephanie muttered to general laughter.

"I threw real vigilantes at you: Jackal, Petra, Venom, Bane, Nemesis, Wildcat – they all enjoyed having some fun . . ."

"Until somebody dropped a damn door on me!" Hailee grunted.

"It was fun," Stephanie laughed. "Thanks for the flash-bangs!"

"I could have taken you down, Wildcat," Naomi commented smugly.

"Never in a million years!" Megan sneered back.

"A standard *Predator* tactic – it's called a Pyrrhic Victory; the idea is to inflict devastating damage on the victor which then turns victory into instant defeat," Naomi explained and Megan winced. "Drop a frag as you go down . . ."

"She's correct," Stephanie confirmed. "Taught towards the end of Phase 1."

"Not bad, Naomi – now," Mindy went on. "I've been talking to the *Vengeance* Management . . . and they have seen fit to expand their ranks. There will be a lot of training ahead, girls – you want in?"

The grins on the faces of the three young girls gave their answer. Cameron and Natasha both stood up and moved to stand next to Mindy.

"Crimson and Drift, please, the floor is yours," Mindy finished.

..._...

"Let's start with Glide – front and centre!"

Kaitlin looked a little worried for a second before she sprang up and stood before the two Vengeance commanders. Crimson grinned as she handed over a small card to the grinning girl. The card was a pale blue with a pair of narrow red stripes across the top-right and top-left corners. In the centre, was the *Vengeance* symbol, a pair of sabres with the points together and the hilts angled out to form the **V** of *Vengeance*. A QR code featured in the bottom-left corner along with a code along the top and right side. The top-left corner of the card bore a single gold stripe with a red border as worn by a Royal Marines Commando Lance Corporal. In the bottom-right corner, there was a name: **GLIDE**.

"Welcome to *Vengeance*, Trainee Operator Glide."

The eight-year-old blushed furiously and she giggled before she ran back to her seat where Stephanie examined the access card.

"Prowl! Front and centre!"

Naomi was blushing before she even reached Crimson who handed her an almost identical card but for the name in the bottom-right corner: **PROWL**.

"Welcome to *Vengeance*, Trainee Operator Prowl."

The girl flushed bright red but she smiled enormously as she also ran back to sit next to her cousin where they instantly compared their access cards and Harper began to fidget badly.

"Polaris! Front and centre!"

Harper jumped up and ran forwards, her face set in an enormous shit-eating grin. The card which Crimson proffered differed from that of the other two girls. Instead of the single stripe, a single 'pip' was present in the top-left corner. Her name was present in the bottom-right: **POLARIS**.

"Welcome to *Vengeance*, Senior Trainee Operator Polaris."

Kaitlin cheered which caused Harper to blush a bright pink as she jogged over to sit with her sister who gave her little sister a big hug.

"Finally – Scorpion! Front and centre!"

Keira almost jumped as her name was called out.

Her expression said, 'Me?'

Mindy nodded and with a friendly shove from Harper, Keira stood up and walked over to Cameron who held another blue card. This card bore three vertical pips at the top-right corner, plus her name: **SCORPION**, at the bottom right. However, it also bore a set of naval-aviator wings above her name.

"Welcome to *Vengeance*, Operator Scorpion."

Harper screamed louder than the rest put together as her sister blushed a bright red.

Safehouse F ***Level 2***

After we had all eaten, Harper came up to me.

"Hi, Harper, how you doing?"

"Thank you, Mindy, for everything. I have had the most amazing couple of days and I know that I have many more ahead of me."

"I enjoyed seeing what you girls could do and I am very pleased that I could help in giving each of you a new life. I know what it is like to have skills that take over your senses and emotions. It is very hard."

"Mindy . . . do you know what happened to my Mum and Dad?"

..._...

I wished so badly that Harper had not asked that question but no matter what I thought about it, I could not lie to the girl. I looked over the railing and I saw the two girls I was looking for talking together below.

"Saoirse! Stephanie! Up here, please."

The two girls quickly ran up the nearest set of steel stairs and skidded to a halt before Harper and me. Saoirse gave me a strange look – I had no idea what my expression was, but it was probably full of sorrow; that was how I felt.

Both Saoirse and Stephanie were worried by the expression on Mindy's face.

"Harper has asked if I know what happened to her parents," Mindy explained simply.

The colour drained from Stephanie's face, as it did from Saoirse's. Both looked appalled by the very thought – but both knew that it had to be done.

"We both found out in the most horrific way possible," Stephanie said. "Which ever way Harper finds out, will be bad, but maybe we can limit this."

Mindy looked at her two *Predators* and she felt so much compassion for the two girls. Yes, she had lost her parents, just as they had. Only Mindy had never known her mother, but she had been there when her daddy had been killed. She knew what it was like to have lost both parents, but she had no idea what it was like to know that you had killed both of them in cold blood.

"What's going on?" Keira asked as she came up to the little group.

..._...

Mindy was struggling with how her day had suddenly changed. How did you explain to a person that the person they loved; their sister, killed the only two other people in life that you loved even more?

"Harper has asked if I know how your parents died . . . I do. It is truly horrifying and that is coming from me, Hit Girl; I find it horrifying and disturbing! That should give you an idea that what happened was bad. Now, I have never told my own daughter this, let alone Saoirse. I hoped it would never come up. Saoirse, Stephanie? The CIA recorded those deaths, each and every time. Marty discovered the recordings about a month ago. I apologise for not telling you both, but I hated Stephanie going through that event herself, the first time, and the same with Saoirse."

"I never want to see that," Stephanie said quietly and Saoirse nodded in agreement. "But I think Harper should. She has no idea what happened and she needs to know . . . and so does Keira."

"She's right," Saoirse admitted as she smiled at Stephanie. "We'll both be there for Harper . . . and for Keira."

Stephanie nodded as Mindy turned to Keira.

"I can't help you with this, but these two can. Keira, I want you to promise me one thing – you will not judge."

"I . . . okay . . ." Keira said quietly as Mindy led everybody into the Briefing Room.

"Lock it up!" Mindy shouted down to the Control Centre and Abby nodded.

Several seconds later, a steel shutter descended to shut off all access to the Briefing Room and ensure complete and total privacy.

The Film

The film began by showing an empty room.

The room was small but very stark. It looked like an examination room in just about any hospital. Against one wall was one of those wheeled hospital beds. In the middle of the room was a metal desk with a computer workstation sitting atop it. Over in the farthest corner, there were two occupied chairs; two adults sat on them, a male and a female.

The door to the room was both seen and heard to open and two people entered the room. One was a middle-aged woman; she was tall, thin, and horse-faced with greying dark hair. The other was a very young, dark-haired girl of maybe eight-years-old. The girl looked around as she took in her surroundings . . . it was Harper! The woman began to speak in a throaty voice with a British accent.

"In this program, you will save the lives of our citizens . . ."

It was a lecture about patriotism, national pride, and saving lives. There was much emphasis on American and British lives – no other nationalities. The woman would add extra British emphasis, presumably because of Harper's nationality.

"As part of this program, you will need to sacrifice your old life . . ."

The Briefing Room

Harper was physically shaking as she watched the scene unfold before her.

"I have no memory of that – none, none at all . . ."

"I do. I remember my own moment in that room – you are not alone, Harper," Stephanie said quietly as she sat down beside the younger girl.

The Film

The image changed to show another room, this one tiled on walls and floor with a large drain to one side. Both Stephanie and Saoirse flinched involuntarily. In the centre of the room was a large steel tank and it was full of water. Harper was hauled into the room and she was stripped of all her clothing but her knickers.

The Briefing Room

Keira screamed as Harper was pushed bodily into the tank of water, face down, by two older girls. Harper could be seen to struggle violently but she had no chance against those holding her down.

"It was so cold . . .," Harper said unbidden. "I had never felt so cold – not ever. The shock of immersion was immense and I fought against those that held me under the water. After what felt like minutes but which had to be only seconds, I was pulled up to receive air . . . then I was plunged under again – I tried to scream and I fought."

Harper could be heard screaming and retching as she was hauled out of the water. The terror in her scream was obvious in the seconds before she was shoved under again . . . and again . . . and again.

The Film

We were back in the room with the two people in the corner.

It was the same rhetoric from the woman, the same shit.

"In this program, you will save the lives of our citizens . . ."

The same lecture about patriotism, national pride, and saving lives.

"As part of this program, you will need to sacrifice your old life . . ."

..._...

The film would cut to other scenes, all showing Harper being all but tortured. She was seen screaming in a cell; she

was in obvious distress as she covered her ears and hugged a corner. Then came the water tank again, then the woman and her lecture, then the cell . . .

Finally, the sequence stopped back in the room with the two people in the corner.

"An asset's greatest weakness are those who know them. People who know you can tell others about you; therefore, they must be eliminated . . ."

The woman stepped forward and she stood before Harper. The woman's arm came up and in her hand, there was a pistol. It was a Heckler & Koch P30SK.

The Briefing Room

Harper was shaking uncontrollably and sobbing, so we took a short break. Keira took a moment to get a drink and she encouraged Harper to do the same. Even Stephanie had gone white at what she was witnessing along with Saoirse who looked physically sick at what she was witnessing.

"I'm ready," Harper said weakly, several minutes later as she hung onto her sister with one hand and held Stephanie's hand with her other. "Let's get this over with."

The Film

"Take this weapon and eliminate those closest to you. When you have done so, you will leave here not as who you were, but as Harper Brown."

Without hesitation, Harper took the weapon from the woman, grip first. She hefted the pistol and she brought it up in two hands. She aimed for the two adults seated in the corner.

The Briefing Room

"It was easy to do; it just felt natural. The pistol felt right in my hand. Then, two gentle squeezes of the trigger and as the smoke from the gunshots was sucked away by the air-conditioning and the sound of the gunshots faded – two bodies lay dead before me . . . my family was dead."

We all looked at Harper as she spoke.

"The doctor walked over to them, she pulled the hoods from the heads of their slumped bodies. I had shot both of them in the head; they were instant, clean kills . . . they were my first – not that I remembered killing them."

Harper paused and her face took on a look of horror.

"I killed our parents," she whispered.

Keira was stunned – just as much as Harper.

What had she just witnessed – a double murder?

Might it have been a triple murder had she herself been there?

Uncontrolled emotions began to bubble up from deep within Keira. There was the shock. The horror. The anger. The hate. The disappointment. The sorrow. The resentment. The compassion. Then the horror again. How could Harper . . . Harper looked wretched as she looked up at her sister, her expression almost pleading as she sobbed.

"Please don't send me away . . . I didn't know what I was doing . . . I . . . please don't send me away . . ."

Keira smiled down at her little sister and she wrapped her arms around the nine-year-old and pulled her close. She then looked directly into her little sister's dark brown eyes. The tears continued to stream down Keira's face unimpeded as she spoke.

"I love you more than anything, Harper. I would never send you away; you are all I have. You had no idea what you

were doing. You were brain-washed into that act. That was not you. That was not my Harper. Yes, I am appalled by what you did; but I don't blame you . . . I never will."

"You really mean that?" Harper sobbed.

"Of course, I do; you are my little sister and we will always be together, come hell or high water."

"I love you so much, Keira, and I am so happy we are back together."

"You coming back to me was my greatest wish in the whole world, Harper."

..._...

As everybody, but Keira and Harper, left the Briefing Room, Naomi and Kaitlin came running up.

"Stop!" Mindy ordered.

"What's wrong with Harper?" Naomi demanded.

"She needs to spend some alone time with her sister. Please leave them alone. Neither of you are to push her for information. Do not ask what went on in there. Harper will tell you when, and if, she feels the time is right. If I find out that you've nagged her about it – I will personally fly over to Scotland and take you both to task. Do you understand me?"

The two young girls were stunned at Mindy's tone, however, they both nodded in the affirmative as they felt a distinct chill creep up their backbones.

That night

Glenview

Against my better judgement, I allowed the sleepover.

To be honest it was against all judgment. I had to *insane* to allow it – maybe I was *insane*! Danny appeared after ten minutes.

"It's horrible!" he grimaced as he cuddled in with me on the sofa.

"What's up, champ?" Dave asked.

"Girls!"

I laughed.

"What've they done, now?"

"They tried to make me punch Megan."

"Well, why didn't you?" I asked, intrigued.

"She said she'd cut off my, you know..."

I giggled – Danny was *not* amused!

"Not funny . . ." Danny growled.

"They're just having a bit of fun," Dave assured his son.

"I'm a little worried about what 'fun' seven Predators, an eight-year-old, and an eleven-year-old, could be having!" I groaned.

The sleepover consisted of Stephanie, Naomi, Kaitlin, Harper, Saoirse, Sky, Chrissy, Megan, and Anne-Marie.

"So many girls is *not* good!" Dave chuckled.

"Tell me about it!" Danny grimaced.

I thought for a few moments.

"I'm gonna go get some Tasers . . ."

..._...

Earlier that evening, I had spoken with Cassie and Sarah. I explained what Harper had asked. Cassie had been appalled. I explained about the film – Sarah looked physically sick at the thought.

"Do you have films of Naomi and Kaitlin – well, you know . . ." Cassie had asked.

"No – Marty hasn't found them . . . yet," I had replied. "Harper *will* say something eventually and I'm very worried about Kaitlin; she's only eight."

"I know," Cassie has said. "It has to come out at some stage."

..._...

After retrieving a pair of Tasers and several replacement cartridges, I handed a set to Dave and then I headed upstairs to the British Sector. The noise was . . . raucous, to say the least! I could hear yells . . . squeals . . . howls of pain . . . giggles . . . *'shows over motherfuckers!'* I rolled my eyes as I gently pushed open the door and . . . my view rotated violently and I found myself staring straight up at the ceiling with my back on the carpet.

"Hi, girls!"

Sky smirked down at me as she released hold of my right arm. Saoirse grinned sheepishly beside a giggling Anne-Marie.

"Hi, Mom!"

"What ya doing?" I asked casually.

"Defending the British Sector!" Stephanie chuckled.

"I knew this place was a bad idea," I growled.

"You are in our custody, Hit Girl, and you must comply . . ."

"Or what?" I demanded with an evil grin.

". . . Or I Taser your purple *arse!*" Megan announced as she aimed the Taser at me.

I muttered a few choice words that had Harper blushing with embarrassment and I felt myself hauled up and pushed onto the bed. I was allowed to sit up and then Saoirse smiled at me.

"We order you to answer some questions, Hit Girl; you make a mistake . . ."

"I'm itching to use this . . ." Megan grinned as she toted the Taser in her hands.

"Bring it on!" I growled.

The British Sector

"How long," Saoirse asked with a grin, "was it between you crushing on Dave and giving him a kiss?"

Mindy saw Stephanie roll her eyes and shake her head at her friend. Anne-Marie giggled as Mindy took a deep breath.

"Four years, 4 months and 23 days – give or take an hour or two . . ."

All the girls gasped.

"That long!" Harper exclaimed.

"I was going through a phase . . . a weird phase," Mindy replied.

"What was it like?" Megan asked.

Mindy chuckled at the memory and her mind drifted back two years and almost 10 tenths.

"It was my very first kiss . . . we had just stopped the Motherfucker and I was about to leave New York forever . . ."

...+...

"I'm leaving New York, Dave. I can't go home . . . I can't put Marcus in that position."

"Woah! He won't arrest you; you just saved the city."

"Yeah, well I also killed six guys with a cop's gun – vigilantes don't get a free pass."

"You can't go; people need you."

"They've got you, now."

"I'm not like you."

"You don't have to be a badass to be a superhero, Dave, you just have to be brave . . ."

...+...

"It was very wet . . . it was the most sensual thing I had ever done in my life. But right then, I owed Dave and I so wanted it to go further . . . but Dave belonged in New York – I did not."

Mindy had the rapt attention of every girl present. Megan had lowered the Taser and she was just as enthralled as the others.

"I left New York. I was alone. I had no one. My life had been stripped from me for a second time. The solitude was becoming unbearable. I thought I knew who I was. I was alone before, after Daddy died. But at least I had had Marcus to look after me and Dave to talk to. They both knew my history; what I was. That was the first time that my life had been stripped from me. I was constantly looking back, to try and find a way that might have stopped me having to leave New York, from having to leave Dave. I hated myself for saying it, but I missed Dave. The only thing that kept me going, was remembering that kiss; my first ever kiss. I felt warm, and more than a little tingly inside every time that I remembered that kiss."

Naomi and Kaitlin giggled but stopped as Megan glared at them.

"Thinking of Dave always made me smile. I thought of what could have happened between us if I had listened to him. Instead of telling him to go to hell. What if I had kissed him much earlier, instead of just pounding his ass into the mats of the Safehouse? The solitude was killing me, from the inside. I found myself in Ohio then four weeks after leaving New York, I had found myself an apartment in Chicago. Then, just one tiny miscalculation and my attempt at being a normal human being was shattered. I was running. I was scared. I was alone. I had nothing, but the clothes on my back . . . and the blood on my hands. My safety, my freedom; it had all been forsaken."

Hardly anybody was breathing – never had so many *Predators* been so quiet!

"I was reduced to the Chicago underworld. I lived off drug dealers: I used them as my personal ATM. But my grip on humanity was slipping from my grasp. I had never needed to control my humanity before; I had always had somebody – Daddy, Dave, Marcus. I was turning Feral and killing for enjoyment . . . I was turning fully into Hit Girl while Mindy Macready faded from existence."

"How did you . . .?" Stephanie asked.

"Thanks, in no small part, to Marty, my knight in shining armour came looking for me . . ."

"Dave!" Anne-Marie exploded.

"Exactly right, little one. Dave found me. Only it was not the meeting you might find in some gooey chick-flick. I think

my exact words when we first met were: 'What the fuck do you want? I don't need your fucking help, cunt!' . . ."

There were several intakes of astonished breath from around the bedroom.

"I sent him away . . . and I hated myself for it. Then I went and got myself shot. Dave found me, carried me back to my shithole of a room, and he tended to my wound. When I awoke, I tore into him again and I reiterated my previous comment."

Mindy flinched a bit at all the angry glares she was receiving from the assembled girls.

"Then Dave tore into me! I won't tell you what he said, but suffice to say, he got through to the bitch inside and . . . well, the rest is history and *very* personal! Needless to say, we all owe our lives to a guy who decided to pull on a green and yellow wetsuit then go out and fight crime on the streets of New York. Without him, I would be dead, another dead corpse on the streets of Chicago. None of what you see would ever have been created. *Urban Predator* would still exist and you all . . ."

". . . would be in hell," Sky finished darkly.

"We all owe our very existence to Kick-Ass," Saoirse summed up.

"I've never told that story until now. But now you all know there was a man named Dave Lizewski, and that he saved me, in every way that a person can be saved."

"Did you just quote *Titanic*," Chrissy asked with a smirk.

"Maybe . . ."

..._...

"I learnt how wonderful a man, Dave was. He could be loving and kind. He was also a geek! But my love grew; it had always been there, just buried. I trained him and I taught him to focus his anger . . ."

"I know!" Saoirse interrupted. "I saw Kick-Ass go ballistic when some cunt laid a hand on Psyche during the Toulouse attack. He beat the man to death. The head was like a crushed watermelon when Kick-Ass was done. Kick-Ass kept yelling about his daughter – he was like a wild animal. After Hit Girl, I'm scared of one person – Kick-Ass!"

"That's our Dad!" Stephanie grinned and Anne-Marie nodded furiously.

"Let's go thank him . . ." Anne-Marie suggested.

The Living Room

Mindy cringed as she saw the horrified look on her husband's face as he was hugged by the marauding *Predators*, plus his daughter and his sister-in-law!

"Thank you, Dave, for everything!" Saoirse grinned as she gave Dave a kiss on the cheek.

Danny looked totally freaked out by it all and he spoke out: "As Megan might say: What the fuck?"

Everybody laughed, including Dave.

"I told them about our first kiss and about my first trip to Chicago," Mindy said slowly. "Sorry . . ."

"Did you enjoy the story?" Dave asked with a chuckle.

"Yeah," the girls all admitted.

"Mindy learnt that she enjoyed these . . ." Dave said as he arose from the sofa. He towered over everybody as he strode over to Mindy and he wrapped his arms around her and . . .

"Ewww!"

"Disgusting!"

"Fucking awesome!"

"Cool!"

When Dave finally released Mindy, she was breathing heavily – and not just because she was out of breath!

"Damn!" Mindy groaned. "That tongue just gets longer each time!"

Stephanie cringed and led the stampede back up the staircase . . .

The British Sector

"Stephanie?" Sky asked as they re-entered the bedroom.

"Yeah?"

"You have the *best* parents ever."

"We do, don't we?" Stephanie replied with a grin at Anne-Marie and Megan.

The Living Room

Danny had vanished up to his bedroom leaving Dave and Mindy alone apart from Horatio who lay purring on the sofa.

"Somebody should write a story about our lives," Dave mused.

"One problem – anybody who read it? We'd have to kill them!" Mindy replied deadpan. "Plus, it would be X-rated, what with Chloe and Josh fucking every few chapters!"

"Good point . . . still, it would make a damn good read. Some funny bits too, every time you fuck up!"

"Hey! Those things I like to forget . . ."

"So," Dave asked. "What next for the mighty *Fusion* story, then?"

"Peace and tranquillity in Chicago?"

"With you about? Nah – if I were a betting man, I'd say the next chapter would be about Megan; she's not caused any shit for a while!"

"Good point . . ."

The following morning Sunday, 19th June

The farewell was a little tearful as *Vengeance* left to head for the airport and then home.

Mindy received a hug from each of the three young girls before they climbed into the SUV. Cameron and Natasha followed suit.

"You come and visit us, soon – they should have just about finished clearing up after your last visit!" Cameron joked and Mindy glared dangerously.

"We miss you, Mindy," Cassie grinned as she hugged her friend.

"You all take care – you hang in there, Harper," Mindy said.

"Thank you, Mindy," Keira smiled. "You've put my mind at rest about Harper . . . and you've given us both a future. Anything we can do, you just call."

"I will . . . count on it!"

The **Vengeance** storyline *will continue in* **Chapter 8: Vengeance Expansion of Vengeance**.

***Chapter 290*: The Vengeful Wildcat**

Sunday, 19th June, 2016
Afternoon

West Columbia

Marcus had to admit to himself that he had never thought he'd ever see the day . . .

Megan grinned up at her step-father and he felt like he had somehow drifted back a few years.

"You're gonna need a bigger jar . . ." Megan laughed as she made a vain attempt to stuff a dollar bill into the very full swear jar.

"I have to admit that I did *not* expect *anybody* to ever beat Mindy."

Megan grinned enormously.

"That is nothing to be proud of, young lady," Paige cautioned.

"It's not often I beat Mindy at *anything*," Megan pointed out.

"I must have been a very bad person in a former life to be punished like this," Marcus groaned.

Morton Grove

Megan was very special to me, in every way.

Most people who did not really know her found her rude and arrogant. Okay, I would be the first to admit that she had some rough edges, but I still loved her without reservation. I would always remember the first time that we met: it was just after my parents had been killed, about eighteen months ago, in Washington DC. It was a Saturday at a place called D-JAK.

...+...

"Hi, I'm Megan!"

"And I'm busy!" I replied, curtly.

"Hey! I'm trying to be nice here, ass!" Megan retorted, with quite a bit of sassy attitude.

I took a moment to look over towards Mindy before I turned back to Megan.

"Sorry, that was unfair; I'm Curtis!"

"I lost my Dad a few months ago; I'll listen if you want to talk," Megan said.

I looked at Megan, then looked over at Mindy again; I was uncertain about opening up. Finally, I smiled and Mindy nodded her encouragement so I walked over to a corner and sat down. Megan followed and she sat down across from me and then we both started to talk.

...+...

I had been taken by Megan straight away. She was funny. Her language was coarse and a little foul at times, but I had grown up around Chloe, so I was not put out. We had both been ten at the time, but I still thought Megan was cute and I loved her auburn hair. Her smile was beautiful too and I found that I could sit and listen to her talking for hours. Megan could talk for hours, too – believe me!

We began to become close. We would go everywhere together; Chloe thought it was cute. Megan was the first girl that I had seen naked other than my cousin. Megan was also the first girl to allow me to touch her – never mind where! When Megan became Wildcat for real, she changed, but only for the better in my view. My love for her grew and we were inseparable. I always hated it when Megan got hurt, as did everybody.

A lot changed in Gotham. Megan was hurt, and we both got a little carried away! That was a first for both of us. We also found it incredibly embarrassing that Erika had figured out what we had been up to almost straight away. More than once, we both got caught up to no good, but I did not care as long as I was with my Megan.

Gibraltar had been a wakeup call to us all. I had almost died until Chloe had given me the kiss of life – yuck! Megan had teased me about that kiss for quite a while which was typically Megan; that girl could find fun in the darkest of moments. I had not even started puberty the first time that I had been able to play with Megan's body. Megan had never commented on my own lack of development, just as I had not commented on hers the first time that I had seen her naked in the Medical Center of Safehouse F. Megan could be kind when she wanted to be and she always was with me.

I had done my best to help her when Paige had been shot – that was hard on us both.

West Columbia

"So, *this* is the Kitty Lair!"

"Funny!" Megan replied as she grinned at Saoirse.

"I expected less pink," Morgan commented as she looked around the room.

"You seem to have a thing for Hit Girl," Saoirse went on as she noticed the posters that adorned the walls. "Jackal, too."

"Yeah, I *really* had a thing for Hit Girl and Jackal, back in the day."

"She talks like a veteran!" Morgan laughed.

"I *am* a veteran!"

"An eleven-year-old veteran?" Saoirse queried with a chuckle.

"I've fucked up more cunts than both of you put together!"

"Feisty!" Morgan laughed and she ignored Megan's scowl.

..._...

The teenage girls began to poke around.

"Wow!" Saoirse blurted out as she dug around in a drawer. "Never knew you could get Rainbow Dash bras!"

"Get off those!" Megan retorted as she grabbed the aforementioned bra from Saoirse's hands.

"You still only a double-A, Megan?"

"Yes!" Megan scowled as her cheeks went very pink. She quickly stuffed the bra back into the drawer and slammed it shut.

"Nice choice in tampons," Morgan commented. "I use the same brand – you find them comfortable?"

"Yeah . . .," Megan groaned as Saoirse smirked.

"What's *this* . . .?" Saoirse muttered as she sat down on the bed. She reached under the duvet and . . .

"No!" Megan exclaimed as Saoirse examined what she had discovered.

"A dog . . . no, a *kitty* collar?"

"You, dark little kitty, you!" Morgan laughed as Megan blushed a bright red.

"I know nothing about it . . ." Megan tried only to receive disbelieving smirks from the two older girls.

"SD – pin her!" Morgan ordered.

The three girls scuffled on the bed for a minute but brawn overpowered size and Megan was pinned, face down on the bed, by Saoirse. Morgan placed the collar around the struggling and very mortified Megan's neck and she secured it at a well-used hole.

"Her size, too," SD chuckled.

"Now," Saoirse mused. "Is this just for when you play with your clit, *alone* – or is it for when Curtis *comes* . . ."

"Nice double entendre, SD!" Morgan laughed.

Megan shrugged knowing that she had no choice.

"The latter . . ."

"She's been spending too much time with Josh," Saoirse chuckled. "Does Chloe know what her cousin gets up to?"

"Yes, she does . . ."

"You know, Megan – all joking aside – you're a lovely girl and Curtis is a very lucky boy. As you grow up, he's going to be even luckier," Saoirse commented.

"Thanks," Megan offered grudgingly. "Please don't tell anybody about. . ."

"I'm not the total bitch that Stephanie makes me out to be, Megan," Saoirse said as she removed the collar. "We won't tell a soul – just between us girls."

"Thanks."

"I meant what I said, Megan. You're a lovely girl . . . and a great friend. You've made us both feel welcome and neither of us ever want you to change."

"Why don't we have a girls' night out – just Foxtail, Raven, and Wildcat," Morgan suggested.

"Will Mindy allow it?" Saoirse enquired doubtfully.

"She's my big sister and we're all Operators – of course she will; she can only say one word . . ."

That evening

Glenview

"NO!"

"Why not?" Megan demanded.

"It's way too dangerous out there."

"Nobody has seen FEAR in almost two weeks," Megan pointed out. "The only fun I've had all week is kicking some Brit *Predator* butt!"

"Megan – I don't want anything to happen to you. You're going to be twelve in less than three months and if anything should . . ."

"I'll be fine; I'll have Foxtail and Raven with me. Foxtail is way better trained than me and Raven put together."

"You want to go out on your Ducati?"

The smile said it all.

"On two conditions."

Megan groaned but nodded.

"You have backup . . . don't interrupt . . . backup which will be out of sight but close enough if trouble starts. That is

non-negotiable. Second – all three of you are inspected by Chloe and Josh before you go anywhere and you carry extra ammo. You also sharpen those damn blades of yours."

Megan nodded her acceptance to the terms.

"Thanks, sis. I know you're just looking out for me but this is the new Wildcat; I know my limits."

Megan scowled as Mindy howled with laughter.

***The following evening
Monday, 20th June***

Safehouse F

"Give me a break!"

"Wildcat – shut it!" Jackal growled as he checked out every inch of Wildcat's combat suit and utility belt. Shadow came next and double checked the more feminine areas that Jackal would not touch.

Next came Foxtail and Raven. Foxtail was fuming as Psyche stood mere feet away; Psyche grinned at Foxtail as Jackal checked out every item of her kit and combat suit. Raven went along with the charade but both girls were kitted out perfectly as was Wildcat. Jackal had noticed Psyche's attempts to humiliate her friend.

"Psyche – you next."

Jackal grabbed Psyche before she could run and he flipped her upside down and he violently shook the giggling vigilante for a few moments before setting her – actually dropping her – back down onto the ground. Psyche scowled with embarrassment as Foxtail and Morgan laughed.

"Good to see you secure your kit, Psyche!" Jackal grinned.

..._...

"You take care out there," Shadow said to Wildcat when they were both alone for a few moments.

"I'll be fine."

"I care about you, you know – despite everything . . ."

"I know, Chloe; you can't get rid of me *that* easily!"

"I hope not. I need somebody to annoy the fuck out of and I couldn't stand Mindy and Joshua moping over your being injured . . . or worse."

"Thanks, Chloe," Megan replied as she gave her former adversary a hug.

North Cicero Avenue

Wildcat with Foxtail and Raven

I had heeded Hit Girl's advice and so we stuck to open streets.

Three powerful machines rode down the street. My Ducati Hypermotard SP led with Foxtail's Aprilia Caponord 1200 Rally to my left and just behind. Raven's Yamaha Super Ténéré cruised to my right and level with Foxtail. Three girls enjoying an evening on the streets of Chicago. The place was peaceful – at least it was until a Kawasaki Versys 1000 LT in metallic black and plasma blue cruised past us. It was flanked by a pair of Kawasaki Versys 650 LT machines in metallic black. My eyes were drawn to the black and red armour.

"FEAR!" I growled.

Safehouse F

Hal's head snapped up at the single word. She hit the alarm and began to issue commands.

"Ready One and Ready Two: Scramble! Medic prepare to move! Psyche, Mist: Scramble!"

Beyond the armoured glass which enclosed the *Fusion* Command Centre, Psyche and Mist could be seen running for *Brute*.

Ready One

North Milwaukee Avenue

Hit Girl and Shadow started their engines and they both accelerated north-west towards the red cross on the map projected onto their visors.

Hit Girl was angry at being caught out, but she knew that FEAR was unpredictable. She cursed herself for allowing Wildcat to be out without close protection.

"You even dare blame yourself, Hit Girl, and I'll fucking kick your arse!" Shadow growled as the two of them weaved in and out of the light evening traffic.

Ready Two

North Cicero Avenue and West Shakespeare Avenue Two miles behind Wildcat, Foxtail and Raven

"Fucking knew it!" Jackal growled as he accelerated his Triumph Tiger 800 XCA towards sixty.

"The hand of fate falls," Kick-Ass added as he followed Jackal on his Ducati Diavel Carbon. "Bet you anything that Hit Girl's blaming herself."

"No bet," Jackal replied sourly.

Medic

Safehouse K

The Honda Fireblade Black Edition accelerated out of the Safehouse and up South Iron Street.

At the South Damen Avenue on-ramp for I-55, Medic headed northeast to the I-94 where she took the ramp northbound.

Medic was hitting ninety mere seconds later.

North Cicero Avenue

Wildcat with Foxtail and Raven

FEAR accelerated up the tree-lined street.

"Hit Girl, this is Wildcat – we're giving chase!"

"Copy *that!*" Hit Girl replied – her tone was none too pleased and all three girls winced behind their helmets.

The chase was at speed – about fifty – but not excessive as the traffic was medium to heavy. We were moving too fast to use firearms and so far, FEAR had not made any overtly hostile actions. Mind you, just her mere presence was a hostile action! I knew that help was on its way so we were not alone. Neither of us were delusional enough to think that we could take FEAR alone – although Foxtail had her moments . . . just joking!

FEAR's two cohorts did nothing more than prevent us getting too close to their Mistress. I worried that FEAR might have had a plan. Was our meeting planned or just a coincidence? I ran through my training looking for answers but

nothing came. I was surprised to see FEAR bear left at West Sunnyside Avenue. Not only did she bear left, she almost got creamed by a large semi as she made the illegal turn over the concrete median and up the wrong side of the avenue. One of her cohorts accelerated ahead and turned right through some steel mesh gates.

We followed and found ourselves passing beneath the railroad and then making a hard right up a dirt slope. We rode across two railroad lines and then made a left over a bridge and followed an old raised track bed that headed north. Every machine had dual-purpose tyres which were perfect for the off-road activity.

It was a struggle to ensure that I had the correct focus on events and not to allow my judgement to be clouded by past events.

Safehouse F

Brute

As Mist and Psyche reached the armoured Range Rover, a voice called out.

"Hey! Wait for me!"

Psyche turned to see Trojan a few yards away and running towards them.

"You're not rostered for duty, tonight?" Mist said quickly as she climbed into the driver's seat.

"It's Megan – I need to be out there."

Psyche studied Trojan for a moment.

"I can't stop you; you outrank me," Psyche admitted to Trojan.

"But I outrank *you*, Trojan, so get in!" Mist ordered.

Wildcat with Foxtail and Raven

We paralleled North Cicero Avenue for about a quarter mile before we angled northeast and passed over both North Cicero Avenue and I-94.

The route was then arrow-straight and we hurtled through some dense greenery as we passed through LaBagh Woods. To be honest, it was a very scenic ride and for a moment I began to enjoy the ride before I was snapped back to the reality of the situation by Hal demanding an update. I knew that we were being tracked and that cameras mounted on our motorcycles were sending back full-colour 4K images to the Safehouse.

"No overt threat from FEAR at this time," I reported.

It was surreal racing through northern Chicago in pursuit of a murderous criminal who was not actually attacking us – there had to be another angle . . . all became clear as we approached West Devon Avenue and FEAR clammed on her brakes along with her cohorts. We did the same a few yards back with warning after warning flowing through my mind. Foxtail noticed the subtle change in the FEAR's two cohorts as they reached down for something and then turned, each with an MP5K in their hands.

We spun our tyres as we rapidly reversed direction and headed back down the retired railroad track. Four more machines appeared out of the trees – FEAR had friends!

Ready One and Ready Two

Under the direction of Hal, both Hit Girl with Shadow and Kick-Ass with Jackal had been diverted via I-94 where they were all able to blaze north at over one-hundred-and-twenty-miles-per-hour. The average speed of advance for Wildcat and her team was only twenty-miles-per-hour.

One minute and two miles later, Ready Two left the I-94 at West Peterson Avenue. Ready One continued north for another mile and a half before coming off at West Touhy Avenue. Hal had already realised that FEAR was following the old railroad tracks and therefore, she spread her forces along the route in an acceptable gamble.

Ready One was closing steadily on Wildcat and her team.

Brute – (Mist, Psyche, and Trojan)

Mist had her foot to the floor as they hurtled up I-94 before Hal directed them to leave and head north up North Western Avenue.

There, they were met by a marked CPD unit which provided an escort north. Trojan was not happy; he knew that his partner was in trouble and over the comms he heard Wildcat's chilling report.

"Ambush! Ambush!"

"Put your fucking foot down, Mist!" he growled.

Wildcat with Foxtail and Raven

We opened fire before they could as we fell to the ground from our machines.

Two men fell immediately as the others dove for cover. We were caught in a crossfire and I noticed FEAR accelerating away.

"No fucking way!" I yelled. "Let's move, fuck these wankers – frag 'em!"

Foxtail threw a fragmentation grenade at the remaining two men while I did the same with the one man remaining after FEAR had taken one man with her. Two explosions later, we heaved our machines vertical and gave chase after FEAR.

West Devon Avenue

A quiet wait for his girlfriend had turned into an entertaining evening for the young man.

First, the peaceful evening had been shattered by the sound of multiple motorcycle engines and then gunfire before two loud explosions had ripped out. Two motorcycles and roared across the road, just before the explosions, both very similar with somebody clad in red and black armour on the first machine. They were followed, a few minutes later, by three more machines, each bearing a Chicago vigilante before they vanished after the other two motorcycles.

Just as his girlfriend pulled up in her car, several minutes later, the sound of high-powered motorcycle engines could be heard again and a purple Ducati Panigale motorcycle burst out of the old railroad and pulled a wheelie as it shot across the street. Another almost identical machine in blue followed behind.

"I think somebody's pissed off Hit Girl," the man commented to his confused girlfriend.

Ready One

Pissed off was an understatement!

Hit Girl had seen the dead bodies and she had heard the sharp reports of the two grenades. Against her better judgement and against her emotions, she knew that she had to let Wildcat take responsibility and keep after FEAR – at least until she herself could arrive.

There! FEAR had stopped a distance ahead . . . and Wildcat was engaging!

Wildcat with Foxtail and Raven

FEAR had stopped and climbed off her motorcycle.

She just stood there on the old track bed, seemingly oblivious to the three vigilantes' approach. Her cohort stood off to one side, his arms at his sides in a non-threatening stance. Wildcat stopped and so did Foxtail and Raven. The

younger vigilante swung her left leg off the Ducati and she pulled off her helmet as her own cohorts did the same and the three girls faced off against FEAR.

"My, my, three little ones!"

"We're way more than you can handle, bitch!" Foxtail replied as she drew her beautifully lethal butterfly swords.

"Fuck you, you whacked out bitch!" Raven threw in as she drew her Katana.

"Let's have some fun!" FEAR drawled as she brought her own sword to readiness.

..._...

FEAR's cohort had stepped well back, away from the impending action. FEAR drove forward as the three vigilantes spread out to reduce the chances of a single strike tacking down more than one of them. The large sword was truly fearsome and nobody had any desire to find out just how well it could cut through flesh and armour. Wildcat already knew that her claws were apparently useless against FEAR's armour so she decided to rely on her Katana which she knew had a keener blade.

The war sword came down towards Wildcat but Wildcat's own sword blocked the strike only the power behind the strike and the weight of the sword were too much for Wildcat but Raven joined in and lent her own weight to the fight. Foxtail slashed out with her twin blades and FEAR yelped as the ultra-sharp blades slashed through the weak armour of her left side. The strike gave Wildcat a chance to recover her stance and move out of the arc of the war sword.

"Hope I didn't damage your expensive looking suit!" Foxtail hissed.

"Oh, Foxy, nothing that a needle and thread can't fix," FEAR drawled in reply.

Raven and Wildcat dove forwards while FEAR was conversing with Foxtail and they struck from the left and the right. Raven's katana struck the heavier armour of FEAR's right upper arm while Wildcat manged to catch a pouch on the left side of FEAR's utility belt. Whatever was in the pouch cooked off and smoke was emitted which began to hide FEAR from view. FEAR ripped the pouch from her utility belt and she threw it to the ground in anger.

Wildcat narrowly dodged the tip of the war sword as FEAR swung it viciously and kicked Raven in the chest sending her backwards and down the embankment of the railroad track. Foxtail blocked the next swipe with her own swords but only just.

..._...

Wildcat struck at FEAR's left leg with her sword but FEAR saw it coming and she kicked out at Wildcat. Wildcat fell backwards and she scrambled away from FEAR. For a moment, it looked like FEAR had the upper hand and Wildcat was about to be kitty food. Neither noticed the motorcycle skid to a halt on the loose gravel, nor the angry vigilante who leapt off the machine and threw her purple crash-helmet off to one side.

"Get away from her . . . you bitch!"

FEAR turned her attentions from Wildcat to the newcomer who was drawing the matched Katana swords from her back.

"Hello," FEAR drawled.

"Enjoy your swim?" Hit Girl growled as the seasoned vigilantes circled each other. "Wildcat – get back!"

"It was refreshing – just what I needed after a night's workout."

"No water around here but I'm happy to give you that workout."

Hit Girl raised her blades just as FEAR brought her war sword to bear and the cold steel clashed together. Hit Girl pushed back with all her might and FEAR stepped to one side, parrying Hit Girl's thrusts away from her own body. There was limited space to fight but that just meant a higher skill was required.

FEAR's remaining cohort made a move but Shadow stopped him.

"You keep out of this, cunt!" she growled as she put a bullet into his forehead before she went after Raven.

..._...

Whatever could be said about FEAR, she was a very proficient melee fighter. She could move with a finesse that kept her alive before the blades of Hit Girl as they were brought to bear with practiced ease by the purple vigilante queen. FEAR's strength was also apparent as she wielded the heavy weapon. Hit Girl was ready for anything that came her way and she used her agility to stay away from the keen blade.

Then everything changed. Wildcat and Foxtail spun around as Raven came scrambling back up the embankment.

"Trouble!" she called.

Her statement was punctuated by gunfire and the sounds of large vehicles pulling up either side of the embankment. Then another voice called out.

"Am I too late?" Sunset Phoenix asked as she ran up behind Raven and took a swing at the young vigilante with her double-bladed ninja sword staff. Raven blocked the strike with her Katana and quickly rolled off to one side.

Wildcat was worried. Something about Sunset Phoenix was off – she was full of herself, which was nothing new, but she exuded confidence where previously there had been none. Her character was different somehow. Her pink outfit still made her look a joke but as Wildcat struck out, her Katana was expertly blocked by the sword staff and the bitch smirked down at her younger adversary.

West North Shore Avenue

A growing crowd was gathering from the nearby properties, drawn in by both the sounds of gunfire and by the clashing of cold steel.

The sight before them was way better than any news report showing *Fusion* in action. Most Chicagoans would have given away their children to witness Hit Girl fighting. Most had never laid eyes on FEAR, nor the pink hussy, Sunset Phoenix. But at that moment, they were able to watch the spectacle of two famous Chicago vigilantes, Hit Girl and Wildcat, plus the lesser vigilantes, Foxtail and Raven, fighting Chicago's most wanted criminal, FEAR. Not to mention that it was incredibly rare for *Fusion* to operate so far north of the City, in what was a good neighbourhood.

Down on the street, Shadow was keeping Sunset Phoenix's cohorts occupied while up on the track bed, swords flashed in the streetlighting as they span at speed. The sword wielders span almost as fast as they intercepted the inbound strikes from their opponents. Cheers erupted from the crowd as FEAR and Sunset Phoenix were pounded. The crowd watched and yelled out in awe when Wildcat executed a perfect backflip as she dodged a strike from Sunset Phoenix.

Then, just as FEAR and Sunset Phoenix appeared to be on the losing end of the fight, several of their cohorts rushed forwards with a selection of weapons that varied from short ninja-to style swords to metal baseball bats. Shadow was seriously outnumbered but still on her feet.

Fusion had no choice but to disengage FEAR and Sunset Phoenix so that they could defend themselves from the new attack.

..._...

Hit Girl was furious as she gave FEAR a sharp kick in the chest which sent the bitch reeling and in her shock, she dropped her war sword – Hit Girl raised an eyebrow behind her mask at that faux pas.

"Go!" Sunset Phoenix appeared to order and FEAR ran for her motorcycle before roaring off northeast towards Lincolnwood.

In the resulting melee, Wildcat and Foxtail took off after FEAR on their own motorcycles while Hit Girl turned her attentions towards Sunset Phoenix as she ran for her own motorcycle with her cohorts providing a shield for her retreat. Hit Girl and Raven killed three, with Shadow adding a couple more to that number before the rest broke off the fight and ran for their vehicles.

Hit Girl ignored the cheering crowd and quickly replaced the twin Katana swords securely on her back and remounted her Panigale. Raven and Shadow followed suit and within a minute the trio were accelerating after Wildcat and Foxtail. They all raced through the industrial heart of Lincolnwood, still on the abandoned railroad bed. FEAR dodged a large truck and several cars as she bolted across North Central Park Avenue and was closely followed by her five

pursuers.

"We have contact with Sunset Phoenix!" came the call over the radio from Jackal.

Brute with Ready Two

Mist with Psyche & Trojan plus Jackal & Kick-Ass

Strictly speaking, it was *Brute* that made contact with Sunset Phoenix – or maybe Sunset Phoenix made contact with *Brute* . . . either way, Sunset Phoenix was not a happy bunny!

"I don't care what universe you're from; that's gotta hurt!" Psyche chuckled as Trojan groaned at her reference.

Mist said nothing as she was just a little stunned having gotten a very close up view of the pink-clad vigilante as she had hurtled across the hood of the Range Rover SUV.

"Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R – nil. Range Rover Sentinel – one," Jackal quipped as he came to a rapid halt beside Mist.

He dismounted, pulled off his helmet and left it on his machine before he stepped over the twisted superbike and advanced on Sunset Phoenix as she struggled to her feet. Her black armour and combat suit with the almost-pink, purple pizzazz highlights was badly scored from the impact with the armoured SUV and the road but she appeared uninjured as she threw down her equally gouged crash helmet.

"I think she's a little pissed!" Psyche growled as she leapt out of *Brute* to stand beside Jackal.

"Another fucking whelp!" Sunset Phoenix growled.

Trojan followed Psyche but turned towards a pair of loud bangs as Kick-Ass rammed the heads of two cunts into the side of *Brute*.

"Hey!" Mist yelled. "I signed for this SUV, you know!"

"Take it up with Ares!" Kick-Ass retorted with a chuckle.

"You gonna take us all on?" Trojan drawled as Sunset Phoenix was encircled.

"Fuck the lot of you!" Sunset Phoenix growled as she threw something to the ground.

There was a large explosion, a bright flash, and a copious plume of pink smoke erupted from what had to be a combined flash-bang smoke grenade. Nobody dared fire into the smoke for fear of hitting an innocent member of the public. The roar of a motorcycle could be heard from beyond the dissipating cloud and Jackal ran through with Psyche before they were left glaring after the rapidly departing Sunset Phoenix.

"Run, bitch," Psyche growled. "We'll find you and we'll fucking gut you . . ."

Hit Girl with Shadow, Wildcat, Foxtail & Raven

At Howard Street, we left the abandoned railroad and turned east before taking McCormick Boulevard north at highspeed.

For a mile and a half, the five motorcycles and riders dodged in and out of the traffic before Raven dropped out with a mechanical issue on her Yamaha Super Ténéré just below Dempster Street. As FEAR turned right onto Dempster Street, Shadow and Foxtail continued north to the next junction with Church Street to block FEAR's advance north.

Dempster Street

FEAR had something about Wildcat and she seemed determined to destroy the younger vigilante in as long and drawn out a method as possible.

She also appeared to have scum-of-the-earth types scattered all over the city. This became rapidly apparent as a truck appeared from a side-road and something about the way it was being driven gave me cause for thought. My

suspicions were confirmed when it veered across the road headed directly at us before fine tuning its path and heading for one particular individual. I barely had time to yell a warning before the truck crunched into what I had to assume was its intended target. My heart missed several beats as Wildcat and her Ducati vanished from sight behind the behemoth. Once the truck had moved on, I was stunned to see that all which remained was the twisted and crushed remnants of the brown and silver motorcycle.

I felt sick to my stomach as I slammed on my brakes and my eyes darted everywhere as I looked around for the bloodied and broken corpse of my sister.

***Chapter 291*: Tattoo**

Monday, 20th June, 2016

Dempster Street

"Thought that was fun, huh!"

FEAR's head snapped around to see a white-clad individual just feet away astride a large black Honda Fireblade motorcycle. FEAR only had seconds to register the armoured sole of the boot which then struck her full in the chest and she fell to the road but rapidly rolled away from her falling Kawasaki.

Medic swung her legs off the motorcycle and she removed her helmet before using the latter as a weapon. FEAR received the helmet full force across her face as she struggled back to her feet. She reached up for her war sword but only felt air as she ran for the truck which had just rundown Wildcat and she swung herself aboard as it passed by.

Medic climbed back onto her motorcycle and roared off down the street to where Hit Girl sat astride her Panigale.

..._...

"Hey!" A voice growled over the comms. "Hit Girl ain't the only one with goddamn reflexes, you know . . . wildcats have them too and I like to walk on the wild side!"

Hit Girl grinned as she saw the younger girl sitting on her haunches over at the side of the road. There were marks on her suit and helmet which showed her close call. Hit Girl was very glad of her mask which prevented anybody from seeing her tears of joy.

"Hit Girl, I am registering Wildcat's bike as down," Battle Guy called from Safehouse F.

Hit girl strode over to the wreckage and stood beside the forlorn Wildcat.

"It's a gonna," Hit Girl replied as Medic pulled up.

There was a puff of smoke from just forwards of the seat and below.

"What in hell was that?" Wildcat demanded.

"Just destroyed the electronics package so nobody can use it against us," Battle Guy explained. "I've arranged for the CPD to recover Wildcat's Ducati and FEAR's machine. Ares is on his way to Raven."

"Thanks, Battle Guy, I'll take Wildcat back with me," Hit Girl replied as a pair of CPD cruisers appeared and they secured both motorcycles from the growing crowd of bystanders.

"You okay?" Medic asked as she looked down at Wildcat.

"The only wound is in my heart," Wildcat replied as she looked down at her Ducati – or what was left of it. "It was my first motorcycle . . ."

"Let's go home," Hit Girl suggested and she climbed back onto her Panigale with Wildcat clambering on behind.

With Medic following, Hit Girl turned for home before being joined by Shadow. Foxtail would stay behind with Raven until Ares arrived with Iron Hide.

"Err, Hit Girl?" Mist called.

"Problem?"

"Please take Trojan off our hands!" Mist begged.

"What the fuck is Trojan doing out . . .?" Hit Girl demanded but then she paused and felt the arms around her waist tightening. "Let's rendezvous . . ."

Half an hour later, Wildcat was doing her best to persuade Trojan that she was all in one piece and that she was not

hurt. Not that she minded feeling his strong hands running over her . . .

"Ewww!" Psyche growled as she grabbed Wildcat's dented helmet and jumped up behind Hit Girl. "I ain't riding back with those two!"

"Funny, Psyche!" Wildcat giggled as Trojan began to get more than a little personal with his gauntlets.

"Just had a thought," Psyche called out as Hit Girl accelerated away. "Anybody checked to see if Wildcat has any kitties in her oven?"

Early the next evening
Tuesday, 21st June

Safehouse D

"I know it is not your birthday – yet – but considering last night, I decided you deserved this . . ."

The 112-hp 821-cc motorcycle was painted in an overall digital urban camouflage made up of the same browns found in Wildcat's combat suit. The machine was fitted with carbon-fibre racing silencers on the engine exhaust, carbon-fibre front wing and various other carbon-fibre covers. Under the seat, the licence plate read '**WILD ONE**'. The motorcycle was fitted with a smoked windshield and LED turn indicators. On either side, at the rear, were a pair of 25-litre panniers in the same colour scheme as the rest of the motorcycle.

"Oh . . . my . . . God – a Ducati Monster!" Megan wailed.

"A Ducati Monster 821 Dark, to be exact . . ." I corrected her. "Dark, just like my little sister."

"Thank you," Megan said quietly as she gave Mindy a rather painful hug.

That same evening

Summit Drive

"Where is it that you go? What do you do?"

"Kelly – stay out of it," Katrina warned her younger sister.

"You came back home the other night and I know you were in pain; you were hurting. If I didn't know better, I'd have thought that you were somehow involved in that fight at Damen Silos."

"Kelly, where do you get these ideas?"

"Kat, I'm not stupid . . . Oh, my God – are you one of those that Hit Girl has been fighting?"

"Kelly, I'm your sister and I've never lied to you."

"So, why are you?"

"You know what happened to Dad – he was killed by Hit Girl. You know what happened to Mom – she died within months of Dad's death; she couldn't live without him."

"Stay away from me, Kat – I want nothing to do with any of this."

Later that evening

Safehouse F

Mindy had just returned from a short patrol.

As she pulled off her mask and walked towards the armoury, she saw Anne-Marie standing alone on the mat. She had tears streaming down her face and she was shaking. The shaking seemed to get worse as Mindy approached her daughter.

"What's going on, Anne-Marie?"

"We've had a security breach," Marty commented as he walked out of the Command Center.

"Who – Anne-Marie?"

"She misplaced her access card; it's outside," Marty explained as Anne-Marie began to cry even harder.

Mindy turned on the sobbing eight-year-old and she could see how hard the girl was taking it; Anne-Marie looked petrified. Mindy felt the anger building up inside her. Anne-Marie needed to be taught a lesson and in a way, that would never be forgotten. Mindy loved the little girl's wayward behaviour – she felt it reminded her of herself at that age – only that wayward behaviour had been allowed to escalate to the point of carelessness that had put the entire organisation and dozens of people at risk.

Mindy seized hold of Anne-Marie by her wrist and began to almost drag the now screaming girl towards the steps down to Level 0. Chloe had appeared behind Marty and she suddenly felt worried for the eight-year-old's welfare.

"Mindy . . ."

"Can it, Chloe!" Mindy snarled.

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Mindy dragged the terrified young girl into the Interrogation area and stopped. She looked down at the sobbing Anne-Marie without any sign of compassion for the little girl's plight.

"You have disappointed me, Anne-Marie. You are not worthy to wear that uniform; take it off – now!"

The shaking Anne-Marie followed the order and she pulled off her boots, pants, and top. Mindy pushed the girl into the Holding Area and with a curt nod towards the camera and a flick of her hand, the cell door slammed shut. Anne-Marie began to scream.

"No, Mommy – *please!*"

"I have a recovery to perform. Get used to your new home, girl!"

With that, Mindy turned and stopped before Chloe.

"Watch over her and keep her safe," Mindy said very quietly so Anne-Marie could not hear.

"I will," Chloe replied.

Mindy headed straight back upstairs, retrieved her helmet and climbed onto her Panigale.

"Battle Guy – send me a route!"

Less than a minute later, Hit Girl was gone.

Belle Plaine

Every access card had a built-in chip which allowed the card to be tracked.

It meant that each member of Fusion could be tracked within the Safehouse, if required, but it also allowed the card to be tracked if lost or stolen. The signal had brought Hit Girl to within one-hundred metres of the card.

"Okay, Hit Girl," Battle Guy explained. "I've set the tracker to high-power. It will only last about twenty-minutes but you should be able to get an accurate fix with your monitor. Take care!"

"Thanks, Battle Guy – how is she?"

"She's calmed down and Chloe is sitting with her."

"Thanks."

Hit Girl studied the five-inch screen mounted on the left lower arm of her combat suit. A map of the area was visible and in the centre, at her current location, there was a small pulsing arrow symbol pointing to the left. She turned in the direction and followed the pulsing arrow for about eighty yards before she parked up the Panigale, removed her helmet, and continued on foot.

"Looks to be the third house on the left," Battle Guy announced. "The card has an elevation of about twelve feet, so expect it to be on the second floor. The monitor should guide you to the exact room."

"I have it – second floor . . . room at the back-right corner. I'm going in."

1437 West Cuyler Avenue

The house was very nice and spread over three floors.

All the lights were out, as might be expected for the late hour. Hit Girl made her way around to the rear of the property and climbed up to a small balcony. There, she bypassed the alarm on the door inside and picked the lock. A minute later, she was standing in a small bedroom with a single bed in the centre of one wall. The bed was occupied by a young boy of about ten-years-old. The door to the landing was closed.

The boy came awake as Hit Girl gently shook him. His eyes went wide at the shadow in the darkness but he did not scream.

"I knew you would come," he stated simply.

"You have something that belongs to me," Hit Girl replied.

The boy slipped out of his bed and he walked over to a small desk on an adjacent wall. He rummaged in his school backpack before turning and holding out the access card to Hit Girl.

"Thank you," Hit Girl said as she took the card and placed it securely in her utility belt. "I know you will be curious about that card and who it may have belonged to. You will not pursue the owner of that card. You will not mention the card to anybody – I assume you've told somebody, your friends, maybe?"

"Just my best friends, Mark and Kaleb. I'm Justin, by the way."

"Good – you pass on my warning, Justin. I shall know if you are searching for Rogue and I shall be very displeased . . ."

"Of course, Hit Girl. I would never do anything to put *Fusion* at risk. My friends will never believe me . . ."

"Give them one of these," Hit Girl chuckled and she passed over three of her 'Hit Cards' as Kick-Ass insisted on calling them. "Thank you for being so candid, Justin. Good night."

Safehouse F

Mindy headed straight down below when she returned to the Safehouse.

Anne-Marie was no longer crying but she looked very subdued behind the bars of the cell. Chloe sat outside the bars, watching the younger girl. Mindy clicked her fingers towards the camera and the cell door slid open. She went down to one knee and she beckoned for her daughter. Anne-Marie ran forwards and hugged Mindy tightly around the neck.

"Are you okay, honey?" Mindy asked.

"Yes . . . I'm sorry, Mommy."

"I know you're sorry. You made a mistake that put a lot of people at risk. That was a taster of what could happen to us if we are all exposed – we would all spend the rest of our lives in a prison cell. Do you understand how serious losing this card was?"

Mindy waved the dark blue card in the air and Anne-Marie's eyes followed its movements.

"Yes, Mindy, I do."

"Good. Now get dressed and let's get ready to go home."

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Mindy walked upstairs holding Anne-Marie's hand with Chloe close behind. There were a few relieved looks as Anne-Marie was seen in one piece . . . and smiling.

"Steph, could you take your sister and get her sorted out so we can go home, please?"

"Come on, jailbird," Stephanie quipped but then she saw the pained expression on her sister's face. "Bad joke, sorry!"

Stephanie wrapped an arm around her little sister and gave her a hug before guiding her towards the changing rooms.

***The following evening
Wednesday, 22nd June***

Glenview

The three kids had finished their homework and everybody had eaten their evening meal.

Stephanie was sitting on the sofa with Horatio while Danny watched TV. Anne-Marie was busy helping Dave in the kitchen as part of her grounding. Mindy was busy feeding the ever-hungry mutts in the basement. Stephanie took a moment to smirk at Anne-Marie as she trudged past the living room with her arms full of neatly folded clothes destined for the bedrooms upstairs. Anne-Marie threw a scowl at her big sister.

A few minutes later, Anne-Marie walked past and scowled at her brother and sister enjoying themselves while she had one-hundred-and-one chores to complete before she could go to bed. Once Anne-Marie had gone back into the kitchen and was receiving direction from Dave concerning her next task, Stephanie gave Horatio a final cuddle and then headed upstairs for a shower.

Twenty minutes later

The British Sector

Stephanie loved the power-shower in her ensuite bathroom.

The amount of water that fell made the shower feel like you were beneath Niagara Falls. Stephanie relished the hot water as it ran over her body and she would stand under the torrent for almost twenty minutes enjoying the soothing nature of the water on her aching muscles after a hard afternoon's training.

That evening was no different as she allowed the water to rinse the shampoo out of her long blonde hair. Then a voice dared to pervade her watery heaven.

"You know, one problem with having Hit Girl as your mother; it gives new emphasis to that common expression: 'Mom's gonna kill you'. So, I'm just gonna come out and say it: Mom's gonna kill you!"

"*What* are you wittering about?" Stephanie growled as she recognised the voice. Anne-Marie turning up for conversations at strange times, such as while she was in the shower was nothing new.

"*That* – on your butt . . ."

Crap!

"Oh . . . Don't tell Mindy . . ." Stephanie tried.

"I'm gonna so enjoy seeing you get roasted!"

"Get back here you little bitch!" Stephanie yelled as the younger girl bolted and vanished out of the bathroom.

The Kitchen

I heard the screaming and the yells coming closer as I made myself a coffee in the kitchen having just finished feeding three hungry canines and one starving feline.

The screaming turned out to be a giggling Anne-Marie with a very angry Stephanie shouting after her. The language was extremely foul as well as very aggressive and it appeared to consist of some rather creative ways for Anne-Marie to die.

Finally, Anne-Marie burst into the kitchen.

"Mom . . .!" She screamed as Stephanie, soaking wet and clad only in a towel, rugby-tackled her sister to the floor and then wrapped a hand over the younger girl's mouth.

"Stephanie, let your sister go . . . what the *hell* is *that* doing on your behind, young lady?"

Stephanie released her sister and the ten-year-old quickly readjusted the towel to cover up her butt as she stood up, however, she was not quite quick enough.

"Was that a tattoo on your right butt cheek?" Danny enquired as he came to investigate the noise.

"Just what *I* was asking . . . when did you get that?" I demanded.

"A couple of weeks ago . . ."

"That looks fresh to me! Who went with you; you know it's illegal to go without an adult present?"

"We bribed the guy . . . a hundred bucks."

"You said 'we' – who else was with you?" I asked suspiciously.

"Not telling . . ."

I had a moment's clarity and another girl drifted into my mind.

"Last week . . . you were out all afternoon with your aunt . . . admit it!"

"Not even if you pull my nails out with pliers!" Stephanie retorted.

"That can be arranged . . . Danny, find me some pliers . . ."

An hour later

West Columbia

"Mindy!" Marcus exclaimed as he opened the door. "What a pleasant surprise!"

I felt Stephanie shove her way past me and then turn to glare at me.

"Stephanie looks happy . . ." Paige grinned.

"I think we need Megan; is she around?" I asked with an evil grin.

"Megan!" Marcus bellowed up the stairs.

Megan came bounding down the stairs with her usual exuberance but she instantly slammed on the brakes as she saw her welcoming committee and the depressed looking Stephanie. Marcus waved Megan's attentions toward me.

"Do you have something to show us, little sister?" I asked sweetly.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," Megan responded with an innocent smile.

"Megan," I said slowly. "We *will* get to the *bottom* of this even if we have to strip you . . ."

Megan turned on her niece.

"You *told* them?" she almost screamed.

"I had no choice – it just came out . . ." the wretched Stephanie replied. "She tried to pull out my fingernails with pliers."

"Somehow, I doubt that, Stephanie . . ." Marcus chuckled. "If she *really* wanted to do that, she'd have done it."

"*She* made me get it on my butt!" Megan growled accusingly.

Stephanie looked outraged at the accusation.

"*She* wanted the pussy to wrap its tail around her right nipple!" Stephanie responded and I heard an audible gasp from Paige as she brought her hand up to her mouth and I saw the beginnings of a smirk. "Only . . . well, the man at the shop said her tits and her nipples were *too* small . . ."

Marcus looked appalled by the open discussion of his daughter's chest. "The *man* . . .?" He growled.

Megan and Stephanie both instantly realised their error and they both dived back in.

"No – he never touched her . . ." Stephanie blurted out.

"I was wearing a tight T-shirt . . ." Megan added.

I knew what Marcus would have been thinking and I might have been on the same page to some extent. Marcus would have shot the man; I would have cut his balls off . . .

"So, missy, where is this 'pussy'?" Paige demanded. "And no wisecracks!"

"On my right butt cheek . . ." Megan admitted with reluctance.

"Stephanie has a version of her Psyche symbol on her own butt cheek – Anne-Marie discovered it and Stephanie kind of showed all . . ." I explained.

"Dead meat . . ." Marcus growled as he glared down at the two girls who visibly wilted before him. "I should cuff you and haul you in, Megan."

"Don't; she'd enjoy the cuffs too much!" Stephanie growled.

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Marcus stormed off into the dining room where he helped himself to a large whiskey from the small bar he maintained there. Paige glared down at her daughter and put on an impatient expression. Megan groaned and knew what was coming.

"Do I have to?" the eleven-year-old wailed.

"Get to it!" Paige ordered and the girl slipped her pyjama pants down just enough to show the small pussy cat that resided on her right butt cheek.

"You too," I ordered Stephanie who reluctantly followed suit and lowered her jeans and panties to expose the small 'psyche' symbol.

"A matching pair of idiots!" Paige commented. "Looks like a month, Megan . . ."

"I intend to give Stephanie the same," I commented with an evil smirk.

Both girls groaned as they covered up their new body art.

Glenview

Anne-Marie had an enormous grin on her face as we returned home.

"Has the criminal been sentenced?" She asked gleefully – overjoyed to see Dave and Mindy angry with somebody else.

I ignored her and turned to Stephanie.

"Get upstairs and get into bed. I don't want to see or hear from you until the morning – is that clear?"

Stephanie glowered at me but she decided not to argue.

"We are very disappointed in you, Stephanie," I said evenly as Dave came and stood beside me. "Go!"

Anne-Marie opened her mouth to say something derogatory as her sister ascended the stairs but I intervened.

"One word from you, and you're grounded too."

The eight-year-old girl fled.

The following afternoon
Wednesday, 22nd June

Glenview

"Hi, girls!"

"Hi, Dave," Saoirse and Morgan said as they entered the house.

"Hello!" Mindy said in surprise as the two teenagers entered the kitchen.

"Hi, Mindy," Saoirse offered.

"Hi," Morgan said with a wave.

"What's up?" Mindy asked.

Saoirse looked over at Morgan who nodded back.

"We've come to speak on behalf of the condemned," Saoirse said.

"Megan and Steph?" Dave asked and Morgan nodded.

"Let's go get comfortable, shall we?" Mindy suggested.

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Once the four of them were comfortable, Saoirse looked up at Mindy.

"It's our fault . . . well, mine actually, that they got the tattoos."

"You?" Mindy queried. She was fully aware that Saoirse had a tattoo of a fox on her right buttock – in fact Anne-Marie was always going on about it, ad infinitum!

"When we were out on the boats, me and Morgan were talking and well, we talked about getting a tattoo each – to help us bond . . ."

Saoirse actually appeared embarrassed – that was rare in itself. Morgan took over.

"We've been spending a lot of time together as we get to know each other properly. SD's been helping me get over my past . . . hence the change in hair colour. We've become true sisters in every sense of the word. SD has things she needs to talk about and some of those things can't be discussed with her best friend."

"Stephanie," Dave stated and Morgan nodded.

"Yeah," Morgan confirmed. "On Tuesday morning, we went to get these . . ."

Morgan shyly lifted her t-shirt just revealing a pink bra. There, just below her right breast and slightly under her right arm was a stunning tattoo that combined a raven with a fox. The black raven body sat below the black-outlined head of the fox. Saoirse did the same on the opposite side of her own body to reveal an identical tattoo. Each piece of body

art was about six inches in height.

"Not bad!" Dave mused and Mindy nodded her agreement.

"Do your aunt and uncle know?" Mindy asked.

Morgan's expression said it all.

"No."

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"Did you enjoy getting the tattoo?" Mindy asked Morgan.

"It hurt – more than SD made out it would – plus it was humiliating!"

"I didn't want to scare you," Saoirse said kindly and Morgan grinned.

"Humiliating?" Dave enquired.

"I had to remove my bra and apart from SD, nobody has ever seen my breasts," Morgan explained as she turned pink again. "I almost chickened out at that point and walked out of the shop. SD's happy to show off her bits like most *Predators*, apparently, so she was topless within seconds!"

"So, how did Dumb and Dumber get involved?" Dave asked.

Saoirse giggled at Dave's comment before she turned serious.

"We met Megan and Steph later that afternoon," Saoirse explained. "It never occurred to me to lie about what we had been doing when she asked. You know, Steph, she's a nosy little bitch!"

Mindy laughed and nodded.

"I told them about the shop – the shop guy barely took a look at our slightly-fake IDs," Morgan added. "I said it was perfect for underage tattoos."

"What's the difference between a fake ID and a 'slightly-fake' ID?" Mindy asked.

"The ages were altered and we both look eighteen . . ." Morgan replied as her cheeks went a deep shade of pink.

"So, without you two, the *Psychotic Predator* and the *Pussycat* would never have gone for tattoos," Mindy summed up.

Saoirse and Morgan both nodded.

***Chapter 292*: Tempest and Discord**

Friday, June 24th, 2016

Glenview

"Hey, Dave . . ."

"Yeah, Marty."

"When was the last time you checked your Kick-Ass website?"

"Not been on there for many months . . . why?"

"Well, you have a message – actually . . . there are a *lot* of messages, but considering you don't get kittens down from trees like you used to . . ."

Dave grinned.

". . . This one is a definite call for help: *'Fusion: Discord in trouble. Need extraction ASAP.'*"

Safehouse F

The senior staff were gathered in the Command Centre.

"Any chance this is a trap?" Mindy enquired.

"Maybe. According to Joshua, Discord did help us gain entry into that bunker so we could finish *Urban Predator*," Dave pointed out.

"Dis . . . cord."

Joshua hissed the two syllables of the word and his face was one of revulsion.

"Okay, Joshua – spit it out!" Mindy ordered.

"That fucking evil bitch stripped Megan naked and then she tried to come onto me. I saved her fucking life *twice*. No more!"

Chloe spoke up first.

"Josh, she's a troubled kid, just like all the others. I know what she did to Megan was bad, but she did help you in the bunker."

"She had no choice; I was about to snap her fucking bitch neck!"

"Okay!" Mindy breathed. "Joshua, you are relieved from this mission."

"Good fucking riddance!" Joshua breathed as he left the Command Centre.

"I'll talk to him later. He fucking hates that girl *and* the boy. He'll never forgive them for what they did to Megan," Chloe said with a grimace.

"Okay," Mindy said as she came to a decision. "Dave, you will head up the mission. Take Chloe, Joshua, and Megan."

"Josh?" Chloe asked.

"He needs to learn to control his hatred. I won't see a fifteen-year-old girl get killed just because she did something bad. She was under the influence of bad people. I know that Megan is still haunted by what did and what might have happened to her. Going will help them both. Most of *Vengeance* are busy with a major operation but Cassie is heading south to open up an MI5 Safehouse. Okay, people, wheels up in one-twenty!"

Chloe was not convinced but nonetheless, she left the Command Centre and went looking for Megan and Joshua.

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She found them both in the armoury and Joshua was firing on all cylinders.

"The fucking bitch can die for all I care!" Joshua growled as he took down his FN Five-seven Mk2 pistol.

"She did bad things, Josh – she really did – but I can't let her die just 'cause she stripped me naked. I won't stand for it and I know you won't either. I know you, Joshua – you're soft as a puppy dog when you want to be but hard as nails when required. I hate to contradict you but you're wrong this time, *Jack!*"

"Megan – what I saw happen to you . . ."

"It's behind me. So, I showed a bit of pussy and my tits – big deal; name one person who has *not* seen my tits . . . not to mention that Steph's comment the other day had my Mom making me piss on a stick to make sure I wasn't up the duff! I can cope with humiliation; it's part of my life . . ."

Joshua laughed for a moment before he returned to his sullen state.

"Okay, just for some fucking peace and quiet – all I need is for Chloe to get on my case, now."

"Here's your chance!" Megan grinned as I let the door close behind me.

"Fucking great!" Joshua moaned.

"Megan – you have a mission . . . and so do you, Josh."

"What!" Joshua exclaimed.

"Mindy thinks it'll do you good," Chloe advised her boyfriend.

"Does she now!" Joshua groaned knowing he was boxed in.

Two hours later

Chicago Midway Airport

The car drove straight into the hanger before stopping a few feet from the lowered boarding stairs of the jet.

The Gulfstream 650ER executive jet was painted in a matt light grey on the fuselage but with a subtly darker shade of grey on the wings and tail. No markings were visible on the fuselage except for the aircraft's international identification code on the engine nacelles: N345AF. The aircraft was at *Fusion's* disposal and came with an experienced flight crew of two pilots and a flight attendant. The crew were all armed and very discrete when it came to their passengers and cargo.

The aircraft could seat 16 with 6 sleeping. The forward section of the aircraft, aft of the cockpit, housed the access hatch and the galley. Next, through a sliding armoured door, came four seats, two per side facing each other across a table either side of the aisle. Aft of them were two sofas which faced one another across the aisle. Further aft were four seats grouped around a table, facing fore and aft in pairs. Across from them was a credenza. Another sliding armoured door separated off a private cabin with seating for four, three on a sofa to port and a single seat and table to starboard.

That office housed the encrypted communications equipment including satellite communication equipment. There was a large head and then the aft cargo compartment. The aircraft had a range of up to 7,000 nautical miles at a cruise speed of almost 500 knots.

..._...

"Welcome aboard, my name is Amy, please take your seats and we will taxi directly," the smiling lady advised her four passengers.

She did not appear to notice that only one was an adult, two were teenagers, and the other was a tween. She knew

full well that they were not normal passengers and neither was the cargo being loaded into the cargo bay in the tail. Megan and Joshua took their seats to port while Chloe and Dave sat to starboard. Joshua and Chloe both faced forwards. The aircraft began to move under the control of a tractor the moment the cargo hatch and the main boarding hatch were secured. The sleek aircraft swept out of the open hanger doors and began to start its twin tail-mounted engines.

"Take-off clearance has been granted, we are taxiing for a direct take-off at max V," the pilot announced as the aircraft began to gather momentum along the taxiway.

Six minutes later, the 100-foot jet accelerated down the runway and then took on a steep upward angle as the wheels left the ground and were raised into the fuselage with a thump. The jet continued to climb to its cruising altitude of 41,000 feet and turned onto a north-easterly course over eastern Canada. Fifteen minutes later, the pilot announced their speed and course: "We are cruising at Mach 0.9, on a course of zero-three-seven, at an altitude of 41,000 feet. We are very light and we have a tail wind for most of the flight so our ETA is expected to be approximately 22:00, UK time. Please sit back and enjoy the next seven hours."

"That take-off was fucking awesome!" Megan exclaimed with a huge grin.

"Hi, guys," Amy interrupted. "Anybody fancy a soda? We have some freshly made burgers aboard and I can get them cooked in no time – anybody for a cheeseburger?"

Joshua and Megan grinned.

"Got some bacon?" Chloe asked.

"Bacon, double cheeseburger?" Amy asked and Chloe nodded.

"Make that two, please," Dave added. "Once we've stuffed our faces, we need to sleep."

22:05

***RAF Northolt, United Kingdom
A little over thirteen miles east of London***

The Gulfstream jet landed without fanfare and the passengers, awoken fifteen minutes previously, prepared to disembark.

Megan was still stretching as she grabbed her bag from the co-pilot as he unloaded the cargo bay. The man smirked at his passengers and wordlessly wished them Godspeed.

Commander Lawrence had been there on the tarmac as the jet had taxied to a halt.

"As Mindy requested, two Sentinels."

"Thank you, Spook," Dave said as he shook hands with the Royal Navy officer.

Once all the kit was loaded, Dave climbed aboard one Sentinel with Chloe while Megan climbed aboard the other Sentinel. Dave and Joshua drove the armoured Range Rovers out of the airbase and they both turned south on the A4180 and then east onto the A40 trunk road.

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A little over six miles to the east, Joshua perked up as they passed over the M25 motorway.

"Isn't this near where Mindy met us in that Police BMW X5 she wrecked a few months back?" he asked.

Dave laughed.

"Yes, it is."

Four miles later, the two vehicles pulled off at the A355 junction and stopped beside an almost identical Sentinel.

"Good evening, my fellow Yanks!" Cassie smiled from the other vehicle. "Follow me to the Safehouse – it's just a mile

or so from the target."

..._...

Twenty minutes later, the three armoured vehicles pulled up outside a small property just to the south of Farnham Common. It was away from prying eyes and it allowed the team to change into their body armour and check out their weapons. The house was all ready for them, thanks to Cassie having blazed down from Scotland at high speed and opening up before going to collect them.

"Marty has confirmed the mobile phone pings as coming from a farm just to the south of here. It is isolated and weapons fire should not carry far as long as it is suppressed. Five will intercept any Police activity but we have been cautioned not to involve any outside agencies such as the local plod. I'll remain here with *Cutlass* . . . just in case I need to rescue your sorry arses!"

"Never gonna happen!" Wildcat hissed with a smile.

Discord with Tempest

"Leave her alone!"

"Shut the fuck up, you little whelp!" The man yelled back as he pistol-whipped Tempest across the face.

The thirteen-year-old boy fell back with a scream as blood flew from his nose. Another man stepped forwards and he kicked the boy in the stomach which elicited another scream of pain. It was totally unnecessary and beyond barbaric but the same man put a bullet into the boy who immediately went silent.

Discord screamed as the man roughly shoved her down to the floor and two other men pinned her. She struggled and she screamed as the man began to attack her clothing. The fifteen-year-old felt the first vestiges of panic as the tips of the man's fingers dug under the waistband of her jeans, then a hand roughly reached around and yanked at her belt buckle.

With a jerk, the belt came apart and the buttons on the jeans were pulled open. The hand yanked the jeans and panties down together. Discord had never felt so scared and she screamed as loud as she could for help. Her mind told her that none was coming and that she would die that night. However, she feared what the men were about to do much worse to her than dying.

She felt her boots, socks, jeans, and panties pulled off her. The man slapped her hard on her bare backside eliciting a yell of pain and Discord began to shake as well as sob and scream. She was roughly rolled onto her back and through her tears she saw the men smirking as they pulled her legs apart and studied what resided at the top of her long legs and shapely thighs.

One of the men then attacked her blouse which ripped and was pulled off her. Her bra came next leaving her completely naked with several men staring down at her body from head to toe. Discord shook with fear. She had been stripped just like she was then, by another; Joshua. She had deserved it after what she had done to that Megan girl. Joshua had let her live to face punishment.

Both her and Tempest had been beaten for that act of misjudgement. They had then been sent to die on guard duty. Only it was Joshua that had found them, in his guise as Jackal. That had shocked her – she had had a member of *Fusion* at her fingertips, maybe another; that Megan. That could have been a route to glory for them both; only it all went wrong – she was glad it had all gone wrong.

She had had an out – or she thought she did. But *Fusion* had not appeared, so she was going to die. She concentrated on anything as her body was lifted off the ground and she was pushed against a table, face down and her legs were pulled apart.

Kick-Ass

While the others kept watch, Kick-Ass moved forwards and he studied the layout of the farm through his NVGs.

He already knew the rough layout of the site from overhead imagery supplied by Battle-Guy. To the left was a low bungalow, with several lights burning. To the right was a low barn and screaming could be heard coming from an open door. Five cars were parked in the space between the barn and the bungalow.

Kick-Ass checked out the partially open barn door and he signalled the rest of the team and waved them inside while he kept overwatch.

Jackal with Shadow and Wildcat

We had arrived not a moment too soon.

The girl was naked again and this time I was *not* gratified to see it.

Only this time, it was not intended purely to humiliate; the intention was obvious as the girl was held up against a table and the man behind her had his trousers around his ankles. The man was only seconds away from driving his rock-hard cock in between the sobbing girl's exposed labia. The man was oblivious to our presence as were the others watching eagerly – tough; their loss.

I raised my pistol and double-tapped the man in the back of the head; the second round was totally unnecessary but it felt good. The corpse with the destroyed head fell forwards against the now screaming girl; her naked body covered in the man's blood and brains. I ran forwards, dragged the corpse off Discord and grabbed hold of the girl as she sank to the ground, sobbing.

"I've found the boy; he's been badly beaten up and I think he's been shot in the back..." Wildcat announced as she examined a body that lay on the ground several yards away.

"She's very beautiful, Jackal, no wonder you got hard . . ." Shadow commented without malice.

"She has a nice body but I only have eyes for you, my lover . . ." I replied quickly.

"Just remember that Jackal – you can look, but you can't touch," Shadow cautioned as she helped me lower the girl gently to the ground.

..._...

Her being naked allowed us to easily assess her wounds. They were mostly superficial and mainly consisted of many cuts, scratches, grazes, and bruises. I had to remember that this was the girl who had made light of humiliating Wildcat, not to mention her attempt to get a rise out of me . . . but she had also shown Wildcat compassion *and* she had helped us big time in Toulouse. The worst, I figured, would probably be the mental trauma at almost being raped, but with what I knew about the *Urban Predator* kids that I had already encountered, I knew it would most likely go much deeper than that.

The enemy was at bay, so we carefully loaded Discord and Tempest into our vehicles. Tempest was still unconscious, which was good, considering his wounds.

M15 Safehouse Farnham Common

We very quickly left the area and we made it back to the Safehouse unscathed.

There, Chloe took Discord – apparently, her real name was Sarah – to get cleaned up and dressed. Dave carried Tempest into the kitchen where the table had been cleared and the boy was laid face down on the table.

Dave and Cassie, with help from Megan, cut away the boy's clothing to find his bullet wound. It was a through and through, so no bullet was visible. After cleansing the wound and dressing it to prevent further infection, Cassie and Dave pulled off their rubber gloves and they went to wash their hands.

Megan had noticed that Marc had a tattoo on his right bicep: it was of a thundercloud emitting lightning bolts.

..._...

Chloe had taken her time with Sarah. The girl was humiliated and worried as she took a quick shower before Chloe handed her what was left of her clothing. Chloe had Sarah were of a similar build so Chloe produced a spare t-shirt to replace the ripped blouse. As Sarah had pulled on the t-shirt, Chloe had noticed a large tattoo on the girl's right shoulder blade. It was black and based on a 'draconequus' creature inspired by Greek mythology which was a

serpentine being with the head of a pony, but numerous different animal parts to symbolise the inharmonious nature of the creature.

I had been pacing up and down in the living room awaiting her arrival.

I had no idea how I was going to react when I spoke to her. I felt compassion for the girl; none of what had occurred was her fault and I had to consider her past actions since that time in Milan. Chloe was right, as ever, I had to give her a chance. Sarah looked very shy when she came into the living room and she saw me.

"Hello, Sarah, how are you feeling?" I inquired as nicely as I could.

"Embarrassed."

"You have no reason to be; you are among friends," I tried.

"I was naked, *again* – not to mention that I was about to be . . ."

Sarah broke down and she began to sob. I hugged her tightly as she cried.

"Am I interrupting something, Joshua?" Came a very familiar voice a few minutes later and I instantly released the girl.

"I think the attack has just come to the fore . . ." I explained quickly.

Chloe smiled and nodded approvingly at my actions.

"I wouldn't wish something like that on anyone," she said calmly.

With Chloe's help, I guided Sarah to a couch and sat her down.

"I'm sorry . . ." she sobbed with obvious relief in her tone.

"Don't be; you've been through hell, Sarah," Chloe tried as she sat down beside Sarah.

A few minutes later, Sarah had calmed down and she stood up.

..._...

Megan then walked into the room and she headed over towards Sarah who looked down at the ground and she tried desperately to avoid Megan's eyes.

"Bet you are *overjoyed* at seeing me almost raped or worse . . ." Sarah said.

Megan did not respond, she simply reached up and slapped the older girl around the face.

"I am *not* in any way *overjoyed*, Sarah, and I am appalled that you would even think that," Megan replied as she controlled her anger.

"Sorry . . ." Sarah mumbled.

"You were *forced* to become Discord, against your will. I don't believe that you enjoy what you do – except for maybe getting a rise out of Josh . . . only joking. I want to believe that there is good in you; you showed me compassion when you did not have to and you saved my life so I owe you for that. I hope that we can be friends, Sarah – Marc, too."

Megan reached up again and the older girl flinched away. Megan touched the scar on Sarah's right cheek.

"I'm sorry about giving you that scar."

"That Glock hurt," Sarah admitted with a smile but then the smile faded. "How's Marc?"

"He's got a new hole in his side but nothing to worry about," Dave explained. "Let's get packed up; the plane is awaiting our arrival."

Saturday, June 25th

RAF Northolt, United Kingdom

It was not long after one in the morning when they boarded the Gulfstream for the return flight.

Marc, still unconscious, was strapped into one of the sofas and a drip was hung from the overhead. Sarah and Megan sat on the sofa opposite while Dave, Joshua, and Chloe took seats at tables. Once airborne, Amy came aft and asked for any food and drink orders.

Megan waved Sarah to go first.

"I could murder a wildcat burger," she quipped and even Joshua laughed.

"Fresh out of wildcat," Amy advised with a wink at Megan. "Unless you want it fresh off the bone . . ."

Megan's eyes went wide for a moment before she quickly suggested a normal burger.

"Make them doubles with bacon and cheese, please, Amy," Dave suggested to nods all round. "Some Coke too, thanks."

Amy chuckled as she headed forward to the galley.

..._...

"Sorry if I spoke out of turn, Megan," Sarah offered apologetically.

"I had a feeling that you knew who we all were," Joshua mused.

"If I had known back in France . . ."

"I know – ticket to glory," Megan added.

"We're all friends now," Dave confirmed.

"How many does that make, now?" Chloe asked.

"Too damn many, if you ask me!" Joshua chuckled. "At least we have a boy now – they've all been damn split-arses up to now."

"Is that an extension of 'tramp'?" Sarah grinned and Joshua grimaced at the reference.

"I was very wrong to say that; you're most definitely not a tramp, Sarah. To be honest all you fucking *Predators* are fucking nuts!"

"How many more of us have been rescued?" Sarah asked.

"You and Marc make nine," Dave replied.

Seven hours later

Chicago Midway Airport

As soon as the aircraft landed, it taxied directly into the hanger where they were met by Dr Bennett and Mindy.

Dr Bennett immediately came aboard and she quickly set to work examining Marc's injuries. He had regained consciousness around the time we had started our descent into Chicago. At first, he had been apprehensive and worried but the sight of Sarah and her soothing words had quickly calmed him down. Dave updated the boy on what had been happening, where they were, and where they were going.

"Where are they going?" Megan asked.

"Glenview, to meet Stephanie and Saoirse, and then onto Safehouse Q," Mindy replied.

Later that morning

Glenview

I led Sarah and Marc into the living room where Stephanie and Saoirse were awaiting their arrival.

Sarah stopped dead as she entered the room and as she stared at Saoirse, a whole host of emotions seemed to sweep across her face before she spoke.

"Saoirse – I . . ."

"She knows you," growled Stephanie, who had a none too friendly expression on her face as she studied the new arrivals.

The same expression crossed Sarah's face as she turned her gaze onto the younger girl.

"What is *she* doing here?" Sarah spat.

"*She* has a name," Saoirse retorted, a little anger in her tone. "Her name is Stephanie."

"I don't care *what* her name is; she's a fucking wild animal!"

I looked over at my daughter – obviously, she got about in the *Predator* world!

"You're a bit like Mindy, Steph: people always remember you but not always for the best of reasons!" Dave quipped as his wife scowled before turning her attentions back to her daughter.

"What did you do, Stephanie?" Mindy asked wearily and dreading the answer.

In response, Sarah pulled up the left side of her t-shirt and she revealed a nasty looking scar about four-inches long.

"She slashed me," Sarah explained.

I looked back at Stephanie.

"She pissed me off – she's damn lucky that I was in a good mood and I chose not to kill her."

"Ladies – please," I insisted.

Stephanie grimaced and she stepped forwards, towards Sarah, who backed off. At any other time, seeing a fourteen-year-old back down from a ten-year-old would have been funny.

"I'm sorry, Sarah," Stephanie said as she held out her hand to Sarah. "That was a bad time for us all. *Us Predators* need to stick together. Friends?"

"Thank you, Stephanie," Sarah replied as she tentatively took the offered hand and shook it.

"My friends call me, Steph."

"Me, too?" Marc asked.

"As long as you don't tie me up, naked, and then wank over me."

Marc went bright red and Sarah did her best not to giggle.

"What are *you* so grumpy about?" Stephanie asked Megan while Sarah talked with Mindy.

"I'm flat broke."

"Why?"

"The tantrum I threw when Mom made me take that damn pregnancy test; it cost me nearly thirty bucks . . . thanks for that by the way!"

"You're always welcome!"

"How's it feel, meeting two more *Predators*?"

"It sucks; they all remember who I was. Either 'cause I was a traitor or because I hurt people for the sake of it . . . I'm not that Psyche – not anymore."

Stephanie looked genuinely hurt and unhappy so Megan quickly changed the subject.

"Where's Horatio?"

"The pussy is with that great canine pussy, Razor – it's almost impossible to separate those too . . . pussy . . . fuck, dammit!"

"Problem, Stephanie?" Mindy asked.

Stephanie turned to look at Sarah and then at Saoirse with a quizzical look on her face and then she smirked.

"SD?"

"Yes, Steph."

"A though just occurred to me. Is this the very same Sarah that you ate out on stage?"

Saoirse went a brilliant shade of pink.

"Fuck, Stephanie!" Saoirse growled as she felt Sarah's hand on her shoulder.

Saoirse turned to see a very angry teenage girl a foot away from her.

"You told *this* girl about *that*?" Sarah demanded angrily.

"It was accidental – how the fuck was I meant to know that I would ever see you again, Sarah?" Saoirse tried and quite reasonably she thought.

"Still – that was a *very* private moment . . ."

"*Private*?" Stephanie demanded incredulously. "You ate each other out in front of *two-hundred* people!"

Sarah smiled before she replied.

"Believe it or not, Steph, we have never spoken about that moment, since it happened; to be honest we never even spoke afterwards – we were too embarrassed to even *look* at each other."

"So, an encore is out of the question, then?" Stephanie inquired with a deadpan expression.

***Chapter 293*: Nightmare Revealed**

Sunday, June 26th, 2016

Lizzie Edwards saw herself as one of *Fusion's* biggest fans.

The bedroom which she shared with her big sister, Lauren, was liberally plastered with posters and photos of the Chicago Vigilantes. Currently, her favourite was a relative newcomer to the scene. Various photos of the female vigilante were prominently visible alongside the likes of Hit Girl, Kick-Ass, and Shadow. Lizzie had no idea that her dream, and much more besides, was about to come true.

That vigilante was known as Nightmare.

That evening

The Edwards Home

"What is this?"

Lizzie Edwards was scared, however, something in the back of her mind told her that she was safe from harm. The female vigilante standing before her was a good few inches taller than her and she had a slim build, despite the teal and dark grey tiger stripes that liberally covered the combat suit which bulked out her figure. On her right hip was a holster carrying a SIG Sauer P239 Tactical pistol in 9-millimetre. Around her waist was a utility belt that carried various pouches as well as a 7-inch knife over her left thigh – Lizzie knew all about her favourite vigilante and the version before her matched the posters on the walls of her bedroom.

The vigilante was standing in that same bedroom having climbed in through the window, just moments before. She knew that the vigilante was known as Nightmare, she also had a shrewd idea who the vigilante really was beneath all the armour, but there was every chance that she was very, very wrong. Lizzie Edwards began to cry, but the vigilante reached out with her left hand and she took hold of Lizzie's right.

"Don't be afraid. . ." the electronically altered voice said.

"I – I'm not. If only my sister could see this. . ."

"She's here, my dear Lizzie, she's here."

Lizzie was very confused and more than a little worried as with her right hand, the Chicago vigilante reached up and she pulled off her mask. For a moment, Lizzie blinked, scared to look but she then took in the face before her. She took an enormous intake of breath as her eyes struggled to comprehend what, or rather *who*, was standing before her.

..._...

The twelve-year-old girl stopped crying and she smiled.

"*I knew it!*" Lizzie exclaimed. "*I knew it was you!*"

"Thank you for keeping it quiet," Lauren replied as she hugged her younger sister. "I had a feeling that you knew what was going on."

"This is *so* awesome – my sister's a vigilante!"

Then came the expected host of questions and comments.

"I saw you on TV – you were awesome!"

"What was it like to kill people?"

"Does Mom know?"

"When you climbed that tower at the silos – you were so brave!"

"Do you know who Hit Girl really is?"

"What will Mom say?"

"Were you scared that night?"

Then she lapsed into silence and the twelve-year-old just flopped backwards onto her bed, stunned by the evening's revelations. But she bolted upright a minute later when their mother pushed open the bedroom door.

"Lizzie, what have I told you about leaving your dirty clothes on the landing. . . oh . . . hi, Lauren – what have I told you about bringing firearms into the house?"

Lizzie's mouth dropped open in shock.

"You *know!*"

"Of course, honey; I'm her mother!"

Lauren grinned.

"Sorry, *Athena!*"

"*What!*" Lizzie exclaimed. She glared at her mother and elder sister. "You, too?"

Emily Edwards glared at her youngest daughter and she shrugged.

"Sorry. . ."

"This sucks!"

..._...

The rest of the evening was spent with Lizzie examining each and every part of Lauren's combat suit as her sister undressed. The weapons were placed securely inside a locked container which in turn was bolted to the bedroom floor and the combat suit went into a locked, Kevlar holdall.

Lauren was very pleased that she did not have to withhold the secret any more. Lauren had been certain that Lizzie was figuring things out and after talking with Mindy and her mother, Lauren was told to come over, in 'uniform'. Both Lauren and her mother had sworn Lizzie to the utmost secrecy and she had nodded her ascent. Lizzie kept lapsing between moments of non-stop chatter and questions to total silence as she struggled to comprehend all she had learnt.

Lauren found her sister's confusion funny and she went to sleep with a big smile on her face.

A few hours later

"What's going on . . .?"

Lizzie struggled to sit up in her bed, her hands rubbing her eyes. Lauren was doing the same thing but then she suddenly came alert and she could hear shouting.

"Get out!" their mother screamed from downstairs.

"No!" came an answering bellow.

"Dad!" Lauren growled angrily as she jumped out of the bed and ran for the bedroom door. "Stay here, Lizzie!"

Lizzie made to move.

"I said to *stay!*"

Lizzie flinched away from her sister, scared by the dark expression on her face. She complied and slipped back under the covers.

..._...

"You fucking, bitch – those are my daughters, up there . . . and I want to see them!"

"It's two o'clock in the fucking morning, you drunk bastard!"

"I've seen what you've done to Lauren; she hates me . . ."

"You made her hate you all by yourself."

"You fucking whore . . . I'm gonna . . ."

The hand moved through the air, the palm of the hand open. Only it was intercepted and brought down smartly before a hand wrapped around Bill Edwards' throat. The arm squeezed and a voice hissed into his ear.

"One quick squeeze and you will never breath again . . ."

Bill Edwards did not recognise the voice which hissed in his ear and he would never have guessed that his daughter could scare him so badly. A hand grabbed hold of his throat and he felt the nails digging in.

"Do you want me to rip your fucking gutless throat out?"

Bill Edwards did his best to shake his head.

"People like you make me sick – I think you need to be taught a lesson; something that you will *never* forget . . ."

With that, Bill Edwards felt the arm release but as he attempted to turn, something hard collided with the side of his head and he lost consciousness before he hit the living room floor.

..._...

"Mom? Are you okay?"

"Yes, honey – I wish you didn't have to see him like that, but thank you for coming to my aid."

"I warned him . . . when he found me at the cinema."

"Yes, honey, you did – he was never one to take subtle suggestions. So, what do you have planned?"

"I have an idea but I'm going to need some help."

The Willis Tower 95th Floor

Bill Edwards was not a happy man – not by any stretch of the imagination.

His head hurt and for some reason, he did not feel right. As he opened his eyes . . .

"Holy fuck!" he yelled.

Everything was upside down and he had a remarkable view of Chicago at night. Then fear gripped him as he realised that he was upside down and hanging from a building, very, very high in the air. He looked around in a panic and at first, he thought he was alone. But no, just a few feet away, he could see the silhouette of somebody close by.

"Enjoying the view?" the electronically enhanced voice asked.

"Scary, ain't it?" another electronic voice asked and Edwards span around to see another form.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"The 95th floor of the Willis Tower – I've been where you are and it sucks."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Psyche. My pal over there, that's Nightmare – she's a bit crazy, by the way."

"Why . . .?"

"Let's just say that we're friends of your daughter and she is not happy with what you're doing to her mother. They want you to stay out of their lives – *for good!*" Psyche went on.

..._...

Edwards struggled with his hands but they were secured, tightly, behind his back. His feet were secured as were his lower legs, almost to the knees. As he struggled, he began to swing from side to side. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw that the two armour-clad individuals were wearing harnesses and hanging off the side of the building, quite comfortably, the right way up.

"What are going to do to me?"

Edwards was determined not to give in to vigilantes but his voice betrayed him and wavered slightly.

"Don't know yet . . ." Psyche replied.

Edwards never saw the fist which swung from the other side and struck him hard in the stomach. Edwards struggled to regain his breath and his inverted position did not help.

"You've pissed us off," Nightmare growled as she kicked him in the face and sent him slamming into the tempered glass of the empty office behind.

Edwards screamed at the pain both from his smashed nose and his bruised head from the collision with the glass.

"I won't go near those girls again . . ."

"Don't fucking believe you!" Psyche drawled.

"You need to suffer a bit more," Nightmare growled as she brought out a knife and cut away his shirt allowing the wrecked garment to drift away, over a thousand feet, to the street below.

Nightmare then cut the belt of Edwards pants and slit up his right side while Psyche did the same on the left side. Each leg was then cut and the pants joined the shirt below. Nightmare seemed to hesitate but Psyche moved in and cut away the man's underwear leaving him naked from the knees up.

"Bit pathetic, really," Psyche commented as she ran the tip of her knife along the man's genitals. "I thought men were supposed to have bigger dicks."

Edwards was shaking with both fear, and the cold.

Nightmare giggled behind her mask at Psyche's comment.

After a brief phone call to Mindy, Dave and Stephanie had appeared at her house to remove the unconscious Mr Edwards. It had been Stephanie's idea to use the same place where she had been left dangling a few months previously. Kick-Ass was above them, in control of the ropes with Jackal and Shadow to assist.

While she had no love for the man who was dangling all but naked before her, she had been a little freaked out about removing his underwear but Psyche had jumped in to cover her unintended hesitation. While she was still squeamish at seeing men naked – in fact, she had never seen any *completely* naked – seeing her own father naked was something else completely. She steeled herself for what was to come; it had to be done to give her, her sister, and her mother some much-needed peace.

Psyche nodded at her; it was time.

"You . . . are . . . going . . . to . . . fucking . . . learn . . . you . . . piece . . . of . . . worthless . . . shit!"

As Nightmare yelled at Edwards, she punctuated each pause with a kick to some part of his body. The final kick went to somewhere delicate and the man screamed out in pain as blood from some of the kicks ran down his body.

"Time to go, bye bye!" Psyche growled and she began to cut the ropes binding his legs.

"No . . . please . . ."

The man was begging and he began to weep.

"You can't . . ."

"Oh, yes we can," Nightmare chuckled.

Psyche cut the final rope and Bill Edwards screamed as he began to plummet earthwards.

..._...

As he fell, the single rope binding Edwards' ankles together came taught after several feet and he was jerked to a rapid halt.

Terror was etched across his face and Nightmare cringed as she witnessed her father piss himself a thousand feet above the City of Chicago.

"Hope nobody's looking up!" Psyche quipped before she looked at Mr Edwards. "I'd keep my mouth shut, too, if I were you!"

As Bill Edwards watched, Psyche and Nightmare were hauled up the side of the building and onto the rooftop above.

"Don't leave me!"

There was no response as he was left to swing from side to side staring down at the dark city below.

..._...

"You think we should pull the fucker up?" Jackal asked.

"Nah – he's enjoying the view too much," Shadow chuckled.

"Pull me up – please . . ."

"Don't think he's enjoying *anything*, to be honest," Psyche commented dryly as she peered over the edge of the tower. "Mind you, I think his dick's getting smaller."

Nightmare laughed out loud and she blushed behind her mask.

"Thank you, all of you. I hate that man for what he's done to my Mom . . . but he is my Dad and while I want him out of our lives, I don't want him dead."

"That's your decision and your decision alone," Kick-Ass said.

"I want to go back to my family now."

"Pull him up!" Kick-Ass ordered and Jackal heaved on the rope.

The Edwards Home

"Lauren!"

"I'm back, Mom."

"I was so worried – your father?"

"He won't trouble us any more . . ."

"You didn't . . ."

"He's alive."

***The following morning
Sunday, June 26th, 2016***

The Edwards Home

"Mom!"

"What Lauren?"

"You may want to see this news item . . ."

'... In other news, a naked man was found wandering around the 95th floor of the Willis Tower in the early hours of the morning. The man, believed to be in his forties, was unable to explain why he was atop the tower but he kept saying that he had to leave Chicago. No charges were filed against the unknown man who appeared to have lost his mind but Police said that he had been provided with clothing and given a bus ticket out of the city...'

"Was that . . .?" Emily asked, a big smile spreading across her face

Lauren simply nodded.

Glenview

Mindy turned away from the TV and she looked over at her husband and daughter as they ate breakfast.

"You two appeared to have had fun, last night," she commented with a grin.

"Nothing to do with me," Stephanie offered. "Ask Psyche and Nightmare – they went a little nuts, last night . . ."

Dave simply shrugged and winked at his daughter who giggled as she dug into her cereal.

"I'll give you both points for creativity. Now, I need to go have words with Emily and I have a feeling that she is *not* going to like my idea."

"She'll give in – we all do . . . eventually," Dave replied sardonically.

That evening

1908 Wagner Rd, Glenview

"Mindy . . . I know some say that you are totally nuts . . .," Mindy rolled her eyes, "and I would not normally agree with them, but right now . . . no, we can't!"

"Emily – I insist . . . and you don't want to cross me; *I'm nuts!*" Mindy warned with a smirk.

"It's far too much. Really, Mindy, we can't . . ."

"Why not?" Lizzie demanded.

"It's a little much, Mindy . . ." Lauren said in agreement with her mother.

"I just want you all to be safe – besides, you'll be closer to everybody else," Mindy pointed out reasonably.

"I'm not going to win this argument, am I?" Emily said.

"No – I'm a pushy bitch!"

..._...

The house had six bedrooms across three floors and was over 5,000 square-feet in size. Each girl would have their own bedroom and a private en-suite bathroom for the first time in their lives.

"I love it, Mindy – it also means I don't have to put up with Lauren farting all night!" Lizzie laughed as Lauren scowled

at her younger sister.

"Okay!" Emily said as she finally gave in and gave Mindy a big hug.

Mindy grimaced but she went along with the hug as she was very glad Emily had taken her up on her offer.

Three days later
Wednesday, 29th June
Evening

Safehouse F

"Oh, wow!"

Lauren giggled at her sister's reaction which was much the same as her own first visit. Lauren recognised the expressions that flitted across her sister's face as she recognised the many familiar faces from either school or D-JAK. There was also some jealousy when Lizzie had first seen Lauren's on-duty uniform.

"Don't worry, Lizzie," Mindy chuckled. "We'll get you one, too."

"Me?"

"We know you can look after yourself – we've seen you in action at D-JAK. If you want in then we have a place for you . . . Torment."

"Torment. . ." Lizzie breathed. "I like it."

"Does that mean you won't be breaking into any more houses?" Hailee asked with a smirk.

"Sorry about that – I was going through a phase. . ." Lizzie explained shyly.

"No harm done."

..._...

"Let's see what you can do, Lizzie," Stephanie suggested. "Remember, this is *not* D-JAK. Down here, anything goes, okay?"

"Okay. . ."

With that, Stephanie began to circle the twelve-year-old girl. Lizzie had picked up her skills quickly at D-JAK so Stephanie was expecting something approaching a passable attack. . . Instead, Lizzie launched into a succession of Taekwondo patterns which had Stephanie rapidly retreating in surprise before she fell over backwards as Lizzie planted her right foot into the younger girl's chest.

"You been holding out on us, Lizzie?" Stephanie demanded as she rubbed her chest.

It was the grinning Lauren who replied for her sister.

"Lizzie practices every minute she can. Mom has to keep moving shit to stop it getting broken. Lizzie has also been trawling the internet for moves which D-JAK doesn't teach."

"Thanks for the heads up, *partner!*" Stephanie growled. "Well done, Lizzie; you're full of surprises."

"Thanks, Stephanie . . . *oooph!*"

Stephanie smiled down at Lizzie as she lay on the mat, her arms wrapped around her stomach.

"Never let your guard down."

..._...

It was a very happy trio that left Safehouse F and headed north to their new home. Emily Edwards was very pleased with how her daughters were turning out and very impressed with her younger daughter's skills. It made her feel more

relaxed knowing that both of her girls could look after themselves. Having her husband run out of town was a dream come true, but for the 'sheriff' to have been her own daughter. . .

For the Edwards family, life had finally improved in every way.

***Chapter 294*: The Gathering Darkness**

Thursday, June 30th, 2016

Glenview

It was the last day of school and everybody was just a *little* bit more hyper than usual.

Stephanie was still steaming because she had failed to win the award for best attendance the previous day.

"I could have hacked the school to give me the perfect attendance," she moaned. "Missed it by only three days, too!"

"Trust me – that *doesn't* work!" Mindy laughed.

"Talking from experience, are we?" Dave asked.

"Yeah – I got busted on the same day some white-assed pimp got his ass kicked!" Mindy laughed as she kissed her husband.

"I try to forget that day. . ." Dave winced.

"So, do I – it caused so many problems."

Mindy was jerked back to the present as Anne-Marie began to yell at her brother.

"Daniel!" Dave growled and the argument rapidly stopped as the boy handed back Anne-Marie's socks.

Even though both Anne-Marie and Stephanie were still grounded, Mindy was giving them a little extra leash each day that they behaved. She was still mad at the both of them and she was determined for them to work to the end of their sentences. However, for that day, though, the start of the summer dictated a *little* compassion.

Mindy was overjoyed when the three menaces were dropped off at school and she could relax.

Mindy's idea of relaxation was to go for some exercise which was also a good way to exercise the three canines.

On leaving the house, she would turn left out of the gates along Burr Oak Drive before taking a left onto Burr Oak Drive West and around to East Burr Oak Drive and onto Mickey Lane which took her down to Winnetka Avenue where she turned right to head east.

At Sunset Ridge Road, she would turn right again to head south until she reached Elmwood Avenue. There, she would turn left to head east again until she reached Brandon Road where she turned left again before running down Woodlawn Road to Wagner Road which, after a left turn, took her north.

She would pause at Cole Park to allow the dogs to have some fun and she would throw several rubber balls around and chase after the animals. After about half an hour, they would begin the run back home turning left back onto Wagner Road, heading north.

At Winnetka Road, they would turn left and head west towards home before making a left turn onto Sunset Ridge Road and then a right onto Burr Oak Drive and through the gates to the finish line. In total the run covered 3.5 miles, not including the running around at Cole Park. The dogs would dive for their water bowls and down the best part of a gallon of cooling water before they headed out into the garden to lie in the sun.

Mindy took the opportunity to go for a much-needed shower – Dave would avoid her with his nose turned up at the smell. The hot shower revitalised her aching limbs and prepared her for the rest of her day.

"You smell sweeter," Dave commented as he gave his wife a kiss on the lips.

"I thought you liked me all sweaty," Mindy pouted as she brushed her long blonde hair before putting it up into her customary pony tail.

"I do – in the sack. . ."

"Well, that will have to wait – I have an appointment at the Data Core."

"Your loss. . ." Dave teased."

Mindy paused at the door for a moment before she turned and smirked at her husband, casually unbuttoning her blouse.

I basked in his body heat.

I was naked as the day I was born and I lay on my front on top of Dave, my head nestled under his chin. His hands moved gently up and down my back – the movements sent tremors through me as his fingers traced up and down my backbone. Dave would laugh as I squirmed and I knew that he was enjoying himself – I could feel something hard on my stomach. I loved the man, almost more than life itself. The decision to reveal my true-identity to him was still the best decision of my life. While I had only been eleven at the time, somehow, I had known that I was doing the right thing.

Now, I regretted nothing as I listened to his pounding heart; the heart that loved me and cared for me. He was my soulmate and I believed myself to be his. Without Dave, I might be dead, haunting the streets of New York City or even those of Chicago. Instead, we had kept each other alive and now we lived in a gorgeous house and upstairs we had three kids who were now the centre of our lives. It still freaked me out that somehow, we had two eight-year-old trainee vigilantes and a ten-year-old cold-blooded killer as our children. I was still a little unsure about the twins and whether I was doing right by them.

"What's worrying you, honey?"

"Nothing..."

"You're scowling and either that means I am no longer any good at turning you on, or you have something on your mind . . . and by your shudders, it has to be the latter."

Damn him for being so astute!

What was bothering me?

My life . . . that was what was bothering me. We seemed to lurch from one crisis to another . . . often with something nice in between, or with some exciting booty.

Crisis Number One – I ran away from New York and almost died, but I gained Dave, a sex life, and a home. We started to watch over our new home, the City of Chicago – shame about their pizza. I also gained my first Katana and got my Panigale back – yay!

Crisis Number Two – Dave found out that Miranda was dead (kind of) and we both found out that Chris fucking D'Amico was still alive despite having been half eaten by an incompetent goddamn shark. Then we had our first round of ninjas! We also discovered a young nutcase (sorry, young girl) who actually saved our lives... Chloe AKA Shadow joined us. Those two bastards (Dave and Marcus) produced the damn swear jar! On a lighter note, I acquired my second Katana and my Tanto – Dave got his Ko-Wakizashi. We also met Abigail and Dave acquired his Harley.

Crisis Number Three – We met Curtis! We also met Kyle – Chloe's then boyfriend – and Commander Ryan Bennett, USN. Marcus produced Sophia AKA Eisenhower, a very welcome addition to our growing team. We adopted two CPD Officers: Murphy and Fellowes. We also gained Safehouse A.

Crisis Number Four – That legless wanker tried to kill Dave; but it failed and Shadow save Kick-Ass' life. On the positive side, Marty was properly on board. Back to the negative and we suffered another round of ninjas . . . and I was injured which allowed me to meet the intrepid Dr Cathy Bennett – Chloe's long-suffering mother.

Crisis Number Five – The Archer began to target innocent people and we entered, the week of hell. I lost my Panigale to that bastard! Once that fracas was over, we brought Chloe onto the team permanently. Battle Guy gained his armour.

Crisis Number Six – Curtis again! He followed his cousin and found Safehouse A – Chloe tried to kill her cousin. A more real crisis cropped up – I was shot, twice. . . We never knew it at the time, but Joshua was there, in Chicago,

and he witnessed me getting shot. Dr Bennett learned our identities and became our official medical support. I was presented with a new Ducati Panigale by CPD SWAT.

Crisis Number Seven – Chloe and I got dragged into a fucking bank heist! Chloe killed face to face, for the first time. I also became a landlord and Cathy found out it was Chloe at the bank. Commander Bennett found out about his errant daughter and Chloe and her Father healed a long-standing rift between them.

Crisis Number Eight – Ralph fucking D'Amico broke out of Riker's Island. We also discovered that a new vigilante, Hawk, was in fact somebody we knew; Kim Burgess – I almost killed her before I attacked Dave and Marty Tasered me! Not my best hour...

Crisis Number Nine – Chloe and I headed off to New York City. There we found Safehouse A had been broken into and I almost killed Joshua. At the same time, Ralph D'Amico began a scheme to have Kick-Ass and Hit Girl arrested in Chicago. Marcus was sent to Chicago to 'help'. We found out that we had a new ally in Chicago – Hank Voight. Dave met Jack Bay. A nasty week ensued with Dave and me separated. The week ultimately culminated in Ralph D'Amico shooting Chloe and almost killing Joshua. At one stage, we thought Joshua dead. I also shared a bath with another female for the first time – Dave keeps bringing that up . . .

Crisis Number Ten – The Russians! They smoothly slotted themselves into the vacuum that was previously occupied by our good friend, Ralph D'Amico. I was worried about our safety – the Bratva were not known for their compassion or their pleasantness. Then things began to escalate as a cop was killed by the Bratva. Dave and I got banged up as we began to take the war to them. Then we found ourselves lured into a trap by a young boy. Then I got myself pinned by a falling beam and had to be rescued by Shadow and Jackal of all people. We also found out that Jackal was highly skilled at Grand Theft Motorcycle! After some time, spent healing, we went after that boy, who turned out to be the missing Tommy Morgan. We rescued him and returned him to his parents – a definite high point amongst many lows. I was not to know at the time how badly that attack would thrust *Fusion* into the limelight.

Crisis Number Eleven – It wasn't really a crisis . . . whether it was, or not, depended on your point of view. Megan came onto the scene trying to bite my arm. She was like a wild animal back then with a foul mouth to match. Dave called her 'mini-Mindy' which infuriated the hell out of me at the time. Never expected that our lives would later become intertwined in more ways than one.

Crisis Number Twelve – Very soon after I had accepted Dave's proposal of marriage, Shadow went missing. Turned out to be a pair of nutcase Brits trying to find their way home. We helped them, Ralph D'Amico lost his arm, and we got Shadow back. I also lost my cool with Chloe and as a result, I gave her the boot – out of *Fusion*! Then Dave got me and Chloe back together again – ultimately a good thing in hindsight. Other than Dave, Chloe was the one other person who understood me and I could not imagine life without her – as I would have been dead.

Crisis Number Thirteen – Right on the back of Crisis Number Twelve, Curtis' parents were killed and he became an orphan. That trip to Washington D.C. had been the worst of my life and I so felt for the little guy. There also formed a dubious duo: Megan and Curtis – those two together were a damn nightmare!

Crisis Number Fourteen – The Russian Mafia struck back – the Bratva had escalated its tactics in a major way and yet again, I was hurt, along with Shadow and Jackal in an explosion.

Crisis Number Fifteen – The New year brought us the Sisters of Trinity. A trio of fucking nutcases who seemed to enjoy causing shit. Then I was shot again and I was rescued by the young Megan Wilson with the help of her Mom, Paige. My identity was also revealed to them both; there was no alternative if I was to live. Turned out to be the best decision ever. Then Dave got a shocker when one of the Nightingales was revealed to be none other than Night Bitch from New York, Dave's ex-squeeze.

Crisis Number Sixteen – Safehouse A was destroyed – at my own hand. On the plus side, we got to move into Safehouse F – note to all: it is not, will not, and won't ever be called, a Hit-Cave!

Crisis Number Seventeen – Jack Bay was attacked and almost killed along with Joshua. However, Natalie Bay was killed. I went on a killing spree to discover who was behind the attack. I also allied ourselves with the Bratva – part of that keeping your enemies closer shit. Then we got a name: Richard Montfort and Kick-Ass had his Harley destroyed by a rocket while he was on it – big drama! We found ourselves assaulting a warehouse in Milwaukee of all places and we gained another name: William Tait and we learnt that he had a yacht which we assaulted from my pride and joy, the *Vigilante*. Montfort was aboard and he died. We then found ourselves back in Milwaukee assaulting a penthouse and killing Tait.

Crisis Number Eighteen – Hit Girl hit Britain. A little worm tried to blackmail *Fusion* into being his own personal

assassins on behalf of HMG. Needless to say, I was not happy but we prevailed after causing a little mayhem around the UK, and the little worm was dismissed – but not by me.

Crisis Number Nineteen – Megan killed for the first time and there were some coordinated attacks against civilians which took a lot of putting down. Shadow was also hurt during one such attack. Todd died passing us some intelligence and we met somebody new; Petra. Worse came to pass when during a waterborne attack from the *Vigilante*, Wildcat came face to face with Ralph D'Amico and then we almost all got blown up by a bomb the bastard had placed.

Crisis Number Twenty – During an assault on what we believed to be Ralph D'Amico's lair, Shadow went missing. We assaulted again with SWAT and the Russians. We arrived just in time to prevent Shadow from losing her right arm. Eisenhower got to chomp on the bastard's balls before I chopped off his head and Shadow blew the fucker's head apart with Jackal's pistol.

Crisis Number Twenty-One – The Bratva went through a revolution and a hard-liner took control. The Cold War was back on in Chicago and we had a few run-ins with them.

Crisis Number Twenty-Two – I almost killed Tommy and myself when I drove my SUV into a river

Crisis Number Twenty-Three – The new CPD Superintendent went on an anti-vigilante mission and Megan disobeyed orders and she was stabbed three times during the pursuit of a mass-murderer plaguing Chicago. Had to rescue Petra who had become an unwitting victim of the CPD's anti-vigilante drive. Megan decided to act out and had to be hauled home in cuffs. We then departed on a pleasant cruise to recover during which we came into contact with pirates – killed 'em all and sank their boat – and then got involved with people smugglers – rescued a bunch of people.

Crisis Number Twenty-Four – During an attack on a drug dealer, we came across an assassin by the name of Mathilda. She had then appeared to declare war on the Sicilian Mafia of all people, and then the city descended into chaos. After a night of continuous action everything went eerily quiet. The city began chomping at the Mayor who seemed incompetent to put it mildly. Oh, yes – Chloe and Megan were at each other's throats, again.

Crisis Number Twenty-Five – Let's not go into the fiasco in New York!

Crisis Number Twenty-Six – Marcus was shot! We tracked down the killer in another city – Gotham. We used some very unorthodox measures, including sending Chloe and Erika into a lesbian bar. I also went a little off the rails again after a car crash. However, the man who shot Marcus paid with his life – piece by piece. . . Curtis was shot and Megan was injured but she also learnt a valuable lesson about her mortality. More came back to Chicago than actually left. We had gained two young children, Daniel and Anne-Marie, after promising their father that we would look after them should anything happen to him. He was killed but we rescued the children and as a result, our lives changed forever.

Crisis Number Twenty-Seven – An Amber Alert had been called – fourteen kids had gone missing along with their teacher and the driver. We discovered them in a warren of tunnels close to the original Safehouse K and Lauren Edwards came onto the scene as one of the victims. Before killing the kidnappers, we extracted some information desired by GCHQ and we tracked down a RIB of cunts. We interrogated them for the name of a ship. As a result, that ship was stopped by a combined RN/USN effort and many people were saved.

Crisis Number Twenty-Eight – After training Batman and Catwoman, plus the most wonderful wedding ever, we engaged in a massive firefight at a trainyard. Hailee was badly hurt and I had to lecture her about following orders. Sophia became pregnant and we fucked around with the Superintendent.

Crisis Number Twenty-Nine – Our lives took another turn. A young nine-year-old girl called Stephanie Walker came onto the scene. Miranda Swedlow also returned which was a surprise for all. After a big operation, we turned the tables on that bastard Superintendent and the Mayor saw him for what he really was – a corrupt bastard in uniform. Jack Bay became the Superintendent and Marcus became a Captain.

Crisis Number Thirty – Paige was shot during a failed kidnapping. Wildcat went slightly nuts on a night out with interesting results and Shadow fell off a roof. We also took down some giant bastard causing havoc in central Chicago. Megan needed to be taught a lesson before she pushed things too far. Then we were ambushed by the Sicilian Mafia. We had a firefight in an old theatre where we learnt that the D'Amico family was still haunting us.

Crisis Number Thirty-One – Where do I start? After adopting Stephanie, we went on a post-Christmas cruise around the Caribbean. Everything went well until Anne-Marie was taken. We tracked down the kidnappers and assaulted a

chunk of Sovereign British Territory to recover her. Got my new yacht banged up into the bargain but at least our family was back together again.

Crisis Number Thirty-Two – Urban Predator. We learnt about a sick CIA plan to use young kids as assassins based on yours truly. Then the CIA attacked us at Safehouse K – and I blew it up! The CIA teams died too.

Crisis Number Thirty-Three – We discovered that Stephanie had a nemesis who was out there to kill her. Her name was Foxtail and she was believed to be a Phase 3 *Predator*, fully trained and deadly. On the positive side, Lauren joined the team as Nightmare – a very apt name for her! It wasn't really a crisis but through no fault of our own, we managed to lose a chunk of our All-American home to the British in a superbly executed secession (had to look that word up) of Stephanie's new bedroom which became Sovereign British Territory in the form of The British Sector. Solved the Nemesis problem by turning Foxtail and Stephanie gained a friend; Saoirse Doherty.

Crisis Number Thirty-Four – A New York vigilante came to cause trouble in Chicago and we had a run in with NCIS. Managed to protect the vigilante known as Raven from herself and hand over a criminal to NCIS.

Crisis Number Thirty-Five – Mixed in with Crisis Number Thirty-Four, the goddamn CIA attempted to frame Stephanie for gun-running. The Stephanie and Saoirse fell for a CIA ruse and almost got themselves killed.

Crisis Number Thirty-Six – *Fusion* was packing to go to Europe. We were going to take down *Urban Predator* once and for all. Turned out it wasn't just a crisis – it was a mega-crisis and the scars dug deep for many of us. Hailee suffered badly after she was taken and tortured. Stephanie suffered the death of a controlling part of her life – Aurora. We almost lost Abby after the CIA changed tactics. We caused a little bit of trouble in Germany, Italy, France, the UK – to name a few countries. . . I got to unleash my pride and joy – *Ocean Vigilante*. We met a French vigilante and we teamed up to take down the final *Urban Predator* site where we freed the final set of kids. That final set of kids included three very special girls who became part of our sister organisation in the UK, *Vengeance*. One was also reunited with her sister. Both Anne-Marie and Danny killed for the first time, too.

Crisis Number Thirty-Seven – This was wrapped up in the previous 'crisis'. *Fusion* was hacked, only it was a proxy-hack (according to Marty). The CIA had attempted to put the blame on five young kids but with the help of Battle Guy and Hal, the five kids put the hack down. We decided to keep the kids on retainer and they became Synthesis.

Crisis Number Thirty-Eight – We had only been back in the US a matter of *days* when the city began to explode – literally. I also learnt that there were some new vigilantes in town, plus some pinky-purple thing called Sunset Phoenix and also another possible super-criminal known as FEAR.

Crisis Number Thirty-Nine – Just a mini problem when Chloe's best friends discovered her deep dark Shadow secret! After a short sharp shock to explain what might happen if either of the two girls spoke out, they were sent on their way.

Crisis Number Forty – The Silos; major battle. Did some base jumping and kicked FEAR's ass! Went on another cruise and got involved with some drug-dealers. Marcus now thinks it is *impossible* for me to go anywhere and stay out of trouble.

Crisis Number Forty-One – Anne-Marie lost her access card. Big drama, but recovered the card and nobody hurt.

Crisis Number Forty-Two – Big race across Chicago and a fight with Sunset Phoenix and FEAR. Wildcat almost killed when her Ducati was destroyed.

Crisis Number Forty-Three – Fucking tattoos!

Crisis Number Forty-Four – An echo from our time in Europe: Tempest and Discord. Had to send a team to extract them from a rather nasty situation. . .

Crisis Number Forty-Five – Lauren and Lizzie's father came on the scene and started causing shit. Psyche and Nightmare sorted him out with a little help from their friends.

..._...

"Wow!" Dave commented. "What a fucked-up world!"

"Fucking tell me about it – don't we deserve a moment's peace?" I demanded.

"We must have been really bad in a previous life."

"Not funny. . ."

"Just look on the bright side – our lives our *never* dull!"

Mindy chuckled and the chuckle quickly changed to laughter as she considered Dave's comment.

Early that afternoon

Latitude: 41°49'35.79"N Longitude: 87°42'4.10"W

The facility was a part of Safehouse E, but they did not need to know that.

As far as they were concerned, the bunker was a secret and only they knew of its whereabouts. Elizabeth 'Libby' Dade had received a cryptic phone call from Battle Guy, the day before. On that afternoon, the high school turfed out the kids for the summer at noon and another call was received. A simple location was provided and the five teenagers wandered into the Brighton Park area of Chicago. Once they had arrived at a very non-descript and all but invisible brick structure with a single door at the top of six concrete steps, Libby had placed her hand on an eight-inch by nine-inch black pad which was affixed to the brickwork. Access was via handprint biometrics and the door clicked open a second later. They were met by Hit Girl.

"Welcome."

Hit Girl guided the five teens down a passageway that was narrow and only allowed movement in single-file. Once they reached the far end of the eighteen-foot-long passageway a door automatically released.

"No hand scanner?" Jesse Dade asked.

"Facial recognition in the passageway," Hit Girl explained.

"If we fail the facial recognition?" Jesse persisted.

"You die."

"O – kay. . ."

..._...

Through the door was a small room with a wall-mounted screen and another eight-inch by nine-inch black pad which was mounted at a forty-five-degree angle towards them just below the screen. There was also a small tray mounted beneath the screen with a slot beside it.

"One at a time, please," Hit Girl advised.

Libby went first, placing her hand on the pad. Words began to appear on the screen:

ELIZABETH DADE . . .

ACCESS GRANTED

PLEASE TAKE ACCESS CARD

There was a dull clatter as something appeared in the tray. Elizabeth took the item. It was a dark blue access card with the name '**SYNTHESIS**' in the bottom right corner and a silver eagle and stripe in the upper left portion.

"Your access card. On arrival, you will collect your card; you will need it to access everything beyond this room. To leave, you must insert your access card into that slot, just to the left of the tray. If you do not, you will not be able to leave the facility."

"If access is not granted?" Jesse asked.

"You die."

"I feel safer already . . ." Jesse muttered.

Jesse was next and he was soon holding an identical access card in his hand. The remaining members of *Synthesis* followed suit: Kate Bradford, Laurence Gray, and Peter Savage.

"Let's go," Hit Girl said as she swiped her own access card to pass through the next door.

Synthesis Data Core

The room was large with eight sides.

The main door into the facility, constructed of armoured steel, was at the seven o'clock position, with another, identical, door over at the five o'clock position – that door led to the server room. At the six o'clock position there was a superbly equipped kitchen with a fridge, sink, microwave, and dishwasher. The remaining five walls of the regular octagon were occupied by a computer workstation located on each wall.

Each identical computer workstation was made up of six 37-inch monitors arranged in a two-layer grid. In front of each of the workstations was a very comfortable looking, high-backed, black leather chair. Located on each desk was a cordless keyboard, cordless mouse, and a selection of other peripherals.

The entire room was air-conditioned and had subdued lighting with more focused lighting fitted at each workstation. In the middle of the octagon, there were two giant printer/copier devices and a massive A0 printer.

"What is that for?" Libby asked as she examined a metal box mounted beneath one of the workstations.

"In each of those is a loaded Glock 19 pistol and two spare magazines. Heavier weapons are available in the cabinet located beside the main access door."

"I've never . . ." Peter began.

"You will each be given training on the weapons held," Hit Girl lectured. "This entire facility is protected by active and passive security including a complete Faraday cage on all sides. No standard cell coverage is possible in here, however there is a relay for your cell phones via the main datacentre. All communications are monitored, both inbound and outbound, including your cell phones. Security is 24-7 and can be onsite very quickly – but I would not recommend testing us. . ."

Five sets of eyes wandered around the amazing facility taking in everything. Finally, the geek side of them all came to the fore.

"Can we?" Libby asked tentatively and Hit Girl laughed.

"Please do. . ."

The five kids scrambled for the workstations where they swiped their access cards and the screens came to life. There was plenty of chatter as they examined the hardware and software available to them. Hal and Battle Guy both came on via video link and they began to take the five hackers through the facility.

Hit Girl chose to go for a wander as it quickly got very technical and therefore very boring as far as she was concerned.

Later that afternoon

Outside North Park Elementary School

Megan and Curtis had been picked up by Paige, so it was just me and my three kids.

"Who wants pizza?"

It was a pointless question as three kids simultaneously exploded with joy as we walked towards the car. It was a perfect day and I felt happier than I had in a long time. Maybe things *were* settling down and we could all enjoy life as a family – well, as much as any vigilante family could.

'I so wish you could be here, Daddy. . .' I thought as I looked up at the sky.

"You're the greatest Mom ever!" A wildly grinning Danny said as he held my hand.

"Whatever it is you want, you ain't getting' it," I laughed.

I truly was a very happy woman and nothing could tarnish that afternoon nor diminish the joy that I felt within me . . .

K

The proverbial bubble of joy burst as my brain told me that the sound was a gunshot – a suppressed, long-range, gunshot but it was still a gunshot. I had no idea where the bullet went but before I could do anything . . .

"Mum, I feel strange . . ."

I turned to look at Stephanie; she swayed as she stood on the sidewalk. However, that was *not* what had caught my attention; it was the rapidly spreading crimson stain that threatened to inundate the front of her white blouse. Anne-Marie screamed at the sight – Danny went white as a sheet and his hands went to his mouth.

After a moment, Stephanie sank to her knees as blood dribbled from her mouth and ran down her chin. I grabbed hold of her when she fell forwards and I cradled her in my lap while I, myself, sank to the concrete sidewalk. I pulled out my cell . . .

"9-1-1 . . ."

"My daughter's been shot . . ."

***Chapter 295*: Hanging By A Thread**

Thursday, June 30th, 2016

Outside North Park Elementary School

It was all a blur.

The ambulance arrived within three minutes and the paramedics quickly seized the unresponsive Stephanie from my arms. After laying her down on a blanket, they cut off her blood-soaked blouse; her entire torso was a mass of blood and I could see the torn flesh where the bullet had entered her body. I shook with a mix of anger and fear as Anne-Marie and Danny both grabbed hold of me. The only good thing, if there was such a thing at that point, was that Stephanie was still breathing. Her body was torn and it was broken; I had no idea if she was going to survive.

It was mere minutes before the paramedics stood up and Stephanie was placed onto a trolley and then moved into the waiting ambulance. My mind registered many more sirens and then I felt a pair of strong, and somehow familiar, hands pull me up to my feet.

"You go with Stephanie; I'll take the twins."

It was Marcus; I recognised his truck parked a few feet away, a blue light flashing on the dashboard. I had no idea how he had arrived so fast. As I just stood there in a state of stunned confusion, he turned to the paramedic as she was about to climb into the driver's seat of the ambulance. He pointed at a CPD cruiser that sat several yards away, blue lights flashing.

"That unit, there, will escort you . . . that's my granddaughter you have in there. . ."

"She's in the very best of hands, Captain."

With that, I climbed into the back of the ambulance and almost immediately, I felt us moving fast, the siren screaming. I sat where directed and I held my daughter's limp hand as the paramedic monitored her condition.

Mercifully, the ride was not a long one.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"We have an inbound – ten-year-old girl; gunshot to the chest."

"Maggie – page Dr Manning and prepare Trauma Three."

The ambulance arrived minutes later.

"Maggie!" The Paramedic called as they wheeled in the girl.

"Talk to me."

"Ten-year-old female, bullet wound to the chest. Unresponsive, flaccid agonal breathing."

"Trauma Three."

Trauma Three

I followed the trolley and my daughter as both were wheeled towards a small, glass enclosed room over to the left.

"On my count . . . one, two, three. . ."

Stephanie was moved over to the hospital trolley and the Paramedic removed the one from the ambulance.

". . . IV is already in. Pulse is weak and thready . . ."

". . . having trouble bagging – a lot of resistance . . ."

I barely understood half of what they were saying but I knew enough to know that Stephanie was in serious trouble.

". . . BP seventy over forty, heart-rate one-thirty . . ."

That was bad; her blood pressure was very low. I felt completely overwhelmed and very alone as Stephanie lay there being prodded and poked by various doctors and nurses. Tears flooded down my cheeks; both unchecked and unbidden.

"Are you the mother?"

I turned to see a nurse before me.

"Yes, Stephanie's my daughter . . . is she . . .?"

"She's in the best of hands, but she's lost a lot of blood and the trauma to her chest is bad."

Safehouse F

Dave put down the dumbbell and he picked up his cell.

"It's the purple terror!" he chuckled to Marty as he pressed the speaker button. "Hi, honey. . ."

There was no pre-amble and they barely recognised the voice that spoke, but the first three words sent a chill down their spines.

"*Thunder! Thunder! Thunder!*" Mindy began. "*Stephanie. . .*"

That was it, all they heard after those three words was sobbing.

The 'Thunder' codeword was reserved for a perceived direct threat to *Fusion* and there was a special set of arrangements to be actioned when that codeword was triggered. It was almost a full minute before Mindy spoke again and by that time, Dave and Marty were in the Command Centre. Marty had hit an alarm button as they had left Level 0 which had, in turn, drawn the other people in the Safehouse into the Command Centre. Therefore, it was Dave, Marty, Saoirse, and Hailee who heard Mindy's explanation.

"*Stephanie was shot . . . sniper. She's in the ER and it doesn't look good. . .*"

"Anne-Marie, Danny . . . you?" Dave asked, his face stricken with a mixture of sorrow and anger.

"*The twins are with Marcus and I'm fine. I'm at Northwestern with Stephanie. . .*" Mindy paused for a moment and Dave took the cell off speaker and walked into a corner to speak with his wife. "Dave . . . she's so young. . ."

Marty looked over at Saoirse and Hailee who were just as stricken but with horror on their faces. He quickly gathered his thoughts as he punched up some details onto a screen.

"Senior staff will go to *Safehouse Zulu*. We maintain a force here at *Fort Fusion* and we send personnel to *Safehouse W*," he explained. "Petra, you will take charge here with Hal, Foxtail, Trojan, and Mist. You will be joined by Medic in due course. I will deploy with Kick-Ass to activate *Zulu* and we will be joined by Rhino, Hawk, Wildcat, Rogue, and Ravage. Jackal and Shadow will follow on to *Zulu* once they have checked out the surrounding area. Leon will be out on counter-sniper and overwatch. Nightmare, Torment, and Athena will remain on standby but on alert for *Safehouse W*. Ares, Aphrodite, and Splinter will go to *Safehouse W* with Raven."

Dave returned as Marty finished speaking.

"You ready to roll, Battle Guy?" he asked.

"I was born ready. . ." Battle Guy replied.

"Dork!" Dave retorted with a forced smile.

West Columbia

Not surprisingly, Megan was pleasantly surprised to see her niece and nephew walk through the door. However, her

surprise quickly turned to worry when she saw the tears on their faces and the set of Marcus' expression. Paige was worried about her husband's expression too.

"What is it, Marcus?" she asked her husband.

"Stephanie has been shot – it was a sniper. . ." Marcus replied.

There was stunned silence for almost a full minute before anybody said anything.

"What the fuck?" Megan exclaimed.

"She's at Northwestern Memorial with Mindy – I heard the call over the radio and I was only a minute away . . . I saw Stephanie. . ."

"There was so much blood . . ." Anne-Marie wailed as Megan hugged her and Danny.

"Is this a threat?" Paige asked, just as her cell vibrated with a text message.

Megan's beeped less than a second later.

"Yep!" Megan announced as she read the three simple words.

"Time to go. . ." Marcus announced as he drew his pistol.

"Right!" Megan commented as she reached behind the couch and produced a small Glock pistol.

Paige ran upstairs and within a minute, several 'go-bags' appeared at the foot of the stairs. Paige had Damon in her arms as Marcus scrambled for the bags and threw them towards the door.

Almost as one, they all headed for the door.

D-JAK Prime

We passed the other parked cars in the lower level of the parking lot and Dave drove the Audi directly towards a steel roller-shutter which raised at a signal from Marty's tablet. Beyond the steel shutter, there was a bare concrete area that had space for maybe half-a-dozen vehicles to park. There was no other *visible* exit.

Once the roller-shutter had closed behind them, the lights went out and at another signal from the tablet a rectangular area was illuminated in dull yellow dashes. Dave aimed for the closest end of the rectangle and lined himself up before he stopped dead-centre inside the rectangle. At another command, the car began to drop . . . and drop . . . and drop. . .

The elevator stopped about one hundred feet down the sheer concrete shaft and a steel door opened up directly ahead of the car.

Dave drove forward into total darkness.

Marcus parked his truck in the usual space in the parking lot and everybody unloaded the go-bags before he waved and drove off.

None of the kids had any idea what they were doing at D-JAK and, it seemed, neither did Paige!

"Welcome!" A voice called out.

Megan turned to see Kim walking toward them.

"Why. . .?" she began.

"Questions later, young lady – let's move. . ."

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

After I finished the call to Dave, I returned to my daughter.

Stephanie was surrounded by numerous medical personnel. Her blood-soaked clothing was in a pile on the floor along with several bloody wound dressings and bandages. I could hear some of what was being said and none of it sounded good. The ten-year-old was lying naked on the bed and a tube had been thrust down her throat to help her breathe. An IV had been inserted into her left arm and another just above her right ankle. Various wires had been attached to her torn body and were connected to various machines.

I could see her vital statistics up on a large monitor above and to the right of her. She was breathing but her heartbeat was ominously slow and as I watched the line began to straighten. . .

". . . stats are dropping . . ."

". . . no breath sounds on the left . . . no pulse; she's coding . . . milligram of epi . . ."

The Inner Psyche

I was happier than I had been in a long time and Mindy looked the same.

She had not been smiling all that much, recently – not surprising really. . . Then I felt a sharp pain on the left side of my chest which spread with a burning sensation as something moved across my body and then the sensation ceased as whatever it was stopped ploughing through my body. Pain swept over me; I felt strange and my muscles would not obey my brain. . .

"Mum, I feel strange. . ."

That was all I could say as Mindy turned around and I felt my legs collapse beneath my body then blackness enveloped me.

..._...

I seemed to wake up . . . only there was blackness and then light appeared dissolving the blackness into white and a great feeling of peace swept over me. There was no pain – no feeling at all. Then I blinked as two people walked towards me . . . Mum? Dad? It was them but how?

"Hello, Stephanie."

"Mum?"

"Yes, honey."

"Dad?"

"I'm here."

"How. . .? I . . ."

"Yes, we know what happened – that was not your fault, honey," my Dad said and I felt immense guilt surge through me at the thought of what I had done to my parents.

I looked around – somebody was missing.

"Where's Jamie?"

My parents looked at each other and exchanged a glance like I had seen them do a million times before. Then my Mum replied.

"You will be reunited with him again, Stephanie; I can promise you that. . ."

He should have been there; I so wanted to see my little brother – I did not understand.

"But. . ."

"You need to go, honey – now is not your time; you have so much more to do," my Dad said with a smile as he began

to walk away.

No . . . don't go.

"Go . . . be strong – you are a survivor, Stephanie," my Mum added as she walked after Dad.

I didn't want them to leave me but everything went black again and I could hear different voices around me.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Tears were flooding down my face as I watched my daughter die before my eyes.

The doctors and nurses were doing everything they could; I knew that. But I was hearing bad phrases: 'still V fib', 'give her another milligram of epi', and worse still: 'no pulse'. A doctor was violently pounding on my daughter's bare chest as he tried to restart her heart then another doctor moved in and he unwrapped something.

"Slide over so I can needle the left chest . . . hold compressions. . ."

With that, the doctor stabbed my daughter below her left shoulder and I almost collapsed with the next comment.

"We've got a pulse. . . Pressure?"

My anxiety and downright distress had eased and my legs felt. The emotions flowing through me were way beyond anything I could cope with.

"A hundred over seventy-eight. . . Heart-rate, one-twenty. Let's get her to the OR. . ."

...—...

I had to let her go.

I hated to see her being wheeled out of the room and into the elevator but that was as far as I could go. I was left a wreck with tears streaming down my face. Never, in all my life had I ever expected to be in such a state – and in public! None of my extensive training covered anything like what I was struggling with right at that moment. Even worse, I had never felt as bad as I was at that moment about losing my own Daddy and there I was bawling my eyes out over a little girl that I had only known for seven and a half months. . .

"Mindy?"

I turned to see Hank Voight and Erin Lindsay a few feet away.

"We came as soon as the Captain told us," Hank explained and he smiled the way he did when he tried to look compassionate.

"How is she?" Erin asked.

"They've just taken up to the OR . . . oh, God . . . Erin, she crashed and I thought I'd lost her. . ."

That was it; I folded and Erin caught me, hugging me tightly as I sobbed.

Safehouse Zulu

"Holy crap!" Megan breathed as she was led towards a barely noticeable elevator.

Kim looked up at an equally unremarkable camera and the doors to the elevator slid open. The inside looked grungy and dirty but Kim waved them all inside with our bags. The moment that they were all inside, the doors closed and they all began to drop. It moved as fast as the elevator at *Safehouse F* and stopped less than twenty-seconds later. The doors opened and Megan peered out. There were many bright lights and she noticed that the elevator exited into a glass and steel enclosed area – a kill zone.

Kim placed her hand on a scanner which turned green and the elevator doors slid shut before the glass and steel doors directly ahead of them, slid open soundlessly.

..._...

"Welcome to *Zulu*!" Marty announced with a flourish.

"Cool!" Megan breathed, a sentiment that was echoed by Anne-Marie, Danny, and Paige.

"This is Level 1 – the main living space. Below us is Level 0 and above us are Levels 2 and 3," Marty went on.

The newcomers each ran their eyes over everything that was laid out before them. There was a large area which was luxuriously decorated in easy-on-the-eye pastel colours which detracted from the fact that they were seventy feet below ground. Unlike *Safehouse F* which was purely functional, *Zulu* was much more comfortable and a bit like *Safehouse K* had been before it had been destroyed.

Plush right-angled couches and chairs were arranged which allowed upwards of a dozen people to sit in comfort and there was an enormous TV mounted on a small partition wall. The ceiling had subdued and diffused lighting that gave a homelier feel to the large space.

"This is the recreation area. Beyond it, over there, are two storerooms, then a bathroom and the dining room – beyond the dining room is the kitchen. Over there, beside the kitchen, is a staircase that leads to all levels and over there, opposite the stairs, there is an elevator that also services all levels," Kim explained. "To our left is a door that leads to the suites, of which there are three. Mindy and Dave have a three-bedroom setup: Suite A. Marty and I, along with Matty, have a bedroom in Suite B. Megan, you will stay with Paige and Damon in the next bedroom. Chloe and Joshua and probably Cathy will share the remaining two-bedroom Suite."

"I'll let you all settle in and unpack before we show you the other levels," Marty added.

"Where's Dave?" Anne-Marie demanded, refusing to be distracted.

"He's in the Operations Centre up on Level 3."

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

It was several minutes before I was able to compose myself properly and I was ashamed about my public show of emotion.

"I'm sorry, Erin."

"Don't be. Look, can we go somewhere and talk?"

"Yeah."

I was led into a vacant treatment room where Hank closed the doors and stood against them while I sat down in (actually collapsed into) a chair and Erin sat on the edge of the bed.

"I know about what you do, Mindy. Hank never told me . . . I figured it out myself. Can I assume that Stephanie is one, too?"

I looked over at Hank and he nodded.

"You could," I replied cautiously.

"She's highly skilled but she has not been with you long; can I assume that she gained her skills somewhere else?"

"You could."

"Can I assume that Stephanie has enemies of her own?"

I laughed.

"The list is extensive and distinguished but it was decreased by two big players a few months back."

"The organisation that created her?"

"Gone – partly by her own hand."

"Somebody tried to frame the girl for firearms trafficking, a few months back," Hank informed Erin.

"Oh?"

"Frame up – but a good one. The idea was for the CPD and then ATF to crucify Stephanie – that part failed but there was a backup plan, actually two," I explained. "The video showing her buying weapons had a teaser in it – she and a friend saw it. They acted on it in error. They met with two other kids from that organisation which created Stephanie. She got the drop on them and persuaded them to turn – only there was a backup. The kids were killed – sniper. The sniper missed Stephanie and her friend."

"Those two kids?" Erin mused. "Their heads were almost blown clean off. The FBI removed their bodies before we could investigate; I remember it."

"It hit Stephanie hard but she's resilient."

"Tell me about her."

..._...

"Stephanie's favourite place is cuddled up with Dave on the sofa. While she'll argue with me about the stupidest things, she never talks back to him or gives him a second of grief. It was Dave who found her and he rescued her. Maybe she's just a Daddy's girl . . . Even though she's a killer and an expert in many forms of combat, she can be the sweetest, kindest, little girl out there. I've seen her treat her younger brother and sister with love and understanding, even though she is mad as hell with them both. Don't get me wrong, if she was pissed off, she could put a bullet into the very centre of your foreheads without a second's thought or the slightest remorse."

"I would really like to get to know her . . . if you allowed me; she seems a wonderful little girl," Erin said.

"She's a Brit to the core. Her idea of a comforting snack is a plate of toast with marmite and a mug of tea. She loves to stretch out on the sofa and watch Disney Channel with her siblings. Her favourite music tends to be stuff from the 80s and 90s. She hates meatballs, but loves spaghetti Bolognese – she's quite a good cook too; way better than me. While her cooking is palatable, her mouth even gives *me* cause to wince from time to time!"

Hank chuckled.

Safehouse Zulu

Anne-Marie headed towards the elevator they had just left.

"The other elevator – over there," Marty pointed out.

"Thanks, Marty!"

Anne-Marie turned to her left and headed towards another kill zone. She placed her hand on the pad beside the door. The glass and steel doors slid open soundlessly so that Anne-Marie, Danny, and Megan could pass through. Once the doors closed behind them, just as soundlessly, the elevator doors opened and they entered the elevator itself and Megan pressed 'LEVEL 3'. After the elevator doors had closed, the elevator shot upwards at speed before stopping at Level 3. They exited into another kill zone before they saw the smiling face of Dave on the other side of the armoured glass and steel. Once clear of the kill zone, the twins ran to hug their father.

"Welcome, guys – you too, Megan."

..._...

Dave took the kids through another kill zone to the left and then into the Operations Area. Unlike Level 1, the area was very sparsely decorated with bare concrete walls and a functional tiled carpet on the floor. The space was lit with bright white light which made the space feel very business-like.

A conference room with glass walls backed up against the kill zone. A polished, dark wood table occupied most of the space with seating for twelve and a trio of large-screen monitors were mounted on the walls. The rest of the area was giving over to the Briefing Space. There, three very large touch-screens were mounted on a wall and eighteen chairs, arranged in rows of six, faced the screens.

Beyond the Operations Area, was the Command Centre.

..._...

The Command Centre was beyond a large partition made up from two layers of armoured glass spaced eight-inches apart, just like that at *Safehouse F*. Again, in an emergency, steel shutters would close off the Command Centre in an emergency. Dave pressed his hand against a glass pad to release the inner and outer doors which slid to one side.

"Cool!" Danny muttered.

The Command Centre was almost clinical in design. The walls to the left and right were painted a dark grey while the far wall was white with six, eight-paned, mock windows spread across the wall. Diffused light filtered through to illuminate the room. The floor was a light grey, almost white, and was made up of many 2-foot by 2-foot tiles – a computer floor.

"Not bad," Anne-Marie commented.

"Pretty slick," Megan agreed.

Five, large, curved desks were arranged in the shape of a pentagon. The three furthest desks, one straight ahead and the others to the left and right, were identical. Each desk had a single chair but eleven computer monitors. Five, 24-inch screens were arranged side by side on the desktop, while six, 48-inch screens were arranged in two rows of three above the lower screens with the top row angled over at 45-degrees. The remaining pair of desks were clear of conventional computer screens but each still had a single chair. On closer inspection, those desks each contained 72" horizontal touch-screens.

"How's Steph?" Anne-Marie then demanded of Dave getting things back on track.

"I'm not going to lie to any of you; Steph is in a real bad way right now."

"When can we see her?"

"Not for a while, honey."

"I want to see her *right now!*" Anne-Marie persisted.

"Believe me, honey, you don't wanna see your sister like she is right now and I'm sure that she wouldn't want you seeing her like that, either."

"She helped me when I broke my arm – I need to be with *her*."

"Look – she's lying on a bed and she's stark naked, with tubes and wires running into her. I know it's difficult, but give it a few days and then as soon as she is ready, we'll go see her."

Anne-Marie could be seen struggling with the perfectly reasonable comment until she finally gave in.

"*FUCK!*" she yelled before she cringed and looked up at Dave. "Sorry. . ."

"We'll let that one slide; you just voiced what we were all thinking, little one."

4500 North Winchester Avenue

The woman finished her climb to the rooftop and she looked around before she climbed up a vertical ladder onto the next level above the roof.

She paused before a point on the south-east corner and raised a portable sniper-scope on a bearing of 211-degrees. In the eye-piece, she could easily make out the police and the blue tape surrounding the scene of the shooting. The range was a very basic 307-yards; an easy shot for even the most rookie sniper.

The woman pulled out her cell.

"Go ahead!" came the familiar voice.

"Definitely a sniper; I've found the nest."

"Okay – thanks, Mathilda."

***Safehouse Zulu
Command Centre***

Dave turned to look at Megan.

"It's a confirmed sniper."

"Shit," Megan replied, understanding the implications.

Dave walked over to one of the horizontal screens and brought up a list of *Fusion* members. He selected 'ATHENA' and then 'MOBILISE'.

"I'm moving Nightmare, Torment, and Athena to *Safehouse W*."

An hour later

"Where we going, Mom?"

"Someplace safe, Lizzie."

"What could be beside the Calumet River?" Lauren asked.

"You'll like it. . ." Emily promised.

"Is it one of Mindy's whacked out warehouses?"

"Wait and see. . ."

..._...

The building was right on the water with a good-sized portion extending out over the water. The outside of the building was made up from apparently rusted sections of corrugated steel which made the building blend into the surroundings. Historically, the building belonged to a shipping company and barges would dock inside the building to be unloaded.

Emily Edwards made for an equally rusty-looming steel door which clicked open as they approached. Lauren frowned and went on guard as her mother pulled open the door and waved her two daughters in ahead of her. As the door closed silently behind them, lights came on and a very modern, very clean, armoured door appeared before them.

With a click, the door opened and Tommy Morgan smiled at the new arrivals.

"Come on in, ladies."

..._...

A yacht sat in pride of place over to one side of the building. Unusually for a yacht, it was out of the water and resting in a frame on the dock. Straddling the yacht was a large boat hoist with twin six-foot-tall wheels at each corner. Three sets of bright orange webbing slings ran beneath the yacht's keel.

"Hey! I've seen that boat before," Lauren exclaimed as she laid eyes on the *Vigilante*. "Well, the schematics, at least."

The performance motor-yacht was just over sixty feet in length overall, with a 44.5-foot waterline. The 27-tonne craft had a top speed of around 32-knots. The hull was black, while the upperworks were purple, which appeared almost black in the dark. Mounted at the highest point of the yacht were a radar antenna and twin domes that housed satellite communications and navigation equipment. There were also two large whip antennae for non-satellite communications.

"That is one of the most beautiful sights that I have ever seen!" Lizzie exclaimed.

"She's nice, isn't she?" Tony Morgan, AKA Ares, grinned. "The *Vigilante* was Mindy's first boat."

"Lauren, Lizzie?" Tommy asked. "You wanna see where you're sleeping?"

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Ever since Hank and Erin had left, I had been alone.

I hated being alone, especially as my eldest daughter was being cut up in the operating room several floors above. I needed Dave. I needed his support. I needed his love. But I knew that there was a bigger picture and Dave was busy keeping many other people safe; I would just have to wait my turn – the needs of the many outweighed the needs of just one veteran purple vigilante and her vigilante daughter.

Then, after having waited for almost four hours, my needs were partially met as my cell rang.

"Hi, honey."

"Dave!"

"What's happening?"

"She's in the OR . . . she crashed and . . . oh, God, she can't die, Dave. She just can't."

"They're doing everything that they can, I'm sure."

"I just couldn't bear to lose her . . . I wouldn't know what to *do* without her in my life. . ."

"I know, honey; Stephanie is a big part of everybody's life."

Just then, a Doctor appeared and he headed directly towards Mindy.

"Dave – I need to call you back."

"Stay strong, honey."

..._...

"Mrs Lizewski?"

"Yes."

"Your daughter is out of surgery, Mrs Lizewski. She's not out of the woods, not yet; she's a very sick little girl," the Doctor said. "She's responding well, so her prognosis looks good. The next forty-eight hours will be critical."

"Can I see her?" I asked – hopefully not *too* eagerly.

The Doctor grinned.

"Yes, in about half an hour. They're going to move her to Room 28. Don't expect her to wake up – not for a while. Her body is putting everything it has into healing itself, so don't expect her to wake up for at least another twenty-four hours."

"Thank you, Doctor, thank you so much – I really mean that."

Room 28

I paced backwards and forwards outside Room 28 as I awaited Stephanie's arrival.

Finally, after what felt like hours but had only been about thirty minutes, I saw a bed being wheeled down the corridor towards me. As the bed approached, I felt trepidation about how Stephanie might look.

"Mrs Lizewski?" a nurse asked.

"Yes!"

"Here's your daughter. Please don't be alarmed; she looks much worse than she really is."

Stephanie was almost completely covered in a pure white sheet as she was wheeled past but I could make out her long blonde hair spread out liberally on the pillow despite the medical apparatus spread around her. Once the bed was pushed into place, Stephanie and the bed were connected up to the room's sensory systems.

The sheet was pulled back and folded down to reveal my daughter's torso down to her waist. My hand went to my mouth at the sight of her and I pushed back on a sob as it tried to form. The majority of Stephanie's torso was a vivid purple from the bruising and most of her chest was covered under medical dressings but there was enough skin visible to see the vivid bruising. Many wires led out from various places on her young body and connected into various monitors beside the bed. Two intravenous drips fed blood and a saline solution into her left forearm and the back of her left hand respectively.

A nasal cannula fed oxygen directly into Stephanie's nose. She appeared to be sleeping peacefully but I knew that inside, her body was fighting to heal her. I fervently hoped that her body would fight just as hard and uncompromisingly as Psyche did when she was in action. I hated seeing the ten-year-old in such a vulnerable state; her body torn and bruised by just a single bullet. She had been through so much in her short life and at that moment, she appeared frail and I hesitated to touch her once the nurses had left the room and closed the door behind them.

Nevertheless, I touched her right hand and I felt warmth on my skin. Even if outwardly asleep, Stephanie would have reacted to any touch. Her finely tuned reflexes would have brought her awake and I would have found a knife to my throat – or worse. But, instead, nothing. I felt so overwhelmed by everything.

"I can't do this alone. . ." I said out loud.

"You will never be alone," a voice said and the reassuring arms of my husband wrapped themselves around me as I began to sob uncontrollably.

***Chapter 296*: The Thread Strengthens**

Two days later
Saturday, July 2nd, 2016
Mid-afternoon

Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28

Two days of flitting between the Safehouse and the hospital – it was only a three-mile, fourteen-minute, drive but it had seemed like an eternity, each and every time.

Two days of trying to be with the twins and with Stephanie without letting the former think that I had abandoned them in favour of their elder sibling.

Two days of pacing around the same damn room.

Two days of shit coffee from the machine down the corridor that hated dollar bills.

Two days of well-meaning nurses offering kind but infuriating words.

Two days of absolute hell.

But it was nothing compared to what my daughter was going through – nothing at all.

..._...

For the first time, in a real long time, I was scared.

I knew full well that I wasn't her real mother, in that I had not given birth to her, but I still felt like my insides were churning as I worried about her. I would go from moments of pure anger where even Dave would keep me at arm's length, all the way to moments of intense sadness where I would just cry and cry.

I missed her. I missed having her around me. Her infectious laughter. Her cheeky smile and shit-eating grin. I even missed her cold, and very lethal, view on killing. Above all, I missed the love that the young girl spread about. She loved me, she loved Dave, and she loved her siblings; Anne-Marie and Danny. She even had love to spare for everybody in *Fusion*. In return, without exception, everybody loved her. She was very popular with just about everybody that she met and, generally speaking, everybody loved having her around. We had all felt her wrath, at one time or another, as well as her fists.

Within *Fusion* there was much sadness but there was also a demand for blood – somebody was going to pay dearly for what they had done to Stephanie.

..._...

When she awoke for the first time, I was there; I was always there.

First came some movement; the first in well over a day, and then I heard a moan followed almost immediately by crying. I turned to see Stephanie's eyes open and she looked around the room in a panic. I squeezed her hand gently and reassuringly as I spoke.

"You're safe, Steph. You're in hospital."

Stephanie's eyes stopped their wild scanning around the room and they focussed on my face.

"I'm scared . . . it hurts . . . Mummy, it hurts . . ."

"I know, honey."

I really had no idea how to react. She was not behaving like the Psyche which I normally knew; she was behaving like the ten-year-old girl underneath and she was both very scared and in a lot of pain. Her voice was croaky, so I held a plastic cup with a straw to her dry lips and she slowly took a tentative sip. Stephanie grimaced with the pain of swallowing the cool water but she smiled her gratitude.

I wiped away my daughter's tears with a tissue – I'd been going through a lot of tissues and had plenty.

"What happened to me?" she asked very quietly as she put on a brave face.

Safehouse Zulu

Anne-Marie was not a happy eight-year-old.

She lay on the floor between Sophia and Razor. The younger animal missed his owner and his canine intuition told him that something was wrong. Anne-Marie had taken to spending a lot of time with Razor. Hope and Kiara, along with Horatio, Hercules and Piper would just ignore their brother as he moped. The animals had all arrived at the Safehouse the previous day with Marcus and had promptly enjoyed checking out every corner of the facility.

Anne-Marie hated to be cooped up and above all, she wanted to see her big sister but nobody was letting her leave the Safehouse, let alone traipse a few miles across the city to the hospital where her sister lay at death's door.

"Anne-Marie, Danny! Training!" Chloe called as she walked out of the Accommodation and into the Recreational Space where Anne-Marie, Danny, and Megan were watching TV.

"Ye-ha!" Danny yelled as he vaulted the back of the couch and ran towards the stairs.

"Anne-Marie, come on."

"No."

"Come on, girl."

"I'm not training today, Chloe, so go take a hike!"

Anne-Marie never saw Chloe's expression change, nor the hands that yanked her off the couch and then dragged her bodily towards the stairs. The eight-year-old struggled and she swore violently but Chloe just ignored the younger girl as they headed up a level.

..._...

Joshua looked up as he heard yelling and he saw Chloe dragging Anne-Marie into the Training Space before throwing the younger girl onto the mat. Anne-Marie immediately sprang to her feet and turned to face Chloe.

"Bring it on, quarter-pint!" Chloe growled.

Anne-Marie kicked out at the older girl but Chloe dodged out of the way with practiced ease. However, the little Lizewski was not finished. She was angry and scared for her sister; Chloe knew that and she wanted to help. Anne-Marie had not talked with anybody, not even Dave. Mindy was always at the hospital except when she came by to shower and grab a change of clothes. Megan had tried, with no success, and Anne-Marie had clammed up as far as her twin brother was concerned.

Chloe continued to dodge as Anne-Marie tried everything she knew to strike at the bigger girl. In return, Chloe was not giving the smaller girl an easy ride. A slap here, a strike there. Anne-Marie screamed through the pain and she just learned to move quicker and dodge faster. Joshua began to get concerned about how far Chloe might take things, despite him guessing correctly what she was up to. He walked over to a wall-mounted phone and selected the tannoy setting.

"Dr Bennett to the Training Space!"

..._...

Chloe knew how far to take the sparring session. She was able to see when Anne-Marie was beginning to tire but instead of backing off, Chloe moved faster to exhaust the girl quicker. Anne-Marie was kicked backwards and she stuck the mat hard with a scream. She sprang up and threw herself back into the fight kicking Chloe in her side. Then she paused and looked up at Chloe who just smiled before sitting down on the mat.

"You done?" Chloe asked once she was comfortable.

"Yeah," Anne-Marie replied as she sat down close to Chloe.

"Feel better?"

"Yes, I do."

Chloe pulled Anne-Marie over and wrapped her arms around the eight-year-old.

"Talk to me."

"I miss Steph."

"We all do," Chloe said. "I know it hurts; I miss her too and so does Josh. I've been there. When Josh was hurt, I hated waiting for him to heal."

"It just hurts inside – I want her home."

"Being eight isn't easy; I remember!" Chloe chuckled.

"Tell me about it – total nightmare," Dr Bennett said as she entered the space and her daughter scowled. "Just thought I'd come to check on any injuries."

"We're fine, Dr Bennett, thanks," Anne-Marie said.

"We're all here to help you Anne-Marie; you just have to talk to us and explain that you're struggling with what has happened. We have all been through bad stuff and we know something about inner pain and frustration," Chloe said as she hugged the eight-year-old.

"Thank you, Chloe – you know, you'd make a great Mom."

Chloe looked pained at Anne-Marie's suggestion but then she laughed.

"I'm a long way away from that, girl!"

"A long, long, long way," Joshua confirmed.

"While I am in no rush to become a grandmother, Chloe, Anne-Marie is quite correct."

"Huh?" Chloe inquired and slightly flabbergasted at the suggestion.

"Over the past two-and-a-half years, Chloe, you have changed from an obnoxious teenaged brat into a mature, open-minded, young woman. Both your father and I are very proud of what you are right now and I would even say that your meeting Dave and Mindy in that alley, was probably the best thing that could have happened to you – despite it also being the stupidest thing that you have ever done, which is saying something!"

"Thanks, Mom – I think. . ."

"I'm sorry I spoke to you, like that – it was not nice," Anne-Marie apologised.

"As long as we each learn from our mistakes as we make them, then there is hope for us all," Chloe said seriously.

Safehouse F

"This sucks!"

"Why?" Hailee asked as she looked across the table at Curtis.

"I'm the only guy here. . ."

Saoirse looked over at Abby and she grinned fiendishly.

"Have no fear – we won't rape you," she teased.

"Thanks, SD, that makes me so much happier!"

"I think he misses Megan's company," Hailee suggested.

"More like her hand on his. . . Ow!"

Saoirse rubbed her arm where Curtis had just punched her.

"You're not supposed to hit a lady," SD growled.

"Well," Curtis replied smoothly. "When a lady appears in the Safehouse, I'll refrain from hitting her."

Hailee and Abby burst out laughing and Saoirse went very pink in the face.

"Despite what Stephanie might say, I *am* a lady!" Saoirse retorted with a grin.

Then she went quiet and just stared at the table and her mug of coffee. She had mentioned the name that they had all agreed not to mention. All of the fun stopped dead and everybody became very subdued.

"Despite my wanting to kill her all those times, I hate what has happened to her. I miss her so much. . ."

Tears ran down Saoirse's face as Hailee hugged her.

***Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28***

Once Mindy had finished explaining the events since Stephanie had been shot, Stephanie spent several minutes going through everything in her head.

"I can't think straight – my head is mush!"

"That'll be the painkillers; they fuck with your mind and your brain goes slow," Mindy explained. "Been there. . ."

Stephanie lifted up the white sheet covering her with her left arm – her right was pinned to her side – and she peered down the length of her body. Her eyes took in the mass of dressings which covered her chest and the vivid bruising visible around the edges. She looked up at Mindy, a single tear running down one cheek.

"Am I going to die? I don't want to die. . ."

"You are *not* going to die. We've been here before, you and me – you are *not* going to die!"

More tears fell.

"Say it!"

Stephanie shook her head and began to sob.

"Stephanie Lizewski – you are *not* going to die, goddammit!"

"I'm scared. . ."

..._...

Mindy was worried by her daughter's demeanour. For her to heal, Stephanie needed to be positive. Being depressed and scared would not help her at all. There was a knock on the door and a man entered.

"I'm Doctor Charles – is now a good time for a chat?"

Mindy took in the writing embroidered onto the man's lab coat. On the right chest, it read:

*Daniel Charles, M.D.
Dept. of Psychiatry*

Mindy's eyes narrowed. She hated shrinks! Doctor Charles noticed and he smiled the most disarming smile Mindy had ever seen.

"I'm not here to 'shrink' anybody; I'm just here to see if I can help. I believe the young girl in the bed has been through a very traumatic event and from your expressions, you're both struggling to cope. May we. . .?"

Behind the doctor was a young woman of medium height and bushy long brown hair. She smiled.

"Doctor Sarah Reese," she said introducing herself.

"Please. . ." Mindy said as she waved them both to a pair of available chairs.

Doctor Charles took a seat while Dr Reese remained standing.

"I'm Mindy Lizewski and this is my daughter, Stephanie."

..._...

"Hello, Stephanie," Doctor Reese began. "I understand you've only been aware of your injuries for the past few hours?"

"Yes," Stephanie replied slowly. "My Mum just explained everything to me."

"You're English?"

"Yes – got a problem with that?" Stephanie bristled.

"Of course, not," Doctor Reese chuckled. "Just don't get that accent around here very often."

Doctor Charles never said a word but Mindy could tell that he was studying Stephanie's expressions and mannerisms as she replied to Doctor Reese's questions. Mindy was unsure about the Psychiatrist; how deep was he going to dig and would Stephanie, in her weakened state, expose herself and by extension, Mindy and the rest of *Fusion*.

"What was your first reaction to your Mom's explanation, Stephanie?"

"I felt scared. Me and my Mum, we have no secrets . . . but I wish she'd not told me I'd actually died – not her fault; we've agreed never to lie to each other."

"A good mother-daughter relationship," Doctor Reese replied approvingly.

"My kids have had various knocks and scrapes – many times – but nothing like this," Mindy said. "She's so young and she has her whole life ahead of her."

"Stephanie," Doctor Charles said as he spoke for the first time in several minutes. "It's obvious that you're loved very much. Think of that, each time you feel scared or lonely."

"Thanks, Doctor Charles," Stephanie offered with a shallow yawn.

"We'll leave you to get some rest," Doctor Reese said as Doctor Charles stood up. "If either of you want to chat, we'll be available."

"Thank you," Mindy said as the two Doctors left.

An hour later. . .

Room 28

Stephanie scowled as I placed a tray down before her.

"I'm not hungry."

"Yes, you are; you haven't eaten in two days. . ."

"Not happening. . ."

Stephanie studied the contents of the tray.

"Jelly?"

"It's Jello, honey," I corrected her.

"It's jelly – jelly is for little kids . . . I am *not* a little kid!"

"No, it isn't, and anyway, you'll find it easy to swallow."

"I can't; I hurt too much."

"You have to eat, Stephanie; your body must be screaming out for energy and it needs that energy to start healing."

"But it hurts . . ."

"I know; I've been shot before and I know what it feels like."

"I'm not eating it . . ."

It was time for some tough love.

"Okay," I said coldly. "If it keeps you alive and it helps you to get better, then I will do *whatever it takes* and coming from me, you know that that is no idle threat, Stephanie."

For a moment, I saw fear but then I saw that I had hit home. Stephanie knew full well what I was capable of and how far I would go to achieve my aim.

"It's embarrassing. . ."

I patiently held the spoon, loaded with Jello, to her mouth.

"You're my daughter and I love you. Whatever it takes, remember. . ." I said in a reassuring tone.

Stephanie reluctantly opened her mouth for the spoon and she swallowed the Jello. Then she began to cry – I felt her left hand grip my own as tightly as she could manage – which, admittedly, was not very much in her weakened state. I recognised the expression of hopelessness and frustration on her face as she sobbed. I had never seen Stephanie in such a state; she was so far away from how we normally saw her – the hard-as-nails girl who would not think twice about punching way above her weight – that it brought *me* to tears as well, despite my wanting to stay strong for my daughter.

After a lot of stops and starts, I managed to get a good quantity of Jello into Stephanie. She finally lay back and gave me a weak smile before she closed her eyes; her small hand still gripped my own. I felt the pressure on my hand gradually ease as the ten-year-old girl fell asleep and I took a moment to dive into the bathroom to wash my face.

That evening

Room 28

When I entered the room, both girls were fast asleep.

I was very pleased that Mindy was getting some rest – she had been on the go without sleep for a long time. Mindy was struggling to cope on every level. Nothing that Damon had taught her had prepared her for what had happened – not that Damon had been able to teach *anything* about parenting. Okay, that was nasty but it was also very true. Mindy was my number one responsibility in life and I had to cope with what Damon had made her. The three kids were equally the second most important responsibilities, although temporarily, Stephanie was moved above the twins – they did not mind; they knew what was at stake.

Seeing Mindy and Stephanie suffering so much, hurt me badly. It also hurt to see a girl so young going through so much shit. I had felt anger like I had never known before – if I ever got my hands on whomsoever had shot Stephanie, I would rip them limb from limb and I would take great joy in listening to their screams as I did so.

I was not the only one to think in that way; Chloe and Joshua were seething. Just don't get me started on Saoirse; Kim had told me the girl had spent over an hour sharpening her Butterfly swords the other night and her face had been like thunder as she did so. Nobody had dared go anywhere near the girl while the swords were out. The twins

had not taken it well; they desperately wanted their big sister back and for the moment, they were unable to even come to see her. Anne-Marie had been inconsolable the other night during dinner; she just broke down in tears and sobbed for over an hour before she finally succumbed and fell asleep. Danny was just as worried about his big sister as everybody else was, only he reacted differently and I usually heard him crying at night.

..._...

I sat down in a chair on the opposite side of the bed from Mindy and I wrapped a hand around Stephanie's much smaller one. I felt the hand move and her gun-metal blue eyes opened and they looked around for a moment before they focussed on me. My daughter smiled and I squeezed her hand gently. It was the first time that I had seen her awake since she was shot.

"Hi, Daddy. . ."

"Hi, Steph. How are you feeling?"

"Scared. . ."

One word and then she seemed to fold into tears.

"You are not alone, Stephanie, and you never will be. We are all here for you and we will all do everything that we can to help you."

"I know. . ."

The poor girl began to sob harder but within a few minutes, the ten-year-old managed to regain control of herself and I wiped away her tears; she forced a smile and then looked a little embarrassed.

"Thanks, Dad. I think I upset Mindy earlier," Stephanie said as she looked over at Mindy.

"Just remember; when things get too much it's okay to cry but it's also good to talk – something your mother never seems to understand."

"I hate not being in control. I hate being helpless; Mindy actually had to feed me earlier. . ."

For a moment, I thought that Stephanie was about to burst into tears again but thankfully she did not.

"You have a lot in common with Mindy; you're both control freaks and you both hate it when you have to rely on others. You're strong, so you *will* get through this. It'll take time and I know you'll be just as well-behaved as Mindy was when *she* got hurt. You can't rush healing; it happens in its own time. You'll hate having everybody doing things for you but it is unavoidable. Your right arm can't be used for a while and there will be a limit to what you can do with your left."

"As long as I can wipe my own arse and fanny, I'll be happy."

I laughed as I detected some of the old Stephanie showing for a moment – but only for a moment. . .

"The pain in my chest makes it difficult for me to breathe . . . and to eat. . ."

She was crying again and it looked like the talking had taken a lot out of her.

"Go back to sleep, Steph. Rest."

"Yes, Dad."

Stephanie closed her eyes and the young girl was soon asleep.

Earlier that afternoon. . .

Office of Doctor Daniel Charles

"So, Sarah, what did you get out of that little interview?" Doctor Charles asked as he leaned back in his chair behind his capacious desk.

"The little girl is hurting and she is very scared. Underneath, there is something else; I saw it in her eyes. I don't think the girl normally gets scared about anything – which is making the whole experience more frightening for her. Her mother seemed to latch onto everything that her daughter was saying – no idea why," Doctor Sarah Reese replied from a comfortable chair opposite the desk.

"Very good. Yes, you are right – there *is* something going on."

"Child abuse?"

"No – definitely not; too much love between the two of them. I also think Stephanie can normally look after herself very well, thank you very much. Wouldn't rule out some abuse before she met her current parents, though. Her medical notes are interesting. According to the State of Michigan and the City of Chicago, Stephanie Walker was adopted by Melinda and David Lizewski at Christmas, last year. She is the eldest of three children apparently – monozygotic twins the other two. Behind her right ear, there is a small tattoo – a commando dagger if I am not mistaken."

"A dagger?" Sarah asked.

"She is very fit – a bonus considering her injury. Something about that child troubles me – let me think on it some more."

***The following morning
Sunday, 3rd July***

***Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28***

I was very glad that I was there to protect the medical personnel.

Mindy awoke just as a male doctor and two nurses appeared on their rounds. While the nurses busied themselves tidying up the room and changing Stephanie's catheter drain bag, the Doctor took a few moments to check Stephanie's notes which hung at the foot of her bed before he gently shook the young girl awake.

"And how are we feeling, this morning, young lady?"

Stephanie blinked as her eyes became accustomed to the bright sunlight which streamed in through the freshly opened curtains and then she scowled.

"You're not from around here, are you?"

The doctor laughed.

"And neither are you, young Stephanie."

"Okay, you got me there, doctor . . . who?"

"No, I am no time lord, just plain old Doctor Edward Salmon. So, how have you been feeling, since you awoke yesterday?"

"I hurt and I feel frustrated. I hate being in bed all the time and I keep crying and . . . and I feel scared. . ."

"Don't feel bad; all that is perfectly normal. That should surprise your Mum; she says that you are not a normal girl."

Stephanie smiled weakly.

"She's right, I suppose. . ."

"Now, let us look at your wounds. This is going to hurt; I'm sorry, but there is no way around it."

..._...

I moved around the bed towards Mindy; I sensed trouble. The Doctor pulled back the sheet and he first ran his eyes and fingers across the dressing that covered most of Stephanie's chest from just below her right shoulder and across

her chest to her left side.

"This will hurt. . ." The Doctor advised as he gently eased back the dressing.

Stephanie screamed out in pain and I felt Mindy try to jump up but I used all my strength to hold her down in the chair.

"They're . . . hurting . . . her. . ." she hissed angrily.

"They have to – she'll get through it. . ."

Mindy, reluctantly, ceased trying to push past me and she sank back into the chair.

"I know. I just feel so helpless."

"Just control yourself; the Doctor probably enjoys living," I whispered and Mindy growled like an angry Rottweiler but I saw a smirk on her lips.

Stephanie was crying with the pain but it had obviously subsided now that the dressing had been removed. I cringed at what I saw. The wound was jagged and had been stitched up, but where the stitches were, the skin was savagely bruised and I dreaded to think what the insides were like. Mindy had seen the bullet, and naturally, she had identified it almost immediately.

It had originated from a Soviet 7.62-millimetre sniper rifle round and such a large and savage bullet had played havoc with the young girl's insides. Her left lung had been nicked which had caused it to collapse. The trauma had included three broken ribs but had avoided anything critical. The bullet had ultimately lodged between two of Stephanie's ribs after it had damaged the shoulder joint of Stephanie's right arm. Mindy had deduced that it should have been a very long-range shot, otherwise Stephanie would have been torn in half. That was a conundrum unto itself. The bullet must have been part-loaded which meant that the bullet had, thankfully, expended most of its kinetic energy before it had struck the girl. The doctors had had to perform an operation just to get at the bullet and remove it. The bullet was now in the custody of Hank Voight.

..._...

Stephanie held tight to Mindy's hand as the Doctor prodded and poked the wound. Finally, once the Doctor was satisfied that all was in order, a nurse applied a fresh dressing to the wound. I turned away to allow my daughter some privacy as the other nurse pulled the sheet down past Stephanie's knees – she was naked – and then checked the catheter which had been inserted into her bladder.

"Ewww. . ." Stephanie complained as the nurse probed her nether regions and Mindy laughed. "It's not funny, Mum – how would you like to have a damn tube stuck up your twat. . ."

Mindy raised an eyebrow along with the Doctor. The nurses just smirked and exchanged a glance.

"Forget I said anything. . ." Stephanie groused.

Mindy looked up at me all smiles. Her expression spoke volumes – she was overjoyed at hearing the real Stephanie.

An hour later. . .

Office of Doctor Edward Salmon

Mindy sat across from the Doctor on a couch while the Doctor sat in a chair.

His office was decidedly well fitted out as suited a senior surgeon. Dave had left about twenty minutes previously after Stephanie had been given her daily dose of various drugs which had had the side effect of knocking her out for several hours.

"So," the doctor began. "Is Stephanie a healthy child, does she exercise much?"

I smirked as a vision appeared in my mind of a ten-year-old girl dressed in jungle camouflage as she viciously killed dozens of gunmen while on a crazed rampage across an island in the Mediterranean.

"Yes, she keeps active," I replied.

"Does she get on well with her siblings?"

"Oh, yes," I replied as another image of the girl appeared in my mind. It was of Psyche shooting a woman for hurting Anne-Marie. "She'd kill for them. . ."

"Metaphorically speaking, of course . . ."

"Of course, . . ."

"Now, in a few days, once I am happy that Stephanie is out of danger and she is healing correctly, I will pass her onto Paediatrics and unto the care of Doctor Natalie Manning, one of our paediatricians. Incidentally, Doctor Manning saw Stephanie when she was first admitted into the ER and is up to speed with Stephanie's condition. She will then oversee Stephanie for the next few weeks as she heals enough to be allowed home. Stephanie still has a long road ahead of her . . . I understand her normal doctor is Doctor Catherine Bennett – she's up on the fifth floor, west wing?"

"Yes – Cathy looks after us all. . ."

"Code Blue, Room 28 . . . Code Blue, Room 28!"

The doctor was out of the room in a second with Mindy close behind the moment the computerised announcement began.

***Chapter 297*: And The Thread Breaks**

Sunday, July 3rd, 2016

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28**

Stephanie was not moving.

Nurses were all around her and one was astride her on the bed, her arms outstretched, elbows locked, as she pushed down hard on Stephanie's chest. Another nurse had placed a mask over Stephanie's mouth and she was squeezing rhythmically to send air into Stephanie's lungs.

"What's happened?" the doctor demanded as he burst into the room.

"She went into sudden cardiac arrest . . . she complained about intense pain in her right shoulder and then she lost consciousness; she went into arrest a few seconds later," a nurse reported as a crash trolley was rushed into the small room.

Mindy quickly moved out of the way. Her face had gone very white as nearly all the blood had drained away at the sight of her daughter being mauled as the nurses fought to keep her alive.

Twenty minutes later

Dave left the elevator and he turned left towards Stephanie's room.

As he turned the last corner, he instantly went on guard; Mindy was sitting on a chair outside the room with her head in her hands and he could hear sobbing.

"Mindy?"

Mindy looked up at Dave, her expression full of sadness

"Dave, I'm so sorry – she's gone. . ."

Dave was stunned and he dropped the bag he was carrying and knelt down beside his wife for a moment before he peered into Room 28. All that could be seen was the bed, a white sheet pulled up over a small mound which lay in the centre of the bed.

"What happened?"

"She arrested . . . I was with the doctor in his office – I wasn't. . . I wasn't there. . ."

Mindy began to sob even harder.

Room 28

With a jerk, Mindy bolted upright in the chair.

She looked around with a start as she heard Dave laughing and she felt her face warming up. Even Stephanie was smiling.

"Am I that boring?" she demanded with mock annoyance.

"I must have dozed off. . ." Mindy began.

"Snoring like a rhino!" Stephanie commented.

"Nah – more like a faulty chainsaw," Dave chuckled.

"I'm sorry – I had the worst nightmare. . ."

"You need a coffee. Shall I?"

"No – I need to stretch my legs; back in a few minutes."

Mindy left the room and she headed for the coffee machine. Just as she was straightening out the fourth dollar bill to insert into the infernal machine, a speaker blared.

"*Code Blue. . .*" Mindy froze and she began to turn back towards Stephanie. "*Room 17 . . . Code Blue, Room 17!*"

Mindy almost collapsed at the relief which flooded over her.

Mindy

It was embarrassing falling asleep, like that, but I was tired and the doctor's words in his office had reassured me greatly so I must have let my guard down.

Humiliation number seven-hundred-and-forty-seven! Putting that aside, I was over the moon to see Stephanie smiling. She still looked very poorly as I walked back into the room but the smile on her face was an awesome step forward.

"You need rest, Mum."

"I do . . . but I don't want to leave you."

I received a glare from Dave and another from Stephanie.

Stephanie

I continued to glare at my Mum.

"I'll be fine – I'm in a hospital; it's not like I'm going anywhere," I groused. "One arm is strapped to my side, I have numerous wires super-glued to where my boobs would be, if I had boobs, and let's not forget that I have a plastic tube stuck up my. . ."

"Okay, Stephanie – enough. . ." Dad chuckled.

". . . twat!" I finished and Mum laughed out loud.

"Let's go before she uses up her *entire* vulgar vocabulary!" Mum suggested.

"Oh, I have plenty more in reserve," I retorted.

"Take care," Mum ordered as she gave me a hug.

"What she said," Dad added as he ruffled my hair.

"Love you both."

..._...

To be honest, I was glad to be alone.

It had been a very busy morning what with being prodded and poked in places that I had, up until that morning, deemed private. I was also feeling a little overwhelmed with all the attention – especially from Mindy. I knew that it wasn't her fault; she was just worried about me and that made me feel good inside. Somebody loved me . . . and I knew it was not just Mindy; it was Dave and everybody else too. It was that love between us which had allowed me to tell them both how I was really feeling without then feeling ashamed or shy. I felt like a sissy crying all the time but neither Dave nor Mindy laughed at me. They were just there *for* me which was comforting and just what I needed.

Okay, sitrep!

My upper right arm was strapped to the side of my body with a bandage which passed around my torso just below my chest and held my right forearm across my stomach. I was a little annoyed that I was naked but I could live with it. My

shoulder hurt like hell when my meds began to wear off but for the remainder of the time, it was just a dull throbbing which I could tolerate. My chest was sore from the right to the left, but mainly on the right. Just like my shoulder when the meds wore off, it was a killer. I had not, as yet, seen my wounds but my Mum's face as the dressing had been removed that morning had remained with me. I knew that it would take a *lot* to shock *her*!

As for the rest of my body: there was something on my left side just beyond where my right hand lay but I had no idea what was there; I could just feel another dressing. I knew that somebody had been playing between my legs as I could feel something taped to my left thigh and there was something between my . . . whatevers – I knew it was a urinary catheter which kind of freaked me out a bit. It felt strange having been in bed heading on for three days – I hated it too; I preferred to be active, not stuck in a bed like a damn potato!

I also hated the fact that I had spent an inordinate amount of time crying and I felt ashamed about feeling scared. I had no reason to be scared; I was better than that. I was a *Predator*. I was *Psyche*. I was a member of *Fusion*. Only, the whole shooting thing had frightened me to death. I had been hurt before but nothing so major. I knew enough to know that I should have died – in fact, I *had* died . . . once. It had hit me like a brick wall at 90 miles-per-hour; I was mortal. Ever since I had killed that girl in the shower, I had seen myself as akin to being immortal.

I could feel the tears running down my face as I considered how close to death I had come. I did not want to die; I had my whole life before me. I had a family. I had everything. I had almost lost everything and everybody that I cared about. As I sobbed, I felt myself drifting into the doldrums and I cried even more.

Then something really good happened . . .

Saoirse

"Saoirse!"

"How's the Phase 2 reject?"

"Let's not go there – how about the Phase 3 fuck up?"

I tried not to notice the tears running down Stephanie's cheeks and the sad, depressed look on her face.

"I'm okay. Believe it, or not, I miss you."

"Bullshit!" Stephanie retorted as she wiped away her tears with her left hand.

"Shit getting you down?" I asked as I sat down on a chair beside the bed.

I cringed at the sight of the bruising above Stephanie's dressings.

"That bad, eh?"

"Yes – it is."

"This must make you happy, SD, seeing me like this," Stephanie offered with a grin.

"Don't even fucking joke about it, Stephanie!" I replied angrily.

I had cried my eyes out when I had heard about Stephanie being shot. Stephanie was only joking but it was very close to the mark – too damn close.

"Six months ago, I would have liked nothing less than to see you dead, or in a bed like you are now. Ever since I stopped trying to kill you, you've been so kind to me. You allowed me to stay in your room. You allowed me to sleep in your bed. You helped me through a lot of shit and I owe you everything, Steph. Now, I want to help *you*. Talk to me."

"I feel like crap and I hate being cooped up in here."

I reached over and took Stephanie's left hand – it was shaking as she cried again. I hated to see her like that. Normally she was a gobby bitch, always smiling and winding people up and we were like sisters as we both caused trouble together.

"It's gonna be hard, Steph, but I'm going to be with you, every step of the way."

"Promise?" Stephanie's voice wavered a little and my heart went out to my former enemy.

"Cross my heart and hope to die."

"You're going to regret it."

"You're going to be fine, Steph."

"I'm gonna be a disaster."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I'm in a hospital, for fuck's sake!"

I laughed; I liked to see the old Stephanie – belligerent and unyielding. I was frightened for her; I knew it would be a ferocious uphill struggle, like nothing she had faced before. I had witnessed kids shot – and the aftermath. . . I knew that Stephanie was a tough young girl and I knew that as a person, she was well able to handle everything before her.

"I feel so weak and helpless and I'm always crying. I've never felt like this before; I couldn't even feed myself this morning – just like yesterday. I felt so ashamed having Mum stuff jelly in my mouth and then some crappy porridge, this morning."

"Steph, you're one of the strongest people I know. You've been through three years of hell and survived. If anybody can do it, you can. I hate to say this and if you tell *anybody*, I'll deny it; but . . . there are times that I envy you."

"Me?"

"You have a perfect life, now, and you handled being a *Predator* way better than I did."

I intended to make it as easy for her as I humanly could and I knew that I was not alone.

That afternoon

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 28

As we walked up the corridor, they saw Saoirse leaving Room 28.

"Hi, guys," she said.

"How is she?" Mindy asked.

"She's sleeping – been asleep for about two hours."

"Thanks, Saoirse, you're a really great friend."

"No sweat, Mindy."

Mindy smiled as she walked past, entourage in tow, then Saoirse turned.

"Mindy?"

"Yeah, SD?"

"Thanks . . . for everything."

Saoirse blushed as she said it and then turned and headed for the exit before Mindy could respond. Dave looked over at Mindy who just shrugged.

"Now, don't go waking your sister, please," Dave warned the two tearaways as they all entered Room 28.

..._...

"Holy, shit!" Anne-Marie almost exploded when she saw her big sister.

"She looks bad," Danny agreed.

"She is bad, Danny, she is," Dave commented quietly.

Anne-Marie went around the bed and peered at her sister's bruises. Sadness and compassion spread across the eight-year-old's face and she looked up at her Dad.

"She will get better, right, Dad?"

"I hope so, honey, I really do. The bullet did a lot of damage to her insides and it will take months for her to heal fully. She will need your love and understanding as she heals. She will be very frustrated and she may say things she doesn't really mean – always remember that," Dave said as he crouched down to look into his youngest daughter's concerned eyes.

"Will she still be the same?" Danny asked.

"Yes, she'll still be the same foul-mouthed, little bitch," Mindy told her son.

..._...

"Somebody talking about me?" a sleepy voice queried from the bed.

Anne-Marie and Danny turned to see their sister looking at them. She looked very tired and her eyes had lost their usual sparkle. The twins appeared apprehensive about approaching their sister but they moved forwards none the less. Stephanie smiled happily as she saw who her visitors were.

"Hi, guys," she whispered.

"Hi, Steph," Anne-Marie began. "You look really bad."

"Thanks – I think."

"I didn't mean. . ."

"I know. I feel pretty crappy and I know I must look like shit, Anne-Marie. I'm just really happy that you all came to see me."

"We've missed you, Steph," Danny said slowly.

"I've missed you all – I hate being here."

"I can believe that," Anne-Marie stated. "I was really scared when I saw you covered in blood. . ."

Stephanie reached out and she grasped her little sister's hand. Anne-Marie was rather surprised at how weak her big sister's grip was. She decided that Psyche or not, Rogue could put her big sister down with one hand tied behind her back. As she squeezed Stephanie's left hand the older girl sniffed back some tears which Anne-Marie never noticed but Mindy did; Mindy missed nothing.

"Just saw Saoirse – is everything okay?" Mindy asked.

"Yeah – I was really pleased to see her. We chatted for a while and then I felt tired and I fell asleep."

Stephanie never mentioned the fact that she had held Saoirse's hand until she had fallen asleep.

***The following morning
Monday, July 4th***

***Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28***

Nobody was in much of a celebrating mood, besides, ever since *Fusion's* British connections had grown, Mindy had decided it was in bad taste – not that Joshua had ever complained.

Rather than spend the night with Stephanie, Mindy had chosen to spend the evening with the twins and Dave at Safehouse Zulu. That morning, Mindy returned to the hospital with the twins and Megan in tow. However, Stephanie was not in a very receptive mood and Mindy was very worried.

"Can't I be left in fucking peace?" Stephanie moaned as everybody entered.

"I thought you'd be pleased to see us," Mindy suggested.

"Well, I'm not."

"Not even happy to see *me*?" Megan asked.

"Should I be?" came the tart response.

"What the fuck's up with her?" Megan asked Mindy who just shrugged.

"Megan, why don't you take the twins to go get a soda?"

"Okay."

Once Megan and the twins had left the room, Mindy turned on her daughter.

"What *has* got into you?" Mindy demanded.

"A bullet, apparently."

"Stephanie!"

"I need to get out of here."

"You need to rest."

"I hate it here."

"I know you are frustrated. . ."

"You know *nothing* about me!"

"You're my daughter. . ."

"No, I'm not! I'm just some shitty wretch you scooped up off the damn pavement like a fresh, steaming, dog turd."

"What!"

"Why do you care? I am nothing to you – I am nothing – I . . ."

Stephanie lay back in the bed and her face scrunched up in obvious pain. Then she yelled out as the pain grew before she started to shake. Mindy stabbed the emergency call button that lay on Stephanie's pillow just as Megan and the twins returned. That was the moment when Stephanie screamed out and then went silent and very still.

Two nurses burst in the door and Mindy shoved Anne-Marie and Danny out of the way. One nurse checked Stephanie's carotid artery in her neck.

"No pulse!" the nurse called out as she hit an illuminated blue button labelled 'CODE' above the bed and Mindy's nightmare became all too real.

"Code Blue, Room 28 . . . Code Blue, Room 28!"

One nurse yanked back the sheet and began to compress Stephanie's chest. Megan screamed out as three of Stephanie's ribs audibly snapped under the pressure being exerted by the nurse. A doctor arrived next and she took charge.

"Hold!" she called out and the nurse stopped compressions while the doctor checked the monitor. "There we go. . ."

The nurses stood back for a moment while the doctor checked the carotid artery again and then listened to Stephanie's chest.

"Let's get her up to CT!"

The nurses rapidly disconnected wires and tubes from the panels above the bed and reconnected some into a portable monitor before opening the room doors wide and wheeling the bed with Stephanie out of the room.

"What's going on?" Mindy demanded in horror at the rapid change in events.

"She arrested. We're sending her for a CT scan to find out why," the doctor said as she headed after Stephanie.

Anne-Marie was speechless with tears streaming down her face and she gripped tightly onto her brother and Megan.

"What the fuck just happened?" Megan breathed.

Morton Grove

Chloe

"It's not fair!"

Joshua was getting his Initial Licence on Thursday.

"He's older than you, honey."

"P – l – e – a – s – e . . . I'll be the best daughter ever . . . I'll never be bad – ever. . ."

"Like that would ever happen!" Curtis muttered with a grin.

Chloe opened her mouth to retort but she closed it and smiled sweetly.

"She's making me feel sick. . ." Curtis added.

"She *is* being more loving and sweet than usual," Mom agreed.

"Aw, come on – I'm being a perfect lady about this," I tried.

"Why would I want to sign anything that says I am: 'legally responsible for the below mentioned minor'?"

"Because you love me and you're the greatest Mommy ever. . ."

"I'm gonna throw up!" Curtis growled.

"Pretty please. . ."

"You're right Curtis; this is making me feel queasy too. . ."

Mom finished filling in the form and I held my breath as she signed it.

"YES!" I exclaimed.

What had made me literally grovel? Mom was filling in my Form DSD X 174. It gave consent for me to DRIVE as Chloe Bennett! I had gained my instruction permit when I had turned fifteen and in another month, after turning sixteen and having completed *fifty* hours of practice driving and a Drivers-Ed course, I could get my Initial Licence. Okay, I had been driving for a while, as Shadow, and on public roads, and at high speed, and I had crashed a car *and* two motorcycles – another advantage of the licence was that I could get it endorsed so I could ride a motorcycle as *me*, as Chloe Bennett.

I was so excited; my next appointment was with Joshua to ease my built-up tension. I crossed my legs and Curtis raised an eyebrow as Mom's cell rang.

"Mindy. . . Calm down – tell me. . ."

My smile faded and so did my cousin's. I saw Mom's face go pale as she listened to Mindy for a few minutes before she returned her cell to her pocket.

"Stephanie's been rushed back into the OR after her heart stopped."

Three days later
Thursday, July 7th

Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28

"Hi, Stephanie, I'm Doctor Natalie Manning. I'm a paediatrician here at Northwestern."

"Hello."

"You've had a bad week, so far, but it appears that the worst is now behind you. Now we've removed that fragment of bone which was crushing your artery you are expected make a perfect recovery. It will be hard – I won't lie to you about that – but I understand you're a strong little girl."

Stephanie smiled as the Doctor made some annotations on her notes.

"I don't remember very much of Monday, or much else until last night," Stephanie admitted.

"You were out of it from when you crashed to when the anaesthetic wore off sometime yesterday afternoon. You've had three operations to repair some more damage which Doctor Salmon found after opening you up again."

"I'm hungry."

"How'd you fancy some oatmeal – your Mom said you aren't all that keen on Jello?"

"Yes, please. Can I feed myself?"

"You can try. Your right arm is still immobilised but if you feel your left is strong enough. . ."

..._...

"Ready for breakfast?"

"Mum!"

Mindy sat down on the bed beside her daughter and smiled. She gently stroked Stephanie's long blonde hair and her cheek.

"You feeling better?"

"I think so."

"Here."

Mindy placed a bowl of oatmeal before her daughter and then passed over a spoon. Stephanie picked up the spoon unused to using her left hand. Her fingers refused to work correctly but after a few frustrating minutes, she was able to scoop out some oatmeal and raise it to her mouth. Her hand was shaking which made the usually simple and everyday task a lot harder. Mindy did not intercede despite the looks of intense concentration and frustration that crossed her daughter's face as she tried to feed herself.

Finally, Stephanie succeeded and the look of success and jubilation on her face almost made Mindy cry but she had no idea why. Once started, Stephanie began to shovel the oatmeal in her mouth as fast as her shaking hand would manage.

"That was good," Stephanie said as she finally put the spoon back down. "Thank you."

"Whatever it takes, remember?"

"Whatever it takes," Stephanie confirmed with a grin before she sagged back onto the pillow, exhausted. "Whatever . . . it . . ."

Stephanie was asleep before she could finish the sentence.

..._...

"She finished it all?" Doctor Manning asked.

"All of it – she fed herself, too."

"Very good – we'll have her home before the end of the month. When did *you* last eat, Mrs Lizewski?"

Mindy frowned.

"I don't know. . ."

"Here."

Doctor Manning handed over two packs of sandwiches which Mindy almost ripped open in her desire for food.

"Your health is just as important as your daughter's. She can't heal properly if you become ill."

"Yes . . . doctor," Mindy mumbled grumpily between bites, too hungry to argue the point but unable to resist a dig. "My own doctor can be a bitch, too!"

That afternoon

"Joshua!"

"Hi, kid. Sorry I couldn't get here sooner."

"What the fuck are those?"

"Flowers. . ."

"What do you think I am?"

"A girl."

"I am not . . . okay . . . nice colours – what are they?"

"Electric blue galaxy Dendrobium orchids."

"Cool . . . thanks!"

"Anything for my little pal."

Stephanie scowled as a thought came to her.

"What day is it, Mum?"

"Thursday."

"Date!"

"July 7th – why?"

Stephanie grinned and reached over to Joshua.

"Happy Birthday, Joshua."

"Thanks, Steph."

"You having a party?" Stephanie asked dejectedly.

"No – I've postponed it till next month. Me and Chloe will have one together. That means you'll be there – no party without my pal."

Stephanie appeared to dissolve into tears and she refused to let go of Joshua's arm as she sobbed. Joshua looked up at Mindy in confusion. Mindy just shrugged.

"I just miss everybody. . ."

That evening
Safehouse F

It was time to get back out into the City.

Voight had not found anything and as far as he could tell there were no pending attacks on *Fusion* beyond what we normally coped with every day. Shadow and Jackal were out checking on the situation. Everybody else was trying to get back to normal. The intention was to return to our own homes by the weekend. Fellowes and Murphy had been patrolling our homes looking for anything untoward but nobody appeared to be monitoring anywhere that we usually frequented.

While I worried about Stephanie almost every waking minute (I had nightmares every sleeping one), I still found the downtime therapeutic in some warped way. There was a lot of anger as everybody trained and a strategy was built. I had toured all the Safehouses with Marty to ensure that nothing had been compromised. Abby had set her Synthesis minions to work digging into the internet and the dark web to find out anything they could about a hit on a young girl in Chicago. Mathilda was scouring Chicago's underworld looking for information there. Tommy was assisting her with his in-depth knowledge of the Russian side of the underworld.

I was on the mat with Megan, when Abby yelled my name.

"Mindy!"

I ran into the Command Centre and Abby looked upset.

"Shadow's been injured – she's on the way back in with Jackal. . ."

The wait was interminable but finally, Abby yelled out that they were coming down the ramp. Hailee and Saoirse were there and they both grabbed Shadow's motorcycle as she almost fell off it. Jackal parked his own machine rapidly and jumped off. He picked Shadow up like she weighed nothing and carried her through the barrier and onto the mat. Abby screamed.

There was an arrow embedded in the armour of Shadow's left thigh.

***Chapter 298*: Echo and Foxtrot**

*Late evening
Thursday, July 7th, 2016*

*Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28*

I was alone and 'enjoying' my eighth night in hospital.

I had been instructed to keep my mind busy; I had nothing to lose – my mind was fully functional even if my body was a train wreck. I thought back to the previous week – the Wednesday night, the night before I had been shot.

Wednesday, June 30th

I was struggling with flashbacks.

I needed time to myself and I wanted to be alone. I knew that if I woke Mindy, she would want to accompany me. I also knew that I was breaking about a dozen unbreakable rules and bending many more. Nonetheless, I soon found myself in a taxi, heading south. The guy dropped me off some distance from my destination for obvious reasons.

"You okay out here, alone?" he asked as I got out of the taxi.

"Yeah, I can look after myself," I replied with a smile.

"Okay. . ." he responded dubiously as I slammed the car door shut and walked away towards West 36th Place.

I enjoyed the darkness; it had never scared me. I savoured it's all encompassing blackness which comforted me more than daylight did. My senses were always peeked in darkness as sound travelled better. I performed several counter-surveillance sweeps to ensure that I was not being followed or monitored in any way. I was skilled at counter-surveillance and had been for several years

..._...

Mindy had issued standing instructions that pedestrian traffic to the Safehouse was not to use the same entrance but to spread across the various different entrances to put off trackers. Therefore, I headed for Pedestrian Entrance Two or PE2 for short. PE2 was a very non-descript property at South Albany Avenue and West 36th Place. The dwelling was unoccupied – supposedly the property was owned by a large company who used the place for transient sales-people, or so I had heard. I hopped over the steel fence into the front garden and then quickly headed down the side of the property to the side door.

I punched in an access code into the hidden keypad and the door unlocked. Once inside, I made for what the plans deemed 'a tornado room'. The room was built from solid steel and concrete. Entry was by hand-print identification only. I placed my hand on the reader and the screen turned green. The steel door slid to one side and I stepped inside a small ante room. Once the main door had closed, another opened before me and I found a small lift awaiting me. I placed my hand against the screen to one side of the lift and the doors opened soundlessly.

Once inside the lift, I hit the second button from the top and the doors closed and the lift plummeted downwards.

Safehouse F

Safehouse F was a haven for me.

It was rare to be there when the place was empty as in most cases the place was full of people going about their tasks. Eating, sleeping, sparring, shooting, planning – it all went on forty feet or so beneath Chicago. As I exited the lift and headed for the kill zone, I took the time to study my surroundings. The walls were bare concrete as I made my way down the corridor known as F4. The floor was concrete painted with a red paint. The lighting was harsh and white. I reached the security door and placed my hand on the pad which flashed green a moment later.

I turned right and faced the outer door for the kill zone. I repeated my hand scan twice more before I entered the

three-storey Safehouse. It was cool inside and I shivered slightly. The stone walls added a coarseness to the facility as the bright overhead lights automatically clicked on. I smelt the ozone from the air-conditioning system and the smell of bleach. As always, the facility was spotless. To my right, the armoured glass walls of the Command Centre shone in the bright lights. Beyond the glass, the multi-coloured lights and screens of the computer systems never slept.

I turned left and headed for the changing rooms. I opened my locker and pulled out my pistol and access card – I felt naked without them in the Safehouse. The H&K P30SK Compact pistol, in its holster, clipped onto the belt of my jeans while the access card slid into my left back pocket. I strode out and headed towards the vehicles at the far end of the Safehouse beyond the great glass barrier. I swiped my access card and passed through.

..._...

Before me, sat *Beast*, *Brute*, and *Hound*. I walked past the big 4x4s and stopped at the motorcycles. The first belonged to Kick-Ass, with Hit Girl's Ducati Panigale beside the Ducati Diavel. I stopped beside my own Honda CRF250L which sat between Wildcat's Ducati Monster 821 Dark and Foxtail's Aprilia Caponord 1200 Rally.

I turned and stared at the top of the stairs that led to the lower level. That was where I had tried to attack Shadow, my first time in the Safehouse. I remembered waking up in the bed and accidentally triggering Wildcat's claws – almost made me shit myself! I took the other stairs upwards and walked along to the Briefing Room. There, I stopped before the memorial wall.

At the top was the picture of Mindy's Mum and Dad – they both looked really happy. I understood that it was taken before Mindy was born. Next to that, on the right, was a framed picture of Dave's Mum and Dad on their wedding day. I knew that Dave's dad had been murdered on the orders of Chris D'Amico. Below those two was a picture of Big Daddy in full battle-order with his daughter, Hit Girl. She was about my age, maybe a little older. Very few people had ever seen Hit Girl in that get-up. I thought she looked awesome and I hoped I would be just as awesome – one day. It also struck me that Hit Girl was really short!

Below them was a larger photo with many people in it. *Justice Forever*. I felt pangs of sadness and tears in my eyes as I focussed on Night Bitch – she had her arms wrapped around Kick-Ass. I recognised Dr Gravity, Battle Guy, and Finding Tommy. I knew that Insect-Man and the Colonel were long dead – the Colonel another victim of Chris D'Amico and his cunts. Then my eyes fixed on the next photo and I smiled.

The image was of a very handsome Royal Marines Commando in full dress uniform with his bride. It was Joshua's Mum and Dad. I knew that his Mum was dead but I had never asked about how his Dad had died. Beside that picture was another one. I did not know the lady but I had been told that she was Natalie Bay and that she had been murdered on the same night that Joshua himself had been shot and almost killed.

I had not wanted to get to the last picture on the wall. I sank to the floor and cried as I looked into the eyes of Miranda. She had died saving my life. Losing her had been so hard. Dave and Mindy had brought me into the Safehouse alone one night and we had hung that picture. I had come apart and sobbed for quite some time before I was able to say anything like a thank you.

I was a *Predator*. I was trained to kill. I was trained to look after myself – only there were so many things where I needed outside support. For that I had Dave and Mindy, then the twins, then Saoirse. I knew that I would never be alone again as long as I lived. How much torment could a ten-year-old take before she went totally barking and fell off the wagon of sanity?

I left the Briefing Room as soon as I had finished crying and I headed downstairs towards the Engineering Workshop beyond the vehicles.

Safehouse E

I passed through a pair of airlocked security doors and made my way 'next door', as Marty would put it.

I smirked when I considered my first time in Safehouse E. I had been all but naked which had soon changed to totally naked thanks to Mindy and her warped training ideas. The 'next door' Safehouse was very stark in appearance. It was all concrete and steel while what paint there was on the walls, was grey. I walked past the armoury and headed upwards towards the concealed Safehouse E entrance.

As I climbed up through a hatch, I found myself underneath a car!

..._...

As I emerged out of the inspection pit, I turned to look at the car. The car seemed somehow familiar but I could not think where from. It was a gloss black from bumper to bumper and it had two doors . . . otherwise, it was sleek and very business-like, but dated. One strange thing to note was an illuminated 'scanner' at the front, mounted just below the hidden headlights at the rim of the bonnet. It scanned from left to right and then right to left. The colour? Purple – thought it should have been red, to be honest.

"Needs a bit of work," I muttered.

"At least I'm fully grown!" a female voice growled.

The voice was reminiscent of that generated by our *Fusion* masks. I was instantly on my guard as the voice was *not* familiar and I expected to be alone at going on for 4am.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Z.O.E."

"Zoe?"

"Zed – oh – eee."

"I know how it's spelt – who are you?"

"Look to your left."

"The car?"

"Intelligent girl!"

Was I actually conversing with a car?

"What are you, KITT?" I laughed.

"No, but if you would like I can change my voice to the Knight Industries Two Thousand – better?"

The voice had changed from a female to that of a male and was vaguely familiar.

"I liked the previous voice, thanks – that one is a bit before my time."

"As you wish. . ." the female voice replied. *"Are you going back down below?"*

"I am – why?"

"You can take me with you. . ."

At that, the driver's door swung open.

"Centre console – small cell phone."

I reached in and picked up what looked exactly like a small cell phone.

"I am integrated into the Safehouses and I will obey any commands you give me – just preface any commands with either 'Zoe', 'Duty Officer', or 'Computer'."

"Is that last one a joke, or was your creator a Trekkie?"

"Bit of both, I think."

"Shouldn't that LED thing be red?"

"If you wish. . ."

The scanner changed from purple to red.

"Blue?"

The scanner changed from red to blue.

..._...

As I went below, I decided to test out the device. I paused before a locked door that blocked my way down the passageway.

"Zoe . . . please open Echo-One-Seven."

I felt slightly stupid – until the door clicked open.

"Err . . . thanks."

"*You're welcome, Stephanie.*"

"You know who I am?" I asked as the door clicked shut behind me.

"*Stephanie Lizewski, nee Reeman. Kidnapped. . .*"

"Okay – I know my own backstory!"

Thursday, July 7th

Safehouse F

I noticed something secured to the shaft of the arrow; it was a note.

In hindsight, it was callous but I was intrigued. I momentarily ignored Chloe's wound and removed the note. I unrolled the note and read it. I began to shake with both a mixture of fear and anger – but mostly anger. Dave grabbed the note from my shaking hands and I saw his fingers flex and his face went very dark.

"What is it?" Hailee asked as she looked past Dave's shoulder and read the note herself:

*I MUST APOLOGISE
I MEANT FOR A CLEAN KILL
IF YOU WISH, I CAN FINISH THE JOB*

"That's fucking sick!" Hailee exclaimed. "Totally sick!"

Josh got up from the mat where Abby was seeing to Chloe's wound which turned out to be minor as less than an inch of arrow had penetrated the armour and the suit.

He walked over to Mindy.

"We are all behind you, Mindy. . ."

As Josh touched Mindy's arm he suddenly found himself on his knees as Mindy twisted his hand savagely and pinned him. Joshua swore loudly with the pain. Mindy released him immediately.

"Oh, Josh, I'm so sorry."

"Mindy, if you hurting me helps you get through this then keep at it," Josh offered seriously.

Mindy laughed and she gave Josh a hug.

"Thank you . . . all of you."

"We are *Fusion*," Joshua stated. "We are a single entity, fighting crime, *together*."

"Well said, Josh," Hailee commented.

..._...

"We know of two people who regularly use arrows like this," Marty stated as he held up the arrow recently removed from Shadow's armour.

"You mean those two miscreants that appeared a few weeks back?" Mindy asked.

"Yes, them."

Mindy's mood darkened.

"Then let's go see Apollo and Artemis – I want to talk to those two."

"Mindy," Dave cautioned. "Talk first, mutilate later. *If they're guilty. . .*"

An hour later

West Cermak Road and South Ashland Avenue

The pair of Yamaha MT-10 motorcycles cruised side by side down the avenue at the speed limit.

The Race Blue machine was ridden by Apollo in a black combat suit with blue highlights. The twin machine, in Tech Black was ridden by Artemis in her all black combat suit. Both vigilantes were out on the streets doing what they could to keep the streets safe. Then their peaceful night came apart, very quickly as several motorcycles and a pair of armoured SUVs appeared as if out of nowhere.

It was a classic ambush as the purple Ducati Panigale shot out of a side street and came up on their right. A yellow and green Ducati Diavel Carbon appeared on their left. Two more motorcycles pulled in front, a Ducati Monster 821 Dark and an Aprilia Caponord 1200 Rally. Behind, two black SUVs, one a Range Rover Sentinel and the other a GMC Sierra 3500HD with a mounted mini-gun pulled into the convoy.

"I think they want to talk," Apollo said dryly to his cousin.

"We done anything wrong?" Artemis growled back.

"Not that I know of. . ."

Artemis raised her right hand, signalling surrender, and Hit Girl pointed to the right and they both kept with the convoy as it turned down South Ashland Avenue.

..._...

The two cousins had no choice but to obey instructions. They stayed close and rode for another mile or so in a seemingly endless spiral around the roads before they approached a large five-storey structure. The convoy rode up a ramp and straight into the building before they all stopped in the darkened interior.

A roller-shutter closed behind them and they suddenly felt trapped and very worried. Lights came on all around them as the *Fusion* vigilantes dismounted from their machines and gathered around them after removing their helmets. The occupants of the SUVs remained inside their vehicles – just in case they did something stupid.

They were not *that* stupid – it was *Fusion* and you did *not* take on *Fusion*; unless you were fucking nuts!

The two cousins appeared distinctly apprehensive as they carefully pulled off their helmets and looked around, their hands well away from any weapons. Hit Girl strode forwards and she circled the two young vigilantes, her lip curling. She said nothing as Apollo and Artemis stood very still, uncertain of what to do. Hit Girl grabbed a Saya with Katana off her back.

"You were both in the city, last night – we have you on CCTV."

"We were out," Artemis replied slowly. "What. . .?"

Hit Girl swung the Saya and struck the back of Artemis's lower legs. The eighteen-year-old fell over backwards and

crashed to the concrete floor. Apollo was seized by Kick-Ass before he could go to his cousin's aid.

"Get your hands off of her!" he yelled.

"I will ask the questions!" Hit Girl growled. "You, Artemis, will answer them!"

Artemis nodded as she did her best not to cower beneath Hit Girl's stare. She was scared – who would not be when faced with an angry Hit Girl!

"Pass me an arrow," Hit Girl went on. "Slowly. . ."

Slowly, Artemis reached into the quiver on her back and she retrieved a standard arrow. She handed the arrow to Hit Girl who looked closely at the tip. Hit Girl looked down at Artemis and her stance changed.

"You shot Shadow. . ."

It was almost a hiss, but it was enough to make Artemis quiver with fear.

"No . . . never . . . please. . ."

"Beg all you want . . . tonight, you die."

..._...

"We did nothing – we would never. . ." Apollo tried. "Please . . . we have no idea what this is about. . ."

"We are on *your side* – we would *never* hurt any of you," Artemis added desperately.

Hit Girl grabbed Artemis' armour and pulled her to within inches of her face.

"Why should I listen to you, you fucking vigilante wannabe?"

"Because we are your friends."

"I don't *have* friends – that's for fucking pussies like Wildcat!"

Without warning, Artemis was thrown backwards and her head hit the concrete. Only the armour on her mask protected her from injury.

"Ow!" she complained.

"Let the whelp go!" Hit Girl ordered and Kick-Ass released Apollo who ran forwards to assist his cousin. "What can you say to help your case?"

"We lost three arrows the other night – they were missing from my quiver – we think they were taken during a brawl," Apollo explained doing his best to keep the anger from his voice. "Is Shadow okay?"

"Yes, she is – not that it is of *any* concern to you. Let them go!"

***The following morning
Friday, July 8th***

***Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28***

I awoke feeling remarkably refreshed, considering.

Don't get me wrong, I hurt like hell all over but you had to be alive to feel pain, so I was glad of it. I had managed to get a really good night's sleep – my first since arriving in the damn hospital. I knew that I had fallen asleep remembering my visit to Safehouse E and F but somehow, I had had the weirdest dream involving a talking car and a voice-activated Safehouse!

I opened my eyes and I didn't see much until somebody opened the damn blinds! I blinked in the early morning sun and I was able to make out a shadow by the window. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I recognised the familiar

silhouette.

"Mum?"

"Morning! How's my little girl feeling?"

I considered a rebuke but then decided that I liked being called that – at least in private.

"She's doing good; I'm feeling a *lot* better."

"Pleased to hear it. Sleep well?"

"I did – very well, thanks, Mum."

"Good – you've got some fun today. . ."

I scowled as my eyes focussed properly and I noticed that Mindy was wearing shorts and a t-shirt. That was very rare in public – it was usually jeans and a blouse as a minimum.

"What's with the get up?"

"It's time to get your ass out of that bed and into a bath!"

"You're going to *bathe* me?" I asked in horror as Mindy just smiled dangerously – I hated that smile!

Ten minutes later. . .

A nurse – Kittiwake, her name was – had run a bath in an adjoining bathroom.

Next, ignoring the indignant moans from her patient, she pulled back the sheet protecting the young girl's dignity and proceeded to disconnect all of Stephanie's wires and drips . . . plus the catheter.

"I hate that thing!" Stephanie complained.

"Give it a few more days and then you can start using a bedpan," Kittiwake said and she laughed at Stephanie's grimace as she carefully removed the various wound dressings.

"Why does everybody enjoy humiliating me?" Stephanie demanded as she winced at the pain when the dressings were removed.

"We don't. . ." Mindy chuckled as she effortlessly scooped the naked ten-year-old off the bed and carried her into the bathroom.

"Better not be too hot. . ."

"Shut up!" Mindy ordered as she carefully lowered her daughter into the water.

Everything was fine until the water touched Stephanie's wounds and she cried out in pain. It took a minute for the pain to ease as she settled back into the warm water. Initially, Stephanie had been a little freaked out by the idea of somebody washing her but Mindy was surprisingly gentle as she went about washing her daughter from head to toe – something which Mindy readily admitted to being a first for her. For Stephanie, it was not as humiliating as she thought it would be – she knew that Mindy was doing it out of love and kindness. Stephanie also took great delight in splashing Mindy and getting her just as wet as she herself was. While Mindy washed Stephanie's long blonde hair, they talked.

"You're a really good Mum."

"Me?" Mindy chuckled. "I'm crap – being a Mom scares me more than facing down cunts."

Stephanie looked up into Mindy's eyes.

"You're the best Mom out there. You are kind and fair. You care and you give out compassion and discipline when required – harsh discipline too. I hate being disciplined but I hate letting you down more. I don't like being bad or getting into trouble but I'm learning to be a child again. I like being a child; I like being *your* child. I am *proud* to be

your child"

Mindy did not know what to say so she said nothing. Stephanie saw the pink on Mindy's cheeks and the smirk of embarrassment and knew she had hit home.

"Thanks for being there for me, Mum. You've been there ever since you took me into your home, last year. You kept me sane while I hung upside down off a damn skyscraper. You kept me on the straight and narrow in the Caribbean and in Europe. You're a saint, Mindy – despite your night job!"

Mindy almost choked at that.

"Dave says I'm learning empathy from you three . . . I suppose I am . . . it's totally alien for somebody like me to worry about the feelings of others but I have to with you guys. I love having you guys around and I'll do anything to look after you. I know I fuck up from time to time . . . but I'm trying, I promise."

"We don't care if you fuck up, Mum. We just care that you're there for us when we need you – like right now . . . ow!"

Mindy had just finished drying her daughter's hair and she was brushing it firmly.

"More 'Sensitive Mum', less 'Hit Mum!'" Stephanie suggested to a chuckle from Mindy.

"Let's get you out of there."

..._...

Once Stephanie was dried off, Mindy helped her to stand up in front of the mirror and the ten-year-old girl looked shocked as she studied the wounds on her body for the first time.

"I'm a fucking mess!"

"Understatement of the year!"

Mindy helped Stephanie through to her bed. The bedding had been changed and instead of a sheet, a duvet in a blue cover was lying at the foot of the bed.

"Hope you like blue, Stephanie," Nurse Kittiwake said as she helped the girl back onto the bed.

First came all the wires on sticky pads in various places on her torso, then the catheter was reconnected – Stephanie made many colourful and crude comments as the nurse checked the 'plumbing' before she taped the tubing to the inside of Stephanie's left thigh. Some cream and dressings followed before a fetching light blue hospital gown was put on the girl and the drip was fixed back in place. Finally, Stephanie was laid back and the duvet pulled up over her.

"Comfortable?" Nurse Kittiwake asked.

"Yes, thank you – I feel a lot better after that bath; thanks Mum."

"Hungry?" Mindy asked with a smile.

"Oh, yeah!"

Just over an hour later, Stephanie had finished her breakfast and she was feeling fully energized instead of tired.

"You changed?" Stephanie asked her Mum who was now wearing a smart pair of blue jeans and a mauve blouse.

"Can't exactly stay in shorts and a T, can I?"

"Okay."

"Ready for some visitors?"

"Who?" Stephanie asked excitedly.

"Surprise. . ."

Mindy vanished out the door before she returned a few minutes later and Stephanie could hear excited voices in the corridor outside.

..._...

First in the door was Jackson Evans with his Mom, Debbie.

"Jackson?"

"Hi, Steph!"

They were followed by Ali Johns, Craig James, and Katy Evans, Jackson's twin sister. Stephanie was over the moon to see all her friends . . . even the boys.

"Hi, guys!"

"We've got a card – signed by the entire class," Katy said, handing over an enormous card liberally covered in signatures and comments. "Everybody was really worried but we're glad you're okay."

"Yeah," Craig grinned. "Jackson missed you."

Stephanie blushed at the comment.

"You're just lucky Steph can't hit you," Ali pointed out.

"She looks different – I've never seen her with her hair down; I like it."

Stephanie looked horrified as Katy and Ali giggled and she resolved to never have her hair down in Jackson's presence ever again.

"Can we see your wound?" Jackson asked.

"No!" Stephanie replied scornfully.

"Why not?" the boy persisted.

"It's in a place that you will *never* see!" Stephanie retorted.

"Huh?"

"Jackson, really!" his sister explained. "It's obvious; the wound is on her chest and she is *not* about to expose herself."

"I don't mind. . . She ain't got boobs, anyways."

"That's not the point!" Katy growled as she slapped her brother who just grinned sheepishly.

At the sound of snickering, Stephanie glared at the corner of the room where the two adults sat trying desperately not to laugh.

..._...

"She looks better than I expected," Debbie Evans commented.

"You should have seen her a few days ago – she's got one hell of a bruise on her chest," Mindy replied. "I saw her properly for the first time today, in the bath, and her body is in a shocking state."

"Jackson and Katy were very upset when they found out it was Stephanie who was shot. You've done really well to cope, Mindy."

"I've got a lot of people to support me."

"You've got us, too. Anything you need – just ask."

"Thanks. I'm just really pleased to see Stephanie laughing and joking. I've been so worried about her. She misses human contact. She misses her friends."

"She's a strong little girl."

"That she is."

That afternoon

Stephanie was over the moon at having had her friends to visit.

"Thanks for setting that up, Mum."

"They were really worried about you, especially your boyfriend. . ."

"I may be an invalid but I'll still slap you!"

"You'd lose a battle with a fly, right now. . ."

"Would not!"

"Would too!"

The argument petered out quickly as three people walked into the room. Stephanie's smile was enormous as she saw three of her best friends. Chloe, Saoirse, and Hailee gathered around the bed. Unbidden, Hailee peered down the inside of Stephanie's gown and she grimaced.

"I had better bruises," she chuckled. "They're way worse than you described, SD."

Chloe had a look herself before she sat down on a chair.

"Everyone had a good look?" Stephanie growled. "Anybody want to check out my snatch?"

Saoirse looked quickly at Mindy who smiled.

"Somebody's feeling a lot better," Saoirse commented dryly.

"Thanks to you and Mum. . ." Stephanie tailed off as she saw Chloe's painful grimace when she moved her left leg. "What's happened?"

Chloe explained the events of the previous evening once Mindy had checked that the door was firmly closed.

...+...

"We wanted to recce the area – check it was safe. I went out with Jackal on motorcycles and we headed in a large box pattern extending out a few miles. We saw the usual trouble-makers and a few snouts – we grilled them about the past week but found out nothing of use. After about an hour or so, we found that we had a tail. It was a black SUV that turned out to have fake plates. We didn't bother to try and ditch it; there was no point – at the time.

"Okay, in hindsight, that was a mistake but we had no way of knowing that at the time. We had stopped off to check on a group of young men when out of nowhere an arrow struck my thigh and penetrated my armour. I screamed; the pain was excruciating. The SUV vanished about the time I was hit and we never saw it again. Jackal bound the wound with a dressing and we headed back to the Safehouse where we found a very pissed off Mindy. While I was bleeding on the mat, she spied a note on the arrow and retrieved it."

"You were doing fine," Mindy chipped in. "But I'm sorry if I appeared insensitive."

"I'm used to it – besides, you had other things on your mind. . ." Chloe replied. "Anyway – my wound was only minor, but very painful. As for the note. . ."

Chloe hesitated and looked over at Mindy for guidance. Mindy scowled and got to her feet. She sat on the bed by her daughter and pulled out a piece of paper from her pocket. It was a copy of the original note. Stephanie read it and her face went very dark and then she shrugged.

"Not the first time somebody has tried to kill me, I suppose."

"You do have that effect on people," Saoirse said without humour.

"Yeah – the list of people would be pretty big," Chloe commented. "We're talking phonebook big!"

"So, no sex for you, then?" Stephanie retorted and Chloe scowled. "Till you heal?"

"Did you and Jackson get up to anything, then?" Chloe asked innocently.

Stephanie growled and Chloe smiled.

"SD, if you please. . ." Stephanie ordered and Saoirse slapped Chloe.

Chloe just laughed as she rubbed her arm.

..._...

"You saw mine, can I see yours?" Stephanie asked as she looked down at Chloe's thigh.

"The arrow only went in about an inch and Mom gave me a clean bill of health. . ."

"That's *not* what she said," Hailee commented. "Spill!"

Chloe's cheeks went a bright pink before she spoke.

"Alright! The good Doctor told me to stop behaving like 'a snivelling little bitch' and to 'suck it up' as I only had a scratch compared to a certain ten-year-old who had had her chest ripped open and had not even whimpered."

"I couldn't whimper; I was unconscious!" Stephanie pointed out quite reasonably.

"You were still very brave – much braver than Chloe!" Mindy chuckled before she looked at the girls in turn. "Now, our brave little princess needs some sleep."

Stephanie scowled at the 'brave little princess' bit but made no comment. As the three girls got up to leave, they each carefully gave Stephanie a hug. Saoirse whispered into her friend's ear.

"Stay strong, Steph; you're doing great."

"Thanks, SD."

Stephanie allowed herself to fall back onto her pillows with an enormous smile on her face and a good feeling inside. Within seconds she was fast asleep. Mindy grinned to herself and headed out to find a coffee.

She had some planning to do.

***Chapter 299*: The Cage**

The following evening
Saturday, July 9th, 2016

Safehouse Zulu

The subterranean bunker was busy.

Battle Guy was making final preparations for the night's activities. Everybody had been activated and the city would be *very* busy. The city would also be *very* safe – for most . . . but *very* deadly for the rest.

On the lowest level of Zulu, *Mirage* was being loaded. Nobody would pay much attention to a blue Ford Transit 150 exiting from the parking lot of a small shopping mall. In the driver's seat of the covert surveillance van, Mist sat ready. Behind her, in the rear, sat Splinter, Nightmare, and Eisenhower.

Lynx handed over the last of the ammunition and weapons and she slammed the side door shut.

Earlier that evening

Erika's Apartment

"Where were you, for the past week, Erika?" Toni demanded as Erika walked into the living room of the apartment that they both shared. "It was like you went underground, or something."

Erika smirked.

"Something like that. I told you, I had to go out of town to see my parents."

"I missed you. . ."

Toni kissed Erika on the lips and ran the fingers of her left hand over Erika's right breast. Erika breathed in as she returned the favour but with a hand on Toni's snatch.

"I gotta go, hun. . ."

"What – you only just. . ."

Erika laid a finger on Toni's lips.

"I'll be back before you know it – I promise."

Toni moaned.

"I need you," she said meaningfully.

Safehouse W

The *Vigilante* was back in the water and ready in all respects for sea.

Ares and Athena, along with Torment were standing by to get underway. They would wait until it was truly dark before heading up the Calumet River in case they were needed. The craft needed a check-ride after the refit to ensure that she was working perfectly.

The three of them expected to have themselves a peaceful evening.

Safehouse F

Hal stepped out of the Command Center and she raised her hand.

"Go get 'em!" she yelled and the Safehouse reverberated to motorcycle engines as Hit Girl, Kick-Ass, Jackal, Petra, and Raven started their engines.

Hal hit the button for the door and a minute later the noise diminished as the motorcycles ascended the concrete ramp. The high-speed fans in the ceiling drew out the clouds of carbon monoxide and Hal settled down to a night of monitoring her friends.

Chicago was going to be a hive of activity.

Safehouse D

"Let's roll!" Shadow growled as Hawk gunned the engine in *Brute*.

"You sure about this?" Wildcat asked.

"You know she's fucking nuts!" Trojan replied.

"Why did I agree to this?" Leon moaned as she ran her eyes across the dashboard before her. "It's like Darth Vader's bathroom!"

"You'll be fine!" Battle Guy chuckled from Zulu. "Just get Z.O.E. moving!"

"Mathilda Lando, a lone crusader in a dangerous world. The world. . . of the vigilante!"

"Yeah, yeah!" Wildcat growled. "Get a fucking move on!"

With the squeal of protesting rubber, the rebuilt, gloss-black, 1982 Pontiac Trans Am powered out of the Safehouse with Wildcat and Trojan following on behind providing close escort.

Brute followed suit but Hawk turned the armoured vehicle in another direction.

That same time

Safehouse Q

Marc Ryan was getting moody.

Two weeks. He had been stuck in the house for two whole weeks. Okay, he had three beautiful girls to talk with but he just wanted to get out of the house. His wound was healing well and Dr Bennett had visited every couple of days to change his dressings. Both Marc and Sarah had known of the twin girls, Sky and Christina.

"Damn psychos!" Sarah had growled.

Sky had laughed at the reference.

"We had a reputation," Christina had chuckled in confirmation.

The four of them found that they got on well together and they had quickly become friends. The fun had ended very quickly after a visit from Megan. She had told them that one of the other *Predators*, Stephanie, had been shot. All four teenagers had thought themselves safe only for that illusion to be shattered in a very violent fashion. Naturally, all four of them had immediately offered their help which Megan had politely declined – for the moment.

At first, Sarah had felt a slight satisfaction at hearing about Stephanie but almost immediately, she had felt bad about the thought and very worried about the *ex-Predator*. Stephanie had been right, they needed to stick together as much as possible.

Safehouse Zulu

Damon Williams was a little over six weeks old and he had just smiled for the first time only the night before while studying his big sister, Megan.

Marcus and Paige had been over the moon and both had started talking about two other little girls and their first smiles. For both Megan *and* Mindy, it had been a *very* embarrassing forty minutes! For the moment, Damon lay in his carry cot listening to his niece and nephew as they sparred together.

Anne-Marie and Danny had the job of looking after Damon, under the watchful eyes of Paige. Despite a 'no fighting' rule for most of the Safehouse, the twins were sparring in the Recreational Space on Level 1. Danny had the upper hand as he kicked his sister's legs out from under her. Anne-Marie did not go down quietly; she yelled at her brother and made an attempt at sweeping out *his* legs. Danny was ready for the attack and he jumped upwards and then came down on top of his twin. Anne-Marie punched Danny in the stomach causing him to roll off her in pain. She jumped up and kicked him in the left thigh before he rolled out of her reach and scrambled to his feet.

"Not bad, Scrappy!" Danny laughed.

"I ain't even started, Tinkerbelle!" Anne-Marie retorted.

Danny ran at his sister and just as he reached her, she sidestepped – but he had expected the move and he deftly adjusted, seizing hold of her and pushing her onto the couch where she landed heavily with a scream. He moved in to attack again. . .

"Okay, sparring is over!" Paige called out before anybody got seriously hurt – one kid in hospital was more than enough. "Both of you – go shower and then I've got some work to keep you both occupied and out of trouble."

The two eight-year-olds ran off laughing.

..._...

Paige then turned her attentions towards the scuffings on the other side of the large open space where Razor and Kiara were play fighting. The dogs seemed to have got the idea from the twins and there had been much growling, whining, and some yelping as the two six-month-old German Shepherd dogs rolled around the floor as Hercules and Hope just lay down and watched their siblings make fools of themselves.

Just as Paige headed over to break up the friendly squabble, Horatio decided to attack his pal and Razor yelped as several needle-like claws dug into his side. Razor barked at the diminutive ginger puss who hissed and bolted for the Galley with Razor in hot pursuit. Kiara just lay on the floor, her four paws in the air and her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth.

Paige caught up with the cat and dog pursuit in the Galley where she found the two furry, four-legged friends wolfing down some liquid sustenance after their brief burst of exercise. Horatio lapped at his kitty milk while Razor slurped noisily at some cold water in a large metal bowl.

Paige just shook her head and grabbed a refill for her coffee.

South Kedzie Avenue & West 26th Street

Hit Girl studied the interior of her visor as she heard a beep and then read a brief text message which appeared on the HUD before her eyes.

'Got info. Worm.'

"Okay – time to see our Worm!" Hit Girl announced and the five motorcycles turned east.

McKinley Park

Worm was a little more skittish than usual.

"I know you're upset about something – at least that is the general vibe around Chicago."

"Oh?"

"Your people have been very angry and they've been very forceful about their enquiries."

"Sniper attack – a week ago, . . ."

"The little girl? That was a stupid thing. . ."

"Get on with it!"

"Nobody has taken responsibility for the attack. Targeting kids is bad, Hit Girl; nobody wants a part of it."

"So, you have *nothing!*"

"Sorry, Hit Girl – saving the best for last. . . bad idea – but here it is: he calls himself a 'Corsair'; he was wounded during your attack at the silos. I heard where he is staying. . ."

"Now, that's my Worm!"

With my cash pot a thousand bucks lighter, we headed to the address Worm had given us. En route, I decided to check in on the twins – in hindsight probably not the best idea!

"Hi, Hit Girl – all's good," Lynx commented over the radio.

I wasn't buying it.

"You think I was born yesterday, Lynx?"

"Okay – the mutts are fighting and the kitty is trying to show who's the boss . . . hold on . . . Ravage! Give Rogue back her towel . . . and her underwear . . . no, she can't run around naked. My God, they're worse than Wildcat!"

"You seem to have everything under control."

"Horatio. . .! When will you be getting back here?"

"Sorry, Lynx – you're breaking up . . . call you later!"

"All good?" Kick-Ass enquired.

"Probably. . ." I commented in reply.

Mid-April, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

The days immediately after 'the killing in the shower', as most seemed to refer to it, were a combination of weird events and a complete change in my lifestyle – only, not all for good.

Nobody yelled at me when I cried at night – very few people even spoke to me. Each morning, when I went for a shower, my arrival in the showers would herald a surge of naked girls dashing *out* of the showers. I did not complain; I had the whole place to myself; my first private showers in months. At breakfast, in the past, I had always found it difficult to find a place – even for a skinny eight-year-old. Suddenly, entire swathes of table became available to me – it was like I had the plague or something.

In a way, I began to miss the bullying – I had become Little Miss Invisible which was a little bit depressing. On the funny side, I had kids almost twice my age giving me a wide berth in the corridors and elsewhere in the facility. I also suffered a lack of partners in sparring sessions – normally, they *fought* over who would get to spar against me; they loved to hurt me – but not anymore; they all thought I'd kill them!

Slowly, over a period of a couple of weeks, some girls began to graduate towards me. Mostly girls of eight and nine who were bullied, much in the same way I had been. I assumed that they thought being associated with me might give them some form of protection. There were four girls, three were Americans – apparently, the other Brits saw me as a traitor – and the other was a young French girl called Yvette. The American girls were called Jasmine, Ruth, and Maxine. Ruth was closer to nine while the others were just eight, like me.

Yvette spoke very little English which suited me as I spoke very little French. She said I was 'incroyable' – apparently, that meant 'amazing'. She was a nice enough girl with long, jet-black hair and pale green eyes. Jasmine was the youngest and she seemed to see me as somebody special – well, maybe I was special as I *did* have my codename.

That made me grin, even after a few weeks had passed. It kind of made everything worthwhile – all the suffering – in a warped kind of way.

Not that my codename improved my behaviour any.

..._...

"Walker!"

"Sir!"

"Are you listening?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't think you are, young lady."

I rolled my eyes.

"Alright! *'An ambush is a surprise attack by fire from concealed positions on a moving or temporarily halted enemy'* – happy?"

"Less of the insolence, young lady!"

"Fucking retarded dipshit!" I growled under my breath and Jasmine giggled.

"I am *not* going to warn you again, Walker!"

"Yes, sir – sorry, sir."

"Okay, back to ambushes. . ."

..._...

"He really rubs me the wrong way," I moaned as we left the classroom forty minutes later.

"I hate him," Jasmine agreed.

"He's no worse than the rest," Maxine warned.

"C'est un méchant homme," Yvette added.

"Huh?" Ruth asked.

I laughed.

"She says that the cunt is a bad cunt!" I explained.

"Instructor Graham?" An older boy asked with a smirk which goaded me into continuing my insults.

"Yeah," I replied. "He's a dumb fuck. . ."

Ruth had gone white and Yvette was shaking her head violently but like a dumb idiot, I ploughed on oblivious as the boy encouraged me.

"Instructor Graham is a grade one cunt fuck, and as far as I am concerned, he can go shit on a fucking stick!"

"Is that so, Walker!"

I span around to find myself face to face with Instructor Graham, himself, and he seemed a little annoyed. Everybody fled as the man grabbed hold of my sweatshirt and he dragged me down the corridor. I was for it – and in a big fucking way.

..._...

I was thrown across a desk in a classroom as the door was slammed behind us.

"Time for you to be taught some manners, you little bitch. Grab the end of the table and you let go, you get a whole lot more!"

I began to shake with fear as all my bravado vanished within just a millisecond and I grabbed hold of the end of the table. As I did so, I felt a hand grab hold of the waistband of my joggers and those of my knickers, at the back, and then yank them down to my ankles. I gritted my teeth and pressed my forehead down against the table top.

The leather strap bit into the soft skin of my right buttock and I screamed out as the sensation surged through me. I had never felt anything like it but before I could come to terms with that first strike, the next struck my left buttock and I screamed out again. I struggled to take a breath as I fought against the agony from my burning backside. Four more, two on each buttock, and it was over.

I barely heard the bastard as he whispered in my ear: "Don't you ever disrespect me again, Walker!"

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I struggled to move as I sobbed into the desk. My arms hurt from gripping the table. It took many minutes before I was able to regain my feet and then I yelled out in pain again as I tried to bend down to pull up my knickers and joggers. Once that agonising task was completed, I wiped my eyes on the sleeve of my sweatshirt and opened the classroom door. I felt so angry and very humiliated by my treatment – not that I could do anything about it; the world of the *Predator* was a harsh one.

I turned right to head directly back to the dormitory – I needed somewhere I could collapse and cry. But, before I had gone far, I met a smirking older girl.

"Bet that smarted, Walker!" the thirteen-year-old girl sneered.

I was in no mood for *anybody*, so I strode directly up to the girl and I yanked down on her sweatshirt bringing her face down to my own height.

"Look, Hampton, you wanna be a clown?"

Hampton looked around at the other kids as they gathered to watch the impromptu entertainment.

"Fuck you, Walker – you ain't gonna kill me!"

"If you're going to be a clown, you need a big red nose. . ."

I rammed my fist into the shocked teenager's face and she screamed out in pain as her nose exploded and blood went in all directions.

"You fucking little *bitch!*" Sarah Hampton growled but before I could do anything, my 'crew' appeared and they quickly dragged me away from the scene and an impending pounding from the thirteen-year-old Phase 3 *Predator*.

..._...

I struggled to sleep that night and I woke up most of the dormitory when I went to the toilet for a wee. The following morning saw a very subdued Psyche keeping well away from others and not going out of her way to cause shit. I spent most classes hovering over my chair as sitting was unbelievably painful. The girls each took the opportunity to check out my strap marks and bruises when I showered the following evening.

"Mon Dieu!" Yvette commented in shock at the sight of my red, blue, and black buttocks.

Hampton would glower at me whenever our paths crossed and in general I kept away from her for my own self-preservation. Not that that worked. A week later, the girl still had a red nose and a major sense of humour failure. She cornered me – alone.

"I owe you something, Walker, and it's going to hurt you a lot more than it's going to hurt me. . ."

I did not wait to find out what she had planned – I whipped out a small switch-blade knife and slashed the girl on her left side. The knife skimmed her, cutting through her sweatshirt and I heard a scream as the blade found skin.

Not surprisingly, I was punished.

I received two strikes with a strap on my bare arse – for carrying a knife. Sarah Hampton also received the strap – *three* times – for allowing herself, a Phase 3 *Predator*, to be slashed by a Phase 2 *Predator*.

I never saw the girl again as she was transferred soon after her strapping.

Saturday, July 9th, 2016

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28**

I was bored and my mind had wandered back over two years into my distant past – well, distant for a ten-year-old!

I smiled at the thought of my triumphs and grimaced at the thought of my impressive downfalls. I actually wriggled my bottom on the bed and I felt like I could feel the strap marks which were still faintly visible on my fair skinned backside. To be honest, I had forgotten much of my past – and for good reason, too. There had been pain and tragedy, some more pain, and also some pain. Did I mention pain?

Ever since other *Predators* had started to appear out of the woodwork, my long-term memory had begun to return – in part. Unfortunately, I had not been able to select what memories were restored and in which order. Sarah's arrival had brought many memories to the fore, including my first appointment with the strap and my journey of self-destruction which resulted in a much more severe punishment which indirectly led me to be the *Predator* that I ultimately became.

I began to feel depressed as I thought about what led to *that* punishment . . . but I was then rudely interrupted!

..._...

"Got time for some visitors?" a voice called out as the door was pushed open.

I was very surprised by my visitors – not to mention the time. But then I remembered what they used to be and that sneaking into a hospital after visiting hours was literally child's play!

"Hi, Sarah – come in, please."

"How you doing, shorty?" Chrissy smiled.

"I'm doing good, Chrissy, thanks . . . hi, Sky . . . hi, Marc."

"We just wanted to see how our fellow *Predator* was doing."

"Thanks, Marc – err . . . does Mindy know you lot are out?"

"You think we can't handle Chicago?" Sarah queried.

"Actually, I was more worried about what effect four *Predators* at large might have on Chicago!" I quipped.

"Too true," Chrissy laughed.

As I looked at the four laughing teenagers, I felt pleased. Without *Fusion*, without Mindy, what life might those four kids have had? I felt sorry for the two older girls; they had fallen victim to Shadow and her bō-staff. Marc was still recovering from his bullet wound, but it was nothing like my own. Sarah was intact – physically at least. I had heard about what she had been going through when she was rescued; horrible. . .

"We hear that you're past the worst," Marc commented as he came to sit on the edge of my bed.

"I bloody well hope so," I growled. "I want to get out there and start to tear limb from bloody limb!"

"That's the Psyche we all know and love," Sky offered with a friendly smile.

I laughed but then grimaced at the pain which shot through my busted ribs.

"Sorry!" Sky said with her own grimace.

"I'm fine – they snapped three of my ribs while resuscitating me the other day," I explained before I turned my head to

look at Sarah. "I was just remembering our meeting in the corridor and later . . . when I slashed you."

Sarah winced and subconsciously rubbed her nose.

"My big gob got me into trouble, didn't it! If I had kept my mouth shut then you wouldn't have broken my nose, nor would I have got myself slashed and then strapped."

"You broke her nose, too?" Marc exclaimed.

"I'd like to say it was an accident. . ."

"*Nothing* you do is accidental," Sky commented dryly.

I tried to come up with a witty answer, but I failed and I just grinned stupidly instead.

"You know – at the time, it pissed me off no end that you never got The Cage. Even now, it rankles a bit," Sarah commented. "You were a wild animal, Steph; you reacted with your fists whenever anybody wound you up. Excluding me, and that girl in the shower, . . ."

Stephanie grinned sweetly.

". . . you broke that ten-year-old boy's arm, then you broke two ribs on that twelve-year-old girl, and that was only while I was at the same centre as you. You kept the Hospital Wing in business, girl!"

Chrissy gave Stephanie an approving look. Stephanie did not seem happy about Sarah's description of her.

"I don't know what was wrong with me – maybe it was the attention, or the lack of it. I began to lay out a path of self-destruction which, you will be pleased to know, led me to spend two weeks in The Cage."

"Two weeks?" Marc demanded. "What did you do?"

Stephanie grimaced and her face took on a pained expression as she thought back to those horrific events when she was just eight-years-old.

..._...

"I was stupid. I allowed those bastards to get to me – I let my guard down, badly. It started with my just being insolent to the instructors – they tolerated that for a while and some even laughed at my nervy behaviour. But then I took things too far – I began to ignore my conscience; I went against all reason. In hindsight I am shocked by my behaviour and my own total lack of regard for my own personal safety. Maybe I wanted them to kill me – I don't know. The instructors began to get annoyed with me – I'd receive a tap from a baton. That tap would increase to a blow. I gathered bruises all over my body until one day, they had pushed me too far.

"It was that bastard, Graham. He was the instructor who took the strap to me, the very first time. I hated him because of that and because he seemed to enjoy tormenting an eight-year-old little girl called Stephanie Walker. Yes, I had my codename, but all that seemed to do was paint a target on my back for that bastard to hit. I turned the beatings around and used them to give me the gall to cause more shit. I'd get beaten for answering back to an instructor. I would get beaten for taking a sparring session too far. I would get beaten for being too cocky for my own good. It all came to a head, one Saturday afternoon."

Mid-June, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

It was Yvette that first noticed Stephanie's behaviour going deep into the danger zone.

The other girls did their best to warn Stephanie off but Stephanie was the boss and nobody dared to argue with her, especially when she got 'that look'. On the Saturday afternoon, 'that look' was back and Yvette nudged Ruth.

"She is going to, err – faire quelque chose de mal . . . do something bad, yes?"

Ruth studied Stephanie's expression and she flinched away at the sight of it. She nodded and tried to grab

Stephanie's arm. Stephanie lashed out and struck Ruth in the face. Ruth screamed out in pain which attracted the attention of Instructor Graham. He advanced on Stephanie and brandished his baton.

"You don't learn, girl, do you?" he growled angrily.

"Fuck you!" Stephanie responded as she glared up at her tormentor.

There was a massive intake of breath from the two-dozen or so kids in the room that afternoon. *Nobody* said that to an instructor – and lived. . . The instructor's face went a strange puce colour as his anger built. His hands flexed for a moment before he turned and picked up his baton. None of the other kids dared to breath as the six-foot man approached the four-foot slim, blonde girl who just glared insolently up at the approaching pain.

..._...

Not many of the kids there had any liking for the girl known as Stephanie 'Psyche' Walker. They saw her as a show-off, a violent psychopath, or just a fucked-up nutcase, among many other crude and nasty comments about the young Brit. Nonetheless, they all cringed in horror while the eight-year-old girl screamed out in pain as the baton cracked across her body and she fell to the ground, writhing in agony. After a dozen strikes, the instructor stepped back to admire his handy work.

Stephanie Walker was bleeding from several cuts on her face and tears poured down her face. Everybody thought that that was it, but no, the young girl was not finished – not by a long shot. Psyche struggled to her feet, her face a mask of hatred and filled with a hunger for revenge. She strode towards her attacker before she executed a perfect spinning kick and the baton fell to the ground. The instructor was incensed at the attack but also very surprised – no kid had ever turned on an instructor before.

His hesitation cost him as Stephanie swept up the baton and she belted him around the head – once, twice, three times. The next blow took the man in the stomach followed up by a blow to the area between his legs. Instructor Graham yelled out and went down hard as he used his hands to cover his torso and protect himself from the blows which rained down on him.

The worm had most definitely turned!

Saturday, July 9th, 2016

South-eastern Chicago

The man was very down about his lot in life.

He had somehow got himself wrapped up with some major criminal shit and, as a result, he had found himself up against Hit Girl and her minions. At the time, they had all seen themselves onto a winner; they had outnumbered *Fusion*, ten to one. Only, Hit Girl did not appear to listen to odds – she just killed every fucker that came her way. Ned had been shot, twice, in the left leg and then his life had gone down the tubes even further. His day job as a security guard was at risk as he could not 'perform' thanks to his wounds and he also had a bitch of a masked boss who wanted him back to work at night.

The idea of being a hired gun had appealed to Ned and the awesome-looking armour had pretty much sealed the deal! He had never seen such hi-tech armour – not that it had done any of his colleagues any good at the silos. No, the silos had not done him any good at all – he needed to rest and recuperate so he could get his life back on track.

He sat watching the TV whiling away the hours until it was time for him to go get some sleep before work the following morning. There was a slight hitch to his planned rest and schedule for the following day – a certain young woman had not read the same memo. Ned started as his front door disintegrated before his eyes and something big, yellow, and green thrust itself through the splintered wood. Ned jumped up and ran for the bedroom and the fire escape. However, he only made it as far as the doorway of the bedroom before he stopped dead and his feet refused to move any further.

A very large black and purple pistol was aimed directly at the centre of his forehead. He could see the purple finger pulling back on the trigger. His injured leg finally gave way and he fell to the floor and his eyes went wide as they focused on the purple boots before him.

..._...

"Get up!"

The growl was anything but friendly but Ned complied as quickly as his hurt leg would allow. Hit Girl thrust him backwards into a chair, none too gently. The man's eyes were very active as they danced from armoured vigilante to armoured vigilante. He took in the large form of Kick-Ass over by the remains of his front door. Beside him was the smaller form of Petra. Behind Hit Girl there was a newer vigilante; he recognised her as Raven.

"You really do make a mess!" an electronic snarl announced as Jackal walked through the pile of matchwood which had once been a door.

"The buzzer wasn't working," Kick-Ass retorted with an electronically enhanced laugh.

"When you two have finished!" Hit Girl snarled.

Raven wondered back into the man's bedroom as Hit Girl began her interrogation.

"Tell me, what the fuck *is* a 'Corsair'?"

"A pirate, that's the definition, I believe. Look it up if you don't believe me," Ned replied insolently but he soon regretted it as Hit Girl smacked him around the face with the back of her armoured gauntlet.

"You've been wounded?"

"What of it?" Ned replied as he favoured his left leg and Hit Girl smirked.

"Who was it?"

"A break-in – where I work. . ."

A cough from the doorway to Ned's bedroom revealed Raven and she held a combined helmet and mask, in one hand, and a set of dark blue torso body armour, in the other.

"Yours?"

"Never seen it before. . ."

"You were at the silos. You fought against my team. Who shot you?"

Ned gave in.

"That Nightmare – she shot me; fucking bitch!"

Hit Girl backhanded Ned, hard, across the face. He recoiled in pain with a loud yell.

"I can go easy, or I can go hard. . . No other choices."

"Fuck you – I betray her; she kills me. . ."

"Oh, sweetie," Petra drawled. "If you *don't* betray her – *we'll* kill you!"

..._...

"Where is she?" Hit Girl growled from merely inches away.

"Who?"

"FEAR. . ."

"She moves around – I don't know."

"Where, is she based?"

"I can't. . ."

"**WHERE!**"

"No. . ."

Hit Girl glared down at Ned before she smirked.

"Time to turn up the fucking heat!"

With that, Hit Girl ignited a road flare which she had produced from her utility belt. The smoke alarm above their heads went off almost immediately – until Kick-Ass smashed it to pieces with his armoured fist.

"You wouldn't. . ."

"Normally, no; I usually prefer more subtle forms of torture – you know, like a car crusher; got one around? Didn't think so. . ." Hit Girl replied conversationally before she quickly plunged the 1,500-degree flame into the man's right shoulder.

Not surprisingly, the man screamed.

Mid-April, 2014

The following morning

An unknown location in the USA

The Cage

Stephanie Walker awoke to a sharp pain in her chest and she cried out.

She looked around her and took stock of her position. She noticed the hefty steel bars that surrounded her and she felt the rough mattress below her body. She grimaced as she noticed she was also naked – not a surprise if she was in The Cage.

'The Cage', was a large concrete, windowless room in which the centre was taken up by a floor to ceiling steel cage which in turn was separated into four smaller cages. Each of the smaller cages had a single door which opened outwards. The floor of each cage was bare concrete with a single, bare mattress to one side and a single plastic bucket in a corner.

"Fuck!" she growled to nobody in particular as she rolled onto her back.

A dozen feet away a small girl sat on a chair.

The seven-year-old girl was dressed in a yellow sweatshirt with a matching pair of joggers. Her job was to keep an eye on those unlucky enough to end up in The Cage. Technically, she was in charge – irrelevant of which phase the incarcerated were in, or how old they were. At that moment, only one eight-year-old Phase 2 girl was in residence. Stephanie Walker had been brought in the evening before. She had been unconscious and covered in blood.

Two instructors had dumped her on the floor before they roughly stripped off her clothing and then literally threw her into a cage. One of the instructors had then proceeded to kick and punch the girl before a rib had snapped and both instructors had left the room. The girl had remained unconscious throughout the night – thankfully, by the look of her injuries.

..._...

Once the Walker girl had awoken, the younger girl ran forwards and grabbed a bottle of water from a fridge before passing it through the bars.

"Drink this, Walker," she ordered the naked girl.

"What?"

"You've gotta keep hydrated while you're in here – and you've two whole weeks ahead of you."

"I'm fine."

"Look, Walker; I'm in charge in here . . . so do what I tell ya!"

"Vicious little yellow bitch, aren't you," Walker growled.

The younger girl relented – slightly.

"You don't obey me and I get in shit – please?"

"Okay – you be nice to me and I'll follow your orders – deal?"

"Deal."

Saturday, July 9th, 2016

South Racine Avenue and West Harrison Street

Foxtail stopped to go see a snout.

She parked up at the side of the street and ignored all the stares from passers-by – she was finally used to it. She never saw the man, two-dozen yards up the street. As he watched the dismounted vigilante walk down the street away from him, he reached into his pants pocket and pulled out a small black box. With a smile, he flipped up a safety lever and then flicked the switch beneath the lever. Almost before the LED had fully lit on the small black box, a signal was beamed down the street at the speed of light. Milliseconds later, the signal reached a mottled grey aluminium can that used to hold a few kilos of potatoes but had been repurposed and was now wrapped in copious amounts of duct tape.

A small circuit board attached to the can registered the signal and closed a circuit which allowed an electric charge to flow through a pair of black wires. The electric charge reached the blasting cap embedded in the top of the can and the small triggering explosive charge detonated which in turn triggered the larger, primary charge of Semtex plastic explosive which detonated and sent a pressure wave outwards at a speed of over 3,000 metres-per-second.

The supersonic overpressure blast wave struck Foxtail without any warning, way before the sound of the explosion reached her. The concussive force hurled her across the street ahead of a 40 mile-per-hour wind where she collided with the windshield of a parked car. The blast blew out all windows for half-a-mile and sent numerous pedestrians flying through the air. Shrapnel and debris billowed through the air, cutting people down by the dozen. Foxtail's armour protected her fragile human physiology from the shrapnel but not from the worst of the overpressure. She rolled off the hood of the demolished Buick and landed heavily on the sidewalk.

Her hearing was temporarily inhibited by a ringing in her ears and she could feel a wetness around her nose and in her ears – she assumed blood from the overpressure. Her head hurt from the explosion and her body hurt from striking the windshield which had shattered under her. As she looked around, she could make out many injured people and several prone bodies around which the walking wounded staggered. As she made to stand up, she felt weak and she used the body of the car to support herself as she triggered her communications equipment.

"Fusion! Explosion . . . my position . . . many wounded. Foxtail down!"

She collapsed to the sidewalk and blackness enveloped her.

***Chapter 300*: Toni and a Second Attempt**

Saturday, July 9th, 2016

Two miles west of the explosion

The man smiled as the sound of the explosion rumbled across the city.

He pressed play on an old cassette tape machine and the martial drumbeat of the Irish band, U2, rang out: *'I can't believe the news today. . .'* as he went back to crushing the RDX crystals into a fine powder with a rolling pin. A few minutes later, the man emptied the resulting fine powder into a bowl which he placed next to another bowl containing a similar amount of PETN powder. The two powders were poured into a jar and shaken for a good five minutes before the resultant mixture was poured into a bowl of liquid which contained among other things, petroleum jelly.

The man demonstrated great skill as he mixed the powder and liquid into a paste; he had obviously made the dangerous mixture many times before. He moulded the resultant paste into a brick which was then covered with wax paper and sealed with plastic film. He placed the freshly made brick of Semtex explosive onto the growing pile concealed inside a kitchen cupboard.

He returned to the kitchen table and reached for more PETN crystals.

South-eastern Chicago

Battle Guy and Hal had both hit the panic alarm together.

Even before that, Hit Girl had braced up as she had climbed onto her Panigale, as the sound of the explosion rumbled past the gathered vigilantes. She pulled on her helmet and started her engine. Hit Girl then spun the rear wheel of her motorcycle and skidded around in a smoky one-eighty before she raced off down the street. Kick-Ass, Petra, Jackal, and Raven followed suit. In their visors, a red cross-hair had appeared indicating an emergency but to make things worse, a flashing *Fusion* symbol indicated a vigilante at risk: Foxtail.

The night was starting to heat up.

Firehouse 51

The two-tone alarm sounded, followed by a klaxon.

"Explosion . . . South Racine and West Harrison . . . Engine 51 . . . Truck 81 . . . Squad 3 . . . Ambulance 61"

They had all heard the explosion and were all but ready when the alarm came. The Engine and the Truck rolled first, followed by the brand-new Ambulance 61 and then Squad 3.

Douglas Park

Leon, Shadow, and their escorts were scouting out the park when the call came in.

The rear wheels of the Trans-Am sent up a pair of chirps as the car accelerated with the two motorcycles following close behind. They did not get far as they found their route blocked and Leon stomped on the brake pedal.

"What the fuck!" Shadow exclaimed.

Mid-April, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

The Cage

After twenty minutes, Stephanie sat up and looked over at the yellow dweeb on the chair.

"What's your name?"

"Electra Harmon."

"Seven?"

"Yeah."

The girl looked very young and she wore glasses. Her hair was short and dark brown. Stephanie was about to ask some more questions when the door opened and an instructor strode in. Electra hit a button which released the door to Stephanie's cage and Stephanie jumped to her feet, her face displaying confusion and fear. The instructor said nothing as he seized the naked girl by the upper left arm and dragged her out of the cage and out into the maze of corridors which made up the training facility.

Stephanie was scared. She had no idea where she was being taken or why – but it had to be bad. Then after a few more turns she braced up and she felt a wave of humiliation and fear as she was thrust through the double doors which led into the main dining room. Silence quickly descended on the large open space as almost two-hundred pairs of eyes focused on the naked eight-year-old. Stephanie was hauled towards an ominously empty table where a pair of instructors waited – one held a leather strap in his right hand.

"Lie on the table – face down!"

Stephanie did as she was instructed – she had no choice. She started to shake with the fear of what lay ahead as an instructor grabbed hold of her wrists while another grabbed hold of her ankles – she was pinned. Then the instructor with the strap began to speak – loudly.

"This little bitch attacked an instructor. That behaviour *WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!* You will all witness what happens if you do something so stupid – the next two weeks will be hell for this example of human detritus."

The strapping began. Five hard cracks resounded around the dining room. The only other sounds were the screams and sobs emanating from Stephanie Walker as she was beaten.

..._...

When it was over, Stephanie was in unbelievable pain. The pain from her existing injuries had mixed with the new and she shook violently as she sobbed.

"Stay there, you little bast'd – you will not move 'til someone comes for yer. Don't move a fuckin' muscle and keep that nose to the table!"

The instructors left and everybody went back to their breakfast. Stephanie was aware of the hushed sounds of whispering and she knew that many were still watching her and making comments about her beating. After a little over twenty minutes, the dining room began to empty and almost every *Predator* walked past the prone, shaking form on their way out the door. Stephanie felt humiliated at being displayed so openly but then it got worse as she was slapped on her bruised buttocks and she was hit on the head by others and slapped elsewhere on her body. As well as the physical abuse, the verbal abuse was dished out.

" . . . you deserved every strike . . . "

" . . . stupid idiot . . . "

" . . . loved the show . . . "

" . . . you should have gotten more . . . "

" . . . hope you suffered, bitch . . . "

" . . . we're gonna love the next two weeks . . . "

" . . . bet that smarted . . . "

" . . . that'll leave a mark . . . "

" . . . worthless fucker . . . "

". . . fuckin' stupid Brit . . ."

Stephanie just sobbed as the pain and humiliation grew. She grimaced through it all – she believed in what was taught in one of her earliest classes as a *Predator*: 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' – a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche. She was determined to live through everything they could throw at her.

It wasn't long before she was alone, the final Predators having headed to their first class of the day. After that, it felt like a lifetime before she finally felt a hand on her arm.

"Walker – come with me back to your cage."

It was Electra. Stephanie struggled to sit up, but she could not due to the pain. She fell off the table and was helped to her feet by the younger girl. Once back in her cage, Stephanie collapsed onto the mattress and she sobbed herself to sleep.

Saturday, July 9th, 2016

South Racine Avenue and West Harrison Street

The first on the scene was *Mirage*.

They parked up in an alleyway and dismounted. Mist, along with Splinter and Nightmare ran towards the devastated intersection. Eisenhower bounded along behind. There were three burning cars, the centre one of which was totally devastated.

"Eisenhower – find Foxtail!" Mist ordered and the dog ran off, dodging the walking wounded and leaping over the dead as she sniffed out Foxtail.

"This is bad," Nightmare commented as she just stared at the devastation.

"Come on – we need to help!" Splinter announced.

Mist followed Splinter but she then ran towards the barking of Eisenhower. She could see the animal's tail behind a wrecked Buick and as she came around the car, she saw Foxtail on the ground.

"Foxtail!" she called out.

There was a groan in response followed by some movement.

"My head . . . it feels like Psyche's been pounding on it. . ."

"Well, if you can joke at a time like this, you're either alive or Hit Girl!" Mist commented dryly.

"*I heard that!*"

"Foxtail's okay by the looks of it – the shockwave caught her but her armour protected her from the worst," Mist reported.

Foxtail sat up with Mist's help and the young vigilante sat on the sidewalk clutching her legs against her chest. Mist heard the chime of her cell in her earpiece and she answered the call.

"Erika?"

"Toni? You okay?"

"Erika . . . I need help . . . explosion . . ."

"Toni?"

The call went dead. Mist was horror-struck. Please no – not Toni. . . Was she here somewhere bleeding to death? Mist stood up and looked around – Toni could be anywhere.

"Toni!" she yelled out.

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 28**

It was actually the first time that Stephanie had seen Cathy since her 'incarceration', as she thought of it, in the hospital.

"What are you lot doing here?" she asked sternly.

"How come you've not been to see me?" Stephanie pouted in response.

"I have, several times. You've either been asleep or unconscious. I have to be careful not to tread on the toes of the attending physicians."

That was reasonable, Stephanie thought . . . then she saw Cathy's expression.

"What's happened?"

"Saoirse's been hurt. . ."

"What!"

"Nothing bad – it was a bomb. . ."

"A bomb!"

Cathy glared at Stephanie.

"Sorry – please continue."

"A bomb exploded . . . down town, and she was caught in the explosion – her suit saved her life. A concussion and a lot of bruises only."

"All because of me. . ."

"Steph – don't be like that, please."

"I know – I just feel responsible."

"We all get hurt from time to time. . ." Dr Bennett said pointedly.

"She's right," Sky acknowledged. "We've all been there."

Douglas Park

Six men stood before the car.

"What are you fucking assholes doing?" Wildcat demanded.

"We have a message," one man said.

"A message?" Trojan echoed.

"A message from Vito Genovese."

Shadow had an unwelcome flashback to the Uptown Theatre, several months before.

"This the Angie D'Amico revenge thing?" she demanded as she climbed out of the Pontiac.

The man ignored her as he continued.

"Hit Girl and her vigilantes have ninety days to leave Chicago."

"Come again. . ." Wildcat demanded incredulously.

"Hit Girl and her vigilantes have ninety days to leave Chicago," the man repeated.

"Or what?" Shadow demanded.

"Or hell on earth will descend on both Chicago and *Fusion*."

"We'll be sure to pass the message on . . . see ya!" Shadow growled as the men drifted into the darkness and the vigilantes all headed for the site of the explosion.

South Racine Avenue and West Harrison Street

Mist was beside herself with worry as she ran from body to body.

"What's going on, Mist?" Splinter demanded.

"I've gotta find her. . ."

"Find who?" Nightmare asked.

Mist never replied as she dodged around the walking wounded. Police and ambulances were arriving en masse and seemingly adding to the confusion. Splinter helped police officers pull survivors from beneath piles of wreckage so paramedics could see to them. Nightmare did her part holding a drip up as a victim was placed onto a stretcher before being rushed towards a waiting ambulance. Nightmare then moved onto the next wounded person and kept going. Eisenhower was able to lead rescuers to trapped people otherwise hidden beneath collapsed walls or other wreckage from the explosion.

People were yelling out in pain and calling for their loved ones. Sirens screamed as vehicles arrived and departed. Police and fire crews yelled instructions and the rush of water from hoses grew deafening as fires were brought under control and extinguished.

..._...

"Help me!"

Mist recognised the voice instantly, it was weak but just loud enough to be heard over the yells, screams, and other background noise. She ran down the street towards where Toni's yell had originated.

"Toni!"

Mist stopped dead. Toni was lying against the wall of a building. Her legs were buried under rubble while her torso was impaled by a sharp piece of steel that had entered the girl's abdomen just below the ribcage. The young woman was shaking, deep in shock from the trauma of her injuries. Blood seeped from one side of her mouth. Mist knelt down as close as she could to her girlfriend.

"Toni – it's me. . ."

"Who. . .?"

Mist deactivated the voice changing technology on her mask.

"Toni – it's me. . ."

"I don't know you . . . you sound like. . ."

The vigilante known as Mist reached up and she removed her mask. Toni was incredulous as she saw her friend and lover emerge from behind the mask.

"Erika. . ."

"Hold on, Toni, the ambulance is almost here . . . *I need help, please!*"

***Early the following morning
Sunday, 10th July***

Safehouse F

"Play it again."

Abby hit play for the fifteenth time. Mindy was seething as she watched the ultimatum which had been recorded by Z.O.E. and the cameras on the two accompanying motorcycles. She was very tired having spent hours helping at the scene of the explosion, as had all of *Fusion*. Marty had broken the news about the ultimatum on her return to the Safehouse. On top of that, Mindy was livid about Saoirse getting hurt and about another good friend, Toni.

Erika was at the hospital with Toni but the prognosis did *not* look good.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 28

When Stephanie awoke, and looked around, she smiled.

There, sitting in a chair beside the bed was her best friend. Saoirse was fast asleep clad in her usual jeans and a blouse. Her head rested on her leather jacket, scrunched up as a pillow. She looked exhausted and Stephanie noticed that she wasn't wearing a bra – bruises, Stephanie figured. Despite her own injuries, Stephanie hated being on the sidelines while her friends were out getting hurt.

She had been over the moon when the other *Predators* had visited. Remembering past events had been hard and even the older girls, Chrissy and Sky, had been stunned by Stephanie's experiences but having somebody with her while the memories flowed had helped.

..._...

"Good morning, Stephanie, may we come in?"

It was Doctor Charles and Doctor Reese. Stephanie nodded and the two doctors sat down on the opposite side of the bed to the sleeping Saoirse.

"A friend of yours?" Doctor Reese asked, indicating the sleeping teenager.

"Yes – Saoirse; she's my best friend."

"I've been having a good think about our last chat, the other day."

"Oh. . ." Stephanie replied cautiously.

"We know that you're not a normal girl," Doctor Reese said carefully. "Normally, you are fearless and you can handle just about anything that is thrown at you – except you got shot and you found yourself in a world that you knew nothing about. You're frightened and out of your depth."

"I'm *not* frightened. . ." Stephanie responded defensively.

"There's nothing wrong with being frightened. It's a normal human reaction and no matter what you are at night, you are still a human being, Stephanie."

"I'm normally in control. I don't let anything get me down – at least not normally. I've been hurt before but never anything like this. I've lost control of situations before but this is different – having to rely on somebody else to eat, crap, wash; it sucks."

"Yes, it would," Doctor Charles agreed.

"I wish this would just end so I could get back to my normal life."

"Normal?"

"Yes; my life is perfectly normal."

"The human soul is a difficult thing to understand."

"Huh?"

"The human *psyche*. . ."

"What *are* you talking about?"

Everybody turned to look at Saoirse who had just awoken. Her expression was one of deep concern. She glared at Stephanie and then at the two doctors.

"So, you're one, just like Stephanie," Doctor Charles commented. "Have no fear – your secret is safe with us; we believe in what you do for this city."

"Yes, we do," Doctor Reese confirmed.

Saoirse stood up and she looked directly at the two doctors.

"We have absolutely no idea what you are talking about," she stated simply.

Glenview

"Thank you, Saoirse – we'll take it from here. Yes, you go home and get some rest."

Dave's eyebrow was raised as Mindy put the cell back down on the kitchen side.

"The shrinks were in chatting with Steph. Saoirse heard some of the conversation and she is convinced that they know Steph is a Chicago vigilante," Mindy explained.

"Oh – a problem?"

"There is doctor-patient confidentiality – but, we shall see when we get there, later on."

"We're going to see Steph?" Anne-Marie asked excitedly from the archway into the living room.

"Yes, nosy bitch!" Mindy grinned.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 28

The drugs keeping the pain at bay fogged up Stephanie's brain – even more when they were freshly in her system.

She was very much aware of her surroundings just not as sharply as her *Predator* training had taught her. There were always nurses and the odd doctor coming and going, plus visitors – 'like the damn M25 at rush hour', Stephanie had growled at one stage. She never acknowledged the current nurse as she entered her room. She never bothered to look over at the nurse as she fiddled with the drip. She never noticed the nurse reach into her pocket for something. However, the next few minutes flew like a blur.

"Who are you?" another nurse demanded from the doorway. "What are you. . .?"

The real nurse never finished her question as the fake nurse shot her down with a silenced pistol. Stephanie braced up at the sight of the pistol and then at the sight of the nurse falling to the floor. The door had closed automatically as the second nurse had fallen so nobody was any the wiser of events as they began to unfold in Room 28. The fake nurse turned towards Stephanie and she smiled. Stephanie recognised the smile as one she used herself when she killed. Her mind began to speed up as she figured out that she was facing a killer – an assassin who was there for one reason and one reason only.

To kill Stephanie Lizewski . . . to finish the job.

The Parking Lot

"I hope she's happy to see us," Dave chuckled as he locked the Audi.

"Of course, she will be," Mindy replied.

"She loves us," Anne-Marie insisted.

"She's going nuts up there," Danny commented. "One of these days, she's gonna kill somebody!"

"I know how she feels being forced to stay in bed – it sucks!" Mindy acknowledged.

"Well, let's get up there before the girl *does* kill somebody!" Dave suggested.

"Yippee!" Anne-Marie squealed in her excitement as she dragged her brother towards the entrance.

Room 28

Stephanie just reacted, her trained brain took over her weakened body and as the fake nurse brought the pistol up, she took a momentary glance at what she held in her left hand – it was a loaded syringe with a clear liquid inside.

The sheet was loose and Stephanie was able to use her left leg to kick the fake nurse in her left side. Not a debilitating blow; Stephanie was too weak for that. Instead, the nurse absorbed the blow without much effort before she reached out and jabbed Stephanie in her ribs. Stephanie roared out in pain and doubled over. The pain and the adrenaline flooding her system briefly overrode the drugs and suddenly Stephanie could think just as clearly as she ever could and options began to pass through her mind at breakneck speed.

Her left arm dived out, but not at the assassin – the arm dived out and grabbed something from the bedside table.

Second Floor Passageway

"When'll she be ready to come home, Mom?"

"Not for another couple of weeks, honey," Mindy replied.

"Security to Room 28! Doctor Manning to Room 28!"

"What the hell now?" Dave growled as they all broke into a run and then joined the various doctors, nurses, and security officers rushing into Room 28.

"Well, that's a new way to die!" Mindy exclaimed as she studied the scene before her.

The room was a state.

Stephanie's bed had been shoved over towards the window and the contents of her bedside table – a jug of water, a plastic cup, and her empty bowl of oatmeal from breakfast – were scattered across the floor. Three bodies were scattered untidily around the tiled floor. One, a nurse lay on the floor, her hands holding an obvious gunshot injury to her left shoulder. Another nurse lay on the floor – obviously dead with a pool of bright red blood spreading from the ruptured carotid artery in the neck. The cause of the rupture was equally obvious as the business end of a spoon stuck out of the side of her neck. In her right hand, was a small black pistol with a suppressor attached to the barrel. Her left hand held a syringe. Stephanie lay on the floor beside the dead nurse, she smiled up at her visitors.

"God, it's boring in hospital. . .!" Stephanie complained before she lost consciousness.

Two hours later

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Marcus was apoplectic with anger and Mindy was concerned he might burst a blood vessel as he raged – at least he was in the right place for an embolism, she reasoned.

The CPD officer guarding Room 28 had returned a few minutes after the fight was over and he had apologised for leaving his post. Marcus, though, was having none of it and over a period of twenty minutes, he reduced the young officer to a smouldering amoeba as he ranted.

". . . You almost cost my granddaughter her life, officer – you have *not* heard the end of this, I can promise you that. Now, get the hell out of my sight and if I ever see you again. . ."

Two other officers were now on duty outside Room 32 – Stephanie's new accommodation on the third floor. They had heard their Captain's rant and they knew better than to *dare* leave their post like their unfortunate colleague. Stephanie was still unconscious – mainly due to the extra drugs in her IV. She had not been injured in the fight but she had overstressed herself and probably added a few more days to her stay in the hospital as a result. The injured nurse was recovering – the bullet had been a through-and-through with no lasting damage caused.

As for the dead assassin – Voight was running her prints through various databases. He had also provided the same prints to Mindy: Marty was also running his own searches.

The following afternoon

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 32

Mindy was busy making notes on her tablet when Stephanie began to stir.

She looked up to see Stephanie's eyes open and the young girl looked around the room in a panic. Mindy squeezed her hand gently and reassuringly as she spoke.

"You're safe, Steph. You're in a different room, in the same hospital."

Stephanie's eyes stopped their wild scanning around the room and they focussed on Mindy's face.

"It hurts . . . it really hurts . . ."

"I know, honey."

"Why, am I in a different room?"

"Well, if you will insist on killing an assassin with a spoon and letting your room get covered in blood and nurses with bullet wounds. You know, I was in this very same room after I took my Land Rover swimming."

Stephanie considered that and as the memories returned, she scowled, "Ha, bloody, ha!"

"Can't leave you anywhere!" Mindy chuckled.

"You're one to talk – Marcus thinks you're a disaster waiting to happen whenever you leave Chicago."

Mindy's cheeks went pink at that.

"My failings are not the point of conversation, here, young lady."

"What? You going to ground your eldest daughter for killing an assassin with a spoon, now?"

"Considered it. . ."

"My life sucks!" Stephanie complained.

That evening

"So, young Stephanie, you've had a trying week."

"You could say that – who are you?"

"Detective Erin Lindsay. I work with Sergeant Hank Voight. Mrs Lizewski, would you please let your daughter know how far the questioning is allowed to go?"

"Mum?" Stephanie asked, a little confused.

"Stephanie, Erin is aware of who you are – who you are when you are out with Hit Girl."

"What!?"

"Erin is a friend, as is Hank Voight. They do not, however, know what you were before you came to Chicago."

"Oh."

..._...

"What can you tell me about the attack, Stephanie?"

"Not much. I wasn't paying any attention – not until that bitch shot the nurse – she okay?"

"Yes, she is – please, continue."

"She called me by my name. . ."

"Lizewski?"

"No – the name I was born with: Reeman."

Mindy looked stunned.

"Who could have known. . ." Mindy began.

"May I finish?"

"Sorry, Steph."

"She also said something else: 'for Kara'."

"Who is Kara?" Erin asked.

"I have no idea," Stephanie replied with a shrug.

An hour later
Safehouse Zulu

Mindy was in the Command Centre with Dave and Marty.

Two of the many computer screens had Mindy's attention. A set of finger prints were visible, including a picture of the dead assassin's face. A computer search was underway for the owner of the fingerprints. There was also another conundrum – the assassin had use the name Reeman. . . On the second screen was a digital copy of Stephanie's *Urban Predator* file.

A seven-year-old Stephanie Reeman stared down at them a large 'TERMINATED' stamp across her photo. According to the file, she had begun her Phase 1 training on October 12th, 2013. That meant the assassin either knew of her before then, or they had access to *Urban Predator* documents. Neither appeared likely.

"Who is 'Kara'?" Marty asked.

"There's no mention of the name in her file," Dave commented. "Marty – how many Kara's were there in *Urban Predator*?"

Marty punched some details into his keyboard before turning back to Dave.

"Fourteen."

"Any at Stephanie's training centre?"

Again, Marty punched away at his keyboard.

"Thirteen."

"Fuck!" Mindy groaned.

"What does it say about that girl," Abby enquired as she entered the Command Centre. "The one Steph killed?"

"Nothing," Marty replied. "All it says is that she killed a girl in March, 2014. No further details are mentioned apart from: 'see Incident Report in Restricted Appendix'."

"We got that?" Mindy asked.

"Not so far."

Mid-April, 2014

An unknown location in the USA
The Cage

I awoke a few hours later, aching from head to toe.

When I opened my eyes, I saw a grinning face through the bars – it was a boy; another *Predator*. He was just as naked as I was – about twelve at a guess.

"Typical, I get thrown in here and the naked girl next door has *nothing* worth looking at!"

"Neither have you – have you actually got a dick?"

I heard a giggle from outside the cage as Electra laughed at the boy who had slunk back to his mattress and now lay on his front. I smiled and struggled to sit up – I also found that I needed to make use of the 'facilities' as they were.

..._...

Becoming a *Predator* had involved many privations and levels of humiliation but nothing could prepare you for having to wee, completely naked, in front of a smiling twelve-year-old boy and a seven-year-old girl. Being naked was bad enough but I was used to that – besides, as the boy had mentioned, I had nothing for anybody to see. Squatting over the bucket had taken a lot of willpower and even more willpower had been required to force myself to wee with two beady eyes on my twat.

The bastard actually grinned throughout the whole humiliating episode!

..._...

They left me alone for the rest of the day and believe me, I needed the rest.

Electra had provided me with a sandwich and more water – and a promise of more if I behaved. The following morning, I was kicked awake by an instructor who handed me a red jumpsuit. I was dragged off – without any breakfast, I might add – to the range where I spent the next eight hours picking up brass, cleaning weapons, and generally being abused by all and sundry.

I was exhausted and dirty by the end of my 'shift' and my muscles ached.

..._...

As I was 'dropped off' at The Cage, I was received by Electra who was all business as she ordered me to strip out of my clothes and re-enter my lodgings. I followed orders – I was very hungry and I knew that bad behaviour meant no food. It was only after I had weed in the bucket – that bastard watched the whole damn thing – that I noticed the black eye on Electra.

"What happened?" I asked as I wiped and then threw the resultant dirty tissues at the boy who dived out of the way in horror.

"Another yellow. . . I – I don't wanna talk about it."

"A boy?"

"I don't . . . yes."

"When somebody tries to hit you – protect your face at all costs. . ."

"He's bigger than me – they all are. . ."

"Okay – when he hits you, drop down into a ball . . . pretend you're scared, protect yourself. He's going to move in to have another go . . . keep your elbows in – protect your spleen, your liver, and other important organs. Then, when he is directly over you, stand up fast and your head will strike his chin. He will be dazed – punch the fucking bastard and keep punching him till he goes down!"

Electra thought about my instructions for a moment and then she smiled.

"Thanks – I think you deserve these," she said as she handed me *two* sandwiches which I wolfed down like they were the finest steak.

"Hey, yellow bitch – where's mine?" the boy demanded.

"Walker just ate it!" Electra replied with a smile as she raised the middle finger of her right hand towards the boy.

Tuesday, July 12th, 2016

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"No – there's gotta be something else you can do. . ."

"I'm sorry, Erika," Doctor Cathy Bennett said quietly. "The damage to her legs, combined to the damage in her abdomen are just too much."

"Toni's my life – what am I going to do, Cathy?"

"I am so sorry, Erika, I really am."

..._...

"I love you Erika – I love you so much."

"I wish we could have had more time, Toni. . ."

"I'm sorry; I should never have been there . . . but, if I had not then I would never have known about you. Mist – you're amazing . . . just keep doing what you do and don't mourn me for too long."

"Please . . . you've gotta hang on . . . please, don't leave me. . ."

"Erika. I love you very much and I know you love me . . . none of us live forever and this is my time. I know you'll be fine – you're the strongest person I know – and you're a Chicago vigilante which is so awesome . . ."

"Toni. . ."

"I love you, Erika."

"I love you, too, so very much. . ."

Erika gave her lover a final kiss and she held Toni's hand until the hand went limp for the final time.

***Chapter 301*: Upcoming in the Forsaken Universe**

Coming up in the **Forsaken Universe**. . .

Please be advised that some of what you see below may not actually appear in the story, or may be changed considerably. Most of the below will be out of context (on purpose) and not necessarily in the right order. Also, the below spans many chapters, so you may not see certain sections for quite a while.

Dark Days in Gotham

What might a new year in Gotham offer for the likes of Bruce Wayne and Selina Kyle? There would be good, but being Gotham, it would also be tempered with something bad. Things were very different than before. Bruce was no longer alone. He had a partner. He had a cause. He had a purpose. That same partner supported him in every endeavour.

...+...

"Bacon and eggs, good lady?"

"Oh, God, no!" Selina squealed. "A glass of milk would be nice, thank you, Alfred."

"A glass of milk for the cat . . ."

...+...

"Right!" Alfred dictated. "One holiday – by God, even if you two don't need one, I bloody well do!"

...+...

"Would've just been easier to buy the bleeding shop!" Alfred grouched.

...+...

"Looks like it's been through a battle," Bruce commented as he took in the hastily repaired bullet holes in the hull and battle-scarred bridge windows.

...+...

The yacht was 88 feet in length and displaced 67 tonnes. Her twin diesel engines could push the triple-decked hull to over thirty knots. The yacht's hull was a deep glossy blue with white upperworks topped off by a flying bridge.

...+...

"Enough for three or four a day . . ." he mused as Selina just wished the deck would open up beneath her.

...+...

Bruce could not stand it any longer and he pulled Selina close to him and he kissed her.

...+...

We had been back from France for two days, yet the boy had barely spoken.

...+...

The two black-clad Gotham vigilantes studied the scene and took in friend and foe alike. It was eight to two – fairly good odds.

...+...

"I hate to use guns, but for you, I'm making an exception. . ." Batman growled.

...+...

"Jerome 'I'm a fucking nutcase' Valeska – he died in Arkham but now he's alive again."

...+...

"You want to know where we go at night?"

...+...

"...welcome, Nightwing..."

...+...

Predator

"Bad dream?"

"Weird. I just saw my sister getting shot – she was in Chicago . . . impossible; I killed her, years ago."

...+...

I was facing a much shorter adversary than normal.

It was just a kid – a boy. He was about four inches shorter than me and somehow, he seemed familiar – somebody from my past, I assumed. His light brown hair was unkempt, just like the hair for most other young boys. The fact that he had disarmed me so easily meant that he was Urban Predator.

...+...

"What, or who, is Abigail?"

"An old friend I haven't seen in over a year. . ."

...+...

The girl was good; she was obviously somebody who had received training very similar to my own – could she be Urban Predator.

I had disarmed her easily, but she had responded with force which I had not anticipated.

I could take her and I would kill her.

...+...

A foot was placed squarely on his upper chest and a pistol was thrust in his face.

The hazel eyes were instantly familiar – especially in their angry state.

"If you know what's good for you, you'll stay away from me, Carter – you understand me?"

...+...

"Fucking Yank pussy!" I growled.

The girl braced up as I spoke, then she snarled back at me.

"I am no fucking Yank – talk about an insult; I'm British, thank you very much..."

"That makes two of us," I replied, a little surprised.

"Urban Predator?"

"What would you know about that, sweetheart?"

...+...

"Stephanie Walker; I hear I'm famous in your world..."

"Psyche..." the boy exclaimed. "You fucking traitor!"

...+...

"You have a codename?"

"They call me 'Rage'."

...+...

Stephanie grabbed the barrel of the SIG and placed the muzzle against her forehead.

"Pull the damn trigger, if you've got the bloody balls for it."

...+...

Vengeance

"In forty-eight hours, we come for you."

"You can't hurt me – I control everything and there is fuck all a trio of fucking roasters can do about it!"

...+...

"I think I can handle three little girls – trained killers or not!"

...+...

"It's you, Kaitlin. . ."

"Am I that bad?"

"The Commander thinks he might be able to afford his own destroyer from your jar alone."

...+...

"Scorpion – meet Twilight!"

...+...

She was painted in a matt dark grey and her registration code was painted in a slightly lighter grey on both sides of her tail: **G-VENG**.

For the moment, she was unarmed – we were only there for a check ride.

...+...

"Boscombe, this is Tango Victor standing by to taxi from Shelter Two-Three, over."

"Tango Victor, Boscombe. Clearance to taxi for direct launch from Shelter Two-Three. Over."

"Tango Victor, acknowledged. Out."

...+...

"Am I gonna like this?"

"You like speed, Hit Girl?" Scorpion chuckled. "Hang onto your tampon!"

...+...

"How's your backflip, Hit Girl?"

I saw the horizon before me and then the night sky and then the horizon again as we backflipped and followed through with the rest of the loop.

"Cool, huh!"

"Fucking hilarious!"

...+...

The combat suit was full body and made up of sections. The dark grey undersuit weighed very little and it allowed the skin to breathe during extreme activities; it was also stab and bullet resistant to Type IIA standards. The modular contoured armour, in black with a broad gold trim, clipped onto the undersuit and joined to the other sections of armour to form a semi-rigid Type II and Type IIIA armour that covered the important parts of the body. The Type IIIA armour covered the chest and upper back. The armour was ultra-flexible and ultra-light which suited the younger vigilante.

...+...

One glance into the shadows beneath her hood was generally enough to encourage even the most rampant male ego to seek a woman elsewhere.

...+...

"She said her name was 'Storm' and that we were safe."

...+...

Everything had returned to normal and most importantly, my secret identity was secure. I had helped to accomplish an amazing rescue. Dozens of kids had gained a chance of a new life. I did not envy them – not one bit. I missed the action; fighting crime in Paris just was not as exciting as running with Fusion.

As I gazed out over my city, I felt a surge of pride in what I was doing. I was a vigilante. I was the front line against what plagued my city. I was La Coccinelle.

...+...

Their son was alive. Their son was an assassin. Their son was a killer.

...+...

"What a fucked-up codename: Stripe! I ask you. From what I see you should never have completed Phase 1, let alone Phase 2. You did well in Fight Club, your third year. I always enjoyed those fights – hurt like the bugger afterwards, but that was life. No – you're not what I'm looking for; it's Polmont for you, boy."

"Who are you?"

"They call me Foxtail."

...+...

The voice was electronically enhanced and it freaked the boy out. His mind was racing as he tried to process everything and come up with a plan of action. Five months of inactivity vanished in a flash as his training came back in a rush of anger. He executed a perfect release from the hand which gripped his face and he kicked out at his assailant. His kick was blocked

but a quick feint and he struck the crimson clad individual in the chest.

...+...

He was stunned to see that it was a young girl – a very dirty young girl, but still a young girl.

"Now, what is your name?"

"Electra."

...+...

The hanger was large, about 120 feet by 70 feet, and the corrugated iron structure covered an area of about 8,500 square-feet. 96-foot-wide, main hanger doors faced in a southerly direction onto a large reinforced-concrete hardstanding of about the same area. The perimeter was an eight-foot tall, razor-wire topped, chain-link fence which enclosed an area of about seven acres.

...+...

"Scourge is still undergoing advanced testing – Twilight, though, she will be here in, oh, five to ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?"

"Twilight is on a ferry flight from Boscombe Down. Our pilot, has our boss with her."

"Her? You have a female pilot?"

"Yes, we do. The best the Royal Navy has available."

...+...

"Vengeance, this is Twilight. Requesting landing clearance at Thunderbolt, over."

"Twilight, Vengeance. Clearance granted."

...+...

The Chief looked shocked by the revelation but he nonetheless shook hands with arguably the most violent woman in the world.

...+...

Normally, the girl's skills would allow her to fight off and where necessary, kill anybody who tried to threaten her life and well-being. That very life and well-being was, at that moment, at risk of being extinguished by her pursuers. The girl reached under her leather jacket and she pulled out a small compact pistol. She raised the Taurus PT111 and fired off four rounds before the slide locked back on the empty magazine. She threw the weapon at one of her pursuers striking him on the head but not stopping his advance.

...+...

The seven-mile drive would take mere mortals almost forty-five minutes – we managed it in twenty-five with a little help from a siren and blue lights.

...+...

The girl was asleep. Her dark brown hair was long and loosely spread over her pillow. She appeared angelic to look at but considering my experiences and why we were there, I had other ideas. I walked over to her right side and gently eased back her right ear. Yes – the same tattoo Harper and the other girls had was there. I nodded at Nemesis as a nurse arrived with a doctor.

...+...

Chloe wrenched open the rear hatch of the Range Rover and she pulled down the lower half of the hatch. There was a large steel enclosure in the back and Chloe released the catches on the lower gun tray.

"Bingo!" Chloe grinned. "Thank you, MI5!"

...+...

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

"Just what I was going to say!" an electronically enhanced voice countered as a dark blue shape dove out of the darkness and put himself between the woman and the pistol.

Both hit the ground as another form, this one crimson, followed the other and put several bullets into the gunman who fell into a pool of his own blood. The man in dark blue armour stood up and helped the woman to her feet.

"Are you injured, Prime Minister?"

...+...

Forsaken

I had never touched a real live girl before, let alone removed the bra of one – I was just glad it wasn't a real bra; I had no idea how they worked. . .

...+...

Her paintwork gleamed as if it had only just been applied, which in all accuracy, it just had.

...+...

"Ocean Vigilante, you have a clear range for missile firing on bearing of two-four-zero..."

I turned from the chart and spoke to the helmsman.

"Helm, new course, one-seven-two, maintain eighteen knots."

"New course, one-seven-two," Hailee acknowledged.

I reached for the phone and pressed the button for ship-wide.

"All hands remain aft of the bridge and standby for missile launch..."

We were closed up at action stations and everybody was wearing a lifejacket and anti-flash hood with gauntlets.

Joshua turned a key from 'SAFE' to 'PERMIT' and a klaxon sounded. His finger hovered over a pulsing orange button.

"Missile one – shoot!" I ordered.

...+...

"Help me..."

"After what you have done?" I responded, coldly.

"She will kill me..."

"Maybe I should help her."

"I'll do anything..."

...+...

Titan was buried under tons of masonry and the last I saw of Foxtail was her motorcycle as it spun across the blacktop and smashed into a parked car.

...+...

"I am Stormtide – were you sent to kill me?"

I laughed. "No, I came to rescue you."

...+...

"You gotta help him – he is alone, please."

"Help who?"

"Rage – they'll kill him."

...+...

There were four kids to get up, showered, and dressed before breakfast.

...+...

She launched herself at Mindy and the younger girl shoved the older girl backwards so her mentor fell over and then she proceeded to punch Mindy in the face.

...+...

"I will not fight you... I know that you won't believe me, but I did not do it because I am cold hearted; I did it out of love – out of love for you."

...+...

"Who the fuck are you?" Tommy demanded.

"Забытый нас так быстро, молодой Фома?"

Tommy felt a cold chill as he heard the Russian words and translated them in his head.

"Александр..."

"Who the fuck are you talking to, Tommy?" Joshua called as he walked over.

"It's the bastard that slashed my chest. He's called Alexander."

"So, a bad fucker, then?"

"Yeah. Three against one, is not exactly fair, Alexander."

"No, it is not, Tommy."

"You expect me to give up and just hand myself over?"

"Oh, no, Tommy. I have far too much respect for you to expect that."

"До смерти!"

"I would expect nothing less..."

"What did you just say?" Joshua demanded.

"I said that we would fight to the death," Tommy replied conversationally.

"I figured that."

...+...

"Well, well, well – if it isn't the not so mighty, Stephanie Walker! Or should we call you, Psyche?"

...+...

"We are no longer Predators – we are much more; we are Marauders."

...+...

"Listen! If you stay with me, you must throw away your weapons and do not resist when they come for me – if you resist, they will kill you."

...+...

"That girl saved my life . . . she doesn't deserve to die. Saoirse, help me!"

...+...

"Rachel?"

Something shifted in my fogged brain and I saw a boy, six-years-old.

"Jamie?"

...+...

"Welcome to the club, Saoirse," Joshua said.

"Club?"

"A club with a very limited membership," Joshua explained.

"Welcome to the 'I blew up Hit Girl's Safe House club!'"

"Oh!" Saoirse breathed. "How many are in the club?"

"Two – including you – I am the founding member."

"Did she forgive you?"

"Eventually . . . she rarely brings it up . . . unless she's feeling bitchy!"

"I'm honoured!" Saoirse growled. "I think..."

...+...

"Walker!"

"Sir!"

"Please meet your new controller: Aurora."

I turned to see a woman, dressed all in black, her amber hair tied back in a ponytail.

"Aurora, meet Psyche."

"Hello Stephanie, my name is Miranda."

"Hi. . ."

...+...

"Damn; it's like fucking Baghdad!"

...+...

Wildcat, Hawk and Raven were using their armour and shields to protect the paramedics and their patients as they worked.

...+...

An RPG powered in and struck a bullet-riddled patrol car. The car exploded and sent red hot shrapnel in all directions.

...+...

Raven screamed as the shrapnel dug into her armoured back and rapidly burnt through the armour.

...+...

Out of the blue, the 12.7x55-mm STs-130VPS 76-gram bullet cut its way through the air at over 300 metres-per-second. It tore through the armour like it was nothing and the lifeless body dropped.

...+...

'If you are reading this letter, then I am dead.'

...+...

Eisenhower stood her ground and she growled at the six men.

"It's just one wild mutt – who gives a shit?"

"Err – you might wanna reconsider that."

From out of the darkness behind Eisenhower, came seven very similar dark shapes all clad in body armour and with protective masks over their faces. They were identical apart from the coloured markings on their armour. Four of the animals moved to Eisenhower's left, the remaining three formed up to her right. All of them were growling in a decidedly unnerving way and saliva dripped from the bared fangs.

"Holy fuck!" one man almost whimpered at the sight of eight sets of very sharp teeth.

Slowly, the seven new dogs began to encircle the men.

...+...

. . . and something else . . .

*All the leaves are brown and the sky is grey
I've been for a walk on a winter's day
I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A.
California dreaming on such a winter's day*

...+...

"I could get used to this!" Sky commented to her twin sister as they both set foot on the tarmac.

...+...

"Six bedrooms – four in the main house. Master Suite on the second level. You two girls get to have a suite each on the main level. Every door is armoured, as is every pane of glass. The grass outback can handle a helicopter as required."

...+...

Each suit was of a skin-tight design and was made up of an ultra-flexible

and ultra-light composite armour which covered every inch of the body from the ankles to the neck. Lightweight, high-strength, stab-resistant boots matched the suit colour. For the hands, armoured gloves extended up past the wrist. A mask covered their entire head and eyes down to the bridge of their nose leaving only the lower half of their faces exposed.

...+...

The city appears to have gained its own true vigilantes. Two females were spotted on the streets, late last night. Eagle-eyed vigilante spotters noticed that the women were equipped in a very similar and professional manner to those vigilantes known to exist in the City of Chicago. A select few attained a closer look at the vigilantes and identified a symbol borne on the left chest of each woman. The symbol was identical to that worn by those same Chicago vigilantes that made up the organisation known as Fusion. Fusion is the organisation headed by the purple vigilante, Hit Girl.

...+...

"You are about to enter a world which is secretive by its very existence. You are about to enter the world of the vigilante. You are about to enter a purple hell."

...+...

"You are shitting me!"

"You guys do not fuck around when it comes to Safehouses, do ya?"

"Hit Girl has a thing for being prepared – she must have been a boy scout in a previous life!"

...+...

The girl aimed down the room and then squeezed the trigger.

Bang!

Scream!

Thud!

Laughter!

"What the hell did you drop it for?" I demanded as Sky rolled around on the floor laughing.

...+...

"I see scum, Venom. Scum that prays on the innocent. Scum that needs to be taught a lesson."

...+...

"You having a midlife crisis or something, Erika?"

"Or something..." Erika replied coolly.

...+...

"This . . . place . . . is . . . fucking . . . awesome!"

...+...

*All the leaves are brown and the sky is grey
I've been for a walk on a winter's day
I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A.
California dreaming on such a winter's day*

***Chapter 302*: Tripartite War Warning**

Author's Note: . . . *and we're back!*

"My name is Stephanie Lizewski and I am part of an organisation which is charged with the protection of the City of Chicago. That organisation is known as *Fusion*. . ."

"Hey, it's *my* goddamn story – even if it *is* based on a story called 'Kick-Ass!'"

"My bad, Hit Girl!"

"You're injured – you're not supposed to be doing narratives, so get the fuck back to sleep."

"Purple bitch!"

"Anyway – my name is Mindy Lizewski. I am the vigilante known as Hit Girl and I protect the City of Chicago along with my husband, Dave Lizewski, AKA Kick-Ass. Together, we lead the Chicago vigilantes who are all part of an organisation called *Fusion*. . ."

"I already said that!"

"Do want to lose the use of your *other* arm?"

"Fucking Yank!"

"Chicago and *Fusion* are in danger. After my daughter, Stephanie, was shot down in cold blood, we sought out her attacker. On the way, we discovered an errant bomber and multiple organisations that wished to do *Fusion* and Chicago harm. *Fusion* is at its strongest ever and our enemies will feel the cold steel of my blades as they cut deep into their living flesh. Their blood will be spilt and Chicago will become safe, once again."

"Who wrote *that* shit?"

"Get to sleep, before I put you out with a bloody spoon . . . and don't you look at me like that, either!"

Five days later
Saturday, 16th July, 2016
About nine o'clock

The streets of Chicago

The cunt stopped moving as the long o-kissaki point of the Katana pierced his left eyeball and continued on through the cartilage and bone deep into the brain behind. Blood exploded out as Hit Girl swung the companion Katana horizontally and took off the man's head at the neck.

"Fucking hell!" Hit Girl swore as the severed head refused to fall off her blade.

She attacked the head with her other sword, pushing the disassociated bonce off the end of the affected sword. Jackal appeared to the side of Hit Girl, his Ninja-To severing the carotid artery of another Sicilian cunt.

"Ah – the dreaded 'head-stuck-on-the-sword' problem – I feel for you!" he chuckled as he dived back into the mass of criminal scum.

"Fuck you, you. . ." Hit Girl retorted as she swung the recently freed sword around and severed the right leg of a large Russian Solntsevskaya soldier, just above the knee. The fucking asshole made to shoot Hit Girl despite his injury but Hit Girl was ready and she lopped off both of his lower arms and left him to writhe in his own warm, spurting blood.

"Messy bitch!" Wildcat growled as she ran past, her own Katana drenched in, and dripping, blood.

..._...

"You okay, Nightmare?" Wildcat yelled as she saw the trainee-vigilante push a recently deceased body away from

her so she could regain her feet.

Nightmare yelled out as a pair of gunshots caused her to be splashed with blood and gore as a Russian had his head blown apart by Foxtail.

"Never lose situational awareness, Nightmare!" she commented as she flipped the Butterfly sword in her left hand inverted and drove it behind her – directly into the stomach of an attacking Corsair.

A pair of armour-clad legs sidestepped the dying Corsair as the body fell to the ground spilling copious amounts of hot, steaming blood.

"Fucking show off!" Raven laughed as she ran past with Splinter beside her.

..._...

"Petra – watch your six; you have several Corsairs approaching your position," Hal announced from *Mia*.

"Thanks, Hal!" Petra replied over the comms.

"Fucking bastards have marked us!" Battle Guy growled as he shot a pair of Corsairs in the head and quickly dived into the driver's seat of the green van before accelerating away. After two sharp turns, he skidded to a halt beside a large trailer.

Battle Guy dived out and grabbed hold of a pressure washer lance and pressed the 'Start' button on the compressor. High-pressure water burst out of the lance and Battle Guy aimed it at the top of the van's side. The thin covering of green paint was blasted away to reveal *Mia*'s natural colour: navy blue. Within five minutes, *Mia* was returning to a different vantage point – a very different van after Battle Guy had slapped on a pair of false plates.

Okay . . . time for questions.

Why was *Fusion* fighting the Sicilian Mafia, the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood, *and* a bunch of mercenary Corsairs? Well, we would need to go back twenty-four hours or more to cover that little change in events.

It had all started on the Friday afternoon, at Safehouse F.

Friday, 15th July

Safehouse F Briefing Room

"We have a new threat."

"Not really *new* – we've fought cunts like them before," Chloe pointed out.

"We're already fighting against FEAR and that pink abortion. We also have whoever shot Stephanie, and some fucked up bomber from Northern Ireland – *now* we have some vendetta-crazed Sicilians and well, I've just got a really bad feeling. . ."

"Han Solo, you are not!" Abby interceded.

"Ha, ha!" Mindy continued. "We are increasing defences for the Safehouses and our homes. . ."

"Another row of Claymores amongst the rose bushes?" Joshua chuckled.

Mindy's expression as her cheeks turned pink confirmed that Joshua's suggestion was, in fact, a key part of her defence strategy.

"Claymore's going cheap, were they?" Joshua added. "Bulk discount?"

"Without getting side-tracked – yeah," Mindy admitted to general laughter. She was glad of Joshua's humour; it broke the ice in what was otherwise turning out to be a very depressing briefing.

"So, we're taking the warning seriously?" Murphy asked.

"We have to," Marty admitted. "We have all our technical resources digging into the Sicilian angle, but so far, we can neither corroborate nor deny the threat."

"Great!" Fellowes muttered to his partner.

"You will all be on the lookout," Dave lectured. "Nobody takes risks or draws attention to Safehouses or identities. The senior staff are taking this threat seriously and you should all accept this briefing as a war warning. We don't want to alarm anybody, nor do we want to scare the younger ones, but we have a city to protect and under no circumstances are we leaving this city."

"Damn right!" Megan cut in, to general agreement from all those present.

"Let's get back to work people," Mindy suggested.

..._...

Mindy had not slept well that Friday night – it was that 'really bad feeling'.

Therefore, the following evening, *Fusion* had gone out onto the streets of Chicago expecting a war – unfortunately, they had found one.

Saturday, 16th July
About seven o'clock

The streets of Chicago

"Hello, fuckers!"

The Sicilian men were not overtly menacing but it was obvious that they would not be a walkover either.

"Good evening, Hit Girl. We just wanted to remind you of how serious we are about you and your people leaving Chicago."

Hit Girl looked around.

"Just you three cunts?" Hit Girl asked, seeing nobody else.

"Not quite," the same man went on.

Hit Girl shook her head as a very familiar individual joined the three Sicilians.

"So, you guys have joined forces – couldn't take little me on your own?" Hit Girl sneered.

"You're good, Hit Girl, we *will* give you that – but we like to be certain. . ." FEAR growled.

"We, too, have a vested interest, товарищ."

Hit Girl turned to see a large man grinning fiendishly. Hit Girl was getting seriously annoyed.

"Who the *fuck*, are you?"

"Солнцевская братва."

Hit Girl struggled to keep her composure; things had just taken a major turn for the worse.

"What would the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood be doing in Chicago?"

"We are expanding our operations and, well . . . you're in the fucking way, Hit Girl!"

"So, Hit Girl, is it time to leave?" the Sicilian chuckled.

"We would miss you," FEAR added.

"Let the fun . . . *begin!*" Hit Girl shouted as she jumped into the air and dived for an overhanging fire escape just as the Sicilians pulled out their pistols and sent bullets after her.

About nine fifteen

So, *that* was how *Fusion* got to be fighting the Sicilian Mafia, the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood, *and* a bunch of mercenary Corsairs.

"Are you going to fight, or just stand there looking like a fucking dick?" Shadow enquired.

"Sorry," Hit Girl responded. "Zoned out for a sec."

The two vigilantes bolted forwards into the melee and slashed their way towards where Kick-Ass was quite literally 'breaking heads'.

"Oy – you bitches give me hand?"

Hit Girl glanced down as she was about to hurdle a dead body and she saw Trojan pinned beneath a very large Russian. Hit Girl glanced over at Shadow who just shrugged and between them they heaved the dead corpse off of Trojan who sprang to his feet.

"Fucker fell on top of me as he died!" Trojan growled as he ran off, yelling over his shoulder. "Thanks, girls!"

Shadow and Hit Girl then turned towards a loud and very panicked scream. After slashing down a Corsair and dodging a couple of knives they found the source of the scream. A Sicilian man appeared to be having an argument with an armour-clad canine.

"Help me!" he yelled as the female Chicago vigilantes came close.

"Yeah, there's a dog on your balls!" Shadow cried out.

"Get it the fuck off of me!" the man was almost hysterical as Eisenhower growled and tugged on her mouthful.

"Eisenhower!" Hit Girl snapped and the dog instantly released her meat and two veg.

"Thank you. . ."

Hit Girl put the man's lights out with her fist before she, Shadow, and Eisenhower went after some more cunts.

..._...

Despite her still being sore from being caught up in the explosion only a few days previously, Foxtail had not wanted to be left out and so, after a clear bill of health from Doctor Bennett, she had geared up and joined the rest of *Fusion*. Her main task for the evening was to keep an eye on her trainee. Nightmare seemed to be fighting well. She was tired, but she was handling it; just as well as any of the others.

Fatigue was always a danger. Hit Girl and Kick-Ass ignored it, as did Shadow and Jackal – sometimes to their cost. For the younger vigilantes, it was harder to fight against. Wildcat, Trojan, and Raven all suffered from fatigue; their bodies were still getting used to the extra abuse from extended operations. Petra, Psyche, and Foxtail were all acclimatised to pushing themselves way past the point of normal human endurance.

The crucial factor was knowing your limits. Nightmare and Wildcat were still learning those limits and they had to be watched.

Lawndale

"*Hit Girl, Battle Guy – you have company!*"

Hit Girl finished administering her latest multiple amputation and she turned at the sound of many powerful engines.

"Well, well, they look right up my street," she growled as she ran down an alleyway.

A minute later, Hit Girl reappeared on her Panigale with Mist at her tailpipe.

Both vigilantes headed directly at the eight black motorcycles, each with their own black-clad rider. The motorcyclists were firing indiscriminately into the buildings which lined West Douglas Boulevard. Hit Girl fired several shots from her pistol to gain the riders' attention. Once the first head turned, Mist and Hit Girl executed a quick one-eighty before they stopped and looked over their shoulders.

"Come get us you fucking cunts!" Mist growled as she revved the engine of her Ducati Streetfighter 848.

The lead rider accelerated and his seven companions came after him. Each rider was astride a BMW S 1000 RR Sport motorcycle, which by the sounds of their engines, Hit Girl assumed to be non-stock. The ten motorcycles raced east along West Douglas Boulevard before they each took the hard right northbound, onto South Independence Avenue.

..._...

Ten motorcycles soon dropped to nine as one rider was taken out by a semi as we crossed over West Roosevelt Road.

"That must have hurt – pity!" Mist chuckled. "Fucking cunt!"

Mindy had been concerned about Erika's state of mind after her having lost somebody so close to her but on the other hand, being able to focus and take your anger out on some unfortunate cunt was also good for a troubled mind – Mindy could personally vouch for that!

As the nine motorcycles wove in and out of the light traffic, they attracted many horns and angry gestures. Some recognised Mist and Hit Girl and gave them a merry wave with rude gestures at the obvious enemy. Hit Girl was scanning the street ahead while Abby provided guidance of potential traffic issues. As she flew over I-290, Hit Girl veered over to the right and entered the, currently empty, grounds of Leif Ericson Elementary School. The motorcycles careered across the playing fields and one of the BMWs skidded into a baseball diamond and he became bogged down in the sand. Before he could get his machine out of the sand, he was surrounded by the CPD.

The remaining eight motorcycles spread out as they played a lethal game of dodgems with more than one collision which pissed off both Mist and Hit Girl. Neither vigilante enjoyed their precious motorcycles suffering even the most minor damage. Mist scored a direct hit with her pistol on one of the machines which smashed directly into a large tree, killing the rider instantly. After a brief radio conversation, Hit Girl took the chase back onto West Jackson Boulevard and then a hard right onto South Central Park Boulevard. The CPD had blocked off all the east-west junctions and Hit Girl hit sixty as the seven riders headed right back to where they had begun the chase.

There, *Fusion* was waiting in ambush.

As Hit Girl raced through the junction of West Douglas Boulevard and South Central Park Avenue, she pulled a wheelie and the armour beneath her machine absorbed several bullets from two Solntsevskaya Brotherhood Krysha's. Behind her, Mist put a bullet into each Krysha as she entered the junction.

As the first BMW made to follow, Jackal threw a discard AK-74 into the front wheel of the machine and . . .

"Holy, fuck!" he exclaimed as the 208-kilogramme high-performance motorcycle went airborne along with its rider.

The combination landed rider first – he cushioned the fall of his ride.

"Like somebody just smashed a large tomato!" Nightmare laughed as the next BMW came through.

"I give him a nine for artistic presentation," Wildcat added as she ran past before yelling back over her shoulder. "He lost a point for the bad landing."

..._...

Kick-Ass dove out of the shadows and he took the rider out of his saddle. The rider-less motorcycle continued on for two dozen yards before it crashed into a parked car. Kick-Ass proceeded to pulverise the cunt, ripping off his helmet and kicking the living shit out of the asshole. Kick-Ass was just in time to take down the final BMW motorcycle by throwing the unconscious cunt into the road at the last minute and causing the oncoming rider to swerve and lose control of his machine – he was thrown forwards and he hit the wall of a building rather hard.

"Was that the sound of his neck snapping?" Shadow queried.

"Cool, huh!" Foxtail replied.

"Crazy *Predator* nut!" Shadow growled as she examined the previous pair of motorcycles which had kind of become mechanical headless horsemen as Shadow had lopped off their heads as they had ridden past her.

"Okay, who's next?" Kick-Ass growled as he turned towards the remaining enemy.

"Yeah, do you wish to engage?" Hit Girl growled as she walked up and stood beside her partner.

The enemy slunk off into the night.

"I didn't think so," Hit Girl finished.

The following day
Sunday, 17th July

Synthesis Data Core

"Hit Girl!"

"Hello," Hit Girl replied before continuing without any further preamble. "We face a grave threat and I want you all to be safe. We will start with some weapons' training, but first, I want you all to go to this place and ask for Paige. Tell her your names and you will find yourselves enrolled in a beginner's class."

Hit Girl passed out a business card to each of the five teenagers.

"D-JAK?"

"I hear it's a great place – they train youngsters and even a few cops. . . Be there!"

The youngsters knew that they had no choice.

"We can do that."

"Good night!"

That afternoon

D-JAK Prime

As directed, the five friends turned up at the D-JAK studio, on West North Avenue.

Paige had been waiting for them, and after taking their details, she had provided them with uniforms and then handed them over to Kyle and Saoirse. The five teenagers were provided with a personal training session off to one side of the facility, away from the other classes.

Saoirse and Kyle took them through basic defence and disarming – there was limited messing about and the five friends took it all very seriously. An hour later, after a break, they were separated into three groups. Saoirse partnered with Jesse while Peter partnered with Laurence and Libby partnered with Kate. Thirteen-year-old Jesse struggled to keep his eyes off of Saoirse's gentle curves and her pert breasts . . . Jesse was kicked down to the floor, three times, before Saoirse decided to go easy on him.

"You land a kick on me – and I'll let you touch them . . ."

Jesse's concentration instantly increased ten-fold! Although, he did notice when his almost fourteen-year-old sister screamed out and hit the mat, hard. Kate was actually very good and she grinned enormously as she looked down at her friend.

"Well, that went well!" Kyle chuckled as he helped the girl back to her feet. "Libby, isn't it?"

Libby allowed herself to be helped to her feet and she smiled up at the boy.

"Oh, God; she's got the hots for him!" her brother grimaced.

"Have not!" Libby sniped back.

"She fancies anything with a cock that's vaguely human," Laurence confirmed as Libby's mouth dropped open in stunned incredulity and her face went a deep shade of red.

"Let's get back to the training, shall we?" Chloe advised as she came over to see what was going on.

That evening

Safehouse F

Mindy was very pleased to hear that *Synthesis* was doing well with their training.

To them, it was all a bit of fun, although they understood the seriousness of the necessity for the training. Mindy knew only too well what could happen to them if they were attacked and she wanted to ensure that they could look after themselves. Did Mindy feel guilty about using five innocent teenagers? Did she feel guilty about putting their lives at risk? A few years before, the answer would have been a resounding 'no', only, Mindy had changed and she now recognised how precious human life was. Compassion had grown within her and she could no longer put people at risk without a damn good reason.

As she looked around the main area of the Safehouse, she smiled at all those who were training hard to be the best that they could be.

Saoirse was training Anne-Marie, in a one-on-one lesson, outside the Command Centre. Both girls held out their Butterfly swords before them and as such, everybody else kept well away for their own safety. Danny was with Joshua; where he was teaching the young boy how to use his Tactical Wakizashi properly. Chloe sat with Lizzie and Lauren, taking Lauren through some of the events of the other night and explaining the tactics used to Lizzie.

Mindy was very pleased that beyond dozens of bruises, nobody had required the services of Dr Bennett, despite a hard night fighting against some very skilled adversaries . . . OW!

..._...

Mindy turned to glare at Sarah who looked very scared and she backed away from Mindy.

"Wow!" Marc exclaimed. "You just struck Hit Girl around the face – you are fucking toast, girl!"

"I'm so sorry, Mindy . . ."

Mindy chuckled and then kicked out and sent Marc flying backwards onto the mat – he yelled out as he landed and then glared at the unrepentant Mindy.

"You do remember I was shot not that long ago," he moaned.

"You're fine," Mindy retorted before she turned to Sarah. "Well done! Marc, Sarah did the right thing – she took advantage of the situation; my momentary distraction, and she attacked. You have to take every chance in a fight, so you can win."

Sarah nodded and so did Marc once he had got back to his feet. Mindy left them both sparring so she could head over to see Marty, Kim, and little Matty. She was intercepted by a nervous looking Sky.

"Mindy?"

"Yeah, Sky."

"Could Chrissy and me go see Stephanie, tonight?"

"Of course, you can, Sky – just don't over excite her, please."

"No, problem, Mindy – it'll be the most boring hospital visit, ever!"

Mindy laughed as the girl ran over to her twin.

"Hi, Marty – Kim."

"Mindy – fancy a hold?" Kim asked.

Mindy was almost scared when it came to the babies – Damon was five weeks old while Matty was nine months old. While she often held her little step-brother, she felt like she might break him, he was so small and fragile. Marcus and Paige thought it so funny, considering that Mindy was Hirt Girl. Nonetheless, Matty was easier – he was bigger and slightly less fragile. As Mindy took the boy from his mother, he looked up at Mindy, and he smiled.

"She looks petrified!" Dave chuckled as he walked over.

Later that night

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 32

Stephanie was very disgruntled.

She was fed up. She knew that *Fusion* had been out on the streets of Chicago, but she knew very little about what had occurred, apart from what she could glean from the news reports. She felt left out and she was desperate to get out of the bed and go home. She missed her friends. She missed her family. Oh, they all came to visit, but they would never tell her what was going on – security, apparently!

"Fuck!" Stephanie yelled out to the empty room.

"Now *that* was a curse and a half!"

"Chrissy!" Stephanie exclaimed, her mood instantly improving.

"Hospital getting to you?" Sky asked, noticing immediately, Stephanie's previous mood.

"Yeah."

"We know how it feels, Stephanie – we thought we'd come to see how you were . . . and . . ."

"*What* is that smell?" Stephanie demanded as she sniffed the air. "Whatever it is, I want it. . ."

Sky laughed as she opened up her bag and she pulled out a McDonalds bag.

"Big Mac and fries, plus a vanilla milkshake – was that right?"

"My favourite!"

In her excitement, Stephanie ripped open the packaging, sending fries in all directions. She began to cram the burger into her mouth. Chrissy and Sky both laughed as they began to eat their own burgers. All three girls were so engrossed in the food that they never noticed a disapproving face appear at the door. Doctor Natalie Manning smiled as she watched the three girls chattering away and eating their fast food. She decided to let it slide, just the once. The look on her young patient's face was enough to justify the blatant disregard for hospital rules.

The Doctor slipped out of the door just as silently as she had entered and she continued on her rounds.

***Chapter 303*: Rogue**

Two days later
Tuesday, 19th July, 2016

Glenview

Mindy headed upstairs to check on the twins.

She began with Danny – he was lying on the floor of his bedroom, playing with his toys.

"Hi, Mom – what's up?"

"Just checking – you go back to whatever."

Danny smiled and turned back to whatever he was doing.

Next, Mindy headed for Anne-Marie's room via the shared bathroom. She was not in her bedroom. A few moments later, she found the eight-year-old. She was curled up on Stephanie's bed, with a purring Horatio in front and a dozing Razor behind. Mindy knew that Anne-Marie was taking Stephanie's stay in hospital rather hard.

"Hi, kid," Mindy said as she sat down on the bed beside her daughter.

Mindy stroked Horatio as he stretched and exposed his tummy. Razor opened a single eye and whined before going back to sleep again. Anne-Marie was cuddling her Rarity pony and looking very down.

"I know you miss her – we all do."

"I know she's done terrible things, but she's also done good since she's been with us. She saved my life and . . . she doesn't deserve any of this."

"We live in a world of bad people, Anne-Marie. That is part of the reason why I became Hit Girl – I wanted to fix what was broken. Believe me, we *will* find whoever shot Stephanie and I'll make you a promise, Anne-Marie. If you want in at the end of that, then I will let you participate."

"Will I be able to hurt them, like I hurt the man who kidnapped me?"

"If that is what you want, but you may have to take a ticket. Many people want a piece of that shooter."

Anne-Marie wrapped her arms around Mindy's waist and Horatio snuggled in for a cuddle of his own. As Mindy hugged her youngest daughter, she looked around the bedroom of her eldest daughter. Everything was in its place, as it always was. Anne-Marie's bedroom was a disaster zone and you took your life in your hands when you went in there, but Stephanie's was always neat and tidy. It was a place where Stephanie felt safe and she could act like a normal ten-year-old rather than the killer she was. Then Mindy remembered something.

"You want a laugh?" Mindy asked the morose eight-year-old.

"Okay," Anne-Marie replied noncommittally.

Mindy pulled out her cell phone and she fiddled around for a few moments, searching for a particular video. Once she found it, she held the phone so she and Anne-Marie could see the screen, then she pressed play. As the video played, Anne-Marie's eyes went wide and she began to giggle. At the end of the video, Anne-Marie smiled broadly and looked up at Mindy.

"Don't *ever* tell anybody you saw that video," Mindy suggested. "Matter of fact, don't tell *her* either or she'll cut our throats one dark and stormy night."

Anne-Marie laughed at that.

"Can we watch it again?"

...+...

Stephanie had been singing, one Saturday afternoon.

Mindy could hear her voice, but no music, so she had carefully eased open the door of the ten-year-old's bedroom, her cell up and filming, to find the young girl dancing on her bed, facing away from the door and singing into a hair brush. On her head were a set of wireless Bluetooth headphones.

'I am immortal, I have inside me blood of kings, I have no rival, No man can be my equal, Take me to the future of the world.

'Born to be kings, Princes of the universe, Fighting and free, Got your world in my hand, I'm here for your love and I'll make my stand, We were born to be princes of the universe.'

...+...

"Bit full of herself, isn't she?" Anne-Marie commented with a smirk. "She's actually pretty good."

That evening

Safehouse F

Joshua and Saoirse were sparring, without additional armour.

Joshua was an enigma to some, actually most, to be honest. Most of the girls saw him as chivalrous and a young man that would never knowingly hurt a female. The likes of Abby and Chloe both knew otherwise, as did Mindy. The newer females in *Fusion* tended to forget that Joshua had learnt to fight, the hard way. He had also been forced to fight against Chloe in the early months of his time with us. As such, he had learnt rather quickly that pulling punches just because his opponent had boobs and a snatch, was a very quick way to end up flat on his face.

Saoirse attempted a feint followed by a kick but she was shocked to find herself punched in the left boob and then in the upper-right arm in quick succession. She fell to the mat groaning and writhing in pain.

"Ow, ow, ow – you are a *total* wanker, Joshua!"

"Don't think I'm going to go easy on you just because you have tits and a fanny."

"Would never expect you to . . ." the chastened Saoirse moaned as Morgan fell about laughing.

..._...

A few yards over, Lauren and Lizzie were taking turns practicing disarming techniques with a very real but unloaded Glock 17 pistol. Lizzie was quick off the mark when it came to learning new skills and in part, she showed up her big sister who at times took a little longer to grasp something. The two girls were very different but then Lizzie had not suffered as Lauren had.

The two girls paused as Tommy and Hailee continued with a rather violent sparring session. Hailee had upped the violence of her sparring ever since her return from Europe and Tommy was an ideal candidate as he rarely pulled his punches, so ingrained was his hard-learned training. Mindy had had pause to contemplate Hailee's change in training tempo. There had also been some reckless behaviour out on the streets but Mindy tolerated it considering what had happened to the girl in Europe.

Tommy fought dirty, but Hailee (in her Petra persona) could fight just as dirty. Despite Tommy only being twelve-year-old, he was still a match for the eighteen-year-old Hailee. That was something that Hailee could not allow, and neither would ever back down. It would normally take intervention from somebody powerful, such as Dave or Joshua, to bring the sparring session to a close. That day was no exception as Mindy whistled loudly at Joshua and tipped her head towards the two sparrers.

Dave heard the whistle and he came out of the armoury to assist Joshua in the task of separating the fighting youngsters.

..._...

"What's going on, Hailee?" Mindy asked her friend after Tommy and Hailee had shook hands and gone their separate ways.

"A very good question . . . I still have nightmares and I feel that I let you down by letting myself be taken. . ."

"Hailee – I know that nightmares cannot be controlled and I have them a lot; ask Dave if you don't believe me. Just remember that we are all here to talk – you know, if you need us?"

"Thanks, Mindy – I *will* talk . . . when I am ready."

"I'll be there for you when you need me."

..._...

Mindy turned as there was a scream and she saw Lauren flipping her sister onto the mat and then diving at her. Saoirse got there first and she pulled Lauren away from her sister.

"Cut that out!" Mindy growled.

"Lauren, you do not attack your sister – you should know better," Dave chastened the young vigilante.

"She started it," Lauren almost spat at her sister.

Dave looked over at Lizzie.

"Sorry – it was my fault. I was teasing her about Brad – they spent time together, this afternoon."

Joshua raised an eyebrow and Lauren's cheeks went pink.

Earlier that day

Wagner Road

"You *can* come closer, Brad . . . you can even kiss me, if you want. . ."

"I . . . I wouldn't want to. . ."

Lauren looked offended.

"You don't want to touch me because I was raped?" she almost exploded. "Or just because you don't like what you see?"

"Lauren!" Brad replied strongly. "I don't want to take advantage of you – I know what happened to you and I am sorry that you had to go through that. I just don't want you to have to do anything which you don't want to."

Lauren smiled.

"You always say the right thing, Brad. I'm sorry I overreacted. Look, I'm Nightmare, I won't *allow* you to do anything I don't want, 'kay?"

Brad smiled and moved closer to Lauren. Then he leant in and he kissed her, on the lips. Lauren's eyes closed as she savoured the kiss which was sloppy and wet, but nice. Both teenagers blushed as they separated and stared at each other.

"You liked it?" Brad asked tentatively.

"It was nice – my first kiss," Lauren said as she reached up under her t-shirt and fiddled with her bra.

"Mine too."

Lauren took Brad's right hand and she pushed it up under her t-shirt and then under her loosened bra. Brad almost yanked his hand back but then relented and allowed Lauren to guide him. He felt very soft skin that was very warm to the touch. Then he felt a soft mound rise under his fingers and Lauren took a deep breath as a finger touched something hard.

"Oh, wow. . ." Lauren breathed.

"Tell me about it," a voice announced.

..._...

Brad yanked his hand from under Lauren's t-shirt and both turned to see Lizzie standing in the doorway.

"I'm telling Mom. . ."

"Lizzie!" Lauren called out.

"You'll tell Mom what, Lizzie?" Emily Edwards asked as she pushed Lizzie further into the bedroom.

"They're doing something disgusting, Mom. Brad had his hand up Lauren's T-shirt and look, her nipples are sticking out a mile."

Lauren went bright pink for a moment before she started to turn red with anger.

"Brad, are you forcing yourself on my daughter?"

"Mom, no! For your information, Brad didn't want to touch me. *I* invited him to kiss me. *I* undid my bra. *I* placed his hand on my breast and what my nipples are doing has fuck all to do with *that* nosy bitch!"

Emily sighed.

"She has a point, Lizzie – your sister is old enough to need her own privacy and you should *not* be going into her room unannounced and definitely *not* when she has company. Lauren, take it slowly, please."

"Mom, no boy is going anywhere near my vagina until I am good and ready. I trust Brad and I want to share myself with him in my own way and in my own time. I promise that I will not be having sex any time soon."

"Ewww!" Lizzie announced and she vanished from the room.

"I trust you, too, Brad. Stay safe, both of you."

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 32

Dave pushed open the door to the hospital room with a smile on his face for his daughter, only the smile quickly faded when he saw Stephanie's expression.

"When can I get out of here – I hate it."

Dave sat down on the edge of the bed and he took his daughter's left hand in his own.

"Very soon, I promise. The Doc says you're doing really, really well."

"Everything still hurts and I can't move my right arm."

"You can handle the pain; I know that you can. Your arm will take time and we'll look after that once you're out of here. Your chest and your side will be painful for a while longer – more once you start to move around more. There's no way around that, honey."

Stephanie leaned over to cuddle into Dave and a small tear ran down her cheek.

"Don't cry – you're better than that. Where's our fearless Psyche?"

"She's feeling tired and dejected right now, Dad. It's just your little girl at the moment and she's hurting."

Dave squeezed Stephanie's hand as the young girl began to cry in earnest. The door to the room opened and Saoirse walked in. She stopped dead at seeing her best friend in tears and her heart went out to the younger girl.

"Steph?"

Stephanie looked up and she smiled at her best friend.

"Hi, SD. Sorry, I must look like shit."

"That's allowed, Steph; you've been through a lot."

"I just want this to be over. I want to go home. I want to be with my friends and with my family."

"It's just around the corner, Steph. We'll all be there for you, once you get out. You just need to bide your time. You've beaten all the odds before, Steph. You beat those bastards who put you in The Cage. You survived their attempts at humiliating you. You survived that bitch, Murdoch – and you survived me. Stephanie, you survived everything that *Urban Predator* threw at you, and you tore them apart in retribution. This is nothing compared to all that, girl."

Stephanie thought about that as she wiped away her tears.

"Yeah, I'm a bad bitch, ain't I?"

Saoirse laughed and Dave smiled down at his daughter, proud of her inner strength and resolve.

***That night
Glenview***

"How's she doing?"

"She had a little crying session but with Saoirse's help, we cheered her up and pointed out that she's beaten much worse."

"She has a had a crap few years and my own childhood pales into insignificance against hers," Mindy replied.

"She's just as strong as you are, honey, so I know that she'll come out of this."

"She is feisty, I'll give her that," Mindy chuckled. "I miss having her around the house."

"I will admit, it has been a bit quiet – even with the twins around."

"Hopefully, she'll be out in two more weeks – at least Cathy and Steph's Doc say so – assuming she behaves."

"It's Stephanie . . ." Dave chuckled.

"Yeah – a little unpredictable, isn't she?"

"Just like you, honey."

Mindy snuggled into her husband and she felt immense comfort in his warmth. All her problems and worries went away as he gently rubbed her back.

***Intercontinental Hotel
Miami Beach, Florida***

The Ole Restaurant

"Thank you for coming, Ms Cummings."

"It is an honour to meet you, Mr Valachi; your reputation precedes you."

"As does, yours, Ms Cummings – and please, call me Joseph."

"Susan. Now, for what did you suggest this meeting?"

"I understand that we have both had dealings with a former native of New York, who now lives in Chicago."

Ms Cummings expression went cold, very cold.

"That bitch needs to die – she cost me millions . . . not to mention my yacht."

"She cost me my niece and her husband, not to mention their son. My family owes them and my father, Vito Genovese, he wants blood."

"What did you have in mind, Joseph?"

"We have an operation underway in Chicago, right now. A week or so ago, we issued an ultimatum to the purple bitch – ninety days to leave Chicago. We are keeping the pressure on."

"Let me know what you need from me. . ."

Two days later
Thursday, 21st July

Lunchtime

North Western Avenue, Chicago

The Pizza Hut restaurant was crowded and a certain set of tables was very rowdy as they ate their pizzas.

"We are gathered here today . . ."

"Marty, it's *not* a wedding!"

"Sorry, Megan – we are here to celebrate the sixteenth birthdays of two very obnoxious young women. . ." Marty corrected.

". . . and by 'obnoxious'," Joshua interrupted, "we mean that these two could give *Mindy* a run for her money!"

The two girls in question glared at Joshua with their mouths hanging open.

"Hey! Nobody out does me when it comes to being obnoxious!" Mindy declared and there was some raucous laughter from all those present.

"Anyway," Marty went on. "Happy Birthday, Sky and Chrissy!"

There was plenty of rowdy cheering as the two girls blushed with the attention.

Later that afternoon

"Saoirse McBride, as I live and breathe..."

Saoirse stiffened. It was a name that she had not heard in seven years and as far as she was aware, nobody else knew of it. She did her best not to react but the name had shaken her. It had also been delivered in a perfect Belfast accent. Something was *very* wrong. Nobody alive could have known who she used to be before she was taken and given the identity of Saoirse Doherty. Saoirse chose to ignore the man and she continued on her way.

"You're the image of your ma. On for a wee dander?"

Saoirse composed herself and she turned to look at the man.

"I have no idea who you are, sir, but would you please leave me alone," she offered in her best British accent.

The man was taken aback for a moment before his eyes narrowed.

"Aye. My apologies young lady."

The man turned and he walked away. Once the rattled fifteen-year-old was certain that he was gone, she pulled out her mobile and she dialled a number. The call was answered speedily.

"Mindy . . . I think I'm in trouble."

That evening

West Columbia

Kim jumped up from the couch to answer the knock on the door and she was very surprised to see who stood on the doorstep.

"Nicole?"

"Hi, Kim – we were in the neighbourhood, so we thought we'd stop by."

Kim hugged her big sister and then turned to the young girl who pushed past.

"Aunt Kim!"

"Hi, Zoe!"

After Kim had hugged Zoe, she closed the door and waved them into the living room. Marty looked up and he gave his wife a confused look.

"You remember my sister, Nicole, and our niece, Zoe?"

"Err, yeah, I do," Marty responded as he got up and gave his sister-in-law and niece a hug. "I had no idea they were coming by?"

"No, neither did I . . ." Kim replied.

"Sorry – we're going to be in town for a little while . . . me and Zoe, and we wanted to spend some time with you and your family, Kim."

"Where's Matty?" Zoe asked as she looked around the room.

"He's upstairs, sleeping," Marty replied. "Come on, you can come see him."

Once Marty and Zoe had gone upstairs, Kim turned on her sister.

"What's going on, Nicole."

"Me and Jordan . . . we're getting divorced."

"What?"

"It's for the best; everything's fine."

"What happened?"

"We just decided a couple months ago; no need to get into details. Zoe and I thought we'd move to Chicago . . . where we have family."

"Okay. How's Zoe taking it?"

"I don't really know; she won't open up. I thought . . ."

Kim smiled.

"You thought her Aunt Kim could get her to open up?"

"You always were good with Zoe – better than me, sometimes. She's eleven and she's got enough on her plate without her parents divorcing too."

"Let's sit down, shall we?"

***Chapter 304*: Loyalty**

Two days later
Saturday, 23rd July, 2016

Safehouse F

The Galley

After a few hours of frenzied activity, the two girls sat down at a table facing each other.

"Why do we do it?" Lauren asked as she sipped at her can of Pepsi.

"A question I ask myself almost every day," Megan replied as she opened her can of Coke.

"Are we bad people?" Lauren persisted.

"Probably."

"You are *not* helping!"

Megan laughed.

"We all have a deep-seated desire to help those who can't help themselves. Yes, we do bad things, but we do 'em for a good reason – yeah, I struggle to understand that, but then I am only eleven."

"You're way more than the average eleven-year-old, Megan. You've done so much and you're an awesome vigilante."

"You're gonna get her damn ego going again – we just deflated that damn thing," Joshua moaned as he sat down with his usual grin. "Got a joke for you two . . . a *cat* joke, as luck would have it."

"Oh, God!" Megan moaned, dropping her head onto the table, but Joshua ignored her and continued.

"There was a cat by the lake and a sausage came floating by. The cat put its paw in and wet its paw. Then a few minutes later a bigger sausage came floating by and the cat fell in. The moral of this story? The bigger the sausage the wetter the pussy."

"And people wonder why I like to kill . . ." Megan chuckled as she slapped Joshua while Lauren had a giggling fit.

"You two having a philosophical conversation concerning our existential time on this earth?"

Lauren and Megan both looked blankly at the Brit as he nonchalantly opened a can of Pepsi Max.

"Ignore him – he likes to use big words to confuse us simple Yanks; it's a British thing!" Hailee commented as she plonked herself down beside Lauren with her own can of Pepsi Max. "Basically, he wants to know if you are discussing the chances of us all losing it and ending up like Mindy."

"You saying that Mindy is several rounds short of a full magazine?" Lauren asked with a cheeky grin.

"That's one way to put it – she's certifiable," Megan replied. "Mind you, we all kill without a second's thought."

"Only when the fuckers deserve it," Josh reminded them all.

"Yeah – we have standards," Megan said with a hint of pride. "We stand for something."

"Very true, Kitty-Kat," Erika grinned as she helped herself to some coffee – Megan scowled. "*Fusion* is an organisation that is nothing without those who uphold its values."

"Us?" Lauren ventured.

"Us," Erika confirmed. "When *Fusion* first began, there were only the four of them. Chloe was little older than you are now, Lauren – same with Joshua. I made the mistake of dismissing the two kids, back when I first met them. Those four gave *Fusion* a reputation . . ."

"But Hit Girl already had a reputation," Lauren pointed out.

"Yes, she did," Erika confirmed. "But only amongst a few select criminals. Very few knew much about her – she was very secretive – and until that video where Kick-Ass and Big Daddy were being beaten to death, nobody had ever seen her – and lived. Hit Girl is a legend in her own time."

"So is Kick-Ass," Chloe said quickly as she sat down. "I owe those two a lot – everything really. I know I say that all the time, but I mean it; Mindy is like a big sister to me, and Dave is a big brother. Without them, I dread to think how I might have turned out – Mindy also got me back with my Dad. None of us are normal – you can't be if you do this shit."

"For many of us, *Fusion* is a home we never had," Tommy said as he joined the group. "We all owe *Fusion* something – *Fusion* rescued us all from something. Many of us might be dead by now without Dave and Mindy."

Joshua nodded.

"Chloe was rescued from a bad idea that put her in harm's way – well intentioned it was, but fucking daft. I was rescued from myself and brought to Chicago. Tommy was rescued from a life worse than death – in my opinion. Curtis was rescued from a nasty twist to *his* life. Stephanie was rescued from what can only be described as a hell on earth. The same with Saoirse and the other *Predators* both here and across the Atlantic. Megan was rescued from a life of crime – am I right?"

Megan nodded with an ashamed look on her face.

"*Fusion* has even stretched outside of Chicago. Bruce and Selina were both saved from themselves. Cameron and Natasha were saved from getting lost in the system of a foreign country. Christina and Sky, Anne-Marie and Daniel, Marc and Sarah – they were all saved from hell on earth. *Fusion* has taken down many that deserved to die. None of those targets were easy. From the D'Amico family, to *Urban Predator*, via Gotham and the Caribbean – we all bear scars of some description, either physical, or those emotional scars deep inside of us all," Joshua continued. "For many of us, we are hooked on a life that is illegal in most states, if not in most of the civilised world. Chicago welcomes us, but only because of that high level of professionalism that we show when we are out on the streets. Some of us get carried away, some of us fuck up. We've all been there. I am pleased and honoured to say that I know Mindy and Dave very well. Mindy has unbelievably high standards but that is only because she wants us all to come back alive. Even though she has difficulty showing it sometimes, she respects each and every one of you. She is also very thankful for the support you all give to her when it comes to Stephanie, the twins, and her wacky schemes."

"Right you lazy twats!" Mindy yelled from the doorway. "You all have training and *not* a session of vigilantes anonymous!"

Despite her feigned anger, Mindy was smiling broadly. How much had she overheard?

"Thank you, Josh," she said as he passed her.

The Command Center

"What have you got?" Mindy demanded.

"We're still searching," Marty replied as images flickered across a monitor while facial recognition software attempted to match a face against the computer-generated image of the man provided by Saoirse two night's previously.

"Could he be this asshole bomber?" Mindy demanded of Saoirse who sat at a console scanning photos on a screen.

Saoirse was feeling awful. She felt immense guilt because the man who had killed Toni, and almost killed her along with dozens of other people, may have only been in Chicago because of her. She also felt that Mindy blamed her. She jumped as she felt Mindy's hand on her shoulder.

"Saoirse – calm down. None of this is your fault. Our pasts usually catch up with us one way or another."

"That bastard is out there and he could be building more bombs even as we speak."

"There is only so much that we can do, Saoirse. We'll find him and stop him."

Level 0

Erika stepped back from the punchbag which she had been pounding for a solid forty minutes.

She grabbed a fresh towel from a pile by the door and she sat down on the mat, breathing heavily. She felt two shapes sit down either side of her.

"Here – drink this," Chrissy said as she offered Erika a cold bottle of water.

"It'll do you good," Sky added.

Erika looked to her left and her right, then she took the bottle.

"Maybe I need it – I'm seeing double!" Erika chuckled between swigs. "What do you two devious bitches want?"

"You," they both replied.

Erika groaned.

"A threesome?" Erika muttered facetiously.

"God, no!" Sky almost yelled. "Sorry – I'm not into that kind of thing; for that, you'd need to speak with Chrissy."

"With my own sister . . . ewww!" Chrissy replied with a faraway look in her eyes.

"No, Erika," Sky explained. "We've been considering our options and well, Mindy let slip that you're also considering your options."

"Mindy's got a big mouth!" Erika exclaimed.

"You've had a massive loss, Erika, and we cannot possibly understand what you have lost."

"You two haven't exactly had an easy life – you both got taken when you were eight and subjected to God only knows what, and then you both get yourselves taken down by Shadow with her bō-staff."

Sky subconsciously rubbed her side where there was a permanent scar visible between her top and her shorts.

"Yes – our lives sucked, but they have suddenly turned around. Meeting Shadow was probably the best – and definitely the most painful – thing that has happened to the both of us. We have a second chance at having a life. We've both decided that we'd like to go with you."

"I barely know either of you and you want me to let you both move in with me?"

"We promise to behave and to do what you tell us. . ."

Erika looked from one set of puppy-dog eyes to the other and she laughed.

"Let me think about it," she said seriously so the two girls knew that she meant it.

The following morning Sunday, 24th July

Safehouse Q

Sarah was half asleep as she made her way to the bathroom for a shower.

She never really heard the running water and she just walked straight in, only to be met by the smiling face of Chrissy Abbott.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry, Chrissy!"

"I'm not bothered," Chrissy said as she stepped out from behind the shower curtain.

Sarah's eyes went wide as she took in the naked body displayed before her. Sarah did not look away; Chrissy looked

stunning as the water ran off her body and accentuated her ample curves.

"So," Chrissy said calmly, and with a little hope in her voice, "you're the magnificent muffin muncher that Saoirse says is total ecstasy."

Sarah felt her face getting very hot and she grinned in response.

"I'd really like to find out what you can do . . . and I can always return the favour. . ." Chrissy said as she ran her eyes over Sarah's pyjama-clad figure and then licked her lips.

Sarah hesitated but after less than a minute, she dropped her towel . . . and then she shucked off her pyjama bottoms followed by her top. Completely naked, she bit her lip as she moved towards Chrissy, who held out her hand to Sarah. Sarah took the hand and Chrissy pulled her under the hot water and they both studied each other's bodies up close.

As their skin touched, Sarah felt a sense of longing which spread from her groin up to her breasts. As their nipples touched, both girls moaned and all barriers dropped away as their hands began to caress each other's bodies. Sarah's hands gently mapped out Chrissy's ample breasts, every curve, all the way to the nipples at the tip. Chrissy's hands were doing the same and Sarah felt emotions and sensations that she had not felt in a long time. A lot of pent up sexual frustration began to ease as hands wandered across her stomach and found her belly button.

Sarah giggled.

"Your skin is so silky smooth," Chrissy purred as she continued downwards into Sarah's pubic hair.

Sarah was doing the same and she gently caressed Chrissy's own pubic hair. Sarah leaned down and she nibbled at Chrissy's right nipple which elicited a long, drawn out moan. The next few minutes or so passed in a blur of feverish sexual activity as both girls brought each other ever closer to an excruciating orgasm. Sarah took a deep breath and she sank to her knees . . . Chrissy smiled as she moved her legs further apart and then she braced herself with her arms for what was to come (pun intended).

Sarah's fingers gently caressed Chrissy's labia before pushing them apart with her fingertips and then she leant forwards. Chrissy could feel Sarah's fingers being replaced by the girl's tongue which pushed inside and then flicked up towards her . . . Chrissy yelped at the instantaneous stimulation that sent electrical impulses racing up her body to her brain. Sarah's reputation was well earned! After another minute of intense stimulation, Chrissy could take no more as she pushed Sarah's face away from her labia and she fell to her knees. Chrissy kissed Sarah on the lips and then she wrapped her arms around the other girl as wave after wave of crippling sensations coursed throughout her body.

The orgasm was just about the biggest that Chrissy had ever endured. She fell onto her back, pulling Sarah with her. They kissed under the water which streamed down from the shower head. Just as the two teens parted from their final kiss, there was a crash as the door was slammed shut. Both girls jumped as they turned to see Marc on the floor by the door, his pants down by his knees and his right hand wrapped around his dick. A thick substance oozed over his hand and dripped onto the floor.

Sarah giggled as she sunk her face into Chrissy's breasts.

Chrissy winked at the boy as he grinned sheepishly.

Mid-April, 2014

An unknown location in the USA

The instructor studied the scene before him.

He was standing in the communal area reserved for the 'yellows', the kids who were deemed too young, or otherwise unsuitable as *Predators* but retained for limited duties around the facility that were deemed below the status of even a Phase 1 *Predator*. An eight-year-old boy was holding his nose as blood continued to pour down his front. The boy glared at a seven-year-old girl wearing glasses who had an enormous and very satisfied grin on her face.

"You did this?" the instructor demanded incredulously as he looked down at the diminutive little girl.

"Yes, sir."

He smirked appreciatively.

"Where did you learn to do that?" he asked.

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"What!"

"I don't want to get them into trouble, sir."

"Well, they have broken a few rules by teaching you to fight, and I want to know who it is – *now*, young lady."

The young girl looked very frightened but she stuck to her guns and showed great courage as she faced down the instructor.

"Sorry, sir – no."

There was stunned silence in the room – no yellow *ever* disobeyed an order.

"Time for you to experience The Cage from the other side!"

The girl was seized and stripped naked before being hauled off down the corridor.

Stephanie heard screaming in the corridor outside The Cage and then the door opened and she saw a struggling naked girl being dragged into the concrete room.

"Open Number Three!" the instructor ordered and the yellow on duty hit the correct button.

The sobbing girl was dropped onto the bare mattress in the cage next to Stephanie before the door was slammed shut.

"What the fuck, Electra?" Stephanie demanded in surprise as she recognised the girl.

"It worked," Electra said through her sobs and she forced a grin. "I broke his nose. . ."

"Why are you in here?" It was unheard of for a yellow to actually be *in* a cage in The Cage.

"I refused to give up where I learnt to fight back."

"You are such a *stupid* little girl!" Stephanie groaned.

..._...

It was now blazingly obvious to Stephanie that the instructors were using Electra to get at her. They obviously knew who had taught her to fight – they were not stupid. Stephanie also knew that she herself had broken about a dozen rules concerning yellows. Stephanie shrugged as she gave the sobbing, naked Electra another glance before she lay back to rest.

What was their warped plan? Stephanie was fed up with them using *her* as their personal punch bag and scapegoat. Either they should just kill her and be done with it, or maybe she should just call them out on it.

Though Stephanie was unaware of it, there were a lot of murmurings in the upper echelons of *Urban Predator* concerning the young British girl with her codename years before it was due. The girl was very advanced for her age and she had showed a level of progression way beyond just about anybody else who had gone through the program before.

All except maybe one girl . . .

Sunday, 24th July, 2016

Glenview

"Oh, for the love of God!"

"I could come back, later. . ."

"No, Anne-Marie – what is it?" Mindy asked her youngest daughter. Impromptu meetings in the shower seemed to be a thing for Anne-Marie; the young girl didn't appear to see anything wrong with invading somebody's privacy during such an intimate time.

"Can I go see Steph, this afternoon?"

"Yes, you can," Mindy replied as she continued to rinse her hair – then she had a thought. "Did you close the bathroom door?"

"Err . . ."

"Never mind," Mindy grimaced as she was shoved to one side by Razor who began to play in the water.

Then Mindy yelped as something sharp dug into her right foot. She looked down to see. . .

"Horatio!" Mindy growled. "Get your claws out of my foot!"

Anne-Marie giggled as Horatio looked up and meowed happily.

"Razor! Anne-Marie – get that mutt outside where he can dry off. As for you. . ." Mindy seized hold of the soggy moggy and stared into his eyes. "You go with Anne-Marie and get yourself dried off in the kitchen."

Mindy passed a horrified Anne-Marie the wet kitty which she held away from her dry clothes.

That afternoon

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Room 32

Stephanie's mood lifted as her brother and sister entered the room.

"Hi, guys!"

"Just thought we'd come by to see how you are," Danny said.

Anne-Marie just grinned at her big sister.

"Is that gap in your teeth ever going to be filled?" Stephanie grinned.

"Not exactly my fault, Steph!" Anne-Marie retorted.

"I know, sorry."

"When are you coming home – I really miss you."

"I can't believe I'm saying it, but I miss the both of you," Stephanie replied.

"I'm stuck with Moaning Annie – it's getting beyond a joke," Danny commented.

"I'm not *that* bad. . ."

"Have you heard yourself?"

"Okay – it's been a hard time for us all. We got to go out on our motorcycles the other weekend, it was awesome!"

"Did you stay out of the mud? Stephanie asked her little sister.

Anne-Marie grimaced.

"I may have come off once or twice. . ."

"Eight times," Danny laughed as his sister scowled.

"Still using too much throttle?" Stephanie asked knowingly with a patronising look at the eight-year-old girl.

"It gets away from me – I can't help it; I suck at riding a motorbike."

"No, you don't," Stephanie replied. "You're only just starting to learn. You're a fiery little thing, and you get carried away sometimes; that is nothing to be ashamed of."

"I just feel bad, is all. I wish I could be as good as you are, Steph."

"You're young, Anne-Marie, and I am very glad that you never had the same upbringing that I did. You will grow and you will be trained – I will train you to be as good as you can be. You just need patience, young one."

"Sage advice from a seasoned *Predator*," Mindy commented as she entered the room. "Don't rush to leave your childhood behind, little one. I lost mine and so did Stephanie. Listen to us when we tell you to enjoy what you have."

"I will," Anne-Marie replied with a smile.

Three days later
Wednesday, 27th July

Glennview

"Why do you *have* to keep trawling *that* up?"

Mindy's scowl was impressive and Chloe grinned to show that she was joking.

"Chloe, it's two years ago – get over it!" Joshua laughed.

"She almost cut your damn head off – she's an animal!" Chloe replied with a broad grin.

"I don't blame her – not really; I *had* invaded her favourite Safehouse – the one where she had lived with her father," Joshua pointed out.

"But," Mindy said with an evil grin. "Finding you, did get Chloe off my back. . ."

"How so?" Joshua asked and Chloe groaned.

"When she's spreading her legs for you, she ain't bellyaching in my lug hole!" Mindy replied with an evil chuckle.

"Bitch!" Chloe growled as she blushed pink.

***Chapter 305*: Sweet Sixteen**

*A little over a week later
Friday, 5th August, 2016*

*Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 32*

"Hi, Mum!"

"Morning, daughter!" Mindy replied with a grin.

"What you got there?" Stephanie asked as she noticed the bags that Mindy carried.

"Bright as a button, as usual," Mindy laughed as her daughter's cheeks coloured slightly. "I think it's time for a little lady to come home."

Despite the reaction being expected, Mindy was appalled by the reaction that her supposedly happy proclamation had brought as Stephanie began to cry out of sheer relief and happiness.

"You don't know what it means to me to hear you say that."

"Yes, Steph, I do," Mindy smiled.

"Right, kiddo, let's get you disconnected for your final time!" Nurse Kittiwake grinned as she breezed into Room 32.

After the usual ignominies of having the duvet and her gown removed, followed by all the sticky pads, Stephanie found herself dumped into a bath where she was bathed – another humiliation – before being returned to sit on her bed wrapped in a towel.

..._...

"I bought you some new clothes, considering that you possessed nothing *remotely* suitable," Mindy began conversationally.

"Nothing *remotely* suitable?" Stephanie echoed. "How so?"

"Da-da!"

"You can get to fuck!" Stephanie growled as Mindy laid out some clothing on the bed.

"Dave quoted you word for word!" Mindy laughed. "Look, I know you hate wearing anything which makes you look like a girl – but that bath reminded me that you are, in fact, a girl."

Stephanie glared down at the two offending articles of clothing. The first was a dark blue blouse with black buttons up the front. The second – and in the ten-year-old's mind, the worst – was a medium-blue, wrap-style denim skirt.

"Why?"

"It occurred to me that you currently have limited mobility in your left arm and that the other is going to be strapped up for a few more weeks. You need clothing that is easy to put on and take off – a blouse. You also need to make use of the bathroom. . ."

"I've been using the bathroom for the past week; ever since that damn hose thing was removed from my cunt."

Mindy noticed that Stephanie was getting annoyed. She smiled.

"You've been using the bathroom wearing only a gown – nothing else. So, I thought a skirt would help you – from a purely practical point of view."

Stephanie's shoulders slumped as she gave up trying to fight the very logical argument and she looked annoyed for a moment before she smiled.

"Thanks for looking after me, Mum."

..._...

Mindy gently eased the sleeve of the blouse over Stephanie's immobilised right arm and then passed the garment around her back to the other side.

"Talking of you being a girl," Mindy commented as she helped Stephanie push her left arm into the other sleeve. "I think you might need a training bra of some sort. . ."

"My chest is *flat!*" Stephanie growled as her face turned pink.

"Not all *that* flat – even Tommy noticed, you know, on the boat."

"Let's talk about boobs another day, huh?"

Mindy chuckled and she helped Stephanie into a pair of pink knickers before she then wrapped the denim skirt around the ten-year-old's waist.

"I like it – comfortable," she admitted, somewhat grudgingly.

Two hours later

Glenview

Stephanie was feeling more than a little humiliated as Dave lifted her out of the car with ease and he carried her inside the house.

"I can walk – sort of – I am *not* an invalid!"

"Yes, you are – so, shut up!" Dave replied with a grin.

Stephanie gave up moaning and she just leant into Dave's chest, enjoying his comforting warmth as she was carried upstairs to her bedroom.

..._...

As Stephanie was laid gently on her bed, she looked around the room which she had not seen in over five weeks. The bed was much softer than that which she had occupied at the hospital, which she welcomed. On her desk was a large bouquet of electric-blue flowers.

"Thank Josh, for me, Mum."

"He thought you'd like them," Mindy smiled. "Glad to be home?"

"Hell, yeah!"

"You will not leave the bed except for using the bathroom – understand, young lady?" Dave lectured seriously.

"Yes, Dad – I'll be a good little patient," Stephanie grinned.

"You think we were born yesterday?" Mindy asked as she helped her daughter out of the blouse and removed the skirt.

"Maybe. . ."

"Get some rest – you have a busy day tomorrow," Dave suggested as he pulled the duvet over the tired girl.

Stephanie did *not* want to miss the party, so she closed her eyes and soon sank into a peaceful sleep.

That same time

Several miles away. . .

"Congratulations, young lady, that was some of the best driving I've seen in a long time. You have some great reflexes and a very pleasant manner."

"Thank you, ma'am."

I climbed out of the car and I was struggling to control my grin as I walked over to Mom.

"Well?"

"You have a brilliant daughter, Dr Bennett. She's very talented and a very sweet girl. . ."

Mom blinked and raised an eyebrow.

"Was it *this* girl you had with you?" Mom queried as she indicated yours truly.

"Oh, yes, such a lovely mannered teenager."

Mom looked at me quizzically.

Forty minutes later

Morton Grove

"Well?" Joshua asked with baited breath.

"Do you *have* to ask?" Chloe demanded.

"She must have hypnotised the examiner," Cathy commented. "It was sickening: ' . . .she's very talented and a very sweet girl. . .' – I ask you!"

"Chloe?"

"Yes, me, you damn asshole, Joshua!"

"Sorry – just a little surprised. . ."

"So, can I get a car now?" Chloe demanded with an enormous smile.

The following day

Saturday, 6th August

Cathy came by.

"So, Steph," Cathy said conversationally, as she examined Stephanie from head to toe. "Anything exciting happen while you were in hospital?"

"You are kidding me?" Stephanie demanded.

"Just distracting you from my prodding," Cathy chuckled as she knew full well what had occurred a couple of weeks previously. "You're doing good – now for the serious part, Stephanie."

"Oh?"

"Don't push yourself too much, please. You are no longer a *Predator* and Psyche is convalescing – *understand?* You do anything stupid and I *will* have you restrained – *understand?*"

Stephanie nodded at the relevant points and cringed. She was desperate to heal but she knew that offending the Doctor was way worse than offending Hit Girl!

..._...

After Cathy had gone, Stephanie decided it was time to see what her left arm could do, so she eased herself out of bed, took a deep breath for the pain, and pushed her left hand between the mattress and the base of the bed. She

frowned – there should have been something there. . . She checked four other places around her bedroom – nada!

"Fucking bitch!" she muttered as she made her way back to the bed and laid down.

Ten minutes later, Mindy breezed in.

"How did you know?" Stephanie demanded.

"The guns?" Mindy chuckled.

"Yeah – the guns!"

"I hid being Hit Girl from Marcus for quite a while – hiding weapons became second nature to me."

"You actually checked my teddy-bear?"

"There might have been something inside it. . ."

"What sort of sick individual would hide a weapon in a teddy-bear?"

"No idea. . . but I think I got all of them. I decided that you might try to train or something equally stupid."

Stephanie scowled.

"You get the one behind the Rainbow Dash poster?"

"No – thanks," Mindy grinned.

"Doh!"

Later that afternoon

Stephanie scowled as she found herself wearing *another* skirt.

"So, I *do* have a sister," Anne-Marie commented approvingly.

"You want your arm broken again?" Stephanie hissed.

"I'm just glad that you're home," Anne-Marie said with a concerned smile.

"Yeah – for once she's talking sense," Danny commented.

'Woof!' Razor added as he lay at Stephanie's feet in the living room and Horatio jumped up beside Stephanie with a small meow.

"I am glad to be home – and glad to be with my family," Stephanie admitted. "Thanks for caring."

"Anytime, sis," Anne-Marie grinned.

That evening

Safehouse D

Marty, Kim, and Abby had outdone themselves.

There was a stage, massive speakers, a karaoke machine, and plenty of tables and chairs. A huge banner hung over the stage: 'Happy Sweet Sixteen'. They had transformed the utilitarian warehouse into a birthday venue. It was warm, cosy, and homely with a large dance floor in the centre. Cathy, Emily, Shannon Morgan, and Paige had prepared an enormous pile of food which threatened to collapse the tables arranged over to one side of the warehouse. Tony Morgan had set up a bar for the night to provide the drinks.

Over to one side, there was a covered area which was marked as 'off-limits'. Everybody knew better than to go anywhere near it – mainly because they knew it could be *anything*, at least if Hit Girl had anything to do with it.

..._...

At around six, that evening, people began to arrive.

Cathy and her daughter were among the first. Chloe wore a very short blue dress which accentuated her feminine curves and long legs. Her blonde hair, with the single purple stripe was hanging loose. Next in was Paige and Marcus, with Megan – who wore a very fetching black dress which went nowhere near her knees (and in Marcus' opinion showed *far* too much thigh) – and Curtis. Arriving at the same time were Lizzie and Lauren, along with the Fellowes family. Brad was holding Lauren's hand and the young girl was blushing as many eyes examined her 'compact' yellow dress which showed off her long legs.

Saoirse and Morgan were also in very revealing outfits, not that either of them minded the attention one bit. Abby breezed in with her mother in tow and she was quickly joined by Avery and Riley – both of whom were giggling away and very pleased to be welcomed to their first *Fusion* event. Kyle arrived and he promptly sat down with Hailee who arrived a few minutes later with her mother, Vicky. Once people had begun to mill about and grab a drink, it was time to begin.

"Okay, people," Marty began from up on the stage. "We have a lot to get through, tonight – so please drink, be merry, and you all have fun now! Oh – looky here – our very first *Predator*, and she's actually dressed like a girl – who knew! Welcome back, Stephanie!"

Said *Predator* froze as she entered the space near the stage and she cringed as everybody looked in her direction and cheered.

"Hi, y'all!" Stephanie drawled as she grinned enormously and waved her available hand a little nervously.

"I think you have nice legs and I like it when you show them," Tommy commented before he stopped talking and looked a little apprehensively at Stephanie.

Stephanie ignored the sniggering (Saoirse and Megan) and instead, she scowled at the older boy before she then marched right up to him and stared up into his face.

"You come down here and say that. . ." she growled.

Tommy looked around and the twelve-year-old went pink in the face as everybody went 'ooooh'. They all expected Stephanie to slap, or otherwise hurt the boy, as was her manner. Instead, as he came closer, she reached up with her left hand, seized his chin, and she kissed him, full on the lips. There was total silence for almost a full minute and then Joshua broke the stillness.

"You sly dog, Tommy boy!" he laughed as both kids went very pink.

"You were just kissed by the baddest *Predator* ever, Tommy – you like to live dangerously, don't you?" Saoirse quipped.

Marty then got clever and began to play '*French Kissin' In the USA*' by Debbie Harry – Stephanie was not amused.

"Not fucking happening, asshole!"

Everybody laughed as Stephanie headed over to some chairs.

"How sweet – Steph's got a boyfriend," Saoirse teased.

"Steph's got a boyfriend, Steph's got a boyfriend," Anne-Marie sang. "Stephanie and Tommy sitting in the tree, k – i – s – s – i – n – g!"

"If I could, I'd kick your sorry collective arses!"

"We're looking forward to it," Saoirse grinned.

..._...

Joshua and Chloe had received strict instructions not to vanish into a dark corner to 'enjoy each other's bodies' as Cathy had put it. Tommy was receiving a lot of jibes about his kiss – mainly from Curtis and Joshua. The young boy took all the ribbing in his stride, like everything in his life. Nevertheless, he went to sit with Stephanie, taking her a

glass of Coke.

"Thanks, Tommy."

"Sorry I embarrassed you," Tommy offered.

"I can take it – I suppose I'm going to have to get used to people making comments about my body. It was nice, though, thanks."

..._...

"How are you holding up, Mindy?" Vicky asked as she watched Stephanie talk to Tommy.

"I'm feeling a lot better now I have her home," Mindy admitted.

"I bet," Vicky replied with a chuckle. "Motherhood is one hell of a challenge, huh?"

"Tell me about it," Mindy grouched. "Being Hit Girl is way easier!"

"You just wait until you have teenaged girls. . ." Vicky laughed.

"I am so looking forward to that!" Marcus chuckled as he grinned fiendishly.

"Look, old man," Mindy replied with her own grin. "You have Megan turning thirteen in a little over a year."

Marcus' grin faded instantly.

"My life is going to hell in a basket," Marcus moaned.

"Just keep her on the right road, just like you did with me, and she'll be fine," Mindy offered.

"Keeping you on the right road was like trying to herd cats."

Mindy and Vicky laughed.

"Look at me as practice for Megan."

"I must have been a really bad person in a former life."

..._...

All chatter ceased as Dave and Marty climbed onto the stage wearing trilbys and dark suits. Dave spoke first as the stood behind a pair of microphone stands.

"One, two, one, two, three, four."

Everybody cheered as the music began and the two friends began to dance on the stage. Then Dave spoke again.

*We're so glad to see so many of you lovely people here tonight
And we would especially like to welcome all the representatives of Illinois' Law enforcement community, who have
chosen to join us here in the Safehouse at this time
We certainly hope that you all enjoy the show and remember people, that no matter who you are and what you do to
live, thrive, and survive
There are still some things that make us all the same:
You, me, them
Everybody! Everybody!*

Marcus, Vicky, Paul, and Sam all cheered loudly at the second line as Dave and Marty sang together:

*Everybody needs somebody
Everybody needs somebody to love
Someone to love (Someone to love)
Sweetheart to miss (Sweetheart to miss)
Sugar to kiss (Sugar to kiss)*

*I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you in the morning
You, you, you when my soul's on fire*

Then it was Marty's turn:

*Sometimes I feel
I feel a little sad inside
When my baby mistreats me, I never never have a place to hide, I need you!*

There was a lot of cheering and yelling during the instrumental break, then Marty came on again:

*Sometimes I feel
I feel a little sad inside
When my baby mistreats me, I never never have a place to hide, I need you!*

*I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you*

Then it was Dave's turn and he looked directly at Mindy as he sang:

*You know, people, when you do find that special somebody
Hold that man, hold that woman
Love him, please him, squeeze her, please her
Signify your feelings with every gentle caress
Because it's so important to have that special somebody
To hold, to kiss, to miss, to squeeze, and please*

Mindy blushed wildly as people followed Dave's eyes.

*Everybody needs somebody
Everybody needs somebody to love (Everybody)
Someone to love (Needs somebody)
Sweetheart to miss (Everybody)
Sugar to kiss (Needs somebody)*

*I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you*

*I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you
I need you, you, you*

*In the morning
When my soul's on fire
When there ain't no-one around*

*I need you, you, you, you
I need you, you, you, you
I need you, you
I need you!*

Mindy was a little concerned that the cheering and chanting might outdo the sound proofing on the Safehouse. . .

..._...

As the cheering died down, Mindy stepped up onto the stage and waved for silence.

"Before we get onto the big presents for my two miscreant lieutenants, I would like to say a few words about a very special ten-year-old who has suffered through immense pain and trauma over the past several weeks. Her fortitude has been an inspiration to us all as she fought past her injuries. Twice her heart stopped, and twice she required emergency surgery. But, as you all know, nothing ever stops that girl – nothing. Many have tried to kill her, and they all failed. Despite being half-dead from her latest relapse, she even had the wits about her, and the fortitude, to put down an attempted assassination. To be honest, in all my time as a vigilante, I have never, ever, seen somebody killed with a spoon. . ."

There was a burst of laughter and Stephanie grinned sheepishly.

"However, that should be a warning to us all of what that young girl is capable of when she is angry or threatened. She still has a lot of work ahead of her and I hope that everybody will support her as she heals – we all want her back out there, kicking ass, but that is a while away. In the meantime, Dave and I have plans for our eldest daughter – more of that next week. Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses to our one and only, Stephanie Lizewski."

Stephanie had been cringing during the entire toast and now she blushed bright pink at both the applause and the acknowledgements. She grabbed hold of her best friend and she hauled herself, a little shakily, to her feet. Saoirse supported her best friend as the applause died down.

"Thanks, Mum. The past few weeks have been very hard and many, many times I wanted to throw in the towel and just give up. Only the tough love from my Mum and my best friend got me through the dark times. Without the both of them. . . Thank you, all of you who took the time to visit me and to encourage me. I really never knew how many real friends I had . . . thank you."

Stephanie dissolved into tears and Saoirse hugged her tightly as more applause echoed through the Safehouse.

"Will you two get a fucking grip!" Mindy growled as she walked past Cathy and Paige who were both crying, despite her wiping away tears from her own eyes.

..._...

"Okay, we're gonna do one more – yeah!" Megan shouted as she mounted the stage with Saoirse and Hailee.

Saoirse handled the opening:

*All the old paintings on the tombs,
They do the sand dance, don't you know?*

*If they move too quick (oh whey oh)
They're falling down like a domino.
All the bazaar men by the Nile,
They got the money on a bet.*

*Gold crocodiles (oh whey oh)
They snap their teeth on your cigarette.
Foreign types with their hookah pipes say
(Ay oh whey oh, ay oh whey oh)
Walk like an Egyptian.*

Then Hailee took over:

*The blond waitresses take their trays
They spin around and they cross the floor;
They got the moves (oh whey oh)*

*You drop your drink then they bring you more.
All the school kids so sick of books,
They like the punk and the metal band.
When the buzzer rings, (oh whey oh)*

*They're walking like an Egyptian.
All the kids in the marketplace say
(Ay oh whey oh, ay oh whey oh)*

Walk like an Egyptian.

It was Megan with the final verses that got the biggest laughs and cheers:

*Slide your feet up the street bend your back
Shift your arm then you pull it back
Life is hard you know (oh whey oh)
So strike a pose on a Cadillac*

*If you want to find all the cops
They're hanging out in the donut shop
They sing and dance (oh whey oh)
Spin the clubs cruise down the block*

*All the Japanese with their yen
The party boys call the Kremlin
And the Chinese know (oh whey oh)
They walk the line like Egyptian*

*All the cops in the donut shop say
(Ay oh whey oh, ay oh whey oh)
Walk like an Egyptian
Walk like an Egyptian*

The cheering was enormous and the four cops present had joined in with the final 'Ay oh whey oh, ay oh whey oh' having grown up with the song and they each knew the lyrics.

..._...

Mindy stopped before the cordoned off area and she turned to the crowd as the cheering wound down. Everybody turned towards her in eager anticipation.

"I'm sure that both Chloe and Josh have guessed what is behind here, but I just want to drag it out a little longer – 'cause I can!"

There was laughter and Chloe scowled at her friend.

"Let's go with ladies first – not that Chloe is a lady . . ."

"I have a cunt, does that count?" Chloe challenged.

"That's no way to talk about Josh!" Mindy quipped back before she continued. "We all thought long and hard about what these two should have. Chloe in particular as the last car she drove; well, she rolled it! We couldn't find a self-righting car, so we got her the next best thing . . ."

Chloe scowled.

Mindy signalled Marty who pressed a button and the black curtain around one of the items dropped to the ground. A chorus of comments erupted as a car was revealed in all its sparkling glory.

The Mini John Cooper Works Clubman All4 sparkled in the lighting. The paintwork was chilli red with black sport stripes along the sides and twin stripes over the bonnet while the mirrors and roof were black with the mirrors each sporting a Union Jack in black and white. The car sat on eighteen-inch alloy wheels and had every conceivable extra fitted – plus some features that did not exist on the standard options list.

Chloe was totally speechless – for about the first time in her sixteen years of life!

"Now that's what I like – a silent Chloe!" Curtis quipped as his cousin just stared at the vehicle.

"It's beautiful . . ." Chloe muttered after a couple of minutes.

"It's from your father and me. Well, the car is – the spy shit is from Mindy!" Cathy explained as she hugged her daughter.

Chloe had had a difficult phone call with her father that morning; she really missed him. But for him to do this for her – Chloe instantly regretted all those years when she had been so bitchy to her father. Tears ran down her face as her mother guided her around to the driver's side and she handed her daughter the key which was actually a small oval remote.

Chloe sat inside her new car and she gazed over the interior, mesmerised by the fact that she actually owned her own car.

..._...

While Chloe enjoyed her new car, Mindy moved on. . .

"Now – for Joshua!" Mindy called out and the next black curtain soon fell to the ground to reveal another car.

The Audi S3 sedan in ara blue crystal, shone under the lights as it sat on its nineteen-inch alloy wheels.

"Wow. . ." was all the boy could muster.

"A present from Jack, Dave, and me," Mindy said. "You've had a tough couple of years, Josh – enjoy it."

Mindy grimaced as Joshua quite literally picked her up in a bear hug, pinning her arms to her sides, and he gave her a big kiss on the cheek. Mindy's face went pink and she began to growl, so Joshua wisely put Mindy back down on her feet.

"Thank you, Mindy."

"You're welcome, Joshua."

Joshua was soon joined by the other boys as he examined his new car.

..._...

"You okay, Steph?"

"Yeah, Mum . . . just very sore."

"You wanna go home?"

"Nah – but I could do with a lay down. . ."

Mindy cleared off a couple of chairs and Dave materialised with a pillow.

"Thought the little lady might need a rest," he said with a gentle smile.

Stephanie laid back on the chairs with Mindy's help and as Dave gently moved her hair out of her face, she closed her eyes and quickly fell asleep.

"I never thought of that – thanks," Mindy said as she gave her thoughtful husband a kiss.

***Chapter 306*: A Meeting**

*The following morning
Sunday, August 7th, 2016*

Glennview

"Wakey, wakey, big sister!"

"Go fuck yourself!"

"That's a nice way to talk to your eight-year-old little sister."

"SD?"

"Yeah."

"What are you doing in my bedroom?"

"We are here to help you get ready," Anne-Marie stated.

"Ready for what?" Stephanie replied, her eyes still firmly closed.

"Your rehabilitation," SD responded.

"You make it sound like I'm a criminal."

"No comment," SD grimaced.

"Okay!" Stephanie opened her eyes as Saoirse hauled back the duvet.

"Why am I only wearing my knickers – come to think of it; how did I get here?"

"You fell asleep, last night, so Dad carried you here and then I helped Mom undress you – I'd not seen your wounds before; they scared me."

Stephanie looked over at her sister and she smiled, then she looked up at SD. She took in SD's clothing which was very similar to that worn by Anne-Marie. Both girls wore a T-shirt and shorts.

"Still not wearing a bra, I see, SD."

"My chest is still a bit too sore – but you can talk!"

"What's with the getup?"

"All will be revealed," Saoirse teased as she helped her friend to stand up.

Without any warning, Anne-Marie yanked down Stephanie's knickers.

"Okay – I'm being stripped naked by an eight-year-old; I know SD goes in for that kind of thing, but I don't, and I didn't know you did, Anne-Marie: besides, aren't you a bit young for that kind of thing?" Stephanie asked her sister who just scowled.

The scowl quickly vanished as Anne-Marie took in the various scars on her sister's body.

"You're running out of space for more scars, Steph," Saoirse quipped to brighten the mood as she produced two items of material. Stephanie rolled her eyes and she grimaced.

"Talk about embarrassing!" she commented dryly.

"There's no way that you can wear a one-piece; so, you either go naked, topless, or you wear one of these," Saoirse pointed out quite reasonably.

"Okay, I suppose . . . thanks."

"It ties around your neck, so no having to thread your arms through anything."

"Mom picked blue – she said you'd like that," Anne-Marie added.

"You two swimming, too?"

Saoirse and Anne-Marie both pulled off their shorts and T-shirts to reveal that both wore two-piece swimsuits. Saoirse's was dark green and the top was more like a sports bra while the bottoms were very like skin-tight shorts. Anne-Marie's was typically that which would be worn by a young girl and was covered in flowers.

..._...

Stephanie was able to make her own way downstairs without any help and she smiled shyly as she found Dave, Mindy, and Danny lazily kicking their feet in the water as she entered the pool area.

"You look good in that, Steph," Dave commented as he swept the girl off her feet and then gently lowered her into the water so she could stand on the bottom of the pool.

"Woah – warmer than usual. . ." Stephanie commented.

"We turned the temperature up a bit, just for you," Mindy advised her eldest daughter as Anne-Marie jumped in followed by Saoirse who executed a perfect shallow dive and came up beside Dave.

"The water will help you to regain the use of your muscles and support you as you rehabilitate," Mindy explained as she slid into the water. "Start using your left arm more and . . . let's remove that support."

Mindy lifted the sling from around Stephanie's neck and then eased it off her right arm. Stephanie cringed with the pain and the ten-year-old bit her lip to stop from crying out.

"Try to move your elbow – slowly," Mindy instructed as she looked down at the arm with concern etched in her face.

"I can't; it hurts too much."

"You must," Mindy insisted as she gently took hold of Stephanie's right hand.

"You can do this, Steph," Saoirse added supportively as she stood beside her friend.

Stephanie dug deep down into herself for the energy to fight through the impending pain. Within her, she knew that everybody wanted her to succeed – she *had* to succeed if she ever wanted to be a vigilante again. She closed her eyes tightly and gripped Mindy's hand as tightly as she could. She willed her elbow to move. . .

Stephanie screamed out as her elbow began to straighten for the first time in over five weeks. Pain shot through the joint and then up her arm to her injured shoulder. She felt her legs buckle beneath her but then a strong arm wrapped itself around her waist to provide support and she looked up into the concerned face of her best friend.

"Thanks. . ."

"No sweat, Phase 2 reject!"

"Fuck this!" Stephanie growled. "I need to be able to kick your fucking arse!"

With that, she regained her footing and pushed Saoirse away. Stephanie gritted her teeth and focussed on a certain point ahead of her. She moved her right elbow and locked her arm fully extended. The whole arm shook while tears of pain and frustration ran down her face. After a few seconds, she moved her lower arm back across her stomach. Only then, did she lean into her friend for both the physical and mental support.

"Not bad," Mindy said as she led Stephanie over to the steps so that she could sit down.

Saoirse supported her friend until she was safely ensconced on the steps and then sat down beside her.

..._...

"That was progress, Steph – substantial progress," Saoirse said encouragingly.

"Hurt like hell. . ." Stephanie replied as she lazily moved her feet in the water.

"You're very brave, Steph," Dave said with a smile.

"Thanks, Dad. You too, Mum – and the rest of you; I love you all."

Mindy was genuinely speechless as she smiled at the ex-*Predator*.

"I couldn't do this without you all. You are all my family. You've all been so good to me; I don't deserve it, considering what I was. . . dammit; I so hate being helpless. . ."

Danny spoke first.

"I hate to hit girls; but she really needs a slap."

Stephanie laughed.

"Yes – I do need a slap," she admitted. "But if you fucking try it, boy. . ."

It was Danny's turn to laugh.

"I could put you down with my pinkie, right now, little girl," the eight-year-old pointed out quite reasonably.

"I would like to remind you that I put down an assassin a couple weeks ago."

Stephanie looked quizzical as Danny pointedly looked around the pool as if he was looking for something.

"What?" Stephanie demanded in a perplexed tone.

"I don't see no spoons."

Stephanie really did laugh at that comment – until her side hurt too much.

That evening

Glenview

"Steph, would you join us in the study, please?"

"Yes, Dad."

Stephanie had just awoken after a few hours' nap and she felt a little concerned as she made her way the few short yards to Mindy's study. Mindy was sitting behind her desk and Dave stood beside her. Stephanie was waved into a chair facing them both.

"Whatever it was – I don't think I did it. . ."

Mindy laughed.

"You're not in any trouble," Dave confirmed. "For a change. . ."

"Steph – we're here to discuss your future in *Fusion* and your future as *Psyche*," Mindy said.

Stephanie looked horrified.

"Please don't kick me out of *Fusion* – please. . ."

"Why do you think I would do that?"

"You kicked Chloe out . . . and she was your best friend."

"You may have noticed that she still is. Chloe ignored my orders; she put both herself and others at extreme risk. That is why I did what I did. You, though, you have done nothing wrong, Steph. You were wounded; that is an exceptional circumstance."

Stephanie looked relieved.

"There will be certain conditions for to obey and to follow – they will be *non-negotiable*," Mindy said coldly. "If you disobey or refuse to follow those conditions then to keep you safe, I will turn to extreme measures. If required, I will break your other arm – then your legs, one at a time. If it keeps you safe, then I will do it – whatever it takes, remember?"

Stephanie looked and felt scared but she was also resigned to her fate.

"I understand."

"Though we have not been together long, you are a true part of our little family, Stephanie. I know you have suffered a lot over the past weeks, but so have we. Each time you died, I couldn't bear to consider life without you. I realised that I loved you more than I could have ever believed. Saoirse was right when she said that you could really be my daughter – we do have a lot in common."

"Err, FYI," Dave interrupted. "That is not necessarily something to be proud of."

Mindy and Stephanie laughed.

"You know, Dad – I love you, but you can be such a geek!"

..._...

"Now – the rules," Mindy began. "You will not train when at home. You will rest whenever you at home. You will be allowed to wear your duty uniform and mask at Safehouse F. You will not be allowed to wear your combat suit. You will not leave Safehouse F unless myself or Dave give you permission. You will not go out into the field. We will allow you to learn to shoot left-handed – with a *small* pistol. But, if I have Dr Bennett on my back about you damaging anything while shooting or working with *Fusion*, guess who I will be visiting next with a baseball bat?"

Stephanie squirmed a bit in her seat.

"While you cannot take part in operations directly, you will be moved onto the Support Staff. As such, you will man the Kirk Chair when on duty. Your experience is invaluable, so, if I cannot use you as an operator, then I will use your experience and skills to provide guidance and support to those who are out on the streets. As such, we are going to give you a temporary promotion to Operator, so that you can take command of operations. You will work for Marty and Abby."

Stephanie nodded her approval.

"I expect you to show some maturity and professionalism when you are on duty. Due to your injuries, and your meds, you will tire easily. As such, you will take breaks and you will get some sleep. If you do not – I come visiting with that baseball bat. Marty has made arrangements for a couch to be placed in the Command Center – he's wanted one there for ages and you provided the excuse. As such, there will be a quilt and a pillow reserved for your use only."

Stephanie felt a lot happier. She hated being relegated to the sidelines, but at least she would be on the spot to see what was going on.

That same evening

Central Chicago

"Are you Sergeant Fellowes?"

Sam looked up from his sandwich and he turned towards the voice to find a young girl standing at the window of his SUV.

"Yes, I am – can I help you, young lady?"

The young girl hesitated and she seemed very unsure for a moment but then she braced up and spoke.

"I need to speak to Hit Girl."

"Why would you come to me for that?"

"You're a 'Fusion Cop'; you can get a message to Hit Girl."

"Maybe I can. What is it about?"

"I can't say, but it concerns Hit Girl and FEAR. I also need the utmost confidentiality."

Sam scowled as FEAR was mentioned.

"Okay – give me your name."

"My name is Kelly Wright."

***Two days later
Tuesday, August 9th***

Safehouse F

It was Stephanie's first evening at the Safehouse in weeks.

Even better, she was wearing her uniform with the twin vertical silver bars of an Operator. She felt ultra-smug as she entered the Command Centre for the first time in just as many weeks. The whole place felt different but it also felt like home. The constant humming, the smell of gun oil, the smell of engine oil, the smell of sweat as *Fusion* members sparred on the mat or exercised close by. One difference was the compact .22-calibre pistol which hung on her left hip, as opposed to her right. It felt different, but *Predators* trained to use their non-dominant hand in combat, so it was no major issue; it would just take some getting used to. Abby smirked as Stephanie strode in.

"You look ready for this," she commented.

"I am – it's great to be back."

"It's good to have you back, Psyche – even if it does mean more immature behaviour from the lower ranks!"

"I can be mature . . . I just choose not to," Stephanie responded with a cheeky grin and Abby laughed.

"Okay – we have special 'girls-only' mission, tonight – seal up the Command Centre, please, Psyche."

Stephanie strode up to the 'Kirk Chair' which sat on a raised platform from where the occupant could oversee every screen and display in the high-tech facility. Stephanie logged onto the eight-inch touch screen which was embedded at a 45-degree angle into the right-hand arm of the chair. She accessed the security settings and with a single swipe, the access door was sealed and the steel security shutters closed within the twin pane glazing which formed the two inner walls of the Command Centre. Once 'sealed up', the space was all but impregnable. Nobody could see in, and nobody could get in.

"Sealed up and all electronic countermeasures armed," Stephanie reported, instantly all business.

That same time

Central Chicago

Kelly Wright was collected by Sam Fellowes and driven around in a seemingly random pattern for almost forty-minutes before she was dropped off, after dark, outside a dingy looking warehouse.

"Go in that door," he ordered. "Good luck."

Kelly watched as the unmarked police car drove off leaving her standing beside the dismal looking warehouse. She took a deep breath, exhaled, and headed for the single steel door. On pulling it open and stepping through, she found herself in total darkness as the door clanged shut behind her.

"Over here!" came an electronic voice out of the darkness.

Kelly moved towards the voice and after about fifty yards, she found herself dazzled by super bright lights.

"Stop!" she was ordered.

She stopped dead and a shape appeared – more of a silhouette than a shape – and another voice was heard.

"Who are you?" the electronic voice demanded.

"My name is Kelly Wright. . ."

"What do you want?"

"I have information for Hit Girl. . ."

"Hold your arms out to your sides and slowly turn around."

Kelly did as she was ordered, holding her arms out parallel to the ground and she slowly turned around before she found herself facing the bright lights again.

"You have information for Hit Girl?"

"I do – who am I talking to?"

"Shadow. Before we take you to Hit Girl you we must be certain that you are not being tracked and that you not carrying any weapons."

"I have nothing, I promise."

"We'll be the judge of that . . . Strip!" came the next command.

"What!" Kelly demanded hoping that she had somehow misheard the command.

"Strip to the skin . . . or get the fuck outta here!"

Kelly heard a bone-chilling snarl from out of the darkness which unnerved her greatly. She knew that she had to get her information to Hit Girl and she understood the risks they were taking just by listening to her – so she complied. She found it hard, especially in full view of at least one other person. Kelly pulled off her jacket . . .

"Hand each item to Nightmare," came the order as a shorter than usual vigilante stepped foot into the light and took her jacket. After a brief check of the jacket, Nightmare placed the item carefully down on the floor.

Kelly unbuttoned and pulled off her blouse where it was then swiftly taken from her hand. Next came her shoes, socks, and then her jeans. She felt cold and humiliated as she stood in the bright lights wearing only her bra and knickers.

"Keep it coming. . ."

The voice was polite, but insistent. Kelly hesitated for a moment before she reached behind her back and undid her bra, dropping it to the floor. Before she could be prompted, her knickers followed.

"Arms out to your sides and turn around slowly."

Kelly did so, fully aware that she was completely naked and that her body was bathed in dazzling white light for all to see – which, she assumed, was the point.

"Stand still – arms out."

Nightmare came out of the darkness and she waved a wand-scanner over Kelly's body from head to toe; first her front, and then her back.

"Spread your legs – keep your arms out."

Kelly reluctantly did as she was ordered and she watched as Nightmare checked her armpits and then knelt down to check between her legs.

"Spread your labia, please," Nightmare ordered.

Kelly did so, and Nightmare shone a flashlight up inside her vagina.

"Get in the vehicle!" Nightmare ordered when she was satisfied. Nightmare had never touched Kelly's naked body during the entire search but Kelly still felt violated.

"My clothes. . ."

"Get in the vehicle!" Nightmare repeated as she waved Kelly forwards.

The still naked Kelly pulled open the rear door on the left side of the SUV and she climbed up onto the leather seat which was cold to the touch on her bare skin. Nightmare finished stuffing her clothing into a clear plastic bag that had wires interwoven through it. The bag was then placed in the rear compartment of the SUV.

"Eisenhower!"

A large dog clad in body-armour ran out of the darkness and jumped into the rear compartment of the vehicle before the door was closed.

"Move over."

Kelly moved over to allow Nightmare to climb in and she was handed a package.

"Put them on."

The package held a pair of joggers and a sweatshirt. Kelly did not hesitate and she pulled both on, quickly covering up her naked body. Once she was dressed, Nightmare turned to Kelly.

"One more thing. . ."

Nightmare pulled a black bag over Kelly's head.

A short while later

West 78th Street

"What is this place?" Nemesis asked as she climbed out of the SUV.

"Safehouse Alpha," Shadow replied curtly. "Get our guest out."

Kelly found herself hauled out of the SUV – she still had the bag over her head as she was led, bare foot, across a rough concrete floor which was very cold. She heard a beeping sound, then the sound of a door opening. She was pulled onto rough carpet which was much warmer under her feet. The door shut behind her, there was another beep and another door opened. She was then led, still on rough carpet, a distance before she heard another beep before she was pushed through another door and then she felt cold metal under her feet. Was she in an elevator?

Yes – the floor moved downwards and stopped after barely ten seconds.

Safehouse F

The entire strip search at the warehouse had been watched by Hal and Psyche – no male had been present in the Command Centre at Safehouse F and the security shutters had been closed for Kelly's privacy. During the drive to the Safehouse, Hal and Psyche had scrutinised the images to ensure that the girl was clean – from an electronic point of view.

"Is she clear?" Hit Girl asked from Alpha.

"All clear, Hit Girl," Psyche responded.

Safehouse Alpha Main Level

As the hood was pulled off, Kelly blinked in the harsh lighting.

She was in a comfortable living area, with couches and chairs. The walls were covered by what appeared to be curtains and Kelly could not see a doorway. Then she stiffened . . . sitting just a few feet away from her was a masked woman wearing a dark grey uniform. She bore a single silver star on her collar and a name tag: **HIT GIRL**.

"I will not apologise for your treatment – it was necessary," Hit Girl commented in an electronically enhanced voice.

"I understand – you have no reason to trust me," Kelly hesitated. "To be honest, I am about to give you a reason to kill me – if you so wished."

Hit Girl pulled out a small tablet computer and she began to read.

"Kelly Wright. Date of birth: 27th November 1998. You are an American National. You live at 2275 Winnetka Road, Glenview. Your parents are both deceased. You live with your elder sister: Katrina. Am I correct?"

"You are!" Kelly exclaimed, a little surprised at how knowledgeable Hit Girl was.

"Continue . . . please."

Kelly took a deep breath.

"I think my sister is involved with FEAR."

"Think?"

"Every time something has gone down – she's been out there. After the silos, she came back badly hurt and soaking wet. Since, then, she's come back covered in bruises. She says that *you* killed my father, in New York. My mother died from a broken heart. I don't believe in what my sister is doing; it is wrong. I believe in the good that you bring to this city. My father was a bad person and I don't blame you for killing him. I'm scared that my sister will drag me into her world and I don't want that. Will you help me?"

"How do we know that we can trust you?" Hit Girl asked casually.

Two hours later

***Safehouse Alpha
Lower Level***

Mindy sat in a chair in the conference room looking up at the eighty-inch screen on one wall which was split into four.

"*Well, we can't keep her confined for ever,*" Marty offered quite reasonably from one of the four sections.

"No – but is she what she says she is?" Mindy persisted.

"*She's not lying,*" Stephanie commented from the top-right portion.

"*I agree,*" Cathy added from below Stephanie.

"*Me too,*" Saoirse chipped in from the final quarter.

"Okay – how do we use her?" Chloe cut in from the other side of the long, ten-seat, polished-mahogany conference table.

Stephanie smiled.

"Go ahead, Steph," Mindy directed.

"*SD? How about we turn her into a double-agent – it'd allow us to monitor her?*"

"*Yes, that might work,*" SD agreed.

"It would give us time to work out if we can trust her," Chloe concluded.

Safehouse Alpha

Main Level

"Leave us!"

Nightmare left the holding area where Kelly Wright sat in a cell with the door open.

"Kelly – we have a proposition for you. It will be a dangerous tasking, but essential if you want us to trust you. You will be protected – I always protect those who assist me."

Kelly took a moment to think, but she knew that she had no choice – none, none at all.

"You want me to spy on my sister?"

"Can you do that? It would mean getting involved in what she is doing without tipping her off – not easy."

"I can do it – I must."

Hit Girl stood up and she waved Kelly towards the door.

"Go – Shadow will take you back to the warehouse where your clothing will be returned to you."

"Thank you, Hit Girl."

"Oh, Kelly? You fuck me over. . ."

Kelly swallowed hard and she felt chills racing up her backbone.

***Chapter 307*: A Searching**

The following evening

Wednesday, August 10th, 2016

Safehouse F

In light of the previous evening's activities, Mindy and Kim had put their heads together and come up with a night's training that would seem unorthodox to some, but normal for Mindy.

Kim turned to the assembled *Fusion* members in the briefing room.

"Okay, we have a very different form of training today. Some of you will enjoy it, some of you will not. Others of you may see it as particularly disgusting. Mindy and I thought long and hard about who we would ask to take part. In the end, we decided on volunteers – therefore, we have four youngsters who have given their time, and also their dignity, to help you all learn a serious and very important skill. A word of warning to you all: anybody who disrupts this training session by introducing lewd behaviour or anything else which makes things more difficult for the four volunteers than it already will be, will *seriously* regret their actions – *I fuck with you, not.*"

There were many looks of confusion around the room.

"Okay," Kim went on. "A scenario: *Fusion* has the requirement to bring somebody into a Safehouse. That person would be an unknown – yes, we can do background checks, but in most cases, we have no way to be one-hundred-percent certain. Right now, *Fusion* is at a high state of readiness in the current threat environment. Any person we bring in could be threat, so we would need to ensure that he, or she, would not be a danger to every member of *Fusion* once they arrived here. Why?"

"They could have a bomb?" Lizzie offered tentatively.

"Very good, Torment!"

Lizzie grinned, enjoying the praise.

"They could be attempting to infiltrate," Tommy offered.

Mindy's expression went very cold at that comment.

"Yes, Splinter – a very high chance of that. So, we need to put in place some simple measure that could save a lot of lives if somebody were determined to infiltrate and cause massive harm to our organisation. What might we do to that person?"

"Kill them!" Christina offered with a deadpan expression.

"Definitely an option, Venom – but let's say that the cunt has some information for us."

"Search 'em," Lauren stated.

"Good, Nightmare. To what level might we search them, Nightmare?"

"Completely – a strip-search," the thirteen-year-old replied fully aware that she had already performed such a search, but knowing that she was sworn to secrecy about Kelly.

"Well done! Tonight, you are all going to learn how to perform a total strip-search of a person. Normally, we would search a person using two people of the same sex. Remember, not everybody we might search would be an enemy. They may be a friendly and as such, we should show them maximum deference. No matter how gentle or polite we are with a strip-search, it will always be humiliating, embarrassing, and for females especially: degrading. In the case of our volunteers, they have agreed to allow the opposite sex to view them as they strip."

There were a few smirks as the news sunk into brains – the boys, especially, had no issue watching an impromptu strip show. Kim was onto them all in a flash.

"Before any of you get any ideas – this is *not* a sexual thing, and I assure you, these four young people will *not* see it as such so I expect you all to treat them with the respect they deserve as your friends, or so help me God, I will make

sure you suffer. Saoirse – we start with you. . ."

All faces turned in surprise to Saoirse as she stood up and walked towards the front, a look of foreboding on her face. In the seat, beside her, an angry looking Morgan glared after her sister.

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Once Saoirse was standing before everybody, Kim began to speak.

"First, we pat the subject down – hold your arms out to your sides, please," Kim commented as she ran both hands along Saoirse's arms and then down the fifteen-year-old's sides, back and front. "Boys, don't be afraid to run your hands over the breasts and between the legs – Chrissy, you and Sarah can play doctors later; please pay attention."

Sarah gently slapped Chrissy's left hand which shot away from Sarah's crotch. Kim ignored them and ran her hands around Saoirse's pelvis, front and back, and then down her long legs.

"Okay – she's not got anything obviously hidden. Therefore, we move onto the strip-search. Give the searchee the opportunity to comply willingly to your orders: Saoirse – please remove your clothing, one item at a time, and pass each item to me."

There was total silence in the open space as Saoirse pulled off her sweatshirt before she passed it to Kim. Many pairs of eyes stared at Saoirse and watched every movement.

"Check the seams of each item of clothing – something may be sown into the garment. A repair is never usually as good as the original stitching. Once the garment has been checked, place it to one side."

Kim dropped the sweatshirt into a small plastic tub before taking Saoirse's proffered T-shirt. Saoirse's cheeks were now visibly pink as she stood in front of dozens of eyes with just a navy-blue bra covering her modesty above the waist. Plainly visible to all was the tattoo of a combined raven and fox on her left side, just below her left breast and continuing under her left arm. She ignored the looks as she knelt down and removed both her sneakers, passing the shoes to Kim who checked each item before they joined the other items of clothing. Kim checked the pair of white socks next and quickly sent them after the shoes. Saoirse hesitated for a moment as she saw that everybody was watching her – Sarah smiled encouragingly and Saoirse smiled as she blanked out the staring faces, just as she had done on the *Predator* stage with Sarah, many months before.

Saoirse pulled at her belt and she released the button on her jeans. She pushed the jeans down to her ankles and stepped out of them, passing the pants to Kim. She felt very exposed in her matching navy-blue panties and bra. Every eye was on her body. For a moment she was freaked out, but then she had a thought: she was wearing about as much as she wore when she went swimming, so why was she worried? She smiled at herself, relieving the tension, just before Kim spoke the fateful words.

"Remove the bra."

Saoirse visualised herself on the stage with Sarah as she reached behind her back and unclipped her bra. She allowed the warm garment to fall into her hands and then with only a slight hesitation, she passed it to Kim.

"Woah – beautiful nipples," Tommy breathed as his eyes almost popped out of his head, then he blushed wildly. "Sorry. . ."

Saoirse laughed at the compliment as she instinctively attempted to cover up her breasts but then she gave up as Kim moved on.

"The panties."

Necks were visibly craning for a better look as the madly blushing Saoirse took a deep breath before she inserted her thumbs into the waistband of her navy-blue panties and then pushed them down her long shapely legs, past the fox tattoo. Saoirse stepped out of the last vestiges of her dignity and then stood up straight with her hands at her sides making no attempt to cover herself up; she was not ashamed of her body, despite the embarrassment of parading completely naked in front of all her friends.

There was total silence in the briefing room as everybody gazed up at the very beautiful, but very naked young girl.

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Saoirse's blue eyes twinkled as she studied the assembled audience before her.

They appeared transfixed by her body as she stood before them. Saoirse felt the heat of the redness which covered her from her hairline, down to the tops of her exposed breasts. Saoirse also felt the cool air of the air-conditioning as it flowed down her body and across her pink nipples which stuck out, fully hardened. The look of abject horror on the young Lizzie's face showed that she had seen the nipples as they had hardened. The cool air had continued down Saoirse's perfect body and across the perfectly flat stomach before entering her thick inverted triangle of deep brown pubic hair which hid her feminine parts from outside view. Saoirse had never felt so aroused as she was at the moment, despite the humiliation. She had expected to feel humiliated but instead, there were many approving looks of support for what she was doing which lessened the humiliation to a tolerable level.

"You have a very beautiful body, Saoirse," Kim commented as she broke the deafening silence. "Now, the next step is to run a wand-scanner across the subject's body – top to bottom, front and back. The wand will pick up any transmissions, metal items, as well as certain explosives or chemicals. Once that step is complete, we can now check that Saoirse has nothing hidden on, or in, her body. For women, we need to search under the breasts. . ."

Saoirse lifted each of her ample breasts in turn, revealing the pale skin underneath. She bit her lip as she did so as lifting each breast had necessitated running her hands over her stiffened, and very sensitive, nipples.

". . . After the breasts, we need to begin with the mouth, ears, and hair. . ."

Saoirse opened her mouth and she rolled back her tongue so Kim could check her mouth. Saoirse then tipped her head to one side, then the other so Kim was able to check in her ears. Saoirse reached up and she removed the bobble from her chestnut brown hair, letting it fall across her naked shoulders.

"Next, we come to the feet. . ."

Saoirse turned around so that everybody got a good look at her fox tattoo and her well-proportioned bottom. In turn, she lifted each foot so that the sole could be checked as well as the spaces between her toes which she wiggled to show that nothing was there.

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Kim directed Saoirse to extend her arms out to the sides and to turn around slowly.

"Check under the arms and pay close attention to body hair which could conceal a dangerous item. For women that will generally be the pubic hair around the vulva. Some people have thick pubic hair, like Saoirse, while others have thinner, lighter hair which makes hiding something much more difficult and much easier to spot. Two more places to check," Kim continued. "While Saoirse is facing away from us, we will ask her to bend over and part her butt cheeks so that we can check the anus for anything hidden."

"Ewww!" Anne-Marie muttered and there were several other scowls of disdain.

Saoirse bent over and with her hands, she pulled her butt cheeks apart. Saoirse really felt the humiliation at that moment; nobody had ever seen that part of her before – not since she was in nappies, anyway. She also felt incredibly degraded but she knew that worse was yet to come as Kim spoke again.

"Thank you, Saoirse . . . now the final part and then you can get dressed. Please stand up and turn to face me. Mindy?"

Mindy brought a chair over and she placed it behind the naked Saoirse. Mindy noticed the tears building in the girl's eyes as she fought through the humiliation of showing everybody her asshole. Mindy rested her hand on the bare shoulder and then spoke soothingly into Saoirse's ear.

"You're doing brilliantly and I think you're very brave."

Saoirse smiled but she still felt very apprehensive as Kim directed her to sit down on the chair. Two rows back, next to where she had been sitting, Saoirse saw her best friend sitting next to Anne-Marie. Stephanie's expression was mixed. There was support for her, but there was also some anger growing. Saoirse smiled at Stephanie who smiled back with encouragement giving her the strength which she needed to continue.

"Women have one more location that needs to be checked. This is going to be very hard for Saoirse, so please support her. Every female has a vagina. . ."

Lauren, Lizzie, Anne-Marie, and Morgan all went very red as they visibly sank down in their chairs. Danny and Tommy were both wide eyed as they stared at Saoirse and then their eyes dropped to the mass of hair between the girl's legs.

". . . the vagina can accommodate large objects . . . if you're lucky!" Kim went on and there was a ripple of uneasy laughter. "Saoirse, would you please spread your legs . . . thank you . . . now pull back your labia so we can see inside your vagina."

Saoirse struggled with the act but she closed her eyes and reached down between her own legs and she gently eased back her labia, exposing the most private parts of her body to all.

"You will find it easier to use a flashlight to see inside . . ."

"That is so gross," Anne-Marie commented.

". . . if the woman is on her period, then she may have a tampon inserted into her vagina. If so, you can ask the woman to remove it to see properly inside the vagina."

Lizzie, Morgan, and Anne-Marie visibly cringed at every mention of 'vagina'.

"Thank you, Saoirse. You can now get dressed – Cathy, if you please. . ."

Cathy came forwards, handed Saoirse a large towel, and picked up the tub of clothes. They both headed out of the briefing room.

"A round of applause, please."

There was an enormous cheer from all those present and Saoirse blushed wildly.

The Galley

Stephanie followed her friend and Cathy into the galley – she was incensed.

"That was cruel!"

"Steph – I volunteered for that. I knew what was going to happen – Kim tried to persuade me against the last bits but I insisted. They needed to see a full strip-search in all its dubious glory."

"I saw the tears, SD – you hated it."

"The little monster has a very valid point, sis – you did hate it."

Saoirse turned to see a grim-faced Morgan slip into the galley.

"Not as much as I thought I would – I enjoyed everybody looking at my body," Saoirse replied as she dropped the towel and reached for her panties.

"Kim was right, SD – you do have a beautiful body," Stephanie admitted with a shy grin.

"Thanks, Steph."

"I'll leave you three together," Cathy said compassionately. "Look after Saoirse, Steph."

"Yes, ma'am!"

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"I don't need looking after," Saoirse commented after Cathy had gone.

"You've just done something which you must have found really traumatic . . . I care, SD," Stephanie retorted.

"Me, too," Morgan added. "Why the hell did you not tell me about today? You've been through so much – I could have done it instead; and I would have . . ."

Saoirse laughed out loud.

"Morgan, I really do love you; you're my sister, but you're also fucking dense at times. As Raven, you are brave as hell; but get you to take your clothes off – you're too damn shy . . ."

"I had a bad childhood," Morgan offered rather weakly, at least she thought so.

Saoirse smiled.

"I know you both care for me. Steph . . . you know I love you for it; you're a good friend – the best I've ever had. Morgan . . . I'm a big girl now and I can look after myself. I don't need you two chasing after me."

Morgan grinned shyly.

"I know Stephanie said that you had a beautiful body, but I have to admit that when I saw inside you – well, that was *totally* gross. . ."

Saoirse laughed as she secured her bra behind her back.

"You've never seen inside yourselves?"

Morgan shook her head as her cheeks turned a dark shade of pink.

"Never – ewww!" Stephanie replied

"Steph – behind your front doors, you and me – Morgan, too – we are all very much the same. Over the next few years, you're going to grow into a beautiful girl."

"Let's get back to the action, huh?" Stephanie suggested. "I hate this talk about puberty and shit – get the rest of your kit back on. . ."

"I'm with the little monster," Morgan added as she handed Saoirse her sweatshirt.

Meanwhile . . .

Mindy glared at the assembled audience in the briefing room.

"Saoirse did not enjoy what she just did – I want you all to show her the respect that she deserves as your friend and your partner. If any one of you gives her a hard time over what she did for you, or any of these three, for that matter; you will feel my vengeance."

Mindy's glare was so serious and menacing that Anne-Marie flinched away and cuddled into her brother who had flinched away too. Marc broke the silence.

"Is it too late to un-volunteer?"

Mindy smiled.

"Of course not, Marc. This is voluntary and you can walk away at any time. You have already shown your courage by volunteering in the first place – either that or you're just as fucking nuts as every other damn *Predator* around here!"

Marc laughed and he thought about that for a moment before he responded.

"If a *girl* can do it, then so can I."

Mindy laughed.

"Good on you, Marc."

"Ah, Stephanie!" Kim called out.

The girl paused as she re-entered the briefing room with Saoirse and Morgan.

"You can get to fuck, Kim. I ain't getting stripped."

"We've all seen you naked, anyways," Anne-Marie chimed in. "Not much to see, really, although you do seem to be poking out a bit and maybe a bra might be an idea."

"Precisely," Stephanie growled as her face turned pink before she turned on her little sister. "Just one more, you little rat!" Stephanie then turned on Mindy who grinned. "You and me, we are going to talk!"

Kim laughed.

"No, Steph – I just thought that *you* might like to strip young Marc."

Stephanie looked over at the unfortunate boy; he scowled.

"Ooooh – yes, please!"

"You're getting me back for Megan, aren't you?" Marc groaned.

"Never crossed my mind," Stephanie replied innocently as she smiled deviously.

Kim looked over at Saoirse as the girl slipped into her seat.

"You okay?"

"Yes – I'm fine, thank you."

"Let's continue then – Marc is going to be stripped by Stephanie to demonstrate the differences of strip-searching a male subject."

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"Err – Mindy?"

Mindy turned to see who had spoken – she was very surprised to see the girl seated next to Saoirse stand up. Saoirse frowned up at her big sister.

"Mindy – could I be next . . . please."

"Are you absolutely sure, Morgan?" Mindy enquired.

"You are one fucked up bird!" Saoirse commented from her seat as she rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Shut up, Foxy, there's a good girl!" Morgan retorted without turning away from Mindy. "Please – I need to . . . Saoirse was brave – I can be just as brave."

Mindy sighed and she looked over at Kim who simply shrugged. Mindy waved Morgan forwards and Marc breathed a sigh of relief before sitting back down beside Tommy. Stephanie returned to her seat beside Anne-Marie.

"Yeah – shut up, Foxy!" she laughed in Saoirse's ear.

Saoirse just growled as she glared at her sister. Morgan was wearing her uniform with a pistol on her right hip. Her first act was to pull the pistol from the holster and eject the magazine, then lock back the action to show the empty breech. She handed both items to Mindy who then handed them off to Chloe. All eyes then turned on the sixteen-year-old who looked down at Saoirse with an imploring expression.

"Oh, for fuck's sake – stupid bird!" Saoirse growled as she stood up and returned to the front of the room where she turned to face everybody. "Okay, I'm back to strip-search my braindead sister. You wanna be brave? Show us what you can do, Raven – get your clothes off . . . now!"

Morgan began to remove her uniform, piece by piece.

Morgan went bright red as she struggled to cope with her emotions.

What she was doing was nothing like that night in Saoirse's bedroom, in almost total darkness. She was actually undressing in front of over a dozen people – male and female – and she was not going to stop until she was completely naked. Her mind was screaming out one word: STOP! The only thing preventing Morgan from following

that advice was that part of her which everybody called Raven. As Raven, she was unstoppable and capable of almost anything. As Morgan, she was timid as the proverbial mouse. That was something which she hated. She loved how sure of herself, Saoirse was – Morgan wanted that assuredness for herself.

First off, came the jacket – that was easy; there was much worse to come, Morgan knew. As she handed the jacket to Saoirse she saw the compassionate look crossed with the annoyed look which Saoirse often wore when Morgan did something silly. However, the supportive smile helped Morgan to continue with her task. Under her jacket, she wore a white 'Fusion' T-shirt and removing that was going to be one of the most difficult things that she had ever done.

'I've overcome much worse,' Morgan thought. 'I've defeated grown men who tried to kill me – grown men who had already killed my parents.'

She grinned sheepishly at Saoirse before she pulled the T-shirt over her head, revealing a plain white sports bra which wasn't all that much different in tone compared to Morgan's very pale skin. Many pairs of eyes stared at her, or more particularly, they stared at the combined raven and fox tattoo on her right side, just below her right breast and continuing under her right arm, but the looks were friendly and full of encouragement. As she knelt down to untie her boots, she heard murmurings and she realised that the boys on the front row were checking out her cleavage. She felt her face reddening even further which caused her to fumble her laces and she had to stop to take a deep breath.

"Slow down – you're doing fine," Saoirse whispered from above her.

In all reality, she was anything but 'fine' – her nerves were about to come apart but she willed those nerves down inside her and she brought Raven to the fore. As she handed her boots to Saoirse, she pulled off her black socks and chucked them at her sister.

"I ain't got all day, Foxy!"

There was laughter as a disgruntled Saoirse scrambled for the socks before adding them to the pile of clothing in the plastic tub. She smirked, knowing that Raven was currently stripping – not Morgan Hella. The belt came off next and Morgan undid the button at the top of her dark grey pants. In hindsight, she wished that she had selected some more flattering underwear but stripping before an audience had never featured on the day's itinerary.

Morgan saw Curtis and Tommy leaning forwards on their chairs as she began to slide the pants past her thighs and towards her knees. She closed her eyes for a moment before pushing the pants down to the ground and stepping out of them. She almost felt too scared to open her eyes as she felt the cool air rush around her bare legs, bare arms, and bare stomach. She opted to keep her eyes tightly closed as she reached up to pull off her sports bra. Just as the garment came over her head, she heard a pair of large crashes and she opened her eyes to see Tommy and Curtis looking up at her with wide eyes – evidently, they had both fallen off the fronts of their chairs as they had leaned forwards in eager anticipation of some breast and nipple action.

There was laughter from those watching – all aimed at the two very embarrassed boys. Morgan – or rather Raven – smirked down at Curtis then threw the sports bra at his head. Curtis picked it up as he returned to his seat.

"Way bigger than Megan's!" he commented before he yelled out as the eleven-year-old in the seat behind slapped him around the head.

After more laughter, which stopped quickly as Morgan glared at them all, her hands resolutely placed on her hips, B-cup breasts and rapidly hardening, cherry red nipples on full display.

"My show – not those two dumb fucks!" Morgan growled.

"Go, Morgan!" Hailee called out in support of her friend.

"You boys wanna see more?"

Tommy just squeaked in response as Morgan pushed down the white boy-shorts that she wore. Saoirse rolled her eyes and muttered under her breath as Morgan took her sweet time sliding the underwear down her shapely hips, revealing more skin and then bit by bit, copious amounts of blonde pubic hair were revealed to all – the bitch was enjoying it, she thought.

"There we go, Foxy – all bare," Morgan teased as she held out her underwear on a single finger.

"Morgan – you're making nutcases like me and Steph seem so fucking normal right now!" Saoirse laughed as she deposited the underwear in the tub.

Quickly, Saoirse picked up the wand-scanner and she took it up the front of Morgan and then down the back. Morgan released her hair from single ponytail and she allowed Saoirse to check her ears and armpits. Morgan hesitated when Saoirse pointed at her breasts but she dutifully lifted them before letting them go. Then Saoirse motioned for her to turn around and face the wall. Morgan bit her lip as she turned away to face the wall. That was when the tears came and she returned to being just Morgan Hella. Without any hesitation, she bent forwards and pulled apart her buttocks.

"Feet," Saoirse said quickly.

With relief, Morgan released her backside and lifted one foot before the other, wriggling her toes. Then she moved over towards the chair which sat exactly where Saoirse had left it.

"You don't have to do this," Saoirse said quietly.

"Stop telling me what I don't have to do, okay?" Morgan hissed back, anger in her tone.

Saoirse backed off as Morgan sat down and spread her legs – tears were running down the girl's face as she reached down and she spread her labia for all to see inside.

Morgan barely noticed a towel being wrapped around her naked body and then being led out of the briefing room and down towards the galley.

There was total silence in the briefing room as Morgan was led out by Saoirse and Cathy.

"I know my eyes tell me different," Curtis said, "but that girl has balls!"

There was a chorus of agreement from all those present followed by enormous applause for Morgan. It was time to get things back on track, so Kim waved a grimacing Marc forwards, along with a smirking Stephanie.

"Get a move on Marc – strip!" Stephanie ordered as she waited impatiently for him to remove his sweatshirt.

"I thought Megan was bad!" Marc quipped.

"You ain't seen nothing yet," Stephanie grinned. "Fear me!"

Stephanie seized the sweatshirt and after a cursory check, she threw it into the empty plastic tub.

"Hey! Don't I get my clothes folded?" Marc complained.

"I've only got one arm, doofus. . ."

A ripple of laughter echoed around the room as Marc's face went pink. He quickly pulled off his T-shirt, toed off his sneakers and pulled off his socks. His jeans followed to join the rest of his clothing in a rather messy pile overflowing from the tub.

"Boxers, too. . ." Stephanie ordered with a smirk then she looked at Megan seated next to Chloe. "We going to see anything impressive?"

"It was nothing special, the last time I saw it, but that was a few months ago," Megan replied.

"He's not badly hung," Sarah shouted out before sinking back into her chair, her face very red.

Marc's face was turning just as red as he shoved his boxers down and off, almost throwing them at the smirking Stephanie. Stephanie looked down at his groin.

"Not too bad – not that I've got anything to compare it to," Stephanie commented.

"Moving on. . ." Marc suggested.

"With boys and men, instead of lifting the breasts to see what may be underneath, we need to check under the penis and the scrotum instead," Kim explained. "We also need to check under the foreskin for those who are uncircumcised."

"Lift it, Marc" Stephanie ordered with a smirk.

Marc did so as he rolled his eyes.

"Balls. . ."

Marc lifted his balls so that Stephanie could see beneath. Stephanie peered underneath for a moment before she nodded and Marc let everything go.

"Err. . ." Stephanie paused and she went red in the face as she looked up at Kim.

"Marc – please pull back your foreskin," Kim directed.

Marc looked very embarrassed as he did as he was directed. Anne-Marie turned to her brother.

"Does yours do that, too?" she asked innocently.

Danny, whose face was rapidly turning pink, scowled at his twin.

"Yes – it does; not that it is any business of yours," he retorted.

"Just asking – I know very little about your thingy, except that it sticks out when you play with it and you get angry when I hit you there," Anne-Marie said stiffly.

Mindy couldn't help laughing as the twins bickered.

"Stephanie?" Mindy directed and Stephanie nodded in response.

Stephanie motioned for Marc to turn around. She ran her eyes across the thirteen-year-old's body as he turned. Marc showed off the soles of his feet as he went around.

"Let's get the creepy bit over, Marc – your arse, please," Stephanie ordered and Marc turned around again and bent over, pulling his butt cheeks apart.

"Yuck!" Stephanie growled. "Thanks, Marc – you're all done . . . you enjoying this?"

Stephanie scowled at the boy as she saw his dick move and it pointed directly at her.

"I'm going to go get dressed . . ." Marc muttered as he grabbed his clothes and dashed out of the room accompanied by loud laughter.

The galley

"You are certifiable!"

"Not now, SD – *please*."

I can understand that you had something to prove, but fucking hell!"

"That was very brave, Morgan," Cathy said as Morgan finished pulling on her uniform.

"Thank you, Cathy."

There was a gentle tapping on the door and Chloe stuck her head in.

"Come in, Chloe," Morgan said.

"You okay?"

"I am – it was humiliating, but exhilarating . . . I think."

"Tell me about it – my first public nudity was . . . liberating, I suppose," Chloe commented with a sly grin towards her mother as she handed Morgan her pistol and magazine. "I need to get back – I have a Megan to humiliate!"

Chloe ran out of the door.

"I suppose we should go see what the little kitty looks like naked," Saoirse commented.

***Chapter 308*: Tempest and Stormtide**

Wednesday, August 10th, 2016

Safehouse F

As Morgan, Saoirse, and Cathy entered the briefing room, all attention was on the eleven-year-old girl, who was just six weeks short of her twelfth birthday.

"You don't have to do this, Megan."

"I know. I trust Chloe – I'll be fine. Thanks for worrying, Kim."

"Knock 'em dead, Wildcat!" Kim replied before she turned towards the eager audience. "Now – we have some role-playing for our next bit of entertainment," Kim explained as she turned back to the assembled *Fusion* members. "Megan will pretend to be an obnoxious bitch who hates being told what to do."

"You mean she'll just be her normal self," Paige chuckled from the back of the room which caused a wave of laughter around the briefing room and lifted the mood.

"Nice – thanks, Mom!"

"Anything for my little girl."

"Chloe!" Kim called out and the veteran vigilante came forward and stopped two feet in front of Megan.

"Megan?"

"What the fuck do you want, you steaming hussy?"

"I am going to ask you to undress so we can ensure you are not hiding anything dangerous," Chloe replied calmly.

"Like that's gonna fuckin' happen . . ."

"Last chance to co-operate, Megan," Chloe continued with a smile.

Megan raised her right hand and then her middle finger.

"Stick that up your fucking twat, bitch!"

Chloe seized the extended arm and she spun the younger girl around and threw her to the floor with very little outward effort. Megan yelled out but then all the breath was knocked out of her as she hit the briefing room floor. Chloe swiftly subdued the struggling Megan with a knee to the lower back and then took hold of Megan's wrists in one hand while she held up her right to Joshua.

"Cuffs, Josh!"

Joshua handed over a set of steel handcuffs which Chloe did not hesitate to secure around Megan's wrists.

"Get these bracelets off me, you fucking lesbian, before I . . ."

Chloe slapped a piece of Duct Tape over Megan's mouth.

"One Kitty silenced!" she quipped as she reached down to her right ankle and produced a large knife.

..._...

"Megan is refusing to be stripped of her own accord, so Chloe will do it for her," Kim explained. "Once you have secured the subject, you should pull on some rubber gloves, then use a knife to cut away the clothing. . ."

Chloe did exactly that, as she pulled on a pair of rubber gloves and then, inserting the tip of the knife down the back of Megan's T-shirt, she cut down, straight through Megan's sports bra at the same time. A couple more cuts and Chloe moved onto the shorts which were cut up each leg along with the panties underneath. Megan's sneakers and

socks were deftly removed before Chloe ripped out the hair bobble and roughly checked Megan's hair for any foreign objects. Next, Megan's head was twisted from side to side so that Chloe could check her ears. Chloe then smirked as she pulled away the destroyed clothing leaving Megan completely naked, but face down on the floor.

"Chloe will check Megan's butt while she is prone on the floor. . ."

Chloe parted Megan's butt cheeks, one of which showed off her pussy cat tattoo to the world, and then Chloe lifted the pink-faced and very naked girl back to her feet where she was turned to face the audience. Megan looked very embarrassed as she showed off her developing breasts to everybody present and her auburn-coloured pubic hair that provided a thin covering to the majority of her vulva. Plainly visible were the three pale scars from when she was stabbed.

"Unlike Saoirse, Megan demonstrates the thinner, lighter pubic hair which does not hide very much, she also demonstrates that not all girls need to lift their breasts. . ."

While Megan grimaced at the comments, Lauren giggled at those comments and she received a very nasty glare from both Cathy and Mindy, which shut her up fast. Megan could do nothing but grimace as she stood completely naked with her hands cuffed behind her back.

"If necessary, lift the breasts to check underneath. If it were a boy, you would lift up his penis and then his scrotum," Kim went on to explain. "So far, Chloe has checked over all of Megan's body, so the final item is the vagina. Obviously, Megan cannot part her own labia, so Chloe will do it for her."

Megan was blushing bright red as Chloe reached down and with two fingers she gently parted Megan's labia and shone a flashlight up inside the girl with the other hand.

"We done?" Megan asked with a little desperation in her voice as Chloe removed her fingers and the flashlight.

"Yes, well done, Megan," Kim replied.

"Keys?"

Chloe looked at Joshua who just shrugged.

"You had them," Chloe said accusingly.

"Not me. . ."

"Come on, guys!" Megan pleaded as she sat down in the chair that Saoirse had used and she crossed her legs to regain some of her dignity. She scowled at Mindy and her own mother, both of whom were smirking.

"Oh, I remember," Chloe said suddenly with a fiendish look. "I gave the key to Curtis – he wanted to borrow the cuffs. . ."

"Did he now?" Megan growled as she glared at Chloe, Joshua, and then Curtis who just grinned. "Well?"

"Search me!" Curtis chuckled with a hopeful grin.

"When I get my hands free, I'm gonna crack some fucking skulls."

"You look hot when you're mad, beautiful," Curtis said calmly and Megan went silent as she glowed a bright pink.

..._...

"Curtis!" Kim announced. "Front and centre, if you please, young man."

Curtis stood up and stood beside his red-faced and very naked girlfriend. Kim looked directly at young Lizzie who was looking just as embarrassed.

"Right – Lizzie, please come up here and you can strip Curtis," Kim directed.

The twelve-year-old girl was visibly blushing as she stood up and walked over to the almost twelve-year-old Curtis. She paused for a moment as Curtis took a brief glance over at his naked girlfriend seated in the chair beside him – she smirked and her face went a deeper shade of red.

"Okay, Curtis – start stripping," Lizzie ordered as she gathered her courage and took charge. "One item at a time, please."

Curtis nodded and he began to strip. Lizzie looked way more embarrassed than Curtis as she kept looking away from Curtis' body as more and more skin was revealed.

"Lizzie – I don't care if you look," Megan said supportively causing the older girl to giggle.

Finally, and with a huge burst of courage, Curtis pushed down his shorts and he handed them to the blushing Lizzie who did everything that she could not to look at the boy's freshly revealed crotch. However, Lizzie forced herself to look and she bit her lip with embarrassment – it was her very first penis. There was a sparse amount of light brown pubic hair and . . .

"Woah – he's a bit small, isn't he?" Lauren chuckled.

"Lauren!" Kim called out angrily and Lauren sank down in her seat. "Would *you* like to strip for us?"

"No," Lauren replied insolently as her cheeks turned pink.

"Shut up, then!"

Kim passed Lizzie the wand-scanner which Lizzie turned on and she then proceeded to scan Curtis' back followed by his front. She stopped when the device beeped.

"His dick just beeped at me," Lizzie giggled.

There was a ripple of laughter as everybody peered to see what had set off the wand. Lizzie pointed at Curtis' dick.

"Lift it!" she ordered getting into the swing of things.

Curtis did as he was told and everybody saw something shiny taped to the underside of his penis – it was the handcuff key. Megan showed immense relief when she saw the key and she grinned when she saw where it had been hidden. Curtis made to remove it but Megan stopped him.

"Leave it there – I'll retrieve it later. . ."

"Kitty wants some hanky-panky!" Chloe chuckled to general laughter and Curtis went bright red.

Sophia appeared in the briefing room and she looked first at the naked Megan, and then up at the equally naked Curtis, her eyes moved down to his crotch . . . she licked her lips.

"Don't you even *think* about it!" Curtis growled as he quickly covered his manhood.

Sometime later. . .

Megan was feeling very low after the evening's escapades, despite her having had some fun retrieving the handcuff key from Curtis.

It had been another forty minutes before she had been able to dress – but at least the time had been spent in private with her boyfriend and both of them had come away *very* satisfied. Nevertheless, her mood continued to head south as she found her way blocked by Saoirse, Stephanie, and Morgan.

"If you three are about to give me a hard time then I'm not in the mood, okay?"

Stephanie grimaced.

"I knew it!" she almost shouted. "Stop trying to be the hard bitch for two minutes, Megan."

Megan looked at the three concerned expressions and her stone façade crumbled as, unbidden, a tear ran down her cheek. Saoirse quickly grabbed hold of Megan's arm and then dragged her into the currently empty armoury. The fact that Saoirse had been able to physically manhandle Megan without any outward reaction was a demonstration of the eleven-year-old's frame of mind. Stephanie closed the door just in time as the floodgates opened.

Morgan looked at Saoirse who winced in response. It was almost unheard of for Megan to show any form of negative

emotion, let alone anything that showed her to be a normal girl. Stephanie wrapped her left arm around her aunt's back and hugged her. After a few minutes, Megan calmed down and she smiled at her niece.

"Sorry about that. I thought that today was going to be a bit of fun and maybe a bit of a dare – exposing myself and all . . . but in reality, it scared me and I felt so humiliated; I really don't have much to show."

"Chloe made it look very real," Morgan commented.

"It was – it hurt, too," Megan confirmed.

"Bitch!" Saoirse commented.

"No – it wasn't her fault. I insisted she went the whole way but she refused until I threatened her. I told her it had to look good or . . . well, I was worried that people would see me as a pussy."

"You *are* a pussy," Stephanie advised her aunt. "A wild pussy."

Megan scowled.

"We all know you like to be a hard bitch, Megan," Saoirse said. "But you don't have to be, not *all* the time. You have nothing to prove to anybody. You fight like nothing else and you are just the person I want as my backup when I'm in a bad situation. I wish I was as brave as you are now, back when I was eleven."

"Thanks, SD."

"I was a pushover back then and they were talking about canning me – you know, a bullet in the head – I was struggling with everything and I was being bullied mercilessly which was why I began to bully the little Stephanie when she appeared a year or so later. I was twelve and well onto thirteen before I had much to show for myself – my breasts were little more than awkward bumps and my pubic hair was hardly worth having."

"Back when SD and me visited you in your bedroom . . . when we found that kitty collar, we. . ." Morgan began.

"I thought we agreed never to mention *that!*" Megan hissed.

". . . we told you that Curtis was a very lucky boy – and now we've had a better look at you and him, you are both very lucky and very good for each other. I assume you retrieved the key?"

Megan grinned.

"Yes – then he got hard and well, I had to deal with that . . . then he . . ."

Megan clammed up and smirked as Stephanie grinned.

"Back the truck up, Megan – what's this about a *kitty collar?*" Stephanie demanded of her aunt.

"Thanks, Morgan," Megan grouched before she turned to Stephanie. "Look, little niece, you can get to fuck!"

"Would this be a certain collar which Mindy tried to make you wear butt naked for being a bitch?"

"Maybe. . ."

"I think we're getting a little off topic here. . ." Saoirse pointed out.

"Yeah," Megan agreed. "One of the reasons I acted out so much when I was nine and ten, was that I had few friends. You guys are always around to talk to me and help me. Our little soiree in Europe healed the rift between me and Chloe – Joshua is my rock and now I don't have to feel weird about going to him to talk. You three have all had bad childhoods; way worse than mine. I love having you as friends – thanks."

"It's an honour, Megan," Saoirse confirmed.

"You were very brave, Megan – I never thought I could have done what you did," Morgan said quietly. "I'm always shy when I'm not wearing a mask and I hate it."

That same time. . .

Mindy was annoyed.

Everybody had behaved impeccably – all except for Lauren. As such, she had gone through Lauren like a ton of bricks, leaving the young girl in streams of tears. Morgan had surprised everybody with her antics but Mindy could understand her reasons for wanting to follow her younger sister. Mindy had also seen Megan looking both happy – Curtis had been grinning earlier – and unhappy. Now, as she rested her arms on the barrier around the walkway and looked down, she was just in time to see the armoury door open and a smiling Megan appear, chatting animatedly with Stephanie. Morgan appeared, with Saoirse and both were smiling too.

That night

West Columbia

"Well done, Megan."

"Thanks, Mom."

"I wanted to wait until we got home to say this, but you made me very proud, today. I honestly thought that you'd use the safe word. But, it impressed me that you did not. You're growing into a lovely young woman and what I saw of you today, proved that."

Megan blushed wildly at the compliment.

"Just you and Curtis control your sexual urges, please."

"We'll be careful, Mom. I'm not pissing on another one of those damn pregnancy tests!"

..._...

Megan turned as she heard a knock on the door.

"We expectin' anybody?" she asked.

"Don't think so," Paige replied.

"Chloe – come in!" Marcus called out.

"Chloe?" Megan queried.

Chloe *never* came around – so Megan felt worried, until Chloe walked into the living room, all smiles.

"Hi, Paige."

"Hi, Chloe – to what do we owe this little visit?"

"Just thought I'd take the car out," Chloe smiled. "You fancy a ride, Megan?"

Megan looked up at Marcus who nodded.

"Anything for some peace and quiet!" he chuckled.

..._...

"Am I safe?" Megan queried as Chloe headed out of the street.

"I'm a safe driver – it's just a bit weird driving legally."

"I can believe that – so what do you want to talk about?"

"You."

Megan frowned.

"I wanted to check that you were okay – I went a bit rougher on you than I should have done. . ."

"Chloe – I told you to be rough; I'm fine."

"You didn't look it."

Megan took a deep breath and decided to tell the truth – she owed Chloe that much.

"Okay – I hated it. I was mortified. The mighty Megan is a fucking pussy with tiny tits!"

Chloe chuckled.

"You're only eleven, Megan. . ."

"Almost twelve!"

"Okay – but I barely had even bumps on my chest when I was twelve. Your body was looking good."

"Thanks."

"Are you blushing?"

"No . . ."

"I thought you were really brave – I know I flaunt it, but you're way braver than me."

"Bullshit!"

"No shit."

"Mind you – my mind was reeling at the prospect of a handcuffed and naked Wildcat!"

"I bet it was. . ."

***The following morning
Thursday, August 11th***

Wagner Road

Lauren tapped on her sister's closed bedroom door.

"Come in . . ."

Lauren pushed open the door and then froze.

"Well, come in if you're going to – there's a draft," Lizzie commented.

"What are you doing?" Lauren demanded as she closed the door.

Her twelve-year-old sister was standing in front of a full-length mirror – she was also completely naked.

"I'm going to be thirteen in six months and my body sucks. Megan isn't even twelve, yet, and she has way bigger boobs than me and way more pubic hair. No boy will ever fancy me. . ."

"Lizzie – your body will develop in its own time. I had hardly anything at your age – less probably. You've enough boob to need a bra and while your hair is a little sparse; it'll grow over time."

"Just say it – I'm like Curtis. . ."

"I didn't mean that – it just slipped out. The only dicks I'd seen previously were the men who raped me – they were grown men with big dicks . . . Curtis is only eleven, I should never have said what I said. Mindy tore me apart for my behaviour and I feel ashamed. You're perfect, just the way you are."

"Thanks."

"You feel better?"

"I suppose . . . I don't really have much choice."

That evening

Safehouse F

Lauren looked for Curtis as soon as she arrived.

She found him in the galley, sitting with Megan and Tommy. As Lauren approached, she saw Megan's smile vanish and her expression harden.

"What the fuck do you want?" Megan growled.

Lauren turned to face Curtis and Megan.

"Curtis – I'm really sorry about the other day. I'm really sorry about my comments – they were uncalled for and very wrong; I was way out of line. Megan – I laughed at your body which was totally unfair. You were very brave to do what you did – I could never do it. I'm sorry for letting everybody down with my behaviour. I don't expect either of you to forgive me but I hope that in time, you can."

Lauren did not wait for a response – she turned and she ran out of the galley in tears. The tears prevented her from seeing where she was going and she cannoned into . . .

"Mindy!" Lauren exclaimed. "I'm sorry – I didn't . . ."

"Lauren – I heard what you said to Megan and Curtis. Well done; I'm proud of my Senior Trainee Operator – that can't have been easy for you."

"I bet it wasn't," Megan said as she put an arm around the older girl. "Come and have a drink with us . . ."

Lauren felt a little bewildered as she allowed Megan to guide her back to the table and Megan sat her down opposite Tommy and next to Curtis.

"Your apology is accepted, Lauren," Megan said first. "Admitting your mistakes is never easy."

"Me too, Lauren," Curtis added.

"Thank you," Lauren replied meekly.

The following afternoon

Friday, August 12th

Safehouse Q

"Marc?"

"More questions, Lauren?"

"Just one more. . . You were Phase 3; like Sarah and SD – did you ever see one of those sex demos?"

Marc chuckled and his cheeks went a little pink.

"Yes, Lauren, I attended several . . . and . . ."

Marc hesitated.

"And . . .?" Lauren pushed.

"I actually participated in one. . ."

"Awesome!" Megan and Lauren exclaimed together.

"I assume that you sex craved bitches want the details?" The very astute Marc commented.

"Every juicy drop!" Megan responded.

"I was thirteen – just. . . They did these once a month and this was the fourth which I had attended. I sat down with the other lads and we joked about what we might be about to see – then I heard a name announced. I must have missed it as I was nudged by several of the lads. 'Tempest!' came the call again. I went pale – or so they told me and I hesitantly made my way down the steps. . ."

Several months earlier

The Urban Predator Academy

I could not believe that this was happening to me!

I made it to the stage and I was positioned facing the audience of two hundred or so eager faces. I barely heard the order to strip, but I did. The T-shirt was easy and so were the trainers and socks – the joggers took a bit more effort. I had been naked in front of boys many times, but girls – none! I had started puberty about seven months before when I was twelve. I knew from looking around in the showers that I was average for my age with all the right bits in all the right places.

Finally, when I was down to my boxers, I hesitated but I knew that hesitation might cause me to be punished so I yanked them down and off. I stood up in front of two hundred kids stark bollock naked and I'm afraid to say that things had shrivelled somewhat and there were some stifled giggles from the watching kids. The wait was the worst – my biggest fear was rubbing dicks with another boy; we were trained for all types of sex, but some forms none of us wanted to experience and definitely not on a fucking stage!

A name was shouted out: 'Stormtide!'

I felt a wave of relief flood over me – I knew Stormtide. Stormtide was a thirteen-year-old girl and from what I had seen of her, she seemed very desirable and I was about to lose my virginity to her – awesome!

The Present Day

Safehouse Q

"Typical boy!" Megan growled.

"You'd have preferred I was fucking a boy?" Marc retorted. "That day was the second most humiliating day of my life!"

"Please continue," Lauren asked politely with an angry glance at Megan.

Several months earlier

The Urban Predator Academy

Stormtide appeared on the stage.

She was about my height and she definitely had the right curves in the right places. She smiled at me – it was a nervous smile, but it was still a smile; at least she didn't throw up at the sight of me. Then she looked down at my 'equipment' – she smirked. Was it a good smirk? I had no idea. . .

Stormtide was given the order to strip and she did but I noticed that her hands were shaking somewhat as she removed her trainers and socks. She dropped her joggers revealing some plain black knickers. Next went her T-shirt and she revealed an equally plain black sports bra. Then she hesitated – I think she was trying to decide what to remove next.

She surprised everybody by turning to me and smiling.

"Tempest, would you remove my bra for me?"

I looked over at a counsellor and he nodded his approval.

I had never touched a real live girl before, let alone removed the bra of one – I was just glad it wasn't a real bra; I had no idea how they worked. . .

The Present Day

Safehouse Q

"Typical boy!" Megan growled again.

"I know how to release the catches now, bitch!" Marc growled.

"Did Sarah teach you?" Lauren teased.

"Let the boy continue. . ." Sarah suggested quickly, her face turning pink.

"One question answered. . ." Megan grinned.

Several months earlier

The Urban Predator Academy

When I touched her skin for the first time, I felt like an electric current was flowing through me and I was amazed at how soft and silky her skin was – I must have tickled her as she giggled; it was a nervous giggle, but still a giggle.

I hesitated as I felt the throb of blood moving very fast into my groin and I could hear murmuring from the audience. Stormtide looked down and I saw her eyes go wide as I grew very rapidly in front of her. She nodded and smiled approvingly. I blushed badly. . .

Anyway, back to the task in hand. . . I carefully ran my fingers underneath the black material and gently pulled it upwards and then I stopped as her breasts were revealed for the first time. Nothing much more than a handful each and each topped with a very appealing and very erect nipple. It was her turn to blush as she saw where my eyes were focussed. She reached down and grabbed my erect penis and that jerked me back to reality as she very gently caressed the tip.

I quickly pulled the sports bra up and over her head – Stormtide obligingly raised her arms for me. Before she could lower them, I kissed her in her left armpit and they both jerked down as she blushed bright red and giggled again. I had remembered my foreplay lecture. . . There was a ripple of laughter from those watching but we both ignored them and focussed on each other.

Damn, I had never been so hard and our breathing was becoming more of an effort as I ran my hands down her neck and over her chest before I touched my first ever nipple . . . it was hard, but very soft at the same time and Stormtide bit her lip as I touched what must have been very sensitive nipples. I could tell that she was desperately wanting to call out but felt too embarrassed.

I ran my hands down her stomach and she kind of pulled me with her and we both fell down onto the large gym mat that had been placed for just that purpose. . .

The Present Day

Safehouse Q

"What the fuck did you stop for!" Megan growled.

"Artistic effect. . ." Marc chuckled.

"Do you really want to die?" Megan said calmly.

"Do you want to hear the rest of the story?"

"Yes!" Came three voices all at once.

Several months earlier

The Urban Predator Academy

Stormtide lay on the mat and I knelt over her.

It was time for her to be naked, just as I was. I put a hand on each side of her knickers and I looked into her pale green eyes – she nodded and I gently eased the knickers down as she raised her bottom off the mat. I pulled the knickers down her long legs and off her feet without ever taking my eyes off her neatly trimmed deep brown pubic hair which matched the long hair on her head that was even now in a tight pony tail.

Suddenly, I became acutely aware of our audience. There was almost total silence as everybody stared at the two naked bodies before them. I began to feel the humiliation flood through me and . . .

"Oh, crap!" I whispered as I felt my dick begin to droop.

"Look at me. . ." Stormtide whispered as she pulled me down onto her and she kissed me – my first ever kiss; it was very wet!

I ran my fingers across each nipple and she moaned beneath me. Her body was very warm and I could feel her heart beating like a crazed drummer. Then the tip of my dick touched the inside of her thigh and I felt the blood throbbing into my groin again. Then I felt her pubic hair on my dick and I sat back up again – my appendage was pointing to the sky as I moved my shaking fingers to her pelvic region and gently entered her pubic hair and touched her labia.

..._...

She jumped as I touched her, but she smiled at me and she *purred!* Her labia were moist to the touch and very warm, almost hot. I gently pushed my finger between her folds and Stormtide stiffened, almost as hard as I was. . . I accidentally touched her at the top of her labia and she let out a little scream. I'd forgotten what lived up there!

Her right hand moved towards me and wrapped itself around my dick; she gripped me tightly.

"Nice. . ." she whispered as I gazed down at her.

"So are you. . ." I replied.

I began to feel sensations that told me I was not going to last all that long and while spurting all over her chest could have been fun; it would have opened me up to ridicule. I think she must have read my mind as she nodded and spread her legs wider. I moved my arms so that I could gently lower myself down onto her. I felt her hands wrap around my back and I gazed into her eyes. She was so beautiful. . .

I kissed her, full on the lips and I felt her tongue push mine aside and enter my mouth.

..._...

I had forgotten completely that we were being watched. I tasted her tongue and it was minty – Colgate probably. Her arms pulled me closer and I felt her breasts against my own chest and the nipples were very noticeable in their hardened state. Then she broke the kiss and smiled.

"I want you, Tempest. . ."

I gulped and tentatively moved my pelvic region forwards and I felt myself entering inside her. She was moist – it was the best way that I could describe it – warm and moist. . .

The Present Day

Safehouse Q

"*Warm and moist!*" Megan explained. "Are you saying that I would be 'warm and moist'?"

Megan accentuated the phrase with air quotes.

"Never got the chance. . ." Marc said with a grin.

"I should think not. . ." Megan stammered as she turned pink.

"An interesting description," Sarah commented with a smirk at her former partner.

"Best I could come up with at the time, Discord!"

Several months earlier

The Urban Predator Academy

Stormtide shuddered as I entered and she squirmed a bit.

Then a wave of pain swept across her face and her eyes closed for a moment. I was about to withdraw, but she crossed her legs across my backside and I was pinned inside her.

"I'm okay – just stung a bit. . ." she said quietly.

I began to gently ease in and out – it was surprisingly easy and it felt really good and by the look on Stormtide's face; she was enjoying it too. Her pelvis bucked as I moved faster and faster – her eyes closed tightly and she seemed to be having trouble breathing, then her eyes popped open very wide and she kissed me on the lips.

"Fuck me. . ." she hissed.

"I am!" I laughed as I pushed in as far as I could manage.

I cried out in pain as I felt needles in my back – she had pierced me with her finger nails; I filed the pain away and then I felt my own breathing hitching and I felt an overwhelming sensation in my groin just as Stormtide gripped me tightly and she screamed out loud just as I felt myself explode inside her. I could not thrust anymore; I was spent and very sensitive. We both collapsed at the same time and I rolled off to one side onto the mat. I looked over at Stormtide and she smiled. I felt her hand take hold of mine and she squeezed hard.

I have no idea how long we both lay there, but when I looked up, the auditorium was empty; we were very much alone.

The Present Day

Safehouse Q

"That's it?"

"Yes, Lauren, it is. . ."

"You sure. . ." Lauren persisted.

"Okay – we got dressed, kissed and then we each went back to our rooms. However, after we had eaten that night – she kept looking at me across the dining room – I was grabbed by Stormtide and she dragged me back to her room, which was empty. . ."

Several months earlier

The Urban Predator Academy

"They won't be back for an hour – get your clothes off, Tempest. . ."

As before, I didn't disobey, only it was a lot easier to strip when it was just the two of us.

"Sit on the edge of the bed. . ."

I did so and I felt a little stupid as my dick hardened up at the sight of the naked Stormtide. I had no idea what she was going to do until she knelt down between my legs, spreading them open, she lent forwards and she took me into her mouth. I shuddered and I braced myself as extreme sensations coursed throughout my body. Stormtide sat back

for a moment and then licked her lips.

"You showered since earlier?" She asked.

"Err, no. . ."

"So . . . I must be tasting myself and that salty taste must be you. . ."

"I guess. . . Err, Stormtide, what's your real name?"

"Shannon. You?"

"Marc."

"Cool. . ."

Shannon dived back to her sucking. . .

The Present Day

Safehouse Q

"That was that – she sucked me off and we went our separate ways. I was deployed a few days later, with Sarah. . ."

"Yeah – I was a last-minute substitution; they never told me why, but I replaced Stormtide," Sarah commented. "I would suggest that they thought you two might spend the entire operation, err what's the word? Fucking!"

Marc looked very uncomfortable and the girls sensed that there was more, but nobody pressed.

"That would explain why you never wanted much more than a blow-job off me – I thought there was something wrong with me. . ." Sarah commented.

"There was something wrong with you; you weren't Shannon. . ."

"Nutcase!" Megan growled.

"You know, you could have been one of us; you had the right stuff, Megan – but I'm glad you never had to suffer what we did. Although, having seen you naked, I would have enjoyed seeing you down on that stage strutting your stuff. . ."

"I'm flattered you think so – my body, I mean – maybe you'll get your chance. . ."

"I feel like I just peed myself," Lauren complained as she manipulated her jeans around her crotch. "Damn, my jeans are damp, too. . ."

"You're not the only one," Megan commented and there was an obvious damp patch on her pants.

"That was the best stimulation I've had in a long time," Sarah confirmed. "Okay, girls – let's leave the kid be."

"Oh, Marc, you said that that experience was your *second* most humiliating thing – what was the first?" Megan asked.

"You!"

"Me?"

"Yeah – despite having a very beautiful girl lying before me, stark naked, I could not perform. . ."

Marc went bright red and he hung his head; he was very embarrassed. Megan blushed too, at his comment.

"Fuck, Marc – maybe that was just your good side coming out. . ." Megan tried. "I didn't mean to humiliate you – it just came out. . ."

"Well, we now know that your love was elsewhere. . ." Sarah suggested.

..._...

As the girls left the bedroom and headed downstairs, Megan turned to Sarah and Lauren.

"He loves that girl: Shannon."

"Yes, Megan, he does," Sarah admitted.

"We need to find her," Lauren suggested.

"My thoughts, exactly," Megan confirmed.

***Chapter 309*: Messenger**

That night

Friday, August 12th, 2016

Kilbourn Avenue

It was Abby's birthday – she was sixteen, just like her friends.

"I look back over the past few years and I'm shocked as hell to find myself still alive and with my best friends. When Chloe first entered my life, she was morose and she needed a shoulder to cry on – I was happy to provide that. I liked Chloe – okay, she was weird, always going on about this awesome guy called *Joshua* . . ."

"I can't help being awesome," Joshua interrupted. Abby and Chloe both laughed.

". . . Chloe was pretty much my only real friend – being a geek kinda kept me on my own. Then I found out she was a wannabe vigilante, called Shadow. I warned her – but since when did Chloe Bennett ever listen to anybody; least of all when she was thirteen. I would cover for her – every night that she went out. Then she had to go and get herself shot which meant she was rescued by the Dynamic Duo. . ."

"Dynamic Duo?" Joshua echoed.

"An apt description," Chloe laughed.

". . . The best thing I ever did was follow Chloe and find out where she'd been going. I will admit, having Hit Girl's arm across my throat scared me half to death, but our adventures, together, have been the best – thanks, both of you, for making my life the best ever," Abby finished.

"Happy Birthday!" Joshua and Chloe exploded.

The next evening

Saturday, August 13th

D-JAK

"Why do I get the job of shutting everything up?"

"Tommy, you work here."

"It's a shit job. Maybe Mindy hates me."

"Nah – she's just a bitch!" Joshua replied with a chuckle.

Tommy laughed and he went back to collecting the abandoned jō-staffs and other detritus left over from a long day of martial-arts classes. Twenty minutes later, Tommy was almost done with his chores and Joshua was close to completing his own. Then, totally unexpectedly, the lights went out in the studio.

"What the hell?" Tommy demanded as the emergency lights snapped on around the space.

An indignant, accusing voice called out from the opposite side.

"What did you do?"

"Nothing!" Tommy replied just as indignantly.

"He's right. It was us."

"Who the *fuck* are you?" Tommy demanded.

"Забытый нас так быстро, молодой Фома?" *{Forgotten us so quickly, young Thomas?}*

Tommy felt a cold chill as he heard the Russian words and instantly translated them in his head.

"Александр. . ." {*Alexander. . .*}

"Who the fuck are you talking to, Tommy?" Joshua called as he walked over.

"I am talking to the bastard who slashed my chest. He's called Alexander."

"So a bad fucker, then?"

"Yeah. Three against one, is not exactly fair, Alexander."

"No, it is not, Thomas."

"You expect me to give up and just hand myself over?"

"Oh, no, Tommy. I have far too much respect for you to expect that."

"До смерти!" {*To the death!*}

"I would expect nothing less from a boy like you. . ."

"What did you just say?" Joshua demanded.

"I said that we would fight to the death," Tommy replied conversationally.

"I figured that," Joshua replied dryly as he flexed his muscles.

"You take those two – Alexander is mine," Tommy directed.

"Great – give me the two large Russian cunts – thank you, Tommy; you go play with your pal."

There was no response from Tommy as he bolted for his nemesis.

..._...

"Where the fuck are they – eight o'clock, on the fucking dot, they said!"

"Calm down, Chloe – maybe they're busy."

"Fucking boys!"

"Your favourite past time!" Stephanie giggled.

"I luck to fuck, yeah – just one boy, though . . . dammit! Let's go find them."

With that, Stephanie and Chloe left the Mini parked at the side of the street and headed towards the main doors into D-JAK. They were half-way up the stairs when they heard fighting – normally a usual activity for D-JAK; only the place was closed with only Joshua and Tommy in residence. Both girls stopped dead and exchanged glances while Stephanie reached down to her left ankle and she produced a micro-compact Kel-Tec P3AT .38-calibre pistol.

"Where's yours," she hissed.

"In the car. . ." Chloe replied as Stephanie just shook her head in disgust.

"Amateur!"

Stephanie went first, pistol held out in her left hand. At the top of the stairs, Chloe moved to the left, heading for the lights, while Stephanie covered her movements in the darkness. By the light which filtered in through the windows from the street poles, Stephanie could make out five people fighting. She readily recognised the smallest silhouette as Tommy.

Stephanie closed her eyes as Chloe raised her thumb in the air. A second later, the lights began to snap on down the studio, dazzling all who still had their eyes open. Unfortunately, that included Joshua and Tommy, as well as their opponents. All were momentarily dazzled, but only for a moment. Chloe dashed in and attacked the closest enforcer while Stephanie ran towards Tommy.

"Hey, I was handling them!" Joshua growled as he saw Chloe join the party.

"Got bored waiting downstairs, so I decided to come see what you boys . . . hold on . . ." Chloe powered her right fist into the Russian's temple as he went down to his knees, putting him out on the ground. ". . . were doing up here."

"Thanks," Joshua breathed as his man's nose exploded as Joshua double-tapped his face with his fists and then followed up with a powerful punch to his jaw. The man quickly joined his pal on the ground.

They both turned towards Tommy who was exchanging blows with a tall, thin man. Tommy's face was full of hate as he struck repeatedly at his opponent. Stephanie closed, looking for a shot, but Tommy clocked her and he shook his head – Stephanie frowned but lowered her pistol a fraction.

"I owe you, Alexander; I want to see you bleed."

"My dear, Thomas, you were made to bleed as punishment for your behaviour; you had to learn to follow simple instructions, мальчик." {boy}

"I was sick of fighting for your warped entertainment. . ."

"You were one of my best."

The blows flew despite the words which also flew back and forth. Stephanie looked over at Chloe and Joshua for guidance, both shrugged – it was Tommy's fight. But before any decision could be made, there was the sound of feet on the stairs and then two objects span across the floor.

"Grenade!" Stephanie yelled.

..._...

The double-explosion stunned the three youngsters and they each fell to the floor. Alexander was also stunned by the sudden flashes and resounding bangs. As the five of them staggered back to their feet, Alexander was seized by two men and dragged off down the stairs. Two further men retrieved their fallen comrades.

It was several more minutes before Stephanie, Chloe, and Joshua were able to see and hear properly. Stephanie clocked the cracked windows and winced and the thought of how Mindy might react to her flagship studio suffering damage. They did not have long to wait as several CPD officers quickly appeared. The surge up the stairs was led by Sergeant Murphy who quickly took charge and secured the premises but the Russians were long gone.

Stephanie's pistol and ankle holster had also mysteriously vanished – nobody noticed the addition to Murphy's armoury. Thirty minutes later, a worried looking Mindy raced up the steps and she grabbed hold of Stephanie, hugging her tightly.

"I'm fine!" Stephanie growled.

"I was so worried when Murphy called – are you all okay?"

"Yeah," Chloe confirmed.

"It was Alexander," Tommy explained, a look of intense anger on his face. "I want him."

"We'll get him – I promise you, Tommy," Mindy confirmed.

"Sorry about the glass," Stephanie offered meekly.

"Fuck that!" Mindy retorted. "If anything happened to any of you. . ."

"She really cares," Joshua commented with a hint of surprise in his tone.

"Maybe she's softening in her old age," Chloe added with a smirk.

Mindy just scowled at her two best friends.

***The following morning
Sunday, August 14th***

Glenview

It was the beginning of the usual raft of crap anniversaries.

The time wasn't helped by the attack the previous evening. Mindy was not overly surprised – the '60-day' mark of their deadline had passed just that Tuesday and she had expected an attack; just nothing that personal.

"What's going on?" Stephanie asked as she came into the kitchen for breakfast. She could sense the tension as Dave sat at the counter, staring at his full cup of coffee as Mindy hugged him.

Dave turned to face his eldest daughter, just as Anne-Marie and Danny appeared – they both stopped dead as they saw the sadness in Dave's face.

"Sorry, guys – no smiles this morning," he explained. "It's been three years since my Dad died. He was murdered in New York, on the orders of The Motherfucker. The worst of it is that it was my fault; if I had given up being Kick-Ass. . ."

"Dave," Mindy warned.

"Sorry – I just get really morose around this time of year. Marty will be too – he was there when I found out. Next week will be the third anniversary of us taking down The Motherfucker in New York – it will also be the anniversary of Mindy leaving New York. . ."

Dave stopped speaking as all three kids ran over to hug him tightly.

The next day Monday, August 15th

D-JAK

All of the damaged glazing had been repaired and all was back to normal.

Stephanie, though, sensed that something was off – but she could not put her finger on what it was until she confronted Mindy.

"What's going on?"

"You have a visitor, Steph," Mindy explained cryptically.

"Who?"

Nobody answered the ten-year-old so she went back to the mat and practicing with her right arm. It was still very painful, but she was coping. She couldn't raise her right arm above her shoulder, but it was still very early days. Stephanie did her best to exercise all of her other muscles which had languished during her time in the hospital. Those muscles included her legs which were as trim as ever, but Stephanie knew that her muscles and ligaments were not in peak condition. Training was not easy with one painful arm held across her stomach, but Lauren and Megan provided as much assistance as they could.

Stephanie paused to sit down and drink a can of Coke just as some people arrived. Stephanie was very surprised to see Cassie of all people walking towards her. Dave was with her, and just behind Dave was a short girl of maybe nine-years-old. All sorts of emotions shot through Stephanie's mind as she studied the girl who had slowed her approach and showed caution as she came closer. Stephanie never said a word as the nine-year-old studied her. However, Stephanie shocked everybody as she stepped forwards and then she slapped the girl on the cheek.

"Whoa!" Cassie announced.

"No harm done," Electra announced as she rubbed her cheek. "Not bad, Steph!"

"You're lucky that I'm a lot weaker than I usually am."

"Yes – I heard about your injury – I'm sorry."

"Don't be. . ."

With that, the two girls hugged and tears were visible in two sets of eyes.

"You two gonna put on a show?" Megan enquired with a cheeky grin.

Neither girl said anything as they released each other and exchanged a glance. Next thing, they both kicked out and Megan fell backwards with a little scream. Stephanie held out her right hand, palm up, and Electra brought her own right hand down hard onto Stephanie's.

"Right on, partner!" Stephanie growled as she winced with the pain.

..._...

"Where? How? When?"

Stephanie was full of questions as the two girls sat down in private on the couch in Mindy's office.

"Cassie's Dad picked me up off a French merchantman, a few weeks back. I escaped the massacre at Milan and found myself in bad company. If I hadn't been rescued from the French. . ."

"It's really good to see you, Electra – I've missed you, kid."

"I've missed you, Steph."

Both girls hugged again and real tears fell as the two girls considered their shared past.

..._...

"What do we know about Electra?" Cassie asked.

"She was what they called a 'yellow' – somebody of now consequence, apparently. According to Stephanie, yellows dealt with the shit quite literally. They controlled *Predators* under punishment and were given mundane jobs that were deemed to be beneath *Predator* status. Most never reached their eight birthdays and were 'disposed of' as part of the identity reassignment part of the *Predator* training," Abby explained as she read the text on her tablet. "Electra, though, she became a *Predator* thanks to Stephanie, it seems. Somebody in *Urban Predator* saw something in the girl, or maybe they were just fucking with Stephanie. Either way, both girls owe their lives to each other. It scares me seeing kids so young and knowing what they went through. She's a geek for fuck's sake – it says so in her notes. She's someone like me."

"I know, Abby, I do," Mindy said as soothingly as she could.

Not much got Abby riled up, but *Urban Predator* was one of them.

"You go check on them," Mindy suggested.

..._...

Stephanie and Electra were talking animatedly when Abby knocked then pushed open the office door.

"Are you two okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, Abby, thanks," Stephanie replied.

"You weren't recruited as a *Predator*, were you, Electra?" Abby asked.

"They took me. I was stripped, prodded, poked – then they realised I needed glasses and I was canned. Well, actually, I was 'yellowed' – the next thing I knew, I was showered, then I was given some yellow clothing to wear. I was only seven; I had no idea what was going on. I spent my first couple of weeks cleaning out buckets of piss. Then they promoted me to The Cage. My job was to strip the *Predators* under punishment, feed them – if they deserved it, and make sure they drank and stayed alive."

"That sounds like shit," Abby commented.

"It was – but then I met Steph. . ."

"I taught her to fight, to protect herself – some fucking instructor latched onto that and decided to use her to get to

me," Stephanie added.

There was a knock on the door and Stephanie smiled as Saoirse entered.

"I heard we'd another *Predator* – hi, I'm. . ."

"I remember you, Saoirse," Electra growled, ignoring Saoirse's hand.

Saoirse paused and Stephanie was confused.

"You made Stephanie's life hell – I saw you slap her backside, that day she was strapped in the dining room. You're a nasty bitch, Saoirse – stay the fuck away from me."

"lectra. . ." Stephanie tried.

"No, Steph, I can't be friends with somebody like her – I'm sorry."

Electra stepped out of the office and went to watch the sparring. Saoirse looked to be almost in tears as she sat down in a vacant chair.

"I know I was bad – and yes, I did slap your bare ass straight after that strapping; I regret that, I really do."

"You were different then," Stephanie tried. "You're not that girl anymore. Same as I was different back then; you know how people react when they first meet me."

"Now I know how it feels to be in your shoes – it sucks."

"She'll come around in her own time, SD – I'm sure of it."

That night

Marquette Park

The Lockheed L-100 Hercules was cruising at 145 knots; landing speed. The aircraft was lined up for runway 31-Right and losing altitude as it sank towards the runway.

Then, just five nautical miles out, the inner starboard engine exploded. A thousand feet below, on the ground, Hit Girl froze as the aircraft hurtled towards her. She had turned at the noise, expecting to see an aircraft passing overhead as it took-off, or landed, at Chicago Midway International Airport.

Instead, the sight was mesmerising.

"Raptor! Raptor! Raptor!"

Safehouse F Command Centre

The codewords echoed out of all the speakers in the Command Centre and Abby went pale as she recognised Hit Girl's voice.

The three code words were designed especially for a vigilante in life-threatening trouble that they could not escape from. The phrase was instigated after both Mindy and Chloe had gotten themselves jammed up in a fucked-up Bank Heist.

"What's up, Boss?" Abby enquired, dreading to hear what would make Hit Girl call the ball.

"An aircraft is about to hit, Hit Girl," Hit Girl announced in an even tone.

Abby looked over at Marty who just shrugged.

"I think she's lost it . . . big time," Abby commented.

"Maybe not. . ." Marty threw back, as the image from a security camera on a nearby building appeared on one of the

large screens.

"Shit!" Abby breathed.

That same night

Marquette Park

Hit Girl pulled herself out of her frozen state and she looked around her.

There were people: men, women, and children. The collateral damage would be huge. She ran forwards and began to yell for everybody to *MOVE*. Hit Girl resorted to some foul language and firing her pistol in the air to motivate people. Every second of delay meant death was a second closer. The roar of the remaining three Allison 501-D331 turboprops was getting louder and louder as they came closer and closer.

"Get out of there, Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass yelled over the comms.

"I can't leave anybody to be killed. . ."

"Dammit!" Kick-Ass responded from the Safehouse.

Hit Girl was out of time as the aircraft pointed directly at her and the south-west portion of the park. Hit Girl ran towards a small boy who was paralysed with fear as he watched impending doom approach at over 100 knots. At the last minute, Hit Girl swept the boy up and she buried herself into the grass, her back armour towards the inbound seventy-tonne aircraft.

..._...

The roar of the impact was spectacular as the reinforced aluminium structure struck the grass just to the south of Redfield Drive. The aircraft remained intact as it smashed three cars out of the way and shot across the lagoon before ploughing into a large sand trap on the golf course. Hit Girl's hearing was inhibited as the roar of engines and twisted metal blocked out even her communications and the screams of the small boy.

Then there was an eerie reduction in the sound, almost to silence. The reinforced radome of the Hercules aircraft was literally an inch from her left arm when it finally came to a halt. Of the four, four-bladed, propellers, one was still spinning wildly despite no sound coming from the engine behind. Hit Girl checked the small boy that she had shielded – he was shaking with fear, but he was alive and unhurt. Hit Girl checked her own armour and body to find herself just as alive and unhurt.

Hit Girl yelled out as an electronic pulse sounded in her earpiece.

"Okay, I'm alive!" she yelled out.

Safehouse F

Kick-Ass had never been happier as he ran for Hound.

"Ambulances are rolling," Abby confirmed. "Petra is on scene and searching for Hit Girl."

"Any idea what the aircraft is?" Stephanie asked.

"I'm just obtaining the callsign from Air Traffic Control and then we'll know. . . got it . . . that's weird," Marty replied.

"Well?" Stephanie prompted.

"Callsign: JUSTICE – only, JPATS don't use L-100s; they use 737s and DC-9s."

"I smell a rat," Stephanie said. "If it involves Chicago and Hit Girl, plus it looks odd – then it's probably an attack."

"She's good," Marty chuckled. "She has her Mom right down."

Marquette Park

Hit Girl handed the small boy off to a CPD officer and she moved to the rear of the aircraft, looking for survivors.

She was shocked to find orange-suited men bailing out of the aircraft en masse.

"Battle Guy, I have fucking inmates pouring out of this aircraft!"

"Err, yeah – it's flagged as a JPATS flight, but there's something off about it, according to the little runt," Battle Guy replied.

Hit Girl smiled at his reference to Stephanie.

"What's JPATS," Petra asked as she appeared behind Hit Girl.

"Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System," Psyche cut in from the Safehouse.

"Brighter than she looks," Petra chuckled.

"Bite me, Petra!"

"Shouldn't we be stopping them?" Petra asked, ignoring the power-crazed vigilante in the Safehouse.

"Yeah," Hit Girl said as she grabbed the nearest orange-suited inmate. "It's a fucking prison break!"

..._...

It was chaos. The prisoners had no problem getting away as Petra and Hit Girl did their best in the darkness amid the broken aircraft. CPD did their best, too, not realising until it was too late what was going on. There were enough problems helping the injured and it was ultimately left for Petra and Hit Girl to make their way into the aircraft and make contact with the flight-crew.

As they made their way down the aircraft from the rear, they found three inmates who had not survived the crash landing. One US Marshal was dead, but two more were alive but injured. Petra finally forced open the door to the cockpit and she found both pilots very much alive.

"Nice landing!" she commented.

"Any landing you walk away from. . ." the co-pilot replied with a grin.

Safehouse F

"Well, we're done for the night," Mindy commented as she finished putting her damp hair up into a pony tail. "When you guys have an update for me, just call. You coming, Steph, or are you waiting for Dave?"

"Would you mind if I waited for Dave?" Stephanie ventured.

"No, Steph – you've done well, tonight."

Stephanie beamed at the compliment and she ran off towards the galley.

"Night, Abby. Night, Marty."

"Night, Mindy – stay away from falling aircraft!" Marty laughed.

"Funny. . ."

Mindy climbed into her Jaguar and she made her way to the surface.

West 31st Street

There had been no real reason to stop, but Mindy did, her senses were still on overdrive as she headed home.

She eased the Jaguar to a halt and jumped out, running across to the sidewalk and stopping to check out a dark shape at the base of a wounded tree. It was a man! Mindy rolled the man over – he wore a smart suit jacket, a tie with an interesting pattern, plus dark trousers, and functional shoes. He was unconscious but otherwise breathing normally, despite the blood on his forehead. Mindy reached into the man's inner jacket pocket and she pulled out his passport – she blanched.

The man was British – that was obvious. The bigger problem, though, was the text beneath the Queen's crest:

**QUEEN'S
MESSENGER**

COURRIER DIPLOMATIQUE

She quickly pulled out her cell and dialled Paul Murphy.

"Murphy, I need you, an ambulance with a crew you can trust, and Cathy. Meet me at West 31st and South Rockall and make it quiet!"

Murphy was well used to receiving cryptic instructions, and downright weird ones for that matter, from the short blonde woman with the murderous alter ego.

***Chapter 310*: Diplomatic Bag**

Tuesday, August 16th, 2016

*The United Kingdom
Scotland*

"Jasper, it is five in the fucking morning!"

"Sorry, Keira, Cassie said you wouldn't mind the early call."

"Tell her, I love her," Keira growled.

"You, me, and Eric are flying to Chicago . . . in three hours."

"What!" Keira exclaimed as she bolted upright.

Southfield Letham

"I *cannot* believe that you woke us all up," Naomi groused as she leaned onto the kitchen table.

"It's not even *six*," Kaitlin added as she lay down almost on top of her cousin, her hair sticking up in every which direction.

"I hate you," Harper growled as she slumped into a chair, her top inside out.

"Not early-birds," Keira explained to Cameron and Natasha with a grin.

"You're going out of town and you need babysitters?" Natasha asked.

"We are *not* babies!" Kaitlin growled.

"We have three *Predators* that need minding," Keira explained. "The question is, Cameron, can you handle three little bitches?"

"I'm well used to bitches," Cameron laughed.

"I don't count," Natasha grinned.

The three girls gazed up at Cameron, their expressions showing that they had a lot of trouble to cause.

"I have the perfect solution, should three young ladies step out of line, even for a minute," Cameron commented as he delved into a kitchen cupboard. He placed onto the countertop, three very large rolls of silver Duct Tape. "If it comes to it, I tie 'em up and throw them into the stables until you return."

"You ever heard of 'child abuse'," Kaitlin asked sweetly.

"Normal children get abused – show me one *normal* child in this kitchen," Natasha challenged.

"Cunt!" Kaitlin growled.

"There will be none of that, young Kaitlin," Natasha said. "Mindy can now supply these in bulk. . ."

She produced a very large, pink-covered tin with two words printed on it: **Swear Jar**. Kaitlin opened her mouth to say something but she then thought better of it and she just scowled and allowed her head to hit the table top in disgust.

Keira laughed and she turned to leave.

"You know, Keira," Eric commented. "I don't think I have ever seen you happier."

Keira laughed.

"I was never happier than the day I discovered that my little sister was alive – now . . . well, I need a holiday from

her!"

"Hey! I can still hear you!"

"See you in a few days, sis!"

Somewhere over the North Atlantic

"So – we need to recover a Diplomatic Bag?"

"Yes. The Queen's Messenger was attacked in Chicago and his two packages were taken. We have no idea what is in the packages, naturally, but they were double-sealed and hopefully still are. We hope it was just some jumped up junkie who thought he had something he could flog."

"Why me?" Eric asked.

"I'd have thought you would jump to go see Abby," Keira teased. "From what I've heard, you two. . ."

"Okay – no Abby talk, please. The question stands."

"The bags have trackers and I have the codes. Unfortunately, the codes are classified NOFORN and UK EYES ONLY. You can use them with Abby, but the codes must be destroyed once you are finished with them."

"And me?" Keira asked.

"This is a British operation, which means UK EYES ONLY – I have received special dispensation from the Foreign Office and Number 10 to go after the Diplomatic Bags using *Vengeance* with assistance from *Fusion*. Mindy understood the significance of the Queen's Messenger and she called Commander Lawrence. To be honest, I've never seen HMG move so damn fast! Mainly, we need British operatives to recover the Diplomatic Bags and keep them in their custody until they can be delivered safely."

"Delivered to where?"

"That would be classified at this point. However, we will have you, me, Cassie – and to some extent, Joshua Williams and young Stephanie. No foreign national is to be allowed contact with those Bags. Oh, yes, almost forgot. There will be a surprise for you when we land – you might want to read this on the way."

"Okay. . ." Keira brightened up considerably when she saw what Jasper had to offer her. "Techs!"

"What about Electra? She has no idea. . ."

"Mindy is telling her, right about now," Jasper replied.

Later that morning

The United States of America Chicago, Illinois Safehouse F

The young girl was thoroughly speechless as she received the personal tour from her friend.

"Well, Stephanie, you've definitely landed on your feet instead of your arse, like usual."

"Thanks, 'lectra."

Mindy studied Electra for a moment.

"You wanna take part?"

"Me?"

"Yeah, you."

"What can I do?"

"Electra!" Stephanie exclaimed. "You are a goddamn *Predator*, so act like one!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Wildcat's old combat suit should fit you. That should give you some protection. We'll partner you with Jackal."

"You called, oh mighty purple leader."

Mindy rolled her eyes and gave Joshua a glare.

"Hi Electra, I am Joshua."

"Another Brit – cool."

"How about we get you changed and then you can show me what you can do," Joshua suggested.

Some hours later. . .

Chicago Midway International Airport

"Good flight?"

"Yes, thank you," Jasper replied as he shook hands with a tall man wearing a dark suit.

"You sure your pilot can fly it?" the man asked.

"Our pilot can fly *anything*," Jasper laughed as he waved Keira into the hanger.

"She's more beautiful than the tech manuals showed," Keira commented as she smiled broadly. "She warmed up?"

"Fully pre-flighted and ready for launch, I've been told, ma'am."

The Bell 429WLG was a medium-lift helicopter with seating for nine, including the pilot, or pilots. Keira was to fly the 3,400-kilogramme, twin-engine helicopter, solo.

"Not the stealthiest of colour schemes," Keira pointed out dryly.

The helicopter was painted in what Bell called: Yellow, with Prominent Orange Accent and Ferrara Red Flashes. The registration was N96543 in orange on the yellow tail. Keira climbed into the front right seat while Jasper and Eric climbed into the rear where six leather seats were fitted in two rows of three, facing each other. Both buckled in facing forwards with Jasper seated behind Keira on the right side. Both followed Keira's example and pulled on headsets.

"You two boys ready for some flying?"

Jasper and Eric looked at one other and they each exchanged a worried glance as the helicopter smoothly lifted into the air.

Safehouse F

Stephanie smiled down at her young companion.

Electra was feeling distinctly embarrassed as she stood before her friend. She had just been stripped and then re-dressed in a state-of-the-art combat suit.

"It's a little big in places but it'll do the job for the moment," Stephanie commented.

"You sure she won't mind?"

"No, I won't," came a voice and Electra span around to come face to face with the fully armoured Wildcat.

"I outgrew that suit a long time ago – you're welcome to borrow it."

"Thank you . . ."

"Megan – it's good to meet you, Electra," Megan said as she pulled off her mask and offered her right hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Megan – Steph has told me so much about you."

"I wouldn't listen to *anything* that girl says – she's full of it!"

"Don't I know it," Electra replied with a laugh. "She should spend more time on the toilet; then she wouldn't be so full of shit!"

Megan laughed out loud as the pink-faced Stephanie scowled.

"When you two bitches have *quite* finished, may we?" Stephanie demanded.

"Let me help you mask up – Stephanie knows shit about putting on a combat suit correctly," Megan grinned.

..._...

Jackal paused to take in the sight before him – it was his worst nightmare!

"Two of you?" he drawled through his electronically enhanced speech.

"Fear us!" Wildcat growled.

"What do we call *you*," Jackal enquired of the shorter 'Wildcat'.

"Me? They call me Rigour – fear it, Jack-ass!"

"Just great, another mouthy bitch – as if I didn't have enough to handle," Jackal commented dryly.

"What?" Wildcat enquired. "You can't handle two little girls?"

"Bring it on, bitches!"

..._...

As Shadow watched from the walkway she nodded approvingly at the way Rigour moved. No wasted movements, just carefully planned steps. Rigour anticipated Jackal's movements – not that Jackal was really trying; that was obvious. He could easily kill both girls with a single punch each but no, he was teasing them, letting them both get in close. Jackal was telegraphing his actions so that Rigour could pick her next movement. Shadow was surprised that Wildcat was playing along – she was far too skilled to fall for one of Jackal's ruses.

Then Shadow braced up as somebody slapped her armoured backside. She turned, expecting it to be Mindy. . .

"Daddy!"

Shadow ripped off her mask and she jumped into her Dad's arms, wrapping her legs around his waist.

"Hi, sweetheart – missed you."

"I've missed you, too – what are you doing home? Mom never said. . ."

"Mom didn't know – I've just come from there. . ."

Chloe pulled back from her Dad and stood back on her own two feet.

"You two had sex, didn't you?" It was more statement than question.

Ryan Bennett just smiled.

"That's disgusting."

"Where do you, think you came from, honey?"

"It's just weird knowing your parents are still . . . you know."

"It's just as weird knowing that my little girl sleeps with a young man in her bed, each night. I'm sure you two don't just sleep the night away."

Chloe's face went very red as she glanced down at that very same young man.

"Who's the extra Wildcat?" Ryan asked as he followed his daughter's glance.

"That, would be Electra."

"Another *Predator*?"

"Yes – Cassie's Dad found her."

"Hello, Commander Bennett!"

"Cassie – please . . . call me Ryan."

"Yes, sir . . . Ryan, sir!"

"How's your old man?"

"Doing good – he's down in the Falklands at the moment, on patrol."

"That should keep him out of trouble for a while," Ryan chuckled.

That afternoon

The Farm

"Wow!" Megan exclaimed as Mindy braked the Jaguar to a halt outside the house.

Megan dived out, along with Anne-Marie and Danny. Stephanie took her time but her eyes were also drawn to the yellow Bell helicopter which sat in the back paddock behind the barn. Stephanie scowled as the chilli red Mini John Cooper Works Clubman All4 skidded to a halt barely six inches short of Stephanie's left leg.

"Chloe!" she yelled as the aforementioned teen leapt out of her car.

"Sorry – kind of got away from me," she grinned unapologetically.

"She wanted to scare you," Saoirse commented as she climbed out from the other side with Cassie and Electra appearing from the back.

The final arrival was Joshua, in his blue crystal Audi S3. His passengers were Dave, Abby, and Curtis.

"Chloe, you are a fucking nutcase and how you did not get a ticket, I will never know," Abby proclaimed.

"I am what I am!" Chloe laughed as she walked over to the house.

"Hello, Mrs Lizewski," Jasper announced as he walked towards the veteran vigilante.

"Hello, Mr Collins," Mindy replied, shaking hands.

"Please, call me Jasper."

"Of course, Jasper; please call me Mindy. This is my husband, Dave."

"Hello, Dave, we haven't met. Jasper Collins."

"Those three are our children – Stephanie, Anne-Marie, and Daniel."

"Very sweet – the latter pair; I haven't met the illustrious Stephanie, who I have heard so much about."

"Stephanie!"

"Hi, Mum."

"This is Jasper Collins. He works for MI-5 and is he currently the HMG liaison for *Vengeance*."

"Hello, Mr Collins," Stephanie said, offering her right hand with a grimace of pain.

"A very polite young lady. I was very sorry to hear of your injury but I am very pleased to see you up and about. I speak from experience when I say you have a rough road ahead of you," Jasper replied as he gently shook her proffered hand. "I am looking forward to working with you."

"This, is Joshua Williams," Mindy said as Joshua came over. "He is our resident Brit, other than Stephanie. He is at your disposal, Jasper."

"Hello, Mr Williams – may I call you Joshua?"

"Yes, sir, you may," Joshua replied as he shook hands.

"Your father was a Royal Marines Commando?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hi, Mindy," Keira said, giving the purple vigilante a hug.

"Good to see you. You enjoying the new toy?" Mindy asked, tipping her head towards the helicopter.

Keira just smiled enormously. Before she could reply, there was an enormous squeal and everybody turned to see two people rolling about on the grass.

"I think Abby just found Eric!" Megan pointed out unnecessarily.

"Why's Eric got his hand down Abby's pants?" Anne-Marie asked innocently.

Mindy's eyes went wide and she quickly pulled Anne-Marie and Danny towards the house where she handed them over to Jack Bay.

"Things are getting a little X-rated out there, Jack," Mindy explained before she headed back out to watch the show.

That night

Glenview The British Sector

"He's a great guy."

"Yes, he is – without Josh, I might not have been able to cope with this grand new life of mine," Stephanie replied.

Both girls were in bed, staring at the ceiling. Neither, were able to get to sleep, so they talked. For Electra, she was over the moon to be able to talk with her one friend that she had in the world – well a friend from her time with Urban Predator.

"I still can't believe that you got taken in by the very person that you and me were trained to emulate."

"Tell me about it – I feel a little like Cinderella."

"Almost every night, since we parted, I've thought of you, Steph. . ."

"Err, 'lectra, I'm not into girls . . . OW!"

Stephanie rubbed her left side where Electra had just dug two fingers in."

"That was *not* what I meant, Stephanie!"

"Sorry. . . At least once a week, I endure a nightmare where I see everybody that I've ever known. I see the faces of everybody that I've ever killed. I see the faces of everybody I cared about – and yes, that includes your face. I relive

killing that Newton girl in the shower. I relive killing those kids in the woods. I relive seeing those twenty-five dead bodies in Milan – those *Predators* who were murdered. I relive. . ."

Stephanie stopped speaking and Electra turned to look at her friend. She was shocked to see tears spilling down the ten-year-old's face.

"I relive people trying to kill me. I relive those moments of hell while I was *Predator*. Then I relive those more recent events. Those when I was so scared either for myself, or for somebody I cared for. I've been humbled by those who care for me. I struggle to understand why anybody cares for me. I still barely understand why Dave and Mindy added me to their family. When I was hospital, everybody cared about me – even my Mum did things that I never thought she would do for me. I never knew that anybody could love me as much as Dave and Mindy do."

"Stephanie, you're a good person, despite what they turned you into."

"No, I'm not; I'm damaged. All I am able to do is kill and maim. I deserved to be strapped. I deserved to be thrown into the Cage. I deserved to have Saoirse try to kill me. I deserved to be shot."

"Please, Stephanie, don't be like this. You *are* a good person and do you want to know why?"

Stephanie did not reply, she just stared up at the ceiling as the tears continued to fall. Electra sat up and glared down at her friend

"You are so stupid, Stephanie. Where should I start? You helped a little girl to fight back against those who saw her as an easy target, despite knowing that it was against the rules. You helped protect the same stupid little girl to survive against all the odds. You gave that little girl a reason to live. That's just the stuff I have experienced. This afternoon, I spent a lot of time talking with Joshua. He related a lot of stories about you. He told me about a young nine-year-old girl who held out the hand of peace to her nemesis. He told me about a young nine-year-old girl who allowed somebody who had tried three times to kill her, to sleep in this very bed. He told me about a young nine-year-old girl who risked her own life to save her little sister that she had only known for a few weeks."

Stephanie still did not reply.

"You're the perfect role-model, Stephanie Lizewski. If I could pick any person in the world to be my big sister, it would be you."

Stephanie's tears of self-loathing rapidly came to a stop. Stephanie blinked at Electra and then she pulled herself, rather painfully, up into a sitting position.

"Thanks, 'lectra. You may only be young, but you always tell it like it is. Sorry for being a pussy and embarrassing myself."

"We all need somebody to talk to. I care about you Steph – I owe you my life."

***The following morning
Wednesday, August 17th***

The Farm

"Hello?"

Joshua and Stephanie were in the basement at the door to the Alternate Command Center. Joshua exchanged a worried expression with Stephanie as they moved further inside. They both froze as they heard giggling.

"Is it safe for an innocent ten-year-old girl to come in?" Stephanie called out.

"Yeah – is it safe for me, too?" Joshua asked.

The giggling became louder and Joshua easily recognised Abby's giggles.

"Abby, are you decent, I have no desire to see your naked butt, this morning."

"Joshua!" Abby growled as she appeared from behind a server cabinet, her face a little too pink.

"Morning, people," Eric commented as he came out from behind the same cabinet.

"You two finished?"

"We might go back later to . . ." Abby said before she drifted into an embarrassed silence.

"We've finished the uplink for the helicopter and we're about to go fit the tracker into the cockpit. Keira should be able to start searching for the transponders by ten o'clock," Eric said quickly as he covered for Abby.

"Well, once you have the tracker done, you can go back to searching inside Abby for her transponder," Joshua deadpanned as he and Stephanie left the room in disgust.

They both grimaced as they heard the giggling start back up again.

Later that morning. . .

Keira was in her element, two-thousand feet in the air and heading in a broad circle around the city.

Beside her, sat Megan who was grinning broadly. She was holding a tablet computer which was scanning for the Diplomatic Bags' transponders via the helicopters recently augmented systems.

"You enjoying yourself?" Keira asked the young girl.

"It's so awesome!"

"You looking forward to tomorrow?"

"Damn right!"

"What is he going to be? Eleven?" Keira teased, knowing full well the correct answer.

"Curtis is going to be twelve, thank you, very much."

"What about you?"

"I've gotta wait until next month. . ." Megan responded dejectedly.

"It'll be worth the wait," Keira laughed. "Anything on that scanner?"

"Not a thing," Megan replied.

"Foxtrot, this is Five-Four-Three, over."

"Five-Four-Three, Foxtrot, go ahead, over."

"Foxtrot, you got anything on the transponder? Over."

"Negative, Five-Four-Three," Abby replied from Safehouse F. "Change heading to zero-one-one for fifty at two-thousand. Acknowledge, over."

"Foxtrot, Five-Four-Three acknowledges course change to zero-one-one for fifty nautical miles at two-thousand feet, over."

"Good hunting, Foxtrot out."

"Holy shit!"

"Huh?"

"Down there – that plane that almost bumped off Mindy; it's ginormous!" Megan exclaimed. "I can't believe she survived; everything is spread way the hell all over the place."

"I've seen bigger . . . plane crashes are like that – kind of reminds you of your mortality," Keira commented.

"Tell me about it – a few months back, I might have made a joke about Mindy being invincible; but I now know that none of us are invincible, our armour is just that, armour, not some magical force that can prevent all injury.

"Yeah, I heard about your visit to that hell hole."

"Gotham – changed my life, in many ways. Mom says that I went away a little girl who enjoyed being an all-powerful, invincible vigilante and came back a mature young lady aware of her mortality. I also experienced my first orgasm, but that's another story."

Keira laughed.

"You know, Megan, with everything I've heard about you, I can only hope that Harper grows up to be even half the young woman that you are."

Megan did not know what to say, so she said nothing as they continued their flight.

Two-thousand feet below and a little to the left. . .

Bell 429WLG N96543

"How strong is this transponder, Jasper?"

"Strong enough, I hope. Battery is supposed to last up to a week – we should have received a GPS signal pinpointing its exact location, but. . ."

"Must be underground, preventing a satellite fix – hopefully, the transponder signal is good enough to escape the building it is in," Mindy concluded.

"We can only hope. Anyway, I'm enjoying being driven around Chicago by the purple menace, herself," Jasper chuckled.

"I am *not* a menace!"

"There are certain people in HMG that would say otherwise, good lady."

"Okay, sometimes I leave a mess behind; I understand that, now."

"*Sometimes!*" Jasper deadpanned. "London is still recovering from your first visit to the UK."

"Actually, that was *not* my first visit to London – but I'm saving that story for another day."

"I look forward to hearing about it, one day."

That evening

Glenview

"That smells wonderful – Mindy cooking?" Jasper asked as he walked in the front door, accompanied by Cassie and Keira.

"Hell, no!" Stephanie commented dryly. "You want food poisoning?"

"You want to lose the use of your other arm?" Mindy asked sweetly.

Stephanie grinned back, just as sweetly.

"Love you, Mom!" she preened in an appalling American accent.

Jasper laughed.

"Sorry, Jasper, these *Predators* are completely nuts," Mindy commented dryly.

"Well, we *were* modelled on you, *Mommy*," Stephanie continued in the same accent.

"Jasper, I am going to go reduce the number of kids I have, by one; back in a minute. . ."

Before Mindy had finished speaking, Stephanie, realising she was pushing her luck a little too far, had beaten a hasty retreat and vanished.

"She's a great kid, Mindy – considering what she's been through, it's good to see her laugh," Jasper said seriously.

"I know; we love her very much . . . despite her nutty behaviour."

"Evening, Jasper – girls," Dave called out from the kitchen.

"Hi, Dave!" Cassie and Keira called as they went through into the living room where Danny handed each girl a cold bottle of Budweiser.

"Thank you, Danny; you're a real gentleman," Cassie told the boy.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," Anne-Marie muttered as her brother's face went pink.

"Shut up!" Danny growled as he headed back into the kitchen after handing Jasper another bottle of Bud.

"Ignore her, Danny – females like to be annoying; I speak from experience. . ."

"He has a valid point, young Daniel."

"I am *not* going to raise to the bait, Lizewski," Mindy offered as she sat down on a couch with her own bottle of Bud.

..._...

An hour later, they were all seated around the table in the dining room and enjoying Dave's steak with jacket-potatoes and salad.

"This is good. . ." Electra announced as she jammed another chunk of steak in her mouth.

Stephanie's reply was unintelligible due to her own mouth being just as full. In the kitchen, Sophia, Razor, Kiara, and Horatio were digging into their own steaks – uncooked of course. For a change, Anne-Marie was very quiet as she dug through an enormous plate of food. Danny was the same, enjoying each and every morsel.

". . . To be brutally honest," Cassie was saying, "meeting Hit Girl and her team was very scary; they all had a reputation – and not a good one depending on your point of view. Then, I found out about Stephanie and I wanted to do something to help. That was why I became Nemesis. I've never regretted it, not for a moment. I firmly believe in what Mindy does and I am very thankful that I have been able to do something to make this world a better place.

"Well said, Cassie," Keira said with an approving nod.

"I agree," Jasper added. "While I was dubious and very sceptical about what I was being asked to coordinate, I now see that both *Fusion* and *Vengeance* have a place on this earth. I've seen the 'Hit List'. . ."

"It is *not* called that!" Mindy fumed.

"It's appropriate," Jasper persisted. "You should actually publish it; you'd have many assholes pissing themselves with fear."

Mindy had to laugh at that. Stephanie grinned her own approval. Dave nodded.

"We'll see," Mindy offered with a grin. "I've yet to meet your own family, Jasper – maybe you should bring them over."

"I would love to."

..._...

After Jasper, Cassie, and Keira had headed back to their hotel, Mindy peered in on the two resident *Predators* in The British Sector. Both girls were in bed, talking animatedly.

"You know, Steph, maybe we should get you a guest bed – one of those fold up, Z-bed things," Mindy commented.

Stephanie looked over at Electra who was almost completely hidden but for her head. They exchanged glances and Stephanie whispered into Electra's ear, both girls then began to giggle insanely. Mindy rolled her eyes and coughed pointedly causing Stephanie to sort herself out and look up at Mindy.

"Nah, we're good, thanks."

Mindy chuckled.

"Just don't go all lesbian on me, girl – we've enough of those damn things as it is!" Mindy growled as she headed out of the room accompanied by another round of girly giggling.

***The following morning
Thursday, August 18th***

Glen Oak Drive

"Morning, Saoirse. How are you, this morning?"

"Very good thanks, Aunt Emily."

Emily waited for Saoirse to sit down at the kitchen table and help herself to some cereal before she spoke again.

"I've noticed that Morgan has been very different, the past few days – is there anything that John and I should know?"

Saoirse laughed but she finished pouring the milk into her cereal before she responded.

"She has changed – only I think it best if she tells you."

"Tells you, what?"

"Morning, honey," Emily said to her niece.

"Hi Aunt Em.," Morgan replied happily. "Morning, little sis."

"Morning, crazy bird – Aunt Emily would like to know why our shy little Morgan isn't so shy anymore," Saoirse explained giving Morgan a meaningful look.

Morgan flushed bright pink and her courage vanished.

"You tell her, please?"

"Stupid bird!" Saoirse growled. "Okay – you remember that thing I did, last week?"

"You demoing a strip search? Yes, you told us about it."

"Well, this little birdy insisted on going through the same thing as me – I found it humiliating as hell, so I warned her, but. . ."

"I had to. . ." Morgan muttered to her astonished Aunt.

"Well, she put on one hell of a show! Curtis and Tommy almost fell off their seats as they stared at Morgan's bare breasts – they did fall off when she bared the rest! I have to admit, it was damn hot!" Saoirse explained.

"Morgan – I'm impressed; I would never have thought that you could strip naked before an audience . . . well done!"

"Thanks, Aunt Em., I had to put my shyness behind me . . . it was so embarrassing, but the response from the boys – well, it was awesome!"

"You're growing up into a fine young woman, Morgan – don't let anybody tell you different," Emily said, giving Morgan a hug.

Keira was airborne by nine, that morning.

Beside Keira for the search, was Curtis . . . and Megan with Electra. While Curtis had the left-hand seat, the two girls sat in the back, chatting like they were long lost friends.

"What's it like being twelve, Curtis?" Keira asked.

"Surprised I made it, to be honest. But it's cool – I feel older."

"Has Megan had her wicked way yet?" Keira laughed.

"Don't you dare answer that question!" Megan cut in.

The grin on Curtis' face told Keira the answer.

"Steph was right; you two *are* a pair of dirty fuckers!" Electra commented.

"I . . ." Megan began before she was drowned out by Curtis.

"We have the transponder!" he almost yelled.

"Where away?" Keira demanded.

***Chapter 311*: Retrieval**

That afternoon

Thursday, August 18th, 2016

Safehouse Zulu

"Not bad, Mindy," Jasper mused as they entered the Command Centre.

"It's our emergency bolthole. We took cover down here after Steph was shot. The planning facilities are better here than at Fort Fusion."

"So, where is the package?"

"To be honest, it'd be easier to recover from somewhere pleasant, you know, like: Tehran, Tripoli, Baghdad, Mosul. I suppose Englewood is better than Riverdale, but it's gonna be hell," Mindy growled.

"Hit Girl a little out of her depth?" Jasper chuckled, then he saw Mindy's expression. "Just kidding!"

"Englewood has the forth worst crime index in Chicago – just ahead of West Englewood. Englewood defines 'beneath the poverty line'. Due to families not having enough money to get through each month, loan sharks breed like rats. Let's just say that none of our people go there alone, period. I wouldn't even feel safe in broad daylight with the armour-clad, battle-tank, Kick-Ass behind me with his AA-12!"

"Somebody call?" the aforementioned husband of Hit Girl asked.

"We were just discussing Englewood and what a lovely place it is. . ."

"Did you suggest Syria as a safer destination for a holiday?" Dave quipped.

"Okay, I get the drift!" Jasper exclaimed, slightly maddened by Mindy and Dave's light-hearted antics, despite the seriousness of the situation.

Mindy took the hint and turned serious.

"We can't just roll-up and kick-ass – there're families all around and they live in shitty clapboard properties, so we can't risk sending high-power bullets all over the place, nor can we trust the opposition not to flood the place with flying lead. The top 9 shittiest neighbourhoods in all of Chicago are on the southside. As you can see from the map, Safehouse Alpha is in the south; we anticipated the crime-level and setup our first place there. Even Safehouse F is in the south for the same reason."

"What are those marks, just north of Englewood?" Jasper asked.

"That place, there, was Chris D'Amico's HQ – we took it out. Just to the north-west of that is where we recovered Tommy from the Russian Mafia and we had a little altercation which resulted in yours truly being rescued by a very young Shadow and Jackal. Riverdale, right down here, is where I lopped of Chris' head – we also have Safehouse W down there, with the *Vigilante*."

"Okay," Dave said. "We need to put people at Alpha and Kilo. We're going to stir up a shitstorm as we march into that hornet's nest. Jasper, they don't like us, down there. Things will go bad, real quick, and we'll need to bug out and we could have the very hounds of hell on our tail."

"It wouldn't surprise me if FEAR and her cohorts put in an appearance, just to cause some shit," Marty commented.

Jasper pulled a face.

"You lot are *full* of fucking good news!"

"We try," Mindy grimaced.

That afternoon

Glenview

"This is really humiliating. . ."

"You want to shower on your own?"

"Do I want to, yes – can I manage, no."

"Mom's had enough of bathing our battered sister, so we volunteered. Mom says the moaning and complaining has started to grate," Anne-Marie explained for Electra's benefit.

Stephanie glowered at her sibling as she walked into her bathroom to find Danny adjusting the shower.

"I'll leave you three in piece – call me if you need anything," Danny suggested as he walked out of the bathroom, closing the door behind him.

"Stop grumping – you said you were fed up with Mom bathing you; so, you're stuck with me. Danny and me both promised to do everything we could to help you. I'm sure Electra wants to help you, too."

Electra nodded as she indicated Stephanie's underwear and then pointed at the running shower. Stephanie just dumped her knickers on the floor and stepped under the hot water.

"I know – and thank you."

The already naked Anne-Marie followed and Electra quickly shed her own clothing. Both girls helped wash Stephanie's hair – actually washing it for her as Stephanie only had the one usable arm, and apparently, washing your hair with one arm was not the easiest thing in the world. To make it easier for the much shorter Anne-Marie, Stephanie sat cross-legged on the floor of the shower. The shower itself gushed water over a large area, soaking the three of them, the shower well able to hold the three youngsters and then some.

"Mom says you're doing well," Anne-Marie commented. "We were pleased to hear that."

Stephanie grimaced.

"Everything still hurts – just don't tell anybody I said that, 'kay?"

"We're sisters, that means we look after each other – I'll not tell anybody, I promise."

"You know I always keep your secrets," Electra added.

"You're a good kid, Anne-Marie – even if you are a little crazy – and thanks, 'lectra."

Anne-Marie laughed as she continued to wash Stephanie's hair.

"Anne-Marie, I'm surprised you haven't commented on my scar – Harper, Naomi, and Kaitlin were very quick to notice and comment," Electra said.

Anne-Marie looked uneasy as she took in the long scar which stretched across Electra's torso.

"I know that Steph is uncomfortable with people commenting on *her* scars, so I didn't want to say anything."

"You're a really good sister, Anne-Marie," Electra said with all sincerity.

"Thanks," Anne-Marie mumbled.

Ten-minutes, or so, later, Stephanie emerged into her bedroom where Danny sat on the bed – he was smiling.

"You look better, Steph – your clothes are ready for you; sorry, it's a skirt again," he advised his sister.

"Thanks, Danny."

After Anne-Marie and Electra had helped Stephanie dry off, Danny passed over Stephanie's knickers.

"You know, Mom was right – you do seem to have some boob. . ." he commented.

"You fucking arseholes been discussing my chest?" Stephanie demanded angrily.

"It was mentioned," Danny admitted before his eyes went wide. "Hey – what's *that*?"

"What's what?" Stephanie asked as she stood up, her knickers part-way up her legs.

"Is that pubic hair?" Danny enquired and Electra giggled.

"Maybe!" a now very red-faced Stephanie exclaimed as she pulled up her knickers one-handed.

"You have a *long* way to go to catch up with SD," Danny pointed out and Anne-Marie joined in with the giggling.

"Any of you tell *anybody*. . ." Stephanie threatened.

That evening

Safehouse F

"Hey, Steph, congratulations," Lauren smirked as she passed the younger girl.

"What?"

"Danny says you've started growing some pubic hair," Lauren explained as she attempted to keep a straight face.

Stephanie's face went pink but then it darkened as it turned red with anger.

"Danny says . . . *DANIEL!*"

The aforementioned boy paused as he heard the bellow from the opposite end of the Safehouse. His eyes went wide and he bolted as Stephanie began to charge toward him.

"I am going to make you bleed, boy!" she bellowed.

"Mom!" Danny yelled as he tried to reach the steel steps beside the Command Centre but failed as Stephanie intercepted him. "Please. . ."

"Grow a fucking backbone, Daniel," Stephanie seethed as she produced a trio of matching titanium throwing knives. "You know what a eunuch is, Danny-boy?"

"No . . ."

"You know what a penis is?"

"Yes . . ."

"A eunuch has had his cut off, along with his fucking balls!"

Eight-year-old Daniel had gone very white.

"Stephanie!" Mindy said as she arrived on the scene; she studied her daughter and then she smiled. "Stop fuckin' with the boy; you're a nasty bitch!"

Stephanie's shoulders sagged.

"Aww, I was having fun!" Stephanie exclaimed.

"Daniel – have you learnt your lesson?" Mindy asked of her son.

"Yes, Mindy."

Stephanie's three titanium throwing knives had vanished and she stepped forwards to give her flinching brother a hug.

"Is your mouth getting you in trouble again?" Anne-Marie demanded of her brother.

"Oh, yeah!" Daniel muttered as he allowed Stephanie to give him a hug.

"He's a sweet little brother," Stephanie grinned as she released Danny but then she punched him, very hard on his left arm eliciting a yell of pain from the boy. "I'm hungry. . ."

"You lot are bloody nuts!" Jasper commented as the crowd broke up.

***The following evening
Friday, August 19th***

Safehouse K

The activity the previous night had been constant as equipment was moved between the Safehouses in preparation for the night's operation.

Then, almost the moment dawn had broken that Friday morning, several members of the team had executed reconnaissance runs of the area. Marty and Abby had wired up four vehicles with cameras allowing a full three-sixty-degree view as the vehicles were driven on different plates and by different people to assuage any suspicion.

Keira was airborne, confirming the transponders exact location and obtaining up to the minute, high-resolution aerial images of the immediate area surrounding the target property.

Absolute secrecy had been maintained throughout, but Mindy knew that the moment they deployed, the news that *Fusion* was out in force, would get around the city in no time. Therefore, disinformation was the name of the game.

Mindy dialled a special number and spoke the moment that the call was connected.

"Fortune, this is Minotaur. Hit Girl will be at West Garfield Park, tonight."

Mindy cut the call after she heard a curt, "Good."

..._...

Vehicles, weapons, ammunition; it had all been relocated to the correct locations from whence it might be called upon as required. Every member of *Fusion* was busy checking their own personal equipment, and they were ready to leave at a moment's notice.

Hit Girl turned to the assembled vigilantes and she began to speak.

"Tonight, we face a difficult task. For the sake of secrecy, many of you have no idea what it is that we seek. Do not take this as any reflection on your skills or your integrity. This secrecy was enforced from the highest level of the British Government. You all know that we have a heavy British contingent with us for the operation. Due to their British status, Psyche and Jackal have already been read into the operation. Jasper, otherwise known as Sleuth, is here as a representative of the British Government to ensure continuity of custody for the items that we seek. Nemesis and Scorpion are here to fight while Q will provide technical support when he is not checking out Hal's peripheral interfaces."

There was muted laughter and a grimace from Hal, currently ensconced at Safehouse Zulu with the aforementioned Q.

"*At least we don't have to put up with the sexual innuendo and heavy petting!*" Battle Guy grimaced from Safehouse F where he was on watch with Psyche.

"Due to this recovery operation being complicated enough, Nightmare will be in charge of our decoy operation. She has been briefed independently and her job, with her team, will be to distract FEAR or any one of the various cunts who want nothing more than to disrupt our operations. Nightmare, is your team ready?"

"Yes, *Hit Girl*," Nightmare called from Safehouse F. "Rigour, Venom, and Bane are ready."

"Rigour?" Trojan enquired.

"Rigour is very new, but her competence has been vouched for by Psyche – and who am I to argue with the most famous *Predator* ever!"

"The more you feed her ego – the worse the little bitch'll become," Foxtail groaned to general laughter.

"You go for it, Rigour!" Psyche called out from off camera.

Rigour was wearing Wildcat's old armour, but to anybody looking, they would see Wildcat. Rigour was to ride Psyche's Honda (with switch plates) for the night's operation, while Venom and Bane would deploy in Hound as overwatch for the younger vigilantes. Nightmare would be out on her own motorcycle for the very first time.

"Nightmare – time for you to depart; stay safe."

"Yes, ma'am!"

..._...

"Talk about polishing an ego; every time I get Hit Girl's feet firmly on the ground, somebody has to re-inflate the damn thing!" Kick-Ass grumbled as Hit Girl threw a full magazine of nine-millimetre rounds in response which he easily deflected with the armour on his lower right arm.

"The guy with the big mouth and the big muscles will lead Alpha Team. With him, will be Shadow, Wildcat, and Trojan. I trust that the big guy can control both Shadow and Wildcat, assuming that Wildcat can keep her claws off Trojan for a few hours!"

"Such a funny bitch!" Wildcat growled.

"You think you can control me," Shadow purred as she looked up into Kick-Ass' eyes.

"Feel free to belt her, Kick-Ass," Jackal called over the comms.

Shadow glared at the screen showing Safehouse Alpha, her mouth hanging open. Hit Girl chuckled before turning serious.

"Bravo Team, consisting of the number one vigilante here. . ."

"Me?" Petra grinned.

"You think too much of yourself," Hit Girl retorted. "As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by Miss Petra, my team will consist of Mist, Miss Petra, Nemesis, and Eisenhower."

A sharp 'woof' was heard from the armour-clad hound as Kick-Ass made his own comment.

"An all-bitch team!" he quipped.

"Oh, yeah!" Mist agreed.

"Fear it," Nemesis added.

"Both Alpha and Bravo will depart from Safehouse K and approach from the north, Alpha on South Damen and Bravo on South Ashland. Charlie Team consists of Jackal, Foxtail, Raven, and Splinter. As we know, Jackal is well suited to handling spirited females, and Splinter will take no shit. Charlie Team will depart Safehouse Alpha and come up South Ashland from the South. In support, we have Delta Team which consists of Hawk, Lynx, and Medic – now *that* is a bitch team!"

"You got that right, queen bitch!" Lynx growled over the comms.

"Delta will depart from Safehouse W once the operation is underway – they will be in *Titan*. Echo, consisting of Scorpion, Sleuth, and Leon, will be in support and flying from Safehouse W. Echo will be the extraction team and they will take custody of the packages and fly them offshore to where Neptune, Ares, and Athena will be waiting in *Vigilante*. *Vigilante*'s mission from that point is classified. Okay – time to tell you all what is at stake.

"The other evening, after somebody dropped a Hercules on top of me, I came across a Queen's Messenger who had been mugged. His packages had been stolen – by whom, we have no idea. To be honest, we don't think they really know what they have in their custody. Those Diplomatic Bags are deemed sacred British territory and the contents must not see the light of day outside of a British facility. The British Government has entrusted *Vengeance* to recover those packages and they have authorised *Vengeance* to seek assistance from *Fusion*. We will not fail in this

operation. *We cannot fail in this operation. Get to it, people and stay safe,*" Hit Girl concluded.

Everybody began to move, heading for their transport.

West Englewood

Okay, West Englewood was not exactly deemed the number one part of Chicago to live in.

However, for most of those who lived there, they had no choice. Their incomes were low, so therefore, they could only afford cheap housing for their families. About the only thing that West Englewood ever came top in, was in the local crime statistics. The Chicago Police Department only went there in numbers. The place generally had its own form of justice operated and interpreted by the gangs which ran the neighbourhood. Somewhere in the region of 35,000 people lived under the gang's thumb.

To the east of West Englewood lay the neighbourhood of Englewood which was only marginally worse than its more well-off neighbour and it also supported several gangs who saw the neighbourhood as their own territory.

Fusion and *Vengeance* were quite literally walking into a potentially explosive, simmering warzone.

Nine-thirty

The late hour had been selected to minimise those innocents that might be still wondering the streets.

In theory, the only people out should be those undertaking dubious and most probably illegal activities that might normally have brought themselves to the attentions of *Fusion*, anyway.

Alpha Team, in *Sentinel*, pulled onto West 66th Street and loitered outside Harper High School, only a couple of hundred metres away from their destination.

Bravo Team, in *Brute*, pulled onto West 66th Street from the opposite end and pulled over onto some waste ground.

Charlie Team, in *Iron Hide*, pulled up outside the Sir Miles Davis Academy on South Paulina Street.

The other teams deployed to their start points, ready to move on command.

"All teams, this is Foxtrot," Psyche began as the final teams checked in. *"Standby to move on my command."*

Everybody was focused on their own individual tasks as they prepared for the power-hungry ten-year-old to set them loose on West Englewood.

Meanwhile. . .

West Garfield Park

"Tell me, sis, why are we out here babysitting a rookie and a Yellow when we could be part of the *real* party?"

Venom laughed.

"Bane – you can be such a disagreeable bitch, sometimes," Venom suggested to her twin.

"I can hear you, Bane – I may have been a Yellow, once upon a time, but now, I am just as much a *Predator* as either of you two bitches."

"Sorry, Rigour, I just miss being part of the action – I meant no offence," Bane conceded.

"None taken," Rigour replied.

"Okay, guys, let's focus, please," Nightmare suggested.

"Not a bad idea," Rigour cut in. "We have company."

..._...

FEAR frowned as she turned onto North Karlov Avenue and only saw two motorcycles, and one armoured SUV. She recognised the body armour of Wildcat, plus one of the newer vigilantes, Nightmare. Nobody stepped out of the SUV, so FEAR had no idea how many were in there, nor who, but nonetheless something was off. She turned to three of her armour-clad henchmen.

"Mop these up and then follow on."

FEAR and her entourage of henchmen turned and headed south, leaving three men behind who climbed off their motorcycles and faced the two young vigilantes. Nightmare did the same, swinging a long leg off of her brand-new Aprilia Shiver 750 ABS motorcycle in a dark and light grey digital urban camouflage. She was quickly joined by the much shorter Rigour.

"Bane, Venom – you stick with your doughnuts; we'll handle this," Nightmare ordered.

..._...

The three men were quite large, and each wore body armour.

For Nightmare, it was just another night out in Chicago, but for Rigour, it was something quite different to what she was used to. Her last 'fight to the death' had been months before and she had been a relative novice to fighting. Since then, though, the nine-year-old had improved her skills, and as she gauged her opponents, she advanced, drawing the Wakizashi which she had been loaned from the *Fusion* armoury from her back.

All three attackers drew their own blades – full-sized Katana swords. Nightmare had recently graduated to her own melee weapon and as such, she drew her Tanto. Rigour moved in first, Nightmare acknowledging the *Predator's* greater experience with a blade.

Safehouse F

"This is Psyche . . . sound off, people!"

"Q is a go."

"Hal is a go."

"Battle Guy is a go."

"Alpha Team is a go," Kick-Ass announced.

"Bravo Team is a go," Hit Girl advised.

"Charlie Team is a go," Jackal called.

"Delta Team is a go," Hawk responded.

"Echo Team is a go," Scorpion added.

"Vigilante is a go," Neptune concluded.

With a nod from Battle Guy, Psyche triggered her microphone.

"*Fusion, Vengeance* . . . standby . . . Echo Team: Scramble. Alpha Team, Bravo Team: Deploy archers. Charlie Team: Cover Alpha and Bravo. Delta Team: Be ready to roll. All Teams: Stay safe!"

Battle Guy stared up at the large screens, each showing multi-coloured dots as *Fusion* and *Vengeance* members deployed on the darkened streets.

West 66th Street

Shadow went first, her compound bow held tightly in her left hand.

Behind her came Wildcat as her close support. Kick-Ass and Trojan ran across the street and took cover behind the parked vehicles. Their movements were mirrored by Hit Girl, a compound bow in her left hand, with Mist as her close

support. Petra and Nemesis ran down the street, taking cover behind parked cars as Eisenhower followed along behind sniffing for any danger. After having driven a couple hundred yards closer, Jackal, along with Foxtail, Raven, and Splinter ran up South Paulina Street to provide support from the south.

Shock and awe was to be the theme for the night's activity.

6558 South Paulina Street

The property was about ninety to one hundred years old.

The upper unit was occupied by one Hector Raymond. Hector was in his early forties, slightly overweight, with a little Mexican ancestry. He ran the 'Cortez Street Gang' and he ruled everything between South Ashland Avenue and the north-south railroad tracks beside South Bell Avenue. The north and south boundaries of his 'territory' were West 59th Street and West 74th Street.

The lower unit housed his goon squad during their nightly activities. That night, about a dozen were present, offloading their cash and picking up their next load of drugs. The CPD rarely came within two blocks of the premises despite being well known for the activities that went on there. Several of the neighbouring properties were also part of his 'estate', housing what he called his 'soldiers' plus his 'women'.

The 'Cortez' were very real and very well equipped. They were also very well connected and just across the 'border' at South Ashland Avenue, lay the neighbouring 'territory' of the 'South Side Stones' which covered a very similar number of blocks. The 'Stones' was run by Phillippe Estevar. For years, the two groups had been at each other's throats, quite literally. However, there was an uneasy peace between the two factions which, at times, lent itself to mutual support.

That night was a classic example of détente.

..._...

Hector Raymond was doing very well off his nightly drug and loan shark activities. But then, something very different had dropped into his lap. At first, he had been very apprehensive about what he considered to be as safe as a live hand grenade, but then, he figured, nobody would ever find it – he just needed somebody to be able to check for boobytraps and then he could make tens of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands.

In a cupboard, sat a pair of 'very hot' packages, currently unopened due to the twin seals on each bag. Neither had been tampered with as there were major concerns on the British using boobytraps. Yes, he was fully aware of what he had custody of and yes, he was fully aware that he potentially held a pair of very hot potatoes. A 'specialist' was on his way to ensure that the bags were safe to open and then Hector would find out what he had and then what he could ask for the items in monetary value.

"Hector!"

"Ramon?"

"Phone call from Estevar."

Hector took the offered cell phone.

"Phillipe, Hector. . ."

"You have visitors – *Fusion!*"

"*Fusion!*"

Before Hector could drop the call, he heard breaking glass coming from the windows and a pair of objects thudded onto the carpet at his feet. Seconds later, the flash-bang devices detonated, closely followed by several more detonations on the floor below.

Hector struggled to focus, his ears ringing. He tried to reach for the pistol which lay on the table a few feet away, but he was totally disorientated.

All around him, his men were trying to recover.

..._...

Outside, Hit Girl, Shadow, and Nemesis free-climbed up to the upper balcony where Shadow pulled open the doors to allow Nemesis and Hit Girl to make their entrance.

There were seven men in the room as Hit Girl and Nemesis burst inside. Most were struggling to regain their feet and were scrambling for weapons. They were rapidly disarmed and kicked unconscious as the two vigilantes swept through them. Shadow remained on the balcony, watching for movement on the street below.

Hit Girl moved on with Nemesis, searching room by room. Beneath them, they heard gunfire and the sounds of bodily contact as Kick-Ass and his team swept through, making their own search of the lower unit.

"Over here!" Nemesis shouted as she opened a cupboard in the master bedroom.

Hit Girl ran through and she smiled as she laid eyes on the two white sacks, both imprinted with:

HM

DIPLOMATIC

SERVICE

"We have the packages!" Hit Girl radioed. "Seals appear intact. Echo, move in for pickup – we're headed for the evac point."

Nemesis grabbed the two packages and carried them towards the staircase where she found the imposing armoured bulk of Kick-Ass waiting. He provided escort as Nemesis carried the packages down the stairs and towards the exit. That was when all hell broke loose. . .

"All Teams, this is Jackal – we are taking fire, multiple gunmen coming up West 66th from the east."

Echo Team

"All Teams, this is Scorpion, we have armed men moving in from the east end of West 66th – they have vehicular support."

The gunfire below looked like fairy lights twinkling in the darkness but Scorpion was not deceived, she knew a battle zone when she saw it. The primary landing zone (LZ) was intended to be the road junction of West 66th and South Ashland but the incoming gunmen made that impossible and suicidal. The secondary LZ was a seven-hundred-metre dash north up South Ashland Avenue to the MTA Green Line Station parking lot.

Scorpion remained high enough to not draw fire but low enough to be able to monitor the situation before and ready to dive for the MTA and the pickup when required.

West 66th Street

As per usual, all had gone to shit, Hit Girl mused to herself.

The last thing they needed was a running gunfight with a pair of notorious street gangs, but they had no choice as Shadow began to rain down flash-bangs onto the street below as a distraction while Petra and Mist ran for the armoured vehicles parked down the street.

Strangely, the gunmen swept past *Brute* without paying it a moment's thought. They also missed Petra as the veteran vigilante slunk down the sidewalk avoiding combat and thus avoiding discovery. She was finally able to climb aboard *Brute* and it was only when she started the large V8 engine and began to make for the firefight that she was discovered and gunfire began to strike the armoured SUV.

Mist was in the clear and she was the first to pull up outside the target property in *Sentinel*. Nemesis jumped in the back tailgate with the all-important packages. Hit Girl and Wildcat dived into the back seats while Trojan rode shotgun beside Mist. The remainder would await the next transport while providing covering fire for *Sentinel*.

Brute pushed through the gunfire and was soon passed by *Sentinel* racing in the opposite direction. Petra dived for

her colleagues, putting Brute between them and the gunfire. Kick-Ass, Shadow, and Eisenhower dived aboard and they provided covering fire for Jackal and his team as they raced back to *Iron Hide*.

Junction of West 66th and South Ashland

As Mist put *Sentinel* in a sideways drift before powering north, heavy rounds began to strike *Sentinel's* armour plating.

"Fuck!" Hit Girl yelled as she recognised the men in the familiar body armour who were opening fire on them from behind parked cars.

"FEAR. . ." Wildcat growled, her tone full of venom.

"Keep going – ignore those bastards!" Hit Girl ordered and Mist rammed her foot down, unleashing the full power of the 6.2-litre V8.

West Garfield Park

Rigour was in her element.

As she focussed all her anger onto the first armour-clad individual, she savoured the thought of drawing blood. She missed the smell of fresh blood; it had always invigorated her. In her mind, she could hear her mentor guiding each and every movement of the Wakizashi, ensuring contact with each fluid movement. It was the first time, fighting in a combat suit and she liked it; she felt cocooned from the outside world and she felt invulnerable as she lopped off the man's right arm, which fell to the ground with a clatter from the blade still clutched in his lifeless hand.

The longed-for fountain of blood exploded out of the severed stump and Rigour grinned broadly as she turned towards her next target and the blade which came sweeping towards her head. The blades clashed and the man grinned insanely as he glared down at the diminutive *Predator* who moved deftly, dodging the long blade of her adversary as she strove to drive her own blade home. The man had seen her blade cut through his companion's body armour like a warm knife through butter, so he was careful not to misjudge the short person before him.

His partner was fighting somebody almost a foot taller and therefore much closer to his own height than the half-pint whom his colleague was fighting. Nightmare was doing well, despite it being her first night out armed with a large blade. Nightmare knew that she had been trained well by Foxtail and she was not about to let down her mentors. Her eyes took in her opponent and she kept an eye on the very sharp blade which was being thrust in her direction.

Then her attacker made a mistake.

..._...

Venom and Bane remained inside the armoured SUV watching the mini-skirmish unfold before them.

"She's actually really good," Bane commented as she watched Electra move, spin, attack, all without a single wasted movement. "She's no fucking Yellow!"

"Yeah," Venom agreed. "A very talented girl and very lethal. I will admit that Nightmare ain't bad, either. Never really trusted that girl, to be honest – even if Mindy went soft on her because she was raped. There's something disturbing about her."

"You looked in the mirror, recently, dear sister?"

"Looking at you is enough, Bane."

"Ooh – I think Nightmare has her man; he just fucked up; ow – there goes his thigh. Not a clean cut but I bet it stings a bit . . . nice follow through, straight to the heart."

"Don't need the damn commentary, Venom."

"Better than listening to your mouth flapping all night!" Venom hissed back.

..._...

"You know, you two can be really distracting," Rigour growled as she drove her right armoured elbow joint into the man's face and his nose exploded into a cloud of blood.

Without a pause, she swung her Wakizashi in a horizontal sweep and then she stopped and looked up at her opponent. He appeared to have paused, then he sagged to one side and his head seemed to slide in the same direction before it slid right off his neck and fell to the road. The severed head was quickly joined by the rest of the body which was pumping out copious amounts of hot, steaming blood from the severed arteries.

"Now that, was cool!" Venom commented with an enormous smile.

"Passable," Bane added with a sly grin.

"Tough crowd!" Electra commented as she wiped off her blade on her most recent kill.

"You're not kidding!" Nightmare added as she followed suit.

Junction of West 65th and South Ashland

Sentinel and her precious cargo were in trouble.

There, standing in the junction was none other than FEAR herself. She stood beside her Kawasaki Z1000SX Tourer, a one-metre-long tube to her right shoulder.

"Holy shit!" Trojan exclaimed as she identified the Russian-made RPG-27, single-use, rocket launcher.

Then, before FEAR could fire the rocket, she turned at the sound of an enormous roar and her eyes would have opened wide had she not been dazzled by the blazing headlights of the 8.5-tonne armoured truck which was heading directly at her. FEAR dropped the rocket launcher and dove out of the way just as the truck struck her motorcycle and all four gigantic Michelin XZL335/80R20 tyres tore into the once beautiful machine.

..._...

"I have been waiting so goddamn long to do something like that!" Lynx yelled. "Fuck you, FEAR – that's for my daughter!"

"You go girl!" Medic laughed from the passenger seat.

"Hey!" Hawk commented. "There's another one. . ."

Lynx chuckled insanely as she turned the wheel and aimed the monstrous truck towards the dark red Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R with neon orange highlights. The motorcycle bolted forwards, but not fast enough.

"Damn!" Lynx growled as the front bumper caught the rear of the motorcycle a glancing blow, sending the rider flying across the intersection and the motorcycle skidding along behind in a shower of sparks.

"All clear, *Sentinel*!" Hawk announced as the armoured SUV sped past.

***Chapter 312*: Defence One**

Friday, August 19th

Echo Team

Sentinel could be seen below, making for the MTA Green Line Station parking lot up South Ashland Avenue.

Scorpion expertly brought the Bell 429WLG twin-engine helicopter down towards the LZ where she touched down at almost the same instant that *Sentinel* hit the parking lot. Sleuth leapt out of the cockpit and pulled open the rear hatch. Hit Girl had dived out of *Sentinel* and run around to the rear, heaving open the armoured rear door. Nemesis jumped out and turned to pull out the two large packages.

Just then, a large calibre round struck the parking lot, inches from Nemesis' left foot. Everybody dived for cover, but just as they did so, their earpieces crackled into life.

"Leon has the sniper . . . adjusting . . . round away . . . he's dog meat; one ex-sniper . . . all clear!"

Nemesis was hauled back to her feet by Hit Girl and she grabbed the packages before running for the helicopter with the rapidly spinning rotor-blades. Sleuth grabbed the largest package and pushed it into the helicopter before Nemesis dived in behind with the second package. Sleuth waved at Hit Girl as he closed and latched the rear hatch before he climbed back in beside Scorpion.

Immediately, the helicopter performed a combat take-off, powering forwards and upwards before skimming across the rooftops as it made for Navy Pier.

Navy Pier

"What are we doing here?"

Bill Wright had been dragged out of the hospital, just four hours previously. His concussion had eased and he was all but ready to head home. He was not happy; he had failed in his mission and he had lost his packages. Now, he was being dropped off in the dead of night, beside Lake Michigan by a pair of plain-clothes Policemen.

"We are about to make you, a very happy man," Paul Murphy chuckled.

Bill was *not* convinced, but his curiosity was piqued when out of the night came the blatant sound of a helicopter, but without the usual accompaniment of flashing strobe lights. The helicopter settled onto the tarmac and the engines immediately shutdown, the rotors spinning slowly to a stop.

The pilot stepped out, head encased in a black flight helmet. In the darkness, it was impossible to see into the shadows of the helmet. The pilot turned to face away from the water, an MP7A1 PDW to her shoulder. He did, however, notice the Union Flag on the pilot's flight suit, plus her callsign: **SCORPION**. Out of the rear of the helicopter came two people, one in body armour and masked, while the other wore a simple business suit with an English cut. The man strode forwards and handed over an identity card.

"Jasper Collins, Five. You are Bill Wright, Queens Messenger?"

"Yes, sir," Bill replied as he examined the identity card.

"You are among friends, Mr Wright. Apart from the Chicago Police Department, we are all British – these two are Scorpion and Nemesis. . ."

"*Vengeance*," Bill commented.

"HMG wanted its property back. . ." Jasper said as he motioned into the back of the helicopter.

Bill Wright displayed obvious relief as he instantly recognised his packages.

"Still sealed and unmolested. We are placing them back in your custody, Mr Wright. From here, you shall be taken across Lake Michigan to a pickup on the eastern shore. Good luck," Jasper finished.

With that, there was the sound of powerful marine diesels starting up and Bill Wright grabbed the two packages. He was escorted by Jasper aboard the *Vigilante* which sat in the water alongside Navy Pier. The man at the wheel wore a navy-blue mask and he waved as the packages were passed aboard into the hands of Ares who held them until Bill Wright was aboard before passing them off to him.

Jasper followed before turning and waving at Nemesis and Scorpion. With a roar, the *Vigilante* took off into the darkness, rapidly accelerating to over forty knots.

..._...

A little over eighty minutes later, Neptune eased back on the power and *Vigilante* settled back into the water.

"What are we doing here?" Bill Wright asked for the second time in less than two hours.

"You have a ride waiting for you, plus an escort," Jasper replied cryptically. "Welcome to Benton Harbour."

The *Vigilante* eased up against the steel pilings, a couple hundred yards inside the breakwater. Four men emerged out of the darkness and Bill Wright froze. The men wore combat fatigues and their faces were blacked out. In their hands, each carried an assault rifle across their chests.

"Good evening," came the challenge in a British accent.

"Hotel, Oscar, Four, Seven," Jasper called out.

"Six, Alpha, Foxtrot," the voice responded. "Lieutenant Jackson, Royal Marines Commando – let's move, we have a tight schedule."

Bill Wright and Jasper were hauled out of *Vigilante* and the packages were passed up and handed over to the Royal Marines. The sound of gas-turbines igniting rent the air as three Rolls-Royce Turbomeca RTM322-01 turboshafts increased speed. By the time Jasper and Bill had been led up the beach to the deserted parking lot, the Royal Navy Merlin HMA.2 helicopter had its rotor blades spinning at take-off speed.

The two men, plus the four Royal Marines climbed aboard and the giant helicopter instantly left the ground and turned north-west.

Safehouse F

It was a bunch of relieved vigilantes who returned to *Fort Fusion*, that night.

All, were tired, but all were pleased with the night's action. Even better, it had been one-hundred-percent successful. Mindy had announced that the *Vigilante* had transferred the packages and the courier to the Royal Navy for onward travel via helicopter to HMS Iron Duke which was alongside in Montreal, Canada. From there, the packages would be placed aboard a British Airways flight to London, Heathrow.

"Congratulations, and well done, to everybody," Dave called out. "Also, well done to Electra – two of FEAR's cohorts will not see the day tomorrow."

"Beginner's luck," an embarrassed Electra commented as Stephanie swelled with pride.

"You trained her well, Steph," Chrissy commented.

"She had no choice but to learn – and fast," Stephanie replied darkly.

"That sounds like an entertaining story," Saoirse said. "But maybe another night – let's get some kip."

"Yeah – I'm back on watch in a few hours. . ." Stephanie groused.

The next morning Saturday, August 20th

Eastern Chicago

Connor, Lucas, and Trinity were the best of friends.

They had been together ever since the first grade. Something had kept them joined together for the next eight years – much to the chagrin of their respective parents as the three restless youngsters had dreamt up ever more ludicrous schemes to keep themselves occupied. Their current escapade was exploring derelict buildings within the Chicago area. All three fourteen-year-olds were highly intelligent and they had spent time examining old plans of the city going back to the 1950s. That evening, they had found their way into (actually, *broken* into) an almost lost and forgotten underground facility.

They had read about it on some obscure website that hadn't been updated in over ten years. They had been able to pinpoint the location as being just off South Sacramento Avenue. After several days searching, they had finally found evidence of a concealed doorway, partially covered in concrete. So, they had toiled up that evening and then, after telling each other's parents that they were staying at the other's house for the weekend, they left their respective homes and met up at the 36th Street & Kedzie Bus Terminal.

..._...

The three teens had made short work of the thin covering of concrete and then they had found a steel door before them. That had taken quite a bit of forcing with a crowbar and the combined strength of each of them to pry it open just enough to squeeze through. Beyond that door, they found a concrete tunnel which ran for about ninety yards beneath a long abandoned rail track before it sloped steeply downwards and it made a sharp left turn and stretched for another fifty yards or so to where they found a second steel door – although it was more of a hatch, being only about three feet in height and raised about a foot off the ground.

"This is really creepy," Trinity pointed out as they sat down for a break and some chocolate.

"Trinity, you're scared of your own shadow," Connor laughed.

"You still sleep with a night-light, Connor," Lucas reminded his friend.

"It's there for safety – I don't *need* it."

Derisive but friendly laughter followed, echoing into the darkness.

..._...

The hatch had not suffered as badly as the first steel door, but it still took some effort to force it open.

"Where, do you think this goes?" Connor asked.

"No idea," Trinity replied as she swung her powerful flashlight in all directions looking for anything and everything.

"These tunnels are old – at least sixty years . . ." Lucas commented.

"You think there's a bathroom down here?" Trinity quipped.

"You're kidding me?" Lucas replied.

"I need to pee."

"Well, go find a corner to pee in, then."

Trinity headed off for a patch of darkness beyond the reach of the boy's flashlights – she did not trust them not to illuminate her in all her glory. Once she was certain that nobody was observing, she shrugged off her backpack and placed it down on the floor along with her flashlight. She unclasped her belt then pushed down her jeans and panties. She squatted down and with a sigh of relief, she released her bladder and then tried to ignore the sound her pee made as it struck the concrete floor below.

..._...

Connor and Lucas were exchanging crude jokes about their friend peeing – they could hear her, if not actually see her – when they heard a rumbling sound and then the tunnel shook and a cloud of dust billowed out from the direction their friend had gone.

"Trinity!"

"Trinity!"

There was no response from Trinity. Both boys rushed forwards, covering their faces with their jackets to assist their breathing against the clouds of dust which were billowing around them. When the boys reached the place where Trinity had been, they found her flashlight, the beam aimed at the ceiling.

"Here's her back pack," Connor called out. "Trinity!"

"She's gone. . ." Lucas said as he stared at the large pile of reinforced concrete and rock which blocked their path.

"We've got to find a way around this blockage – she's gotta be on the other side, Lucas."

The two boys turned back and they both began to search for another passageway.

Early hours of Saturday Morning

Safehouse F

All, was very quiet.

The Command Centre was empty, as could be expected at just after one in the morning. The only visible activity was the computers as they monitored, among other things, the Safehouse, the Safehouse entrances, and the Safehouse surroundings. A large 27-inch computer screen, off to the left side of the large space, was split into eighteen segments, each showing the feed from a security camera. The images changed every few seconds in a seemingly random fashion to show further images from around the Safehouse, and its exterior.

Then, one image froze as the computer system detected movement and an orange border began to flash, highlighting the image. The image automatically moved to one of the larger monitors and the view showed concrete and rock crumbling from the ceiling, plus something else falling into the subterranean tunnel. The image was labelled 'X422' and it showed one of the myriads of tunnels which ran beneath the City of Chicago, only a small portion of which were close to the Safehouse and therefore monitored by the highly-advanced security systems. The tunnel in question was located approximately eighty yards to the south of the Safehouse. The tunnel defences were part of the outer perimeter which protected Safehouse F and Safehouse E from attack.

Once the computer had confirmed a security breach, it began to execute a pre-arranged set of commands. The first was to notify everybody in the Safehouse that there was a potential attack underway: a raucous klaxon sounded throughout the Safehouse and red beacons began to flash in every space. The lights in the sleeping areas came on automatically, dazzling the sleeping – and very tired - vigilantes.

The computer system armed all primary and secondary protection systems and shutdown the access routes by dropping armoured steel covers over elevator shafts and staircases, sealing off the Safehouse completely.

Level 2

Abby awoke with a start at the sound of the klaxon.

She struggled to see as she was first dazzled by a bright flashing red light, and then by the harsh white light from above her as the strip lighting on the ceiling snapped to life. Once her brain had caught up with her hearing and her sight, she jumped off the top bunk and prodded the almost-awake Hailee into life.

"Defence One!" Abby yelled at Hailee and then at Morgan and Saoirse.

All four girls scrambled as they grabbed up their clothes and ran out of the bedroom.

As Abby, and the other girls burst out of their accommodation, Mindy and Dave burst forth from their own bedroom, with Danny and Anne-Marie close behind.

"Rogue, Ravage – get to the galley and stay there," Dave ordered.

"Yes, Kick-Ass," both kids replied dutifully as they ran for the galley, pistols ready in their hands.

Mindy ran down to the Command Centre, close behind Abby who immediately jumped into her chair and began to hammer away at her keyboard.

"Status!" Mindy ordered as the klaxon stopped its deafening roar.

"We have a breach in Sector Four – Inner Ring," Abby replied as she pointed up at the image: 'X422'.

"A cave-in?" Dave asked.

"Could be," Abby confirmed.

"We need to check it out," Mindy declared. "I'll go with Petra and Raven and we'll see what's going on."

"Psyche – I want guards posted at the entrance to Echo and the ladder below. Ensure that the trainees are safe; see to it," Dave ordered the girl as she entered the Command Centre, a pistol in her left hand and her mask in place.

"Got it!" Stephanie replied as she ran out of the Command Centre. "Wildcat, Splinter – mask up, you're with me. Nightmare, Torment, Rigour; get to the galley – ensure all are masked."

Mindy also ran out of the Command Centre, pulling her own mask into place.

"Raven, Petra – with me!"

Trinity

Trinity had no idea where she was.

Everything was dark and her body appeared to be on fire. Pain was everywhere and it became worse as she tried to move. Then she heard movement and voices. The voices were not of people; they were electronically altered. Her closed eyes caught the flicker of bright lights as the voices came closer.

"Definitely, a rock fall."

"Any sign of trouble?"

"Nah."

"Holy shit!"

"What?"

"I have somebody."

Trinity heard the unmistakable sound of a pistol being made ready and she forced her eyes to open. Her eyes went wide as in the bright, almost dazzling, light she saw the gaping muzzle of a pistol just inches from her face. Beyond the pistol, she could make out a purple mask and below that a dark grey uniform with a single silver star on the collar.

"Why are her pants around her ankles?"

Trinity kicked out, hitting the person, but she passed out with the pain of moving. She awoke a short while later as she felt herself being moved. She tried to move her head but it was secured tightly, as was the rest of her body. Then she felt a jolt and a sharp wave of pain which made her pass out again.

..._...

When she next regained consciousness, Trinity was being moved onto a bed and she felt her clothes being removed – she also heard real voices.

"She's got a lot of bruising to her legs, especially her thighs. Her stomach has a bad cut – that'll need stitches. I'll need to check her out fully before I can be certain there are no internal injuries. For now, it is unsafe to move her out of the Safehouse."

"Do what you can, thanks."

A masked face appeared.

"I'm just going to give you a sedative – you're in safe hands, Trinity."

Trinity felt the prick of a needle in her left arm and then as her eyes closed, she felt nothing.

Lucas and Connor

"I think we're getting somewhere. . ." Lucas huffed as he pulled open yet another steel hatch.

"These tunnels seem to go on forever – I have no idea which way is out, Lucas," Connor replied as he gave his friend a worried look. "What time is it?"

"A little after five in the morning."

"We've been wondering around for *four* hours?"

"Apparently. . ."

"Let's try down here – we've got to find Trinity. . ."

After about twenty yards, the boy's progress was stopped by what looked like a large box suspended between the roof and floor by four steel wires that held the box in the centre of the tunnel.

"What is it?" Lucas asked.

"Nothing good – if I had to guess, I'd say it was a mine of some sort; I've seen 'em in my computer games."

"What do we do?"

"I can't see any other way to go but past it. We touch any of those wires . . ."

"We can *just* slip through – I'll go first," Lucas said as he handed his backpack to Connor.

The boy was skinny, so he was quite well-suited to squeezing through the narrow opening. He felt really nervous, not knowing if the object was truly a threat or not. He pushed through with his head and right arm, then his right leg and finally the rest of his body and remaining limbs. The boy breathed out not realising that he had held his breath the whole time.

"Pass the backpacks through . . . good . . . now, it's your turn, Connor."

"Was it scary?"

"Yeah, it was," Lucas admitted.

Connor did exactly the same as Lucas, only his right leg caught on the wire.

"A red light is flashing!" Lucas almost yelled.

Connor froze as he also saw the pulsing red light.

"Oh, God. . ." he muttered.

Safehouse F Command Center

"Disarm the primary and secondary defences," Mindy ordered and Abby punched some buttons.

"Done."

"This is a fucking nightmare! We have a fourteen-year-old girl . . . could she be a *Predator*?"

"Checked over her body and I couldn't find a single mark of any kind," Cathy confirmed.

"Her name is Trinity Thompson," Abby reminded Mindy.

"Yeah, her . . . we can't move her to a hospital, neither can we keep her here – her parents will be worried sick!"

"Above my paygrade, Boss," Abby quipped in an attempt to put a different spin on things – the attempt failed miserably.

"This is bad, but I suppose it can't really get any worse."

"You're tempting fate, Boss."

"I know – thanks, Abby."

Lucas and Connor

"Where the hell are we?"

"Damned if I know."

"Whatever it is; it's lit – maybe it's a . . . I dunno."

The two boys were stood facing an aluminium duct which angled downwards into the floor. Through the vent, they could make out what looked like a changing room . . . a changing room? They had to be over forty feet below the ground – maybe the place was a left over from something; no . . . there was lighting and it didn't smell musty like the rest of the tunnels. There was no sign of any activity, so Connor reached down and he carefully lifted up the air vent.

..._...

Both boys dropped down into the changing room, leaving the air vent as they had found it. The two boys found themselves in the middle of a large room surrounded by lockers. At the far end, there were toilets and showers. Then Lucas read the names stencilled onto three of the lockers: **FOXTAIL, PSYCHE, WILDCAT**.

"Oh, fuck!"

"What?" Connor asked but then he followed his friend's glance and his face drained of all colour.

"We just found the *Fusion* hideout," Lucas commented unnecessarily.

"We are in so much shit," Connor muttered as he moved over towards the changing room door.

"Ya think!" Lucas replied, moving past his friend.

..._...

Lucas eased open the door and squeezed through. There was another door a few yards away: **MEN**. He looked up at the door from which he had just come: **BITCHES**. He smiled at the sign as he turned to his left and found another door. He eased it open, pulling it towards him. Directly ahead was a small glass enclosure. Past that, there was a large room with glass walls, full of computer equipment and large screens. As he watched, a girl, her head covered in a mask and wearing a dark grey uniform with a pistol on her left hip, walked out of the glass-walled room and headed down the . . . Lucas looked upwards and he could only describe it as a large cavern. He heard voices.

"Wildcat, Splinter – stand down and go get some breakfast."

"Thanks, Psyche," a female voice replied.

The two boys slunk out of the doorway but they suddenly stopped and both quickly slunk back inside as the girl came back towards them – her right arm was held in a sling across her chest. There was no sign that either of the boys had been seen. The smell of freshly cooked bacon was wafting around the cavern and all of a sudden, both boys felt very hungry.

"What do we do?" Lucas asked his friend.

"See those steps going up?"

"Yeah."

"Let's make a dash for them," Connor suggested.

"Then what?"

"We try and hide in one of those rooms up there," Connor said as he pointed to where doors were visible on the next level up.

"On three," Lucas said as he took a deep breath. "One . . . two . . . three . . ."

The two boys ran out of the doorway and towards the steel steps which ran up beside the glass-enclosed room filled with computers; three people were visible, all facing away from them. Lucas was in front and just as he reached the steps, one of the people in the glass-enclosed room turned to look directly at him. Lucas was instantly aware of the purple markings on the mask, not to mention the name tag on the woman's left breast: **HIT GIRL**. His legs went weak as he tried to run up the steps. He made it to the top, but Lucas never saw the pistol as it smashed into his face; he just saw blackness . . . and then nothing.

Connor was very scared. He had seen his friend fall at the top of the steel steps. All around him he could hear shouting accompanied by the pounding of running feet. A klaxon was sounding; the loud sound disorientating the boy as he ran the length of the cavern. He crossed what looked to be a large training mat and he came face to face with a short girl in a mask, her name tag read: **WILDCAT**. She pulled a device from a holster and aimed it at him. Connor instantly recognised the yellow device held by the young girl but before he could do anything, all his senses went wild as his body tensed up and he fell to the ground. . .

. . . then he passed out.

***Chapter 313*: Rigour Rises**

An unknown location in the USA

Early June, 2014

Stephanie was led into the Head Instructor's office. She stopped the requisite distance before the desk and she looked nowhere but straight ahead – she knew the drill.

"Walker!"

"Sir!"

"We have something nice for you – well, 'nice' may *not* be your first reaction. . ." the bastard chuckled heartily before he continued. "You're off to Virginia."

Virginia?

The State of Virginia

About forty miles, east-south-east of Richmond

Stephanie had absolutely no idea where she was.

She had spent almost two hours in the back of a C-130J Super Hercules, enduring the incessant roar of the four Rolls-Royce AE 2199D3 turboprop engines as the all but empty transport aircraft cruised at about 348 knots on an easterly heading. The landing had been rough and the deceleration spectacular. As the aircraft taxied to a stop, the rear ramp lowered. A few minutes later, a man in camouflage fatigues which bore no rank ascended the ramp and he beckoned for the eight-year-old girl to follow him. At the bottom of the ramp, the man pointed into some trees.

"Do you see that orange marker?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are others: follow them – DO NOT DEVIATE – after about a mile, you will find a hut. Inside the hut will be your kit – get changed, rest, get something to eat. The exercise has a start time which you will find on the instructions provided with your kit. Get going, girl – I would advise you to keep up a fast pace!"

The man chuckled as Stephanie began to run, fast, towards the orange marker at the treeline. She briefly looked behind her and she saw a long runway which pointed off towards some water. The airfield was otherwise surrounded by trees.

..._...

Stephanie was worried as she found herself running hard down the side of a tarmac road with trees either side of her. She ran past a couple of large buildings with cars parked outside but she saw no people. It was humid but under the trees, she felt cold, and she would have shivered had she not been perspiring from the running. The weather was not the best and there was a slight drizzle. Her trainers were soaked within a minute as she splashed through muddy puddles and her joggers were getting heavier and heavier as they absorbed more and more water and mud.

After running through more dense woodland and getting wetter and colder, she finally reached a T-junction with an orange marker which indicated she should turn left, which she did, and then very soon, she turned right and was much relieved to find herself outside a small wooden hut in a much larger clearing amongst the trees.

..._...

As Stephanie tentatively pushed open the door to the wood hut, she tensed up, ready for any attack on her person.

The hut was cosy – a fire was lit in the stone fireplace which provided much needed warmth to the young girl. After a brief pause beside the fire to warm her hands, Stephanie moved further into the hut where she found a single camp bed, a small kitchen that consisted of a sink, a microwave, and a kettle. Beyond that, there was a surprisingly modern bathroom with an electric shower, a sink, and a toilet.

The main open-plan area in the hut, which formed the living space, kitchen, and bedroom was lit by indirect spotlights and the three small windows had shutters closed over them. Stephanie closed and locked the door before she went over to a single wooden table that had two chairs. On the table was a single piece of paper with typed instructions.

...+...

Exercise Ratchet

The exercise will begin at 1900hrs.

At that time, you will be expected to be located at the rally point: Point Ratchet, which is a 0.9-mile hike away (as shown on attached map). Further instructions will be received at that time. The exercise will be physically strenuous and will have very few limits, other than a few basic safety factors.

You will find the necessary fatigues, boots, and weapons in your accommodation. Take the spare time to familiarise yourself with the map and your weapons. You are advised to get as much rest as possible as the exercise is not over until it's over.

NOTE: *As of 1920hrs, you may be attacked at **ANY** time, **WITHOUT** warning. You will use any skills or weapons in your possession, or those which you may acquire during the exercise.*

*Emergency Code Phrase is: **BLACK DEATH**.*

...+...

Stephanie was suddenly very annoyed as she looked up at the clock on the wall above the fireplace; it was a little after eleven in the morning! Those fucking bastards; there had been *no* need to run – *none . . . at . . . all!* All the way to the hut, Stephanie had been sure that she was being watched – those cocky bastards were probably laughing at her, every damn minute of the run.

Stephanie kicked off her ruined trainers and then pulled off her dripping joggers along with her equally soggy shorts and underwear. The sweat-top and t-shirt joined the pile of dirty clothes as Stephanie made her way to the shower.

..._...

Twenty minutes later, a much revitalised – and much cleaner – Stephanie reappeared wrapped in a dark green towel. She stopped at the camp bed. Laid out with military precision was her kit. She pulled on black underwear, a black T-shirt, black combat trousers, and black socks. The trousers were supplied with a webbing belt which she quickly fitted through the loops. She grabbed up the remainder of the gear, except for the boots, and then headed over to the table.

She placed down a shoulder holster, which would allow a small pistol to hang under her left arm. Space for two spare magazines was allowed under her right arm. The pistol was a Smith & Wesson M&P 22 Compact. Stephanie checked through the items before her but found no magazines and the pistol was unloaded with no round in the breech. She frowned but assumed that she would receive ammunition at the rally point. She strapped on the holster, then an eight-inch combat knife was inserted vertically into a scabbard mounted on the shoulder holster strap and aligned between her shoulder blades. A black combat jacket and a black woollen cap completed the ensemble.

After pulling on the waterproof, light-weight walking boots, Stephanie heated up a can of tomato soup in the microwave and buttered several slices of white bread. She sat down on a chair at the table and slowly consumed her meal. The hot shower, the soup, and the fire, all combined to warm her body ready for the night's action.

After the meal, Stephanie double-checked the locked door before she lay down on the camp bed and the young girl quickly fell asleep.

1850

Point Ratchet

The instructor smirked as he saw the diminutive girl approach.

He was impressed by her turnout. She was dressed correctly and she was black from head to toe. Her blonde hair was hidden under the woollen cap, and her pale face had been dulled down with camouflage face cream. The kid actually appeared deadly which surprised him.

"Okay, Walker. You have two targets for tonight. Target number one, is codenamed Fury. Target number two, is codenamed Blaze. You will find your way blocked by other targets of opportunity. If you are able to take down both targets, the exercise ends. The exercise will also end if one of the targets takes down *you* and the other target. You have the map – DO NOT go past the marked boundaries. Understand, so far?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will find caches of equipment out there which you can make use of, as you see fit. The caches will include food. Here are three loaded magazines for you – rubber bullets. If you encounter anybody wearing a white armband – ignore them as they are neutral umpires. There is no set time limit but there will be four timeouts of one hour each, per twenty-four-hour period. The first will be at 0600, tomorrow morning. Good luck, Psyche – you have ten minutes to get going before you are open to attack."

"Thank you, sir."

With that, Stephanie ran off into the trees.

There was not long to wait as a single blast of an air horn echoed around the woods.

Stephanie prepared herself for action as she headed deeper into the woods. She kept off both the paths and the roads, preferring the safety and comfort of the undergrowth. Her short stature assisted the eight-year-old to hide within the greenery which flourished in the cold winter's night.

Stephanie thought about her instructions. She had two targets that had to be taken down – not to mention God only knew how many supernumeraries to make her life more difficult. She had a distinct feeling that there would be no silver medal for second place – besides, Psyche only went for gold.

Snap!

Stephanie braced up at the sound – it was close.

The boy was fourteen and he had only been a Phase 3 *Predator* for a very short time.

The exercise was to be part of his training and if he did well, he would be advanced in his training – if he failed . . . he did not want to fail. He, and fourteen other *Predators* had arrived at the training area, the previous afternoon. All were either senior Phase 2 or early Phase 3. They had been issued combat clothing and weapons. Then had come the briefing and the issuing of maps and supplies.

He was determined to succeed – he *had* to succeed. . .

..._...

The undergrowth was thick and he had had to jump over a fallen tree trunk. He had heard the branch snap beneath his boot. He froze and quickly scanned all around him. Nothing – he was safe. . .

No – something was there . . . in the darkness. It was small – maybe a wild animal . . . it was! The 'animal' flew at him just as he drew his pistol. But his final sight was of the broad smile of his attacker and the butt of a pistol as it struck his left temple.

Stephanie frisked the unconscious boy and she liberated a second knife, three more magazines of rubber bullets, and his pistol.

She decided against taking the pistol as it was a large frame Glock and she did not need the extra weight, so she disassembled the weapon and scattered the parts all around her. Then, just for kicks, she kicked the boy between the legs and quickly moved off, away from the 'kill'. About a hundred yards to the west, she stopped by a tree, and she smiled. There, at the base, was a small pack.

After a quick check for tripwires or other booby-traps, she opened the pack and found a torch, three chocolate bars, and most importantly, a litre of water. After a quick swig of refreshing water, Stephanie slung the pack over her shoulders and headed off into the trees.

...#...

About half an hour later, Stephanie turned as she heard pounding behind her and it became obvious that somebody was blindly running through the trees with reckless abandon. Their loss, she thought; an easy mark! Stephanie slipped behind a tree and she became instantly invisible to anybody running headlong through a forest in the dead of night. As the runner came closer, she could hear . . . sobbing?

At the very last moment, just as the runner made to run past Stephanie's tree, Stephanie stuck out her left arm and the runner impacted the arm with her face and was flipped over onto her back. The scream had identified the runner as a girl – the size meant a short girl. Stephanie seized the girl and dragged her fifty yards to the east to avoid any immediate attack from anybody who had heard the girl's scream. The girl was wearing near identical clothing as Stephanie was but something did not seem right and on closer inspection, the girl was completely unarmed.

"Stop snivelling, you little bitch, or I'll throw you to the fucking wolves!" Stephanie hissed into the girl's ear.

The girl immediately stopped snivelling and looked up at her captor.

"Walker?"

Stephanie dropped the girl in surprise.

"Electra?"

"What the fucking hell are you doing here, Electra?"

"I don't know. They told me to board a plane and then I found myself handed a load of clothes and they told me to change. They threw me out of a car, just a few minutes ago. The darkness scared me – I ran."

"Okay – still doesn't explain your presence."

"I was ordered to give this to you," Electra said as she passed over a sealed envelope.

Stephanie grabbed the envelope, shoving it into a pocket, then she grabbed hold of Electra and they both ran two hundred yards or so to the north to where there was denser woodland. There, Stephanie stopped and they both sat down beneath a large fir tree. Stephanie shielded the torch before she turned it on and she looked at the envelope. The envelope was dark grey – ignoring the mud and tears – and it had a single word written on the front, in red ink: 'PSYCHE'. Stephanie ripped open the envelope. Inside, there was a single sheet of paper which she unfolded and then she began to read the bold, printed text.

...#...

If you are PSYCHE, continue to read this document.

If you are NOT then you are ordered to read NO FURTHER and you are further ordered to KILL the courier.

...#...

EYES ONLY: PSYCHE

1: It has been determined that the difficulty of your task should be increased.

2: You will take immediate responsibility for ELECTRA HAIG.

3: If you complete the exercise without ELECTRA HAIG, you will be deemed to have failed the exercise.

4: If ELECTRA HAIG is taken down, you will be deemed to have failed the exercise.

5: Failure to protect ELECTRA HAIG will affect your future as a PREDATOR.

6: You may make use of ELECTRA HAIG as you see fit.

...#...

Stephanie looked over at Electra as she turned off the torch.

'Those fucking bastards!' she thought.

"You are one lucky bitch, Electra," Stephanie whispered. "If you had found somebody else, they would have killed you. Instead, I have to lump your sorry arse about for the duration of the exercise!"

"Sorry."

"Don't be – we are at the whim of some sick bastards. Let me check-out your kit."

Stephanie stuffed the envelope back into a pocket and she ran her hands over Electra's combat trousers and jacket. Everything was being worn correctly and the boots were properly secured. The only issue was Electra's pale-skinned face which shone like a beacon, so Stephanie dug out some face cream and she applied it to the younger girl's face after removing her glasses.

"Can you see anything without those things?"

"Not really."

Stephanie chuckled and gave the girl a hug.

"You stick with me, kid – I'll get us both through this. Whatever you do, stay quiet, and you do exactly as I tell you."

"I promise. I won't let you down."

"You'll do *anything* I say?"

"Anything."

Sometime later. . .

Electra complicated things, no end!

Stephanie had water and she had food, but unless she could secure more, she would have to share what she had – even if she was *not* responsible for the girl, Stephanie would have still fed her and helped her.

"Right, you stick to me like fucking glue. I duck, you duck. I dive to the ground, you follow like your fucking life depends on it – 'cause it does."

"I understand. I'll do my best."

"Let's move on – we have some fucking bastards to take down."

..._...

It was getting darker and colder as the evening turned into night. The rain was increasing too just to make everything that little bit more miserable.

Towards ten o'clock, Stephanie froze and she groaned as Electra cannoned into her from behind. Before Electra could start to apologise, Stephanie placed a finger to the younger girl's lips. She then pointed into the darkness and Electra stared ahead before she nodded in understanding.

"I have an idea but you are *not* going to like it," Stephanie whispered.

"Don't worry; I've not liked very much of what has happened to me since I was taken four months ago."

"I'll go gentle, I promise."

"I trust you, Stephanie."

..._...

"Are you trying to get me killed?"

"Sweetheart, if I wanted you dead, I would have snapped your pretty little neck, hours ago. . ."

"I feel so much safer!" Electra growled.

"You got something better to be doing, right now?"

"Nothing that I can think of. . ."

"Get out there and start making a little noise – remember, a *little* noise."

"Okay – I'll do it."

Electra swallowed hard and stepped out onto a muddy path where she took a deep breath and looked in the darkness to where a shadow was crouched down.

"Oh, shit!" she exclaimed, just enough for the shadow to hear her and stand up.

Electra turned to run as the shadow bolted in her direction. The shadow did not get anywhere near her . . . instead, the shadow suddenly fell forwards and hit the mud. The shadow was a girl – about thirteen-years-old and very skilled but all her training seemed to vanish as her face was shoved into the mud by a size two boot. She fought to breath as mud went up her nose and into her mouth. Her legs kicked, trying to get purchase in the mud. Her hands flailed trying to seek her assailant. Then she began to suffocate in the mud.

Electra could only stare as Stephanie pushed down harder on her boot and hence the girl. The struggling began to get more spasmodic as the girl ingested more mud. Electra began to shake as she watched Stephanie kill the girl – Electra had witnessed a lot in the previous four months but never a murder right before her very eyes. Stephanie removed her foot after another minute and looked over at Electra.

"It had to be done – I want them to know that I will *not* be fucked with."

"I think I understand," Electra whispered as her shaking turned into sobbing.

"No – please, Electra; you need to fucking toughen up."

Electra sank down to the mud beside the dead girl.

"Ok – we need to talk. Can we just get the fuck away from the scene of the crime?"

..._...

Half an hour later, they both found some deep undergrowth and after Stephanie setup some 'early warning' traps, she sat down opposite Electra.

"You're a Yellow, right?"

"Yes – I was. . ."

"Somebody seems to think that you are more than that – can't think why; as far as I am aware no Yellow has *ever* become anything more . . . except maybe dead. It seems that as I have been training you to protect yourself, some funny fucker decided to have me train you some more. Now, I am going to train you to look after yourself, and not just because that benefits me, but because I want to show those fuckers that Electra Haig is more than just cannon-fodder. You can be more, Electra – and I hope that being more means that you'll get the chance to live, to survive. One day, I will take this organisation down, you mark my words. But before I can do that, we need to get through this whatever it is."

Electra nodded.

"Now, let's get some rest – I hope you don't fucking snore!"

..._...

It was very cold when Stephanie suddenly came awake. It was a little after four in the morning and the early strains of daylight were spreading through the woods. She carefully nudged Electra awake with a hand over her mouth.

"Morning," Stephanie whispered.

"Hi – I need to pee."

"Okay; so, do I – go pee over there and I'll keep watch," Stephanie said as she handed Electra a single tissue.

Once Electra had peed, wiped, and was struggling to pull up her underwear and trousers, Stephanie took one more look around before she slid down her own trousers and underwear. Electra giggled as Stephanie emptied her bladder into the mud, somewhat noisily.

"Stop it," Stephanie ordered as she grinned.

After the refreshing pee, they both shared an energy bar and took a long swig of water.

"We have two hours until the first timeout – we just need to last until then," Stephanie said and Electra looked hopeful.

Both girls froze as they heard a snapping sound and Stephanie dived forwards, a pistol in her hands. It looked like a boy and he approached their hiding place before he stopped, unzipped his trousers and pulled out his dick. There was another sound from a short distance away and something fast could be heard running through the trees – a rabbit. The boy shoved his dick back into his trousers and zipped back up before moving off towards a tree.

"This should be a good one!" Stephanie hissed into Electra's ear. "You stay hidden while I take him out."

Electra giggled quietly as Stephanie slid out of the undergrowth and closed the gap to where the boy, of maybe twelve years of age, was busy unzipping his trousers and reaching inside for his equipment. Stephanie was just a foot away when the boy unleashed a yellow torrent at the tree which he stood facing.

'What is it with boys and trees?' Stephanie thought to herself as she reached around the tree and while the boy was checking out his surroundings, she grabbed hold of his manhood, just as he was finishing his urination. The boy yelped.

"Make a sound and I fucking squeeze!" Stephanie hissed with an evil chuckle.

The boy froze, knowing that the small girl, who had seemingly appeared out of nowhere, quite literally held all the cards.

"Not even a handful – you'll never impress the girls; maybe I should just cut your dick off . . . not that you'd really notice the difference . . . ewwww!"

The boy's appendage was hardening – and getting bigger - as she grasped it and that fact freaked Stephanie out, no end.

"Stop it!" she ordered.

"I can't – it does that all on its own; maybe I think you're hot."

Stephanie growled as she felt her face getting very warm. With one hand occupied, she placed her pistol against his head. Don't fucking move.

"lectra!"

The seven-year-old bounded out from her hiding place and she scowled at what Stephanie was holding.

"Is he hard?"

"Yeah. . ." Stephanie growled back feeling just a little embarrassed. "Undo his belt and his trousers."

Electra followed instructions.

"Yank them down – take a knife to his boxers. . ."

Electra pulled the boy's trousers down to his ankles and cut off his boxer shorts, leaving him naked from the waist down. The boy was unable to run, so Stephanie released the boy's dick and wiped her hand on his thigh. She kept the pistol pointed at his head.

"Remove the rest, yourself – move!"

The boy reluctantly removed his upper clothing, dumping everything on the ground. Electra kept an eye on their

surroundings while Stephanie kept her pistol pointed at the boy's head. When he was finished, she ordered him to remove his boots, trousers and socks. Once he was completely naked, she ordered him to spread his legs. Stephanie smirked as she ran the tip of her knife across his balls – his dick began to rapidly soften before her eyes. She back handed his equipment and as the boy fell to the ground, his hands between his legs, she placed the pistol at the back of his head.

"Run – now!"

The naked boy stood up, tears running down his face. He took one look at Stephanie's expression and he took off into the woods. Electra giggled for a moment, at least until she heard a gunshot and a scream.

"Okay – somebody is in that direction, so let's go this way," Stephanie suggested coldly after she had gathered some items from the boy's equipment. Electra now had her own small rucksack and some rations of her own, too.

..._...

The siren blasted out at six am and they both dropped to the ground. Both girls were exhausted but due to the freezing morning, they cuddled together as they each bit into a chocolate bar.

"How much longer?" Electra demanded.

"God only knows. We've only taken down losers, so far."

Both girls slept until they heard the siren and they began to hike off into the woods together. For the next hour, they saw nobody but Electra was not enjoying the early morning walk in the woods.

"I can't do this," Electra moaned.

After a full hour of it, Stephanie was fed up with the moaning and the complaining – it had finally got to the point where Stephanie was having murderous thoughts and visions of slitting Electra's throat and dumping her body. When it really was too much, Stephanie stopped and quick as a flash, she pinned Electra to a convenient tree by that very same throat.

"Look, you little fuck: I'm sorry that your life is so shit. I'm sorry that you got taken at such a young age. I'm sorry that you're stuck here with me in this hell hole. I'm sorry that our sodding lives are now intertwined."

Electra had tears streaming down her face as Stephanie spoke slowly and clearly mere inches from her face.

"You die, I die. I die, you die. We need to stick together to stay alive. I never wanted you here – I don't need you – nevertheless, I have no fucking choice but to lug your sorry arse around these godforsaken woods. Now the crunch question? Do you *want* to become what I am? Do you *want* to become a *Predator*? I have a feeling that is why they dumped you with me – so that I could train you."

Electra nodded and she wiped away her tears.

"Yes, Stephanie, I want to be like you. I want to walk the walk, talk the talk – please. . ."

Stephanie grimaced and then she slapped Electra hard across the face. Electra looked stunned; Stephanie had *never* hurt the girl up until that point.

"That's for complaining and making me into a bitch."

***Chapter 314*: The First One Falls**

Saturday, August 20th, 2016
Early Afternoon

Glenview – The British Sector

"Did you know she had a massive scar, Steph?" Kaitlin enquired over the video link.

Stephanie grimaced.

"Yes – I was there when she was wounded; I treated her. . ."

"With goddamn Duct Tape!" Electra exclaimed.

"I had nothing else to hand, but it stopped the bleeding and it kept your skinny arse alive."

"It did do that," Electra admitted.

"Electra won't tell us how she got the scar – she said it was too personal," Kaitlin said.

"Well, if Electra wants it kept a secret, then my lips are sealed," Stephanie commented.

"Tell them, Steph," Electra said.

"You sure?"

"Go ahead."

Anne-Marie, Danny, and Electra got comfortable in the bedroom while Kaitlin, Naomi, and Harper did the same, some 3,000 or so miles away.

"Well, you now know how Electra found herself in the middle of a *Predator* exercise – now, we go back to Virginia. . ."

Early June 2014

The State of Virginia
About forty miles, east-south-east of Richmond

Electra was very quiet for the next hour.

She kept rubbing her cheek where Stephanie had slapped her and sending dirty looks towards her mentor. Stephanie was oblivious to it as she kept a wary eye on her surroundings. She felt very tired, despite the short nap earlier. She was also very hungry but she did not dare dig into her food reserves any further until she was certain of being able to replenish the pitiful supplies she carried.

At least once she had had to stop Electra drinking too much. If she ran out of water, then she would dehydrate, not to mention that stopping to wee was also very dangerous – as that boy had discovered to his cost. Stephanie smiled at the recollection – it was the very first time that she had ever touched a boy down there. To be honest, it had felt weird – very soft, but then it had hardened but was still soft; a conundrum. But a conundrum for another time.

"Electra, snap out of it – or you're going to get us both killed."

The girl nodded and smiled at Stephanie. A forced smile, but still a smile, nonetheless. Then, out of the blue, a girl dropped out of a nearby tree and kicked Electra to the ground before turning on Stephanie.

"Who the fuck, are you?" Stephanie demanded.

"They call me Fury. . ."

Stephanie grinned – *Target Number One!*

The girl was taller than Stephanie but dressed in a very similar fashion.

Stephanie ran her eyes across the other girl, checking and absorbing everything about her. She appeared to be about a year older than Stephanie, with an experienced air about her. Her kit was all in order, including her weapons.

'What was so special about Fury?' Stephanie wondered to herself as she slowly moved to put herself between her opposite number and Electra who was struggling back to her feet.

Fury carefully placed her feet down as she moved, keeping a set distance from Stephanie and her eyes could be seen darting around, taking in everything and maintaining a good situational awareness. Then she smirked and Stephanie caught the indicator of an attack – but only just in time as Fury lunged forwards with lightning speed and drove a fist into Stephanie's left shoulder.

Stephanie was angry at herself for getting caught out but it had only been a glancing blow and nothing more than a little pain. Stephanie responded, kicking out and missing but following through with a punch of her own which caught Fury on the left thigh.

..._...

Electra was in pain. She was tired. The sun was beginning to push its way through the trees but she was still cold. She was also very hungry and on top of everything, she was now very muddy and she had a wet arse. Stephanie was fighting the girl who had appeared out of a tree. The other girl was bigger than Stephanie, and that fact alone worried Electra. She was also very aware of another fact which sat squarely in her mind: if Fury beat Stephanie then Electra herself would be next.

While she could defeat the odd Yellow boy, who tried to hurt her, fighting properly against a skilled Phase 2 *Predator* was not even remotely on the cards. The idea was so remote that it sat squarely on the dark side of the fucking moon. As Electra watched her new mentor fight, she watched taking in every movement, every punch, every kick, every word spoken, every insult passed. Watching and learning were something that Electra enjoyed. Normally, she would read books, but watching the real thing was unbeatable when it came to learning something new.

Stephanie was good, but Fury appeared better.

..._...

Stephanie went down into the mud and she struggled to regain her feet as she wiped the mud out of her eyes and her hair – her hat having come off much earlier in the fight. Stephanie knew that the fight had to end and soon – the noise was going to attract other interested parties and complicate things even further.

"Get up!" came a growl as Stephanie felt someone close by – Electra!

"I'm trying. . ."

Electra looked up at Fury as she closed on Stephanie, looking for the coup de grâce. Stephanie forced herself to stand but she slumped back down again – she was exhausted, but then so was Fury; the two girls had been fighting all out for over ten minutes. For whatever reason, Fury ignored the presumably insignificant Electra – to her cost, as Electra brought up the pistol which had been seized from the naked boy and she fired three shots into Fury's chest.

The older girl fell backwards with a yell but she quickly regained her feet and advanced on Electra who just froze and dropped the pistol, fear coursing through her. Electra fell backwards with her own yell of pain as Fury punched her hard in the chest. Electra was saved from any further harm when Stephanie kicked out and caught Fury on the right thigh. She followed through with a punch to the girl's abdomen and another to her groin. Fury doubled over in agony – then the siren went, signalling the end of the latest phase.

"Till later, bitch!" Fury growled as she hobbled off into the trees.

"Good fucking riddance!" Stephanie called after her.

By the time the siren went again, signalling the start of the next phase, Stephanie was feeling very low.

The pain. The bruises. The wet clothing. The mud. The hunger. It was all coming to a head and Stephanie was struggling against the tears that kept wanting to fall. She was dejected and unsure if she could survive the event. She knew full well that if she failed, then Electra would die. How could those fucking bastards put another's life on her

shoulders – she was only eight-years-old for fuck's sake!

Stephanie had spent several minutes trying to compose herself. She had to survive or the past years of hell would have been for nothing. Electra was still pure; untainted by Urban Predator. Stephanie was determined for the girl to survive – Stephane so wanted to do something right for once that did not involve killing. Electra was going to be her personal project. Electra was going to be Stephanie's way to shove one up the instructors' tight backsides.

Electra was going to become a very special *Predator*.

..._...

"Are we going to get out of this alive?"

"Yes."

"You certain?"

"Electra, I *will* get you through this, I promise."

"Don't make a promise that you can't keep, Stephanie."

"This one I have no intention of breaking and I mean that."

Electra stopped and looked up at Stephanie.

"I believe you, Steph."

Then, Electra continued walking.

'Well done, Steph – way to make promises you can't keep!', Stephanie thought to herself.

Ninety minutes later, Stephanie had cause to be haunted by that very thought.

Fury was in a fury.

The ambush had been almost perfect and for a moment, Stephanie and Electra had had the upper hand – until Fury changed tactics and she went after Electra, knowing that Stephanie would have to protect her and thus let her guard down.

It was like fighting with a millstone around her neck. She could take Fury, but having to defend Electra at the same time. Stephanie's mental agility was stressed to breaking point as she watched for Fury's attacks and she watched for Electra. Then, the moment Fury changed tactics and went for Electra, Stephanie snapped. Her exhaustion was starting to take its toll on her mind and she struggled to process everything that her senses were telling her.

Then, in a single lapse, everything fell apart when Stephanie went down onto the ground, just as Fury span, her short sword sweeping in an arc downwards. Electra screamed and she fell backwards as the sword very briefly came in contact with the front of her body. The high-pitched screaming continued as the seven-year-old girl clasped her chest, rolling in the mud.

Stephanie leapt back to her feet and she grabbed up a fallen billy club from the mud – her mind was filled with the screaming Electra and what might happen if she died. For some reason, Stephanie found herself *caring* about the young girl and that gave her a feral edge in the fight as she struck out at Fury, parrying every strike from the sword with the club – which was getting very dented, to say the least, and probably would not last all that much longer.

With care and deft movements, Stephanie moved the fight closer to the fallen Electra and then, just as Fury moved into a very favourable position, Stephanie lunged forwards and Fury stepped to one side . . . but her foot came down onto Electra's left leg and Fury fell backwards. Stephanie kicked out, catching the girl on the jaw, momentarily stunning her. Fury dropped her sword as she fell to the ground. The girl scrambled to grab it but she screamed out as a knife was driven through the back of her hand and down into the earth.

Fury screamed. Electra screamed harder. Stephanie stared at the blade and the hand which held it. Electra released the blade and fell backwards cradling her torso again. Stephanie was stunned - but for a totally different reason. Electra, despite her injuries, had pulled a blade from her belt and she had stabbed Fury in her right hand, preventing

the other girl from regaining the sword.

Stephanie picked up the sword and she was about to run it through Fury's still beating heart when bullets began to whizz past her head. She turned to see a large boy running towards her, a pistol in his hand. She grabbed hold of Electra, dragging her to her feet, and stowing the sword in her own webbing. She pulled her own pistol and fired off several rounds in the direction of the boy, putting his head down.

With a last kick at Fury, the two girls moved off into the denser undergrowth.

..._...

Stephanie dragged the girl through the woods.

Electra was stumbling, barely making sounds as her body struggled to cope with the trauma she had just endured. Stephanie knew that she could not go on forever, dragging a wounded seven-year-old through the woods of Virginia. It took a while longer to find a thicket where she could examine Electra in peace. She placed the young girl down and then began to remove Electra's webbing.

"No. . ."

Electra made feeble efforts at pushing away Stephanie's hands.

"We need to check your wound, 'lectra – hands off!"

Ignoring Electra's pathetic efforts, Stephanie pulled off Electra's webbing and then her upper clothing.

"Crap!" Stephanie announced to nobody in particular.

The wound was *long* – but mercifully, it was *not* very deep; just a flesh wound. Stephanie pulled down Electra's trousers and underwear to follow the wound. The wound extended from just above Electra's right breast, and down to her left thigh, passing just below her belly button. The wound seeped blood and the surrounding skin was covered in the same dried substance.

Stephanie had no wound dressings, so she did the next best thing. She poured water on the wound to wash it out – Electra screamed – before Stephanie dug into her backpack and produced a roll of the ubiquitous Duct Tape. Since becoming a *Predator*, Stephanie had learnt to love the silver fabric tape – you could secure people with it, secure explosives to a building with it, even waterproof your lunch with it. Stephanie firmly believed in the philosophy where if a roll of Duct Tape failed to fix the problem, you simply hadn't used enough of the stuff.

Electra's eyes went wide as she heard the tape being ripped off the roll and she began to complain bitterly as Stephanie went ahead and secured Electra's wound with the fabric tape from top to bottom, and she then added a few more strips at various strategic points for good measure. Finally, Stephanie stood back to contemplate her feat of medicine.

"Well, you won't bleed to death – and no shit should get into the wound either," Stephanie explained with a satisfied expression on her face.

Electra wiped away her tears and she groaned as she looked down her body.

"You taped me up?"

"Yup."

"With Duct Tape."

"A little unorthodox, I will admit, but the end result is good – you're going to have a scar that the boys will really like, but you're going to live."

"It hurts. . ." Electra said as the tears started again.

"Damn right it will, but you've just got to put up with the pain. We have a task to complete, you and I."

"I can't. . ."

"You have to – or we both die. Do you want to die?"

"No," Electra replied after a short pause.

"Well, let's get you dressed – you can't wonder around the woods with your fanny hanging out, now, can you?"

..._...

They had barely gone a hundred yards when a man appeared; he wore a white armband.

"Can she continue?" he asked as he looked over at Electra.

'Shall I put your dog down?' – that was how it had come across to Stephanie and she bristled with hate and anger.

"Fuck you! We're *both* able to continue – you are *not* killing either of us, this day."

The umpire grinned.

"Well, I applaud you for that. Due to Haig's wound and to your exceptional behaviour, so far, not to mention the behaviour of *some* of the other participants, you are all being granted an eight-hour stand down. A vehicle will be coming by when the siren goes at 16:00 to take you both back to your accommodation. You will find proper medical supplies awaiting you. The exercise recommences at midnight."

The man headed off into the trees, and five minutes later the siren blew. A camouflaged Humvee pulled up almost immediately and Stephanie pushed Electra and all their equipment into the back. Electra was sobbing almost uncontrollably with the pain as the vehicle bucked and rolled over the rough terrain.

The ride was over within three minutes as they were dumped, along with their kit, outside the hut where Stephanie had begun the whole escapade the previous morning.

16:08

When Stephanie entered the hut, she froze and quickly pulled out her pistol.

"Come out, with your hands in the air!" she called out.

She heard shuffling and then she was startled to see a small boy appear, he was about the same age as Electra, but with fiery red hair. He also wore yellow joggers with a matching sweatshirt.

"Hi, Electra," he said with a wave of his hand.

Stephanie scowled.

"Hi, Billy," Electra said before she collapsed onto the floor.

Stephanie swore as she holstered her pistol.

"What. . .?"

"Go lock the fucking door!" Stephanie ordered and she watched as the boy did as he was told. "Go turn on the shower, then make sure the kettle is full and put it on."

The boy followed instructions as Stephanie set to work stripping every item of clothing off the unconscious girl. By the time the boy had returned, Electra was naked and Stephanie was pulling off the. . .

"You used Duct Tape on her?" Billy asked as he stared at the wound.

"All I had – the wound isn't all bad, but it's going to hurt like hell for a while."

"What happened?"

"Fury happened. That bitch used that sword to slash her. I'm going to fucking kill the fucking bitch!"

Stephanie began to strip off her own kit as she talked. Once she was down to her T-shirt and knickers, she enlisted the not-so-eager Yellow to assist her with carrying Electra into the bathroom and then set to work washing the girl

from head to toe. The camo-cream on her face took some work and Stephanie was glad that the girl was unconscious while the decidedly extensive wound was cleaned.

Once Electra was tucked up in the bed with fresh dressings on her wounds, Stephanie stripped off completely and took a shower herself. The hot water eased her aching muscles and while it made her feel better, it also made her feel drowsy. Once she had finished, she dried off and pulled on her decidedly unappealing underwear and settled down on a blanket to get some much-needed, uninterrupted, sleep.

"Rest up, kid – wake me up at nine; unless Electra wakes, then wake me."

The Yellow nodded his head and Stephanie was asleep within seconds.

Two miles away. . .

Fury was very unhappy as she carefully applied a bandage to her right hand after enjoying a hot shower.

It had been a clean wound; the blade had missed every bone in her hand, so it was expected to heal fully – in time. The wound would hamper the way she fought and she still had two primary targets to take down. Psyche had successfully put her down, despite her having to protect that Yellow welp.

Psyche! What a fucking name! The girl had passed up the chance to kill her to save herself and that Yellow welp. Her mistake, Fury was determined to put that bitch down, permanently. Fury was the best, which was why she was there. Blaze was obviously the best from his facility, and Psyche the best from hers – from the Phase 2 level, at least.

After getting something to eat, Fury lay down to get some much-needed rest.

21:00

Stephanie came awake as she felt a hand on her shoulder.

Then there was a scream as Stephanie flipped the hand's owner onto his back on the floor before twisting the wrist.

"Stephanie!"

Stephanie stopped and looked around. She released the boy's wrist and stood back. She then looked over at the glaring seven-year-old on the camp-bed.

"Sorry, kid – Billy, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Electra, are you okay?" Stephanie asked.

"Yes, I feel a lot better, despite the pain. Looks better without the Duct Tape, too."

Electra forced a smile but Stephanie could see the pain in the young girl's eyes.

"Let's get something to eat before we have to get kitted up and back out there."

Stephanie headed into the kitchen to make some soup, tea, and toast. Billy followed her.

"Why do you care? You're a Phase 2 and she's just a Yellow, like me."

"A very good question, Billy. I have no damn idea – but some fucker threw that young girl into this fucking exercise and I have to keep her alive. She might be a Yellow, but she's still a human being and so are you."

"Thank you."

"What for?"

"Treating *me* like a human being."

Stephanie smiled at the boy as she carried three sets of hot soup over to the table before she helped Electra to sit up

in the camp-bed.

"Drink this – all of it!" Stephanie ordered as she handed the girl the steaming mug of tomato soup. "You're going to need your strength. You're going to eat two slices of toast, as well as drink a mug of tea."

"You trying to fatten me up?"

"Just trying to keep you alive."

"She cares, Electra," Billy offered.

"I know – weird, huh?"

23:40

Electra was feeling a lot better having had some more food and drink – plus some painkillers.

Stephanie checked over every inch of Electra for about the tenth time, which was well past the point of annoying for the girl. Billy was actually laughing as Stephanie applied the finishing touches to Electra's face paint.

"Stop laughing, Billy!"

"You'd better listen to her, Billy – she stabbed and shot a girl, yesterday."

"She did?"

"Oh, yeah – she's a bad-ass!"

By the time the siren went off, twenty minutes later, both girls were deep in the pitch-dark woods.

Revitalised by eight hours of rest, the two young girls concocted plan after plan for what might lay ahead of them. They both knew that neither of them had laid eyes on Blaze – although Stephanie was fairly certain that he had been the large boy who had gone after them, preventing her from killing Fury.

That still rankled; she had been so close to taking out one of her primary targets - permanently. Nevertheless, Fury had been wounded – by Electra no less! Stephanie had mentioned the knife through the hand, but Electra couldn't really remember doing it.

"I just reacted, I think," was her reasoning.

"I'm glad you did or we could both be very dead."

"What's the difference between 'very dead' and just being 'dead'?" the ever-inquisitive girl asked.

"Nothing, I suppose," Stephanie replied.

There was a rumble of noise not too far away and Electra seized hold of Stephanie's left arm.

"It's just thunder. . ."

There was a flash of forked lightning and the heaven's opened, soaking both girls in minutes, despite the trees above them.

"Let go of me – let's get a move on; we need to be extra careful as we won't be able to hear anybody coming with so much rain pounding down."

"Which means that nobody will be able to hear us moving, either," Electra pointed out.

"Exactly – well done. . ."

Her mind was trying to figure out where her targets might be and what they might be doing. But, it seemed, one of her targets had taken the opportunity to alleviate that little conundrum. As appeared to be the trend, Electra was unceremoniously kicked off to one side.

"Aw, come on!" she yelled out indignantly as she hit the wet, oozing mud – again.

The boy ignored the insignificant little girl as he strode through the driving rain and he threw a punch at Stephanie.

Stephanie caught the fist and she twisted it but she missed the size 6 boot as the twelve-year-old boy kicked into her left thigh sending her splatting into the mud beside the very unhappy Electra.

"Get up!" Electra exclaimed as she wiped the rain from her face.

"I am – for fuck's sake!" Stephanie growled at Electra who just made a face and then rolled into the undergrowth.

'Good girl,' Stephanie thought. Electra had taken herself out of play.

The boy faced off against the girl who was well over a foot shorter than he was. An easy target, was his first impression, but then he considered that his targets had not been selected for their incompetence.

"Just before I squash you into the mud, are you Fury or Psyche?"

"Which was your number one target?"

"Psyche."

Stephanie grinned enormously.

"You must be Blaze – you are *my* number two target, so that puts me above you, you gay twat – I'm Psyche and don't you fucking forget that, bitch!"

Stephanie lashed out with her knife, catching the boy on his right cheek. He yelled out in pain and glared down at Stephanie.

"I'm going to make you regret that. When I'm done with you, I'm gonna fuck you till you can't fucking walk; you hear me, bitch!"

Stephanie laughed as she moved.

"Well, if your dick is as small as that kid's dick was, yesterday, then we've got nothing to worry about. . ."

Stephanie slashed out with her knife, catching his left lower arm, slashing the material of his jacket. He responded with his own knife, a blade which was three inches longer than Stephanie's own. Stephanie had the advantages of speed and size on her side as she ducked and weaved to avoid the razor-sharp blade. Blaze had a longer reach, to be sure, but Stephanie was able to manoeuvre her body which was light and slim offering a smaller target for the boy.

Conversely, Blaze was a larger target and susceptible to Stephanie's attacks – as long as she kept out of reach of his muscular arms. The boy was on the verge of puberty and his body was changing. He had plenty of muscle available if only he could get a firm hold of the rapidly moving Psyche. When he did, he could snap her in half, or simply crush the life out of her. His chance came when Psyche made to stab him in the thigh but her blade caught and was yanked from her hand, disarming her in an instant. Before she could react, the boy had grasped her arm and twisted it around behind her back, eliciting a scream of pain from the eight-year-old girl.

She struggled to twist herself out of the grip but the boy was very strong, much stronger than Psyche was.

..._...

Images from her training began to play through her mind, the different techniques intended for different situations. She had less than a second to come up with a way to escape. With a split-second remaining, Stephanie reached backwards and she grasped the boy's left ear and wrenched. The boy yelled out and he released Stephanie.

As far as anger was concerned, the boy was apoplectic. There was no way that the little bitch was going to get the better of him. He never let a girl beat him, *ever!* 'Psyche was nothing special; her age wasn't even in double figures for fuck's sake,' he thought to himself. He reached out and punched her in the face – at the last moment, she moved but not before his fist struck her left cheek and she went down into the mud.

Stephanie could do nothing as the bastard held her down. The mud was cold and sapping her strength. The rain

pounded into her face and into her eyes. Her senses were failing her and so was her skillset – nothing she could think of would work as she felt a knee pushing into her stomach, pinning her down. She tried to reach for her pistol but her hand was knocked away and then she felt Blaze's hands on her neck.

She began to panic, kicking and punching at the boy – but his arms were longer than hers by a mile. She struck at his arms but she might as well have been punching a mature oak tree.

Stephanie knew that the end was in sight – for her. His hands were tightening around her neck and despite the ferocity of her kicking and punching, she could not push away the blackness which began to creep in from all sides of her vision. She needed to breathe, but she could not and she thought, she probably never would again. Her struggling was becoming less forceful as her body was starved of lifegiving oxygen and she began to suffocate and then die. The boy grinned down at her, satisfaction in his eyes – he had won, he had killed his primary target.

One down, one to go. . .

..._...

Stephanie barely registered the change in his expression which changed from satisfaction to shock and surprise in an instant. Then Stephanie felt something on her face that was not cooling rain; it was warm and she could make out blood dripping from the boy's mouth. Suddenly, she found that she could breathe again as the death grip around her neck eased. She sucked in several lungful's of lifegiving air and then she effortlessly pushed the boy away from her. He fell onto his side, then rolled onto his front, motionless.

As the lightening flashed, Stephanie was shocked to see a sword sticking out of the boy's back. After the next flash, she was even more shocked to see Electra standing behind the boy, her chest heaving with the exertion of her approach and of driving the sword into the boy's back – contrary to popular belief, driving a sword into a person's back is not as easy as it often appears to be in the movies.

A streak of fresh blood marred her face paint and the front of her webbing.

***Chapter 315*: The Infiltrators**

Saturday, August 20th, 2016
Early Afternoon

Glenview – The British Sector

"Well?"

"Well, what?" Stephanie replied to Harper.

"What happened after that?" Harper pushed and Naomi and Kaitlin could be seen nodding expectantly.

Stephanie looked over at Electra who smiled and nodded. Anne-Marie and Danny grinned in eager expectation.

"Okay – the next bit started well, but kind of ended on a rather sour note," Stephanie conceded.

"Tell me about it," Electra commented.

Stephanie scowled at the grimacing nine-year-old.

Early June 2014

The State of Virginia
About forty miles, east-south-east of Richmond

"You killed him."

"Was I not supposed to?" Electra growled back as they both trudged through the woods in the pouring rain as the thunder boomed and lightning flashed.

"You're a Yellow."

"So?"

"Thank you, for saving my life."

"I had to. Without you, I'd be dead, not to mention that if you had died, Blaze would have chopped me into little pieces," Electra pointed out.

"Very true!" Stephanie replied as she sat down under some bushes.

Electra squeezed in under the same bushes and she sat down between Stephanie's legs and they kept each other warm as they shivered in their wet clothing.

"You've really impressed me, Electra. You need a codename."

"I'm a . . . actually, I don't know what I am, right now . . . but I am *not* a Phase 3, Steph."

"Well, I am going to call you 'Rigour' and to hell with what any other fucker thinks!"

"Rigour?"

"Rigour – you are thorough and careful about what you do, amongst many other, equally good qualities, Electra."

"Thank you, Stephanie – that means a lot coming from the famous Psyche."

Stephanie grinned enormously.

"Have no fear, 'lectra; you can shower with me anytime without me killing you."

"Thanks – I think. . ."

..._...

By four o'clock, that morning, both girls were frozen. The rain had eased and the sky was beginning to lighten very slightly as the dawn began its never-ending daily ritual of forcing the nighttime darkness to retreat. They were huddling together under yet another bush, trying to keep warm and not get any wetter. The mud on their clothing had dried in parts but felt horrible on their flesh.

There was intense relief, two hours later, as the siren blew, indicating the next one-hour pause in hostilities. As the girls emerged into the sunlight which streamed through the trees, they felt the warmth of the sun and the humid heat.

"That feels so much better!" Stephanie breathed as she pulled off her webbing and her jacket.

The warmth on her skin felt like nothing on earth and she glared at the sodden jacket which lay on a patch of damp grass. Electra followed her mentor's example as she did the same and then enjoyed the same sun. They each chomped on a chocolate bar, for their breakfast, and then drank some water as they dried off. They made the most of the time to rest and prepare for what they seriously hoped was the last round.

They were not the only ones . . . apparently.

..._...

As they walked in the sun, the girls' morale had improved significantly after the night's lows. It was amazing what a few minutes in the sun could do. Despite the feeling of relative happiness, both girls kept their eyes and ears open, knowing that they were both still in mortal danger. The calm was nagging at Stephanie and she knew that, as a general rule, the calm came before the storm. She was not wrong, as a few minutes later, Stephanie stopped dead and she extended an arm to stop Electra.

There, just a couple of dozen yards away, stood Fury. She glared at Stephanie and Stephanie glared back. They continued to glare as a referee crossed the path, equidistant between the two girls. He threw out a pair of objects, in either direction, then he vanished into the undergrowth. Stephanie and Fury looked at the objects, both girls full of curiosity. Then their eyes went wide as they both recognised the combat wakizashi swords which lay on the path, about six yards apart. Both began to move at the same time, sprinting for the advanced weapons.

The two girls were well matched, diving for the blades at the same time. Stephanie caught hold of the sword as she hit the ground, rolling forwards and bringing the blade up to protect herself, just as Fury swept up her blade and brought it down towards Stephanie's head. Electra stood watching in awe as the blades clashed and the sunlight glinted off the blades.

Instinctively, she knew that the fight was to be the decider – the final showdown.

..._...

Seeing the swords flash in the sunlight reminded Electra of her actions only a few short hours previously. She had no idea what had possessed her to try something so dangerous. Had it been loyalty? Loyalty to whom? Stephanie Walker? She liked the girl, she really did – not that it would last. Walker was a Phase 2 *Predator* and *Predators* of any phase had no use for a Yellow – in fact, they detested Yellows, especially if they had had cause to be ordered about by one while naked in a cage.

Electra felt powerful when she was on duty in The Cage. She, a mere seven-year-old, was empowered to order about kids many years older than her – and not just eight-year-olds, she had had thirteen-year-old and fourteen-year-old girls and boys under her command. They would strip naked at her order and carry their urine and excrement in a bucket down a corridor to be emptied while she escorted them. She had seen the humiliation in their eyes, especially with the older kids. She had had real power – much more than any *Predator* ever had.

Electra worried about what was going to happen to her after the exercise. Was she to be cancelled or terminated? She knew that kids would be hauled out of classes and then there would be a solitary pistol shot, a few minutes later. The instructors did not exactly conceal when kids were terminated – presumably to reinforce in the other kids what might happen if they did not knuckle down to their training.

Was that why she had helped her new friend? Was Stephanie really her friend, or was she just being nice because she had to? There was something about Stephanie Walker which she had not seen in any other *Predator*; compassion. The naked Stephanie Walker had shown compassion to a Yellow in The Cage when all others had shown contempt. That Yellow had decided to do something in return.

She had pulled the sword from her webbing and without much thought, she had rolled out of the undergrowth and once back on her feet, she had approached the boy, trying to ignore the death throes of Stephanie Walker as her legs kicked from beneath the boy's own. Out of nowhere, Electra had felt anger surge up inside her and the hate which she felt for the boy and what he was doing to her friend made her lose control for a split second, but just long enough for her to raise the sword high and plunge it down with all her strength and anger, into the boy's exposed back.

Strangely, the boy made no sound as he died. All she could hear was the rain pounding down, but then she smiled, as she heard Stephanie coughing and breathing in the life-giving air which had been choked out of her by the boy. Electra gave the sword a vicious twist and the boy fell to the side, away from Stephanie before rolling onto its front.

Electra stared down at the relieved Stephanie and the corpse which was no longer a living, breathing boy.

..._...

"I understand that Blaze is dead – thank you; makes it so much easier for *me* to become the best."

"I am so pleased that I could be of assistance, you fucking dyke!" Stephanie yelled back as she parried the next strike and dodged an associated punch.

Fury's face was full of rage and hate. She was angry and she so much wanted the 'exercise' to be over. Mentally and physically, she was exhausted. Her body ached all over from cuts and bruises. She was annoyed that Psyche had managed to get the drop on Blaze, but nobody had said that they had to get both targets – they just had to both be very dead. Another thing that rankled was that Psyche appeared to have an assistant. Fury also wanted to meet this 'assistant'; the bitch had stabbed her in the hand and her hand was very, very sore. Therefore, Fury had made a deal during the previous pause in the action.

Stephanie paused as she heard a scream – Electra! The screaming was coming from a distance away but then the screaming was suddenly cut off.

"Say bye, bye to your little friend, Psyche!" Fury growled.

"Fuck you!" Stephanie retorted angrily as she swung the sword harder and harder at Fury.

Fury also moved harder and harder, beating the shorter girl down. Stephanie was just as mentally and physically exhausted as Fury but she did everything she could to push on. She had to destroy Fury to then go after Electra. Stephanie was so focused on Fury that she never noticed herself being manoeuvred by the other girl. It was only when Fury smiled and stopped that Stephanie smelt a rat. But before she could react, she felt her left foot falling with nothing to support it and she followed. She fell about ten feet before she hit the surface of the lake and the very chilly water. She came to the surface, just in time to look up at Fury.

"Dasvidaniya, whore!"

Fury vanished into the bushes as Stephanie struggled out of the water.

Electra was beside herself with fear.

Two boys had grabbed hold of her and dragged her away. They were very rough and they seemed to enjoy causing Electra pain. She found herself hauled into a clearing where she was thrown down at the base of a tree. She tried to escape but she was kicked in the chest and she screamed out with the pain. She barely resisted as she found the two boys, both of whom were about twelve-years-old, stripping the clothes off her.

By the time Fury arrived in the clearing, she found the two boys sitting on the ground enjoying the sun. Behind them, secured to a tree was Electra. She was naked, her clothing strewn around the clearing. Electra's face was full of hate and stained with tears. Fury chuckled as she examined her handy work.

"Not a bad wound, girl. What's your name?"

"Go to fuck!"

"Foul-mouthed, little Yellow, ain't you?"

Fury traced a finger over the wound dressings from top to bottom, pressing every few inches and causing Electra to cry out in pain.

"I need to reward you for what you did to my hand," Fury growled as she held up her right hand which was bandaged tightly. "Let's see how *you* like being stabbed."

With that proclamation, Fury pulled a small throwing knife from her webbing and she drove it into the front of Electra's right thigh.

..._...

Stephanie looked up in a panic as she heard the unearthly scream coming from not too far ahead. What was Fury *doing* to Electra? Another scream rang out and Stephanie broke into a run, the combat wakizashi ready in her hand. She was out for blood and she was going to fucking get it!

She slowed as she heard talking and laughter and stopped on the edge of a clearing. She took in the two boys. She took in Fury. She took in the screaming Electra – she had a knife sticking out of her right thigh and Fury was holding another, identical, knife in her right hand.

There was no time to lose. Stephanie bounded out of the undergrowth and into the clearing. She fired three rubber bullets at the first boy – he fell backwards with a scream and hugged his stomach. The next boy received the wakizashi into his chest and he went down next to his colleague, screaming. Stephanie turned as another high-pitched scream ripped out across the clearing. Fury was grinning as she stabbed Electra again, this time at the top of her left shoulder, just below the collar bone.

Stephanie did not pause, she drove forwards and she smashed the twin wakizashi to her own out of Electra's hands before smashing her in the face with her fist. Blood exploded from her nose and she tried to retaliate but missed as the wild-eyed Psyche dodged before kicking Fury in the stomach. Then the butt of the pistol was brought down on Fury's skull – she blacked out and collapsed to the ground.

Stephanie got to work. She released Electra and then helped her lie down on the ground. Stephanie left the knives in place, just placing field dressings around each blade and securing them in place – with Duct Tape, of course. By the time she was done, Electra had passed out from the pain.

The first boy was trying to regain his feet – his companion was dead. Stephanie placed the tip of the sword against the boy's neck, nicking it slightly.

"Stand up and if you want to live, you will do as I say."

The boy nodded – it was the same boy which she had stripped earlier on during that exercise. Stephanie directed him to drag the unconscious Fury towards the centre of the clearing. Then she began issuing rapid instructions to the boy.

..._...

Fury regained consciousness to find herself staring up into the sun. She also felt different and as she looked around, she found that her hands were above her head and tied to the base of a bush. Her ankles were bound and she could feel the rope passing under her back and tying on to the same bush. The rope had been pulled tight so that her ankles were right back by her bottom and her legs were bent at the knees. She was also naked.

"Well, hello."

Fury glared as she recognised Psyche appear in her vision and then that Electra girl.

"We are going to have some fun. Yes, it involves knives – Electra's idea. Me, I just wanted *him* . . . to rape you."

Fury turned her head to see a naked boy kneeling beside her with his hands on his head. Any witty retort vanished as she considered what Psyche might make the boy do to her – Psyche had gone way too far.

"Hope this hurts!" Electra growled as she knelt down and sank a knife slowly into Fury's left side, just below her left breast.

Fury screamed out in agony as the knife stopped after sinking its point in barely half an inch. Then Electra drew the knife down Fury's body about eight inches.

"Hurts, doesn't it?" Electra hissed.

"Just fucking get on with it, Psyche!"

"You ready to be raped?" Psyche growled as she pushed the naked boy on top of the equally naked, and very exposed, Fury.

Fury screamed, "NO!"

Psyche gave it a minute before she pulled the boy off the screaming Fury and then told him to run, advice which he took readily and he ran off into the trees, naked.

"Unlike you, Fury, I am not a bitch who relishes in the suffering of others."

Fury was sobbing as she glared up at Stephanie.

"May Psyche know the name of the one she vanquished?"

Fury seethed for a moment before she spat out her name.

"Wilde . . . Abigail Wilde."

Stephanie and Electra left the clearing.

Within seconds, they were met by a referee who nodded his approval and he then arranged for transport back to their hut. Once the two knives had been removed from Electra by a medic, the two girls were told to rest for a few hours before they were called for their flight back home.

Stephanie and Electra both took the opportunity to take a shower, get some decent-ish food and then they both laid down on the camp bed together and very quickly, they fell asleep.

..._...

Stephanie awoke with a start, four hours later, as somebody knocked on the door to the hut. Gently, Stephanie woke Electra up and then she walked over and unlocked the door, pulling it open.

"May we come in?" an instructor asked without awaiting a response.

Stephanie was surprised to see, a now dressed, Abigail Wilde being pulled inside by a second instructor. That instructor span Wilde around and glared down at her.

"You lose, Wilde – so now it's time for the victor to literally take a piece of your ass."

Wilde looked up at the two instructors and a very worried expression spread across her face. Before she could fully comprehend her fate, she was pushed up against the table by the instructors who then pulled down her trousers and underwear before pinning her face down across the table. One of the instructors turned to Stephanie – both had ignored Electra completely.

"Walker," he directed as he handed Stephanie a stout leather strap. "I think five should reward Wilde for coming second."

Stephanie ran her hands over the leather strap. She had felt a leather strap on her skin before – just not with her hands. The power which she held in her hands felt enormous to the eight-year-old, but as she stared down at the shaking nine-year-old, Stephanie paused.

"Get on with it, girl!" one of the instructors ordered.

"Do it!" Wilde growled, her voice shaking with fear as she tensed up.

Stephanie brought the strap down, hard.

Wilde screamed as the leather cut into her behind. Stephanie grimaced as she brought the strap down again, aiming for unblemished white skin. Again, Wilde screamed out in agony. Despite Stephanie's hatred for Wilde, Stephanie hated inflicting so much pain in a way that was normally reserved for the bastard instructors. It felt like an age before the fifth strike was administered and Stephanie dropped the strap onto the floor. Wilde was released and she fell to the floor where she shook from head to toe as she sobbed.

Stephanie made to say something to the sobbing girl, but an instructor ordered Stephanie and Electra out of the hut.

Meanwhile. . .
Saturday, August 20th, 2016

Safehouse E

The room was about nine feet by six feet in size and the walls were bare concrete, as was the ceiling and floor.

The door was steel, as were the two bed frames to either side of the centrally placed door. Each bed was made up with white sheets, pillows and duvets. But that was not all – each bed also contained a teenaged boy.

Both were sleeping soundly.

..._...

Abigail's eyes moved across to the next screen. It was an almost identical room, except that only the one bed was occupied. The occupant was female and her long deep red hair was spread over the white pillow. Her face was marred by a piece of sterile gauze, taped to her right cheek. There were scratches and grazes on her forehead and on the left side of her jaw.

"They boys should be waking soon," Cathy commented as she entered the small control room.

"I'll send in the Kitty!" Abigail chuckled.

"*Why do I put up with this shit?*" Wildcat growled as she glared up at a camera in the corridor outside the two rooms.

Abigail looked up at the monitor which showed the boys' room. Both were beginning to stir.

"Just go get the boys," Cathy ordered and Wildcat threw a mock salute up at the camera before swiping her access card and pushing open the steel door.

..._...

"Morning, boys!"

Connor turned his head and opened his eyes – at first, he thought he might be dreaming but then he focused on the person standing in the doorway. Whoever it was, she had nice curves and definite bumps on her chest beneath the tight-fitting, dark grey shirt. Her name tag read: **WILDCAT**. Lucas was doing the same as his friend, examining what he thought was a perfect figure.

"When you two have finished mentally undressing me, get the fuck out of those beds!" Wildcat ordered in her electronically enhanced voice.

The voice echoed around the concrete room and it made both boys jump out of their beds.

"Not bad, really," Wildcat mused as she checked out the two naked fourteen-year-old boys.

"Not fair!" Lucas yelled as he covered himself up.

Wildcat laughed as she threw each boy a bag.

"We had to strip you both to search your clothing – get dressed!"

Wildcat stepped out of the room, closing the door behind her. She couldn't resist giggling.

..._...

Medic pushed open the door to the next room and she walked over to the bed where the girl was sleeping.

"Trinity? Trinity?"

"Wh . . . what?"

"Trinity, wake up, honey."

The fourteen-year-old girl opened her eyes and she tried to sit up, but she paused, covering herself with the duvet.

"I'm naked."

"Yeah – well, your pants were around your ankles already, so we kinda finished the job," Medic commented.

"I was trying to take a pee – then everything went black . . . I think."

"The tunnel you were in – it collapsed. You were rescued from the rubble and brought to safety."

"Where are my friends? They'll be looking for me."

"They're fine. What are their names?"

"The blond one; that's Lucas. The other, him with brown hair; that's Connor. Who are you?"

"I am Medic."

Trinity looked stunned and her mind was working fast. Then fear spread across her face. She looked up at the masked woman.

"Fusion?"

"You got it, honey!"

"Am I in trouble – am I going to die?"

"No – you're perfectly safe here."

"I don't believe you."

"Will you believe me?"

Trinity went pale as another woman entered the room – the colours on the mask identified the vigilante without needing to read the name tag.

"You are my guest and I give you my word that nothing will happen to you, nor your hapless friends."

Trinity breathed a sigh of relief. Hit Girl was renowned for keeping her word.

"Can I get dressed?"

"Let me check you over and make sure your wounds are okay, then yes, you can," Medic replied.

Hit Girl vanished and Trinity lay back down.

Safehouse F
The galley

"I'm starving!" Lucas commented between mouthfuls of sausages.

"Me too," Connor added.

"Did either of you take a moment to consider what was happening to *me*?"

"Trinity!" both boys called out.

"They said you was okay," Lucas pointed out.

"Thanks for caring, Lucas."

"They're boys – food comes first!" Wildcat growled as she leaned against the wall of the galley.

Trinity gave the female vigilante the once over.

"You been entertaining the boys?" Trinity grinned.

"Nah – they've been entertaining me."

"She saw us naked," Connor explained.

"I can't take you two, anywhere!"

..._...

After breakfast, the three friends found themselves sitting on comfortable chairs in a large open room. The walls were covered by curtains and before them sat Hit Girl and Wildcat.

"You three have seen a lot – too much, to be honest," Hit Girl began.

"It was an accident – we didn't mean to," Lucas tried.

"Please – we won't say anything," Connor added.

"Thank you for rescuing me and fixing me up," Trinity said with a smile.

Hit Girl nodded.

"You will each be blindfolded and then placed in the back of a car. You will each be taken to your own home where a Police Officer will speak with your parents."

"Police!" Lucas and Connor said together.

"None of you are in trouble, you have my word."

***Chapter 316*: The Predator Plan**

Wednesday, August 21st, 2013

New York City

"Hello?"

"Marcus?"

"Mindy! What's going on? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. We know where the Motherfucker's hiding. He's recruiting an army of super-villains and making homemade bombs. Marcus, he wants to burn the city down."

"You promised me. . ."

"I know you see me as this little girl . . . but I'm not and I never was. You're right, Daddy did take my childhood away, but I'm not so sure that was a bad thing. Marcus, he gave me a gift, a gift that I can't escape no matter how hard I try. Neither am I going to spend the next four years of my life trying to figure out who I am, because I already know: I'm Hit Girl!"

Sunday, August 21st, 2016

Lunchtime

Glenview

"That was the night Mindy came out," Marcus explained.

"Mindy admitted she was gay?" Megan asked incredulously.

"Do I need to tape your mouth shut?" Mindy asked sweetly.

"Nah, I'm good. . ."

"Mindy told me that she had found herself. Mindy told me that she was Hit Girl – I already knew, but I had tried so hard to stamp it out of her. Turned out to be a losing battle; I might as well have tried to hold back the tides."

"She is stubborn!" Megan laughed.

"Dave," Mindy asked. "Do you have that roll of Duct Tape handy?"

"I'm shutting up now. . ."

"It was a bad night for everybody," Marty admitted as he looked over at Dave.

Dave's expression was mixed as he thought back.

Wednesday, August 21st, 2013

New York City

". . . tonight we are going to fuck this city up, or my name is not . . ."

"Chris D'Amico!"

"That is not my name!"

"No, you're right; your new name is Little Bitch."

"Oh, this is perfect . . . are you really that stupid – there's two of you, and a whole army of us; do you really have such

a hard on to die."

"No, that's why we brought our friends."

...

"Avengers assemble, asshole!"

"What's the matter, Chris? Shit hit your shorts?"

"Yeah, and I'm gonna wipe my ass with your face."

"You're gonna pay for what you did to my Dad."

"Your Dad? You blew up my Dad with a bazooka!"

"I know how to get this started . . . Schwanz!"

Sunday, August 21st, 2016

Glenview

"That was Night-Bitch," Marty said with a wary glance over at Stephanie.

"It was amazing – the barking, snarling, Eisenhower bounded through the crowd and he made straight for Chris's crotch," Dave explained as Sophia sat up and ran her tongue over her jaws.

"Eisenhower was there, too?" Stephanie asked.

"Yes, he came with me," Isaac replied.

"It was a wild fight and one which I did not expect to survive," Marty admitted. "Hit Girl was facing off with that massive bitch. . ."

"Mother Russia," Mindy mused. "She was a challenge, to put it mildly."

"You should have seen your Mom and Dad, Tommy – they were awesome!" Marty said with a look over at Tony and Shannon who sat on the other couch.

"It was an experience," Shannon admitted with a smile.

"Then Mindy left," Dave said. "It was the worst moment of my life. I never knew what I had until it was gone."

"I hated leaving, but I had to. I had to protect Marcus. I had to protect everybody that I loved – and that included Dave," Mindy admitted shyly.

"Thus, the story began. Mindy killed some guy who tried to bike-jack her and the rest is history," Dave finished.

"You don't have to be a badass to be a superhero, Dave, you just have to brave," Mindy echoed from three years previously as she leaned over and gave her husband a deep and loving kiss.

Dave grinned.

"Back then, that was my first kiss. . ." Mindy admitted, her cheeks turning pink.

"And you know what she said to me?" Dave prompted.

"Be nice or I rip your ass out through your mouth!" Mindy growled.

Everybody laughed, even Marcus.

The following morning

Monday, August 22nd, 2016

Glenview

"This is ominous," Saoirse commented as she and Stephanie were directed by Mindy to sit down in the living room.

"Tell me about it," Stephanie growled as she recognised the lady sitting across from them.

Stephanie glared at the woman for a moment before Mindy dived in.

"Obviously, Stephanie remembers you," she mused. "Saoirse, this is Deputy Director Landy of the Central Intelligence Agency."

Saoirse scowled too.

"I know you two have no love for the CIA – and your hate is well founded. I am very pleased that you are both free to live your lives as you see fit. As you know, *Urban Predator* is dead – but there has been immense fallout from your operation in France. There have been many high-level talks between the Governments of France, Great Britain, and the United States. All three Governments have accepted responsibility for what occurred right under their noses, within their own borders. As such, a fund has been assembled to provide each surviving *Predator* with financial aid to assist with their rehabilitation."

Saoirse and Stephanie both appeared surprised at that revelation.

"There are times when Governments *can* actually do the right thing at the right time – and yes, it surprises me too. The British Government will be providing a significant bounty to the both of you for what you did to bring down *Urban Predator*. The British Government will also compensate those *Predators* who have been rehomed, such as the girls currently under the protection of *Vengeance*, in the UK. The US Government will look after the Abbott girls and Aiden Maxwell in Gotham. They will also provide for any future American *Predators* as they are recovered," Landy elaborated. "It has taken many months to identify those *Predators* recovered from France. Many have no living family and they are being looked after by their home country. Some have been rehomed with relatives, if they exist. However, as you both know, it is not an easy transition from being a *Predator* to being a normal boy or girl. As such, I have asked Mindy to help with the re-settling of *Predators* and the ongoing support for them."

"I thought immediately of you two," Mindy explained. "I can think of no others who have the compassion and intelligence to help other *Predators* just like yourselves."

Stephanie and Saoirse appeared very surprised.

"You are both uniquely suited to the task," Mindy went on. "Will you do it?"

Stephanie looked up at Saoirse, who smiled. The two girls could communicate without speech – a skill which often annoyed Mindy, amongst others.

"Yes," Stephanie said. "We'll do it."

That same time

West Columbia

"Anybody seen my cuffs?" Marcus asked.

"I'll just go get 'em," Megan said as she vanished upstairs.

Marcus gave Paige a questioning look. Paige just looked down at young Damon and grimaced. Megan soon reappeared with the handcuffs which she passed to Marcus.

"Where were they?" Marcus asked suspiciously.

"In my bedroom. . ." Megan replied innocently.

"Why?" Marcus asked.

"Curtis was over, last night. . ." Paige offered with a chuckle.

"Never mind – I'll get a new set. . ." Marcus growled disgustedly as he handed the cuffs back to Megan and headed out the door.

Megan grinned at her mother.

"I don't know what they must think down at the precinct," Paige said conversationally with a twinkle in her eye. "We go through so many pairs of cuffs. . ."

Megan looked appalled.

***The following day
Tuesday, August 23rd***

Glenview

"Your first tasking," Mindy said as she dropped a pair of thick files onto a table.

"Cool!" Stephanie commented.

"Where?" Saoirse asked.

"Indianapolis. . ."

"How will we get there?" Saoirse persisted.

"Mathilda will drive you both and act as overwatch."

"When do we leave?"

"This afternoon."

Tuesday, May 10th, 2016

Toulouse, France

It was another day.

To be exact, it was day 1,630 of the boy's incarceration as a *Predator*. It had been four years, five months, and seventeen days since he was taken – not that he was counting. He was alone – he had been alone for all that time. His family was gone: his parents, his brother; all were gone for ever. He sat up in his bed and swung his legs out from under the duvet. His feet came into contact with the cold lino floor and he shivered. All around him, other boys were coming awake. They varied in ages from around eight-years-old to boys who were closer to fifteen.

There was a set routine which all followed – deviation brought you to the attention of the instructors and that was not conducive, in any way, to a long and happy life. He stood up and pulled off his T-shirt, dumping it on the bed behind him – his boxer shorts followed and he headed for the showers, a towel in his hand. After the hot shower, he dressed and joined the dozens of other boys as they left the dormitory and made their way to breakfast. En route, they mingled with dozens of girls as they too left their own dormitory.

Breakfast consisted of a large buffet from which the kids could help themselves. Every child ate a large breakfast as lunch was quite a few hours away and the day would be strenuous for all.

..._...

By lunchtime, the twelve-year-old boy was hungry. He had spent an hour on the range, another hour sparring with his colleagues, and then an hour listening to an instructor prattle on about covert infiltration tactics. Lunch consisted of high-protein foods, such as chicken, eggs, oatmeal, and fish. Milk was also available in almost obscene quantities. Every *Predator* had their diet inspected on a regular basis to ensure that they were healthy and that their bodies were building up the relevant muscle and bulk required to cope with the arduous training program.

Hunter Graves, just the week before, had reached the peak of his potential. He had been granted Phase 3 status and he had been given his much-coveted codename: Cut-Throat. That previous week had also seen a massive influx of

instructors, security personnel, and other *Predators*. There were many rumours unfolding – each one wilder and more nuts than the previous one. That afternoon, things appeared to be taking a turn for the worst as Hunter found himself issued with body armour and a SIG Sauer assault rifle. He spent another hour at the range honing his skills with the weapon.

As he cleaned his weapon, he overheard the instructors discussing defensive tactics. Was something going on?

"Graves – stow your weapon and go get something to eat then return here for your duty posting."

"Yes, sir!"

Hunter got a nasty shock when he entered the dining room. 'Nasty' might not have been the best description but he was shaken to the core by the person he saw sat at a table with some other *Predators*.

"Leo?" Hunter demanded as he stopped at the table.

The ten-year-old boy turned and then his face dissolved into tears as he recognised his big brother.

"You're dead – I killed you. . ." Leo Graves began.

"I could say the same thing," Hunter replied as he hugged his younger brother. "Where the hell did you come from?"

"I just got here – few minutes ago."

The two brothers moved to a spare table where they ate their meal together and they talked. Both had believed each other to be dead, but their inner psyche had still held out hope that they would once again be reunited. As Hunter finished his food, he knew that he had to get back to his duty posting.

"Leo – I'm sorry about this but I have to go; some weird duty posting. I'm sure it's just some fucked up training thing. I'll see you later, or most probably in the morning. It's really good to know that you're still alive."

"Stay safe, Hunter."

..._...

Several hours later, Hunter found himself standing just inside an external door, his assault rifle at the ready. He was certain that the whole thing was some over the top exercise – at least until a klaxon sounded, red lights began to flash, and gunfire erupted from the direction of the kitchens. He saw an instructor gunned down, several yards away down a corridor – that brought it home to him that it was *not* an exercise.

Hunter had no idea who or what the enemy were – apparently, the instructors had no idea either. For over an hour, Hunter kept out of the way while he had no idea who the enemy were. He did catch sight of some armour-clad individuals armed to the teeth. Somewhere, things took a turn for the worst as *Predators* turned on their former instructors and captors. The place was sheer pandemonium with explosions and gunfire coming from all directions. Hunter ran towards the main accommodation – along the way, he passed several *Predators* who had been Tasered – but then, as he came around a corner, he collided with several young *Predators*.

"Hunter!"

"Leo! Are you okay?"

"Yes – we're scared and we don't know what we're supposed to do. There's people killing instructors – they have body armour."

"I know – it looks like *Urban Predator* is coming apart. Come with me."

..._...

Hunter moved forwards, followed by Leo and four other young Phase 2 *Predators*. As they made their way down the corridor, two instructors stepped out of a classroom. Without hesitation, Hunter dropped them both with a roar of gunfire.

"Leo – grab a weapon!"

Leo grabbed up a pistol while one of his friends picked up the other discarded pistol. They all ran looking for help – all

they found were dead instructors and security guards. Then it happened – there was an explosion and the ceiling above them collapsed knocking out two of the kids – Leo pulled at another kid and they both helped Hunter out from underneath the smashed ceiling tiles. There was no sign of the other *Predator*. One of the kids yelled out as three men appeared – security guards. Leo shot one but he was knocked down by one of the guards. Hunter was unable to shoot as he found that Leo and another kid were in his line of fire.

"Get down, Leo!"

Leo dove for the ground, dragging the other kid with him. Hunter held down the trigger, emptying the magazine and dropping the two remaining guards but not before one of the guards had thrown a knife at Hunter. The knife went into his left shoulder, just above his body armour, passing all the way through, up to the hilt. Hunter yelled out in agony but he was able to scoop up a pistol as he staggered backwards. He shot the security guard in the face as he scrambled towards his brother who was huddled against the wall.

"Hunter!" he yelled out as he saw the knife protruding from his brother's shoulder.

"We gotta move, Leo – let's go!"

Leo had just got back to his feet when two more security guards appeared, one fell as an armoured individual sank a sword into his chest. The other guard fired off several bursts from his assault rifle. Hunter threw himself in front of his brother as the bullets struck his body armour, one finding his upper chest. Hunter heard a scream behind him and as he fell to the floor, he saw his brother, blood spreading across his torso.

His last sight was of a pair of crimson-clad legs which appeared between him and his brother.

The Present Day

Tuesday, August 23rd, 2016

Indianapolis

"Hello."

"I believe you are expecting us, Mr Travers."

"You are. . ."

"Saoirse Doherty and Stephanie Lizewski – our identification, Mr Travers."

The two girls handed over their CIA credentials which Mr Travers scrutinised.

"Come in, please."

He handed back the credentials before he led the two girls into the living room.

"Please sit down – I'll go get the boys."

A few minutes later, two boys came into the room accompanied by a woman with curly, light brown hair.

"Hunter, Leo – Stephanie and Saoirse," Mr Travers said as he introduced the boys.

Hunter studied the two seated girls, then he walked around to them and he stood his ground.

"Let's see 'em," he ordered.

Both girls leaned forwards and tipped their heads so that Hunter could see behind their right ears. He nodded and sighed as he sat down, pulling his brother to sit down beside him on the couch. Mr and Mrs Travers sat down on another couch.

"Hunter, Leo – cards on the table – we are both *Predators*. We were both there at the end, in Toulouse. We know that you have both spent two months in hospital before finding your way to your aunt and uncle. We are here to help you in any way that we can. We will not interfere, nor will we push you into anything," Saoirse explained.

"I was Phase 2, Saoirse was Phase 3. We know what you both went through. We also know how hard it is to

reintegrate into society. We know that deep within you, you have an urge to kill . . ." Stephanie said.

Nicola Travers looked shocked by the blatant remark which had just come out of a ten-year-old girl's mouth.

". . . you have an urge to destroy, to maim. At times, it is irresistible; you just want to hurt somebody. You wake up at night soaked to the skin having had the most horrendous nightmare. The only thing that keeps you even remotely sane is each other – yes?"

Leo looked relieved at Stephanie's comments.

"Okay – I believe you; you obviously suffer the same way that me and Leo do," Hunter replied. "What can you do to help us? Our aunt and uncle have put up with a lot over the past few weeks and it isn't fair on them – they have three kids of their own and . . . and I know that they have both had second thoughts about taking us in . . ."

"No, Hunter," Nicola Travers said quickly. "It has been a struggle, but you and Leo are family – we would never refuse you a roof; a place for you both to call home."

"Thanks, Aunt Nicola," Hunter said with a smile.

"Could we speak with your aunt and uncle, please," Saoirse said pointedly and she received nods from both boys.

..._...

Once the boys had left the room, Stephanie turned to the Travers.

"What do you know about where the boys have been for the past few years?" Stephanie asked.

Jeremy and Nicola Travers looked at each other, exchanging a glance.

"We don't really know; the boys won't talk about it," Jeremy Travers replied in an even tone. "The US Marshal who brought the boys to us, she explained that the boys had been through hell but she could not divulge any more."

Stephanie took a deep breath before she spoke.

"Both boys were taken by force from their parents. They would have been scared stupid as they were hooded and tied. The first few days would have been disorientating as they were pumped full of drugs that played with their minds. They would have begun to forget things – even each other. They were only allowed to remember what the instructors wanted them to remember. They would have been forced to learn bad things. How to kill. How to maim. How to torture. If they did not obey, they were disciplined.

"Discipline began with the baton that all instructors carried. Those batons hurt like hell. Next came the leather strap which was used in extreme circumstances – they used it on your bare arse and you could not sit down for hours. For those who needed worse, there was The Cage. The kid would be stripped naked and thrown behind bars for a number of days. In general, you lived from day to day, hoping for something better, but it never came. The boys may have had different experiences to Saoirse and me, but not wildly so. Hunter is young, very young for a Phase 3; that marks him out as being very advanced and highly skilled. You want to know his codename?"

There was a pause before Nicola Travers nodded.

"Cut-throat."

"Oh, my God," Nicola Travers exclaimed. "You both went through all that?"

"Yes," Saoirse replied and Stephanie nodded as she spoke again.

"The place was hell on earth. I was bullied almost from the moment I was taken; I was seven-years-old. I was always too small, too skinny, too British . . . Finally, when I was eight, I snapped. I killed my main tormentor, in the shower one morning – smashed her skull to pieces. You know what the instructors did? They said well done and gave me my codename."

"They're *both* killers?" Jeremy Travers asked with dread in his tone.

"Yes – and if Hunter made it to Phase 3, then he is an expert. Leo, too," Saoirse confirmed.

"What is it that you can do for them?" Nicola Travers asked.

"One of the most important things is to be able to talk. Saoirse is my best friend – she used to be my nemesis; she was sent to kill me, but she failed. Now we rely on each other for somebody to talk to – it makes a difference that we can relate to one another."

"You are friends, even though. . ." Nicola Travers demanded.

"Yes – the circumstances are exceptional but we need each other to survive. Your nephews make thirteen *Predators* recovered, by us, so far. We can ensure that they have somebody to talk to; somebody who has experienced what they have gone through. My parents run a Dojang, in Chicago. We run special classes for *Predators*. The time allows them to exercise their frustrations in a safe environment. We allow one-on-one and multiple-on-one sparring. Somebody is always on hand to stop everything if things go too far. Or we just Taser their arses!" Stephanie explained. "*Predators* have needs. Of course, we can't let them kill, but we can let them use their skills in a controlled environment with others just like them. We can help them bury their skills if need be. We can also teach the both of you how to control them both – if needs be. Which brings me onto another question – how much do your own kids know?"

"Very little, but they have had cause to be scared of their cousins. I know it isn't anybody's fault, but things get said and Hunter or Leo just explode."

"We can also put you in touch with others who look after *Predators* – if that helps," Saoirse explained. "We know that gaining two more mouths to feed will also be a financial burden to you both. As such, the US Government will provide each boy with a lump sum to help with their resettlement. You will also receive a monthly stipend to help ends meet. You also need to keep your mouths shut. *Urban Predator* will never come out – that is for the good of the respective governments and also for the *Predators* themselves."

"We understand."

..._...

Once the boys had returned, Stephanie explained about the money and the Dojang.

"Why should we listen to a little girl – even if she *was* a *Predator*?" Hunter said sharply.

"Would knowing my codename help?"

"You said you was Phase 2 – they don't get codenames. . ." Hunter paused as he watched Stephanie's expression. "Only one person has ever gained their codename in Phase 2 . . . *you*?"

Stephanie nodded.

"*You* are Psyche?"

"Please don't," Saoirse commented dryly. "She's hard enough to live with as it is."

Stephanie ignored her friend.

"Yes, I am."

"Okay – we accept," Hunter agreed.

That evening

Glenview

"Well done, girls."

Stephanie smiled up at Mindy. Saoirse, though, appeared guarded.

"I get the feeling that we're not done yet."

Mindy smiled.

"Not by a long shot, my little *Predator* princesses!"

Both girls groaned.

***Chapter 317*: Cat vs Cat**

Later that same evening
Tuesday, August 23rd, 2016

Safehouse F

Stephanie was dozing on the couch in the Command Centre, when the alarm went off – she had quite literally just closed her eyes, only a few minutes before.

She came awake within seconds and she quickly scanned the computer screens.

"What's going on?" Megan asked as she ran in the door, closely followed by Curtis.

"There's gunfire in Echo – Wildcat, Trojan; arm up and get over there," Stephanie ordered.

Megan and Curtis looked at one another and then they both shrugged.

"Go!"

The two vigilantes vanished just as Electra came in the door.

"What's going on?"

..._...

Two minutes later, Stephanie's curiosity got the better of her.

The ten-year-old vigilante took a deep breath and she ran out of the Command Centre after Wildcat and Trojan.

"Mindy'll kill you!" Marty shouted after her.

"It was nice knowing you, then. . ."

"She's toast," Electra groaned.

Marty just shook his head as he continued to scan the cameras.

Safehouse E

Wildcat and Trojan moved quickly down the corridors, pistols raised before them.

"Take corridor 2E," Battle Guy directed.

"Wait for me!" Psyche called as she caught up.

"What are doing here?" Wildcat hissed.

"You're not allowed to do this!" Trojan cautioned.

"Stop your fucking whining and let's move!" Psyche growled as she took the lead, her pistol held steadily in her left hand.

They moved down the indicated corridor and then down another before they heard the gunshots coming for a room, just off to the right.

"It's coming from the Computer Store," Psyche reported back to Battle Guy.

The three vigilantes moved closer to the room in question and then they stopped as a voice could be heard shouting.

"Where are you, you little fucker!"

"Was that Abby?" Wildcat asked.

"I'll fucking teach you to chew on my goddamn copper cabling!"

Psyche groaned as she holstered her pistol.

"Stand down! Hal is on a fucking mouse hunt!" she reported.

Safehouse F

Stephanie was grinning broadly as she walked back into the Command Centre. She was about to throw some witty comment at the very unamused-looking Electra, however, her smile vanished as she saw Mindy standing beside the couch, a wooden baseball bat held in her right hand.

"Any last words, before I break your left leg, honey?"

"You left me in charge – the alarm went off; I dispatched Wildcat and Trojan from their snogging and I suppose my curiosity got the better of me. . ." Stephanie responded evenly before she placed her left foot on the couch and stretched out her left leg.

Stephanie cringed in spite of herself as she felt the baseball bat whizz past her head. Electra let out a small scream as the bat plunged downwards towards her mentor's leg at an amazing speed. There was an almighty crack . . . but no pain. Stephanie found that she had involuntarily closed her eyes. She opened them to find her leg completely intact.

Mindy grinned.

"Good work, Psyche!" Mindy chuckled as she walked out of the Control Centre, the baseball bat resting on her shoulder.

The bitch had struck the couch, just inches away from the outstretched leg.

"You're a *Bitch!*" Stephanie yelled after the chuckling purple vigilante.

"You never learn, Stephanie – at least not the easy way!" Electra chastised.

"I'm only ten, Electra; I'll figure it out, one day."

Across Chicago

"You *will* be amazing, little sister."

"I hope so."

"I would suggest that you continue at that D-JAK place – they will be able to improve your skills and I have asked for you to be placed on an advanced course that will involve sword-play. You think you can manage that?"

"Yes. I can do it."

"I will have your suit ready by the end of the week and then I can parade you before the troops. I am very proud of you and showing you off will mean a lot to me, Dread."

"Dread?"

"Your name."

"I like it."

That night

Over the previous week, reports had been trickling in of a new Chicago vigilante – a non-*Fusion* one.

As far as anybody could tell, the new vigilante was short, female, and apparently out to do good – at least she had not been seen doing anything bad. She was also very angry and anybody committing a crime, whom she crossed paths

with, usually regretted it. For the moment, no member of *Fusion* had actually crossed paths with the new girl, neither did anybody know her name. The unknown vigilante was, to all appearances, highly skilled. Her personal transport was a KTM 125 Duke motorcycle – in orange, yellow, and black digital urban camouflage – which was compact, just like the vigilante who rode it.

Jackal and Wildcat had been paired for that evening – not that they minded. As they rode their motorcycles through Garfield Park, they joked and did their utmost to outdo the other with ever cruder jokes.

"Keep 'em coming, guys – I think Psyche is glowing red with embarrassment," Hal chuckled over the comms.

"Well, she is still a little girl," Wildcat laughed.

"Just 'cause you spend your nights stark naked with Trojan's fingers up your twat and your fingers wrapped around his rock-hard cock!" Psyche retorted.

"I think you touched a nerve, there, Wildcat!" Jackal laughed.

"She'll get over it," Wildcat replied.

"You and me, Wild Kitty – we're gonna fucking tango!"

"Bring it on, Psycho Psyche!"

"File that for later, little girls, we have some new vigilantes ahead," Jackal advised as he pulled over to the side of the road.

..._...

As Wildcat dismounted her motorcycle, the new vigilante did the same. Both walked towards one another, hands well away from any weapons. Jackal watched from a dozen yards away. He studied the new vigilante while keeping a firm eye on his Wildcat. The new girl was about the same height as Wildcat, with the same body form.

Her armoured suit was primarily yellow while her knee-length boots, gauntlets, and utility belt were a matt black. Her mask was in the form of a cowl, with cat-like ears on each side. The front of the mask covered all but the mouth and jaw. The mask was black, with yellow highlights. Billowing out from behind the mask, were copious amounts of fiery red hair. She carried a brace of pistols, one on each hip. Extending over her left shoulder was the hilt of what appeared to be a Wakizashi.

For a moment, each vigilante examined the other, checking out their equipment and other attributes. Then the new girl looked up at Wildcat.

"Well, hello, Wildcat," the yellow-clad vigilante growled in an electronically enhanced voice.

"What do I call you?" Wildcat asked in her own electronically enhanced voice.

"I am called, Hellcat."

"Great!" Jackal moaned as he stopped a couple of feet behind Wildcat. "Just what we need on the streets; another obnoxious kitty!"

"Fuck you, asshole!" Hellcat called out and Wildcat nodded her approval. "You don't even know me!"

"You have claws, too?" Jackal went on with a chuckle.

Hellcat grinned as she flexed her wrists and triple-bladed claws emerged from each gauntlet.

"Nice!" Wildcat declared as she triggered her own claws.

"Please tell me they're not comparing claws!" Psyche groaned.

"Like two boys seeing who can pee the farthest!" Jackal replied.

Both 'kittys' turned to glare up at Jackal.

"You get used to him," Wildcat commented dryly.

"See you later, Wild Kitty!" Hellcat laughed.

Wildcat and Jackal turned as they heard the roar of an engine and a motorcycle decked out in orange, yellow, and black digital urban camouflage skidded to a halt beside Hellcat. She deftly jumped onto her ride and started her engine before she flipped Wildcat the bird as she accelerated away alongside the other machine.

The other rider was clad in a similar fashion to Hellcat. His armoured suit was primarily orange while his ankle boots, gauntlets, and utility belt were a matt black. His chest armour was tan in colour. He wore a mask which was in the form of a cowl, with tan cat-like ears on each side. The front of the mask covered all but the mouth and jaw. The mask was orange and tan, with black highlights. He carried the same brace of pistols, one on each hip. Extending over his left shoulder was the hilt of a Wakizashi

Wildcat grinned at the motorcycle's licence plate: **TIGERCAT**.

***The following evening
Wednesday, August 24th***

Glenview

Almost as soon as dinner was finished, the five kids sat grinning up at Dave.

"I want you all ready for bed before we begin the movie," Dave ordered and the five kids vanished up the stairs.

Dave laughed as both Chloe and Mindy ran off to the master bedroom, leaving him alone with Joshua.

"Nutcases, the two of them," Joshua laughed.

"They're like sisters – inseparable," Dave confirmed.

While Chloe was like a sister to Mindy, Joshua was like a brother to Dave. The two couples were completely inseparable and they could work as the most perfect of teams, knowing each other's movements and thoughts. Both teenagers reappeared a few minutes later in overly large T-shirts which acted as nighties.

"You approve?" Chloe teased as she exposed a bare thigh, for Joshua, just enough to show a small amount of pubic hair before she dropped the t-shirt.

"You are so evil, Chloe Bennett!" Joshua growled as Chloe and Mindy dived onto a couch, pulling their long legs up, and grinning.

Seconds later, there was an almighty thundering sound on the stairs as five giggling kids burst into the living room and two of them dived onto the same couch. Stephanie, in a set of pale blue pyjama shorts and a matching pale blue pyjama top, sat next to Mindy, pulling Mindy's right arm around her. Megan, in an identical set of pyjamas, sat beside Chloe, crossing her legs and scowling at Joshua as she leaned against Chloe. Anne-Marie and Danny flopped down onto the mat and casually waved their bare legs in the air as they propped up their chins with their arms. Both youngsters wore pyjama shorts and tops. For Anne-Marie it was a My Little Pony themed top of the Mane Six while for Danny, the theme was Star Wars. Electra sauntered in last, once the free for all was over. Electra wore a site of red pyjama shorts and a matching top – apparently, Electra favoured the colour red. She sat down next to Stephanie and snuggled into her friend.

The movie for the night was an old one, but one which the girls had selected: Sleepless in Seattle. Talk about tears! Apart from Dave and Joshua, all were crying by the end of the movie – even Danny. Joshua had had to go and seek out copious amounts of tissues for the tearful ladies to share. Mindy, in conjunction with Megan, then insisted on watching Dirty Dancing. However, Mindy and Chloe had passed around mugs of marshmallow-reinforced hot chocolate. It had then only been another twenty minutes. Dave and Joshua thought it was cute.

Stephanie was cuddled up with Mindy and both were fast asleep. Megan was snuggled up with Chloe and again, they were both fast asleep. The twins were sprawled out on the rug, just as out of it, a sleeping dog close by each of them. Electra lay beside Stephanie, her left hand gripping Stephanie's right.

Horatio sauntered in and with a brief meow, he jumped up beside Joshua.

"Just the cat and us, pal," Joshua commented to Dave as he changed the chick-flick to something with a bit more action. . .

***That same night
Indian Knoll Road***

Hailee smiled as Adam gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"Mom, this is Adam. Adam, this is my mother."

"Mrs Richards."

"Hello, Adam."

Vicky Richards ran her practiced eyes over the young man before nodding her approval. Ultimately, there was nothing much that she could do about him; her daughter was eighteen and responsible for her own life. Vicky could also see that the relationship was at an advanced stage. At the back of her mind was the state which her daughter had been in on her return from Europe. Was she ready for a 'hands on' relationship?

"Mom," Hailee said, shrewdly recognising her mother's expressions. "It's all in hand – I'm fine."

"Stay safe, Hailee."

"Yes, Mom, love you."

..._...

"Your Mom really cares about you," Adam noted as Hailee led him up the stairs to her bedroom.

"She's all I have and I love her very much," Hailee replied. "Talking of love, how about we make some. . ."

Adam smiled.

"You sure?"

"You don't want me?" Hailee mumbled, faking annoyance as she pulled off her T-shirt to reveal a light blue bra.

"I wouldn't say that," Adam offered as he gently ran his hands up Hailee's silky soft skin, tracing up the sides of her body.

Hailee giggled.

Adam's lips kissed her lips and she kissed him back. It had been quite a while since she had last had anybody touching her in a loving manner. The nightmares still came and went. The beatings and the humiliation - they were never far from the back of her mind. But for the first time in many months, she felt comfortable enough to allow somebody to touch her most private parts. She felt Adam releasing the clip on her bra and she felt the tightness of the garment slacken as he gently eased it up her body to expose her breasts.

For some reason, she giggled.

Thursday, August 25th

Over the North Atlantic

It had been an early start – 6am!

Dave had ferried Saoirse, Stephanie, and Electra to the airport where they had boarded the Gulfstream. He trusted them and he knew that they would stay safe – hell, there were three Mindy's on that damn aircraft!

"I could really get used to this," Electra commented as she relaxed in the forward-facing seat on the starboard side, facing Stephanie.

"It's nice – I like it; the only way to travel."

"Would you ladies like a drink?" Amy suggested as she appeared from the forward galley.

Electra smiled, "I'll have a glass of milk, please."

"Girl Scout!" Stephanie growled. "Pepsi Max, please, Amy."

"I'll take the same as Steph, please," Saoirse added.

"For a killer, you really are a pussy, 'lectra!" Stephanie commented.

"Just 'cause I can, does not mean I enjoy it. Also, for your information, missy, milk is good for a growing girl. . ."

Electra replied in a calm and level tone.

Saoirse sniggered.

"Laugh it up, you Irish tart," Stephanie retorted.

". . . One day, I want boobs like Saoirse," Electra finished and Saoirse's cheeks went pink as Stephanie roared with laughter.

"She likes to speak her mind, doesn't she," Saoirse stated.

"Tell me about it – her gob has got me into trouble on more than one occasion," Stephanie growled.

"Is the great and powerful Psyche, complaining?" Electra asked with feigned sweetness.

"No, she is not."

Friday, August 26th

West Columbia

*Well, I'm just outta school,
Like I'm real, real cool,
Gotta dance like a fool,
Got the message that I gotta be a wild one,
Ooh, yeah, I'm a wild one.*

Marcus picked up his cell as the ringtone rang out.

"Which one?" Paige asked.

"Our one is still in the shower," Marcus pointed out as he accepted the call. "Morning, wild one!"

Mindy laughed.

"Morning, old man."

"I know you never sleep, so I won't comment on the early hour."

"Dave and I are thinking of going on a trip – any chance. . ."

"You need somebody to look after the munchkins?"

"You've had an easy few weeks – time to so some work," Mindy chuckled.

"You're one funny girl!"

Glenview

"We're going to miss you," Anne-Marie pouted.

"I need to go see what your sister is up to, among other things."

"Don't be gone, long."

"I'll be back before you know it."

Mindy gave Danny and Anne-Marie a big hug – she hated to leave them, but she knew that they would be perfectly safe with Dave.

"Love you, Dave."

"You be good – leave the Brits alone and don't cause any trouble," he said with his dorky grin.

"I'll behave, I promise."

***Chapter 318*: Hit Girl in San Diego - Part I**

Author's Note: *Events in the latter part of this chapter, and in the next, will operate in parallel with Chapter 5: Escalation and Chapter 6: Take Down of my other story, Creatures of the Night.*

Monday, August 29th, 2016
Early morning

Glenview, Chicago

"Oh, come on!" Mindy exclaimed.

"Mindy, you have a reputation for, how should I put it. . ." Marcus chuckled.

"Invading sovereign territory. Sinking foreign yachts. Blowing up just about anything and everything," Megan finished.

"There are times that you need a damn good thrashing – only, I think you'd actually *enjoy* getting your ass cracked!" Mindy growled.

"You know me so well. . ." Megan laughed.

"I promise – no explosions," Mindy promised.

"One tiny explosion and I tan your backside, young lady," Marcus warned.

"I'd pay to see that!" Paige laughed as Mindy scowled.

"No tiny explosions, I promise."

"I can guarantee no tiny explosions," Megan offered. "It's Mindy – they'll be massive!"

"You are not helping, you little bitch!"

"Love you, big sis. . ."

That same day
Late afternoon

Mission Beach
San Diego

The heat was incredibly soothing after the long flight.

Mindy wasted no time changing into her bikini and heading down to the beach. Dave had also changed and he spent twenty minutes taking his time, coating Mindy in sun cream.

"I am not exposing my nipples, so why cover them in cream?" Mindy demanded with a giggle.

"Just being cautious. I understand that sunburnt nipples can be very sore. But, on the other hand, well creamed ones are very hard!"

Mindy laughed as she pushed his hands away.

"I need a swim."

That evening

Aboard Pacific Predator

Mindy flopped onto the couch on the starboard side of the flying bridge.

Dave appeared a few minutes later with two plates of food. A healthy chicken Caesar salad with a side of fresh fruit. They ate and chatted as they took in the perfect view from their mooring in Quivira Basin. Dave preferred the perfect view that he had of his wife's scantily clad body. Her skin shimmered in the sun that filtered through the sunshade above them.

Mindy pretended not to notice his roaming eyes but the fact that she was assisting with the large and prominent bulge in his shorts made her feel just as aroused. After finishing her meal, Mindy headed below into the main salon. As she went, she shrugged off her bikini before vanishing down the next set of steps to the lower deck. She turned left and entered the master suite. There she strode into the shower and spent ten minutes washing off the sweat and sun lotion.

As she stepped out of the shower, her naked husband pushed past, rubbing his body up against his wife.

"Dave . . . you're all sweaty and I just got clean," Mindy moaned half-heatedly.

"well, we better wash you off, honey," Dave grinned as Mindy reached down and began to caress his stiff member.

..._...

After her *second* shower of the evening, Mindy dressed in black knickers, black sports bra, black leggings, a black T-shirt, and a black leather jacket. On her feet, she wore black socks and lightweight boots, which were also black. Dave was dressing in similar clothing, only he wasn't wearing knickers or a sports bra – just boxers in lieu. He also wore black combat trousers instead of the leggings.

Mindy finished gathering her equipment before smiling at Dave as he finished his own preparations.

"You ready, Mr Lizewski?"

"Are you, Mrs Lizewski?"

"I was born ready!"

An hour or so later

West Harbor Drive

The two Kawasaki machines cruised through the twilight.

Dave was riding a candy lime green and metallic spark black 2016 Ninja 650 ABS motorcycle. Mindy was beside him on a metallic matte carbon grey 2016 Ninja ZX-10R ABS motorcycle.

"We're being followed," Mindy commented over the communications, soon after they had left Seaport Plaza, heading south-east on West Harbor Drive.

They had both paused at the Plaza for twenty minutes to enjoy the evening and talk about nothing in particular.

"I know – Honda Interceptor, three vehicles back – two riders," Dave acknowledged.

"Split up – we'll meet in fifteen at Point Delta," Mindy directed.

Mindy made a hard left at the next intersection, beside the Convention Centre, heading north up 5th Avenue while Dave continued straight ahead following West Harbor Drive. Their follower turned left after Mindy, but then turned right down L Street.

"Either they weren't following us, or they have training," Mindy mused as she watched her mirror.

Mindy was about to double-back and follow the follower, but then just as she was heading down K Street and approaching the baseball stadium, something else caught her attention and her happy demeanour changed completely as winter came to her expression.

"Dave – black Camaro; I'm trailing. We're heading east on J Street. It's a fucking druggie."

There was a pause before Dave came back over the comms.

"You wanna do this now, honey?"

"You know me, when. . ."

"When you see evil, you just have to act – it's one of the many reasons that I love you."

Mindy grinned enormously.

"Let's go, GI Mindy!"

..._...

The Camaro had zigged and zagged its way through the streets before passing beneath the 75 freeway on East Harbor Drive. Dave had joined up with his wife and he was about thirty yards behind her. Then, rather surprisingly, the Camaro turned right into an industrial area. Dave and Mindy could not follow as the Camaro had passed through steel gates which were guarded by armed security guards.

Dave and Mindy turned around and they hid their motorcycles under the freeway, beneath some trees. It did not take them long to find their way back down the road and then over a low fence into the industrial area.

Mid-City, just south of Downtown

The industrial area was just that.

Buildings crammed with heavy machinery of indeterminable use and lots of grease. After a brief search, Mindy smiled as she heard voices. She and Dave moved from shadow to shadow until they found a good vantage point. From there, Mindy studied the brightly-lit scene before her with a monocular.

The scene was not much of a surprise. Mindy found herself staring at a bunch of naked females – maybe thirty or more of them. The naked females varied in age from girls not much older than Chloe to women in their late twenties. All wore white dust masks over their faces and their hair was covered by white paper hats. Their only other covering was a pair of rubber gloves on their hands. So, why were they naked? It was the druggies' product protection scheme. While the naked girls and women packed their expensive product, they were free of the temptation to steal as there was nowhere to hide even the smallest sample of powder. Mindy decided that she needed to get closer – she wanted to gather more intel on what was going on.

"I want to get a closer look – see what we're up against."

"How?"

Mindy pointed over to a door, off to one side. Almost on cue, the door opened and a young girl stepped out – she was completely naked, except for a white dust mask which covered her mouth and nose.

"You're just gonna strip naked and saunter in there?" Dave asked – almost rhetorically.

Mindy's cheeks went a little pink and she grinned.

"Remember, eyes on *my* snatch only!"

"I can do that," Dave replied with his own enormous grin.

Mindy passed back her weapons and other accoutrements before heading for the changing room.

..._...

It took a lot of willpower to strip off all her clothing and don just a dust mask, along with the paper hat and rubber gloves. She felt very exposed and vulnerable. The trepidation and nervousness were very real which added to her cover. Just as she reached out to pull open the door, it was pushed open from the other side and a striking red-head walked in – she looked just as nervous and apprehensive as Mindy felt. Mindy left the changing room but paused before entering the dazzling array of lighting. A couple of minutes later, the red-head appeared completely naked – she was a true redhead, Mindy noticed. She allowed the young girl to approach and beckon Mindy to go with her. Mindy did, following a foot behind, studying the younger girl.

There was something off about the redhead. She wasn't the average street girl looking to make some money by spending a few hours stuffing bags of drugs while standing completely naked so half-a-dozen goons could enjoy a bit of female skin. The girl's body was too perfect – her muscles too honed. There was barely any fat on her body and Mindy was reminded of somebody else with a similar looking body – her own. The girl could only be about fifteen, maybe sixteen. Then Mindy smiled inside as several pieces of the 3D puzzle in her mind began to slot together.

Mindy took in everything as she strode timidly across the brightly lit area. She saw the eyes of the men and the grins as they took in the fresh meat as it walked towards the table. One of the men pointed them both to a space at an array of long tables, laid out in a 'T'. Mindy watched as the other women scooped white powder out of large steel tubs, before pouring said powder into small plastic bags. The bags were weighed and where the necessary product was added or removed. It was obvious that the guards preferred the younger girls, like Mindy and the redhead. The man at the far end of the table was looking at Mindy – his looks were giving her second thoughts about exposing herself so blatantly and her skin crawled as she felt his eyes running over her breasts and moving downwards to her dark pubic hair.

Beyond the creepy man, Mindy could see another room. In that room were more men, all armed, all smoking, and all playing cards. There were about eight of them. So, about thirty workers, and about fifteen guards. Then . . . fuck me! In the same room as the armed men playing cards, there was a man counting wads of cash. As the fat bastard counted the cash, he placed the wads into a large leather case. There was another man, off to the side – he had to be a courier waiting to take the cash somewhere safe at the end of the night.

..._...

It wasn't until Mindy was busy stuffing small plastic bags with white powder that Dave noticed another watcher in the shadows – okay, he had been distracted a bit, watching Mindy's tight butt as she stood at a table beside a stunning looking redhead who, Dave had noticed, was very much a natural red-head from the thick red pubic hair visible in her crotch.

The other watcher was small – maybe a very young girl. She was wearing a bandanna across her face and a cap to put her face into shadow. Was the girl a threat? If so, to whom? Was she a threat to him and Mindy, or just a threat to the drug dealers? Dave moved so that he could keep both Mindy and the watcher in his frame of vision.

As he watched, the watcher began to look around her – something was wrong; she smelt a rat. Dave knew he was safe, hidden in the shadows. As he watched, though, he was very surprised to see the watcher stand up behind a piece of machinery and then begin to strip. Within two minutes the watcher had turned into a naked girl of about thirteen. The girl ran barefoot and very naked towards the bright lights and the other naked girls. Dave heard laughter and then a man's taunt.

"Piss off, little girl – come back when you've got some tits and a pussy!"

The naked girl had fled back into the darkness and back to her clothing, donning everything as fast as she could. Dave took in the tears streaming down the girl's face as well as the pistol which she scooped up off the floor and stuffed into the back of her pants. There was more to that girl than met the eye – a *Predator*?

"Okay – times up beautiful ladies, get your Jacksons, get your clothes – and fuck off home!"

Dave was very relieved to see Mindy scampering off towards the changing room after collecting the wage for her work. He enjoyed seeing Mindy run naked – it was a definite turn on. He was a little disappointed to see her appear a few minutes later, fully dressed. Mindy saw his expression on her return.

"Don't worry, I'll strip the minute we're aboard and you can have your wicked way with me, big boy!" she promised.

Pacific Predator

Mindy was true to her word.

The moment the doors were closed and latched, Mindy shed everything and stood there, hands on her hips as Dave ran his eyes across her gorgeous body. Mindy grinned as she stepped forwards and began to undress her husband. Off came his t-shirt to reveal the chest which Mindy found so attractive. She ran her hands across the firm pectorals and she worked her way down to his pants. The belt was rapidly released and the combats fell to the floor as Mindy undid the button and pulled down the zip.

Mindy groaned as she saw that just a thin piece of cotton separated her from her target which was standing up very straight behind its cotton protection. Mindy could not stand it a moment longer. It had surprised her how much standing naked in public had actually turned her on inside. The ride back and the thought of what she was going to do once back aboard had kept her going long enough so she could feel herself very ready. She yanked down the boxer shorts and gently rubbed the hard member which stood before her. Dave moaned with pleasure – he had been hard for quite a bit of the evening, what with so many naked women about.

Mindy began to kiss Dave on the tip of his cock, licking some of the precum which seeped out. Enough was enough – the taste had set her off.

"Dave – I need you. . ."

Dave picked up his wife and he kissed her full on the lips, pushing his tongue inside as Mindy did the same. They both sagged down onto the floor of the main salon and they went to town on each other's body. Mindy squealed as Dave's fingers worked their magic on her rock-hard nipples. Then one of his hands moved downwards.

"Wow – you are hot and moist, tonight!"

"More action . . . less talk . . ."

Dave's magic fingers moved up and down on Mindy's labia exciting them to levels which Mindy was struggling to handle. Her breathing was becoming more laboured as she came (pun intended) closer to a raging orgasm. There were times when she feared her own orgasms – they were *that* strong. One was building up steadily inside her, the epicentre at the top of her vulva as Dave moved his fingers to the top of her labia. Dave cringed as Mindy's fingernails dug deep into his back as she struggled to cope with the body shattering orgasm which exploded inside of her. Mindy screamed and she rolled over into a tight ball.

Dave grinned as he ran his fingers up and down Mindy's taugt backbone. He watched the tremors in her back as he did so and he heard her moan. To Mindy it just accentuated her orgasm – yes, it was a form of torture, but he knew that Mindy loved it. It was another few minutes before she opened her beautiful green eyes and she smiled. To Dave, she was the most beautiful thing in the world as she lay on the thick carpeting, with sweat glistening across her naked body.

"You ready for round two?" Dave asked.

Mindy giggled as she lay on her back and spread her legs wide open.

***The following morning
Tuesday, August 30th***

Over breakfast, Mindy studied her laptop.

"You going to get dressed anytime soon?" Dave asked as he enjoyed the view.

"I need a shower first," Mindy replied as she nonchalantly dug into a bowl of cereal while she studied the map of San Diego on the laptop screen.

Mindy was still naked from the previous night and her skin glowed.

..._...

An hour later, they were both out on the road. Each had tasks to complete before the big mission that night. While Dave was busy sightseeing, Mindy rode up I-8 on an easterly heading. After seven-and-a-half miles, Mindy turned north onto I-5 and then off to the right into the urban surroundings. She pulled over on San Diego Mission Road and she studied the nearby apartment complex. Mindy pulled out her smart phone and selected a particular app. A pulsing symbol was visible on the map of San Diego.

The girl was still there – just a few dozen yards away.

Qualcomm Stadium Station

Mindy had watched them leave the apartment and followed them.

On arrival at the stadium, she had taken a faster route to the station – the two girls on the motorcycle were in no hurry. Thus, she was ready for them when they pulled up.

"Good morning!"

The older girl slipped off the motorcycle and she turned to face Mindy.

"What the fuck do you want?" the older girl demanded as she stood covering the younger girl who looked very scared.

Mindy studied the older girl for a moment before she responded.

"I just wanted to talk with you – we appear to have a similar agenda."

"Fuck your agenda – stay away from us," the girl warned.

Mindy kept her eyes on the girl but then she saw movement behind her and a pistol came into view. Then flashes as the suppressed bullets were expelled from the muzzle of the pistol. She felt two of the bullets strike home, pushing her off her feet – the third bullet missed.

..._...

'The fucking bitch!' Mindy thought angrily as she felt the searing bruises on her left shoulder and chest.

She heard an exclamation and then feet coming towards her – she remained still – at least until she felt the presence of somebody else very close. She took a breath and reached out with her legs, dragging the girl to the ground. The girl was skilled, Mindy would give her that. For the moment, she would give the girl a pass and just play with her.

It wasn't long before they were both back on their feet, facing off against one another. The girl dived forwards attacking Mindy. The strikes were good, but Mindy was able to dodge or absorb all of them. In return, Mindy was able to connect with a good amount of her strikes causing the girl to call out in pain. Then Mindy got in a good kick to the girl's left thigh and she went down. Mindy dived after her, pinning her with a leg across her throat. The fight was all but over, but then out of the blue, came a kick from the younger girl. Mindy punched her hard in the chest and the girl screamed as she fell backwards against a concrete pillar.

"Stay out of this!" Mindy suggested.

The fight was over, plus the police were probably not all that far away. Mindy released the girl and ran for her motorcycle, grabbing her helmet as she swung a leg over the machine.

"Till we meet again!" Mindy called out to the two girls before she accelerated away.

Aboard the Pacific Predator

"Have a fun morning?" Dave asked.

"Yeah," Mindy mused.

"Anything exciting happen?"

"Nothing that I'd call exciting. . ."

"You fought that girl, didn't you?"

"She was good – not as good as me, obviously."

"Obviously. . ."

"I'm going to speak with Homeplate – you doing lunch?"

"Obviously," Dave mused as Mindy vanished below.

..._...

Down in the master stateroom, Mindy set up her laptop and dialed Safehouse F.

"Fusion Operations – speak to me, but be warned: Psyche is very busy right now."

Mindy grinned as she enabled the far end camera and saw her eldest daughter lounging in the Kirk Chair with a large chocolate bar in one hand and a large glass of Coke in the other.

"Well, young lady, could you tear yourself away from that tasty chocolate bar for a moment?"

Stephanie almost dropped everything as she swallowed her mouthful of chocolate and placed the glass and the chocolate down on the adjacent table before stabbing a button on the arm of the chair.

"Hi, err Mum!" she smiled as Mindy appeared on the giant wall-mounted screen before her.

"Hi, Steph; you look as though you're enjoying yourself."

"It's been a slow day."

"I bet it has!" Mindy chuckled. "Has Marty got that data I requested?"

"Yes – he mentioned that you were up to no good, out there," Stephanie replied with a fiendish grin. "Shouldn't you be setting a good example for your kids?"

"Would it make a difference?" Mindy asked seriously.

Stephanie thought about that for a moment.

"Probably not," Stephanie replied.

"Hi, munchkin!" Dave called out as he entered the stateroom.

"Hi, Dad – is Mum behaving?"

Dave grinned.

"It's Mindy – what do you think?"

"Hey!" Mindy growled good-naturedly.

"Hi, Mindy: the packet is ready for us to send to your laptop," Marty commented from offscreen.

"Hi, Marty – thanks for your help," Mindy replied.

"You two stay safe," Marty called out.

"Hey, it's me!" Mindy laughed.

"That's what we're afraid of!" Marty and Stephanie said at the same time.

..._...

"You find what you needed?" Mindy asked as she dug into her chicken sandwich.

"I did – enough for us to go for a little ride, tonight, honey."

"Will I get to kill someone?"

"It's highly possible," Dave chuckled.

"Cool – I'm going to lie down, up top, for an hour or so . . . you wanna oil me up?"

Dave grinned as he wolfed down the rest of his sandwich. A few minutes later, he was very angry.

"You got shot!"

Dave glared at the twin bruises on his wife's shoulder and chest.

"It was the little bitch – her third shot missed," Mindy growled.

Dave relented as he leaned down and tenderly kissed each bruise.

That evening

National City East 19th Street

The ride had taken about thirty minutes and they had arrived at their destination after dark.

Hit Girl parked up her motorcycles, some sixty yards down the street and moved in under the cover of the darkness and numerous unlit light poles. The target was a non-descript house set back from the street. Within that house, there was a lot of cash – upwards of \$200,000. It was where the cash went when it left the industrial facility. Dave had been able to track it down with information gleaned from local sources. The plan for the night was to take the place down and confiscate the cash. There was also no requirement to leave anybody alive which Mindy felt was very agreeable.

At the front of the property, three men were visible, one in the drive and the other two patrolling the front lawn. No weapons were in evidence, but they were there.

..._...

Kick-Ass made his way to the rear of the property and hopped over the concrete wall there while Hit Girl made her way towards the front of the property. The men decorating the front lawn were the first to die as Hit Girl vaulted the fence and silently severed a pair of carotid arteries.

"Well, that's the lawn watered," she muttered to herself as she moved just as silently towards the guard on the drive.

He never heard death creeping up behind him. The first he knew was when an arm wrapped itself around his neck and his head was twisted violently to the right. His dead body was dumped under a tree out of sight.

"Three down – moving towards the house," Hit Girl reported.

..._...

Kick-Ass moved silently across the back garden. No guards were evident but he knew that they would be close by. As he closed the house, a door opened and Kick-Ass hid behind the garage. A guard stepped out of the door and he lit a cigarette, his automatic weapon dangling by his side. That was his loss. He never saw the fist which came out of the darkness and smashed his head against the garage wall. A large red stain on the white wall indicated that the man was all but dead.

"One, kind of down – I'm at the back door," Kick-Ass reported.

..._...

"Breaching in three . . . two . . . one . . ."

Hit Girl ignored the door – it was armoured – and she instead crashed through a window, rolling and coming up with a suppressed pistol in each hand.

"Fuck!" came a voice.

"Not very original!" Hit Girl growled as she dropped the speaker with a single bullet to the head.

Three more men died where they stood as they tried to bring weapons to bear. There was the sound of running as two more men appeared but before Hit Girl could open fire, they both fell forwards as bullets tore into their backs. Kick-Ass stood in the doorway looking at his wife, a suppressed Glock 17 in his gauntlet.

"That was fun!" he drawled.

"Let's get the cash," Hit Girl directed and they kicked open the door to a bedroom.

Gunfire ripped out, narrowly missing the two vigilantes. Hit Girl dived inside and kicked the MAC-10 out of the hands

of a large man who was evidently the guard for the large packages of cash which were stacked up all around him. The man was strong – he punched hard, much to Hit Girl's annoyance. He had obviously been selected for his guard duty because of his skill and his bulk.

As Hit Girl fought the man, she could hear more fighting outside in the corridor. Two more men had appeared from outside and they had attacked Kick-Ass. Pandemonium ensued as the two veteran vigilantes fought their attackers in close quarters combat. Kick-Ass was fighting in a corridor which prevented him from using any of his weapons – however, it also prevented *his* attackers from attacking in a coordinated fashion.

Hit Girl was exchanging punches and kicks when the drywall beside her suddenly exploded outwards and a body crashed down between her and her opponent. Immediately behind the body came the muscular bulk of Kick-Ass who took the opportunity to kick Hit Girl's assailant in the chest with enough force to send him crashing into another wall and destroying some more drywall. Hit Girl wasted no time in putting a bullet in his head before she ran out into the corridor and then into the kitchen.

The last man was deciding whether to attack or run, but Hit Girl made his decision for him as she kicked him into the corner of the kitchen where he fell hard against the cooker.

..._...

"I think we're done, honey!" Kick-Ass announced as they began to check out the packages of cash.

Hit Girl ran an electronic device over and around the packages looking for any transponders – she found two which she left in the room. The packages were then hefted out of the room by Kick-Ass and into the back yard. Kick-Ass jumped the wall and opened the back door of a Jeep SUV. From the back yard, Hit Girl passed over the packages of cash in a speedy fashion before they both headed back inside the house to check for anything that they had missed.

"Do I smell gas?" Hit Girl demanded.

"Oh, shit!" Kick-Ass responded as he kicked out the nearest window.

"We need to get the fuck outta here!" Hit Girl pointed out unnecessarily.

"Let's go!" Kick-Ass suggested as he picked Hit Girl up and threw her out the window.

"Hey!" she yelled as she flew through the air before coming down hard on the grass beside the house.

Kick-Ass dived after her just as there was an almighty explosion which showered the area with flaming bits of house.

"Okay – it went bang!" Hit Girl growled.

"Marcus is going to. . ."

"Marcus doesn't need to know!"

Kick-Ass rolled his eyes and he chuckled as his wife scowled.

***Chapter 319*: Hit Girl in San Diego - Part II**

Author's Note: *Events in the first part of this chapter, and in the latter part of the previous one, will operate in parallel with Chapter 5: Escalation and Chapter 6: Take Down of my other story, Creatures of the Night.*

The next afternoon

Wednesday, August 31st, 2016

Pacific Predator

"Well, that was fun," Dave commented.

"I think it is the right thing to do, don't you?"

"I just hope it doesn't backfire on us . . . or anybody else for that matter."

"I'll explain it all to Erika – she'll have the job of keeping an eye on them. It's only a couple of hours' drive, or an hour's flight time, from L.A. to here," Mindy commented.

"She's gonna love you!"

"She'll get over it – I got her the car she wanted, so she can't exactly complain if I make her life a tiny bit more complicated."

Dave just shook his head and he went back to cleaning his weapons ready for the night's action.

That night

Mid-City, just south of Downtown

It was a little after eight that night when Hit Girl and Kick-Ass broke through the outer perimeter of the industrial complex.

It had not been much of a surprise to find an increase in the number of roving guards – a direct consequence of the previous night's activities. As far as they could tell, there were about eighteen armed men and women scattered around the outside of the facility – a walk in the park as far as Hit Girl was concerned. They both wore their Fusion Covert Combat Suits or FCCS for short, just as they had on the previous evening.

Hit Girl went first – she was the more stealthy of the pair, after all. Kick-Ass followed, packing a Franchi SPAS-12 combat shotgun and a suppressed .45-calibre Glock 21. Hit Girl was packing twin suppressed .40-calibre Glock 23 pistols, as well as her numerous ever-present blades. Almost every floodlight was lit but there was plenty of shadow, not to mention that there was plenty of space to manoeuvre *above* the bright lights.

As soon as they closed the lights, Hit Girl preferred to take the more challenging route above – it was so much more of a challenge, she thought. Kick-Ass remained below on the ground – he felt safer on the ground. He ensured that he could see his partner at all times, just in case he had to intervene. Hit Girl knew that she was good, but she also knew that she was not invincible, so knowing that Kick-Ass was close by filled her with a feeling of well-being.

The first man fell to Kick-Ass, much to Hit Girl's annoyance. The man had stepped into a suitable shadow so that he could have a cigarette.

"Well, they do say cigarettes kill," Kick-Ass quipped.

"Funny, green asshole!"

Hit Girl swung down from the pipe network, hanging upside down as she dropped two guards with her pistols.

"That's two to your one – your move!" she growled as she flipped down to the ground.

Kick-Ass chuckled as he kept moving.

..._...

"That's three to your two, honey!" Kick-Ass laughed as he drove the butt of his shotgun into the head of one and then the other guard.

Hit Girl was getting angry – she was not about to be upstaged by a dick in a wetsuit! Then she paused as she came around the far side of the facility – there was a body on the ground, lying on her back. On closer inspection, Hit Girl found the knife wound in the chest. Just the single stab wound, nothing more. There was no sign of a struggle, either, indicating a professional strike out of the darkness.

"We have company, Kick-Ass – we have a *Predator*, maybe two."

"I thought I was getting a week away from goddamn crazy nutcase killers!" Kick-Ass growled.

"What about me?"

"You're not crazy," Kick-Ass pointed out.

"So, I'm a nutcase as well as a killer?"

"I would say so."

"Let's get on with this before *they* get all the kills!"

..._...

It was crucial to gain entry to the facility before the men inside realised that something was wrong – if they were concerned for their safety, then they might kill their workers. Kick-Ass and Hit Girl put down a guard each before they headed for the target building and quickly made their way inside. It felt good to Hit Girl to be inside the building with clothes on; she was *not* repeating *that* exercise.

They closed from the southern end of the building and stopped within the confines of the shadows, a few feet from the dazzlingly bright arc lights. As before, there was a group of about thirty naked women going about their taskings. Watching over them, were twelve armed men, a combination of pistols and automatic weapons in evidence. At the head of the T-shaped table, a large guard stood before the counting room where there appeared to be heavy security – at least six men were visible around the man who was busy counting a large amount of cash – obviously eager to make up for what they had lost.

Hit Girl looked over at Kick-Ass.

"You ready for this?" she asked.

"You really have to ask?"

"Nah! Fire in the hole!"

With that, they each threw a pair of M84 stun grenades into the light.

..._...

The detonation of seven stun grenades, each good for 180 decibels, was monumental and the entire building shook as the sound reverberated around the metal work, amplified as it bounced around. The million-candela flash multiplied seven times was just as monumental and every person within the facility (excepting the four vigilantes) reeled in pain from the combined effects of disorientation, confusion, loss of balance, and loss of coordination. They all suffered from intense inner ear disturbance, tinnitus, and deafness – not to mention the flash blindness.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl, protected from the effects by their high-tech masks, rushed forwards and pushed the naked girls to the floor while they targeted the guards. The additional three M84s had been a rude surprise but not entirely unexpected. It was obvious that the opposing team was present and following a very similar plan of action. It was also equally obvious that they had not expected the additional M84s and Hit Girl could see a pair of black-clad forms rolling about on the ground a few feet from the incapacitated gunmen.

"I'm going for the Predators – you get the girls moving!" Hit Girl ordered and she ran over towards the two girls.

"Fucking get up!" she yelled as she pulled them both to their feet.

The taller one was the first to respond, shaking her head and then pulling away as she took in who had helped her. She pulled her younger friend with her.

"Watch yourselves!"

Hit Girl drew her pistols and she began to drop any guard within sight. Kick-Ass was visible pulling naked girls to their feet and shoving them bodily towards the exit. Most were responding but some of the younger ones were struggling from the effects of the explosions and bright flashes, not to mention the sounds of gunfire which was echoing around the building. It was obvious that some of the guards had responded well to the grenades – maybe they were used to the non-lethal weapons. Either way, they were responding with everything that they had to hand.

But then so was Hit Girl.

..._...

The guards were organised – they were protecting their money and the man counting the money. The standoff was obviously intended to give the men in the backroom time to pack up the cash and make a run for it. The backroom had a back exit – typically. However, when one of the guards tried to open it.

"Hey! The damn door is stuck!"

Yeah – Kick-Ass had kind of pushed a large dumpster against the outside of the door . . . seemed the right thing to do at the time. The language that flowed out of the room was borderline extreme – even by Hit Girl's standards. The gunfire increased as the guards made to push their escape. Then one of them made a stupid mistake – he threw a smoke grenade out towards the machinery in a bid to cover their escape.

The heat generated by the device as it issued copious amounts of white smoke set fire to a pile of oily rags. It did not take long for the additional black smoke to begin filling the building.

"Fucking, cretins!" Hit Girl breathed.

"Well, that puts a clock on things," Kick-Ass pointed out.

"Yeah – we'll have fire and police here in minutes," Hit Girl agreed as she made her way through the smoke.

Bullets were being fired off, indiscriminately in all directions and in some cases, they then ricocheted off the steel work back down to earth in unexpected directions. Kick-Ass saw four men were escorting the money man. He was a fat man and choking on the thick smoke as he was pushed forwards and in the direction of assumed safety. The five men made their way down behind an enormous piece of machinery.

Kick-Ass followed, trying to get into a good position to take down the guards, all of whom carried automatic weapons. Hit Girl made a wide sweep to try and flank them. As she went, she found a firefight in progress which appeared to end as a gunman sprawled to the ground, blood spilling out of his torn torso. Two more gunmen took off, so Hit Girl dropped them both with a couple of rounds each.

Hit Girl noticed the taller girl over by some machinery, the younger girl next to her. Hit Girl waved a hand in their direction before she dived into the swirling black smoke.

..._...

Kick-Ass kept up a running commentary over the communications as he tracked the five men through the facility. Hit Girl, meanwhile, was closing in from her own direction. They were making their way towards the southern end of the facility – towards the water. Hit Girl assumed that they had a waterborne escape planned. She could also hear sirens wailing in the distance over the sounds of the crackling flames.

"They're just approaching the back exit – hold on . . . I just got a look through a gap in the smoke; the girls are down. You think you can handle the goons?"

"I should be insulted that you would even suggest that I could not handle a five to one fight – but I know you like to worry, so I'll let it slide."

Kick-Ass chuckled to himself as she jumped onto a catwalk and ran through the smoke, his mask protecting him from

the worst and his low-light vision allowing him to move at speed.

..._...

The two girls were both on the ground, coughing and spluttering. The younger one looked to be in a bad way while the older one was struggling to stay conscious. Kick-Ass jumped down behind them and without a moment's thought, he swept up both girls and he ran in the direction of the five running gunmen.

As he came closer, he could hear the sounds of mayhem and mutilation that could only be attributed to Hit Girl on a rampage. Indeed, the southern end of the facility was relatively smoke free and as such he was able to see his vigilante companion as she flew through the air, twin Wakizashi swords in her hands. One man was already badly mutilated and he lay in a growing pool of his own blood. Two more men were impaled and then eviscerated as Hit Girl regained her feet to face the final gunman and his overweight protectee.

The gunman made a feeble effort to fill the air with lead but to no avail as Hit Girl bent and twisted her body before coming to rest *behind* the gunman and she drove both blades into his back, allowing him to fall to the ground as she turned to the money man.

"Take it – it's yours, all of it. Please . . . just let me live. . ."

The wimpy fuck was crying as he begged for his life. Hit Girl was not one to give mercy. Yes, she had changed and matured over the years and she chose who and when to kill. However, there were certain people who she came across that turned her back into that feral creature which Kick-Ass had first discovered slaughtering cunts in a downtown apartment. Kick-Ass knew when to steer well clear and allow his partner to dish out her own form of vengeance and justice. The money man fell beside his guards, his insides spilling out around him as he bled out. The pain was beyond anything which he had ever experienced and he went to hell with his own steaming intestines being the last thing which he would ever see.

..._...

The area behind the facility, on the south side was relatively safe; all the police and firemen were towards the north end where the fire was raging at its worst. Kick-Ass had laid the two girls out in the recovery position and he had given each of them a blast of pure oxygen to relieve their lungs. Both were still out cold. Hit Girl took a moment to check behind the right ear of each girl while they lay unconscious. She was very surprised on checking the younger of the two girls and finding nothing there. Whatever their story was, it had to be a good one.

After a comprehensive sweep to ensure that the girls were safe and secure, Kick-Ass and Hit Girl returned to the two vigilantes for a moment before leaving the scene.

"Sleep tight," Hit Girl said to the older girl as she and Kick-Ass blended into the swirling smoke.

***Late the following afternoon
Thursday, September 1st***

Chicago

"Why are you staring at my ass?"

"Just imagining what it'll look like once Marcus has finished spanking you."

Mindy's cheeks went pink at the suggestion.

"How about *you* spank me?"

Dave smiled wistfully as he walked towards the hatch. Once he was on the concrete, he managed to walk almost ten feet before the sprinting Stephanie slammed into him and her arms gripped him tightly around the waist.

"Dad!"

"Good to see you, Steph," Dave replied as he hugged his daughter back. "Any chance I can be allowed to breathe?"

Stephanie grinned up at Dave as she released him.

"She's been insatiable, ever since I picked her up, this morning," Paige laughed. "Marcus has taken Megan, Anne-Marie, and Danny into the office with him. We'll pick them up – assuming they haven't destroyed the District – on the way home, Dave."

"Suits me," Dave commented. "Hi, Electra – you okay?"

"Yes, thanks, Dave – Stephanie has been keeping me very busy."

"You two been mile-highing?" Paige quipped.

"I'm not one to kiss and tell," Mindy grinned deviously as she joined Dave.

"Ewww! Do we need to clean off the seats before I sit down?"

"Oh, yeah, little Stephy!" Mindy chuckled.

"See you, Dad!" Stephanie called out as she scampered for the steps and vanished aboard the jet followed by Electra who waved at Dave.

"You be good, now," Dave suggested.

"I can't promise anything," Mindy replied as she gave her husband a very deep and very passionate kiss which had Paige blushing.

..._...

Once aboard, and with the hatch shut, Mindy turned to Stephanie.

"You gave Dave a hug, why not me?"

"You get better, Mum," Stephanie grinned. "You get *me*, on a plane, for *seven hours!*"

Mindy laughed nervously.

"Where are the parachutes," she commented dryly.

"This could be a very long flight," Electra added.

"With you aboard, yes!" Stephanie countered and she was still grinning as she planted herself in a seat and strapped herself in. "Well, I want to know all about those explosions in San Diego – Marcus says he wants to tan your arse!"

"It was an accident – well, kind of. . ."

"Okay, Mother – let's hear it."

"This ought to be good," Electra grinned.

..._...

Mindy awoke part way into the flight and headed aft to make use of the bathroom. On her return through the darkened cabin, she noticed that Electra was awake. The two girls had gone to sleep on the same settee.

"You okay, honey?" Mindy asked and Electra nodded.

Mindy sat back down where she had been sleeping and she saw Electra eyeing up the seat next her.

"Come and sit down beside me and we can talk," Mindy suggested.

"Thanks."

Once Electra was settled, with her legs crossed and facing Mindy, Mindy spoke.

"I have a question, Electra. I noticed that Steph calls you 'lectra – dropping the 'E'. I also noticed that when Megan tried that, you nearly ripped her head off."

Electra smiled.

"Stephanie was the first to call me that . . . and, well I liked it – but from her only. Mindy – you can call me 'lectra too, if you'd like."

"Thanks, 'lectra. You and Stephanie have a history; I know that . . . but there's more, I think."

"Stephanie was the first person to treat me like a human-being. I was a Yellow, as you know. Nobody paid any attention to us Yellows – not that I ever blamed the *Predators*; they had a lot on their plates and they were treated pretty harshly. I found that out . . . once I became a *Predator* myself. Anyway – even though Stephanie was in a cage, stark naked, she still had the time to treat me like a human being. I first met her, when she came under my custody for two weeks of hell in The Cage. When she was brought in, naked, she was unconscious – they had beaten her really badly. Then she noticed a blackeye, one morning. Despite her privations, she taught me how to protect myself from the Yellow who had punched me. Without her, I would be dead – Yellows never got a chance to prove themselves; Stephanie got me that chance.

"Okay, it went badly for me, at first – I got stabbed and slashed, but Stephanie stayed with me the whole time. Yes, she had no choice, but she helped me way more than I thought she ever would. I love her more than anybody else, ever – I have nobody, but Stephanie. She's a really strong girl – putting up with being a *Predator*, then she gets stuck with me. No matter what anybody throws at that girl, she always pushes through it. I feel blessed having found Stephanie and then I was rescued by Cassie's Dad – any other ship and I don't know. He was the first to treat me as a human being, since Stephanie. That was why I gave up fighting and allowed him to rescue me."

"Thank you for telling me that, 'lectra – you've been very brave for anybody, let alone somebody your age."

"You know something, Mindy. You are nothing like what we were told Hit Girl was like. We were told that she only thought of herself and didn't care about anybody."

"They were right – at least until I found Dave and then Chloe. Together, they introduced me to my emotions. I found that I could really care about somebody and I found that I liked caring about people. It was hard; really hard. Then I became a parent – what I felt when Anne-Marie was taken; I had never felt those feelings before. But the feeling when I finally found her. . . Then, a couple months back, when Stephanie was shot, I felt so empty. I worried about how I could go on without Stephanie in my life. She lights up my world – I love her. Each time she died; I died inside. She's a very special girl and I'm learning things from her, just as she is learning things from me."

"Thank you for telling me – you've made me part of your worldwide family. The family of *Fusion*, with its cousin, *Vengeance*."

"Let's get some sleep and we can talk again over breakfast," Mindy suggested.

..._...

With a little over an hour before landing, Mindy awoke and she stretched her long legs.

"Coffee, Mindy?" Amy asked from the galley.

"Thank you," Mindy replied as she took the steaming mug of coffee.

"Breakfast will be along in about ten minutes," Amy added as she returned to the galley.

Mindy looked across at the sleeping Stephanie and Electra. Like most little girls that age, they both appeared angelic while sleeping. Dave referred to Stephanie as a coiled viper when she was sleeping. The euphemism was very apt, considering that the girl could go from asleep to defensive in an instant. Mindy gently shook her daughter by the shoulder until she snapped awake and groaned.

"I need to wee!" she exclaimed as she suddenly bolted up and ran aft to the head.

A few minutes later, Stephanie reappeared looking refreshed and neat – having taken the time to tidy her hair and wash her face. Electra had awoken and was awaiting Stephanie's return, so she quickly scrambled aft to the head just as needy for the facilities.

"Morning, Mum – morning, Amy!" Stephanie called out.

"Morning, sweetie," Mindy replied.

"Good morning, Stephanie," Amy replied as she placed a glass of orange juice down at a table for Stephanie, plus another for Electra.

"Thank you. Umm, that smells good – I'm ravenous," Stephanie commented as she sat down.

"What's new!" Mindy chuckled as she sat down opposite her daughter.

They were joined a few minutes later by Electra who also looked much more herself as she sat down and took a long gulp of orange juice.

Amy reappeared with three steaming plates piled high with bacon, eggs, sausages, baked beans, and hash browns. Electra and Stephanie smiled broadly as they got stuck in.

"Thank you, Amy – have you all eaten?"

"Yes, thank you, Mindy."

"I hope you enjoy your time in Edinburgh – we won't be needing the jet till the weekend."

"Oh, we have plans!" Amy grinned.

..._...

"You two enjoy your heart-to-heart, then?" Stephanie asked as she munched her way down a sausage.

Electra's face went pink.

"How much did you hear?" she asked.

"A good amount," Stephanie replied, her own face turning pink. "It's not often I hear somebody say such nice things about me."

"I meant every word, Steph," Electra confirmed.

"You are a very special girl, Steph," Mindy added. "Despite your antics. . ."

"Thanks, Mum – it feels good to have people like me for who I am," Stephanie said meekly.

"At least the nice side, which is usually overshadowed by the bitchy Psyche who thinks she's the queen-bee," Electra stated as she finished bacon.

Stephanie grinned as she downed her orange juice.

"I must have been a very bad person in a former life to have to suffer you two," Mindy complained as she stabbed an errant hash brown.

"Past life – you looked at yourself in *this* life?" Stephanie quipped and she ignored the icy 'Hit Girl' stare.

"Once upon a time, I was feared by all, even Kick-Ass – now I get no respect whatsoever!"

"When she moans, she moans!" Stephanie commented to Electra.

"Does she ever!" Electra replied as Mindy scowled.

Inside, Mindy felt happier than she had been in a while. For once she appeared to be getting something right in life and she had her family that she adored and who appeared to adore her in return. Her life was perfect and she hoped that her Daddy was proud of her, wherever he was.

"Right, you little varmints – I would suggest that you both finish your food because we're going to be landing very soon," Mindy growled good-naturedly.

"She does like to growl, doesn't she?" Electra commented.

"She's not called a bitch for nothing," Stephanie replied. "Dave says she likes having her tummy rubbed, too."

Mindy's face went very pink as she drained her coffee mug and headed aft, ignoring the snickering coming from the two little girls.

***Chapter 320*: Back To School**

Saturday, September 3rd, 2016

Blairhoyle, Scotland

"I honestly can't believe that I'm saying this to you, Abigail, but you stay safe, okay? We may be mortal enemies but we both love a boy for very different reasons and we both want to see him back in our lives."

"We'll find him, Stephanie – I promise. You stay safe, too, okay – we need a rematch, you and I."

"I'll be there, bitch!" Stephanie grinned as she turned to a very tearful Electra. "I'm going to miss you 'lectra, but at least I'll be free from your snarky comments. Now, don't you let these bitches get one over on you, okay? Remember everything that I've taught you. You're a survivor."

Electra hugged her mentor, tears streaming down her face like Niagara Falls.

"She talkin' about us?" Kaitlin asked facetiously.

"Think so," Naomi replied.

"Cool!" Harper added.

After more hugs, all around, Stephanie and Mindy left for the airport and home.

Tuesday, September 6th

Glenview

Chicago, United States of America

"Are we not picking Megan up?"

"No, Anne-Marie; Megan is starting Junior High, today," Stephanie advised her younger sister.

Anne-Marie nodded and then an evil smirk drifted across her face.

"Bet a certain boy is looking forward to seeing *you*," she teased her big sister.

Stephanie turned around in the front seat of the Jaguar XJR and glared at Anne-Marie.

"Well, you did take longer to get ready than you usually do," Mindy admitted.

"I have a weak right arm," Stephanie responded lamely as her cheeks turned pink.

"Yeah, right!" Mindy laughed.

"You do look very smart, Steph," Danny said.

"Thank you, Danny."

Lake View High School

"Hi, Megan – you ready for high school?"

"Hi, Chloe – yeah, I think so."

"What's up?"

"Talk about a humiliating morning . . . Mom – she was crying this morning because her little girl was starting high school!"

Chloe laughed.

"Been there – Mom cried on the phone this morning; 'her big girl is growing up too fast', apparently."

Megan was a little surprised at Chloe's candidness. Chloe grinned.

"Megan – you're my friend and you're like a sister to me; I have no secrets from you, all that's in the past."

Chloe ruffled Megan's hair generating a scowl.

"Bennett, I hope you aren't bullying the new kids."

"No, Mr Swanson; just checking that Megan is okay," Chloe grinned as Isaac Swanson winked and sauntered off down the corridor.

"Megan!"

"Hi, Zach."

"Wow, you look hot!"

"Hell, yeah!" Jake added.

Megan blushed.

"She's done a *lot* of growing over the summer, boys, but she could do with a little bit more hair down below," Chloe teased and Megan's mouth dropped open in shocked astonishment.

"Can I see?"

"No, you cannot!" Megan responded tartly, her cheeks a fiery red. "I do not just flash my naked body for anybody. . ."

"Nah, just a dozen people, or so. . ." an Irish lilt quipped.

Megan scowled at the grinning Saoirse as she walked past with Morgan.

"Chloe!"

..._...

Chloe turned to find her two best friends moving towards her through the throng of excited teenagers. Avery and Riley hugged their friend tightly.

"You've been busy, girl!" Avery pointed out.

Chloe rolled her eyes, knowing exactly what she meant. She was not referring to Chloe, but to her alter ego, the vigilante known as Shadow.

"We were worried about you – we never saw all that much of you," Riley said. "How's Stephanie?"

"She's had a rough time over the summer – really rough – but she's pulled through."

"I heard that Shadow was injured," Avery said very quietly.

"Yeah – arrow in my thigh; it was sore as hell, I can tell you."

"You better now?"

"Yeah."

North Park Elementary School

"Stephanie!"

The ten-year-old paused and she closed her eyes, wishing that she was invisible.

"I won't ask if you had a good summer, as I know you didn't. We're really glad to see you up and about, not to mention in one piece."

"Thanks, Jackson."

The eyes of Jackson and Craig wandered all over Stephanie's body and she felt a little weird.

"You look really nice, Steph – I like the skirt," Katy offered.

"Despite what some may think; I am a girl," Stephanie pointed out with a grin.

"Taken you long enough to realise that!" Ali commented dryly.

..._...

Almost from the moment she had set foot out of the car, that morning, Stephanie had been mobbed by well-wishers and curious kids wanting to find out more about the shooting, several weeks previously. There was even an argument between a group of boys about which one was going to carry Stephanie's schoolbag – eventually, Stephanie just left them arguing and carried her own bag to class.

The teachers, too, were very curious, but happy to see the rambunctious ten-year-old back at the school. While they often tired of Stephanie's behaviour and often violent and foul-mouthed outbursts, she was a firm favourite amongst the teaching body as a whole. Stephanie was quick to show her anger and even quicker to resort to physical violence, but she would never hurt anybody younger than herself and she was very quick to defend any youngster who was being bullied.

Indeed, in the months that Stephanie had been attending the school, the bullying statistics had dropped sharply. Her aunt, Megan Williams, had also seen to a lot of the bullies but Megan had deigned to be less obvious and overt about her threats of violence. Stephanie had been warned about vigilantism in the school, but the fact that she only targeted active bullies allowed the school to turn a blind eye to Stephanie's actions. It usually only took her arrival outside at recess for the bullies and troublemakers to fade into the background and the more timid children to come to the fore and enjoy their time outside the classroom.

Stephanie was a very popular pupil and education-wise, she was very intelligent.

That evening

Glenview

"Mindy, when are we going downtown?" Stephanie asked almost the moment they had all arrived home.

"Not tonight, honey."

"Why?" Stephanie demanded petulantly

"Less of that tone, young lady – homework, please."

"I want to go downtown – I can do my homework there."

"No Psyche on a school night."

"Fuck, that!"

"Stephanie! That is enough – get upstairs, now!" Dave roared.

Stephanie glared at Dave and then Mindy before she ran up the stairs, muttering and swearing.

"I'm off to do my homework – see you at dinner," Danny called out as he headed off up the stairs.

"Pussy!" Anne-Marie called after him.

"Anne-Marie!" Mindy growled.

The eight-year-old grimaced.

"I know. Anne-Marie: put a buck in the jar. Anne-Marie: go do your homework."

Mindy smiled as the young girl dejectedly stuffed a dollar bill into her personal swear jar and then she headed up the stairs.

..._...

Up in the British Sector, Stephanie was calming herself down as she sat at her desk, her school books laid out before her. Mindy had been absolutely right and she had just behaved like a petulant child just because she could not get her own way. That annoyed Stephanie. She was trying to act more mature, hoping that Dave and Mindy might see that she was growing up and that she was due some more responsibility. That idea had failed in a most spectacular way!

Stephanie picked up her mobile and she sent a text:

Sorry Mum :)

A few seconds later, a response arrived:

No harm done :)

..._...

Downstairs in the kitchen, Mindy smiled as she read the next message:

Love you Mum

Stephanie was growing up and showing increasing levels of maturity way beyond her years. But then, *Predators* had been encouraged to grow up and mature much faster than they needed. Mindy was very pleased with how the girl was growing up. Mindy's cell beeped again:

Steph is sending texts instead of doing her homework :)

It was Anne-Marie trying to get Stephanie into trouble.

Steph is talking with ME!

The reply arrived a second or two later:

busted :(

"Let me guess," Dave chuckled as he saw his wife's expression. "Anne-Marie trying to get Stephanie into trouble?"

Mindy nodded as she sipped her coffee.

"Steph's doing well. Must be hormones – kind of reminds me of another girl about the same age. . ."

"I was older. . ."

"Still suffering from hormones – I mean; she was a fucking show off, but a moody bitch, too."

"I suppose, I was," Mindy admitted, "a *little* hormonal."

"A *little*!"

"Funny!"

That evening

D-JAK Prime

It was a busy evening.

As Mindy left the back office wearing her black Gi, she looked over her burgeoning clientele. Many faces were recognisable – indeed, many were her friends while others were her friends but they had no idea that Mindy was *their* friend having only met her in her Hit Girl guise.

In the introductory class, with Kyle, were five teenage friends: Elizabeth, Jesse, Kate, Laurence, and Peter. To most at D-JAK, they were just five friends all learning to defend themselves. To Mindy, they were *Synthesis*, the hacker arm of *Fusion*. The kids were true to their word (or just scared of Hit Girl) and as such, they turned up regularly to learn the art of self-defence – with a few extra skills thrown in.

Further over, the intermediate class was being taught by Megan and Curtis, who each wore a blue Gi. In that class were two sisters: Lauren and Lizzie. In the same class were two of Chloe's friends: Avery and Riley. Avery enjoyed throwing her friend down to the mat but Riley was also quick to put Avery down, just as hard. Megan or Curtis would usually stay close to Lauren as the girl would sometimes get a little carried away when she sparred against her sister.

The advanced class was being taught by Hailee with help from Saoirse. That class had a certain young girl learning advanced skills. Her name was Kelly and she was something very special. So special, that only half-a-dozen people knew that she was a double-agent. The girl had no idea that the smiling young woman in the black Gi had an alter ego for whom she was now working clandestinely.

..._...

Over in a distant corner of D-JAK, were Stephanie and Tommy.

Mindy noticed that something appeared off, the moment she approached. Stephanie was making use of the punch bag with Tommy to help - the two youngsters had been spending quite a bit of time together since Stephanie's return from the hospital and Tommy was helping his friend to regain her previous peak physical condition.

Almost immediately, Mindy noticed that Stephanie seemed annoyed about something and her face was pinker than usual – and not just from the exercise. Mindy looked past the youngsters and she rolled her eyes as she found a very good reason for Stephanie being annoyed – actually three of them. Joshua and Chloe, along with Anne-Marie, were talking together and by Anne-Marie's giggles, Mindy assumed they were all up to no good.

"I suppose you *could* be right; there is *something* showing, well *two* somethings – not much, though. . ." Chloe commented as she studied Stephanie from a safe distance.

"You sure; I can't see *anything*?" Joshua replied with an evil grin.

"They're there," Anne-Marie assured them both. "I've seen 'em – a bit like fried eggs."

Stephanie was wearing a sports bra while she exercised her weakened right arm. Naturally, the garment matched the contours of her body and yes, there were two very gentle mounds on her chest.

"Yeah – I suppose you *could* call those breasts," Chloe continued.

Mindy groaned, figuring that Stephanie was on the verge of exploding – the body language of the ten-year-old was unmistakable.

"Enough – Chloe, Joshua, Anne-Marie," Mindy said, attracting everybody's attention. "Chloe, according to your mother, Stephanie has bigger boobs at ten than you had when you were twelve. Anne-Marie, I am going to allow Stephanie to respond as she sees fit – don't look at me like that; I'm sure it will be quick, but very painful. . . Joshua – how about you spar one on one with Tommy; I am sure he will be fair."

"Sorry, Steph," an embarrassed looking Chloe said.

"Yeah – just joking around," Joshua added.

"Just winding you up a bit – you'd never hurt your little sister," Anne-Marie tried.

Stephanie just scowled at each of them in turn.

..._...

Stephanie smiled at Mindy as she headed towards the back office for a drink. As she went, she heard a yell of pain from Joshua as Tommy laid him out on the mat, closely followed by a scream from Chloe as she was thrown on top of

her boyfriend. Anne-Marie had fled. Stephanie saw Saoirse standing with Paige and she altered course.

"So, the ungrateful bitch returns," Saoirse commented as Stephanie approached her.

"Yeah – I spoke out of turn, but I'm glad to have a best friend to set me straight," the chastened Stephanie replied as she surprised her best friend by giving her a hug.

"You can be a big softy, Stephy," Saoirse laughed as she returned the hug.

"About that. . ." Stephanie muttered as she pulled away and punched her friend in the left breast. "I have a reputation to uphold, you know."

"You bitch!" Saoirse called out as she rubbed her breast.

"That's better!" the laughing Stephanie called out as she bolted to safety.

"When you grow some tits, I will make you pay!" Saoirse yelled after the retreating girl.

..._...

Mindy just shook her head as she saw her daughter laughing while she sprinted across D-JAK. Stephanie was still favouring her right arm and that was affecting her running, but not by all that much. The swimming plus a strict training regime had ensured that her arm was returning to full functionality. It had been very painful but with the help of her family and friends, Stephanie had pushed through and she was very close to the home straight.

Saoirse was the driving force behind Stephanie's recovery and Mindy knew that she owed the fifteen-year-old. Maybe Saoirse felt guilt over her attempts at killing Stephanie, so she wanted to do everything that she could to help Stephanie recover from her wounds. Whatever the bond was between them, they were inseparable and they both needed each other. Seeing Stephanie laughing was amazing considering what the poor girl had endured over the previous few months.

Stephanie finally calmed down but Anne-Marie refused to sit next to her in the car on the drive home.

***The following afternoon
Wednesday, September 7th***

Morton Grove

"Hi, honey!"

"Hi, Mom!"

"For what do I owe this little visit?"

"Is Curtis in?"

"He's – how should I put it – entertaining Megan, 'downtown'."

Chloe was staring down at the floor, unable to meet her mother's eyes. The sixteen-year-old's body language made her mother wary of what was coming next.

"I've missed my second period in a row . . . and . . . a few weeks back, we had a condom rip. . . Mommy, I'm scared."

Those last two words were a phrase which Doctor Catherine Bennett had *not* heard her daughter say in a long, long time. It was also something that she had never expected to *ever* hear coming from the mouth of the famed *Fusion* vigilante known as Shadow.

"Well, honey, it shows me that you're taking your new situation seriously."

"You're not mad?"

"I'm a little angry and very worried – you are only sixteen, but I trust you, and I know that you took precautions. You are not the careless young girl from three years ago; it is not your fault. Does Joshua know?"

"About the busted condom? Yes. That I'm pregnant? Not yet."

"What do you think he will say?"

"He'll support me, whatever decision I take; he loves me and he respects me."

"I know he does, honey."

"What am I going to do? I'm only sixteen!"

"Well, in seven months, or so, you are going to become a mother, and Joshua a father."

"Josh a Dad. . . Oh, God – what will Daddy say?"

"He'll be mad, but he loves you very much and I know that he trusts both you and Josh, so I don't see any real problems there."

Chloe sank down onto a couch and she began to cry.

The following evening

Glenview

Mindy had just learnt of Chloe's situation.

"I'm taking you off operations, Chloe."

"I know. What am I going to do, Mindy?"

"If I can bring up a kid, you can!" Mindy pointed out.

Chloe forced a smile.

"I should be happy, but I'm just scared."

"That's what I said to Marcus when we returned from Gotham with the twins."

"I'm too young for kids – I'm. . ."

"Everybody stood by me when I gained the twins – they'll do the same for you. You have a very big family, Chloe."

"I know."

Chloe began crying again. Mindy had no idea what to do, so she just hugged her best friend. It wasn't the first time that Mindy had cursed her Daddy for not teaching her how to *cope* with emotions rather than just teaching her how to block the damn things out! Dave had spoken with Joshua – who had taken the news of impending fatherhood in his stride – and discovered that Joshua was scared stiff about the responsibility of bringing up a child. Mindy had heard Dave's response – and growled at it.

"I was scared at the thought of bringing up the twins and then Stephanie, but then I figured that I had survived Mindy going through puberty, so nothing could *possibly* be worse than that!"

Joshua had laughed.

***Chapter 321*: The First Ones**

November 2006 – Operation Treadstone and Operation Blackbriar come apart. Dr Albert Hirsch and CIA Deputy Director Noah Vossen continue their research into the ultimate assassin.

September 25th, 2009 – Big Daddy is murdered, live on the internet. Hit Girl is, very briefly, shown to the world, live on the internet.

November 31st, 2009 - Dr Albert Hirsch and CIA Deputy Director Noah Vossen instigate the Urban Predator program.

January 6th, 2010 – The first Urban Predator student is recruited and trained in Hit Girl's image.

They were the first – the very first.

They were the first victims of the experiment which would ultimately result in the deaths of hundreds and lead to the loss and the destruction of hundreds of childhoods.

At the tender age of ten, neither of them had any idea of what it was that they were beginning. For the first eight months of the program, the two youngsters; one boy and one girl, were very much alone – other than having their adult instructors for company. As time wore on, they both forgot about their early lives; they were both street rats – nobody would miss them, nobody would file a police report.

The girl quickly forgot about the night when she was seized from the Hawaiian beach. The boy quickly forgot about the night when he was seized from the frozen streets of London. They both quickly forgot about being normal children.

Instead, they focussed only on what was ahead of them as their Instructors turned them into finely tuned killers; a tool to be used and quite literally, abused.

By the time they were both eleven-years-old, nine months after they had been taken, any recollection of life beyond the concrete walls where they were to exist for the next five years of their lives, had faded completely.

Wednesday, January 6th, 2010

The first twenty-four hours of her incarceration were a very rude awakening for the girl.

She was seized off that beach in Hawaii, in the dead of night, thrown into the back of a car, and then pushed aboard a large cargo aircraft. The flight appeared to take hours, somewhere close to seven, and it was very noisy and uncomfortable. The girl was dazed by her swift abduction and she was being moved around so fast that she never even considered resisting.

After landing, again at night, she was hauled off the aircraft into a cold habitat that was very different to the tropical islands of Hawaii. Before she could see very much, she was bundled into an SUV and driven a few miles to a large concrete building that seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Then had begun her induction into the world of the *Predator*.

Within minutes of entering the building, the ten-year-old found herself summarily stripped and shoved into a shower.

Her clothing vanished from sight during that shower and when she was finished, she was handed a white towel and dragged off to see a thoroughly unpleasant female doctor. After a host of very invasive and incredibly thorough examinations, and despite her forceful objections, her long dirty blond hair was cut short and the remainder shaved to a number 4 cut. Finally, a plastic bracelet was attached to her right wrist and another to her left ankle.

She was sent back for another shower and as the remains of her lovely hair was washed off her body, the girl began to shake as the reality of her situation hit her like a block of concrete. After the shower, she was led down several concrete corridors, barefoot on the concrete floor, to a room. The door was opened, she was pushed inside, and the door was pulled closed behind her – then locked. She was alone for the first time in many hours. She had no idea

where she was. Her only possession was a white towel wrapped around her body.

The room was about three metres long by four metres wide and finished off with concrete on the walls, floor, and ceiling. Four light fittings were sunk into the walls and they provided illumination for the room. The girl reached for the light switch by the door and flicked it – the lights went off . . . and back on again as she flicked the switch back. Other than the lights and the light switch, there was a bed, a desk with a chair, and a three-drawer unit beside the bed. All were made of steel and bolted to the floor. On the wall, adjacent to the door was a full-length steel mirror – the girl frowned at her new reflection; she hated it.

There was another door, off to the left. It led to a very small bathroom that consisted of a shower stall, a sink, and a toilet – again all were steel, even the mirror over the sink. The girl returned to the bedroom and she pulled open the drawers . . . they were full of clothing – all sorts of clothing. She pulled out a pair of white boy-shorts and a white T-shirt. These, she pulled on after shedding the towel. Then she sat on the bed which was made up with a pink duvet and two white pillows over a white sheet.

She pulled her knees up under her chin and as she sat there, she began to cry.

Thursday, January 7th, 2010

The boy awoke in his concrete cell.

He had slept surprisingly well. The bed was comfortable; the best that he had slept in . . . probably ever. But it was not that; he had been exhausted when he had been pushed into his cell the previous day, wearing nothing but a white towel. He had been stripped, showered, probed by a very unpleasant female doctor, and then his head was shaved leaving barely half-an-inch of hair on his scalp. Another enforced shower had been followed by the fitting of a pair of permanent plastic bracelets on his left ankle and right wrist.

His 'cell', maybe bedroom would be a better description, was well equipped and he had found a pair of boxer shorts in a set of drawers full of clothing – surprisingly, all the clothing was in *his* sizes.

..._...

He thought back over the past few days. That night in London when two people, a man and a woman, had grabbed him off the very cold streets and then thrown him into the back of a white Ford Transit van. His questions and demands and gone unanswered as he was driven through the night and he soon found himself at an airfield where a large passenger aircraft, with jet engines mounted at the base of a large T-shaped tail, sat with the engines screaming. A man pulled him out of the van and he was taken aboard the jet which took off minutes later.

After landing, many hours later, it was still night, and he was hauled off the aircraft into a cool habit that was very different to the frozen streets of London. Before he could see very much, he was bundled into an SUV and driven a few miles to a large concrete building that seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Then had begun his induction into the world of the *Predator*.

One week later. . .

It was time for the two recruits to become aware of one another.

They had been kept separate until their instructors were happy that the mind-bending drugs which the youngsters had been fed had started to take proper effect on their young minds. Both ten-year-olds were very strong-willed, especially the girl. It had not been easy keeping them apart – both were naturally curious children and they had spent many hours investigating their new home – another reason to bring them together.

Naturally, the instructors had a cruel streak, so they had devised a smart plan for putting the two kids together.

..._...

Both kids had been undergoing intensive physical training that morning and it was coming up to lunchtime. Therefore, both headed for the showers – up until then, they had used their own changing rooms. But that morning, the boy, just after he had stripped and stepped under the hot water, was ordered into the next door changing room. He thought nothing of the steam already belching out from the showers, assuming that somebody had turned on the hot water for him – as if! It was only when a slim, pale-skinned arm appeared out of the steam followed by a . . .

"Who are you?" the boy demanded.

The girl was momentarily startled to hear another voice in the showers, but then stunned to see a naked boy standing before her.

"L – Lucy. . . Who. . .?"

The boy's eyes drifted lower as the steam drifted and his face went pink. Lucy quickly covered herself.

"My name . . . err, Leo. . ."

Lucy laughed, shook her head, and then shouted into the steam.

"Funny bastards!"

Leo's eyes snapped back to Lucy's face.

"Devious would be my comment," he offered as he began to soap himself.

"You been here long?" the embarrassed Lucy asked as she retreated deeper into the showers and was soon hidden by the steam.

"About a week, you?"

"Same."

..._...

Lunch that day was a funny affair. The two kids sat opposite one another, eating their hotdogs in silence.

Leo felt very awkward – he had always felt that way around girls, but meeting one for the very first time when both were naked, was just weird. Yes, he had enjoyed what he had seen; not that there had really been anything to see, as far as he could remember. Mind you, his own body had not been much better. The girl was pretty, about his own age, but she scowled a lot.

As far as Lucy was concerned, the boy was just an annoyance. She had been annoyed to find a boy running his eyes over her naked body in the shower, but considering that she had nothing much to show, it was not all that bad. He was a skinny boy with thin arms and thin legs. She had about an inch on him as far as height was concerned and she assumed that he was about the same age as her. She left her thoughts as Instructor Millar came over to the table and he sat down beside Lucy.

"So, you two have met?" he asked politely.

"Well, considering we met in the shower, it's not like we have any secrets from each other!" Lucy pointed out sardonically and the instructor laughed.

"Not my idea, but at least you now know about each other's existence. You are both *Predators* and you will train together from this point on. There is no need for you both to become friends; but you must be able to work together as partners."

"With him?"

"With her?"

"Let me get serious: you both work as a team, or you don't work at all. . ."

"You mean, we can leave?" Leo asked hopefully.

"With a bullet in the head, yes," Instructor Millar replied darkly.

Lucy smiled at Leo.

"Hi, I'm Lucy; we're going to be working together," Lucy said as she offered her hand.

Leo sighed and held out his own hand.

"Hi, I'm Leo. I look forward to working with you, Lucy."

Both shook hands, somewhat earnestly – they both knew that their lives depended on it; they both knew that their lives depended on one another.

Thus, the world's first team of *Predators* came into being.

The *Urban Predator* rulebook was written during their first year, or to be more exact, the rulebook was written *for* them.

Each and every time either one of them fucked up, which was often, another rule was added to make the lives of both present and future *Predators* just that *little* bit harder. Between the two of them, the ten-year-olds were determined to push the bounds of their captivity and enforced training. They also took perverse enjoyment in pushing the limits of their instructors' sanity as far as they deemed safe.

By the time the boy and girl both turned eleven, other *Predators* had joined the program; Lucy and Leo had gained companions – other children, who just like them, had been seized from their comfortable lives to be trained at the whim of their instructors. The presence of the other children changed Lucy and Leo – they began to rebel against the instructors and their authority. Neither child was much liked by the new waves of *Predators* which followed, mainly due to their harsh tempers and training methods.

The two rebels began to terrorise the other *Predators* and sabotage the facility behind the backs of their instructors. That added complication soon gave the instructors the requirement to monitor both the girl and the boy, twenty-four-hours a day. Not surprisingly, the instructors were already fed up with watching the rebellious children, so they had created a new way to monitor the *Predators*; thus, the 'Yellows' came into existence.

Yellows were drawn from the younger kids who were normally 'disposed of' as they were deemed surplus to requirements. Instead those youngsters, both boys and girls, were retained as nothing more than servants at best, slave labour at worst. They were given menial tasks normally deemed beneath the average *Predator* and they were looked down upon by the other kids as being just that. For example, a team of eight Yellows was designated to watch the girl and the boy, all day and all night. They would report back to the instructors and detail *anything* that either did wrong.

Naturally, the eleven-year-old girl hated being monitored by kids of seven and eight. The cruel instructors even ensured that it was a *male* Yellow who was posted to watch her shower and make use of the facilities, each morning and night. After two yellows died at Lucy's hands, she was punished severely, and after a very public strapping – yes, the strap was brought in *because* of the girl's behaviour – the almost twelve-year-old girl was forced to spend an entire week without clothes. That, in itself, did not go well either – a Phase 1 *Predator* died after pushing his luck teasing the girl and after he actually dared to lay his hands on her naked body; the rebellious Leo killed him. Thus, a new punishment regime was instigated – The Cage.

Considering that the girl was barely twelve, but already had two murders under her belt, you would have thought that her time as a *Predator* was all but over. But no, she was deemed perfect; at least the instructors thought so: what were a few dead kids along the way when you were creating perfection – the deaths were a worthwhile price to pay for the ultimate in assassins.

..._...

Thus, by the time that Lucy and Leo both turned twelve, they were a truly fearsome team – as well as becoming the very first Phase 2 *Predators*. The girl and the boy were skilled in various forms of the martial arts and physical weapons of every description. Many instructors had gained not insignificant injuries at their hands, during sparring. The bodies of Lucy and Leo were almost permanently marred by bruises due to their remarkably high tolerances when it came to pain; Lucy especially could absorb blows *way* beyond many of her peers.

When they became the very first teenaged *Predators*, they became the very first Phase 3 *Predators* and as such they gained their coveted, and long promised, codenames. For Lucy: *Piranha*. For Leo: *Wolf*. To mark the momentous event, both teens were allowed to acquire a tattoo each. Lucy, a tattoo of the omnivorous fish which featured on her right thigh and was highly visible when she wore shorts. Leo, a tattoo of a howling wolf on his own right thigh. The instructors were a little unsure of the results – the idea had been to give graduating Phase 2 *Predators* a tattoo which would act as their identification – 'too large' was the main comment, among others.

The pair, therefore, became the first to gain a much smaller tattoo behind their right ear – the ubiquitous command dagger, which signified the skilled capability of each and every *Predator*. The tattoo was summarily issued during the Phase 1 stage for *Predators* deemed suitable to continue their training: if you did not receive a tattoo, you generally received a bullet in its place.

Despite the pride felt by the instructors for what they had created, they were also very wary of their most advanced creations. The powers-that-be were also not above punishing and humiliating either the boy or the girl, constantly reminding both of *who* was actually in charge. Care was taken to keep the youngsters balanced psychologically so that they would not turn on their creators and kill them – a constant and very real fear for the instructors. Lucy and Leo spent many hours with The Doctor undergoing 'shrinking' sessions to reinforce the intensive drug program and other, more disturbing, brain management sessions.

A few weeks short of their fourteenth birthdays, Lucy and Leo graduated from the *Urban Predator Academy* and they were allowed to decompress in preparation for their very first official missions.

Approximately eight months later
Sunday, September 12th, 2010

The Urban Predator Academy
Colorado, United States of America

"What's going on?"

Lucy was a little over two weeks short of her eleventh birthday. The skinny, unhealthy girl from eight months earlier was long gone. Lucy now had a tight physique with barely an ounce of fat on her slim frame. Her muscles and abs were as tight as they could be and her fitness was second to none. Her dirty blonde hair had been allowed to grow back and was currently tied up in her customary ponytail, high on the back of her head. She wore a tight black sports bra which highlighted the limited growth in her chest and black jogging pants with black running shoes.

"You, our little snapping viper, are about to gain some little friends to play with."

"Fuck, you, *Instructor* tight-ass!"

"One of these days, Lucy. . ."

"Yeah, bite me!"

Lucy sat down in the otherwise empty cafeteria. It had always been empty, usually just her, Leo, and a half dozen instructors. A few moments passed before Leo, dressed in a black T-shirt and black joggers entered and sat down beside her.

"Something happening?" he asked.

"I think we have visitors," Lucy commented.

Before Leo could respond, there came the sounds of shouting and yelling coming towards the cafeteria. The doors to the cafeteria opened and eighteen kids were pushed through the door and guided to three tables a short distance away from Lucy and Leo. Each three-sided table could seat six and once each was full, the two *Predators* studied the occupants. It was an even mix: nine boys and nine girls. All were about ten years old. Two girls in particular stood out from the crowd. As well as them both being an inch or so taller than the other girls, they were also absolutely identical. Several of the kids were struggling as they were forced to sit.

Both of those girls and three of the boys each sported a wicked bruise on a cheek – they had obviously resisted their forced appropriation. Lucy noticed one of the instructors holding a three-foot baton in his hands. Lucy was very familiar with the device having experienced its gentle touch on more than one occasion – Leo was grimacing too; he could remember the same gentle touch.

"Welcome!" Senior Instructor Hanley called out. "You are now *Predators* – at least you will be if you survive. . ."

The instructor broke off as one of the kids – a girl with short blond hair made to run. She made it twenty feet before Lucy kicked her to the ground and pinned her. Senior Instructor Hanley smiled.

"Lucy - release her! Leo!"

Lucy rose to her feet after leaving her customary two seconds before following the command. Hanley growled and he shook his head at the girl. Leo was already standing up, frowning at Lucy's continued display of insolence, knowing that one day, the girl would push things way too far.

"These two here, are Lucy Ford and Leo Shepherd. They are senior to you little bastards. They are Phase 2 *Predators*, while you worthless pieces of shit are Apprentice *Predators*. If any of you survive the next four weeks of hell; you will each become Phase 1 *Predators*. Lucy is a cocky little bitch, but you will listen to her when she gives you orders. You will listen to Lucy and Leo when they train you. I would also advise you *not* to piss Lucy off. . ."

The remaining seventeen kids all looked down at the sobbing girl lying on the floor of the cafeteria – a good demonstration of what the girl called Lucy was capable of. The bastard laughed as he walked out of the cafeteria leaving eighteen very scared kids behind.

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Senior Instructor Hanley's deputy stepped forward and he faced the unfortunate Apprentice *Predators*.

"That was Senior Instructor Hanley. I am Instructor Millar, his deputy. Stand up!" Instructor Millar called out. "You will each strip out of your clothes – just dump them on the floor in front of you; you won't be needing them again."

As they stood up, none of the kids looked very happy at that order; especially the girls who had no desire to strip in front of any boys, let alone the adults present.

"Move – or we will strip you. Forget about your modesty, girls; there is no need for any of that nonsense from this moment on," Instructor Morris growled.

Instructor Morris was one of the two onsite female instructors and she was a total bitch – at least as far as Lucy was concerned, and from her own personal experience, Morris was beyond cruel. Nobody moved, but several of the kids began to shake with fear. Instructor Morris stepped towards the girl who still lay on the floor sobbing. Without a pause, Instructor Morris yanked off the unfortunate girl's clothing until she was completely naked. The young girl struggled and fought throughout the enforced stripping and it was obvious that the girl was frightened beyond belief as a pool of yellow liquid spread beneath her body.

Another instructor, this one a male, Instructor Knight, came forward holding a large black rubbish bag and he held it open. There was general hesitation amongst the remaining seventeen ten-year-olds but with a single fearsome glance from Instructor Morris, plus a look at the girl on the floor, every kid jumped up and clothes began to land on the same floor. Five minutes later, just like the girl on the floor, all nine boys and the remaining eight girls were as naked as the day they were born. All, made efforts to cover themselves from the prying eyes of their new colleagues. Two of the girls and one of the boys had urine running down their legs; they were so scared by the events unfolding around them.

"Clean it up with your clothes, you dirty little shits," Instructor Morris barked. "Ford, Shepherd – take these rejects down to the changing rooms. Little shits – pick up your own clothing and dump it in that black bag."

"Yes, Instructor," Leo replied.

"Yes, Instructor," Lucy replied smartly; Lucy did not fuck about where Instructor Morris was concerned.

..._...

Instructor Knight stood beside the open doors and each kid reluctantly dumped their clothing into the gaping black bag knowing that they would never see their clothes again. The thoroughly humiliated and scared kids were led naked down several cold concrete corridors before they entered the changing rooms and stopped beside the other onsite female instructor. Instructor Turner was nicer than Instructor Morris, but not by much.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine – over that side," she ordered, randomly selecting the first nine kids, irrespective of gender. "The rest of you this side."

The two groups of kids were waved towards two groups of showers where they found Instructor Matthews waiting.

"Collect some shower gel as you go. No playing grab-ass: boys, hands off the girls – girls, hands off the boys. Concentrate on your own body and once you are done, step out here," he ordered.

The kids, expecting to be able to wrap themselves in one of the many white towels piled by the door, moved fast,

washing themselves speedily and trying to ignore the fact that the opposite sex was watching their every move. Only, the first kid out - one of the twins - found herself grabbed and her long hair quickly cut off, then the rest of her hair was reduced to a grade 4 cut. The same task was repeated on every child without exception, both boy and girl. After the impromptu haircut, they were ordered back into the showers.

Only then were they each allowed to wrap themselves in one of the white towels.

..._...

Lucy and Leo were then ordered to escort the eighteen towel-wrapped kids down to see the nurse.

The *Urban Predator* facility had a very well equipped medical wing, with a permanent medical staff consisting of a doctor and six nurses. Each of the Apprentice *Predators* was lined up under the watchful eye of Lucy, Leo, and Instructor Morris. They were then called into the Nurse's Office, wrapped in their white towel. There they endured a full and very invasive medical before reappearing, fifteen minutes later, dressed in light grey joggers and a white T-shirt. They were still bare-foot and none of them wore underwear, but at least they were covered up, they all thought.

Lucy was given a clipboard and the instructors vanished. If the kids thought that they were going to get an easy time, they were very, very wrong. As far as Lucy was concerned, she could see no reason why her own suffering should not be endured by those eighteen kids. Leo was the same – if it could happen to him, it should happen to them.

The first task on her list was showing the kids their accommodation and their home for the next few years.

..._...

The dormitory was in the next corridor from the more private rooms occupied by Lucy and Leo. There were twenty-four beds, arranged in four groups of six, each group was separated by six large lockers, arranged in threes back to back.

"Take a bed," Lucy announced. "That bed will be your bed for the rest of your time here. . ."

"I'm *not* sleeping in the same room as boys," one of the girls announced in a voice tinted with a British accent.

"You'll do what you're fucking told, bitch!" Lucy growled.

"Fuck you!" came the instant retort.

"Name!" Lucy growled as she strode over to the girl and she glared down at her, despite their barely being an inch difference between them in height.

"Willow."

"Well, Willow – you're gonna do what the fuck you are told. . .," Lucy began but then she paused and turned to face the whole group. "I have no love for this fucking place, nor for any of you. But I am going to be nice, just this once – you want this to be as easy as possible, then you follow instructions. Life is gonna be hell for you all – we know; we've been here for eight months."

"What is this place?"

"Hell, on earth! Now, you will all follow Leo and draw the remainder of your clothing from the stores."

Sunday, September 26th

Colorado Springs

"Hi, honey!"

"Shannon got into trouble at school today. Iain bit Annabelle, so she bit him back," Taylor Millar advised her husband as she vanished back into the kitchen.

"Hi, Daddy," seven-year-old Shannon offered sweetly.

"What did you do?" Patrick Millar asked his daughter resignedly.

"Well . . . a boy said something nasty . . . so I hit him. . ."

"Tell your father *where* you hit him," her mother prompted.

The girl looked miserable but she looked up at her father as she continued.

"I hit him in the . . . you know . . . between the legs. . ."

"Shannon, what have you been told about hitting, period?"

"Don't hit people unless you want them to hit you back – I apologised to the boy."

"Did you get punished?"

"I got detention. . ."

"Good."

"Patrick, honey – Annabelle and Iain are squabbling!"

The Urban Predator Academy Colorado

The seventeen Apprentice *Predators* were halfway through their hell month – yes, *seventeen*.

One, a girl called Teresa Palmore, had been summoned to see the Senior Instructor that very morning and she had not returned. However, a single pistol shot from the direction of the Senior Instructor's office had shaken up the remaining *Predators* who had figured out what the gunshot probably was almost immediately. The girl had been struggling to keep up with her other Apprentice *Predators*, she had been warned, but to no avail – the girl had just given up.

Her death had given the remaining kids extra resolve to stay alive. It had also driven home their very precarious situation: train or die. Their lives were quite literally hell – the girl, Lucy, had been very accurate in her description of Hell Month. Lucy and Leo would take turns getting up to wake the Apprentices at five. Lucy took immense pleasure in storming into the dormitory, flicking on the strip lights, and then ripping off the duvets covering the tired youngsters.

"Move it!" she would yell as they all fell out of bed and staggered for the bathroom.

By the end of the second day, boys and girls intermingled in the bathroom, making use of the facilities and showers without complaint or concern at being in the presence of the opposite sex. To speed things along, Lucy would shut off the hot water and then laugh as eight kids screamed as they received a dousing in freezing cold water.

Once they were dressed, Lucy and Leo would escort them on a two-mile run. Whomsoever came last, at the end of the run, had the job of clearing up the dirty clothing from the previous day and carrying it all down to the laundry. After the run, everybody showered before heading for breakfast. That occasion, each morning, was one of the few times that any of the kids actually smiled. The food was good and plentiful. The kids were encouraged to eat big meals, which were high in protein and all the other things that growing kids required.

After the 7am breakfast, which lasted about an hour, lessons began at 8:30am, lasting an hour for each lesson period. There was a short break of twenty minutes at 10:35am before another hour's lesson lasting until noon. The Apprentice *Predators* were allowed five minutes to get between lessons – lateness was not tolerated. An hour was allowed for lunch, with the afternoon lesson starting at 1:30pm and lasting two hours. At 3:30pm, the trainee recruits were allowed two hours of self-study where they were monitored by the instructors. The much awaited 6pm would allow the kids to eat again, and they would be famished after having endured a thirteen-hour day to that point.

After the meal, for which an hour was allowed, the kids had two hours of free time before they were to be in bed for 9pm. There were no complaints about the bedtime; indeed, many of the thoroughly exhausted kids were often in bed before eight and fast asleep within seconds. The majority of their training for the first month, was physical and very strenuous. The training was intended to weed out those deemed unable to succeed as a *Predator*. It was tough, but they had all made it through almost three weeks of hell.

Almost. . .

***Chapter 322*: The Wolf and The Piranha**

Tuesday, October 2nd, 2010

*The Urban Predator Academy
Colorado, United States of America*

As a combined birthday present, the two eleven-year-olds, Lucy and Leo had been moved into a mini apartment, across the corridor from the two main dormitories, only one of which was in use.

The suite consisted of two ensuite bedrooms, very much like those they had inhabited for the first months, plus a recreational area adjoining both bedrooms which was equipped with a TV, a secure computer, and a small kitchenette. It was intended as a show of trust from the instructors – and a place for Lucy to play her 1980's music which they were fed up of hearing around the facility!

..._...

"Lucy! Leo!"

There was banging on their respective bedroom doors which were shoved open and their bedroom lights were switched on. The girl's eyes squinted in the dazzling light but she quickly snapped awake and swung her legs onto the floor.

"We have a job for you, girl," Instructor Millar offered cheerfully.

"What?"

"A pair of Apprentices have escaped. We want you to hunt them down. . ."

Lucy smirked. Finally – some action!

While the instructor vanished across the way to notify Leo, Lucy stripped naked before she pulled on some clean black boy-shorts and a black sports bra. She then pulled on a pair of black combat trousers, a black T-shirt, some black socks and her black lightweight combat boots.

She emerged into the recreational area to find Leo waiting – he was dressed just the same (except for the boy-shorts and the bra!).

"Your kit – let's move!"

Millar handed Lucy and Leo a set of black webbing each. The webbing was pre-equipped with a pistol, knife, plus other supplies and equipment. Lucy and Leo pulled their webbing on and strapped it into place as they ran after Instructor Millar. A pistol holster hung over their right hips and was clipped around their right thighs. The eight-inch knife hung vertically on the left side of their chests.

By the time the group reached the vehicle garage, both were ready. A desert camouflage Humvee sat with its engine running and the left rear door open. Inside were three members of the *Urban Predator Security Force*. They smiled as Lucy and Leo climbed aboard and slammed the door shut.

"You ready, young Lucy?" Rudy Boise laughed.

"Bite me, Boise!" came the insolent reply to which the three men laughed.

..._...

The Humvee quickly left the blacktop and turned off-road. The two kids had obviously been missing for a while and covered some distance.

"Who are they?" Leo asked.

"Robert Evans and Trina Carroll. They were found missing, about four hours ago. Hanley has ordered their termination," Boise advised the two youngsters.

"We can handle that," Lucy advised.

A couple of minutes later, the Humvee skidded to a stop and Boise turned to Leo and Lucy.

"Go get them – call on Channel 2 when you need picked up."

"Don't wait up, boys!" Lucy growled as she left the Humvee and vanished into the darkness with Leo close behind.

Boise watched them go. It was a fortunate test for the two youngsters. Somewhere along the line, they would have to learn to kill, to take a life, if they were to become assassins. Hanley had made his point very clear. Either the runaways died at the hands of Lucy and Leo, or Lucy and Leo would die at Boise's hands.

To Hanley, life was cheap.

..._...

Lucy paused in the darkness, listening.

Leo was a dozen yards away, doing the same. They had both been taught how to track down prey and the night only made it easier. In the desert around them, sound travelled remarkably well, especially at night. The runaways were expected to be heading in a westerly direction but they had no idea if that were accurate, nor the exact direction in which they were headed.

The two kids in question were both ten-years-old and very green. They had learnt fast how to fight and both were very fit, but there were significant gaps in their training, which Leo and Lucy would exploit – should they catch up with the runaways. Leo and Lucy had spent time talking together a lot since they were pressed. At first, it had just been idle conversation between two kids getting to know one another, but then they talked about their new lives as *Predators*. They had discussed what they were there for.

Only once had an instructor alluded to their eventual future – as assassins. That had been backed up by their training in knives, shooting, fighting – not just defensive stuff, but offensive stuff too. They had been taught where on the human body it was beneficial to strike with a knife. The same with where to place a bullet for a quick – or a slow death. Leo had first broached the subject, about two months into their training.

"Luc – could you kill?" he had asked.

"I don't know, Leo," had been the response. "They make it sound so easy . . . but to actually take a life. . .?"

"We'll worry about that when we get there, eh, Luc?"

"A typically English response!" Lucy laughed.

Neither Lucy, nor Leo, were stupid. They both had a shrewd idea that they were being tested – they had learnt enough about *Urban Predator* to know that you had limited opportunities to prove yourselves worthy of continued life.

Should you not prove yourself, you were deemed disposable and 'disposable' meant death.

..._...

The two escapees were quite literally running for their lives. They both knew the penalty for their escape, should they be captured. Neither Robert nor Trina had much of a life to return to. Both had been troubled kids and their parents would not be missing them. A Predator's life was not for them – they wanted to live in peace, not be turned into killers . . . or worse. They had both heard about what had happened to the Palmore girl – a bullet to the temple. That had galvanised them both into action and they had slipped out, earlier that evening. Neither child had any idea that the alarm had been raised, nor who might be sent after them.

They moved as fast as they could go, knowing that they had to put as much distance between them and their former home before daylight revealed them. Fear coursed through them both, each and every time they heard a noise. The desert was full of wildlife and much of that wildlife was out and about that night making noises as it went about its business.

"I need to pee. . ." Trina Carroll whispered to her friend.

"Can't you hold it?" Robert Evans replied.

"No."

"Over there, by that bush, and be quick about it, Trina."

Trina ran over to the bush and she quickly pushed down her joggers and panties. She felt relief as her warm liquid spilled out onto the sand beneath her.

"Hurry, Trina!" Robert whispered as he kept a lookout.

"Okay, I'm done – let's move."

..._...

Fifteen minutes later, Lucy paused beside a bush and she sniffed the air. She knelt down and observed a dark patch of sand which was slowly drying in the coolness of the night.

"Somebody stopped for a pee – a girl, not that long ago," she whispered to Leo.

"You can tell it was a girl?"

"Easy. There are foot prints either side of the pee where the girl crouched down. If it were a boy, the piss would have gone all over the place – you boys insist on waving it around when you go."

"What's wrong with a bit of fun while you wee?" Leo retorted.

"I am not having a conversation about peeing, Leo, ewww! Let's get after those two little shits."

Leo smirked as she started moving again. The two youngsters were firm friends with nothing between them. They had learnt to trust each other, implicitly. Each knew what the other was capable of and when the other needed support . . . or just a shoulder to cry on. The first few months had been miserable and they had both done a lot of crying. They had had only themselves to console each other as they struggled to get through everything which was thrown at them.

It was the very first time that either of them had been entrusted with live weapons. All weapon use was strictly supervised for obvious reasons and generally limited to range use only. They had training devices for use during classes which had no capacity to actually cause anybody any harm – unless you hit them over the head with it, of course!

Leo paused, his ears picking up something. He used hand signals to inform Lucy that he had heard something, a short distance ahead.

..._...

The attack came out of the darkness and the first either of the escapees knew about it was when they found themselves shoved to the ground and then punched into submission.

"Please. . ."

The begging was ignored. Lucy had a hold of Trina and was punching her in the face and chest. The girl was screaming for mercy, but Lucy knew that with Trina's death would come her own elevation in status. She knew no other life than what she had at that moment and she was determined to excel at it – of that was what it took to stay alive. Lucy considered her pistol but she decided that would be too easy and too clinical. Instead, she pulled her knife and while she stared into the panic-stricken eyes below her, she rammed the knife upwards into the abdomen of her prey. Trina stopped struggling as the shock of the intrusion into her body paralysed her for a moment.

Lucy placed a hand over the girl's mouth as she tried to scream. Lucy twisted the blade to the left causing the body beneath her to shake violently before all movement ceased within thirty seconds. Lucy could feel the warm blood seeping into her own clothing and coming into contact with her own skin. The eyes of her prey had shown fear and then pain and maybe betrayal, but then they showed sorrow and then nothing. She stood up, pulling the knife out of the stomach cavity and wiping it off on the dead girl's clothing.

A few yards away, Leo was doing the exact same thing, a dead ten-year-old boy at his feet. Leo had also opted for the more personal kill provided by a knife. He surprised himself by feeling nothing – no remorse, just pride at having completed his mission.

"You ready to call in the cavalry?" Lucy asked as she stowed her knife.

"Make the call, Luc."

Two hours later

That morning was very different for the Apprentice *Predators*.

Everything had changed. There was general unease in the cafeteria as the tired *Predators* entered for their breakfast. The cause of their unease? Lucy – no real surprise; most of the *Predators* were uneasy around the eleven-year-old girl. That morning, though, they were surprised to see the girl fully kitted out for combat, but nonchalantly digging into a full cooked breakfast. She was dirty, her kit was dirty, right down to the sinister black pistol on her right hip. She seemed oblivious to the dried blood on her face and arms. It was the blood which freaked out most of the kids – they knew that there had been an escape attempt in the early hours and it did not require all that much intelligence to figure out why the two senior *Predators* were covered in blood.

Leo sat across from his partner, enjoying his own breakfast. He was just as bloody as Lucy, but he paid it no heed. While most of the Phase 1 *Predators* were scared of Lucy, Leo was different. While he was slower to lose his temper, he spent longer considering his actions before he engaged. But when he *did* get angry, you instantly regretted making him angry enough to attack you. He was also fiercely protective of Lucy, not that she needed his protection. Everybody learnt very quickly that you did not say a single word about Lucy in the presence of Leo unless you had a death wish.

Both *Predators* were exhausted after their early morning stroll across the desert. Boise had been very impressed when he had turned up to find the two kids nonchalantly sitting beside a pair of corpses. Boise had made a mental note not to piss off either child as they appeared to both be cold killers. Once his men had loaded the dead children into the Humvee they had headed directly back to the facility. Lucy had dozed off, cuddled up with Leo who catnapped, keeping a wary eye on Boise and his men while watching over *his* Lucy. Boise also knew that Leo was fiercely protective of Lucy. It was a bit of a joke amongst the instructors, but Leo was very serious about 'his girl'.

..._...

Instructor Millar looked down at the two kids as they ate their breakfast.

"Well done, both of you. Go get yourselves cleaned up – maybe a long hot shower and then get some rest. You are both excused classes today, but SI Hanley wants to debrief you both at four, this afternoon."

"Thank you, sir," Leo replied as he helped Lucy to her feet and they both stumbled back to their rooms.

The two youngsters had no secrets from one another, so the moment they entered their 'apartment', both stripped off their weapons and clothing before they headed into their respective showers. Leo was busy soaping himself down when the bathroom door opened and Lucy entered, naked and still with soap on her body. She pushed her way into the shower and sagged down onto the tiled floor. Leo sat down beside his friend. Neither said a word for a minute or two before Lucy spoke up.

"We just killed, Leo. I just killed a ten-year-old girl."

"It scared me, killing that boy – but it was them or us, Luc."

Lucy had obviously been crying – her eyes were very red. She began to sob and she leaned into Leo. Despite Leo's attempts to be strong, especially in front of Lucy, he felt his own tears welling up inside him. They both sat there crying, for almost ten minutes, allowing the hot water to wash away their tears and the blood of their victims which had seeped through their clothing and onto their skin.

For Lucy, it had been the sight of the blood on her tummy – another girl's blood. She had started her shower, but then she felt lonely and she did not want to be alone, so she had just left her shower and run through to Leo. She felt safe when she was with Leo. He had endured everything that she had and they could each relate to each other's fucked up lives. When they had been awoken, about six hours previously, she had been excited about going out into the desert.

"I looked into her eyes. She was so scared – she knew what was going to happen. She begged me to let her go. . ."

Leo wanted to say how he felt, but he could not. He wanted to stay strong for Lucy. He allowed her to cry on his

shoulder but then he told her to stand up and he washed her shoulder length blonde hair for her. Lucy just stood there, unable to move as she thought about what she had done that morning. She was only just eleven-years-old, yet she had just taken the life of another child, even though she was still only a child herself. She could tell that Leo was feeling something similar; she had learnt to read his expressions. She had also seen Leo crying. Leo almost never cried, so that was a sign of his own internal worries, just like hers.

When they had both cleaned off all the blood, sweat, dirt, and sand, they both lay down on the couch together. Leo wrapped his arms around Lucy and they both fell asleep within minutes.

..._...

That night, Leo was not surprised to find Lucy squirming into bed with him. He was glad of her company, not having wanted to go through to Lucy. A girl climbing into a boy's bed for company was deemed okay. A boy climbing into a girl's bed would be seen as something bad.

"Thanks for being there for me, Leo."

"You too, Luc. I'll always be there for you."

They had slept till almost three, that afternoon, when Instructor Millar had awoken them. He had pointed to their lunches which he had left on the table, three hours earlier, then left them alone. He had smiled at them both cuddled up together. They had obviously fallen asleep together after taking showers as both had been loosely wrapped in a white towel each.

Millar did not agree with what was going on – at least not anymore. At first, he had seen it as something workable as only street rats were being selected, or so he thought. The First Predator Intake had had only six street rats out of the eighteen recruits. He had queried where the others had come from, but the good Doctor Hirsch had made some noncommittal remark and sidestepped the question. He had known Lucy and Leo since their very first day as *Predators*, almost nine months previously. He liked the kids; they were full of life and Lucy was a firebrand with a fire inside her that nobody could quench, no matter how hard they tried.

Leo was very different. He was a British boy who was more reserved and less forward than Lucy was. He was slow to anger, but when he was angry, woe betide anybody who got in his way! The boy always smiled and he got on with his studies, causing a lot less trouble than Lucy. The boy was polite and well-mannered. He had some funny habits which most just put down to the fact that he was British. Millar hoped that the two youngsters might survive the CIA's abhorrent attempt at creating master assassins.

If anybody deserved to survive, Lucy and Leo did.

That afternoon
16:00 hours

Senior Instructor Hanley was impressed.

Both eleven-year-olds stood before him, immaculately turned out in white T-shirts with black joggers and dark blue trainers. Lucy's hair was pulled back into a ponytail, high on her head and surprisingly, the usual obnoxious expression was missing, replaced by one of the utmost seriousness.

"Well done, both of you. You both exceeded my expectations of you both. You have both taken a momentous step forwards in your training. As a reward, you will both be given more responsibility and freedom around the facility. Lucy – please do not abuse that extra freedom."

Lucy scowled.

"We know you, Lucy. We know that you like to push your luck. Leo, please help Lucy stay on the right track."

"I'll try, sir, but I cannot guarantee anything."

Senior Instructor Hanley laughed.

"Diplomatic as always, young Leo!"

Leo smiled and so did Lucy which was a surprise. She hated Hanley but so did Leo, only he chose *not* to antagonise

the man, unlike his tomboy pal.

..._...

A few hours later, after dinner, the Phase 2 *Predators* were listening to Lucy's Pet Shop Boys album. The current track was her favourite: *It's a Sin*. They both felt a lot better after a good meal and knowing that they had 'exceeded' Senior Instructor Hanley's expectations which in itself was an event so rare as to be almost impossible. Instructor Millar pushed open the door and he grinned at the two smiling youngsters.

"Vehicle garage – now!"

Lucy reluctantly shut off her music then she and Leo followed the instructor to the far side of the facility. By the time Lucy and Leo arrived in the vehicle garage, they found fifteen *Predators* waiting outside the double doors. They, plus Lucy and Leo, were paraded through the doors and into the vehicle garage.

There was stunned silence as the group of ten-year-olds, plus the two eleven-year-olds took in the two dead bodies of their colleagues which had been laid out on a steel-topped table. Both bodies were nude, their clothing having been cut off. The absence of clothing allowed the cause of their deaths to be readily evident – there was a single stab wound in each abdomen and copious amounts of dried blood encrusted the stomach area. The faces of both dead children were bloody and bruised.

"This is what happens should any of you try to escape," Senior Instructor Hanley explained in an even tone.

A few faces turned towards Lucy and Leo. Both of whom stared straight ahead ignoring the body and the appalled looks which they were receiving from their fellow *Predators*.

***Chapter 323*: The First Kiss**

Friday, September 9th, 2016
Early morning

Glenview

The dreams had been particularly vivid.

"You murdered me."

"No, Jamie; you're alive. I did not kill you."

The vision of her five-year-old brother with a bullet hole in his forehead dissolved and instead, she saw the five-year-old reappear with an accusing expression.

"You abandoned me."

"I had no choice – I didn't want to leave you. They took me away from you."

"But you did leave me; I was alone. You left me all alone. I was only five-years-old."

"Jamie – I tried. . ."

"You did nothing to find me."

"I thought I had killed you."

"But you did."

The vision changed back to the boy with a bullet hole in his forehead. Stephanie found herself in a vicious circle and no matter what she did, she was faced with the fact that she had murdered her little brother. She now knew that that was not true, but her subconscious kept trying to tell her something different. She found herself going from virtual room to virtual room in her dream – or nightmare – and each time she entered a room she would find her brother dead in a different manner . . . different, but all caused by her.

Stephanie began going out of her mind as the visions chopped and changed before she finally fell to her knees and she began screaming and screaming.

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Anne-Marie was dragged out of her own dream – a good dream where Rogue was winning a massive battle single-handed – by the sound of screaming. She recognised the scream as being that of her big sister. Less than a minute later, she heard footsteps padding across her carpet and then a body pushed its way into the bed beside her. Anne-Marie could feel the sweat on Stephanie's skin and the older girl was shaking as she cried into the pillow. Anne-Marie wrapped her arms around her big sister providing what comfort she could.

Stephanie had always been there for Anne-Marie, so Anne-Marie was determined to be there for Stephanie. She felt very sorry for what Stephanie had been through in her short life. So much hell. So much pain, both physical and mental. How could Stephanie remain sane through it all? Anne-Marie knew that Stephanie was not *entirely* sane – she could not be. Mindy had tried to explain Stephanie to Anne-Marie and her brother, but to no avail – Stephanie's mind was a complicated one to understand.

Either way, Anne-Marie hugged her sister, calming her down until they both fell asleep.

Later that morning

Mindy breezed into Anne-Marie's bedroom at seven o'clock – she and Dave took turns waking the kids.

"Morning, Anne-Marie! Time to get up for school!"

There was a groan and then a little girl sat up in the bed, rubbing her eyes.

"Morning, Mom."

Anne-Marie motioned at the bump beside her in the duvet and Mindy grimaced. It could only be one person.

"I was awoken up by her screaming. Then she came through and climbed into the bed. She was all sweaty and shaking. I hugged her until she cried herself to sleep."

"Thanks for being there for her," Mindy said as she sat down on the bed.

"No problem, Mom – she's always been there for me, so I want to be there for her."

Anne-Marie scrambled out of the bed and ran for the bathroom which she shared with her twin brother who was already busy with his own ablutions.

"Hey! Hurry up, doofus, I need to pee!"

"I'm peeing as fast as I can, jeez!" Danny called back.

"Well, pee harder!" Anne-Marie called back.

Mindy chuckled at the twin's early morning bickering and she slowly pulled back the duvet to reveal the sleeping form of Stephanie Lizewski. She rubbed her daughter's back gently and very carefully. Stephanie moaned as she began to straighten herself out. Her eyes opened and she looked up at Mindy. She did not smile, in fact, Stephanie bore a very sad expression on her face. She sat up and wrapped her arms around Mindy, squeezing hard.

"Another nightmare?"

"It was the Jamie one again."

"It's understandable, honey. You've been through worse nightmares. We're going to find him, I promise."

"How will ever face him? I betrayed him – I allowed them to take him."

Mindy pushed Stephanie away from her.

"Now you're just talking stupid, Stephanie."

"I – left – him."

"You had no goddamn choice!" Mindy said loudly enough to get her daughter's attention.

"I could have fought back. . ."

"Christ!"

Mindy pulled Stephanie off the bed and down the corridor to her own bedroom, slamming the door behind her as she went. Stephanie was almost thrown onto her own bed, bouncing twice before she came to rest.

"Snap out of it, Stephanie! You were seven-years-old and you knew *nothing!*"

"I would have tried!" Stephanie yelled back. "I would have died trying!"

"Grow up, Stephanie!" Mindy retorted. "The scared little girl that you were back then was unable to do much more than fucking piss her panties and you damn well know it. The girl before me now, *she* would have died trying, but you have almost three years of training behind you, yes?"

"Yes."

"Don't play the blame game. Dave does that with my Daddy and me. Shit happens in life. I blame myself for not getting to my Daddy sooner, but no matter how good I was back then, there was nothing that I could have done – I lacked the experience."

Stephanie smiled for the first time.

"I did fucking piss my panties, you know."

"I wouldn't have blamed you for it," Mindy said calmly with a smirk. "I think you need a diversion and I have just the idea."

That evening

Glenview

"You finished your homework for the week?"

"All except today's."

"You been in trouble this week?"

Stephanie looked hurt.

"No."

"Do I have any letters on the way from the Principal?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Very diplomatic," Mindy laughed. "Go get yourself showered and changed. Your date awaits."

Stephanie's face lit up and she was gone in a flash.

..._...

Nervous . . . so nervous.

It was so ridiculous – he was a boy, a boy that she had known for months, so what was the damn problem? Okay, they were friends and he was an awesome fighter and he was also cute, but he was twelve and she was only ten. . . What should that matter? Her Mum had said that it was okay and that was all she really cared about. God damn it! Why did she feel so nervous? Her stomach felt like she had been on a goddamn roller coaster.

'Oh, God! He's here – his Dad's dropping him off. Get yourself together girl!' she thought quickly.

Stephanie climbed out of the Jaguar and she just stood there feeling very stupid and her face was burning like a nuclear fire. He looked smart, Stephanie thought, much neater than usual and he looks nervous too, good. Stephanie scowled as she looked up at her Mum; she was smirking. . .

"Now, you two be good – no talking to strangers and *no killing!*"

"Yes, Mum!"

"Yes, Mindy!"

The nervous boy turned to Stephanie and he checked her out from head to toe. Stephanie put a hand to her stomach which was busy doing loop-the-loops.

"You look good tonight, Steph."

"So, do you, Tommy."

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They started the evening in McDonald's, enjoying a burger each and just talking.

"My Dad thought it was really funny when Mindy called up to arrange this," Tommy muttered.

"Yeah, parent's like to have their fun, don't they," Stephanie agreed. "Thank you for agreeing to come."

"Steph – I would *never* turn down time with you."

Stephanie giggled which made her feel stupid but Tommy's smile reassured her. Nevertheless, she took a large bite

out of her quarter pounder to disguise her embarrassment. The conversation continued on with more mundane things. By the end of the meal, all the uncomfortable feelings had gone and they were happily laughing at each other's crude jokes. The two youngsters had a lot in common considering their fractured childhoods. Both had been taken and forced into lives which involved fighting to survive.

After they had eaten, they both headed outside to talk where they could not be easily overheard.

"When did you first kill, Tommy?"

"I was almost nine. I had been with the Russians for about four months. I had learnt to look after myself; there was no choice if you wanted to survive. Another boy – a Russian kid; Mikhail, his name was. He was about a year older than me and he tried to steal my food. We didn't get much; barely enough to survive on. You had to *earn* your food. Fighting gained you food – winning gained you even more. The kid was probably desperate; he had no choice – but it was him or me. I challenged him but he blew me off. I stabbed him with the knife I had been using to eat with. It was a lucky strike – the blade punctured his heart and he bled out fast. I was shocked by what I had done on pure reflex. You know what? They rewarded me with improved conditions, just for killing that kid."

"Been there," Stephanie commented dryly.

"What sort of a place rewards a kid for killing?"

"The very same thought that went through my mind when they gave me my codename. I suppose I was lucky – I lived in a relatively structured environment. You lived in hell, Tommy."

"It was bad, but they looked after us – to a point. We were valuable – at least those who could fight and those who would win fights. My biggest problem at first was learning the lingo. When I was taken, I had never even heard anybody speak Russian, let alone knew any of the language. That was one hell of a learning curve. One of the older boys took pity on me and he taught me some basic Russian – enough for me to get by and survive."

"Why do you like me so much, Tommy? I mean; you know what I was, what I am."

"Stephanie . . . you're beautiful and I love the way you talk – your accent is awesome."

Stephanie was blushing and so was Tommy.

"You've also been through a lot – just like me. I feel that I can relate to you. You're also an awesome fighter and I respect you for who you are. . ."

Tommy tailed off with embarrassment. Stephanie stopped walking and she turned to Tommy. Then she reached up and she kissed him, putting as much meaning into the kiss as she knew how. She pulled away, her face burning. Tommy was grinning.

"What was that for?"

"For saying such wonderful things about me. I know I kissed you before, but this was my real first kiss, so suck it up, asshole!"

Tommy laughed and he put his arm around Stephanie's shoulders.

"You are a fucking nutcase, Stephanie Lizewski!"

"That's rich coming from you, Tommy Morgan!"

Stephanie pulled Tommy around into another kiss – she was enjoying the tingling feeling on her lips each time they kissed.

"You think anybody is watching?" Tommy asked.

"Probably – you know who my Mum is."

"Yeah – she'll have a dozen cameras on us at all times. If I so much as make an advance on your body, she'll appear out of nowhere and slit my throat," Tommy laughed.

Stephanie laughed as they sat down on a vacant bench.

"I don't have much of a body, I'm afraid."

"It looks lovely from my point of view."

Stephanie found herself giggling again.

..._...

"So, Mum – you get everything on camera?" Stephanie asked Mindy as they headed home, an hour or so later.

Mindy laughed.

"Dave persuaded me not to have Marty monitor your activities. I'm sorry; I just wanted to protect you. I know, I'm being stupid."

"No, Mum. It feels good to know that you care."

"The kissing looked fun!" Mindy quipped.

Stephanie's mouth dropped open and her entire face exploded into life and turned a very deep shade of red.

"It was my first proper kiss. . ." Stephanie mumbled.

"You'll remember that kiss forever."

"I hope so. Thank you for setting this up, Mum. It was a great evening and it allowed me to have some fun without worrying about Jamie all the time."

Mindy smiled happily. It had been Dave's idea – as usual. She was very pleased that all had gone well.

Glenview

"Had a good time?"

"Yes – thanks Dad," Stephanie said as she gave Dave a big hug.

"You two had sex?" Anne-Marie asked and Stephanie's jaw dropped open.

"Can I slap her?" Stephanie asked.

"No," Mindy said with a chuckle.

"Maybe a finger-fuck?" Anne-Marie went on.

"Anne-Marie!" Dave exclaimed.

"Just askin'" Anne-Marie muttered.

"Now, you can slap her!" Mindy suggested as she scowled at her youngest daughter.

Anne-Marie let out a little scream as she bolted for the kitchen, continuing through into the pool area. Stephanie gave chase.

"Get back here, you little bitch!"

..._...

Dave and Mindy listened to Anne-Marie's screams and Stephanie's crude language. Then they heard giggling and uncontrollable laughter – Anne-Marie was being tickled; apparently mercilessly.

"I'm – going – to pee – myself!" Anne-Marie managed to get out as Stephanie tickled her.

Then the giggling stopped and Anne-Marie screamed again.

"No!" she yelled before there was an almighty splash.

Dave and Mindy ran through to see Anne-Marie in the water, swimming towards the steps. From the view, and the pile of clothes beside the pool, it was obvious that the eight-year-old was naked. Stephanie was smiling sweetly, trying to look innocent.

"What have you done, now?" Danny asked as he entered the pool area and took in the smiling Stephanie and his naked sister sitting on the pool steps.

"I opened my mouth," the dejected Anne-Marie groused.

"That's normally all it takes," Danny mused. "However, I have to protect my twin, so. . ."

Danny shoved Stephanie and she fell into the water, swearing violently.

"Far from us to have a favourite twin, so we must treat you both fairly," Mindy said as she gave Danny a shove and he fell in beside his big sister.

"Far from us to miss out," Dave chuckled as he grabbed Mindy around the waist and then jumped into the deep end.

Mindy screamed bloody murder but she then laughed as she tried, unsuccessfully, to duck her husband. Danny had pulled off his soggy clothes and he quickly joined his sister in the buff as they swam around chasing one another. Stephanie kicked off her shoes and her jeans, chucking them onto the side of the pool. Dave and Mindy removed their outer clothing and Dave began to chase Mindy who pretended to be scared and she emitted mock screams, mimicking Anne-Marie who just laughed.

..._...

"Feeling better?" Anne-Marie asked Stephanie almost an hour later.

"Yes – it's been a very memorable evening," Stephanie replied as she lounged around on the steps. She too had stripped off her wet clothes and was just as naked as her siblings. "Thanks, all of you, for helping to give me something else to think about."

"You're worth spending time on, Stephanie," Dave said with a smile.

"I'm hungry," Danny complained.

"Let's go get something to eat," Mindy suggested as she climbed out of the pool, followed by Dave.

"I'll go get some towels," Dave suggested as he jogged around the pool to a table which was piled high with fluffy towels in assorted colours.

He selected five towels and walked back around the pool to where everybody was waiting, standing on the side of the pool, before handing a purple one to Mindy, a pink one to Anne-Marie, a yellow one to Danny, and a blue one to Stephanie. Dave wrapped himself in a green towel. Everybody grabbed a stool at the breakfast bar while Dave began to pull food out of the fridge. He threw some bacon into a pan on the stove and then began to butter some thick slices of bread. Mindy took the time to take off her panties and her sports bra, wrapping herself tightly in her purple towel. By the time she had finished, Dave had the bacon cooked and he had passed out the thick bacon sandwiches.

"You going to start wearing a bra?" Mindy asked as she looked pointedly at Stephanie's chest – the ten-year-old had only bothered to wrap the towel around herself loosely and it had slipped down – not that she was particularly bothered.

"Nope!"

"I think she wants Tommy to be able to see them properly," Danny laughed.

"Maybe I do," Stephanie pouted.

"I think they need to grow a bit, don't you?" Anne-Marie grinned.

"So, Anne-Marie," Dave asked conversationally. "Where did you hear that phrase?"

"Which one?" Anne-Marie asked innocently – she had hoped that everybody had forgotten about her little faux pas!

Mindy laughed as she dropped a big hint, "That would be the 'finger-fuck' one."

"Oh. . ." Anne-Marie replied. "I heard SD say it to Morgan at Foxtrot."

"I might have known!" Stephanie commented. "Do you actually know what a finger-fuck is?"

Anne-Marie thought about it for a moment, but then she shook her head.

"No, I don't?"

"It's when a girl has a finger stuck up her snatch and she receives stimulation," Stephanie explained.

Mindy raised an eyebrow at Stephanie's explanation.

"I must have read it somewhere," Stephanie muttered as she went red in the face and dug into her bacon sandwich.

"Ewww – that's totally gross!" Anne-Marie growled as her own cheeks went very pink.

"Oh, I don't think so," Mindy commented as she took a deep breath. Dave's hand had wandered up her towel and was 'busy'. "Not gross – just . . . aaahhh . . . not now, Dave!"

..._...

At bedtime, that evening, Stephanie had just pulled on her pyjamas and she was climbing into bed when Anne-Marie and Danny trooped into the bedroom.

"What do you two want?" Stephanie demanded. She was tired, but not looking forward to going to sleep.

"We're here to keep you company, tonight," Danny explained as he clambered onto the bed and dived under the Duvet beside Stephanie.

Stephanie scowled as Anne-Marie did the same on the other side of her.

"I know I'm not the boy that you *really* want in bed with you," Danny went on.

Stephanie laughed.

"One more word, Daniel! Thank you, both of you."

"We love you, big sis," Anne-Marie offered as she cuddled into Stephanie.

Stephanie smiled happily, "I love you both very much, too."

Mindy peeked into the room and she smiled at the sight of the three kids settling down for the night.

"You three be good, okay?"

"Night, Mom!" the twins called out.

"Night, Mum!" Stephanie added.

"Sleep tight," Mindy replied as she turned out the light.

***The following morning
Saturday, September 10th***

Safehouse F

"In light of the current influx of Predators, we've been compiling lists of who we know to be alive, who we know to be missing, and who we know to be dead. We have more and more information coming from Marty's data extraction of the CIA data we originally acquired, back in May," Mindy explained.

"Oh, wow," Saoirse commented as she read through the names which ran down the large screen in the Command

Centre. "I recognise many of these – you even have Lucy and Leo. Those two were very special; if they are still alive, Lucy would give Hit Girl a run for her money, Mindy."

"Oh?"

"She was the best that I have ever seen and totally dedicated to her training. She was a bitch, no denying that – but no worse than Hit Girl. . ."

Mindy growled.

". . . I liked her – some of the time – at least when she wasn't humiliating me. If you meet her – she *is* deadly; be warned. Leo is just as highly skilled. I've sparred with them both and they never lost a fight – *never*. Lucy is a seasoned killer – she has the deaths of at least three *Predators* and three *Yellows* on her conscience. Leo has killed at least two *Predators* to my knowledge."

"I look forward to meeting them – assuming they are still alive," Mindy commented.

Saoirse looked very pensive for a few minutes as she thought back to her early days as a young ten-year-old *Predator*. Mindy came over and she wrapped an arm around Saoirse's shoulders.

"I didn't mean to bring back bad memories, SD."

"No, it's nothing like that. Seeing those names: Lucy, Leo, Willow, Guinevere, Carrie, Dakota – it brought back memories, yes, but they weren't all bad. While we did not exactly have friends – some of us got on together, at least enough for moral support, anyway. We all suffered together, so I can't hold grudges, just as I don't with Steph."

"You've been through a lot, Saoirse. It's good for you to have a positive outlook on things."

"Thanks, Mindy."

..._...

Saoirse headed up to the galley for a hot drink. She found Sarah and Marc there along with the Abbott twins. They were chatting raucously and enjoying each other's company. They stopped chatting as Saoirse sat down with her cup of tea.

"Saoirse," Sarah began. "From what I understand, you are *uniquely* qualified to answer this question. As the only person, presumably ever, to have been actively hunted by Hit Girl and to have actually survived – what did it feel like?"

Saoirse grimaced and then her face took on a very pained expression and she looked like she might be physically sick.

"That night, the night when I realised that Hit Girl knew my whereabouts . . . I had never been so scared in all my life. I was only fourteen and at that moment, I never expected to reach my next birthday. I knew that I would never see the sun rise the next morning, or ever again for that matter. So many things I had not done – I considered my life to be over; *finito*. I just sat in a chair and I awaited my fate. I cried for hours as I waited. I wanted to have kids. I wanted to fall in love. I wanted so many things – I knew that I would never get to experience any of them.

"Then she appeared in my apartment – like a ghost in the night. Don't laugh – but I pissed myself when I realised she was there; I was that scared. I thought I had mere seconds left to live . . . but then she let me go – I was stunned beyond belief. Nobody's ever explained to me why she let me live. Then Stephanie did the most wonderful thing – she forgave me and she offered me a life. I can never repay her kindness and I will always look on her as my best friend, no matter what."

"I saw something in you," came a voice and everybody turned to see Mindy walking over towards them. "I was going to kill you, right there in your apartment. I looked into your eyes, just as I have done with so many of my victims. I saw a frightened little girl in them. A little girl who had been forced into a life of killing. I knew it was not your fault that you were trying to kill Stephanie. I knew that you had no choice but to follow orders.

"Stephanie lost it – she called me a 'soft fuck'. I explained to Stephanie that Foxtail deserved to die, just as much as she did. Just as much as I did. Just as much as all of you here. I saw myself in Foxtail's eyes. I saw Stephanie. I couldn't kill her, I could not kill Foxtail. We hatched a plan to turn Foxtail. It worked and we brought Saoirse Doherty into our midst. It is a decision that I have not regretted. Mind you, the two *Predator Princesses* have kept me up,

many a night with their antics!"

Saoirse grinned as Mindy finished.

"Thank you for telling me that, Mindy. I was too scared to ask you why you didn't kill me."

"You have no reason to be scared of me, Saoirse. You've earned my trust on many an occasion. You are selfless and a very good friend to all who see you as their friend," Mindy said.

"You will always scare me, Mindy," Saoirse commented.

"That's good, I suppose," Mindy reasoned with an evil smirk.

"Did Stephanie really call you a 'soft fuck'?" Marc asked.

"Yes, she did."

"What did you do to her?"

"I kicked her across that very mat, down there," Mindy replied with a twinkle in her eye.

***Chapter 324*: Psyche Rampage**

That same morning

Saturday, September 10th, 2016

Safehouse F

"Stephanie!"

Stephanie looked up above her to see Mindy waving at her from the steel walkway and then pointing towards the Command Centre. Stephanie nodded at Tommy who stepped back from their sparring and she headed over to meet Mindy at the bottom of the steps. Stephanie frowned – Mindy looked unhappy.

"Steph – we need to talk."

"What about?" Stephanie asked as they both headed into the Command Centre and the door locked behind them and Mindy motioned her daughter over to the couch and they sat down.

"*Vengeance* ran an operation, yesterday, in London," Mindy started to explain.

"Jamie?" Stephanie's tone was full of hope.

"No – but some valuable information was obtained. We have lead – a very good lead."

"Why didn't you let me know, yesterday?" Stephanie's tone had a hint of anger in it.

"I didn't want to get your hopes up unless we really knew something."

"I accept that; thanks for being honest with me."

"Steph – no lies between us; we promised each other, right?"

"Yeah, we did," Stephanie replied with a smile before she got down to business. "What leads?"

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"*Vengeance* tracked down where Abigail was being held, along with Jamie. They spoke directly to the top dog, a William Fraser – CEO of Scorpio Enterprises. Apparently, he knows all about *Predators* and he sees a financial angle. He says that has *Predators* in his custody. . ."

"Jamie?" Stephanie interrupted.

"We don't know. We believe that he has others – but we have no idea who. We have one clue: he told us . . . well, listen to it for yourself."

Stephanie frowned as Mindy waved at Marty who punched a button on his keyboard. Sound began to emanate from the speakers in the room:

"I'll leave you with a teaser – Jamie and his whore headed southwest, maybe a hundred miles or so. Take it, or fucking leave it."

Stephanie's face contorted into anger as she listened to the voice. She imprinted the voice onto her brain so that she would recognise that bastard the moment she heard his voice again – then she could kill him.

"So – where does that put us?" she asked, looking up at Mindy.

Marty brought up a map which showed the southern section of the United Kingdom. A red circle was displayed centred on the Scorpio HQ in London.

"One hundred miles puts us towards the southwest of the UK – east of Portsmouth and Southampton," Marty advised.

"What's there?" Stephanie asked.

"Not a lot!" Marty commented. "Several large towns: Bath, Shaftesbury, Bournemouth. He could be leading us on a wild goose chase, or. . ."

"He could be leading us into a trap," Stephanie growled.

"Exactly," Mindy admitted.

"There's more," Stephanie stated, seeing Mindy's expression.

"Natasha and Abigail chased Fraser for over sixty miles. He was being a little obvious about it too which leads us to believe that he is leading us into a trap – he knows that there are many more *Predators* out there and we believe that he may be recruiting them to use for his own devices. Now, my girl, I want to assess you to see if you are capable of going back out into the field. Do you think you are ready?"

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It had been many weeks since Stephanie had been shot, but she had been healing inside and out all that time. The ten-year-old had been constantly monitored and she had received many check-ups to ascertain how her shoulder and side were healing, not to mention everything inside her young body which had been moved about. Both Cathy and Mindy had come down heavily on Stephanie whenever she tried to hide any problems with her body. Both Mindy and Cathy had noticed pain in Stephanie's eyes when she moved her right arm and when she overstressed her left side.

Mindy had reminded Stephanie of their bond and that they would not lie to one another. In turn, Stephanie had tearfully admitted that she was still in pain. Cathy had arranged some different drugs to combat the pain while Mindy had devised a new training regime for her daughter. That, in turn, had improved and assisted the healing muscles in Stephanie's right shoulder. The weeks in bed had wasted away at Stephanie's finely-honed body but since then, she had spent many hours returning her body to its previous state of excellence.

Mindy had no intention of allowing Stephanie into the field if she was not ready. Mindy was fully aware that she might have to physically restrain her daughter to prevent her from going after her brother, but should that be necessary, then Mindy would do it. She would do anything to keep the young girl alive – even if it meant putting a rift between mother and daughter.

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Forty minutes later, Psyche was on the mat.

For the first time in months, her body was encased in a combat suit. But not her original one – no, this one was brand new. Psyche was covered from head to toe in ultra-flexible Type IIA armour. The torso was a dark royal blue along with the arms which ended in deep royal red gauntlets. The remainder of the armour was a deep royal red right down to the boots on her feet. Embossed onto the chest was the gold symbol denoting the Greek letter 'psi'.

Around her waist, a gold utility belt held a pair of SIG Sauer P225-A1 Nitron Compact pistols in 9-mm calibre, each with a capacity of eight rounds. Also on the belt were a pair of SR09-K suppressors to fit the threaded barrels of the pistols. In the top of each boot, Psyche's custom-designed Sais fitted securely. Her right thigh supported a mount for three titanium throwing knives. Hanging from the utility belt, a much shorter, deep royal red skirt was visible.

The mask was new and it covered her face completely. The majority of the mask was the same dark royal blue but with a red stripe accentuating her eyes. The cape was also there.

"You ready?" Hit Girl demanded.

"Bring it on, bitch!" the electronically enhanced voice of Psyche replied.

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The two vigilantes, mother and daughter, were both fully suited and booted. Both were fully equipped with their weapons and accessories. Kick-Ass was on hand in his own combat suit to act as referee. There was quite a large crowd on the balcony that morning and there was an ample supply of fresh popcorn available – thanks to Cathy and Paige. There was the sense of a carnival atmosphere in the safehouse as everybody gathered to watch a spectacle like no other.

"You can pull the plug at any time, honey – understand?" Hit Girl warned Psyche.

"No chance, Mum – but I promise not to push it too far," Psyche replied. "I promise not to hurt you, either!"

"As if!"

Then the festivities began as Kick-Ass addressed the assembled watchers.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and girls! *Predators* and vigilantes! Curtis and Megan! Welcome to the extravaganza of the weekend. We have a mother vs daughter fight: Hit Girl vs Psyche. Can we please have a cheer for Psyche and her new combat suit."

There was a roar of clapping and cheering to which Psyche bowed theatrically.

"How about a cheer for our purple queen?"

"Fuck that!" Chloe yelled but she cheered none the less with everybody else.

"Hit Girl, are you ready?"

"I was *born* ready, green asshole!"

A ripple of laughter echoed around the Safehouse.

"Psyche, are you ready?"

"Hit Girl is going down!" Psyche called out and she was cheered on by a huge roar of approval from those watching.

"In your fucking dreams!" Hit Girl growled as they both shook hands before moving a few feet apart and facing one another.

"Let the fight begin!" Kick-Ass yelled as he stood away from his wife and daughter.

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Hit Girl opted to give her daughter a chance – it was an assessment after all and not a 'kick the shit out of Psyche' fight. Psyche, on the other hand, saw the fight as a 'kick the shit out of Hit Girl' fight and she was *not* intending on holding anything back. Her mind had been working out how to put Hit Girl down but nothing workable had come to fruition so Psyche was just going to go all out and hope for the best – at least until something better came to mind.

Psyche did, however, have an ace-in-the-hole. The ten-year-old had spent many hours with Chloe and Tommy. With their help, Stephanie had been able to regain full use of her right arm. Chloe, naturally, was well aware of how difficult it was to regain the use of your shoulder once a bullet or two had fucked around with it. Chloe had also pushed Stephanie past the pain to get her arm moving. The air had been turned blue as Chloe had helped work the shoulder and also the elbow. Tears and some screaming had also been a standard part of the recuperation.

As a sweetener to Stephanie to apologise for causing her so much pain, Chloe, Tommy, and Joshua had helped her to learn some new moves. Nobody had told Mindy about them – which was part of Chloe's plan! The new moves were running through Psyche's mind but she had to wait for the right opportunity and she did not want to tip her hand too early.

Hit Girl struck first with a swift punch which Psyche dodged and she retaliated with an equally swift kick to Hit Girl's left leg. There was a cheer as first contact went to Psyche. Hit Girl was not one to allow another to savour victory, so she quickly smacked her daughter in the chest, shoving her to the mat – a loud 'boo' followed the attack to which Hit Girl gave everybody the bird. Hit Girl was not exactly known for her kindness (Mindy was something else) and she demonstrated her cruel streak by executing a perfect spinning kick, catching Psyche around the head and sending her crashing to the mat.

Psyche scrambled to her feet, drawing a Sai with each hand and rushing at Hit Girl. Psyche was very skilled with the three-pronged weapons and Hit Girl knew it. The purple queen dodged each thrust, watching her opponent and the tips of each weapon with practiced ease. Hit Girl had a situational awareness like no other which she used to maximum advantage during a fight. Within another minute, Psyche had lost first one Sai and then the other and she was suddenly on the defensive with a very angry Hit Girl on the offensive, bearing down on her.

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"She's fucking dead!" Lauren exclaimed and to be brutally honest, many agreed with her.

"Come on, Steph – you can take the bullying bitch!" Saoirse yelled out and there were cheers for Psyche.

Psyche, however, had her own ideas. As she stumbled back and fell to the mat, she swiftly rolled off to one side. Psyche then came back up with a pistol in each hand and she emptied both magazines into the approaching Hit Girl who fell backwards under the barrage of low-velocity training rounds. Psyche smoothly swapped out her empty magazines and she re-holstered her pistols as she closed on Hit Girl who was regaining her feet. Psyche struck just as Hit Girl turned to face her opponent and she received a kick to the shoulder followed up by a hard punch to the chest.

Hit Girl never learnt how to stay down, only how to stay standing. She absorbed the punches, showing no fear. Then she seized hold of Psyche and flipped her over as easily as she might turn over a mattress. Psyche hit the mat hard, knocking the air out of her lungs. The younger girl rolled away from her attacker and quickly regained her feet before turning back to face Hit Girl. Psyche punched and kicked, punched and kicked, not allowing Hit Girl a moment to gather her thoughts and reattack. Then, just before Psyche's energy began to flag, she shocked the fuck out of everybody there – especially Hit Girl.

Saoirse was getting very worried. While she could not see her best-friend beneath all the body armour, she knew that Stephanie had to be in pain and sweating buckets, not to mention being exhausted. The attack on Hit Girl was blistering and the colliding limbs were almost blurred with the speed of movement, both on attack and on the defence. Then, just as it seemed that Hit Girl was about to turn the tide of the fight with her infinitely superior skills, Psyche executed her endgame. If you blinked, you might have missed it, but Psyche struck out at Hit Girl with her left fist before pushing off with her right foot and then *flipping* herself over and clobbering Hit Girl around the back of the head with the armoured boot on her left foot.

Hit Girl went down like the proverbial sack of spuds!

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The Safehouse was almost totally silent as Hit Girl hit the mat and rolled off to one side. Psyche sprang back to her feet and she swept up a discarded Sai. She ran over and kneed Hit Girl in the solar plexus. Hit Girl yelled out in pain but she did not move as she found the very sharp point of a Sai against her neck.

"You yield?" the victorious Psyche demanded.

Hit Girl considered her situation and for the first time ever, she uttered two words which she thought would never pass her lips. However, under the circumstances, she was very pleased to be saying them.

"I yield."

Psyche stood up and pulled off her mask, grinning hugely at the crowd of smiling faces above her. Hit Girl pulled off her own mask and then she seized Stephanie's right arm and raised it high.

"The champion!" Hit Girl called out with a broad smile.

The Safehouse erupted with cheering and yelling. Stephanie, sweat pouring off her, just stood there grinning like an insane idiot.

"Well done, honey," Mindy whispered into her daughter's right ear.

Stephanie swung around and hugged Mindy tightly.

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Mindy cringed as she pulled off her body armour and she rubbed her abdomen. She was sweating buckets and after returning her weapons, she walked back to her suite in just her sports bra and boy shorts. Stephanie followed and joined Mindy in the capacious shower. While Mindy washed Stephanie's sweaty, tangled hair, they talked.

"I'm sorry if I hurt you," Stephanie said as she saw the large bruise in the centre of Mindy's chest, just below her breasts.

"I'll heal – I always do. I will admit, I was shocked with that somersault kick. Did Chloe teach you that?"

"I can neither confirm nor deny such a comment," Stephanie replied. "It was good, huh?"

"It was perfectly executed and in the perfect place, too."

"And the student shall become the master," Stephanie quipped.

"Not fucking yet, honey!" Mindy said as she pulled downwards on her daughter's hair to look her in the eyes meaningfully.

Stephanie giggled as she received a face full of water from the shower head.

"So – am I cleared for action? Is Psyche back on the streets?"

Mindy looked down at the hopeful expression. Stephanie was biting her bottom lip, much like Mindy herself often did to reassure herself.

"Aww come on! Do I have to fucking beg?"

"You passed – just don't hug me, you fucking nutter!"

Stephanie sat down at the side of the shower and she began to cry. Mindy left her be. She could see the smile as well as the tears. She knew that it was sheer relief. Passing that assessment had brought Stephanie full circle. The shooting. The painful recovery. It was over – well, almost. . .

"Your arm hurts, doesn't it?"

"Like the buggery!" Stephanie grinned.

"You *Predators* are fucking psychotic!"

"It's a state of mind, Hit Girl!"

"I suppose."

..._...

Twenty minutes later, the freshly showered Mindy and Stephanie reappeared to cheers and yells.

"Mum says I'm psychotic," Stephanie informed Dave.

"Like mother, like daughter," Dave chuckled.

Anne-Marie and Danny rushed forwards and both hugged Stephanie, ignoring her cringing as they crushed her right arm. Chloe pushed through and hugged Stephanie and she whispered her congratulations into her ear. Mindy just growled and punched Chloe on her left shoulder.

"Ow!" Chloe grinned.

"Thanks – you too, Tommy and you, Josh. You all helped my little girl regain who she really is, thank you."

"I'm off downtown with Riley and Avery – see you guys soon!" Chloe said and she headed towards the exit.

"Right, Psyche – get your butt into that armoury and clean those pistols!"

"Aye, aye, Hit Girl, ma'am!" Stephanie replied with a mock salute as she ran to the steel steps which led below.

"Megan, Curtis, are you both ready to head up to D-JAK?" Mindy called out.

"Aye, aye, Hit Girl, ma'am!" Megan yelled as she snapped to attention and saluted – Curtis just rolled his eyes and grinned stupidly.

Mindy laughed as she headed down to her Jaguar.

Much later that afternoon

Central Chicago

Chloe was out with Avery and Riley enjoying a brief shopping trip.

They had not done very much – just been for something to eat and they had had a good chat. It was the first time that the friends had had to catch up with one another since school had begun; the first week had been very busy. They were walking down North Michigan Avenue when Chloe suddenly stopped dead and Avery almost bumped into her. Then as Avery and Riley watched in horror, Chloe doubled over, gripping her stomach and she fell to the sidewalk screaming out in agony.

"It hurts! It hurts so much!"

Avery quickly regained her senses and she began looking around desperately for help. A couple dozen yards away, she saw a police officer running towards them, alerted by the Chloe's screams.

"Quick, my friend needs help," she said in barely restrained panic as the cop reached her.

"We need an ambulance at corner of East Ohio and North Michigan," the police officer radioed as he knelt down.

The man tried to pry Chloe's hands from her stomach but she had an iron grip as she writhed with the agony.

"Are you injured, miss?" he asked but Chloe was in far too much pain to respond.

"She just keeled over," Riley offered as she stared down at her friend.

The ambulance was there within two minutes and Chloe was quickly helped to her feet and taken aboard.

"I'm pregnant. . ." Chloe managed to say as the paramedic helped her to lie down.

"What!" came the shocked exclamation from Riley and Avery as they joined their friend in the back of the ambulance.

"Let's move it!" the paramedic directed as she slammed the rear door and pounded on the bulkhead for the driver.

The ambulance accelerated away, siren screaming.

***Chapter 325*: Shadow Chloe**

Earlier that afternoon

Saturday, September 10th

D-JAK Prime

"I expected you sooner," Paige commented as she checked her watch.

"Mindy stuck to the speed limits!" Megan complained.

"Oh!" Paige sounded surprised.

"Must be sore after having her ass handed to her by a ten-year-old!" Megan grinned.

"Language, Megan!" her mother cautioned.

"Is 'ass' a swearword now?"

"For you, yes."

"Oh, brother!"

"Stephanie's assessment?" Paige asked Mindy while ignoring her petulant daughter.

"Yeah – she passed!" Mindy chuckled.

"Brilliant! Bet she's happy."

"That's an understatement," Mindy admitted.

"Mindy got kicked down – it was so awesome!" Megan grinned.

"I mean this in the nicest possible way, dear daughter: fuck off, you little shit!" Paige said and Megan's mouth dropped open.

Mindy spun the speechless eleven-year-old around and pushed her out the door.

"Now, Boss – how about this getting your ass handed to you by a ten-year-old!"

Mindy rolled her eyes and pushed the door shut.

"As Megan said; it was awesome. . ."

..._...

"Do I have to?"

"Yes, Zoe, your Aunt Kim suggested that it might help you settle in – you know, meet some other kids your own age and maybe learn some useful skills."

"But I know some of that stuff – Aunt Kim taught me some stuff when I was eight."

"Please?"

"Okay, Mom – I'll give it a try."

"Zoe!" came a loud voice as Kim Eisenburg came running over.

"Hi, Aunt Kim."

"Let's get you into a class – but first, I'll let a friend of mine see how good you are."

Kim led her niece across the floor and over to where a young girl, not much older than Zoe was kicking a punchbag

while a boy of very similar age held it steady. The girl and the boy both wore a Gi in blue with a green belt.

"Megan, this is my niece, Zoe."

"Hi, Zoe."

"Hi, Megan."

"Megan, could you check out Zoe and see where her skill level lies, please?"

"She know anything?" Megan asked.

"I've taught her one or two things," Kim offered with a smile.

..._...

"Taught her one or two things, huh!" Megan growled ten minutes later as she lay flat on her back.

"Yeah – one or two things," Zoe grinned as she held out a hand to Megan.

"You fight well, Zoe – damn well!"

"Well, a girl needs to be able to defend herself – am I right?"

"Damn right!" Megan replied as she allowed Zoe to help her to her feet. "Come and meet Curtis."

"He's your boyfriend, right?"

"Kind of."

"Aunt Kim says you and him mess about in bed, naked."

Megan's cheeks went very pink.

"A little – we've known each other for about two years."

"You two done it yet?"

"Huh?"

"Has Curtis stuck his dick inside you, yet?"

"You ask a lot of very personal questions, Zoe – no, we have not had sex. How about you?"

Zoe's face went pink.

"I've never been with a boy."

"Well, hands off Curtis – assuming you don't want your hands chopped off," Megan advised sweetly. "Curtis – this is Zoe; Kim's niece."

Curtis studied the new arrival.

"Hi, Zoe. Nice moves on Megan, over there."

"She has some nice moves, I'll agree – just don't applaud her too much, Curtis, or you'll be pleasuring yourself, tonight." Megan retorted.

There was the sound of sardonic laughter from behind the three youngsters.

"I don't see Megan passing up playing with Curtis' dick!" Nikki Hutchens laughed.

"Thanks, Nikki – tasteful," Megan growled.

"Oh, she tastes his dick, too!" Nikki laughed and Zoe giggled.

Central Chicago
North Michigan Avenue

Chloe was over the moon that Stephanie had passed her assessment.

Chloe knew what it meant to be side-lined due to injury. Admittedly, Stephanie had taken it a lot better than she herself had, but then Stephanie had been younger and she had had much more support. Chloe was pleased that she had been able to help the young girl. Stephanie was like a niece to her, just as Mindy was like a sister. It was even better that Stephanie had been able to put Hit Girl down. Chloe knew full well that Mindy had not put her heart and soul into the fight – if she had, then Stephanie would have died within two seconds of the fight beginning!

So much was going on in everybody's lives. School, Fusion . . . a baby. Joshua had been stunned, but within seconds his face had exploded into a massive smile. He had hugged her so tightly, Chloe had actually had to use their safe word – yes, they had a safe word, and never mind why! They had sat and talked for hours while Joshua had gently rubbed his hands across Chloe's stomach. It was a weird feeling, knowing that there was something growing inside of her – a new life. Between them, they had discussed how they might bring the child up – would he or she follow their parents into a life of vigilantism, or would he or she be allowed a childhood.

It was an awesome responsibility and Chloe was scared of what was to come. Joshua too had fears of his own. He loved Chloe more than anything else in the world and he would support her through anything. However, the thought of being responsible for a miniature human being was a daunting thought. Would he be a good father? Would they be able to cope? They *were* both very young – *very* young. No – they would receive help from their friends; whether they liked it or not, Chloe knew. A baby! Her mind was still struggling to come to terms with her new condition.

'Oh, Chloe! You do get yourself into some pretty wild situations!' she thought to herself.

Her next problem was spreading the news. That afternoon she had intended on telling Riley and Avery, her two best friends – but what might they think of her? Chloe already had a certain reputation around the school – and not the violent one, either. Some called her a slut – not to her face, of course – they were wrong; she only had eyes for Joshua and as far as she knew, she had only had sex with Joshua. What might people think and say when they found out that she was pregnant at sixteen? Chloe did not normally care what people thought about her but somehow, she felt incredibly vulnerable and she didn't want to become an embarrassment for her parents.

"Chloe – you okay?"

"Yeah, Avery; I've just got a lot on my mind."

"Thinking about some new sex positions?" Riley teased.

"There can't be all that many left for you two to try!" Avery added.

"Funny – so funny!" Chloe grinned. "I have something to tell you guys."

"You sound serious," Avery commented.

"Yeah – it is serious; I'm . . ."

Chloe suddenly stopped dead and Avery almost bumped into her. Then as Avery and Riley watched in horror, Chloe doubled over, gripping her stomach and she fell to the sidewalk screaming out in agony.

"It hurts! It hurts so much!"

Two hours later

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Chloe felt numb.

Her happiness from earlier was gone as if it had never been. It wasn't the only thing that was gone as if it had never been. Her baby was gone. The new life that had been growing inside of her for a number of weeks – it was gone. The word that the nurse had used still echoed in her mind: miscarriage. A horrible word as far as women were concerned. Devastating for a mother-to-be. Her mother had been there with her for most of it and then Joshua had burst in just fifteen minutes previously. He shared her devastation; he had wanted the baby just as much as she had. They had

both lost something very special.

The young man had not known what to say – in fact he had not said a word since his arrival. He just sat there, stunned, but holding Chloe's hand tightly. His being there was enough for Chloe. She needed him there. Words were unnecessary; she knew how he felt. She could sense his feelings, just as he could hers. They both had a link which was unbreakable and to others, unfathomable. Cathy called it love and maybe she was right. It was one of the very few times that Chloe had ever seen Joshua cry. Chloe worried about him, just as much as he worried about her. Cathy had called Mindy to advise her of what had happened, but nobody else had been informed – most did not even know that she had been pregnant in the first place.

Sitting outside the room were two very miserable teenagers. Riley and Avery had been very upset with what was happening to their friend. Cathy had done her best to explain everything to them and assure them that Chloe was fine. True, there were no medical complications and Chloe would be free to go home in a matter of hours, but it would be the mental scars which would be difficult if not impossible to eradicate and Chloe would carry them for the rest of her life – Joshua too. Cathy had mixed feelings – maybe it was for the best; they were both too young to have children, but Cathy still felt for her daughter and a boy who Cathy cared for as if he was her own.

From purely a medical standpoint, it was a miscarriage – a fact of nature. Chloe's body had decided that the foetus was unviable and therefore ejected the unborn and undeveloped human being. Chloe was tough – very tough. It would be difficult but she would survive. The bleeding had been heavy, so Chloe was weak but a few days of rest would help her body to recover.

That evening

Glenview

Mindy looked out of the kitchen window.

Her mood was mixed. She was happy for Stephanie who was currently running around the garden with Razor and Horatio. Horatio was just getting in the way, but he loved a bit of rough and tumble with his canine friend. Anne-Marie was out as well, with Kiara. Sophia was a few feet away from Mindy keeping her company. On the flipside, Mindy was miserable – her best friend was struggling to cope with the loss of something very special.

Mindy had to come to a decision. She was putting together a team to go to Europe and normally, Chloe would be at the very top of that list. There were times that difficult decisions had to be made and Mindy hated them with a passion – it was always the bane of every leader. Mindy had been to see Cathy and had sought her opinion on her daughter's condition. Cathy had expected the visit and she had, as always, been prepared. Yes, Chloe was okay to travel – physically at least. Mindy decided to leave it to Chloe to come to a mature decision.

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Chloe arrived with Joshua in tow a little after nine that night. Cathy had driven them both over and left them as they would both spend the night at Glenview.

"Okay, Chloe – you know what I am going to say."

"I have to come, Mindy – I'm okay; I just need some heavier tampons is all."

"Chloe – you're my best friend; I know a little of what you're going through. . ."

"What the fuck would you know about losing a child?" Chloe blurted out but then her expression of anger changed instantly to one of horror at what she had just said. "Oh, God, Mindy – I am so sorry; I should never have said that."

"Chloe, you're allowed to be angry. . ."

"Not with you and not with something like that. I know from a very personal point of view the personal hell that you endured when Anne-Marie was taken and then when Stephanie was shot and each time she died. I just want to be there; you need me."

Chloe hugged Mindy tightly. They had both been through a lot together and Chloe needed Mindy, just as Mindy had needed her before.

Stephanie stopped at the entrance to the living room.

Mindy was on the couch with Chloe, only Chloe was cuddled into Mindy and sobbing her eyes out. Mindy just shook her head and Stephanie backed off. Instead, she headed into the kitchen where she found a morose looking Joshua sitting opposite Dave.

"What the fuck is going on?" she demanded.

Joshua stood up and he guided the ten-year-old through into the living room. He sat her down on the opposite couch to the two girls and then sat down beside her.

"Chloe has had a miscarriage," he explained. "Do you know what that is?"

Stephanie was horrified – she knew exactly what a miscarriage was. Her eyes filled with tears and she her heart went out to both Chloe and Joshua.

"Yes – I do, but I never even knew that Chloe was pregnant."

"We hadn't announced it. . ."

Stephanie saw the tears spilling down Joshua's cheeks and she hugged her friend. He had always been there for her – now it was her turn to be there for him.

***Chapter 326*: Stormtide**

Sunday, September 11th, 2016

Chicago, USA

Fusion was embarking to cross the Atlantic.

Equipment and supplies were being loaded aboard a giant Lockheed LM-100J transport aircraft. The equipment had all been loaded into cargo containers suitable for loading into the aircraft's cavernous belly. A lot of the equipment would probably never be used but it was better to have it than not and Mindy did not want to deplete the *Vengeance* equipment reserves unnecessarily.

After much soul-searching, Dave and Mindy had chosen to leave the twins with Marcus and Paige. Stephanie would be travelling, of course, as would Saoirse, Abby, Chloe, Joshua, and Mathilda. They would all fly out on the Gulfstream a few hours after the Lockheed transport which flew at half the speed of the executive jet.

Three hours before departure, Mindy received an urgent call to go see *Synthesis* at their facility. Naturally, with a lot still to arrange, Mindy was not happy.

Synthesis Data Facility

"This had better be good!" Hit Girl growled.

Libby turned to face the purple-clad vigilante queen and she swallowed deeply before she spoke.

"I was talking with Q and, well, we had an idea. . ."

"Spit it out, girl!"

"Back in early June, there was a gunfight in the English seaside town of Whitby – it ended up on YouTube."

Libby clicked on a button and on one of the large screens, a video began to play. The video was entitled: 'Young boy shoots man on Whitby street'. As Hit Girl watched, she saw an image of the Yorkshire fishing town on the west coast of England.

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The sun was shining and it looked like a typical family video. Until . . .

A young boy could be seen looking down the street, then he dived flat to the floor and several pistol shots were heard. The boy reached into his pack and he produced a small pistol. Very quickly, he came up into a kneeling stance and very calmly, he began to return fire. His smaller pistol issued sharper cracks compared to the heavier booms of the opposition's weapons.

The camera had moved to show three adults, each with large pistols evident in their hands. One, a woman, dived into cover behind a parked van. A man followed suit but the third member received two bullets to his chest and he went down hard. The boy showed no fear, nor any remorse, as he emptied his magazine towards the adults before calmly reloading and running towards the swing-bridge across the water. He just made it to the other side before the bridge began to open for an approaching boat.

Screams and sirens could be heard as people dove for cover. The young boy was last seen running into the narrow streets of Whitby.

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"Holy shit!" Hit Girl murmured.

"Yeah – not your average event on a sunny afternoon in an English town."

"More like Chicago on a Saturday night!" Hit Girl commented dryly.

"Well, after witnessing that attack on Scorpio, in London, we began to do some thinking. . ."

Libby paused as Hit Girl began to growl.

"Look – we're not stupid; I assume you would not have recruited us if we were," Libby said and she visibly breathed a sigh of relief when Hit Girl nodded and then waved for her to continue. "Those kids were amazing – they were also really violent. We heard the term, 'predator' in relation to them, so we assumed that they were some highly trained kids – you know, like that girl in Stranger Things."

"Go on."

"Well – seeing the way those kids fought; well, it kind of reminded me of that boy in the video. So, I got to thinking – the video was crap; always is from phones and when caught on the fly. We did what we could to acquire a clean image of the boy's face and body – the results were poor, but Kate and Laurence managed to clean things up and they were able to obtain height, approximate weight, and some very crude facial stats. Kate?"

"Err yeah, we started searching cached CCTV in London – never mind how! We got a hit, about three hours ago – then another, and another."

"Okay," Hit Girl said. "Show me what you got."

A grainy image appeared on the screen – it was early morning, but Mindy could make out a young boy and an older girl standing on a busy street. Then another image appeared beside it. It was of better quality than the first and it appeared to have been taken in a parking lot late morning. The image showed a boy and a girl – it wasn't a perfect match, but they could be the same pair.

"We identified the motorcycle that they were riding. We were able to access the motorway camera network that the Brits use to track licence plates. We found several hits on the plate – they were heading west. They also came back a few days later – heading east before we lost them about sixty miles west of London."

"Very good, *Synthesis!*"

"You can pass on the details to Battle Guy, but for now, where did they go?"

"Blandford Forum – a market town."

That same time

Blandford Forum, England

There had been six deliveries over a period of four hours.

The British Army Foden DROPS trucks had deposited six containerised loads side-by-side before disappearing. One of the flatbed containers contained two fuel tanks – petrol and diesel. Five identical Range Rover Sentinels were also delivered and they were parked undercover behind the containers.

The site was an MI5 Safehouse and it was currently being occupied by the *Vengeance* forward unit which consisted of Eric, Natasha, and Abigail. Together, they inventoried all the supplies and they ensured that everything was ready for the arrival of *Fusion*. Nothing was overlooked – Eric of course ensured that Abby would have the required secure internet connectivity as well as readying one of their drones for a reconnaissance mission. Back in London, Commander Lawrence and Jasper were busy deconflicting the *Vengeance/Fusion* activities to ensure that there would be no interference from the military, nor from the local police.

That, in itself, was dangerous as nobody knew how far Scorpio might have the local police penetrated. Commander Lawrence had to assume that Scorpio would be fully integrated with local law enforcement so no local police were notified, however, the Home Office was prepared to intervene should the police report any potential terrorist activity in the West Country. It would not do for any blue on blue strikes nor did HMG wish to publicise the fact that they were actively allowing vigilante activity within UK borders.

It was also very important to ensure that the press did not get wind of Chicago's own vigilante queen causing bloody havoc in a sleepy part of England.

Monday, September 12th

**MI5 Safehouse
Blandford Forum**

It was something which always amazed both Cassie and Keira.

The giggly little girls who were always out to cause trouble were totally different when they were deployed as their not-so-alter egos. From eight-year-old Kaitlin to twelve-year-old Craig, there was one-hundred percent concentration.

Keira had just driven in with Harper and Craig, each of whom had flown down to their temporary base at Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton. *Twilight* was stored out of sight in a hanger beside helicopters which were much more familiar to the ex-Royal Navy pilot. The helicopter was also being transformed into its attack guise under the guidance of the Chief who was very pleased to be back in his former surroundings.

Harper and Craig got on amazingly well – Keira had been forced to listen to an hour's worth of conversation which had covered the internals of various machineguns and the benefits of a closed-bolt design over an open-bolt design. A conversation which Keira had found both very boring and one which was very odd for a nine-year-old girl and a twelve-year-old boy to be actively engaged in.

The *Predators* were in the dining room, busy checking through all the weapons and loading magazines. They were very skilled and efficient at it too. The conversation was limited and only relevant to the task at hand.

"Maybe we should have them servicing weapons and loading magazines 24-7," Cassie quipped.

"Would give us a peaceful life," Keira agreed.

Kaitlin barely looked up from her magazine filling.

"A couple of murders would give us a peaceful life too," she muttered to nobody in particular.

Before Cassie could respond to Kaitlin's suggestion, there was a commotion from outside the Safehouse. Cameron peeked his head into the dining room.

"They're here!" he called out before vanishing.

Harper, Naomi, Kaitlin, Electra, Abigail, and Yvette bolted out of the room like they were being chased by the hounds of hell. Craig shrugged and followed on more sedately.

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Parked up outside were two extra vehicles.

There was a large 26-foot Euro6 curtain-sider truck with a Mercedes cab and a Mercedes V-Class MPV. Dave was climbing down from the truck along with Mathilda. Out of the MPV came Stephanie, Saoirse, Abby, Chloe, and Joshua. Mindy climbed out of the driver's seat.

"You allowed Mindy to drive?" Natasha quipped.

"Hi, Nats!" Mindy laughed as she gave her friend a hug.

Naturally, all the female *Predators* began screaming and they each dived onto Stephanie and Saoirse. Saoirse was unused to the big welcomes which Stephanie seemed to attract and she looked a little freaked out as she was hugged by each girl in turn. Abby, of course, appeared to vanish along with Eric. Keira studied Chloe but Joshua just shook his head and Keira left it for later – she could tell that something was wrong.

After everybody had finished enjoying the welcoming ceremony, Stephanie took Abigail and Electra off to one side. Electra knew what was coming and her doleful expression showed it.

"You going to kick our arses?" Abigail asked.

"I should – when I heard about what you two did, I wanted to come over here and tear you both apart."

"We worked out our differences and while we're not exactly fucking each other, we're not fucking each other over either," Electra commented with a smile.

"You really do have a way with words, 'lectra!" Stephanie laughed. "Just stay friends, that's all I ask."

"We're working on it," Abigail said as she put an arm around Electra and hugged her.

Electra cringed.

..._...

"It's good to be together, again," Dave said as he sat down with Cameron and Joshua.

The *Predators*, now joined by Stephanie and Saoirse, had gone back to preparing the weapons. Chloe was off with Mindy and Cassie checking out the truckload of cargo while Keira was helping Mathilda with her personal weapons. Abby and Eric were conspicuous by their absence although the *Vengeance* Command Van known as *Cyclone* appeared to be moving around a bit on its suspension.

Once all the equipment was unpacked and passed onto the *Predator* production line for further checks, Mindy and Cassie went for a ride on a pair of Triumph Tiger Explorer XCA motorcycles. Mindy was in her element as she raced around the narrow lanes many of which were sunken and the tops of the hedges were several feet above them. They passed through Tarrant Rawston and then rode past the old World War II RAF airfield at Tarrant Rushton. At Witchampton, they stopped to check out the access roads to what they were calling 'Scorpio Satellite Site B'.

The location sucked as far as making a covert assault was concerned. Any assault would have to execute after dark and on foot. Any vehicles approaching would be heard a mile away. Images from a high-flying drone, EAGLE-1, had revealed many heat blooms indicating upwards of thirty occupants on the site. The nine buildings were a mixture of old and new and were primarily on the north side of the almost eleven-acre site. Nobody had any idea if it would be all gunmen, or kids being held against their will – or something else.

A quick ride up the A3078 with a left at the Horton Inn, took Mindy and Cassie down some excellent roads as they headed north-west. Naturally, Mindy got a bit ahead of herself and she put the 1,215cc 3-cylinder engine through its paces, racing along the narrow lanes at over seventy miles-per-hour. They slowed down as they approached the small village of Tollard Royal and what they were calling 'Scorpio Satellite Site A'.

Site A was a large manor house dating back to the 1800s. It would be a very difficult place to assault but it was doable. Both Mindy and Cassie agreed with earlier ideas that the assault would be best with helicopter support. They had *Twilight*, however, a second helicopter would have been useful, but *Scourge* was not ready and they did not have a second combat pilot anyway. Drone imagery had also identified the presence of a Storm Grey McLaren 675LT parked outside the building and the tracker which Abigail had been placed on William Fraser was still functioning and it indicated his presence at the site.

There was a lot of planning to complete.

MI5 Safehouse

The return of Mindy and Cassie signalled dinner time and then bedtime.

The kids were sent to bed once they had all been fed – they would all need their energy for the next twenty-four hours which promised to be exciting. The accommodations that night were tight to be fair but the kids were used to it. Harper was sharing a room with Craig.

"I hope you two won't be screaming like Cassie does when *she* has sex," Kaitlin commented as she walked past the door to their bedroom.

"Kaitlin – shut the fuck up!" Harper growled as Craig's cheeks went red.

"Why else would a boy share a room with a girl?" Kaitlin asked innocently.

"Because there's no space anywhere else, you dumb fuck!" Naomi advised her cousin.

"There's no need for bad language," Kaitlin retorted as she vanished down to the room which she was sharing with Abigail, Electra, Yvette, and Naomi.

***The following afternoon
Tuesday, September 13th***

Scorpio Satellite Site B

The facility was of a very utilitarian nature but the landscaping had been completed well, thus blending the site into the surrounding countryside.

Shadow and Hal had been studying the site from a distance using high-powered optics. It was forbidding, but it had been deemed that two people could slip in and hopefully out without any significant issues. They needed intel and intel was what they were there to acquire. Shadow would get them both in, and then Hal would go to work on the Scorpio computer systems with remote help from *Synthesis*. High above them, the \$3million ScanEagle X200 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) known as EAGLE-1 flew in a large racetrack pattern. The 22kg aircraft with its three-metre wingspan and 1.5-horsepower engine flew at 60 knots and was capable of remaining airborne for over twenty-four hours. The high-definition cameras were aimed at Site B and they were watching the area to help guide the two vigilantes inside the facility.

Then they found an ally as the heaven's opened, drenching the Wiltshire countryside in sheets of freezing icy rain. The vision suddenly dropped to mere yards instead of the half-a-mile that they had enjoyed only minutes previously. They both jumped up and ran forwards. They had a thousand yards to cover over two muddy fields, not that it was a problem for the two ultra-fit vigilantes. Both wore their Fusion Covert Combat Suits, complete with masks, under British MTP camouflage clothing. As they ran across the fields, they were quickly covered in mud and soaked, but their skin stayed dry thanks to the combat suit which let sweat out but prevented the rain getting in.

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Shadow raised her clenched fist and Hal stopped dead. Directly ahead of them was a hedge, beyond that hedge were two long buildings – the first of Site B. On closer inspection, the hedge was concealing security measures and if they had simply blundered through, then they would have triggered off alarms and . . .

"Is that a fucking Claymore?" Hal demanded.

Shadow nodded as she pointed out the trip wire and the detonation device. Shadow sent an image of the device back to Q who would add the intel to the burgeoning stack of intel back at the Safehouse. Shadow disabled the detonation device and they moved through the hedge and stopped beside the first building. There were no visible windows in the sides of the building so Shadow led the way down the side towards the front of the building.

The building had a sign on the door – 'Generator' – another image was sent to Q as Shadow picked the simple Yale lock and eased open the door.

That same time

M15 Safehouse

"Welcome!"

"You must be Hit Girl," the man said as he took the offered hand.

"You must be Astute."

"Thank you for allowing me to join your team."

"We want to get your daughter back, and I need to find my daughter's brother," Mindy replied.

"I understand you've tracked them down?"

"We think so."

Patrick Millar looked around the room and he took in the nine kids. His face went very serious as he realised what they were.

"I know you," the eldest girl stated.

"Saoirse Doherty – Second Intake."

Mindy frowned.

"Instructor Millar was there when I was taken. He was there when we were stripped naked and we had our hair cut off," Saoirse explained.

"I remember every kid who was there while I was and I can only apologise, Saoirse. I believed in *Urban Predator* when it was just Lucy and Leo – they were street rats given a new life. Then they began taking kids like you – kidnapping you and forcing you into a different life. Lucy and Leo had no life, no future; you did – as did you all."

There were a lot of glares from the kids' present once they realised that they had an *Urban Predator* instructor amongst them. Saoirse noticed and she moved in between the potential lynch mob and their target.

"Leave him alone," she ordered. "Instructor Millar was never cruel. He looked after everybody there, when he could. I hated him at first, just like the rest; they had humiliated me and taken away my individuality. But then a scared ten-year-old found that there was somebody who would listen when things got too much. Somebody who would stand up for our welfare. I know that Leo and Lucy both spoke highly of him. You guys want to lynch him then you're going to have to go through me."

"Did you know, Mindy?" Abigail asked.

"Yes, I did. He was vouched for. The girl currently running with Jamie? Shannon is Patrick's daughter."

"They took her when I rebelled against them. I was being transferred – Shannon got angry and she stormed out to let off some steam. That was back in 2011; I never saw her again."

"Shannon Millar?" Saoirse asked.

"Yes."

"I remember her but I never made the connection," Saoirse said. "She came in out of sequence; three months after the rest of her intake. She received harsher treatment compared to the rest of us. They stripped her in the vehicle garage and marched her naked through the facility to the showers where she had her head shaved in front of everybody. She sobbed for three days straight – she was so scared. She was beaten badly, several times during her first month. Now it makes sense; they were punishing her for what you did."

"Thank you for telling me that, Saoirse. I know how much you must all resent me and what I represent. Where is Stephanie?"

Stephanie raised her hand.

"I spent many weeks in contact with Miranda and she talked about you. She was a very courageous woman and I'm sorry she died."

"Thanks," Stephanie said simply and she held out her hand to the man.

He hesitated, unsure of taking the hand.

"We all have scars. We all have things we did. We all have regrets. We've all been given a second chance and we need to embrace that," Stephanie stated as she resolutely held out her hand.

Patrick Millar took it and he shook it.

"Welcome to the club, Mr Millar," Saoirse grinned.

Scorpio Satellite Site B

The generator building, unsurprisingly, held a large generator.

However, that was not all. Hal was pleased to see a computer terminal which was patch into a cabled network connection. While Shadow kept a lookout, Hal set to work hacking into the Scorpio network. It did not take long and she was able to connect up a small wireless interface which would then allow Synthesis to connect into the network

from Chicago.

Hal ensured that her freshly installed equipment was not visible before she and Shadow made their way back outside and back into the driving rain. They had only moved a dozen yard before there was movement close by and a rain-soaked guard appeared from around the next block. Shadow seized him and threw him down into the mud, punching him hard in the face with her armoured gauntlets. The man was out cold before he even knew that Shadow and Hal were there. But before they could gain entry to the next block, the rain began to lift and they heard a challenge from across the compound.

"Command – contact, contact, contact!" Shadow radioed.

Shadow then snapped off a bullet in the direction of the challenge and she dove behind the block with Hal beside her.

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Their presence was most unwelcome, but not all that unexpected, it seemed. People began to spill out of the blocks. Most of them were armed and bullets began to fly. Shadow and Hal were both lightly armed – it was only supposed to be a stealthy infiltration, after all! But they were not unsupported – not by a long shot.

The long shot came out of the rain and a guard fell backwards into the mud, a large hole in his chest. Another guard ran over to check his colleague – his head exploded as the .50-calibre BMG round passed through and continued on for another few hundred yards. Eighty metres away, Leon adjusted her aim for the next target of opportunity. Leon had a personal hatred for people who targeted children and she felt no remorse as she coldly dropped another guard before moving on to the next.

Something caught Shadow's eye, across the far side of the compound. It appeared to be a young girl – not altogether a surprise – but the girl was very small. Before Shadow could move, she heard several yells and the guards began to withdraw, running back to several parked four-wheel-drive vehicles. They were obviously bugging out in the face of superior fire-power. The mere presence of an unseen but very deadly sniper was enough to scare the crap out of anybody. Three vehicles vanished down the muddy track. The last vehicle, however, deviated from the course of the other vehicles.

Shadow looked on in horror as the Land Rover drove directly at the little girl with the obvious intention of killing her; she was evidence, after all.

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Shadow yelled out a warning but the little girl had already reacted with lightning speed. A very impressed Shadow watched as the girl dropped to the swirling muddy torrent at her feet and balled herself as tight as possible, like a peanut, and the large 4x4 drove directly over her with barely an inch of clearance. Shadow bolted forwards with Hal beside her and they both emptied their pistols at the retreating vehicle. Shadow smiled with undisclosed pleasure as she registered a large dark smudge which appeared on the windshield and the Land Rover careered into a concrete wall, rebounding and then stopping against a parked car.

Shadow ejected her empty magazine and inserted a fresh one, as did Hal. As she did that, she ran forward and quickly scooped the little peanut out of the mud and into her arms.

"You alright, peanut?" Shadow asked.

The little girl looked up at Shadow out of her pale brown eyes. She brushed the wet hair out of eyes and she smiled. Then she frowned.

"My name is Becky, *not* 'peanut!'"

Shadow laughed at the fiery, indignant response.

"You okay, Becky?"

"Yeah – that was scary."

"Let's get you some place safe, okay?"

The little girl's smile vanished and tears began to fall.

"I have nowhere to go."

"Oh, yes, you do, honey. You wanna come home with me?"

The smile returned, but the tears remained.

"Can I?"

"Of course, Peanut. Is there anybody else here?"

Becky shook her head, "No."

Shadow wiped away the little girl's tears which seemed just a little bit redundant considering the pounding rain which soaked the little girl's skin and she headed out to the RV Point with Hal protecting their rear.

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Fifty yards to the north of the site, Hal popped a smoke grenade and threw it a few yards away. While the smoke was all but invisible in the rain, the heat-bloom from the grenade's chemical reaction blossomed onto Scorpion's Forward Looking Infra-Red (FLIR) display and she dived *Twilight* down through the rain.

"Standby for pickup, Chief!" Scorpion ordered.

Aft of her, in the main cabin, Chief Montgomery checked his safety harness before he pulled back both side doors and latched them open. He picked up a Heckler & Koch G36K short submachine gun and prepared for the extraction. Through the NVGs mounted on his flight helmet, he could make out three people – one much smaller than the other two - awaiting pick up. Scorpion was seconds away from placing *Twilight* down beside Shadow and Hal when The Chief issued an urgent warning.

"Pilot, Crewman – trouble inbound at ten o'clock!"

Scorpion abandoned the landing and she spun the helicopter around on its access, arming the weapons systems as she went.

"Shadow, Hal – aborting pickup; un-friendlies inbound – take cover while we prosecute, Scorpion out!"

Shadow and Hal flattened themselves on the ground with Shadow on top of Becky. Scorpion lined up *Twilight* and she prepared to attack the three approaching vehicles. As the aiming reticule in her visor adjusted under the control of the firing computer, Scorpion steadied the aircraft and then just as the reticule passed onto the target, she flipped up the cover on the guns button just above her right thumb.

With that simple movement, Scorpion fired off *Twilight's* first ever war shots.

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The helicopter had not been visible as it had closed but Shadow and Hal had both heard the turbines and rotor blades. *Twilight* had been in full combat mode with no visible illumination on the aircraft helping the dark grey helicopter to blend into the driving rain. Just before it had aborted the landing, Shadow had taken in the helicopter's latest guise.

Twin pods were mounted, one on either side of the fuselage. Each held a 12.7mm (.50-calibre) FN M3P machinegun which was capable of firing 1,200 rounds-per-minute with each pod holding 250-rounds. Mounted under each pod were three launch tubes for three 2.75-inch unguided HE rockets.

Shadow's immediate thought was how deadly the helicopter looked but then she almost jumped out of her body armour as a single burst of machinegun fire leapt from each pod-mounted .50-calibre weapon. As far as Shadow was concerned, the sound was stupendous. It was also extremely accurate as a dozen bullets cut into the bonnet of the first Land Rover, destroying the engine and killing two of the four men on board.

The other two vehicles rapidly performed one-eighties and roared off back down the track.

"Shadow, Hal – target prosecuted; *Twilight* inbound for pickup – forty seconds!"

"Copy that, *Twilight*," Shadow replied as she stood back up, pulling Becky with her.

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As *Twilight* came around into the wind, The Chief resumed his position ready for a combat pick up. Scorpion brought the helicopter in fast, flaring at the last second and dropping the undercarriage. The helicopter settled into a hover, three feet off the ground – she did not want to get the tyres muddy! While Hal kept watch, Shadow threw Becky up to The Chief who shoved her firmly into a seat – niceties could be observed once clear of the combat zone. The Chief then reached down and he hauled Hal up into the helicopter followed by Shadow who quickly grabbed hold of a second H&K G36G and took post at the open port door. The Chief did the same as he contacted Scorpion.

"Pilot, crewman – team aboard; clear to depart!"

"Acknowledged!" Scorpion responded as she firewalled the engines and pulled up on the collective, pushing forwards the cyclic.

Twilight rapidly accelerated forwards and upwards, gathering speed and quickly passing one hundred knots. Scorpion was very pleased to be moving skyward; a helicopter's transition from the hover to forward flight was its most dangerous when in a combat zone. Once clear of the ground, Scorpion altered course to the west and within minutes the sound of turbines and churning rotors vanished from the area.

The Chief closed both side doors and everybody settled into their seats for the ride to safety.

MI5 Safehouse

Scorpion set *Twilight* down behind some trees to one side of the Safehouse and dropped off Chloe and Becky – Hal, Scorpion, and the Chief still had a lot of work to do.

When Shadow entered the otherwise empty Safehouse, she sat Becky down on a couch in the living room. Shadow pulled off her mask and smiled down at the youngster.

"I'm going to get cleaned up and changed, then I'll sort you out, okay?"

Chloe turned and she headed for her room but before she could move more than a foot, she felt a small hand inside her own. Chloe looked down and she saw the scared look.

"Let's go, Peanut."

In the bedroom, she placed Becky on the bed and moved towards the bathroom. Becky was slipping off the bed before Chloe had made it to the door, just a few feet away.

"Can't I shower in peace?"

The look Chloe received, said 'no'. Luckily, the bathroom had both a bath *and* a separate shower, so Chloe ran a bath for Becky – there were no bubbles, so soap would have to do. While the water was running, Chloe pushed Becky back into the bedroom.

"Get undressed and I'll dump you in the bath."

Becky quickly began to shed her clothes. The little girl's face was covered in cuts and bruises, as well as mud, so Chloe should not have been all that surprised to find out that the child had many more which had previously been covered up by her clothing. As Becky revealed more and more skin, Chloe got angrier and angrier: almost every square-inch of the eight-year-old's body had a mark of some sort on it. Her neck, chest, stomach, legs, back, and her backside itself showed evidence of her having taken a beating, recently too. There were numerous cuts, some healed over. The poor girl had obviously been abused over her entire time as a trainee *Predator*.

Chloe's heart went out to the little girl as she was lowered gently into the hot water. Becky cried out as her fresher injuries touched the water and Chloe had never felt so horrible inside. How could *anybody* do such a thing to such a sweet little girl? Chloe so hoped that Vossen and his pals were having a really good time in hell and if she had her way, they would be gaining a colleague!

Once Becky was busy soaping herself, Chloe stripped off and dived into the shower. She was very glad of the water as it washed away the tears that she hoped Becky had not seen.

Meanwhile . . .

The A354 west of Tarrant Hinton

The girl was frozen.

Her clothing was soaked and the rain was unrelenting. She had never felt so cold. She had no idea where she was going nor what she was going to do once she got there. She had nobody, she was alone. Who could she contact? Her mind was a muddle – she couldn't think straight. That little girl kept popping into her mind alongside Jamie. Both were at risk. The little girl meant nothing to Shannon - but the little girl had killed for her; she was obviously a *Predator*, so she deserved to live, to survive. Only, Shannon would have to survive first and then find help before she could return to help that little girl – and rescue Jamie.

Shannon shivered as a gust of wind blew *through* her clothing. In seven weeks, she would be fourteen-years-old – but right at that moment, she was beginning to think that she would not live that long, and real tears of both fear and failure joined the torrent of rain which flooded across her face. Then she paused and her *Predator* training came back to the fore as she heard a deadly sound – an approaching helicopter.

The girl dove into the mud beside a hedge which ran alongside the road.

..._...

"Hit Girl, I have a heat signature, a mile ahead of you – it's hiding behind a hedge to your right," Scorpion radioed.

"Copy that, Scorpion, thanks," Hit Girl replied.

The five-vehicle convoy was headed east at speed towards the Scorpio Satellite Site A. Hit Girl was in the front passenger seat of the leading vehicle while Kick-Ass was driving. Behind her sat Psyche, Stripe, and Rigour. In the vehicle behind, Jackal drove with Foxtail beside her. In the rear seat were three very eager young girls: Prowl, Polaris, and Glide. The rear vehicle had Drift at the wheel with Nemesis beside him. In the rear seat were Fury, and La Terreaur.

The fourth vehicle: *Cyclone*, followed the three Range Rover Sentinels with Q at the wheel and Hal in the rear with her equipment. The intelligence obtained by Hal had also included access to certain systems at Site A. *Synthesis* were busy hacking in at that moment and passing across whatever they found to Hal.

The fifth vehicle was the tail-end-Charlie and it was being driven by Crimson with Astute in the seat beside her.

Scorpion kept the heat signature visible as the convoy closed. Her immediate job was to prevent any ambush on the combined *Fusion/Vengeance* attack force.

"Target is sixty yards on the right," Scorpion radioed.

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The convoy slowed and stopped as the vehicles took up tactical positions – the two rear-most Sentinels guarding the Command Van. Hit Girl climbed out of the Sentinel, her SIG Sauer MPX-K raised ahead of her. Kick-Ass covered her with an identical weapon. Hit Girl leapt over a wooden five-bar gate and quickly levelled her weapon at the dark shape huddled under the hedge. With a slight movement of her finger, a dazzling light illuminated the target.

"Hi, there, my name is Hit Girl – you would not, by any chance, be called, Stormtide?"

Stormtide raised her hand against the dazzling light, temporarily blinded. Her senses and training ordered her to react, but the electronically synthesised voice had scared her and the young girl had nothing left to resist with. Throughout her training, she had been told that one day, Hit Girl may come for her life. That day had come and she was going to die without ever seeing Jamie again.

"I am Stormtide – are you here to kill me?"

Hit Girl laughed.

"No, I came to rescue you. There are is somebody in particular who is desperate to see you."

"Shannon!"

Shannon's head came up and she turned toward the voice.

"Oh, my God – I never thought the day would come," Patrick Millar said as he emerged from the rain and he laid eyes on his daughter properly for the first time in five years.

"Daddy?"

It had been many years, but she still recognised her father's voice. The thirteen-year-old girl broke down and she sobbed as her father hugged her tightly. Nemesis came over and she helped the sobbing, shivering girl into the waiting Range Rover. But Stormtide stopped and she turned to Hit Girl.

"You gotta help him – he is alone; please."

"Help who?"

"Rage – they're gonna kill him."

*This storyline continues in **Chapter 20: Jamie of Predator** as well as simultaneously in **Chapter 23: LV-426 of Vengeance** and **Chapter 327: Scorpio Satellite Site A of Forsaken**.*

***Chapter 327*: Scorpio Satellite Site A**

That evening
Tuesday, September 13th

Attack Force 1

Scorpion was flying low, very low!

The three-ton helicopter was flying at what seemed like only feet above the ground as she came in from the west without lights. Scorpion was making use of her NVGs and a Forward Looking Infra-Red (FLIR) turret to see where she was flying. The flight was relatively short and very soon, Scorpion held up two fingers, indicating two minutes.

"Stand by to deploy!" Scorpion radioed.

A very fast two minutes later, *Twilight* flared and accelerated upwards forty or so feet before she came into the hover about two feet off the flat roof of the main house. The side doors were both locked back and the six-person team jumped off the helicopter – three to port and three to starboard - before they crouched down facing outwards, as the helicopter dipped forwards and rapidly increased speed. The noise coming from the twin 714-shp engines was deafening and the down-blast from the 10.8-meter, four-bladed main rotor was almost incapacitating.

Kick-Ass, along with his team: Psyche and Foxtail, prepared their weapons. On the opposite side of the landing zone, Hit Girl with her team: Jackal and Stripe, followed suit.

Attack Force 2

Over to the south, Crimson with her team: Polaris, Rigour, and La Terreur, approached the main building.

Less than fifty yards ahead of them, they could see their target. The building was lit up and the occupants did not appear to be expecting an attack. The approaching team knew otherwise. While *Twilight* was fitted with silencers for her turbines, there was no hiding the sound of the rotor blades; the building's occupants *must* have heard the helicopter.

The team paused to check over their weapons and equipment before they moved onwards, towards the house.

Attack Force 3

Moving in from the west, below *Twilight's* flightpath, Drift's team appropriated the downdraught and noise from the helicopter's approach to cover their dash across the open gravel-covered area towards the main entrance to the house.

Above Drift, Nemesis, Prowl, and Glide, there was the sound of weapons' fire. Some of the weapons' fire was automatic, but some were single shots. Bright flashes could be observed coming from some of the upper windows and they could all hear the 'crump' of flashbang grenades being used high above them.

The team headed directly for the main door in an arrow formation. Nemesis had the point position, with Prowl behind and to her left. Drift was behind and to her right with Glide behind and to his right. Each member had a SIG Sauer MPX-K raised to their shoulder covering their own arc of advance. Not surprisingly, when they reached the main door, they found that it was closed and locked! Drift gave the large, wooden, blue-painted, double doors a good kick in the centre and they burst open. He moved forwards into a small entrance hall where there was another set of much heavier wooden doors. Again, they were closed and locked.

Nemesis applied a C4 demolition charge to the centre region of the two doors and then inserted a detonator. She yanked out the initiating tab then ran back outside waving everybody to take cover. The explosion when it came, was loud and bits of wood, large and small, flew out past the sheltering vigilantes and several windows shattered. There were quite a few unhappy sounding shouts and screams coming from inside the building. For good measure, Nemesis threw in a pair of flashbangs, both of which exploded a few seconds later with a blindingly bright flash and a devastatingly loud bang, as expected.

Under the cover of copious amounts of dislodged dust and plaster, the team entered the main building.

Attack Force 2

Ground Floor, South End

The six-foot-tall, six-paned, window disintegrated as Crimson fired off three breaching rounds into the wooden frame.

The crimson-clad vigilante stood to one side as Polaris, Rigour, and La Terreur burst through the wreckage, kicking what was left out of their way. They landed in a large, high-ceilinged room which was laid out as a Library. Books towered above the three girls, otherwise, apart from some tables and chairs, the room was devoid of human presence. Without words, Rigour ran to the interior set of tall double doors. She paused beside them, listening for what might be going on, on the other side. Polaris and La Terreur held position a few feet away, covering the closed doors.

"I have footsteps!" Rigour warned as she scrambled backwards, away from the doors. "And a weapon being cocked!"

Automatic gunfire ripped out, shredding the wooden doors, the remains of which were kicked out of the door frame as three men burst in, shredding the shelves with bullets. They looked around, taking in the devastated window and the otherwise empty library.

"They must have jumped back out the window," one of the men stated.

"Or it was a diversion," another commented.

"You talk so much shit, the both of you," the third one growled as he studied the tables and chairs.

Almost without warning, one of the tables leapt into the air and something crimson leapt into the men's view.

"You should listen to your pal, next time," Crimson suggested as she gunned down all three men.

"Not that there's gonna be a next time," Polaris growled as she put a bullet into one of the men who was still twitching.

Attack Force 1

Second Floor

The helicopter had dropped them off onto the flat roof of the main building just as the other teams were beginning their coordinated assaults.

Kick-Ass and Psyche had gone first, sliding down the old lead tiles to the balustrade below. Hit Girl and Foxtail followed, both pairs taking up positions beside a window. Jackal and Stripe kept watch from the rooftop as their colleagues smashed open windows and threw in flashbang grenades before standing back and avoiding the flying glass and wood splinters.

Jackal joined up with Hit Girl and Foxtail while Stripe joined Kick-Ass and Psyche. Each team took a window and dived through into what appeared to be staff quarters. Naturally, the majority of the staff were elsewhere in the house which meant very few pickings. Stripe, it appeared, was very angry with anybody who was involved with the mistreatment of *Predators* – and he showed it! The first person he came across was barely able to move a muscle before Stripe flipped the woman over and smashed her head against a door frame, leaving fresh blood on the gloss paintwork. A quick check showed that the woman had been armed with a pistol, despite her uniform which indicated that she was a maid.

"Hope that's not how you treat *all* your girlfriends, Stripe," Psyche commented as she headed further down the corridor.

Attack Force 3

Ground Floor, West Side

As Nemesis' boots crunched through the broken glass, wood chips, and discarded plaster, she could see at least three dead bodies and several live ones.

The live ones squirmed with their hands over their ears; each was rapidly put out of their misery with single shots to the head. The team found themselves standing in a large, high-ceilinged entrance hall. There was an enormous fireplace, over to the right and three exits; a large wooden door to the left, with a smaller wooden one about six feet past it, and a large open archway in the far right corner just beyond the fireplace. The floor beneath their feet was wood and the walls were covered in a dark wood panelling. Gunfire could be heard from beyond the archway. The smaller door over to the left was open, so Glide and Prowl moved over to cover the potential threat sources of the doorway and the archway.

Drift and Nemesis made for the larger wooden door and Drift kicked it open for Nemesis to dive inside. She came up and scanned the room which had a large snooker table in the centre and comfortable seating around the walls. It had the same high ceiling and several large floor-to-ceiling windows. Nemesis and Drift proceeded down the room in tandem checking each nook and cranny. At the far end of the room there was a single door in the right-hand corner – it was opening as they watched. The muzzle and barrel of a pistol appeared, followed by a head.

Nemesis then splattered that very same head over the tastefully painted wall with a single bullet.

Attack Force 2

Ground Floor, South End

Crimson and Polaris moved out of the library.

Echoing around the house and mostly coming from upstairs, they could hear shouts, screams, and gunshots, with the occasional crash of a flashbang or the larger bang of an explosive hand grenade. As Rigour and La Terreur joined them, they found themselves in a long room with the same high ceiling and dark wood panelling along the walls. At the near end, beside them, were two large glass doors which led outside. Leading off each side of the room were two pairs of doors, arranged opposite each other. They had just come through one of those doorways. Another was a few feet away opposite them, with the other pair right down the far end. Past those doors, there was another doorway and over to the right, there was a large wooden staircase sweeping upwards and turning to the left. Over to the far left corner, there was a large open archway.

From their current position, they were unable to see if the further pair of doors were open or closed. The door directly ahead of them was closed – well, it was until Crimson kicked open the doors and Polaris lobbed a hand grenade into the room before jumping back away from the doorway. The team awaited the explosion with baited breath. Just before the explosion, they heard screams and yells which were rapidly cut short as the grenade exploded with a deafening crash. The explosion was followed by a large crashing sound and a cloud of dust and plaster exploded out of the door. Once the majority of the dust had died down, Polaris and Rigour dived through the damaged doors and swept into the room. They found two dead bodies which had *not* been killed by the grenade directly. In the centre of the room, there was originally a large crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling but the grenade must have dislodged it and the chandelier had crashed down on top of the two men. All of the windows had been blown out, with no glass remaining in the frames. Sections of wood panelling had also come off the walls. Three men and a woman were dead.

As the team left the room and moved down the long room, they saw several shapes appear from the archway over to the left.

Attack Force 1

Second Floor

The building was extensive.

There were many rooms, cupboards, and dark spaces, all of which needed to be searched. It made the progress slow going, but they were *not* taking *any* chances.

"Oh, fuck!" Psyche commented as she found herself face to face with a Claymore mine. "Nobody move!"

Everybody froze as the ten-year-old followed the triggering wire to the detonator and then to a tripwire. With practised ease, Psyche disconnected the triggering wire and then released the tripwire.

"All clear!"

"Well done," Kick-Ass commented with a squeeze to his daughter's left shoulder.

"That was dangerous, leaving that there; any kid could have found it," Psyche commented.

"A kid did find it," Foxtail commented dryly.

"Ha, fucking ha!"

"Enough bickering!" Hit Girl growled. "You two *Predator* Princesses better get a move on – well done, Psyche!"

"Ha!" Psyche threw back at Foxtail as she strolled past.

Stripe just shrugged and followed Psyche.

"Please tell me, Kick-Ass. Was I ever *that* obnoxious?" Hit Girl asked.

"No, definitely not. . ."

"Good to know."

". . . You were way worse!"

Kick-Ass chuckled as he left a fuming Hit Girl standing alone in the corridor.

Twilight

As Scorpion flew over the main house in a wide orbit, keeping an eye open for trouble, her electronic warfare suite lit up.

"*Twilight* is defensive! I'm being locked up!"

Scorpion accelerated and climbed vertically, triggering off a dazzling array of flares and chaff into her wake. Her AN/AAR-57 electronic warfare suite indicated the direction of the threat and the heads-up-display in her helmet directed her towards an interdiction position from where she could counterattack her attacker. The target quickly came into sight: It was a Land Rover 120 fitted with a triple Javelin launcher in the flatbed.

The attached laser tracker was attempting to lock onto *Twilight*.

Attack Force 3

Ground Floor, West Side

Prowl and Glide went first with Nemesis following.

Crimson and La Terreaur kept a lookout, covering their fellow vigilantes' backs. They passed through the large open archway. There had just been a large explosion down the far end of a long hall, followed by gunshots. Attack Force 2 was expected from that direction but it would not do to take chances.

"Big Daddy!" came a call out of the semi-darkness and swirling smoke.

Nemesis smiled as she yelled back the response to the challenge.

"May the D'Amico's rot in hell!"

Out of the smoke, came the very recognisable form of Polaris, followed by Rigour and Fury. Crimson was very pleased to see her friends and all in one piece and uninjured, too. The *Predators* tapped fists all round – they were too professional to go in for hugs during combat, even if that was what they would have preferred.

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Together, the two teams kicked down the two remaining double sets of doors to clear what turned out to be empty rooms. That left a single door which was locked.

"I'll take care of this," Glide commented as she produced a quarter block of C4 and a compact detonator from her utility belt.

With considerable care and skill, she attached the C4 to the door and then she added the detonator. She tugged the short plastic strip which initiated the timed detonation sequence and she stepped back smartly, waving everybody into cover. A few seconds later there was a small 'crump' as the lock on the door was vaporised. Nemesis waved Prowl and Glide forward into what turned out to be a private study.

"Polaris, crank in one of Q's 'hack-me-quick' devices into that computer," Crimson directed.

The young girl dug a small USB device out of her utility belt and she inserted it into a slimline computer which sat on the desk.

"Q, you getting anything?" Polaris radioed.

"Connecting now, Polaris . . . looking good; downloading is under way."

"Copy that – we got some killin' to do!" Polaris replied.

Twilight

The Javelin operator moved his weapon system around to keep the targeting laser locked on to *Twilight*.

But Scorpion was having none of it and before he could fire, Scorpion triggered off a pair of CRV7 2.75-inch unguided rockets, one from each pod and they flew in his direction at over 1,000 metres per second.

Both 4.5-kg high-explosive warheads detonated on impact and the man, plus his missiles vanished in a spreading cloud of flame while *Twilight* flew through over the wreckage unscathed. Scorpion took up a new orbit, constantly altering the orbit to confuse any watchers. There had not been any intelligence to point towards surface-to-air weapons, but Scorpion had been ready and it also confirmed that Fraser had his fingers in some serious pies.

High above *Twilight*, the EAGLE-1 UAV orbited, its sensors searching for trouble.

Attack Force 1

Second Floor

Foxtail was on point and she stopped when she heard a noise over to her right.

She raised her left hand which was clenched into a fist. Those following her stopped and took up covering positions. Foxtail indicated hearing a noise from beyond a closed door to the right. The door actually turned out to be a set of double doors and Foxtail kicked them open, while Psyche covered her friend with her weapon. Stripe threw in a flashbang and Hit Girl followed close behind with Kick-Ass and Jackal, almost immediately after the detonation. Four men were in the room and each was shot, in rapid succession, with a three-round burst.

Hit Girl's ears perked up as she recognised the sound of a submachine gun being cocked, closely followed by an identical sound. Both came from the other side of the false wall beside them.

"Get the fuck down!" Hit Girl growled loudly and everybody dove the floor just as the wall beside them was very quickly turned into Swiss cheese by around sixty 5.56-millimetre bullets.

The moment the bullets stopped, Kick-Ass jumped up and he smashed through what was left of the wall. Hit Girl followed behind and she calmly gunned down the two men who had turned the wall into Swiss cheese. A man jumped up from a far corner of the room and he fired off several shots from a pistol into Hit Girl's chest armour. The man, in turn, was almost cut in half and shredded as Psyche emptied an entire magazine into his torso.

"You okay?" she asked Hit Girl.

"Thanks, Psyche – but that was a little over the top."

"He earned every bloody bullet!"

"Nobody shoots Hit Girl when I'm about . . . and survives," Psyche growled.

"I love you, too, honey!" Hit Girl chuckled.

Primary Rendezvous Point

Half a mile to the east

The Primary Rendezvous Point (RV) was hidden from the main house in a copse of trees.

All the vehicles were laagered together with the Command Van, *Cyclone*, as the focus. The RV was being guarded by Astute and his daughter, Stormtide. Mindy being Mindy, she had brought spare clothing for Shannon and Jamie, just in case. As soon as they had parked up at the RV and the teams had moved off to attack the main house, Shannon had unwrapped herself from the thick blanket which was keeping her warm. While her father stood guard, she had stripped off her wet clothing and towelled herself dry. The clothing which Hit Girl had handed her was a very good fit. There had been knickers, a sports bra, jeans, and a T-shirt, plus socks, a pair of boots, and a rain jacket. Once fully dressed, she opened the back door of the Range Rover Sentinel and slipped outside into the rain, pulling up the hood of the jacket.

"You know how to use one of these?" her father asked as he passed over a SIG Sauer MPX-K.

Shannon glared at her father as she removed the magazine before expertly clearing the weapon and then returning the magazine into place and cocking the weapon. Patrick nodded his approval but Shannon, despite her earlier happiness at being rescued from her life of hell and finding her father, just glared.

"Get this on, please, honey – I don't want to lose you again."

Shannon took the offered body armour and she strapped it on over the jacket with her father's help. He pulled the straps tight and made sure that it was secure.

"I hated you," she began. "I hated you for ages. When I was taken – I was only a block away from home – I was so scared. Then they took me to a place that could only be described as hell. A boy forced me to strip naked in front of him and within sight of other kids – boys and girls – he then made me chuck my clothing into a dumpster. I was forced to parade myself, stark naked, down corridor after corridor. I was sobbing, wishing that my Daddy would come to rescue me. Then they made me shower with a group of boys and they cut off my hair – my lovely hair was taken from me."

Patrick Millar grimaced. Shannon had loved her flowing hair which had been very long and thick. For her to lose it, at only nine-years-old would have been very hard for you – not to mention all the other degradations forced upon her.

"After two weeks, one of the bastard instructors explained to me why I was being treated so harshly. He said that it was because of my father. I was devastated to find out that my own father had been an *Urban Predator* instructor – I hated you from that moment on. I swore that if I ever saw you again . . . I swore that I would kill you. I blamed you for every injustice. I blamed you for every bad thing that happened to me. Then, after about a year, I began to think differently – I decided to give you a chance at explaining yourself. You had a family – you had me, you had my brother and sister; I could not understand how you could have betrayed me."

Patrick braced up, feeling very sad, but he did not react as his eldest daughter turned her weapon on him. He looked straight down the barrel.

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"When I helped bring about *Urban Predator*, it had a noble plan. When we recruited Lucy and Leo, they were the ultimate example of what we were doing. We were to take homeless kids with no future and we were going to give them a future. They were to be trained as assassins in Hit Girl's image. But then some dumb fuck decided to change that and about half of the First Intake were boys and girls who had been abducted from happy lives with families. Shannon – when I began to question what was happening, I was warned off. They transferred me – I accepted on condition that they left my family alone. I found out soon after I had left that you had been taken. I was naïve enough to not immediately consider that you had been taken by those bastards.

"When I tried to trace you, I kept hitting brick walls. That was when I knew that they had you. But what could I do – I was but one person against the sinister forces of the CIA. I did everything that I could to track you down. I came

across another CIA agent who had reason to hate Urban Predator. She was killed in Europe, back in May. Then I picked up your trail in Whitby. I saw that boy on the bridge, shooting at those CIA assholes. I tracked you both across the country, York, Nottingham, London. I was very impressed when you tortured those two women to get the location of your friend – yes, I was watching you. I tried to intervene with Jamie when they took him but I was out of position. Did you enjoy getting that tattoo? Must have hurt."

Shannon felt all the pent-up hate for her father vanish.

"That, was you?"

"It was."

"Yes, it hurt!"

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"I'm sorry, Daddy," Shannon said as she lowered the weapon.

"So am I, champ. I know you're not my little girl anymore but I'm real proud of how you've turned out and I know your Mom will be so happy to see you again."

"Does she know about what happened to me?"

"Yes, she does – that was not easy, telling her."

"Does she know that you've found me?"

"Not yet – we can call her once all this is over."

"Thank you, Daddy."

"Now, let's get back to protecting these vehicles or we'll *both* be answering to Hit Girl!"

Over to the Southwest

It was almost impossible to see the prone form as she lay absolutely still to one side of the field.

Her eyes and ears tracked everything that moved within a thousand yards. Beside her, she had an eight-inch screen relaying information from the UAV, high above her. She had preselected six locations for her perches. The current perch allowed her to cover the rearmost advances to the main house – which just happened to be the direction from which the main garrison would arrive. The UAV had identified the heat-blooms of six vehicles and over thirty bodies. Within another minute, they would parade before her and then she would start taking lives.

The Accuracy International AS50 sniper rifle was among the top rifles in the world and used by the best in the world. The weapon held five rounds and could snap off a full magazine in around 1.6 seconds. For the night, Leon had a heavy load of twenty magazines in her pack. Each magazine held five .50-calibre BMG rounds. She had a selection of rounds available: standard ball, tracer, armour-piercing, and incendiary. The weapon could disable a vehicle with just a single round, just as it could tear apart a human being.

Leon smiled as she controlled her breathing, lining up her sights and mentally ordering her targets. Her first round was to be armour-piercing. She adjusted her sights to take into account the wind and the rain and then settled the aiming reticule on her first target, moments later, she squeezed the trigger.

Scorpio Garrison Commander

Nobody had expected the attack that evening.

The intelligence had, however, expected the attack within a few days. Site B had been attacked only a little over an hour before with light casualties. Suddenly the main house had been assaulted from teams on the ground and from the air. Devastating firepower was being used to counter Scorpio's heavier weapons, such as the Javelin battery – which was being rapidly replaced. His men had been preparing for the upcoming attack, but it had taken them time to ready themselves and the intention had been to move out and protect Site B. Then the attack had begun and contact

with security staff at the main house had ceased.

The commander had watched the main house through a night-scope and through the rain, he had seen the flashes of pyrotechnics. He had also heard the steady beat of rotor blades above them. The helicopter was obviously heavily armed as the Javelin battery had discovered to its cost. The Boss was not happy and he was headed down from his house three miles away, to take personal control of the situation. Nobody had any idea, yet, how many losses they had taken, nor for that matter, who the enemy actually was. His intention was to. . .

The armoured 4x4 in which he rode was shaken as something struck the engine compartment and then the vehicle ground to a halt. The driver tried to restart the engine but while the starter turned for a second, it stopped and refused to turn again. Smoke crawled out from under the bonnet and . . . the heads of both the driver and the front passenger exploded a milli-second apart, showering the other occupants of the vehicle with blood, bone, and brain matter. The commander and the man beside him rapidly dived out of the vehicle and to the soggy, muddy, ground. The vehicle immediately behind had met the same fate and the engine was smoking.

"Get the fuck out of the vehicles!" he ordered over the radio and his men quickly dived to the ground.

There was a resounding clang as something struck the next vehicle along – a sniper!

Attack Force 2: Crimson, Polaris, Rigour, Fury

Attack Force 3: Drift, Nemesis, Prowl, Glide, La Terreaur

Ground Floor

The combined teams moved out with Polaris and Prowl on point.

They passed through the main entrance hall and then headed down a corridor. The corridor was about twenty yards long and had four doors and an archway leading from it, down near the end of the corridor and to the right. Rooms were cleared they were passed – they were nothing special, mainly store rooms. No opposition was found in any of the rooms giving everybody a short but much appreciated, breather. At the end of the corridor were the kitchens. They did not take long to clear as they were relatively open-plan.

Once the kitchens had been cleared, the combined teams moved through the archway. Behind the main house were several buildings that were attached to the main building by a long corridor that ran beside a laundry and some store rooms. The corridor was about eighty yards in length and ended at two doorways, one to the right and one directly in front.

At that point, the two teams split up, with Crimson and her team headed to the right while Drift took his team straight ahead.

Attack Force 3

Nemesis pulled open the door and Prowl moved into a large room that was obviously used for changing and there were showers off to the left. The security personnel who used the place were either dead or elsewhere in the facility. Glide and La Terreaur cleared the showers before the team moved on.

Prowl was on point as she passed through an archway. Out of nowhere, she was attacked from her right by a man armed with a pistol and a combat machete. She expertly blocked the man's weapon with her assault rifle and she tried to push him back but his machete came down again. Prowl kicked out and broke the man's left knee, which stopped his attack and he fell to the floor screaming. Glide was close behind and she shot the screaming man in the head with a single bullet. The team was no much warier of advancing. The security force had apparently sorted itself out and were now using ambush tactics to improve their chances against their attackers.

Prowl listened for even the minutest sound that came from around her and the team. Then, a dozen yards ahead, she was ready and she raised her left hand in a clenched fist to warn everybody. The team stopped and Prowl deployed the Bagh Naka embedded into her left gauntlet. The razor sharp curved claws were lethal. With her right hand, she passed her assault rifle behind her to Glide and pulled out her six-inch combat knife. Somebody was here, almost directly in front of her. With a nod from Nemesis, indicating that she was covered from behind, Prowl moved forwards, sensing her surroundings. There was movement in the darkness and as she was attacked, she pirouetted around and seized hold of the attacker's neck with her left gauntlet, sinking the claws into the soft skin and ripping open the carotid artery. The attacker was a woman but Prowl paid no heed as she sank the blade of her knife into the bitch's

chest, severing her heart in two. The woman was all but dead as she sank silently to the floor. Prowl pulled out the blood-soaked blade and triggered her equally bloody claws to retract.

La Terreur had swept up the combat machete from the previous kill and she ran forwards, stabbing into the darkness just beyond Prowl. The young girl had caught a movement and attacked, knowing that there was no time to alert Prowl, nor time for her to react. La Terreur pushed her attack hard, forcing the attacker backwards until she hit the wall. The French Predator could see fear in her eyes as she knew that death was coming.

"Mourir comme l'écume que vous êtes et puis pourrir dans l'enfer pour toute l'éternité," she hissed as the woman slumped to the floor.

"What was that?" Prowl asked.

"Die like the scum you are and then rot in hell for all eternity – or something like that," Q reported from the command van.

"Exactly," La Terreur offered coldly as she wiped off the combat machete on the dead woman's clothing.

"Damn – you are cold!" Glide commented.

Attack Force 2

After leaving the other team, Polaris took point and led her team into the unknown.

They passed through a set of double doors which opened up into a large open area. *Twilight* could be heard orbiting almost directly above. It was comforting to know that the helicopter was there in close support. Rigour and Fury went from room to room, finding nothing. Crimson kept watch on their backs while Polaris kept watch on an opening at the far left corner of the open area. Once the four rooms had been cleared, Crimson and Polaris peered down the next corridor which had several doors leading from it. The corridor was not straight and it had a slight turn to the right about twenty yards down, so they could not see what was at the far end of the corridor.

Slowly and stealthily, Polaris and Fury moved forwards, towards the first door on the left while Rigour kept watch down the corridor. Polaris kicked open the door and Fury dived in rolling up to one knee and . . . Fury paused as she felt something against the side of her head.

It was the barrel of an assault rifle.

Fury considered the odds of survival and she came up with some pretty poor numbers.

Attack Force 3

Ground Floor

Prowl was back on point – she enjoyed being the first to spot danger.

She just ignored the fact that she could also be the first to enter into contact with an unknown enemy at any moment. Prowl had led the team through into a large room which looked to be a recreational facility for those on guard duty. As would be expected during an attack, it was empty, with half-eaten sandwiches and pizzas scattered on tables along with abandoned cups of coffee. With Glide and Nemesis providing direct cover, Prowl reached for the door handle of the opposite door leading out of the room. The door suddenly burst open and a small form rolled into the room before coming up ready to engage.

Prowl placed the muzzle of her assault rifle against the invader's temple and she squeezed the trigger.

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The trigger of the MPX assault rifle required a pressure of 4.25-pounds of pressure to break and then initiate the sequence which resulted in a bullet exiting the muzzle and spinning towards its target.

As Prowl's finger tightened on the trigger, she registered a voice calling out.

"Prowl, stand down, for the love of God!"

At 4.1-pounds of increasing pressure, Prowl released the trigger and she looked up at Nemesis, then down at her intended victim. Prowl's brain registered the compact combat suit worn by Fury and she suddenly felt a chill shoot up her backbone.

"Fuck!" the nine-year-old growled as she held out a hand to Fury.

The hand was gratefully taken and Fury stood up before nodding at her friend. Nemesis breathed a huge sigh of relief as she got back to the plan.

"Let's go – we have a corridor to clear!"

Attack Force 2 & 3

Ground Floor

Both teams moved down the corridor.

As they passed each doorway, a pair of vigilantes cleared each room. After four rooms were cleared, with no gunmen or anybody else found, they all started to get a little bit concerned. What might be waiting for them around the bend in the corridor?

"Anybody got any flashbangs or grenades?" Nemesis asked.

"Fresh out," Drift replied.

"Well, we'll just have to use good old-fashioned brawn and courage," Crimson suggested.

..._...

A few minutes later, Nemesis was leaning against the wall at the bend in the corridor and she held a mirror in her hand. She gently eased it out past the bend and the far end of the corridor came into view. Two doors were visible, one on either side of the corridor, about fifteen feet away – that was the good news. As Nemesis studied the image, she could make out the shape of a man crouching in each doorway. Further down, past the two doors, right at the end of the corridor was a set of double doors and in front of the doors were another four gunmen. All had large weapons in evidence, which were probably assault rifles. Nemesis relayed everything that she saw back to the two teams who were awaiting the assault down the corridor.

Polaris and Prowl went first, crawling into position and sending automatic gunfire down the corridor to keep the gunmen's heads down. Behind them, Glide and La Terreaur took aimed shots at the gunmen in the doorways, dropping both within seconds. The four remaining gunmen sent bursts of automatic fire back down the corridor while avoiding the accurate gunfire of Polaris and Prowl. Three men fell before the fourth pushed through the double doors at the far end of the corridor and vanished.

Crimson and Drift ran forwards, kicking in the doors to the final rooms and clearing both. Nemesis and Polaris pushed through the double doors to find themselves under sustained gunfire from the escaping gunman. They both dived to the floor before Polaris outflanked the man and while his attentions were on Nemesis, she shot him in the head.

"Command, Nemesis! Ground floor clear!"

The story continues in Chapter 21: A Bonus Twist of Predator.

***Chapter 328*: So Many Changes**

Author's Note: *This is the continuation of the storyline from Chapter 21: A Bonus Twist of Predator as well as of Chapter 23: LV-426 of Vengeance.*

***That night
Tuesday, September 13th***

Chicago, USA

Sky News Excerpt

". . . Reports of black helicopters flying over the West Country, today, were compounded by additional reports of armed helicopters operating, both in the West Country and in the South, around the Southampton Container Terminal. Eye-witnesses in Southampton reported the presence of a Royal Navy Mk6 Seaking helicopter that was operating a machine gun over marshland, just to the south of the terminal. A representative from the Ministry of Defence, speaking on behalf of the Admiralty, advised that the Royal Navy 'no longer operates the Seaking Mk6 operationally', so it could not have been one of their helicopters . . ."

Marcus growled.

"I hear things like that and I see purple!"

"Just Mindy letting off some steam," Megan suggested.

"Has Mom done something bad?" Anne-Marie asked.

"One of these days, the Brits are going to throw her into the Tower of London and throw away the key!" Marcus muttered dryly.

"Let the girl have some fun!" Paige offered coolly.

"At least she doesn't seem to have blown anything up," Danny said.

"Yet!" Marcus growled.

MI5 Safehouse

Blandford Forum, England

Joshua discovered that he had a *lot* to get his head around by the time he returned to the Safehouse.

He had been aware that Chloe had managed to get herself into a solo action chasing after a young *Predator*. He was also very concerned as to her motivations behind that chase. Chloe had returned to the Safehouse just fifteen minutes after Joshua. She was a mess – there was no other way to put it. Between the face paint, the gun smoke, and the general dirt, he barely recognised his girlfriend. Standing beside Chloe, as she had entered the living room, had been a similarly dirty little girl. Chloe had hugged Joshua for what seemed ages until they had both heard somebody clearing their throat in a rather annoyed fashion.

Chloe looked down to find a very disapproving eight-year-old and she grinned.

"Joshua, please meet Rebecca. Peanut, please meet my boyfriend, Joshua."

"Hi, Rebecca," Joshua said as he crouched down to Becky's height.

"I prefer: Becky."

"I prefer: Josh."

Becky smiled.

"Hi, Josh."

"Hi, Becky. Not: Peanut?"

"Becky. Only Chloe is allowed to call me that."

Chloe gave Joshua her best smug expression.

"Okay, I can respect that," Joshua replied before he gave Chloe a very pointed look. "May I speak with you?"

Chloe nodded with a resigned expression on her face and she followed her boyfriend towards the bedroom which they shared. Joshua noticed Becky following.

"Alone!" he said pointedly and Becky nodded with some reluctance.

..._...

Joshua closed the bedroom door behind them both before turning to Chloe.

"You've become attached to that girl, am I right?"

"Yes – I have become very attached," Chloe replied honestly.

"I want to be sure that you are doing this for the right reasons, Chloe. Rebecca is not a replacement for our baby."

"No, Joshua, Rebecca is not a replacement for our baby. Nothing can ever replace our baby. Yes, I feel a loss inside of me – both physically and psychologically. I miss having our baby growing inside of me. I miss dreaming of how we might bring up our child. Yes, I want to take care of Rebecca – the little girl has been through a lot. I'm getting close to her because I see some of myself in her. I am not doing it just because I lost my baby a few days ago."

Chloe was bristling for a fight and her expression dared Joshua to speak out of turn. But he knew his Chloe; he knew her very well. He knew that while she was goading him, he had been goading her to find out how Chloe was really feeling inside. He had his answer.

"I'm behind you, Chloe," he stated, simply.

Chloe hugged him tightly.

"Are you okay? Any injuries?"

"A few cuts, many bruises – and a flesh wound from a bullet, otherwise, I'm fine – just very sore; I don't think I'm ready for all this physical shit yet. Lucky Mindy sent me on an easy mission, huh?"

"You two finished, or are you both about to engage in sexual intercourse."

Joshua stared down at the little girl who had snuck into the bedroom without either of them noticing.

"Peanut – bath – now!" a red-faced Chloe ordered and the cheeky little eight-year-old saluted with a broad grin.

"Aye, aye, Shadow!"

Joshua laughed as the little girl vanished into the bathroom for her second bath that day.

"You need a bath, too, Shadow – you stink!" Joshua chuckled as he took in the face paint and other crap on his girlfriend's body. "We can check out your wounds, too."

"How about you help me with Becky – maybe wash her hair?" Chloe suggested.

Joshua knew that there was more to Chloe's simple suggestion but he let that slide.

"You okay with that, Peanut?" Chloe asked as a mostly naked Becky appeared at the bathroom door.

"You'll get no complaints from me – I *assume* he's seen a girl naked before."

"Congratulations, Chloe; you've found a total nutcase – but I suppose it takes a nut to find a nut!" Joshua complained

as Chloe grinned sheepishly.

..._...

Once Chloe had run the bath for Becky – she had added copious amounts of bubbles (Spook had managed to obtain some urgent shopping to replace that which had been destroyed when the Sentinel had been blown up) which Becky was happily playing with – she stripped off and dived into the shower. Joshua's expression while Becky had climbed into the bath had turned very dark indeed. He had taken in all the cuts and bruises which occupied most of the girl's small body. He looked over at Chloe who returned his dark look as she carefully cleaned her leg wound.

"From this moment on, Becky, you will always be safe," Joshua said in a calm tone as he began to wash the little girl's long brown hair.

Nobody spoke much as Chloe and Becky washed. After Joshua, had finished with Becky's hair, he started work on her face which was covered in God only knew what.

"Oh, oh, I made a clean spot here; now I've done it. Guess I'll have to do the whole thing!"

He soaped a washcloth and very gently he began to clean her face, starting from her forehead and working down each side.

"Hard to believe there's a little girl under all this! A pretty one, too."

Becky giggled and she smiled up at Joshua for a moment, before her hand slapped a good amount of bubbles onto his face. Becky laughed out loud as Joshua spluttered – Chloe caught the exchange and she laughed too as she worked at cleaning the gunk off her own face. Joshua growled as he came across a fresh wound on Becky's forehead, not to mention the vivid bruise on the side of her face.

"That looks like it hurts."

"Not really," Becky replied bravely. "It's just a graze; I've had worse."

Joshua's expression was grim, but he let her comments pass. After another few minutes, Joshua held out a towel for the much cleaner Becky, who stood up and allowed Joshua to wrap the towel tightly around her body. He lifted the little girl out of the bath and she wrapped both arms around his neck before bursting into tears.

..._...

Joshua carried the eight-year-old through to the bedroom and he sat down on the bed, hugging the girl tightly.

"What's wrong, sweetie?"

"I'm just glad it's all over . . . it is over, right?" Becky asked.

"It is, sweetie. You will never need to experience anything bad, ever again," Joshua said soothingly as Chloe joined them, wrapped in a towel.

"You will never be alone, Peanut – no matter what you choose," said as she joined the hug.

"Can I stay with you two?"

"If that is what you want, then we will do everything we can to make that happen, sweetie," Chloe offered as Joshua nodded. "You ready to go meet everybody?"

Becky looked up at Chloe and the eight-year-old rolled her eyes.

"Like this? I'd rather get dressed first," she suggested with a smile.

Mindy was observing her teams as they all unwound and cleaned themselves up after the intensive combat mission.

There had been a rotation of sorts as combat suits were removed and weapons were cleared, then people drifted off to the bathrooms to shower or take baths. Everybody was tired, but they all had tasks to perform before they could settle down and rest.

"Fucking *Predators!*" Cassie growled as she stormed out of one of the bathrooms, her T-shirt very wet. She looked over at Mindy. "Harper thought it a good idea to save time by sharing a bath with Electra and Abigail – not one of her best ideas! Naomi and Kaitlin aren't exactly helping, neither."

Mindy laughed, glad that there was some humour drifting around – even if it was dark humour, or just generally being an ass. Mindy was one of the last to go and shower, along with Dave – they always checked on her underlings first. After the refreshing shower, she returned to the living room. Mindy was concerned about her two senior Lieutenants. Chloe had suffered a devastating blow, only days previously. In turn, Mindy had offered her the easiest mission possible, knowing that Shadow would not willingly restrict herself to a non-combat operation. Mindy had caught sight of the little girl as Chloe had brought her in. Mindy had also seen Joshua's expression and Mindy knew that Chloe and Joshua would be having a serious heart-to-heart.

Mindy smiled as Chloe came out of the bedroom, followed by the little girl – now dressed in brand new, clean clothing – and Joshua. They steered directly for Mindy and also Dave who had appeared from his shower.

..._...

"Dave, Mindy – please meet Rebecca Wren; she prefers to be called Becky."

"Hello, Becky," Dave said with a reassuring grin.

"Hi, Becky," Mindy added.

"Becky, this is Dave and Mindy."

Becky studied Dave and Mindy for a few moments before she looked up at Chloe and waved the taller girl down to her own height.

"Is it safe to talk about 'you know what'?"

Chloe laughed.

"Yes, Peanut, it is."

Becky looked back up at Dave and then at Mindy.

"You are very beautiful, Mindy, so you must be Hit Girl," Mindy blushed as Becky looked over at Dave. "You are a handsome hunk, so you must be Kick-Ass."

Mindy looked over at Chloe who grinned.

"I like this girl!" Dave commented with his dorky grin.

"What makes you think that?" Mindy asked.

Becky rolled her eyes.

"Chloe said you were intelligent!" Becky huffed before she lectured Mindy. "If Chloe is Shadow, then Joshua has to be Jackal – I could then speculate that you are Hit Girl and that Dave is Kick-Ass."

"Speculate?" Mindy enquired.

"It means to theorise or . . ."

"I know what it means – I just never heard an eight-year-old use the word," Mindy cut in grumpily.

"Read it somewhere – I like to read."

Just then, Stephanie appeared in the living room, fresh from her own shower.

"Who's the half-pint?" she asked.

Becky looked at Stephanie strangely as she caught the accent.

"My name is Becky. Are you saying that I am short? You're not exactly perfect in that department."

Stephanie grinned.

"I'm sorry if I insulted you, Becky."

"No problem – err. . ."

"Stephanie, but you can call me, Steph."

"Stephanie is also one of our senior *Predators*," Mindy explained.

"Oh," Becky replied thoughtfully. "That figures – I've seen a photo of you before."

"Where?" Stephanie asked, intrigued.

"It was in the Senior Instructor's office – it was pinned to the back of his door and it was full of holes plus a couple of throwing knives. I don't think he liked you very much."

Chloe and Mindy burst out laughing while Stephanie just growled dangerously.

..._...

When Abigail came out from her shower, she stood facing Jamie.

Neither spoke for almost a full minute. Neither had had the opportunity to say much more than a brief 'hi' during the rescue. Then they both hugged and ignored the wolf-whistles from all those watching. Abigail tenderly touched the boy's bruised left cheek.

"A present from that bastard, Fraser."

"I'm really pleased that you are alive, Jamie."

"You, too, Abigail."

"You vanished and we feared the worst," Shannon added as she came over.

"Hi, Shannon," Abigail said, giving the older girl a big hug.

"Jamie, Abigail – please meet my father. . ."

"Patrick Millar – it's very good to meet you, Jamie."

Jamie shook the man's hand.

"Shannon said that you were an instructor."

"Yes, Jamie. I oversaw the induction of many kids into *Urban Predator*, including your friend, Saoirse. I cannot undo what I have done – I can only help to make things better."

"You have done, Mr Millar," Jamie replied with a smile.

..._...

"Hi, Rebecca," Shannon said as she sat down beside Becky.

"I prefer, Becky."

"Okay, Becky. I'm really pleased to see you. I never got a chance to really thank you."

"I did what I had to do," Becky replied simply.

"You helped my friend," Jamie added as he joined them. "I saw what they did to you. . ."

"You took part of that beating for me, Jamie – thanks," Becky cut in.

Jamie's face had turned pink and he muttered something unintelligible as his sister came over to see what was going on.

"Stephanie Walker – Psyche – well, well, I never thought that we would ever meet," Shannon said. "I've heard about you – you were infamous; you were always rebelling against 'the system'. I've since heard about what you've been doing and I owe you – every *Predator* owes you. You too, Saoirse – you are just as guilty as her. You both took down an organisation which I never thought could fold. You freed us all – both of you."

Both girls were feeling distinctly uncomfortable as Shannon preached.

"We had a *little* help," Stephanie replied meekly.

There was a growl from Mindy at that comment.

"A *lot* of help, actually," Stephanie corrected quickly.

"I find myself owing my life to Hit Girl," Shannon proclaimed as she turned to Mindy. "For many years, I had planned what I wanted to say to you, if I was ever unfortunate enough to find myself facing you in battle. I blamed you for my life. I blamed you for giving the CIA a template for them to force us all into. But then I mellowed and realised that you didn't choose to become Hit Girl, just as we never chose to become *Predators*. However, you lived up to your awesome reputation and you faced off against the CIA and you won. Ultimately, you supported Stephanie and Saoirse, giving them the resources to complete their mission."

It was Mindy's turn to feel distinctly uncomfortable inside. She hated praise, but she tolerated it nonetheless. However, worse was to come. Shannon stepped forwards and she hugged Mindy, before moving onto Stephanie, and then onto Saoirse. Shannon finally finished her love fest and she giggled.

"Wow – I just hugged Hit Girl without being killed," she said.

"Surprises the fuck outta me, some days. . ." Mindy mused.

"You're just a big softy, Mum," Stephanie laughed as she gave Mindy a hug around the waist.

"Shannon's no longer the little nine-year-old that I once knew," Patrick said wistfully. "It's going to take time to get to know her again."

"I'm still the same little girl, Daddy," Shannon replied.

"Only, she now has boobs – soft ones at that – and she has some lovely thick. . ." Jamie paused as he caught various glares, then he grinned. "I think I'll be talking about something else. . ."

Shannon was blushing furiously but she winked at Jamie nonetheless.

..._...

"So, what's Jamie like?" Saoirse asked Shannon with a smirk.

"An evil little shit who constantly winds me up and doesn't know when to quit!" Shannon exclaimed. "What's Stephanie like?"

"An evil little shit who constantly winds me up and doesn't know when to quit!" Saoirse laughed.

"Hey!" Stephanie and Jamie exclaimed together.

"You can tell they're brother and sister, can't you?" Joshua commented with a grin. "You've got your hands full, Mindy – you too, Dave."

"Oh, yeah!" Dave muttered with a grimace at his wife.

Jamie looked up at his sister who was grimacing and rubbing her right shoulder. Stephanie noticed the glance.

"Don't worry about it, Jamie – I'll tell you about it, later," she suggested.

"Okay. This is the happiest day of my life, Steph. Finding you. . ."

"I know. . ."

Mindy smiled happily as she saw the two siblings hugging and exchanging tears. Stephanie's greatest wish had come true – as had Jamie's. Mindy considered what the twins were going to say; they had no idea that Stephanie had a living brother, nor that he was about to be moving with them. Jamie was older than the twins – only by about six months – so he would be their big brother. Mindy hoped that both Daniel and Anne-Marie would welcome him and that they would get on well, together. It was still very early days and Mindy was aware of how Naomi and Kaitlin had drifted apart since their rescue. Cassie had explained that the two girls were often squabbling over the stupidest little things. Mindy's worry was that Stephanie and Jamie may be too independent to go back to being as close a brother and sister as they apparently had been; it had been so long since they had last been together and they may no longer tolerate each other's idiosyncrasies.

Only time would tell.

..._...

Shannon had never felt so nervous about anything before – not even having sex with Tempest in front of two-hundred kids. Her hand shook as her father handed her the phone. She took it and she held it up to her ear.

"Mommy?"

There was a pause and a stifled sob but then, for the first time in five years, Shannon heard the soft voice of her mother.

"Shannon."

For Shannon, it was too much and she slid down the wall to the floor and she sobbed, hugging the phone as she did so. Her Father sat down beside her and he hugged his daughter tightly for only the second time in five years. It was several minutes before Shannon was able to talk coherently.

"I've missed you, mommy. . ."

"Shannon, it's so good to hear your voice – I have waited for this day for so long. Are you well?"

"I'm fine, mommy – a little bruised and very tired, but I'm okay."

"Your father and I are looking forward to having you home, as are your brother and sister."

"I've really missed them – although I almost forgot about them at one stage and that scared me. Will they remember me?"

"They have never forgotten that they have a big sister and they talk about you a lot."

The conversation was starting to get to Shannon, so she said her goodbyes and handed the phone to her father who chatted for a few minutes with his wife. Shannon made for Saoirse and tapped her fellow *Predator* on the shoulder.

..._...

Saoirse looked up at Shannon and she instantly saw that something was wrong.

"Steph – I'll be a few minutes," Saoirse said and Stephanie nodded as she took in Shannon's expression.

"What's up, Shan?" Saoirse asked as they moved away from everybody.

"Where am I sleeping, tonight?"

"With me and Cassie, I think – although Natasha may be in with us, too. Why?"

"I just wanted to be alone."

Saoirse showed Shannon the camp bed which had been allocated to her. The thirteen-year-old girl slumped down onto the bed and buried her face into the pillow. Saoirse heard the tears and she closed the bedroom door before sitting down on the floor beside Shannon. She rested her hand on the younger girl's back. Saoirse could remember Shannon's first day, like it was yesterday. The girl had been so frightened and Saoirse had done what she could to help the girl. Saoirse had been a *Predator* for eight months which had allowed most of her bitterness to pass. Her hair was still being shaved but she had been able to live with that but the new girl had appeared more devastated than

most when she had been shown into the dormitory. Saoirse had found out why, during the evening meal.

Some of the boys had been discussing the new 'naked girl' who had been forced to walk through most of the facility butt naked. That had been a surprise revelation as most public humiliation involving nudity had ceased a couple of months previously when a certain senior female *Predator* had been disciplined quite severely and there had been some repercussions that the instructors had not expected. Saoirse had figured out, almost immediately, that the instructors had had something in for the girl.

No single *Predator* had received such abuse – until one certain little girl who had begun her life as a *Predator* in October 2013. Saoirse still felt bad about how much she had made that little girl's life so horrible.

..._...

"Saoirse?"

Shannon looked up and she turned her head to look at who was rubbing her back.

"Yeah – I wanted to stay with you; make sure that you're okay."

"Thank you, Saoirse – you always were a good friend to me. I'm worried, so worried. This is going to be the first night in months where I know that I am going to be safe. I thought that that would make me happy but I keep worrying about what my family is going to think about me. The last time they saw me, I was just a little girl – now I'm a fucking assassin!"

"You don't have to be, Shan. Your family will love you no matter what."

"What if they don't?"

"Shannon!"

Shannon sat up at the sharp rebuke and Saoirse looked up at her.

"I tried to kill Stephanie – three times. You know who my best friend is now?"

Shannon looked blank.

"Stephanie. We are the best of friends because we need one another. What we've done – all that shit is buried. What you've done – nobody will bring that up unless you want to. When you are back in the States, you will always have friends and somebody to talk to. My door is always open to you, Shannon – as will Mindy's."

"Thank you, Saoirse – I'll remember that. This is all so new to me."

"Give it a couple of weeks and you will be enjoying your new life, I promise you."

"I'll sleep better – thanks."

"You want to borrow a T-shirt for bed?"

"Yes, please."

..._...

Mindy faced everybody as they gathered in the lounge.

"I know you're all tired, so I shall keep this short. We've accomplished a lot, tonight. Fraser is missing, but he won't get far – not after what Rigour did to him. Well done, all of you. I am very, very impressed by how you *Predators* fought, tonight. It was the first real opportunity for you all to fight together and a first for the *Vengeance Predators*. You all have Hit Girl's respect and gratitude for your impressive courage and your professional conduct. I speak for Kick-Ass when I say that we would both happily fight alongside any one of you."

The embarrassment on the young faces was palpable as the praise and cheering was dropped upon their very young shoulders.

The following morning

Wednesday, September 14th

That morning the group began to go their separate ways.

For the younger girls, there were tears – which had surprised Mindy.

"Just because *you've* got the emotional range of a teaspoon, doesn't mean we all have, Mindy!" Chloe teased.

"You watch too much Harry Potter," Mindy groused as she gave Chloe her best scowl.

"Chloe loves Harry Potter," Abby chuckled as she strolled past. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good!"

"She's off to say goodbye to Eric," Chloe commented with a grin.

..._...

Vengeance was packing up for the short road trip to Bournemouth International Airport and from there a flight back to Scotland.

There was a slight difference, in that Abigail would not be returning to Scotland, and neither would Electra – at least not at first. The same with Yvette, who was heading back to Paris. That caused a small scene as the girls sobbed their way through lengthy goodbyes.

Craig was joining his father up at RNAS Yeovilton where he was overseeing repairs to *Twilight* – the helicopter had been collected by a Royal Navy recovery team and carried back to RNAS Yeovilton on the back of a truck. Keira was also joining them before flying back up in a few days.

Mindy and Dave were remaining in the UK for another day or so, along with Stephanie and Jamie. Everybody else was flying back to the USA, later that afternoon once the Gulfstream jet had returned from Scotland.

..._...

There was one other issue: the girl, Amber.

She was an unknown quantity and despite Jamie commenting that she carried a pistol, she did not appear to be a *Predator*; there was no tattoo of a dagger behind her right ear, for a start. Since her return from the attack, Amber had been kept in a back bedroom so she could not see any faces.

Ultimately, she was to be left with *Vengeance* and she would be *their* problem.

Later that afternoon

Aboard Alpha Foxtrot

Once the Gulfstream 650ER executive jet had climbed to its cruising height, everybody settled down for the long flight westward.

Becky looked over at Chloe.

"Are we gonna sleep, all the way home?"

"All the way home."

"Can I dream?"

"Yes, honey, I think we both can – sleep tight."

"Affirmative!"

***Chapter 329*: New Kids in Town**

Wednesday, September 14th
Early evening

Chicago, USA

"Look at what we have here – two little kitties in the *wrong* part of town."

"They look so cute."

"Get out of our way," Tigercat growled in an electronically enhanced growl.

"Or what, you little freak?"

"Or we'll kick your fuckin' asses!" Hellcat growled in her own electronically enhanced voice as she deployed her claws.

"Ooh, she has claws – I'm so scared!"

Hellcat dived forwards, driving her claws into the man's left side before spinning off and striking with her other set of claws. The man yelled out in agony as his torn side spilt blood down his leg. His partner fared little better as Tigercat attacked with his own claws. With a final punch in the face, Hellcat stood back to admire her handy work.

"Let's move!" her brother suggested.

"Why – we killed them," Hellcat responded.

"We need to go!" Tigercat persisted.

"You should have listened, kid," a voice purred.

Hellcat felt fear coursing through her as she turned to face her fear. Tigercat did the same, his legs feeling weak beneath him.

"Two more hides for my wall," FEAR drawled as she drew her battle sword.

The two pint-sized vigilantes drew their Wakizashi swords and took up fighting stances.

Two miles to the east

"You noticed that the streets tend to be quieter when Hit Girl is out of town?"

"She'll kill you for saying that, Splinter," Trojan laughed as they patrolled. "You missing your girlfriend?"

Splinter did not reply. It was not a goad; he knew Trojan better than that. Yes, he missed Stephanie but he did not want to admit it.

"Your silence speaks volumes," Trojan commented.

"I miss her a lot more than I thought I would," he admitted grudgingly.

"It gets worse, pal – I feel horrible inside whenever Wildcat goes out of town without me."

"You mean you have to wank yourself?"

Trojan laughed.

"You're picking up some of Stephanie's crude language!" Trojan laughed. "I have no problem with getting myself off. Do you and Steph . . . err?"

"No – I haven't even started puberty, yet, and Stephanie would cut my hands off if I so much as touched her near her

snatch."

"It'll be worth the wait, pal – I assure you."

"Trojan – FEAR has been spotted two miles to the west of you; take care," Battle Guy radioed. "Petra and Mist are inbound."

"Copy that, Battle Guy – am on the way with Splinter."

The two youngsters ran off down the street, towards their motorcycles.

Hellcat and Tigercat

They knew that facing off against FEAR was suicidal but their escape had been cut off by her minions.

The fight started easy as FEAR appeared to toy with them and she easily fended off the two apprentice vigilantes. They used their combined skills to attack FEAR from two sides – only she was too good for them and she appeared to have no issues avoiding their thrusts.

"Hellcat, Tigercat – what the hell, do you think you are doing?"

"We're not fighting her by choice, Audacious," Hellcat responded as she dived out of the way of the huge battle sword.

"Withdraw as soon as you can."

"We will!"

Hellcat was very scared – facing off against thieves and rapists was one thing, facing off against the arch-villain known as FEAR was something very different. Were their lives about to come to a very abrupt end at the hands of FEAR? The youngster's thoughts were cut off as gunfire ripped out and FEAR's minions began to drop by the wayside. FEAR herself span around as she was struck by what appeared to be a chain whip which cut into her body armour but did not penetrate.

"Why don't you pick on somebody your own size?" an electronically enhanced voice suggested.

Hellcat instantly recognised Petra and Mist as they faced off against FEAR. Before she could see any more, she and her brother were pulled out of the combat zone and they found themselves facing Splinter and Trojan.

"Get back to your rides and get the hell outta here!" Splinter ordered.

Neither vigilante needed telling twice as they stowed their Wakizashi's and they ran down an alleyway.

Unknown location Northern Chicago

"Hurry up, you two – we have to get home."

Hellcat pulled off her mask and growled. Normally, they were allowed plenty of time to get themselves cleaned up. Her brother appeared from beneath his own mask looking dejected after their narrow escape.

"What about getting cleaned up?" Annabelle Millar demanded.

"You can both shower when we get home – in fact, I insist on it!" Taylor Millar grinned.

"Gee, thanks, Mom!" Iain Millar replied as he pulled off his combat suit.

"I'll be in the car."

Sheridan Road

Shannon Millar was very scared as her father stopped the car on the drive.

"You're gonna be fine, Shannon," Patrick Millar said as he took his daughter's shaking hand.

"Will I recognise them? Will the recognise me?"

"Yes."

Patrick had to go around to open the door for his daughter as she was frozen with real fear. The house was new to her and unfamiliar – as would be the people inside.

"Just hold my hand and you'll be fine."

They walked up the drive and Patrick opened the front door. He waved his daughter inside but she wouldn't move until Patrick guided her inside. Taylor Millar appeared from the kitchen and she froze as she saw her husband and the tall girl who stood beside him.

"Shannon!"

"Mommy. . ."

Shannon released her father's hand and she bolted forwards hugging her mother for the first time in five years. They both cried openly, out of sheer happiness as they renewed the broken bond that had existed between mother and daughter. Patrick stepped forwards and he wrapped his arms around mother and daughter, completing the parental circle for Shannon.

"It is so good to see again, Shannon," Taylor said happily as she stepped back to look over her daughter.

Shannon was no longer the skinny nine-year-old. She was much taller with long, shapely legs, a feminine waistline and gently curving thighs. A major difference was that Shannon had a chest which had not been there before. Shannon was very much a young woman. For Taylor Millar, she would have recognised her daughter anywhere, no matter how much time had passed – the eyes were unmistakeable.

Shannon had barely wiped away her tears when there was the sound of pounding feet from upstairs which quickly descended the stairs.

"Is Dad back?" came a girl's voice.

"We saw the car," a boy's voice added.

Shannon began to shake again as a boy and a girl came into view. The girl was tall, with flaming orange hair. The girl was showing the signs of puberty with gentle swellings on her chest and spreading hips. Shannon guessed her age to be twelve. The girl was examining Shannon very closely as was the boy. The boy was a couple of inches shorter than his sister and typically for a boy of his age which Shannon estimated to be about ten. He also bore a cheeky grin.

"Mom?" came the worried query from Annabelle, her voice shaking.

"Shan?" Iain Millar burst into tears as he ran to hug his big sister.

The boy had only been five when he had last seen her but again, it was the piercing blue eyes which gave Shannon away. Annabelle quickly followed her brother as she joined in the welcome. Her mind went back to when she was seven and had last seen her older sister. The happiness was overwhelming for the entire family and the tears flowed steadily. Ten minutes passed before the three siblings separated and Shannon found herself being dragged into the living room and pushed onto a couch with sibling on either arm. Shannon was still overwhelmed by it all as she studied her new surroundings and the two youngsters who held onto her arms.

Shannon was finally able to pull her arms away from Annabelle and Iain and she then turned to them both, studying each child. She could remember them both – only they had been much smaller. The cheeky grin for Iain was still the same, as was the cheeky smirk for Annabelle.

Then Shannon noticed something and she felt the anger welling up inside her as she stood back up and turned to her father and mother.

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Patrick caught it first – he was more familiar with young assassins and he saw the darkness cloud his daughter's

face.

"What is it, Shannon?" he asked carefully with a warning look thrown at his wife.

"What have you done to them?" she demanded with malice in her tone.

Shannon had picked up several tell-tales. The two kids had both come downstairs fresh from a shower – nothing untoward there. However, Shannon had noticed her siblings' skin. Annabelle had significant bruising on her stomach and on her chest which had been visible to the much taller Shannon beneath the loose pyjama top. Iain had bruises visible on his legs – the same with his sister as both wore pyjama shorts. Shannon took hold of Annabelle's hand.

"You been cleaning weapons, tonight?"

"Huh?" Annabelle responded.

"I can smell the gun oil – it's under your fingernails – and don't tell me you've been doing Taekwondo or some other shit. Those bruises are from combat," Shannon stated as she lifted her sister's top to reveal the bruising. "You turning them into vigilantes, Daddy?"

Patrick could see that his daughter was furious and he opted to tell the truth.

"We wanted to break it to you, honey – but only when we thought that you were ready. Annabelle and Iain are vigilantes – they were out, tonight."

Shannon took her brother by the jaw and she studied his eyes. She glared at her mother and father.

"You've turned them into killers – just like me. How could you do that? You fucked up with me – that was bad enough – but to do the same thing with them?"

"We knew that you would come back a veteran and that you might find it difficult to adjust. We thought that you could take command of your siblings and all three of you could go out together, using your skills for good," Taylor responded. "It all started as self-defence. After you went missing, I insisted that they learnt the skills needed to protect themselves. Your father and I chose to teach them so more unorthodox fighting styles as well as offensive fighting styles. They both learnt weapons and they both learnt to ride a motorcycle before they were eight."

"Do they know what I am?"

"No," Taylor admitted.

"Mom?" Annabelle asked.

"Shannon, honey, please sit down," her father directed.

Once everyone was seated, Patrick Millar spoke and he did not stop for a little over two hours. Shannon interceded to add her own views and by the end, both youngsters were shocked by what was revealed about a program called *Urban Predator* and by what their sister had subsequently endured over five years of hell. By the time the truth had come out, everybody was tired and there was a lot to think about as everybody headed upstairs to bed a little after midnight.

The second floor, Shannon discovered, was occupied by her parents in the Master Bedroom and their father's office. Two further bedrooms were kept available for guests. Annabelle and Iain dragged their sister up to the third floor to where they both lived.

"This is my room – looking out over the back yard," Annabelle explained proudly.

"My room is just at the top of the stairs, looking out over the front and side," Iain added.

"Your room is in between," Taylor explained.

Shannon gingerly pushed open the door to find a large bedroom with a window looking out over the front of the house and another to the side. There was a double bed tastefully made up with pink bedding and a pile of pillows. There was a dressing table, fully equipped with accoutrements. A built-in wardrobe lay empty, as did a stack of drawers.

"We'll go shopping in the morning," Patrick suggested.

Atop the stack of drawers, Shannon saw all the soft toys which she had not seen since the day when she had been taken. The girl sat down on the bed and she cried. She was so happy to be home and safe with her family.

"Goodnight, sweetheart," Taylor said as she hugged her daughter, handing her a large T-shirt to use as a nighty. "I love you so much."

"Sleep well, Shannon. Love you," Patrick added.

"I wish I could say the same thing, only a lot has come out tonight that's got me worried. I hope you can understand that while I do love you inside, I can't bring myself to say it right now."

Shannon stripped off once everybody was heading off to their own bedrooms and she pulled on the T-shirt. The bed was amazingly comfortable and she could hear giggling coming from the bedroom that belonged to her little sister.

"Night, Shannon!" Annabelle called out.

"Night, Annabelle."

"Night, Shan!" Iain added.

"Night, Iain."

Despite her anger, Shannon smiled as she swiftly fell asleep.

***The following morning
Thursday, September 16th***

"Shan?"

"Come in, Annabelle."

"I didn't want to intrude."

"Never used to bother you."

"You're older now."

"So are you, and you look amazing."

Annabelle blushed.

"You're angry with Mom and Dad."

"Yes, I am."

"We both know what we are doing, Shan."

"That isn't the point. I've seen hell, Annabelle, and it really hurt to find that you've been trained like I was."

"Our training was nothing like yours, Shan. You went through hell while we were pushed but not forced. I may have only just turned twelve but I know what I am getting myself into."

"I can tell by your eyes that you've taken a life."

"That was hard. It was just a month ago – a man. I've killed three times since then. Iain was a week later – just one since."

"I've killed so many times it scares me. I've tortured people but I've always put them out of their misery. You never forget those kills. To take a life tears at your soul in a way that can never be repaired."

"I understand. Will you be a part of it?"

"I don't know. I just want it to be over. . ."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. You are my sister and my door is always open to you, Annabelle. I really do love you."

Shannon hugged her little sister tightly.

"What about me?"

"You too, brat!" Shannon grinned as she pulled her brother into the hug.

Later that morning

Once Annabelle and Iain had left for school, Shannon settled down on the couch in the living room to watch some TV.

A little after ten, she heard her mother answering the front door. She had been avoiding her parents but they had respected that and given her the space that she needed to think. Shannon was, however, surprised at who the visitor was.

"Hi, Mrs Millar. I'm Saoirse and this is Marc – we've come to see Shannon."

"Come in, Saoirse. My husband told me about you."

Marc? No – it couldn't be. . . Shannon stood up to welcome Saoirse but just behind the girl, Shannon laid eyes on. . . No words passed her lips as she shoved Saoirse off to one side and she seized hold of the smirking boy. He never got a chance to say a word as Shannon pulled him into a firm embrace, lips joined like they were welded together. After thirty seconds, Taylor spoke.

"I take it they know one another. . ." she commented dryly.

"Oh, yeah!" Saoirse replied.

"Well?"

"Oh, they've gone way beyond kissing."

"How far?" Mrs Millar enquired with a scowl.

"Penis, vagina – the whole nine yards!" Saoirse confirmed.

"They stay connected, somebody is going to pass out," Taylor Millar chuckled before she raised her voice. "Hey! Love birds!"

Marc pulled away from Shannon who looked very annoyed.

"If you two are going to be making out, I do hope you've brought condoms, young man," Shannon's mother commented.

Marc went bright red, as did Shannon, who giggled.

"For fuck's sake!" Shannon growled. "Here's two."

Shannon almost took Saoirse's fingers off as she snatched the condoms out of her hand and she dragged Marc up the stairs. Saoirse and Taylor exchanged a look as they heard a door slamming far above them.

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Fifteen minutes later, Shannon returned, wrapped in just a towel and with a very sheepish look on her face.

"That was quick," Saoirse commented with an evil grin.

"Marc struggled to control himself but considering neither of us has had sex in months – we both went off like a damn rocket."

"We heard the screaming!" Taylor laughed as her daughter shrank onto the couch her face threatening to set fire to

something.

Marc appeared, just then. He was dressed and he bore a very satisfied look on his face.

"You both reconnected, then?" Saoirse chuckled as Marc blushed.

"Her boobs have grown," Marc commented with a grin.

"So's his dick," Shannon countered with a giggle.

That same morning

Morton Grove

The little girl was very nervous as the car pulled up outside the house.

Naturally, as they entered the house, with Becky gripping Joshua's hand tightly, Chloe was ambushed by her mother and then her cousin. Then, after the hugs had ceased, including Cathy hugging Joshua, Cathy noticed another little person present and she raised an eyebrow.

"Mom, Curtis – this is Rebecca and she is going to be staying with me and Josh for a while. She prefers to be called: Becky"

Cathy looked at Joshua who just shook his head and Cathy saved the inevitable questions for a later moment.

"Hi, Becky. My name is Cathy and I am Chloe's mother."

"Hello, Mrs Bennett," Becky said politely.

"A Brit?" Cathy commented, a little surprised. "Please call me, Cathy, Becky."

"I will."

"Hello, Becky. I'm Curtis, Chloe's cousin – I live here."

"Hello, Curtis. You're nice."

"If only you really knew him like I do!" Chloe chuckled.

"You a *Predator*?" Curtis asked.

"You a vigilante?" Becky countered.

Chloe nodded at Curtis.

"Trojan at your service."

"Wow!"

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While Becky got to know Curtis, Cathy took her daughter and Joshua off to talk.

Chloe wilted before her mother's piercing stare as she built up the courage to say what she needed to say.

"Mom, before you begin . . . I've already had Josh go through me about Becky and while I won't say that she has nothing to do with losing our baby, that little girl is not a replacement. We are doing this out of love for the girl. She has no home and she has suffered so much. Yes, she is a *Predator* and as far as I know, she has killed twice. I want you to check her over, Mom. She's been beaten and there is barely a square inch of her skin which isn't cut or bruised."

Cathy smiled at her wayward daughter.

"I am going to give you both the benefit of the doubt as I trust you both. Don't think that this is getting you out of

school, either. That applies to the both of you."

"Yes, ma'am!" both replied in unison.

"So, am I to be 'grandma'?" Cathy grinned.

Chloe just smiled.

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Joshua found Becky talking to Curtis in the living room. The two appeared to be getting on very well. Then Chloe knocked over her coffee with the expected response.

"Oh, fuck!"

Joshua heard a quick intake of breath and he turned back to see an astonished Becky with a hand over her mouth.

"You said a bad word!" she exclaimed.

"Sorry!" Chloe replied. "How long were you a Predator? Two months? I would have thought that you would have heard many bad words and phrases."

"I did. Just 'cause others use 'em, does *not* mean that *I* should."

"Okay. . ." Chloe replied, a little surprised.

"I love this girl!" Joshua chuckled. "You wanna be my girlfriend?"

Chloe glared at Joshua.

"Not a chance!" Becky replied. "You are way too old – almost ancient."

"Ancient?" Joshua enquired. "I'm sixteen, for Heavens' sake."

"Yes, and that's *twice* my age," Becky reasoned.

"Your loss. . ." Joshua mused with a grin and a wink at Chloe.

Curtis laughed. He thought that Becky was awesome and as far as he could glean, it looked like he was to become her uncle or something like that.

Later that afternoon

Glenview

Another youngster was feeling just as nervous as Dave turned into the drive and stopped.

"We're both here with you, Jamie – so don't worry," Abigail offered supportively.

As they all walked towards the house, Stephanie paused and she turned to her brother.

"I forgot to mention – you've now got a younger brother and sister. . ."

The twins came out of the living room, almost the moment the door had opened with Megan close behind.

"Jamie, this is Danny and Anne-Marie, they are now your younger brother and sister," Stephanie said. "The other girl is Megan; she's our auntie."

"Danny, Anne-Marie – this is my brother, Jamie. This girl here, she's called Abigail and she is a friend"

There was barely a flicker of surprise on both youngsters faces as they took in the news about Stephanie having a brother. It appeared that Paige had already broken the news as Mindy had requested. Paige had also sorted out sleeping accommodation for everybody.

"Hi, Jamie – you wanna go see your room?" Danny asked after he and his sister had hugged their parents.

I saw Stephanie squeeze Jamie's hand. The boy smiled and he let go of Stephanie's hand for the first time since they had left the plane.

"Okay."

Anne-Marie and Danny vanished up the stairs, Danny dragging Jamie with him while Anne-Marie dragged Abigail with her.

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After Mindy had hugged Marcus and Paige, she gave her attentions to her little sister and hugged her too. Mindy raised an eyebrow as she saw the brace on Megan's right wrist. Megan saw the look and she quickly tried to hide the offending wrist. Mindy smirked.

"Did you get that jerking Curtis off?"

"No!" Megan retorted in an exasperated tone. "Why does everybody think that we grope each other, morning, noon, and night?"

"Do you?" Mindy asked.

"Well, yes, but that's not the point!"

"Did you get that fending off hordes of cunts?"

"No."

"Doing something valiant?"

"No."

Marcus could not take it any longer.

"Megan, tell her – she'll find out anyway," he pointed out with a huge grin.

Megan's face went bright pink as she gave in.

"I tripped over the sodding dog!" Megan exclaimed reluctantly as she gave Piper a nasty look.

"Sodding?" Mindy inquired.

"I got it from Stephanie – it means. . ."

"I know what it means but I've never heard it spoken by an American," Mindy cut in with a chuckle. "Still – very funny!"

"Laugh it up, purple bitch!" Megan growled.

That night

Jamie had been allocated the space above Danny's room.

Both boys were of comparable ages, with only six months between them and Jamie being the eldest of the pair. The two boys had hit it off at once and even Anne-Marie had latched onto the boy. Nobody had had any idea how Jamie might fare in his new surroundings; the boy had been thrust into not just a new family but he had also been reunited with a sister that he had thought to be long dead, and one that he had thought to have been murdered at his own hands.

On his first night at Glenview, Mindy had gone to check on the kids before she turned in and she had found Jamie's bed empty. For a moment, Mindy had begun to panic – then she had headed over to Stephanie's bedroom where she had found Jamie cuddled up with his big sister. Abigail was on the other side of him and all three were sleeping soundly.

Mindy had just smiled and left the two siblings sleeping.

The next day
Friday, September 16th

Glenview

That first morning – it was busy, to put it mildly!

There were five kids to get up, showered, and dressed before breakfast. Everybody had a busy day ahead of them – Jamie and Abigail were about to meet their new world. Standing in the kitchen and watching the five kids eat their cereal at the counter, you could tell that Stephanie and Jamie were related. Their expressions as they smiled, smirked, and laughed were almost identical. Despite the joviality over breakfast, Mindy could tell that while Jamie was happy, he was still haunted and troubled by his past – as was Abigail.

The only person who seemed to have noticed, other than Dave and Mindy, was Anne-Marie – that girl could be super-perceptive at times. Anytime that Jamie seemed to be getting buried by his big sister's almost overbearing love and attention, Anne-Marie would dive in with a joke or something to break the tension. Stephanie had been unable to let her brother out of her sight – which, while understandable, seemed to be too much for the young boy.

Still, it was early days.

***Chapter 330*: Promotion**

Friday, September 16th, 2016

North park Elementary School

Jamie and Abigail supported each other, that morning.

It was a completely new environment for them both; neither had attended an American elementary school before and Jamie hadn't attended a real school since he was five. Stephanie, of course, breezed in like nothing was wrong and she dutifully aimed Jamie for his correct class. Abigail, it turned out, was to be the same class as Stephanie. Abigail made a distinct point of sitting as far away from Stephanie as she could – not that Stephanie minded; they had shared a bed for the night and both girls needed their space.

At lunchtime, Stephanie laughed as she saw Jackson's expression when Jamie came over to sit next to her.

"Have no fear – he's not my boyfriend . . . and neither are you, butt breath."

Jackson Evans visibly deflated and he feigned a hurt expression, but he grinned all the same as his sister laughed at him.

"This is Jamie, and he is my little brother. We got separated when we were small, but now we are back together again," Stephanie explained simply.

"Is he as wacky as you are, Steph?" Ali asked.

"Way wackier!" Stephanie admitted and Jamie grinned as he sat down at the table.

"Who are you?" Jackson asked as he looked at the other new girl with an eager grin.

"You must be Jackson – Steph warned me about you. My name is Abigail and I don't need a boyfriend."

Everybody laughed as Jackson pretended to sulk.

Lake View High School

"Here she comes!"

"Funny, SD!" Megan growled.

"How's it feel, being twelve?" Morgan asked. "Happy Birthday!"

"Good – it feels good," Megan admitted with a smile. "Thanks."

"Happy Birthday, Megan!" Chloe said as she hugged her friend.

"Happy Birthday, short-arse!" Joshua called over with a grin.

After some more good-natured abuse, Megan vanished with Curtis following close behind.

North park Elementary School

At lunchtime, Anne-Marie and Danny both sat with Becky.

They had been introduced that morning when Chloe had dropped her off at Glenview. Becky had been very quiet and she had kept to herself all morning in lessons. Anne-Marie had tried to start conversations but she had failed miserably. Danny was worried about Becky. He was aware that Becky was a *Predator* but he sensed something deeper and darker.

"Becky – you know it helps to talk, huh?" he tried.

Becky's shoulders slumped and she put down her sandwich. She turned to face Danny and he could see that her eyes were filled with tears.

"I'm lonely."

"We're here with you," Danny said kindly. "You know who our Mom is, right?"

"Mindy, yes I know."

"You know about what Mom does at night, yeah?"

"Yes."

"We do that too," Danny said as he leaned closer and lowered his voice. "I'm Ravage and my sister is Rogue."

"You are vigilantes?"

"Yes. We've had a rather violent year," Anne-Marie chimed in.

Becky smiled.

"I didn't feel like I fitted in – I'm not normal, but I thought you guys were."

"We are *far* from normal!" Danny grinned.

Danny was pleased, the tears appeared to have vanished and Becky was smiling.

"Thanks," Becky said shyly.

"Don't forget Steph is over there and so is Jamie – Abigail, too."

"I know – I just didn't want to look weak."

"Screw that!" Anne-Marie laughed. "We are what we are."

Lake View High School

"Those two are weird," Lauren commented.

"Yeah," Lizzie responded. "They just stare at each other – that's the same sandwich the new girl's been holding for the last twenty minutes. I wonder if she knows that Marc is not a normal boy."

"From what we saw of him the other week, he looked perfectly normal. You couldn't take your eyes off his dick, Lizzie."

Lizzie scowled.

"I'd never seen one before then and I got to see two!"

Lauren laughed.

"What's her name, anyways?" Lizzie asked her big sister.

"Shannon, I think."

That evening

Safehouse F

The place was bursting at the seams with people *everywhere*.

"May I have your attention, please!" Hit Girl called out as she stood up on the walkway with her senior staff.

Beside her stood Kick-Ass, Battle Guy, Shadow, and Jackal. Below, spread out across the mat were over thirty individuals – not including the animals (by animals, we mean the four-legged ones – not Megan, Curtis, and Stephanie). All those with uniforms were wearing them. There were also several new faces who had never before been in the Safehouse.

"Before we get to the fresh faces amongst us, we have some promotions to get out of the way."

"Mist – front and centre, if you please!" Kick-Ass ordered.

Mist jogged up the steps to the walkway and she stopped facing Hit Girl. She grinned in eager expectation.

"Mist is receiving quite a lot, this evening – greedy, bitch! Not only is she being promoted to Sub-Commander, she is also receiving her *Fusion Wings*. Congratulations, Mist – you are our first Fusion pilot."

There was cheering and applause as Mist received her new ID card, the new insignia on her collar, and the patch for her flight suit. The patch consisted of **FUSION** and **MIST** above and below the gold wings of a *Fusion* pilot.

"Next, on the list is somebody who I see as a key member of Fusion. With Mist departing soon for sunnier shores, we find ourselves in need of another Senior Operator to join Petra. After not all that much deliberation, we selected a worthy candidate."

"Foxtail!" Kick-Ass bellowed and the girl in question could be seen to almost faint.

Foxtail looked very bemused as she made her way to stand before Hit Girl.

"Let me get this straight," Psyche called out from below. "She tries to kill me, three times, and then gets promoted?"

"I've tried to kill you," Fury pointed out. "Maybe I should be promoted."

Hit Girl laughed.

"If we rewarded everybody who tried to kill Psyche, we'd have way too many Senior Operators!" Hit Girl quipped and she received an icy glare from Psyche.

Hit Girl replaced Foxtail's twin vertical bars with the gold oakleaf of a Senior Operator.

"You've earned this, Foxtail – not least for putting up with Psyche!"

"Thank you," Foxtail said quietly as she meekly accepted her new ID card.

The fifteen-year-old girl couldn't help smirking as she headed back down below. There she received a hefty pat on the back from her best-friend.

"Next, comes a young girl who needs *no* introduction!"

"Psyche!" Kick-Ass called out to simultaneous cheers.

The girl bolted up the steps and stood grinning before her parents, resplendent in her uniform. Hit Girl took her time swapping the existing insignia to the twin vertical bars of an Operator.

"Well done," she whispered as she handed over a new ID card.

"Thanks, Mum!" Psyche grinned before she ran back down the steps to make way for the next victim.

"Splinter!"

The twelve-year-old boy smirked as he headed up to the walkway where he received his own promotion to Operator. He grinned down at his father, Ares, as he hastily rejoined Psyche on the mat.

"Nightmare and Torment!"

The two girls looked very surprised as they both glanced over at their grinning mother, Athena, before running up to stand before Kick-Ass and Hit Girl.

"You two have impressed us all. Nightmare, while you have lived up to your name, you still have a lot to learn,

however, you deserve a promotion to Junior Operator. It will be on a provisional basis to ensure that you are up to it but I am sure you will be. Torment – you are now *the* Senior Trainee Operator and you will be in charge of our training squad which, as you will learn, now numbers seven."

"Seven?"

"Seven."

Once the newly promoted sisters had received their new ID cards, they both ran below eagerly to show their mother.

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"Now, the more observant of you will have noticed one or two new faces in the Safehouse, tonight. I think some introductions are in order. Could the Millar kids come up, please?"

Three faces cringed as their parents pushed them forwards. The two youngsters looked up in awe as they faced Hit Girl and Kick-Ass. The younger girl actually giggled as she comprehended where she was and who she was with. All three youngsters wore Fusion uniforms but with no visible rank. The two youngest had only met the unmasked Hit Girl and Kick-Ass an hour before and they were both still reeling from being so close to their idols.

"The tall young lady, here, is Shannon," Hit Girl announced and the tall young lady blushed as all eyes fell on her. "Beside Shannon are Annabelle and Iain. Alternatively, they are Stormtide, Hellcat, and Tigercat."

There were some surprised looks – Wildcat for one. For most, it was good to know who the two new vigilantes on the streets of Chicago were.

"Stormtide is a *Predator* who was rescued just a few days ago. Please treat her well as I know you all will – Tempest, it appears, already is!"

There was laughter at that and both Stormtide and Tempest had very pink faces.

"Stormtide, you are being made an Operator. Tigercat and Hellcat, you are both to be Senior Trainee Operators and you will operate alongside Torment in Training Squad – your ranks will be provisional as you train, but from what *Fusion* members have already seen, neither of you will have any problems. *Fusion* would also like to welcome the parents of these three youngsters, Patrick and Taylor – we will know them as Astute and Audacious."

After a brief round of cheering and applause, the embarrassed youngsters ran back to their parents – and Marc.

"Next, we have five more *Predators* – Jamie, Abigail, Hunter, Leo, and Becky. Please come up, all of you."

Jamie needed a shove from his big sister before Abigail seized his hand and pulled him up the steps. Becky received a similar shove from Cathy. The two Graves brothers hesitated but followed on.

"Hunter Graves is Cut-Throat and he will join Nightmare as a Junior Operator. His younger brother, Leo, will join the younger Millar kids as a Senior Trainee operator – he is known as Relentless. That just leaves three. We have the latest – and last – addition to the Lizewski household, Jamie – Stephanie's younger brother, known as Rage. He will become a Junior Operator, as will his friend, Abigail Wilde, who many will learn the hard way, that she suits both her surname and her codename: Fury! That just leaves a new member for the Bennett clan: Becky Wren, also known as Scamp. Don't be fooled by the cute little British girl routine – Stormtide owes the little girl her life."

Scamp grinned enormously and Stormtide nodded her approval. The youngsters each received their coveted Fusion ID Cards and rank before re-joining the crowd below.

"The final changes are Tempest and Discord who are finally becoming active as Operators. Discord will also be running Safehouse Q for us."

Tempest gave Stormtide a longing glance before he ran up the steps with Discord and they both received their rank and their ID cards.

"Due to the large size of *Fusion* – we number over forty, now – we will be splitting the Operations Section into two eight-person squads. The squads will be known as Leopard Squad and Jaguar Squad," Hit Girl explained. "Each Squad will have a commander, a second-in-command, four Operators, and two Junior Operators. Leopard Squad will be commanded by Shadow with Foxtail as second-in-command. They will be joined by Stormtide, Wildcat, Tempest, Trojan, Cut-Throat, and Nightmare. Jaguar Squad will be commanded by Jackal with Petra as second-in-command."

They will be joined by Raven, Psyche, Splinter, Discord, Rage, and Fury."

"We will also operate a training squad which for now consists of Torment in command. She will be joined by Tigercat, Relentless, Hellcat, Ravage, Rogue, and Scamp. That Squad will be called Panther Squad. As required, members of Panther Squad will join Leopard and Jaguar on operations. We are also very pleased to have Audacious joining Medic to bolster our medical support – I hate to say this, but we have some dark times ahead of us and we will need them both. Thank you for your time," Hit Girl finished.

"There is just one more thing," Kick-Ass interceded. "Who in their right mind gave the dogs insignia and a uniform?"

The crowd parted slightly as everybody turned to look at the eight animals who sat patiently. Each wore a dark grey harness which was adorned with their name on either side and their rank. Eisenhower bore the insignia of a Senior Operator. Loki bore the insignia of a Senior Trainee Operator while the other animals each bore the inverted stripe of a Trainee Operator.

All eyes turned on Hit Girl.

"It seemed a good idea at the time. . ."

A little later. . .

"Where the hell, are you taking us?"

"All will become clear, my dear daughter," Hit Girl responded cryptically as they walked down a corridor into Safehouse E and then. . .

"A lift?" Psyche asked. "To where?"

"Down," Hit Girl replied as she swiped her access card and the doors opened.

The lift car was enormous – three metres by five metres – which allowed everybody onboard in two runs. The trip down was quick and they soon stopped at 'LEVEL 0'. The doors opened onto a large open area that appeared to be a massive training mat surrounded by a raised walkway about a metre above. Directly ahead, overlooking the mat, was a massive concrete structure with recessed windows.

"Welcome to Training Facility Echo!" Hit Girl announced once the second party had arrived and everybody had spread out around the walkway. "Directly before you all is the Primary Training Area. This is where you will train from now on. Safehouse F is way too small for all of us. That steel-reinforced concrete structure extends down four levels. On this level, you will find the Command Bunker. Beneath is the Server Facility spread over two levels with the Main Armoury on Level 3. The walls are up to three feet thick and the windows are armoured. Behind the Command Bunker are changing rooms and showers plus a store for training equipment. There is a second elevator in the far corner. Only this elevator connects with Safehouse F."

"Awesome!" Wildcat exclaimed as she set foot on the enormous five-hundred-square-metre mat.

"Let's head down to Level 1," Kick-Ass directed.

..._...

This time, when the elevator doors opened, the first group exited into a three-metre wide corridor which extended ahead to a set of double doors.

"Level 1!" Hit Girl announced proudly. "To the left is the Medical Centre with beds for eight and a complete trauma theatre. To the right is the Medical Store. Straight ahead is the Dining Room with the Kitchen off to the right."

"Wow!" Trojan exclaimed as they all swept into the Dining Room which had tables and chairs arranged in a dozen separate groups which seated six in each group.

The same concrete edifice extended floor to ceiling. Steps on each side of the structure allowed access to a corridor.

"Behind the Server Facility – Upper Level, is the Computer Room and the Kitchen Store with larder and freezers. Onwards!"

..._...

"Level 2!"

"Bloody hell!" Tempest exclaimed and Mindy grinned.

"Living quarters. This is the main Recreational and Briefing Space."

Soft couches and a massive wall-mounted screen dominated the space. Around the walls were workspaces and a small area for making drinks and snacks. The layout was similar to the previous level with the same concrete edifice and steps either side. Hit Girl took the left set of steps and followed a corridor, at the end of which was another elevator. Psyche followed directions and she pushed open a set of double doors to the right and she stopped dead.

"Six cabins, three per side – each of which can sleep eight in bunks with four more on the floor. Bathrooms are beyond – unisex."

"Nice seats!" Foxtail commented as she tested out one of the couches outside the cabins.

"Onwards again!"

...+...

Earlier, that evening, Hit Girl had taken Rage and Fury on a tour of Safehouse F which had included the armoury.

"It's not much of an armoury, really," Rage had commented. "I've seen better."

He had looked up at Hit Girl who had smirked. "You want to see inside the armoury that feeds this one?"

"Try me!" had been Rage's challenge.

...+...

"Level 3! This level is basically storage with the Main Armoury and lots of equipment."

Psyche saw Hit Girl smirking as she walked through the Equipment Storage Area and then up a central set of steps before she turned left along a raised walkway and then right down a corridor. Ever since they had entered Safehouse E, Psyche had been concerned that Hit Girl might decide to have some fun. True to form, she just *had* to go and open her big gob.

"Has Steph told you about the time she ran through the Safehouse butt naked?" she asked Rage conversationally.

Rage turned and he smiled at his sister whose face turned a pleasant shade of pink with a hint of red.

"No, she has not."

"Now, ain't the damn time!" Psyche growled as the group stopped outside the door labelled, **MAIN ARMOURY**. She swiped her access card but nothing happened. "Huh?"

"Only Senior Operators, Psyche," Mindy chuckled as she swiped her own access card.

"Foxy has access to here?" Psyche demanded.

"Of course," Hit Girl grinned as she pushed open the heavy steel door.

Psyche muttered obscenities under her breath which had Scamp blushing as she pushed past Hit Girl into the armoury.

..._...

"Oh, wow!" Rage exclaimed.

The place was enormous – over 360 square-metres and a little over three metres in height. While the Equipment Storage Area had consisted of rack upon rack loaded with combat gear, body armour, boots, webbing, and God only knew what else, the Main Armoury held everything which was explosive. Over to the left was a large caged area with warning signs and a locked gate. Through the mesh, Rage could make out many blocks of C4, crates of hand

grenades, stacks of M81 Claymore mines, LAW rockets, dynamite, and . . . was that the business end of a torpedo?

Hit Girl led Psyche and Rage over to the right where the smaller weapons were stored. Everything had its place. Rage recognised several M2 Browning .50-calibre machine guns, at least two M134 mini-guns, several M60E4 and M60E6 machine guns, four L7A2 GPMGs and an entire rack of FN Minimi L110A2 light machine guns. There were many racks filled with a selection of almost every pistol he could think of. It was apparent that Hit Girl obviously preferred to buy Glock and SIG weapons, although H&K was well featured too.

Rage loved the array of shotguns, including the monster AA-12 automatic-shotgun, one of which had green and yellow highlights – it obviously belonged to Kick-Ass. Next, came the assault rifles, submachine guns and PDWs; there must have been hundreds of them – Hit Girl liked to buy in bulk it seemed! M16s, M4s, MPXs, MP5s, MP7s, and P90s were visible among many.

Rage turned to Hit Girl and he grinned.

"You win!"

..._...

"Level 4!"

Nobody said a word as they emerged into a giant cavern which extended 105-metres into the distance and was forty metres wide. The concrete ceiling towered five metres above them and was supported by a dozen two-metre diameter concrete pillars.

"Is that a running track?" Stormtide asked.

"Yes, it is – four-hundred-metres and four lanes," Hit Girl replied proudly.

"A pool!" Rogue yelled as she bolted forwards and she was quickly joined by some of the other members as they stopped to admire the Olympic-sized swimming pool with curved ends.

"You have outdone yourself, this time, girl!" Medic chuckled as she stood beside the eighteen-year-old vigilante. Then she gazed down toward the far end of the cavern "What is *that*?"

"Oh, you've seen the climbing wall. . ."

The climbing wall was double-sided and built over a hollow frame. It was 8-metres wide and a metre deep. It extended all the way to the ceiling which towered ten-metres above them.

Training Facility Echo Dining Room

"How's it going, Scamp?"

"Fine, thanks, Steph."

Becky was sitting at a table, a bottle of Pepsi in her left hand and her brand-new *Fusion* ID card in her right. She was smiling.

"You look happy," Abigail pointed out.

"I am – this is the best thing that could ever have happened to me. I have Chloe and Josh. I also have you guys."

Stephanie smiled.

"We are all here for each other, aren't we Abigail?"

"I suppose," Abigail replied.

The ten-year-old was still struggling to handle her new relationship with Stephanie. There was a deep-seated hatred for what Stephanie had done to her – not to mention the humiliation at her hands – but she owed it to Jamie to try and be civil to his newly-discovered sister. Stephanie grinned – she knew that Abigail was unhappy living with her and

Stephanie wasn't exactly over the moon about it either. She also knew that her brother had a deep-seated affection for Abigail and she had no desire to spoil that for him.

"You two really hate each other, don't you?" Becky stated.

Abigail laughed.

"Yes, we do," Stephanie replied. "Only we are trying to get past it."

..._...

"Hi, Shannon."

Shannon looked up as two identical girls sat down across from her and Marc.

"Can't say I'm happy to see the 'Bitch Twins!'" Shannon growled.

"Shannon!" Marc growled.

"Sorry," Shannon said quickly. "I'm still trying to get used to all of this. I know that was uncalled for."

"It was a lifetime ago and we had no choice – we apologise for what we did to you," Sky said and her sister nodded.

"I accept that – but it was bad," Shannon said with some reluctance.

"Yeah, it was," Chrissy admitted with a pained look.

..._...

"So, what do you guys think?" Saoirse asked the Graves brothers at another table.

"Awesome!" Hunter grinned.

"Out of this world!" Leo added.

"It's going to be hard work – I won't lie about that. Hit Girl can be really hard; she can be a complete bitch, too."

"I've noticed," Hunter commented.

"How's the move coming along?"

"Really good – we should be moving by the end of the month."

"Glad to hear it. Now, remember to keep things secret. None of what you are wearing is to leave here – the ID card stays in your locker, understand?"

"Believe me, you *don't* want to take that card outta here!" Anne-Marie commented as she strolled past with a pained expression.

..._...

"So, we finally meet."

Annabelle and Iain looked up at the young girl who then sat down across from them with a boy of similar age.

"I am Wildcat, and this is Trojan – but you can call us Megan and Curtis."

"Hi," Annabelle said with a smile.

"Good to meet you, at last," Iain added.

"You, too – you fight well and I am looking forwards to fighting alongside you both," Trojan said.

"This must be the 'Kitty Table'," Joshua laughed as he sat down beside Trojan.

"You always did like to play with kitties, cousin!" Chloe chuckled as she sat down beside Annabelle.

Curtis glared at his elder cousin.

"You are so funny, Shadow!" Megan growled. "You too, Jack!"

"Sorry – just having a bit of fun at my little friend's expense!" Joshua said as he ruffled Wildcat's hair.

"You lot are mad," Annabelle commented with a grin.

"You can talk!" Iain said as he nudged his sister.

"So, Megan – what did Curtis get you for your birthday?" Chloe asked.

Megan's cheeks turned pink and she rubbed her neck. Chloe laughed and she smiled knowingly.

"I see. . ." she said. "Don't forget to agree a safe word!"

Megan's mouth dropped open and she glared at her friend. Curtis' face was a deep red and he had slunk down in his chair.

"Megan likes to wear a kitty-collar," Chloe explained with an evil smirk. "Long story, but she borrowed a spare from Sophia and they have fun with it. She's twelve today, by the way."

Annabelle giggled and Iain looked very embarrassed – not as much as Megan, though.

"You two having fun?"

Annabelle and Iain looked up into the smiling face of their big sister, but before she could say anymore. . .

"Hi, Stormy!"

"Jamie!" Shannon growled as the boy came up behind her and then stood beside Joshua. "Don't call me that!"

Iain laughed and Annabelle giggled.

"Either of you call me that and I'll kick your fucking asses!" Shannon growled.

"Yes, Stormy!" her siblings said together and then they both laughed.

Shannon screamed.

"Now, look what you've done; you little cunt!"

Jamie laughed out loud and he grinned, then he yelled out in pain.

"Stop that, Jamie!" Abigail growled as she slapped him on the back of the head.

"Just having a little fun. . ."

"Learn to respect your elders!" Abigail persisted.

Jamie swore violently as Shannon laughed.

"She's a wonderful young girl."

Several sets of eyes had watched ten-year-old Abigail Wilde throughout the evening.

"She has a furious temper when provoked," Mindy commented.

"She will be hard work," Dave added.

"You go first, partner; Rachel always wanted a daughter – a sister for Brad," Sam Fellowes offered.

"We'd love to," Paul Murphy replied. "If you are sure."

"Go for it."

***Chapter 331*: Advance Preview of Fusion: Los Angeles**

Coming up, very soon!

A new story from the **Forsaken Universe!**

Please be advised that some of what you see below may not actually appear in the story, or may be changed considerably. Most of the below will be out of context (on purpose) and not necessarily in the right order (on purpose). Also, the below spans many chapters, so you may not see certain sections for quite a while.

Synopsis: Sky and Christina Abbott are sixteen-year-old twins. Their parents are dead and the two girls were the survivors of a heinous CIA program destroyed by Fusion towards the beginning of the year. After many weeks of recuperation from serious injuries inflicted at the hands of Shadow, the two girls, codenamed Bane and Venom, were then offered a new life by Hit Girl. Despite them not holding the repentant Shadow to blame for their injuries, both girls decided that they needed a completely fresh start away from the City of Chicago.

Hit Girl jumped at the idea to broaden the scope of her organisation and thus, a new branch of Fusion was born. While Vengeance, in the UK was based on Fusion, the British organisation went its own way as far as support and operating methods were concerned. The Los Angeles 'branch' of Fusion would remain true to its mother organisation.

One member of Fusion would be going along with the girls to act as their mentor and the leader of the new offshoot. That member suffered an horrific loss in Chicago, therefore, Los Angeles was hoped to be an important way for her to come to terms with her loss.

All the leaves are brown and the sky is grey
I've been for a walk on a winter's day
I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A.
California dreaming on such a winter's day

...+..._...+..._...+...

FUSION: LOS ANGELES

...+..._...+..._...+...

ABC7 Eyewitness News

Los Angeles appears to have gained its own true vigilantes. Two armour-clad females were spotted on the streets of Santa Monica, late last night. Eagle-eyed vigilante spotters noticed that the women were equipped in a very similar and professional manner to those vigilantes known to exist in the City of Chicago. A select few observers obtained a much closer look at the two vigilantes. Those observers identified the symbol which was visible on the left chest of each woman. The symbol was identical to that worn by those very same Chicago vigilantes that make up the organisation known as Fusion. Fusion, is the organisation headed up by the purple vigilante, Hit Girl.

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"I could get used to this!" Sky commented to her twin sister as they both set foot on the tarmac.

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"How can I go out on the beach looking like this?" demanded Chrissy as she checked out her own bruises which were spread out across her abdomen.

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"Six bedrooms – four in the main house. Master Suite on the second level. You two girls get to have a suite each on the main level. Every door is armoured, as is every pane of glass. The grass outback can handle a helicopter as required."

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Each suit was of a skin-tight design and was made up of an ultra-flexible and ultra-light composite armour which covered every inch of the body from the ankles to the neck. Lightweight, high-strength, stab-resistant boots matched the suit colour. For the hands, armoured gloves extended up past the wrist. A mask covered their entire head and eyes down to the bridge of their nose leaving only the lower half of their faces exposed.

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"You are about to enter a world which is secretive by its very existence. You are about to enter the world of the vigilante. You are about to enter a purple hell."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"What the fuck is this? Who the fuck do they think they are, coming into my fucking city and causing fucking trouble?"

"I want them dealt with before they can get settled into L.A. – I will not have any of that vigilante bullshit here in my city! The fucking arrogance of those bastards!"

"Kill them and I want their dead bodies so that I can display them as a warning to any other fucking wannabe vigilantes. Do not fuckup like that bastard, D'Amico!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

"You are shitting me!"

"You guys do not fuck around when it comes to Safehouses, do ya?"

"Hit Girl has a thing for being prepared – she must have been a boy scout in a previous life!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

The interior of the space was pristine and could not have been cleaner. To the right, were weapons of every kind. To the left, in racks, were boxes of loose rounds and other ammunition. Straight ahead were the combat suits.

...+..._...+..._...+...

The girl aimed down the room and then squeezed the trigger.

Bang!

Scream!

Thud!

Laughter!

"What the hell did you drop it for?" I demanded as Sky rolled around on the floor laughing.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"When you two decide to grow up, let me know," Erika growled as she glared at the two girls.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"I see scum, Venom. Scum that prays on the innocent. Scum that needs to be taught a lesson."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"Welcome to Los Angeles, Mindy – you too, Steph, Saoirse."

...+..._...+..._...+...

"You having a midlife crisis or something, Erika?"

"Or something..." Erika replied coolly.

...+..._...+..._...+...

"This . . . place . . . is . . . fucking . . . awesome!"

...+..._...+..._...+...

"I hacked the fuck out of the CIA."

"Yes, you did – not bad for a thirteen-year-old. Would you like to know what you found?"

"Would be nice – the fucking file was encrypted up the wazoo and they caught me before I could start decrypting it."

...+..._...+..._...+...

*"You are a very important part of this team. We want to keep you alive.
You need to learn to look after yourself – I am not babysitting you every damn night we go out!"*

...+..._...+..._...+...

"I have no time to talk – I have a mission to complete."

"A mission? Who for? Urban Predator is dead."

"You don't understand. I have to complete this mission."

"No, you don't."

"Get out of my way, Steph – or I will shoot you."

"Do it, then."

...+..._...+..._...+...

FUSION: LOS ANGELES

...+..._...+..._...+...

*All the leaves are brown and the sky is grey
I've been for a walk on a winter's day
I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A.
California dreaming on such a winter's day*

***Chapter 332*: A Change of Pace**

Saturday, September 17th, 2016

Northern Chicago

The assault, when it came, was silent.

The civilian guard force never knew they were under attack until the very moment of their death. The strike was made with military precision on a facility which was deemed to be 'black'. It did not feature on any publicly available records and very few who lived nearby had any idea what was stored there.

They attacked with military precision in teams of six. Four teams had been deployed. Nobody was left alive and the only evidence which remained were the shafts sticking out of the victim's bodies. The only weapons employed appeared to be arrows and knives. They left with slightly more noise as six trucks were stolen. Each eight-tonne truck was preloaded with military supplies and ready to deploy at a moment's notice. Thus, the US military lost 48-tonnes of military stores in an attack which lasted just twenty minutes.

The attack was not discovered until a failed check-in, forty minutes later.

Training Facility Echo Level 4

Dave smiled as he observed the activity.

Megan, Curtis, Stephanie, and Tommy were pounding around the 400-metre track on their second lap. They were not racing – it was training and they were all keeping up a steady pace. Sweat was evident as they ran but they were all smiling, enjoying the exercise. The swimming pool was occupied by most of the younger vigilantes which included: Anne-Marie, Danny, Annabelle, Iain, Lauren, Lizzie, Leo, Abigail, and Jamie. Hailee was patrolling the pool as lifeguard and referee as the youngsters swam lengths of the fifty-metre pool. Those lengths were randomly interrupted by some good-natured fooling about. All, were competent swimmers although Abigail and Jamie both showed a marked dislike for the water.

Further around, the climbing wall featured Shannon, Marc, and Mindy part way up, with Joshua actually at the top.

Level 0

Saoirse and Morgan were sparring on a section of the mat, as were Hunter and Sarah.

Chloe was referring a sparring match between Paige and Taylor which was getting very bitchy! Patrick was instructing Abby in some self-defence techniques over in another corner of the giant mat. Marty peered out of his armoured windows as he finished off some computer updates. He was amazed at how well things were coming along but at the back of his mind, he knew that very soon everything could come apart.

Everything that he had helped to build – it could all come crashing down.

That afternoon

Level 2

The briefing area was very full and it took a few minutes for all the gossiping and giggling to cease.

Everybody was in high spirits, which was good, however, Hit Girl had to burst everybody's happy bubble – she had no choice; it was time for the serious side of *Fusion* to come out. She had to remind everybody of what was at stake and why *Fusion* existed in the first place. As silence settled on everybody, some of the smiles faded as the grim expressions on the faces of their leaders gazed down at them.

"Three weeks!" Hit Girl almost yelled.

There were a few confused expressions.

"For those of you who do not know – *Fusion* was given a three-month ultimatum to leave Chicago. We are *not* leaving Chicago. That means we need to train and we will train and guess what? We continue to train! Chicago faces a living hell if we back down and leave the city in the hands of the most evil people in America."

"Every *Fusion* facility is being made ready. Every member of *Fusion* will need to be ready. As the team which we are, we will prevail. Until the deadline, we will protect this city, but we will not take any unnecessary risks and risk anybody being on the side lines when we really need them. All of you newbies – get with the program and learn from your mentors. We need everybody to work together. *Fusion* succeeds because it is a group of individuals who work together like nothing else.

"This is not just a pep talk – I want you all to realise the seriousness of what you are training for. *Fusion* is *not* an after-school club – it is a paramilitary organisation with a slant on vigilantism. If any of you have reservations of what you are getting involved with, then please let us know as soon as you can and we will try to resolve any problems. I have seen many of you in combat and I know how highly skilled you are. You *Predators* – I have seen how you fight and while I abhor how you came to be what you are, I am proud to have you fighting by my side.

"The next four weeks will decide the future of Chicago. The next four weeks will decide the future of *Fusion*. I just hope that in four weeks, I will be able to look upon you all, just as you are now. I won't lie to you; people will get hurt. We do not know what is out there waiting for us – but it won't be good and it will be intent on killing us all. For my part, I will provide each one of you with the best weapons and the best defensive equipment that I can get my hands on. Your safety is of paramount importance but we have innocents to protect and that means we have to put ourselves, our bodies, in harm's way.

"That is a tall order for the younger members here but an everyday occurrence for the older and blooded ones amongst us. To put it in perspective: 2.7-million people are relying on the forty of us to protect them. As soon as we have confirmed intelligence, then we will have regular briefings to bring everybody in on the full picture. Some of the intelligence will be classified but I will not keep you in the dark."

Mindy's oration had been long but it had focussed the minds of everybody present as Mindy had intended.

The following afternoon
Sunday, September 18th

Training Facility Echo
Level 1

"Why are you looking like a kid who just lost her ice-cream?" Mindy asked her Lieutenant.

"She's feeling frustrated," Joshua explained.

"Huh?"

"Sexually frustrated."

"Huh?"

"We seem to have appropriated a human contraceptive."

"Huh?"

Joshua sighed before he began orating as Chloe's forehead hit the table with a bang.

"First night – she was in her own bed for ten minutes before she slipped in between us and fell asleep. Second night – I'd just got Chloe's motor going and I was just about to penetrate. . ."

Mindy growled.

". . . Well – she appeared again. 'Don't mind me,' she said as she slipped under the duvet and fell asleep between us. Third night – we'd just stripped off and climbed into bed but then Chloe felt something *in* the bed and she was there again. She wriggled up the bed and sat there smiling for a minute before she rolled over and closed her eyes. 'Your dick's not sticking out like it was last night,' she says. We haven't bothered since."

Mindy smirked but then she couldn't help herself and she giggled before regaining her composure after a minute or two. She turned to the little girl two tables over.

"Becky!"

"Yes, Mindy," Becky said as she scampered over – a big grin on her face.

"Would you like to spend the night at my place, tonight?" Mindy asked.

Becky's face lit up.

"Will Anne-Marie be there?"

"Yes, she will – no doubt she will want to have you in her room. You okay with that?"

Becky's grin was enormous as she ran off to find Anne-Marie. Chloe lifted her head off the table and she smiled at Mindy as she mouthed, 'thank you'.

"And people see me as a 'cold heartless bitch!'" Mindy laughed.

"You are a 'cold heartless bitch', honey – one day, you're going to have to face up to that," Dave chuckled.

"I have no problem being a 'cold heartless bitch'," Dave. "It makes me what I am."

Then Mindy scowled as Stephanie gave her a hug around the waist.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"I was feeling overheated so I thought I'd hug you to cool down," Stephanie replied with a cheesy grin on her face as Mindy growled.

Level 0

"I can't do it – everybody is bigger than me."

"Becky – you killed a grown man with a knife!" Shannon pointed out.

"He had no idea I was there," the girl pointed out.

"I think we can show that size isn't everything," Foxtail said as she pulled on her mask. "Rogue!"

The diminutive Rogue came out onto the mat and she faced off against the taller, larger girl. Both wore their full combat suits and at a nod from Foxtail, both girls reached behind them and drew their highly-polished, devastatingly sharp, Butterfly Swords. There was a lot of murmuring from those watching as they took in the amazing weapons held by the two girls. Very few saw the swords out during training without some form of protective cover in place as they were *beyond* lethal.

The girls began slowly, gauging their attacks as they circled, their blades darting out and clashing with the sound of metal upon metal. The smaller girl darted in for an attack before her strikes were parried away by the bigger girl but Rogue pushed back before catching Foxtail on her backside with the flat of one of her swords. Rogue laughed out loud as she dodged a counterstrike and with an amazing twist, she flipped on of Foxtails blades out of her gauntlet and sent in clattering to the mat.

There was a sharp intake of breath from all those present as Foxtail did not flinch as she continued the fight with only one blade. The clang of the blades resounded around the concrete box which was the Safehouse and all eyes followed the flashes of the lights which flashed off the keenly sharpened blades. Foxtail was good and she was able to push back the smaller Rogue, despite Rogue still having both of her swords to hand.

Foxtail was not losing the fight so she waited for Rogue to make a mistake which did not take long as the younger girl opened herself up too much and Foxtail parried a blade to the side and she kicked the eight-year-old in the stomach. Rogue fell backwards, her blades crossed over her chest as she crashed to the mat. Then she froze as Foxtail went down on one knee, the hyper-sharp blade to Rogue's neck.

As Foxtail pulled Rogue back to her feet, there was cheering from the dozen or so faces who were watching.

"That was bloody awesome!" Becky announced.

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Patrick studied his daughter as she patiently guided her younger siblings through their training. Patrick was impressed as he watched Iain and Annabelle watch and take in everything that their elder sister told them. It was as if they had never been parted. Patrick was amazed by how mature Shannon was and how much she had grown. He so wished that he had been able to recover Shannon while she still had her innocence, however, he knew very well that few kids retained their innocence much past five or six months as a *Predator*. By then, they were nothing better than feral – a state brought on by a combination of drugs, influence, punishment, and indoctrination.

Patrick was fully aware of how his eldest daughter disagreed with what he and his wife had done with her younger brother and sister. He hoped that she might mellow over time – only time would tell. He had had second thoughts about throwing everything in with Hit Girl and *Fusion* and his initial intentions had been to keep his three kids as a team operating as *Fusion* allies. But then he had seen how *Fusion* fought with immense skill and professionalism. He had seen how the *Predators* had fought using every skill that they possessed and had learnt since their freedom had been realised. They fought because they wanted to fight rather than fighting just because some bastard was holding a big stick over them.

He knew that Mindy and Dave were very well off and financially secure for life. However, he also knew that every member of *Fusion* wanted for nothing. Mindy had obviously spent enormous sums on the best weaponry and the combat suits were way beyond state-of-the-art. The training facilities open to *Fusion* vigilantes was the best that Patrick had ever seen. Dave and Mindy were not using *Fusion* to make money – that was just a benefit – Dave and Mindy had a professional organisation headed by the famous Hit Girl and Kick-Ass team.

Patrick was familiar with the long and illustrious list of those who had taken on Kick-Ass and Hit Girl – and lost everything, if they were lucky. Most simply lost their lives and as far as Patrick was concerned, if Hit Girl was after them, then they probably deserved everything that they got. Surprisingly, Mindy had morals – of a sort. It was amazing to see that Mindy had taken a *Predator* as her own – a famous one too.

Saoirse had sat down with Patrick and brought him up to date with everything she knew since he had left the *Urban Predator* program. Saoirse had related how terrible things had got and then what had happened to the 'new girl' and her subsequent abuse. Patrick had believed in a program which rewarded the *Predators* – only, while Lucy and Leo had been rewarded with their own accommodation and better conditions, the later *Predators* were deemed undeserving of reward – except for being rewarded by slightly less abuse.

Saoirse had told him about a young girl who had been bullied to the point where the eight-year-old had killed a girl, four years her senior. Patrick knew that under his regime, Stephanie would have gained better conditions and maybe her own room. He hated how those bastards had mutilated and ultimately destroyed the vision which he had helped create. He felt responsible for all those kids who had been slaughtered in Europe. But he felt pride at knowing that many had survived and some had been able to avenge every *Predator*.

Mindy had joined them towards the end of their discussion and she had explained about *Fusion's* latest problem and the ultimatum which was rapidly approaching. Patrick had again considered keeping his kids out of it but that would not be fair – without Mindy, Shannon might . . . Shannon might be dead.

There was, however, one other more disturbing issue which he and his wife had deemed to be beyond their control: Marc. Saoirse had explained to Patrick about the demonstration which Marc and Shannon had put on before two hundred witnesses. She had also mentioned the suspected relationship which had meant that Shannon, instead of being deployed with Marc, was replaced by Sarah. Since Shannon's return and her meeting up with Marc – well, they had been 'at it' as Annabelle had put it. He knew that he could not prevent Shannon from having sex with Marc – and he was not about to try; he had caused enough heartache for the girl.

He would just have to put up with the continual squeaking of the proverbial bed springs!

..._...

"Okay, Scamp – let's see what you can do," Hit Girl announced.

Scamp wore a pair of dark-blue shorts and a white T-shirt, both with the *Fusion* shield embroidered onto them. The eight-year-old girl was barefoot as she faced off against the identically clad Rogue. Scamp was about three inches

shorter than Rogue and quite a bit thinner.

Scamp darted forwards and she kicked out at Rogue who dodged the kick kicking out herself, catching Scamp on the left shoulder. The younger girl – by one month – grimaced but otherwise ignored the strike. The idea of the sparring match was to see how skilled Scamp was and where her weaknesses lay – a custom training regime could then be worked out. Scamp was fast, darting around, using her strength which was her manoeuvrability and avoiding her liability which was her muscular strength.

Rogue had been sparring for almost a year and she was highly skilled and focussed when she fought – as two men had found to their cost, earlier in the year, when Rogue had killed them both during a European tour. The older girl did not hold back as she kicked out and sent Scamp flying backwards onto the mat. Scamp scrambled back to her feet and her face scrunched up in anger as she dove at Rogue and drove a fist into her opponent's left thigh eliciting a loud scream of pain as she did so. Rogue returned the compliment with a sharp kick to Scamp's own left thigh which she had left vulnerable.

Scamp screamed out as she fell to the mat and Hit Girl saw Jackal bolt forwards but he stopped as Shadow rested a hand on his lower arm. His expression was grim as he watched Scamp regain her feet, tears running down her cheeks. The girl was very brave and despite the pain in her thigh, she was game enough to continue the sparring. Hit Girl was in two minds about stopping the fight then and there – not least because Jackal was about to kill somebody to protect his Scamp. Nonetheless, she allowed the fight to continue.

Scamp glared up at Rogue who frowned at her opponent. She was worried that she might have gone too far and she was fully expecting Jackal to come over and flatten her. Hit Girl nodded and Rogue darted forward but she found Scamp doing the same thing and she was shocked as she felt considerable pain in her abdomen as Scamp drove both fists into Rogue's stomach knocking the air from her lungs. Rogue fell to her knees gasping for breath as Scamp kicked Rogue in the side sending the gasping girl over onto her side.

Then Scamp brought back her right foot and she drove it forwards towards Rogue's face.

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Hit Girl grabbed hold of Scamp just before her foot came into contact with the cringing face of Rogue.

"Easy there, girl!" Hit Girl said as she brought the angry young girl back down onto her feet.

Rogue stood back up and she held out her right hand to Scamp as she smiled at the younger girl. Scamp was seething with anger as tears of frustration flooded down her face.

"I'm sorry, Scamp," Rogue offered. "Well done."

Scamp began to control her breathing and the tears stopped. Shadow and Jackal ran forwards but Hit Girl waved them back, giving Scamp time to sort herself out, by herself. With supreme effort, Scamp controlled her temper and she held out her hand, forcing a smile. Rogue gripped the proffered hand and they both shook.

"Thanks, Rogue."

Both girls were dripping with sweat after their sparring match and both received a cold bottle of water from a grinning Ravage.

"Wow! That was awesome, sis – you too, Scamp; ice cold!"

..._...

"Mindy – that went too far!" Joshua growled

"Josh – she could handle it. Diving in would have given her cause to doubt herself. I needed to see how she could handle herself and you know that. Believe me, Josh, I know what it is like to worry about somebody you love and I am very proud of you for your reactions towards Becky. She's a wonderful little girl and she has a lot of hard-learned skills that we can build on. She's safe and I promise to look after her, tonight, okay?"

"Josh; Mindy's right," Chloe said as she looked up into her boyfriend's anger-filled eyes. "God, you made me proud today – and so did Becky."

Joshua relented and he smiled at Chloe before looking at Mindy.

"I know you'll look after her, Mindy – I just saw red when Anne-Marie hurt Becky."

"You remember what Mindy was like that day Anne-Marie had her nose punched by a boy accidentally?" Chloe asked.

"I thought she was going to go all Hit Girl on the poor kid," Joshua replied with a laugh.

"I never knew that bringing up kids was so hard," Mindy said. "It is damn hard but it is also the best thing ever to see them smile at you and to feel their love."

"I'm looking forward to that," Joshua said as he hugged Chloe.

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"Anne-Marie?"

Anne-Marie was busy soaping herself in the showers when she saw Becky hang up her towel and grab a bottle of shower gel from the shelf at the entrance to the showers. Anne-Marie winced as she saw the vicious red marks on Becky's body – they were healing but it had barely been five days since they had been inflicted. The bruise on the little girl's face was slowly healing too but it showed that the girl had been through a lot.

"Hi, Becky."

"I'm sorry I went to kick you in the face – it was just instinct and I was angry."

"I'm sorry as well, Becky. I went a bit far."

"I think Mindy wanted you to go to town on me just to see how I reacted."

"Mindy can be very tough but she means well and . . . well, I wouldn't be alive today without the training which Mindy has provided me. We may be little kids but we are training to fight in a nasty world full of people who want to fuck over people like you and me . . . what's the scowl for?"

"I don't like swearing."

"Sorry – I've picked up some bad habits from Steph . . . and Mindy!"

"Thank you for making me so welcome. I can't believe that it was only Tuesday when I was being strapped for helping Shannon escape. I've killed four people – two I killed on Tuesday."

"I killed two men, back in May – they tried to kill me and my brother and Hailee. Danny took down one man, too. I hated doing it and I still get nightmares; it was the first time that I had used my beautiful swords."

"You two going to finish showering or what?" Megan asked as she walked into the shower area and began to wash. "I think Mindy is looking for you both."

"Oops!" Anne-Marie muttered as she quickly rinsed off the last of the shampoo from her hair and Becky finished off her own.

The two younger girls quickly left the showers to get dressed, grabbing their towels as they went. Stephanie, Lauren, and Abigail soon joined Megan in the showers. They were all chatting when Saoirse and Shannon appeared.

"Hold it!" Saoirse said as she caught sight of Stephanie. "The last time I saw Stephanie in a communal shower, she was killing somebody. Are we safe, Steph?"

Stephanie laughed at her friend's expression and she went back to her shower without rising to the bait.

Glenview

The house was pandemonium!

Mindy was making a vain attempt at sitting quietly so that she could read her 160-page Guns and Ammo magazine which had recently arrived. Unfortunately, a combination of four-legged and two-legged hyperactivity was preventing Mindy from concentrating despite her best efforts. The ginger kitty landing with claws extended on her magazine with

a pair of large German-Shepherd dogs in hot pursuit, not to mention the two eight-year-old girls who were screaming as they chased the dogs, was just a little too much for Mindy and she growled.

Stephanie heard the growl and sensing an explosion with the potential to go nuclear, she grabbed both girls and quickly dragged them out of the living room and shoved them both towards the stairs.

"Go play upstairs," Stephanie suggested.

Becky and Anne-Marie giggled as they ran up the stairs while the two dogs sat staring up at Stephanie, tongues hanging out and panting heavily.

"You two look so stupid!" Stephanie told Kiara and Razor

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"Sorry, Mum."

"Don't be silly, Steph – they're just letting off some steam," Mindy chuckled as she glared at the ginger menace which lay across her legs, purring happily as he looked up at Mindy, his eyes half closed.

"I thought that they were about to be slaughtered," Abigail commented as she looked up from another one of Mindy's Guns and Ammo magazines.

"My thoughts exactly," Stephanie commented.

"Those two really look dumb," Abigail pointed out as the two canine trainee vigilantes stared at the girl, their tongues lolling out the sides of their mouths.

"They do that – I think their brains sometimes get disconnected, or something," Stephanie replied as she stroked Razor while Abigail concentrated on Kiara.

Mindy smirked as she went back to her magazine. She was pleased that Stephanie and Abigail could get some quality time together without ripping each other's throats out. Fifteen minutes later, Jamie ambled into the living room with Danny beside him.

"Do I want to hear this," Mindy asked as she read the boy's expressions.

"We've not done anything," Jamie offered with a sly grin.

"The two girls, however. . ." Danny grinned.

Mindy sunk her head into her hands for a moment. She had worried that it would have been Stephanie and Abigail killing each other which would have upset the evening.

"Where's Dave?"

"He's taking a shower."

Mindy listened hard and from somewhere upstairs, she could hear giggling – loud giggling – and . . . was that water splashing?

..._...

Mindy had no idea what she was going to find as she climbed the stairs, followed by Stephanie, Jamie, Danny, Abigail . . . and the two dogs – Horatio remained stretched out on the couch in kitty heaven. The giggling got louder, as did the sound of splashing. Mindy made her way down the corridor and then into Danny's room. She pushed open the door into the shared bathroom and she froze as she felt her socks suddenly feeling very damp.

"Holy, fuck!" Stephanie exclaimed as she splashed into the bathroom beside Mindy. "You two are so dead!"

The two in question, Scamp and Rogue, were pretty-much naked and what clothing they wore was soaked. Scattered around the bathroom were sodden lumps which were evidently the girls' discarded clothing. The bath was full and overflowing. The shower was running and water was streaming from the stall across the floor. Even more surprising was who was in the shower stall.

"Sophia!" Mindy exclaimed as the dog whined and looked a little sheepish.

Stephanie pushed past and she shut off the shower while Abigail reached into the bath and she yanked out the plug. The water gurgled as it flooded down the plughole.

"You hear that noise, girls – that's your freedom going down the drain!" Mindy stated and both girls groaned. "Anne-Marie – go find towels for you and Rebecca. Rebecca, I am going to be speaking to Chloe about this."

Becky knew that she was in big trouble as soon as she saw Mindy appear in the flooded bathroom. The use of her full first name just reinforced the fact. She was also unhappy about disappointing Chloe. Jamie and Danny just shook their heads as their sister reappeared with towels for Becky and herself.

"Steph, Abigail – please escort Sophia downstairs to the basement and get her dried off."

The unhappy looking Sophia headed off downstairs in the custody of Abigail and Stephanie. Mindy smirked as the dog vanished – the animal could kill if she so desired but as Sophia, she was soft as a rag and she loved to play with the kids. Then Mindy's expression went cold.

"Anne-Marie – you and your friend get to bed, now!"

"So immature!" Danny exclaimed as the two girls vanished from sight.

"Okay, Mr Mature – go get a bloody mop!" Mindy growled.

***Chapter 333*: Fury v Psyche**

Sunday, September 18th, 2016

Glenview

"I'm sorry, Mindy. . ."

"Chloe – shut the fuck up!"

"I'm responsible for her, so. . ."

"Did you bring her school stuff?"

"Yes. Can I see her?"

Mindy and Chloe headed up the stairs. They paused at the door to Anne-Marie's room which was partially open – the room beyond was quiet. Both young women peeked inside and they smiled. Becky and Anne-Marie were fast asleep. Becky's dark brown hair was spread out on the pillow beside the lighter brown hair of her friend.

"Little terrors!" Chloe chuckled as she turned away from the little girl who had recently become the centre of her and Joshua's lives.

"Go get fucked!"

Chloe scowled and Mindy laughed.

"I mean it – go get fucked by your man. . ."

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Lucy hated Sundays.

Something to do with Monday following on close behind. The girl sat astride her black Yamaha FZ-09 motorcycle, just off Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway, about six miles south-south-west of Colorado Springs. Below her, in the valley, just to the south of Fort Carson, were the ruins of a large complex of concrete buildings. All were destroyed, mostly by fire and, her skilled eyes told her, explosives.

To Lucy, the place had been hell on earth, but for almost five years, it had also been the closest thing she had had to a home. It was also where they had first met, seven long years before. A single tear ran down her left cheek at the thought of what she had lost.

"Fucking pussy!" she growled, ashamed at herself for showing her feelings.

With a kick of her left boot, she kicked the motorcycle into first gear and accelerated down the road, leaving her past behind her.

The following day

Monday, September 19th

Chicago, Illinois

Glenview

"Mindy?"

"Yes, Becky."

"I'm really sorry for my behaviour, yesterday."

"I know you are – you're just being a kid and no harm was done. Apology accepted."

"Thank you."

"Go get your breakfast, sweetie – you look very smart."

Becky blushed and giggled as she joined Anne-Marie in the kitchen for a bowl of chocolate cereal before school. They were joined by the two boys, as well as by Stephanie, soon after.

Mindy finished off her own breakfast as Dave breezed in, gave his wife a kiss, said goodbye to the kids, and headed out the door.

That evening

Training Centre Echo Level 0

"You sure about this, honey?"

"Yes, Dave – it'll be fine . . . I think."

"Okay – you going to talk with them first?"

"Yes, I will."

Mindy headed for the changing rooms where she found Stephanie, Megan, and Abigail.

"You guys, okay?"

"Hi, Mindy," Abigail replied with a smile. "Thanks for this."

"Okay – while Megan finishes dressing you, let's go over a few things. Stephanie, Abigail – I know that there is no love lost between you two. This sparring session is intended to allow Abigail to get used to fighting in her new combat suit. I am also allowing you two to vent a little against one another – but you both need to remember that killing each other is in the past. Please do not abuse my trust – I think you both know what might happen should you abuse my trust."

"We do," the two girls replied.

"I'm expecting to see some good moves out there – use your skills and demonstrate what you are both capable of. While I am familiar with what Stephanie can do and I have seen some of what you can do, Abigail, I need to be certain that you can keep up with the rest of us."

"I can!" Abigail growled.

"Yes – but I want to see it."

"Okay."

"Megan – send them both out when Abigail's ready, okay?"

"Will do!" Megan replied.

..._...

Okay, Mindy was being devious – not really a big surprise – she was setting up Psyche and Fury; just for a bit of fun, of course – just some harmless fun.

There was cheering from the assembled vigilantes as the two masked vigilantes made their way down the steps and onto the mat. Psyche was dressed in her combat suit and ready for action. Her adversary was Fury, who was appearing for the very first time in her new combat suit. The ten-year-old's slim frame was covered from head to toe in body armour which was predominantly scarlet in colour but with her chest armour and thighs in graphite grey. Her face was completely covered and the young vigilante showed no skin. Her eyes glowed a luminous yellow to accentuate the furious look of the mask. Her utility belt held a single Heckler & Koch P30SK pistol on her right hip with four spare magazines, plus communications equipment and a combat knife. She wore gauntlets with graphite

grey armour on the back of her hands. Her boots were also graphite grey and they rose up her lower leg to just below the knee. Fury's primary weapon was a custom double-ended carbon-fibre bō-staff which she held in her left hand.

As Psyche looked around, she smelt a rat – she had expected to see her brother on the sidelines watching the fight; he was not there. The veteran *Predator*, and more recently, veteran vigilante, had no more time to dwell on her thoughts as Fury attacked. Psyche struggled to clear her mind which was dredging up memories which she never wanted to see again. She saw the naked Electra with vicious, bloody scars across her body. She saw Electra stabbed and tied to a tree. Then she saw the cause of those horrific injuries – she saw Fury, in that woodland.

Psyche saw red as she drew a Sai in each hand and she parried away the razor-sharp bō-staff blade.

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Fury noticed the change in Psyche's demeanour and to be brutally honest, she was visualising exactly what she figured Psyche was. It had been years ago, but it all still felt very raw as the physical scars still existed, as did the mental scars. Fury had mental scars that revolved around Psyche setting her up to be raped and that experience was now associated with something that she could not remember but which had left mental scars which caused horrific nightmares as her mind visualised what some man had done to her body while she had been under the influence of some godawful drugs.

Fury hated Psyche like nothing else only, part of her liked the girl inside, Stephanie. The young girl was nothing like she had been when Fury had last known her and that gave Fury pause to reconsider her own feelings towards Stephanie and her alter-ego, Psyche. Nonetheless, Fury needed to fight her nemesis before she could put away her memories for good. Fury was skilled with the bō-staff and she wielded it against her adversary. Twice, she struck Psyche with the flat of a blade, causing a shout of pain and indignation

Fury was rewarded for her strikes by a Sai striking her new body armour – they hurt! Psyche had her own supporters but Fury had expected to have had her own but there was no sign of Jamie, nor was there any sign of Shannon. Fury had no time to dwell on unimportant thoughts as she found herself kicked hard and then her bō-staff was knocked out of her hand by a double roundhouse kick the second one of which sent the girl spinning onto the mat. Psyche ran at Fury, kicking her in the side just as the other girl rolled away, seizing Psyche's right ankle and yanking it.

Psyche struck the mat, hard, but she instantly regained her feet as Fury attacked again and they both went down together, viciously punching each other wherever they could reach. Their respective armour provided protection but only to a point. Both girls yelled out as the other punched them in the head, in the side, in the chest, in the stomach. It was a full-on brawl and the bruises were stacking up.

Then Hit Girl threw in her wildcard – actually *two* wildcards. The two young girls broke apart as Hit Girl yelled out a warning.

"Team up, Psyche and Fury – you are under attack! Comms are activated and isolated."

Psyche and Fury were forced to change from fighting one another to fighting as a team as two unknown armour-clad individuals appeared on the mat, advancing towards Psyche and Fury. One was tall and one was short – both girls had an inkling who they might be.

"I've got your back, Psyche," Fury called over the comms circuit.

Both girls swept up their discarded weapons and they turned to face the approaching threat.

"Copy that, Fury."

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The taller vigilante was a girl – tall and well-formed; it had to be Stormtide.

Her combat suit was predominantly azure blue with basalt grey tiger stripes covering the armour. Her eyes glowed a luminous green which complimented her stormy colour-scheme. As with Fury, no skin was visible. Twin H&K P30 pistols adorned her hips along with the usual array of magazine pouches and communications equipment. Her right thigh bore a mount for four titanium throwing knives while an eight-inch combat knife was strapped to her left calf. In her left hand, she held a double-ended carbon-fibre bō-staff which was very similar to that held by Fury but a few inches longer in length to match the girl's extra height.

The bō-staff cut through the air and Fury had barely a second to react as the bigger girl attacked and reattacked. Fury

was already tired after fighting Psyche but the new girl appeared very fresh and full of energy. But Fury had trained for such a situation and she did not back down easily but instead, she flew at Stormtide while Psyche faced off against the other new armoured vigilante who appeared more than a little familiar to the seasoned fighter.

The boy was covered from head to toe in a deep orange combat suit with certain sections of armour in flame red, trimmed with signal yellow. The eyes in his mask glowed a luminous red. Around the boy's waist was a utility belt carrying communications equipment, spare magazines, and a custom Heckler & Koch P30SK pistol. On his right calf, he carried a six-inch combat knife.

"You think you can take me, Rage?" Psyche growled as she spun the Sai in each hand.

"I can take you, anytime I choose, slapper!" Rage growled as he wielded his twenty-eight-inch Messer Sword.

"Big words from a little shit!" Psyche responded with a grin as she considered that it was barely a week since they had last fought one another.

"Less chatter, bitch – let's see some fightin'!" Rage responded.

..._...

Mindy smirked as she watched the four youngsters spar on the mat. The sparring attracted quite a few onlookers who stayed off the capacious mat due to the very sharp blades which were being employed. Despite her attempt at causing trouble, Fury and Psyche were holding their own against the opposing team. Stormtide had numerous advantages over Fury but the younger girl was doing well as the bō-staffs clashed. Lucius Fox had done well to provide the combat suits so fast but they would be needed, very soon, to protect every member of *Fusion* over the coming weeks. While Stormtide fought the ferocious and aptly names, Fury, Mindy turned her attentions to the two siblings who fought a few yards away.

Mindy was still coming to terms with having a new child in the family. Stephanie had taken some getting used to but Jamie was something else and he was still very unsure of himself and his new surroundings. The boy was capable – that was obvious by how long he had survived alone and then with Shannon. Dave and Mindy were still piecing together the events surrounding Jamie, Shannon, and Abigail. Rage was using his blade to good effect as he swung it towards his sister. Psyche was highly skilled and more experienced than her younger brother but Jamie had raw skills which Psyche was still quantifying. He managed to land a strike on Psyche which elicited a cry of rage and then Rage found himself in retreat as he was chased by a Sai-wielding maniac.

Rage was not looking where he was going and he cannoned into Stormtide, taking the older girl down with him as he fell. Fury took advantage of the unexpected turn of events and she kicked Stormtide in the left thigh, following up with a punch to the chest which elicited a scream from the infuriated teenager.

"You fucking little bitch!" Stormtide growled.

"Maybe Tempest will rub your boobs better," Fury teased.

"When you get some, I'll return the fucking favour!" Stormtide barked back.

"Will you two just get a bloody room!" Psyche growled as she flipped Stormtide over and down onto her back for the second time in as many minutes. "Stay the fuck down, Stormy!"

"You too, fuckwit!" Fury growled down at Rage who was trying in vain to regain his feet but with Fury's right foot on his throat.

..._...

"Well done!"

The four youngsters turned to face Hit Girl as she stepped onto the mat.

"That was a remarkable display and well executed. Rage, honey, you need to sort out your situational awareness – you took out your partner and laid yourselves open to attack. Fury, Psyche – very good, today. I commend you both for your abilities and for being quick to reassess the situation when I tried to fuck things up for you both."

"I know how you work," Psyche chuckled. "I expected something."

"I am pleased to see you both working together as a team," Hit Girl finished as she helped Stormtide back to her feet and the annoyed vigilante pulled off her mask, glaring at Jamie as he reappeared from under his own mask.

"Don't get stormy with me, Stormy," Jamie quipped – then he yelled out as Shannon kicked him in the side.

Jamie landed in a heap and he glowered as laughter rang out from the surrounding walkway.

"Where's Abigail?" Stephanie asked as she pulled off her mask and looked around the mat.

"I think I saw her heading towards the changing rooms," Tommy Morgan offered. "That was good fighting. You looked good."

Stephanie grinned as she headed towards the changing rooms beyond the enormous concrete edifice that occupied the area beside the mat.

..._...

There was no sign of Abigail as Stephanie headed into the changing rooms. The male section was empty as was the female area. However, Abigail's body armour was strewn on a bench. Stephanie removed her own body armour, collating it neatly on another section of bench ready to be returned to the armoury after her shower. After pulling off her sweaty T-shirt and boy shorts, Stephanie grabbed a towel and she headed for the female showers from where she could hear water running. As Stephanie entered the showers, she could hear something amidst the steam . . . crying.

"May I join you, Abigail?"

"Go away!"

"It's Steph – please?"

Abigail said nothing, so Stephanie took that as a 'yes' and she hung up her towel before heading into the shower area. Stephanie found Abigail huddled under one of the showers, hot water pelting her body. The girl looked miserable and very soggy. Stephanie turned on the next shower and she sat down under the water, enjoying the pounding hot water on her sore body.

"Talk to me, Abigail."

"I don't know what to do. We're not supposed to be enemies but I'm still struggling with our past and I want to push past it but I can't. I feel so alone. I feel like you are the only one that I can talk to – only you are my Nemesis, not my friend."

Stephanie felt really sorry for the girl but despite her own feelings towards Abigail, she had a responsibility towards the girl and they both needed to work at moving on from their shared past.

"You are *not* alone!"

"I've been alone for months – I've had nobody."

"You had Jamie and Shannon," Stephanie pointed out.

"Yes – that was good, for as long as it lasted."

"I know – you got take and . . ."

"You can say it – I was raped."

"Yes."

"My life is one ginormous fucking train wreck," Abigail growled as she looked over at Stephanie. "I even tried to bloody well kill myself!"

"Considering how much effort you put into everything, Abigail, if you really wanted to kill yourself, then you'd be pushing up the fucking daisies!" Stephanie pointed out and Abigail actually giggled.

"I had no other option open to me."

"Yes, you did!" Stephanie said angrily. "You think I never thought about killing myself and ending the suffering? Those bastards had a fucking hardon for me and they made my life worthless. You are just as strong as me, Abigail, you are a survivor. You are a survivor, just like me, just like Jamie, just like Shannon and all the others: Naomi, Kaitlin, Harper, Yvette, Craig, Saoirse, Aiden, Christina, Sky, Sarah, Marc, Electra, Hunter, Leo, Rebecca – they are all survivors who want to live.

"Mindy put me and Saoirse in charge of the welfare of all you *Predators*. Mindy figured out early on that what we all need is somebody who understands what we've all been through. I had Saoirse to help me through the worst shit – and she had me. We hated each other much worse than you and I do. Right now, I can't imagine life without that girl to talk to and laugh with. What you need, Abigail, is a friend."

Abigail stared at the tile floor for a minute before she looked over at Stephanie again, a smile showing amidst a look of desperation.

"Will *you* be my friend? Will *you* be there for me?"

"Till the end of time, Abigail," Stephanie replied as she stood up. "I owe you, Abigail – without you, I might never have found my little brother . . . alive. Now, stand up and get yourself cleaned up."

..._...

Abigail smiled as she began to wash, feeling happier than she had in many months. Stephanie was her nemesis, just as Saoirse had been Stephanie's. Abigail hated to admit it, but Stephanie was right. The girl whom she had hated for over two years was to be the one to help her get her life back together. Abigail laughed as she washed her hair.

"Something funny?" Stephanie asked.

"I'm being lectured by a girl, six months my junior! You know, it sucks – I'm six months older than you, but you have boobs and you're growing hair down below; I have absolutely nothing – not even bumps!"

"Sorry – I have no control over my body's physical development, but I'm sure you'll get the right bits in due course. Jamie will just have to wait."

Abigail blushed furiously at the last comment but then she smirked at Stephanie.

"Shouldn't you be wearing a bra?"

Stephanie rolled her eyes.

"Nope!" she growled.

"You look like you need one."

Stephanie shook her head and she chuckled.

"Did Mindy put you up to this?"

"Nope."

"For the love of God!" Stephanie breathed. "Okay, they aren't all that big and a bra will just swamp them for Heaven's sake!"

"Still think you need one."

"Can we talk about something else, please, Abigail?"

..._...

As the two girls finished showering and moved to leave the shower area, they heard voices from the changing rooms. The voices were getting louder as one voice got more and more agitated.

"I just wish that two of the most important people in my life weren't always at each other's throats!"

It was Jamie's voice followed by Shannon's.

"Give them time, Jamie – they'll come around."

"I wish they'd just kiss and makeup."

Stephanie and Abigail looked at each other.

"You want to fuck with Jamie?" Abigail said after a pause, her cheeks turning pink.

"Why the hell not?" Stephanie replied, rhetorically.

..._...

Jamie was surprised – very surprised.

His sister had just appeared from the showers . . . with Abigail. He began to smell a rat when he saw them both holding hands like they were friends. Shannon was a little confused too, knowing that the two girls were long-time foes.

"Hi, Jamie," Abigail said sweetly.

"We got a surprise for you," Stephanie added.

Then, to Jamie's surprise, both girls dropped their towels and they turned to each other and kissed one another, full on the lips, their naked bodies pressed together. Shannon produced a very loud wolf-whistle as she watched the two girls kissing. After about ten seconds, Stephanie and Abigail separated.

"Well, Jamie," Abigail commented. "We made up, earlier – now we've kissed. . ."

"You happy, Jamie?" Stephanie grinned.

The boy was totally speechless and his mouth hung open, his eyes popping out of his head as he tried to register the sight of his sister and best-friend kissing while stark naked. Chloe was standing beyond Shannon and her mouth hung open, too. Shannon wolf-whistled again as the two embarrassed girls grabbed up their towels and scampered off to find some clothing. They were followed by cat-calls and wolf-whistles as the boys present quickly got in on the act. The red-faced Stephanie hugged her towel to her body as she scampered past a wide-eyed Tommy who smiled approvingly as he watched her vanish behind some lockers.

"Wow. . .!" Tommy exclaimed.

Later that night

Glenview

"Can I trust you two to behave while sharing the same bed? You know, after that erotic display, earlier?"

Both girls blushed bright red as Mindy grinned. Stephanie growled and glared at her Mum who just chuckled and smiled proudly at her daughter.

"Good night, girls."

Once Mindy had gone, and the door was firmly closed, Abigail looked over at her new friend.

"Your Mum is really proud of you, Steph . . . will I ever have a family? I want somebody to be proud of *me*."

Stephanie grinned fiendishly.

"I may have some thoughts on that, Abigail. Now you be a good girl and go to sleep."

Abigail grinned, just as fiendishly.

"Fuck you!"

The following morning

Tuesday, September 20th

Glenview

"Steph?"

"In here, Jamie."

The boy followed the sound of his sister's voice but then he stopped dead as he found his sister in the bathroom – she was completely naked and she stood facing him. Jamie winced as he noticed the ragged scar on her chest, among other things, and his mouth dropped open in surprise.

"Steph – you're naked. . ."

"I've just stepped out of the shower – I usually shower naked."

Jamie felt his face getting really hot then Steph smiled and she laughed.

"You've seen me naked before – admittedly, it was quite a while ago but nothing much has changed, believe me."

"You have hair down there. . ." Jamie commented shyly.

"Not all that much, but yes, I have pubic hair – so what?"

"I'm sorry. . ." he spluttered as he ran out of the bathroom.

Stephanie rolled her eyes and she grabbed up a fluffy pink towel, wrapping it around her body.

"Jamie!" she yelled as she came out of the bathroom into her bedroom.

Stephanie found her brother sitting on her bed and he was looking down at the floor.

"I'm sorry if I embarrassed you, Jamie. I tend not to think about nudity much; I was naked a lot as a Predator. Mind you, from what I understand, you're not exactly a novice when it comes to seeing females naked."

"Shannon and Abigail weren't my sister. Is it true that you killed a girl while you were both naked?"

Stephanie grinned.

"Yes, Jamie – that's how I got my codename so early."

"Can you tell me the story some time?"

"Definitely – the others have heard it and SD has filled in some of the gaps for me."

"Will you tell me about that scar, too?"

"Of course – you're my brother – but I might need help as I don't really remember all that much about it. What were you wanting?"

"I wanted to thank you for what you're doing for Abigail. I know it must have been really hard for you both to see eye to eye."

"You care about her, don't you?"

"I do."

"It was time for us both to put the past in the past. We both care about you, Jamie, and neither of us wants to hurt you."

"I love you, Steph . . . I'm glad we're back together again."

"I love you, too, Jamie."

That evening

South Whipple

Abigail was silently crapping herself.

The ten-year-old had done many things in her life which had scared her half to death. The girl had taken lives. The girl had mutilated other kids, leaving them scarred for life. However, the prospect of meeting her new family was so nerve-wracking that she almost felt like weeing herself as she struggled to cope with her insides which were turning around like a washing machine on high-speed spin.

Mindy grinned at Abigail's expression as she and Stephanie escorted the young girl up the path to her new home. Waiting on the doorstep were three people: Paul Murphy, his wife, Rachel, and his son, Bradley. They smiled at their visitors and headed inside the house

"Murphy family," Stephanie announced. "Please meet Abigail Wilde. Abigail, this is Paul, Rachel, and Brad – Brad is thirteen and he likes to read porn mags."

"Stephanie!" Mindy growled as Abigail giggled and Brad blushed wildly while his father raised an eyebrow.

"Just trying to put her mind at ease, is all!" Stephanie hissed.

"Welcome to our home, Abigail," Rachel Murphy said. "I am Rachel and we want you to see this house as your home, too."

"Welcome, Abigail," Paul added.

"Hi, Abigail – you're now my kid sister," Brad said proudly and Abigail grinned.

"Watch out, Bradley," Stephanie cautioned. "She bites!"

"I told Jamie not to tell anybody about that," Abigail groaned.

"You bit Jamie?" Stephanie asked.

"Never mind," Abigail muttered.

"I think we'll be just fine," Brad commented as he smiled down at his new sister. "You wanna come see your room?"

Abigail's uneasiness returned with a vengeance.

"Can Steph come?"

"The more the merrier!"

***Chapter 334*: A Hack Too Far**

Wednesday, September 21st, 2016

The home of Chloe and Joshua

The first few days had been difficult and the adjustments required, hard.

However, the young Rebecca Wren, know to all as Becky, loved her new home. She loved the fact that she had a dog – not exactly a cute, fluffy one but Hercules loved the new girl who patted him and hugged him relentlessly. His usual owners tended to pet *each other* a lot more than they petted *him*. For Rebecca, the whole feeling of being wanted was from a lifetime ago. She struggled to sit down and just do nothing – for months she had been unable to get more than a few minutes alone. Some bastard would hit her, throw something at her, yell at her. The young girl had been unable to switch off and properly rest.

She was exhausted from everything and she amazed herself how quickly she had taken to her new life. She felt silly falling asleep at strange times of the day, usually cuddled up with Hercules. It usually took some gentle coaxing from Chloe or Joshua to wake her up for mealtimes and school. School; how normal. From fighting for her life one week, she had changed to a world where the only fighting she did was over who got the ball, her or Hercules. Her body was still bruised to hell, but for once, the bruises were healing without others replacing them.

She loved Chloe and she loved Joshua. At times, they sometimes went over the top watching over her . . . but she knew that she was cared for and that was enough for her to overlook the obsessive protection – yes, she had seen Joshua's attempt to intervene during her fight with Anne-Marie. Each night, she snuggled down into a soft bed in her own room – both a novelty to the young girl. For a few nights in a row, she had awoken from a nightmare and found herself squirming into bed with Chloe and Joshua. Sometimes, she just could not sleep. She had been so used to sleeping on a blanket on the floor like she was a dog.

Going to bed – actually being *told* to go to bed – was a different experience to the previous months. She was able to take her time using the toilet and then changing into clean pyjamas – Chloe had bought a set of pyjamas with My Little Pony characters all over them which Becky loved. Having the bed to sleep in was a welcome change and so soft. Her body still hurt where she had been punched and strapped but it felt better every day. Enjoying a hot shower and pulling on clean clothes each morning was an unbelievably good feeling. Seeing people smile at you because they cared about you each morning was different, rather than people who smiled at you because they just saw an easy target coming into view. Chloe and Joshua ate big – well Chloe was an American – and Becky sometimes felt bad about not being able to finish her meals. A tearful but calm conversation with Joshua had eased her worries and Chloe had promised to serve Becky smaller portions.

Then Becky had made a big mistake and she had found herself in big trouble.

..._...

It had just been a bit of fun – at the time.

Anne-Marie had first suggested that they have a bath together – then a water fight had begun. Then Sophia had wandered in and things had kind of got out of hand very quickly with water getting everywhere.

Upsetting Mindy had made Becky feel really bad. Knowing that Chloe would find out had made her feel even worse. She felt like she had betrayed the very people who had put everything on the line to rescue her and then find her a nice home with people that loved her. Becky's greatest fear was to be rejected and sent away – maybe put into an orphanage. She constantly worried that if she caused enough trouble, Chloe and Joshua may not want her anymore.

When she had returned home after school on Monday, Chloe had been very angry but she had calmly explained to Becky what she had done wrong and why it was unacceptable. Chloe was also calling her 'Rebecca', instead of 'Peanut' – that had hurt. For the past two days, she had been sent to bed the moment that she had finished her tea and completed her homework and *Fusion* activities – no TV, no playing with Hercules (Hercules was sulking).

Chloe had still appeared to give Becky a hug before turning the light off, though, despite the punishment.

That morning

Becky groaned and the little girl rubbed her eyes as the light came on and her curtains were pulled open.

"Morning, Peanut!"

Becky smiled as she heard Chloe's words and she sat up in the bed – her punishment was over!

"Hi, Chloe."

"Up you get, honey!"

Chloe began to throw clean clothes onto the bed as Becky scrambled out from under the duvet and she ran for the bathroom.

"Hi, Josh!" Becky called out as he flattened himself against the wall so he didn't get mown down by the speeding eight-year-old as she vanished into the bathroom. "Such a relief!"

Joshua laughed as he continued on towards the kitchen for his morning mug of tea.

Later that morning

Safehouse F

Mindy was brooding.

Their enemies were planning something, only Mindy had no idea what. Her snouts and informers had not produced much in the way of useful information and she was loathe to risk her one ace in the hole – her double agent. However, a meeting was due that evening with the young girl who was embedded in FEAR's organisation.

Mindy's thoughts caused her to miss the warning but she felt the kick as she suddenly became weightless for a second before gravity intervened and she crashed onto the mat.

"You are a pitiful sparring partner, today, honey," Dave pointed out with a chuckle.

"Fuck you, green asshole!" Mindy growled as she leapt to her feet and went on the offensive.

Dave grinned.

"You are weak, little girl!" he mocked as he kicked and spun around, landing some heavy punches on his annoyed wife before she was kicked to the mat.

"Fucking, cunt!" Mindy growled as she regained her feet and she scowled at her husband.

"Oh, take your tampon out, Mindy!"

It was like a red rag to a bull - literally!

..._...

Mindy *hated* it when *anybody* turned her own words against her and those words were from a distant time and they had been aimed squarely at a, then useless, Kick-Ass. She loved her husband very much but there were times when she had to remind him *who* was the world's number one vigilante and *who* was number two. It did not help that Dave was grinning, fully aware of what he was saying and what his words were doing to his wife's sanity.

Mindy focussed on Dave and she let him have it. The show was epic and attracted many watchers who rarely saw Dave and Mindy sparring together.

"This is rare – normally they only spar in the sack," Joshua commented.

"That's disgusting," Stephanie commented dryly.

"Get with it, little girl, join the sexual revolution!" Chloe chuckled as she watched her mentors spar.

Stephanie ignored Chloe and Joshua and she focussed on her parents who were going full tilt – Dave was good, surprisingly good. Everybody knew that he could hold his own in a fight but everybody also knew that Hit Girl was the

best. Whereas Dave had strength, Mindy had speed and manoeuvrability on her side. She used it too as she darted in for a strike and then backed off to avoid Dave's large fists. Dave grinned as he made a surprisingly swift dive to the right and Mindy's punch missed his stomach by two inches. Mindy growled angrily as she adjusted and kicked Dave in the thigh eliciting a small grunt of pain.

Mindy was not worried about hurting her husband – he could take just about anything which she could dish out with her hands and feet.

..._...

Dave took advantage of his wife's manoeuvrability, catching her as she flipped past him – or tried to. With a hand on either hip, he twisted the struggling purple queen around and threw her to the mat where the catlike vigilante landed comfortably and sprang back at her aggressor. Dave was ready, but so was Mindy as she feinted to her right before diving to her left while Dave dodged right, straight into the angry young woman's fists. In turn, Dave reached out and he grabbed Mindy by her sports bra, throwing her behind him onto the mat – giving the world a fleeting glance of two very nice-looking breasts.

"Fuck you, Dave, fuck you!"

Mindy reattacked as soon as she had readjusted her clothing. Her face was contorted in anger and more than a little pink. Dave was smirking which only guaranteed his suffering as he was punched and kicked in very quick succession like he as a punchbag dangling from the ceiling. Dave took the abuse for almost a full minute before his reduced nerve function was exceeded and he began to feel some real pain. He waited for his wife to calm down, just slightly – he wanted her het up and angry.

With his strength, he seized Mindy's lower arms and gripped them tightly, forcing her to spot moving. She was angry – more than just play angry, too. He loved her when she was angry; her eyes positively sparkled. The sweat running down her subtle curves attracted Dave's attention and he struggled to contain the love which he felt for the eighteen-year-old young woman which he held in his iron grip.

"Dave. . ."

Mindy was unable to finish whatever crude insult was on her lips as Dave pushed his own lips to hers and pulled her body into his. He wrapped both arms around her, lifting Mindy off the mat. As the kiss continued, Mindy's body fell limp and she absorbed her husband's kiss, returning the pressure. Dave sank to the mat, laying Mindy down and they both wrapped their arms around one another and continued to kiss.

"Oh, wow!" Anne-Marie commented as she watched the sparring match degenerate into a sexually-charged kissing fest.

"I feel sick!" Stephanie exclaimed as she placed a hand over Anne-Marie's young eyes.

"More than you should be seeing, little one," Joshua said as he covered up Becky's slightly younger eyes.

"Hey!" the eight-year-old growled as she tried to pull his hands away, eager not to miss a thing.

"Somehow, I feel very inadequate," Joshua commented as he could not help but stare at his mentors as they rolled around the mat, kissing like there was no tomorrow.

It was another few minutes before they both broke apart and lay on the mat breathing heavily.

"You two enjoy yourselves?" Hailee asked with a grin as Mindy finally opened her eyes.

"Hell, yeah; I'm soaked!"

"Not from sweat, neither," Dave chuckled as he stood up.

"Dave!" Mindy exclaimed, her face getting redder.

"You two gonna do that again?" Curtis asked.

"It was hot!" Megan admitted.

"One show only," Dave replied while Mindy struggled to produce words.

That evening

Central Chicago

"We doing this *again*?" Kelly Wright moaned as Nightmare held out jogging pants and a sweatshirt.

"You know the drill, Fortune," Shadow growled from the shadows.

Kelly pulled off her clothing as quickly as she could, then she held out her arms and the seventeen-year-old girl turned a full three-sixty.

"You guys get off staring at my snatch, or what?"

"Just get dressed!" Nightmare suggested after performing a quick cavity search and an electronic scan of Kelly's body.

Once Kelly was dressed, Nightmare pointed to the backseat of the SUV and she handed the girl a black bag.

Kelly groaned but she climbed into the SUV and pulled the black bag over her head.

A few miles away

It had been an exhausting 1,100-mile ride and her backside was sore as she checked into a small hotel a short distance from McKinley Park.

They were trained to operate alone, but that did not stop her missing her partner. Where was he? Was he still alive? He had to be still alive – she was certain that she would have felt it if he had died. She felt a yearning for him, despite it only having been a couple of weeks. She had expected something on their birthday, but she had heard nothing, nor had she dared contact him, just in case she compromised his safety.

She was currently the hunted one, not Leo. Her mind was in turmoil – she had fucked up, allowed everything to go wrong. Her first two operations and gone down like clockwork, but the third had gone haywire. It had been really simple – her comms had gone down after one final comment from her handler.

"*Urban Predator* is gone – you're on your own, kid."

With that comment, she had aborted her mission. Only for the target to catch sight of her as she had made her escape. Leo had escaped clean, at least she hoped he had. They both had an escape plan, unknown to the other – for security reasons – but they also had an ultimate escape plan for when they both had the chance to escape *Urban Predator*.

The sixteen-year-old eased herself into a hot bath and she allowed her muscles to relax – she was exhausted.

Safehouse Alpha

"Hello, Fortune."

"Hello, Hit Girl."

"I'm sorry about the hoops that you've been made to jump through but it is essential as I am sure you can understand."

"I can. Having seen what, she is capable of and having seen first-hand how she operates – she makes my skin crawl; I am struggling."

"You can do this, Kelly. I am sure you're intelligent enough to have figured out what might happen to you, should you be found out."

"I watched her slit the throat of one of her own, just two nights ago – I threw up, minutes later."

"I assume that she will want you to kill at some stage, Fortune. You will have to do it, too, if you are to maintain your

cover."

"She's planning an operation – well, her part of a larger one. I don't know the details but it is for Saturday night and she's putting ninety-two men forward for it. The Russian's are putting forward seventy-two while the Sicilian's have forty-eight. As for that pink bitch – God, I hate her – she's off doing something else; I don't know what."

"Stardust."

"What?"

"Stardust. You use that in any communication, or you say that to any member of *Fusion*, and we will pull you out. Nobody knows who you are, but Shadow, Nightmare, myself, and select others. Other members of *Fusion* will be made aware of that codeword and will have orders not to harm you but to get you to safety. There will be no going back after we extract you – do you understand?"

"Yes, Hit Girl, I do. Thank you."

"This will all be over, very soon, Fortune."

***Very early, the following morning
Thursday, September 22nd***

West Columbia

Marty growled as a sound brought him out of his deep and pleasant sleep.

He opened his eyes to find himself staring at a nipple, just inches away from his eyes. His wife who was attached to the very same nipple was sleeping soundly. Without waking Kim, Marty sat up and he looked over towards his laptop – it was the source of the sound. He groaned as he stood up and walked over to the laptop and sat down before it. Once he was logged on, he checked the logs and then he felt a cold chill shoot up his backbone.

Thirty seconds later, his secure cell was putting a call through to another secure cell phone.

"This had fucking better be good, cunt!" Mindy Lizewski growled.

"Sorry, your purpleness!" Marty said briefly before he went on with his explanation for waking up his leader at 04:47. "*Vengeance* have just declared a *Code Alpha* – you know what that means?"

"Yes, I do," a suddenly wide-awake Mindy replied, stiffly.

"Two minutes ago, Eric dumped his servers. *Vengeance* has gone dark. It can only be HMG."

"Activate Victor Yankee and Thetis . . . let me make a call and see if we can't get some friends out there to help."

"I'll do what I can from here without compromising them. I've blocked all their active comms devices in case anything falls into the wrong hands. If they make it to Thetis, they can collect virgin comms."

"Fucking, hell!" Mindy growled. "Keep me updated – thanks, Marty."

"I'm headed down to Foxtrot. I'm bringing Kim, Matty, and Hope – I'm worried that things are going to blow up here, too."

"We need hope," Mindy said as she dropped the call.

"What is it, Marty?" Kim demanded from the bed.

"*Vengeance* has gone dark."

"Chicago?"

"Going to hell and back."

Kim leapt out of the bed and she began to dress.

It had been spreading throughout the city like a cancer for weeks.

The cancer was initially small and for a while, it had gone unnoticed but then it had begun to rear its barbs and dig into anybody who would listen. Every store that was robbed. Every citizen who was mugged. Every person who had their car jacked from under them. Every person who was scared out of their home and out of their neighbourhood. Every person who was extorted for protection. They were all told the same. They were being persecuted because of Hit Girl. They were being persecuted because of Kick-Ass. They were being persecuted because of *Fusion*.

At first, the words were shrugged off by a city who felt safe under the protective umbrella which their vigilantes provided but as more people suffered and the suffering became harsher, human nature began to look for somebody to blame beyond those hurting them. Human nature turned the citizens of Chicago against those who had protected them for almost three years. Instead of shouts of welcome and yells of praise, *Fusion* began to receive angry comments and more than once, an armoured vigilante was pelted with rotten vegetables and eggs. However, *Fusion* took it all on the chin as the heroic vigilantes that they were, shrugging it off and continuing to protect the city.

Those barbs dug deep within those heroic vigilantes and the words hurt, even if the rotten eggs did not. The younger vigilantes were unhappy at the sudden twist in how *Fusion* was respected out on the streets of Chicago. For weeks, they had struggled to contain the anger within them, knowing that to react would go against what they represented. Against what *Fusion* represented.

Then the Mayor had tried to come up with an answer. The people wanted blood. The people wanted peace. The people wanted to live and work without fear. The Tripartite Threat, as it was referred to, was paralysing the city. The Mayor was honest, unlike his corrupt predecessor. The Mayor had reluctantly summoned Superintendent Jack Bay to his office. The response from the Superintendent had been colourful, to say the least, but he could see where the Mayor was coming from. He cautioned the Mayor that his order would not go down well with the rank and file of the Chicago Police Department. The Mayor backed down and a relieved Jack Bay went back to policing an increasingly dangerous city.

Before long, it was to be the Chicago Police Department who found themselves the hunted as they found themselves facing the Russian Solntsevskaya Brotherhood, the Sicilian Mafia, and the self-styled super-villain known as FEAR along with her cohort: Sunset Phoenix. On top of the unlikely display of united organised crime, the CPD found themselves needing protection from those they were sworn to protect. The Chicago Police Department was about to face a massive backlash after a devastating night.

It was a kidnap gone wrong that had ultimately ended with horrendous results and equally horrendous consequences for the city.

Later that morning

Lincolnwood

"I did it, Libby!"

"What, dweeb?" Elizabeth Dade asked her annoying brother.

"I hacked into her network and I managed to grab some files before I was kicked out," the excited boy explained.

"Whose network?"

"FEAR's!"

Elizabeth's face went pale.

"Are you stupid?"

"What?"

"Did you hack her from *here*?"

"Yeah . . . oh, shit!" the thirteen-year-old boy exclaimed as the penny dropped.

"You, dumb fuck," his newly fourteen-year-old sister groaned. "We gotta get the hell outta here . . . now!"

"I'm sorry, Libby – I'm so sorry. . ."

"Tell it to Mom and Dad, wanker!"

..._...

Mark and Sarah Dade were getting themselves ready for work and they were about to call their teenaged children downstairs when there was pounding on the stairs and their daughter appeared in a panic.

"We gotta go, Mom, Dad."

"Calm down, Libby – what's going on?" Sarah Dade asked.

"As usual, butt-breath has been thinking with his dick, again. . ."

"Libby . . . Language!" Mark Dade growled at his daughter.

"Sorry – he used his genius brain to hack into FEAR's network – but he previously used his dick to think and he did it from *here*."

"Libby!" Mark growled but his daughter stood her ground.

"What have we told you, Jesse?" Sarah demanded as her son appeared.

"I messed up, Mom."

"Yes, you did – get your kit, some clothes . . . but move!" Sarah ordered and both kids bolted for the stairs. "Libby? Did you call for help?"

"Err – doing it now, Mom!" Libby said as she pressed the pulsing orange button on her *Fusion* cell phone.

..._...

As soon as the voice answered, Libby exploded into life. However, all Battle Guy heard were a few key words:

". . . brother . . . hacked . . . network . . . FEAR . . . at home . . . scared . . ."

"Calm down, Flare – listen! Did your brother get any data?"

"Yes – on his laptop."

"Take the laptop with you – it'll be taken and placed into a Faraday bag once we get to you. Until then, get out of the house. Drive southeast down North Lincoln Avenue until you reach West Petersen Avenue. Get out, abandon your car and head into Legion Park. Keep your Fusion phones on you – destroy the rest. I can track you and a friend will meet you in Legion Park – remember your training and stay safe. Codeword is 'banner'."

"Thank you."

Eight minutes later, the Dade family drove away from their home at speed. It did not take them long to travel the mile or so to the junction with West Petersen Avenue where they abandoned their vehicle at the entrance to Legion Park. Each carried a small pack and the family ran into the park, their eyes scanning around for trouble. All four were very scared, knowing that they were up against a ruthless organisation who would think nothing of killing them. The park was long and thin with a river down the middle. The path meandered in and out of the trees with grass either side. The fast walk was actually quite pleasant in the early morning sunshine. But then Libby screamed as she saw movement up ahead and three Corsairs came running out of the trees and levelled automatic weapons at them.

The family froze, not moving.

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Jesse's head came around as he heard the roar of an over-revving engine coming from West Ardmere Avenue which terminated at the park.

A Chevrolet SUV burst out of the trees and took all three Corsairs in the back, two being scooped up and thrust into the windshield, shattering it, before one of the, just as shattered bodies, was thrown off to one side to join his

colleague who had been catapulted into a tree where his head had made a funny squelching sound on impact.

"Get in!" Sergeant Paul Murphy yelled. "Banner!"

Everybody clambered aboard with Libby riding up front with Murphy, who threw a large bag with embedded copper wiring at her brother.

"For the laptop!" he growled and Jesse shoved his laptop inside the Faraday bag, sealing it.

Gunfire erupted from deeper into the park as Murphy reversed at speed back out onto the road, shedding the third Corsair on the way as he spun the vehicle around and floored the accelerator, his blue light flashing and siren screaming.

..._...

An hour and two vehicles later, the Dade family had no idea where they were – not least because they found themselves in the back of a high-powered SUV with hoods over their heads.

Another twenty minutes and the vehicle slid to a stop and the engine shutoff and they were finally still for the first time in almost two hours since they had started running for their lives.

"You can remove your hoods now," a voice told them and they all did so. "Step out of the vehicle."

The Dade family found themselves in a garage beside an armoured SUV. Before them stood a young girl of maybe sixteen-years-old and she smiled before waving them all through a door and into what appeared to be a normal home.

"My name is Discord and you are safe here," the girl explained as she rested a hand on the holstered automatic pistol at her right hip. "You will not leave this building. You will not open a door or window. You will not do anything to attract attention to this building. You will follow any command I give you. Any deviation from these rules and I cannot keep you alive. Yes, that is my job, to keep you four people, alive. I am a member of *Fusion*, and I run this Safehouse. I know that this will be difficult for you but please look at this place as your home. I live here too, but I will allow you all some privacy as a family. Mr and Mrs Dade – bedroom, top of the back stairs on the right. Jesse Dade, next on the right. Libby Dade, last on the right. Do not go into any other rooms and stay out of the basement, otherwise the first floor is open to all."

"You're British!" Jesse pointed out.

"Sorry," Sarah grinned.

"No – it's fine."

"Go get yourselves settled in, sleep, do what you want, but I would advise you to spend some time together," Sarah advised.

***Chapter 335*: Chicago into Darkness**

Thursday, September 22nd

Synthesis Data Core

Marty looked up as Hit Girl entered the space.

"His laptop is clean – he can have it back. . ."

"But. . ." Hit Girl prompted.

"He downloaded about a hundred files before he lost the connection. We have a map of Chicago with positions marked upon it and a shitload of other crap which I'm trying to decode. I think FEAR is paranoid when it comes to her own security."

"Was the map encrypted?" Mindy asked.

"Yes – it was the first file to be decrypted – we're getting a file every hour or two."

"Let's see it."

Marty pulled a large A0 piece of paper from his wide-format printer and he threw it over the central desk. Mindy recognised it, immediately. It was indeed her city and, yes, there were a dozen locations marked. The markings were very spread out, however, her experienced mind told her that the locations were important.

"Find out everything that you can about those locations. Hopefully, we'll get some documentation from them out of the decryption process."

"I'm on it, my queen."

Mindy laughed.

"See you later, super-geek!"

Marty grinned at the compliment as he turned back to the computers. Mindy looked over at Kim who was sitting on the floor with little Matty – the boy was eleven-months-old and he was very close to his first birthday.

"We'll come with you, Mindy – leave the geek to his other women!" Kim suggested.

Marty gave his wife a long kiss before hugging his young son.

"Behave, honey – look after your mother, Matty."

Summit Drive

Kelly was worried.

So worried that she had taken the day off school and just stayed at home. She told her sister that she was having period pains – well, she was on her period – so it was a good enough excuse. Annoyingly, her sister had reappeared from her day job as a high-flying executive for some seedy-sounding import-export conglomerate. Kelly was finding it increasingly difficult to show a happy face to her big sister. Katrina, in turn, was putting off her moods to the recent changes in her life and the harshness of her new training routine.

"Kelly?"

"Sis?"

"It is time for you to assume your position in the organisation. I want to introduce you to your new team. You will command a small strikeforce which will rain hell down on this city. I also have your new body armour ready which will mark you out as my successor and as my sister."

Kelly was overjoyed at the news.

"Looking forward to it, sis," Kelly replied as she forced an excited smile to her face.

That afternoon

Synthesis Data Core

The other members of Synthesis were very worried about their leader and her brother.

Neither had been seen nor heard from since the day before. Each had received a cryptic message on their *Fusion* cell phones telling them not to worry, but that had just worried them even more. Directly after school, they each headed down to the Data Core. They were surprised to find Battle Guy working away at one of the consoles.

"Good afternoon," he offered. "I am sure you are very keen to learn what is happening with your colleagues but that will have to wait a few minutes. We have work to do. We have some files to decrypt and I need some assistance."

The three teenagers jumped onto their terminals and logged on, eagerly.

...—...

Fifteen minutes later, the hatch opened and two people stepped through into the space. The two boys, Laurence and Peter, plus the lone girl, Kate, looked around to see two girls standing beside the hatch as it closed behind them. Both girls wore *Fusion* uniforms, just like that worn by Battle Guy except that, unlike Battle Guy, neither girl wore a mask.

"Who are you?" Kate asked.

"I know you – you're Chloe Bennett," Peter exclaimed as he laid eyes on one of the hottest girls in his school.

"Abigail Hunt?" Kate ventured as she recognised the school's biggest geek.

"Please don't call me that – it's Abby or Hal."

Only then did the eyes of the kids fix onto the names displayed on the left chest of each uniform.

"Cool!" Laurence exclaimed.

That same time

Safehouse Q

The Dade family were feeling very low.

It had been a depressing day which they had spent keeping themselves to themselves. Their minder had vanished that morning – for school apparently. She had been replaced by the 'day shift' – a lady in her forties who smiled and kept herself to herself giving the Dade's their space as had been promised.

Jesse felt very low as he knew that he was to blame for almost getting him and his family killed. His big sister kept making snarky remarks which made him feel much worse but he endured them as he sulked. Libby, however, was annoyed that she was missing school – she was also very annoyed that she was not allowed to go down to the Data Core. It was Libby, who had been wandering from one end of the house to the other, who noticed that they had a visitor.

"Mrs Lizewski?"

"Hello, Libby, how are you doing?"

"Fine . . . I . . . what are you doing here?"

"I like to check out my Safehouses from time to time," Mindy explained as she walked into the living room. "I also like to check up on the people whom I am protecting."

"I don't understand," Libby said as she watched the woman she knew as Mrs Lizewski from D-JAK sit down in a chair

and she faced her parents and brother.

"Hello, Jesse, I understand that you are the stupid little brat who put his own family at risk."

"Excuse me!" Sarah Dade exclaimed.

"Your son put everybody at risk, including my own people," Mindy replied with a little anger in her tone. "However, he is young and mistakes are made – some of us are only human."

"Motherfucker!" Libby exclaimed as it hit her like an eighteen-wheeler.

"Elizabeth Rachel Dade!" Mark Dade exclaimed but Libby ignored her father.

"You're her!"

Mindy chuckled.

"I am who I am."

"Honey – who?" Sarah Dade enquired.

"Mom, you can be so dense!" Libby exclaimed in a very exasperated fashion. "She's Hit Girl, Mom!"

"Motherfucker!" Sarah Dade exclaimed.

"No – I chopped *his* head off," Hit Girl chuckled.

That evening

South Whipple

"Abigail! Brad!"

Rachel Murphy yelled for the umpteenth time. It had only been two days but Rachel was very pleased with the new family member. It was nice to have a girl in the house, balancing out the genders. While Rachel was fully aware of who and what Abigail was, plus her medical history, she saw the ten-year-old as a lovely little girl who was very polite and who was happy to help around the house. Brad and Abigail had immediately bonded – the two were always together, talking and playing on the PlayStation together.

The two nights that Abigail had been with them and been a little fraught. Rachel had awoken to hear screaming on the first night and she had found Abigail in streams of tears, sitting up in her bed. It had taken most of an hour to calm the girl down enough that she could fall back to sleep. They had not spoken about the nightmares which had occurred the second night, too. Abigail had simply said, 'thank you' each morning.

"Abigail! Brad!"

From up the stairs, she could hear laughing and giggling – it sounded like Brad was play-fighting with Abigail who it turned out was very ticklish. Brad had been warned by his father and by Mindy that Abigail was a trained fighter and a killer. He had been warned to be very careful when he wound her up. Abigail, in turn, had been warned by Mindy to control her temper. Brad, at thirteen, was physically bigger than Abigail and he used that extra weight and muscle to his advantage against the slimmer, lighter, Abigail.

"If I have to call again, heads will roll!" Rachel called again.

The giggling stopped as did Brad's laughter. A thundering of feet moved towards the stairs and then thundered downwards.

"Yeah, Mom!" Brad exclaimed as he skidded to a halt in the kitchen doorway with Abigail slamming into the back of him as she came to a rapid stop.

Both kids were red-faced from all their exertions and panting heavily.

"Brad – lay the table. Abigail – help Brad."

"Yes, Mom!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

Rachel grinned as the two youngsters fought over who was getting the knives and forks out but she left them to it and went back into the kitchen.

..._...

Rachel had just finished cooking when her ears perked up.

She could not hear the two kids – that meant they were up to something. She did, however, hear a thud as something hit the doorframe between the kitchen and the dining room. Carefully, she peered round said doorframe and then looked down at the floor. A dinner knife was lying on the carpet and there was a small dent in the painted wooden doorframe. On the other side of the dining room, Brad stood with his right arm raised and another matching knife in his hand, held by the blade. Beside the boy, his female mentor was instructing him on throwing said knife.

"Bradley!"

Brad dropped the knife to the floor and Abigail jumped away looking very guilty.

"Who's idea was it?"

"Mine, Mom – I asked if Abigail could show me how to throw a knife."

"Sorry, Mrs Murphy," Abigail offered as she stared down at the dining room carpet.

"Abigail – while I know that you are highly skilled, would you please keep your skills to yourself. Ignore the idiot boy, beside you, when he asks to learn anything dangerous from you, please."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Both of you: go sit."

The two kids smirked at one another as they sat down on opposite sides of the table.

Wagner Road

Lauren was happier than she had been in many months.

Almost ten months previously, she had suffered something no thirteen-year-old should ever have to endure. Now, on the day of her fourteenth birthday, she could finally put it all behind her. Her life could not have been better. She had found herself a new life as Nightmare which was an outlet for her anger and frustration that she had felt at having her innocence ripped away from her. She had also gained a new home and her family was whole – fuck her father! The best bit of it all was her boyfriend.

Brad Murphy was the gentlest boy she knew. Brad always knew what to say, when to say it, and when to keep his trap shut. He knew all about what she had endured and he was always there when things got too much. That very morning, Brad had surprised her with a kiss which had almost made her collapse. Brad had wanted to be with her that evening but the boy had a new responsibility. He had gained a little sister who was keeping him very busy. Lauren liked Abigail – she was wild (just like her name) but she got on really well with Brad and the two were always laughing and, it seemed, always getting into trouble. Abigail had quickly picked up on the relationship and very astutely, she kept out of the way when Lauren and Brad were together.

"Happy Birthday, honey!" Emily Edwards smiled as she placed the enormous chocolate cake down on the kitchen table.

Lauren quickly counted the fourteen candles and she grinned.

"Blow them out, already," Lizzie Edwards suggested. "We'll have the Fire Department here before too long!"

Lauren closed her eyes and she blew out all the candles in one go.

"Did you wish?" her mother asked and Lauren nodded in response.

Emily was very happy for her daughter who had endured a miserable year. To see her smiling so happily meant an awful lot. Mindy had surprised her daughter, earlier that evening with a personal visit to deliver a birthday gift. Lauren had almost burst into tears at the sight of the two-foot long Jungle Sword with its sixteen-inch blade with a blood groove along the top of the right side. Emily smiled at Mindy's discomfort as Lauren had hugged her tightly.

All in all, it was a very happy birthday for her eldest daughter.

***The following morning
Friday, September 23rd***

District 21

The reputation of the Chicago PD was at an all-time low.

The massacre had destroyed within hours what the men and women of the police had striven hard over several years to rebuild. The police had been respected by the majority of the city – even the less law-abiding members of the community. That had all been undone in just a single night.

Fourteen people were dead at the hands of the Chicago Police Department. No, it had not been a frenzied attack by crazed police officers, it was a simple case of mistaken identity. The CPD had fallen into a carefully laid trap and they had reacted just as their training had dictated. The hostage rescue had been executed 'by the book' with tragic consequences. The twelve-strong SWAT team had assaulted the building with the best intentions but the criminals had been smart and it had been a foregone conclusion even before SWAT had rolled up that evening.

It was a classic switch: the hostages had been made up to look like the masked hostage takers and it wasn't until the attack was fully underway and unstoppable that the error was discovered but not before innocent hostages had been killed. The press had had a field day. Naturally, heads had to roll and the head of the SWAT team involved had been summarily suspended pending an Internal Affairs review. Sergeant Craig Matthews had no choice but to comply as he went home to brood over the unavoidable mistakes made under his command.

He had supporters, many of whom had rallied to his side – one supporter, in particular, was incensed by his treatment and she opted to visit her comrade in arms that night.

That night

The home of Craig Matthews

Sergeant Matthews heard the knocking on his back door.

He drew his service weapon, which he had been allowed to retain under the circumstances, and he moved towards the door. He peered outside through the kitchen window and he chuckled to himself as he holstered his pistol then unlocked the door.

"Wondered if you might make an appearance – please come in, young lady."

"Not the usual way that I'm greeted."

"Sorry if I don't scream and run away!" Matthews chuckled.

"Funny!"

A boy ran into the room, intrigued by the electronically synthesised voice of the visitor.

"Hit Girl!"

"Who is this?" Hit Girl asked as she looked down at the boy.

"I'm Max – I'm eight."

"Good to meet you, Max."

"Wow! I just shook hands with the amazing Hit Girl! Where's Kick-Ass?"

"He's busy, Max."

"I like, Kick-Ass – he's so awesome and indestructible."

"He is that," Hit Girl growled.

"*I am what I am!*" Kick-Ass chuckled over the comms.

"Yeah – I'll tell Kick-Ass that you were asking after him."

"Craig?"

A young woman in her thirties appeared in the room.

"Honey, this is Hit Girl. Hit Girl, this is my wife, Theresa."

"Hello, Hit Girl. Craig has told us a lot about you."

"Hello."

"Are you here to help my husband?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am. Your husband is a good man and I won't let him suffer because of some underhand act."

"Do you know who was behind it?" the woman asked.

"Yes, ma'am, I believe that I do and I will not rest until she pays for the lives that she has ruined."

"She?" Matthews asked.

"Sunset Phoenix. We are very sure that she was behind that abortive kidnapping – her intention was most likely to catch you, or even *Fusion*, in the act of killing innocents."

"Bitch!" Matthews breathed.

"We have your back, Sergeant – have no fear of that!"

..._...

Hit Girl was very angry as she left the house and she made her way to where Kick-Ass awaited with her Ducati.

"Things are going to hell and people that I care about are getting hurt – that bitch is going down!"

"Don't let me stop you," Kick-Ass chuckled as his partner swung a long and inviting leg over her motorcycle.

"I have a need. . ."

"A need for speed?"

". . . A need to kill . . ."

"Thought so – Battle Guy has some cunts lined up for us a few blocks over," Kick-Ass mentioned as he started the engine of his Ducati.

Hit Girl laughed out loud.

"You know me too well!"

"That I do, my sweet."

..._...

It did not take them long to find their way a little more than a few blocks, over to West Englewood. Hit Girl knew full well that she was in deep. The neighbourhood had not quite recovered from the Diplomatic Bag incident which had

decimated the ruling gangs. However, while they still fought amongst themselves, they were united when it came to *Fusion*. The bullets which followed the smirking Hit Girl down South Ashland Avenue were anything but friendly. Kick-Ass followed his partner towards the location identified by Battle Guy and marked on the moving map which was visible in their visors.

At the junction of West Marquette Drive, they found their target. Two CPD cars were pinned down in a crossfire. Kick-Ass brought around his Heckler & Koch G36C and he began dropping anybody with a gun. After three bodies hit the ground, the rest dived for cover allowing Hit Girl to jump off her Ducati and move toward the four CPD officers who were using their vehicles as cover. With Kick-Ass using his own motorcycle as cover and looking out for any trouble, Hit Girl made it to the four officers.

"You guys a little stuck?"

"Thanks for coming, Hit Girl," one replied.

"I was looking for a bit of action," Hit Girl mentioned as casually as if she were discussing the weather.

"Well, you found it – now how do we get our collecting asses out of this?" a female officer asked.

"I have a cunning plan. . ." Hit Girl advised them.

"Why do I get the idea that this is going to hurt," another officer groaned.

"Suck it up, Rogers!" the female officer chuckled.

"Lead the way, Officer Ramsey," Rogers directed as he checked his pistol. "Six rounds left."

"Only seven," Ramsey commented.

The other two officers had six rounds each remaining in their weapons.

"Trust me!" Hit Girl growled in her electronically enhanced voice.

..._...

The *Cortez Street Gang* had a new leader who was keen to prove that he had the balls to run the outfit.

He was complemented by his opposite number, just across South Ashland Avenue. While Hector Raymond had not survived the last run in with *Fusion*, paving the way for Ramon Javier to take over, the leader of the *Stones*, was still the same Phillipe Estevar. At Javier's command, heavier automatic weapons were issued and three Ford pickup trucks were soon speeding for the area of conflict with seven men aboard each truck. Experience had taught Javier that he would need to use overwhelming force if he were to take down not just the City's finest but also *Fusion's* finest. A brief call to Estevar had warned the opposing gang-boss of the imminent threat to his domain and he, too, was mobilising significant forces in support, should Hit Girl or Kick-Ass set foot on *his* side of the street.

While the neighbourhood gangs were gearing up, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass decided to move the cops out of harm's way. With a few well-placed bursts of gunfire from Kick-Ass' G-36C, the four cops all piled into the one running police cruiser and they accelerated off down the street with bullets pinging off the bodywork and passing above the cowering officers in the rear seat as they went clean through the smashed windows. Two young men fell to bullet wounds and they were dragged off by their remaining colleagues. Rather than follow the escaping police officers who were rapidly surrounded by their colleagues, several miles down the road, Kick-Ass and Hit Girl remained at the junction of West Marquette Drive and South Ashland Avenue.

All gunfire had ceased allowing them both to walk over to the neighbouring KFC restaurant where they obtained a large bucket of chicken to while away the time as they awaited the inevitable attack from the street gangs.

..._...

When the attack came, it was every bit as wild as Hit Girl had hoped it would be.

The first pickup truck skidded to a halt thirty yards short of the intersection and disgorged six men before moving into a covering position from where the driver cut off any escape to the west. The second and third pickup trucks did the same covering the north and the south exists from the intersection.

"You get the impression they want us to head east?" Kick-Ass mused.

"They *do* kind of hint in that general direction," Hit Girl responded.

"Might I assume that down east is more trouble?"

"You could be right – to be honest, I hope it's a better quality of trouble as these dicks look a little lame!"

"Is that the best that you bitches can come up with!" Kick-Ass yelled out to the assembled masses – well, the twenty-odd well-armed gang members, at least.

"We outnumber you, Kick-Ass!" came the response.

"Not from where I'm standing," Kick-Ass countered half-heartedly.

"Can't you fucking count, you vigilante retard?"

"I can."

"There's twenty-one of us . . . and only fucking two of you, you stupid dumb fucks!"

One of the *Cortez* members fired off three shots from his AR-15 rifle – two of the rounds hit Kick-Ass' frontal chest armour. He staggered back a few steps but remained on his feet. Then, out of nowhere, there was a slashing, tearing sound as something cut through the air at near the speed of sound and the man who had fired was decapitated by the .50-calibre round hit dead centre, exploding the head.

"We are *not* alone, cunts!" Hit Girl growled

"Neither are we, Hit Girl!" came the unperturbed response as the remaining gang members surged forward, firing their weapons.

..._...

Hit Girl drew both of her Katana Swords and she ran at the advancing men coming from the north while Kick-Ass drew his Ko-Wakizashi swords and he advanced on those coming at them from the west. Bullets struck the advancing vigilantes hindering their advances but they did not prevent Hit Girl getting close enough to draw blood with her swords. Two men fell, closely followed by a third as blood gushed across the street and into the nearest drain. She whirled, taking out another man, then dodging a bullet as she rolled across the street, ramming a blade up through the groin of an unfortunate gangbanger. The man screamed as the blade was yanked back out of his abdomen, dumping his entrails across the street, before he collapsed into a blood-soaked heap.

A short distance away, Kick-Ass bulldozed his way through his own gang-bangers leaving carnage in his wake. Bullets would not penetrate his armour and they were no more annoying to him than if they were simply rounds from a BB-gun. His Ko-Wakizashi blades were no less sharp than those of his partner and they released more blood and entrails which were swept towards the drains by the rain which was beginning to fall, turning the dark streets into a swirling hell of blood for the gangbangers.

Their numbers rapidly dwindled, despite those guarding the south exit from the intersection running to support their colleagues. Very soon, there were just seven men left standing, facing off against Chicago's most famous vigilantes.

..._...

Phillipe Estevar decided it was time to make an appearance and maybe even save the lives of some of Havier's men which would mean that the gang leader would owe him a favour.

However, there was a problem – two in fact. One problem was purple, the other yellow and green. They both lived up to their respective reputations as being fearless and indestructible and that had encouraged fear to grow in every man present that night at the road intersection. The gang leader had decided to lead the attack himself to ensure that everything went right. He drove his new GMC Sierra truck at the head of the four-vehicle convoy. In total, he had twenty armed men at his disposal and he was determined to prevail over the vigilante threat. Beside him, in the truck, he had his lieutenant, Diego López. Diego was armed with a large automatic weapon, the AA-12, which Phillipe knew that Kick-Ass favoured and had used with devastating effect.

As he drove along West Marquette Road, towards the ongoing battle, he began to receive reports from the front. Not

good ones, either. The *Cortez Street Gang* had been routed and Hit Girl was headed directly for them up West Marquette Road while Kick-Ass had headed a block north before turning east. There was also an unconfirmed report of a sniper operating in the area.

..._...

Leon was very pleased with her sniper perch.

She had killed one man one sheer impulse. It had not been needed but she had wanted to instil fear into the men; a hidden sniper scared the living daylights out of the bravest men. As Kick-Ass and Hit Girl mopped up the first attack and then made their way west, she spun around to track the oncoming convoy which consisted of four vehicles and was led by a very smart truck - pity.

The truck had two people in the front and three in the back. As directed, Leon chose to leave the truck and its occupants for Hit Girl and Kick-Ass while she turned her attention onto the second vehicle. It was an older truck loaded with five men. It was also about to encounter a very violent blowout. . .

Ah, the fine art of sniping!

..._...

Phillipe Estevar glanced in his rear-view mirror as he heard a loud bang and he saw the next truck in the convoy, immediately behind his own truck, spin out of control and slam into two parked cars coming to a stop very quickly.

'A blow out – or something more sinister?' he thought.

While he was considering that thought, there was another bang and the next truck in the convoy careered off the road narrowly avoiding the previous truck but nonetheless, stopped with its hood buried in the side of another vehicle.

The sniper!

Phillipe Estevar picked up a radio.

"Sniper is close by – highpoint along West Marquette Road."

"Copy, out!"

..._...

As would be expected of a vigilante with her reputation, Hit Girl stood her ground as the truck came towards her – she had seen, or rather heard, two large smashes as other vehicles had crashed further up the street.

"Nice truck!" Kick-Ass exclaimed as he aimed his G36C and blasted the front, hood, and windshield.

Kick-Ass was surprised to see the windshield remaining intact – ballistic glass; just what every assuming gang boss needed. The passenger door opened and Kick-Ass immediately recognised his own personal favourite, the AA-12 automatic shotgun. He grabbed Hit Girl, shielding her, as round after round was triggered off by the holder of the deadly weapon. The pellets from the cartridges pelted Kick-Ass' heavy back armour.

"Fuck this!" Hit Girl growled as she pushed Kick-Ass away and drew her .40-calibre, Glock 22 pistols before emptying both weapons at the shotgun wielding gangbanger. Her bullets shredded the man as he failed to take cover and he fell to the blacktop along with his weapon.

As Hit Girl swapped out her magazines, other men spilled out of the vehicle and began to fire in their direction. Bullets flew in every which direction as bodies fell and blood run into the gutter.

..._...

Leon monitored the scene from her vantage point.

The men from the crashed vehicles were sorting themselves out with the assistance of those from the fourth vehicle. Her job was to control the area around Hit Girl and Kick-Ass so as to prevent them from being overwhelmed. While she was watching through her scope, she felt the hairs on the back of her neck go up. Long ago, a man had taught her to respect her sixth-sense and to acknowledge that something was wrong.

Leon immediately rolled to her left, just as a large calibre bullet struck the rooftop where she had been lying just a second before. She rapidly rolled behind an air vent and after a quick check of the gouge left from the bullet, she engaged her night-vision scope and began to scan in the approximate direction of where the bullet had come from. Somewhere out there, there was a counter-sniper. Leon fervently hoped that it was the one who had shot Stephanie – *that* would be a very welcome kill indeed.

Leon searched, carefully.

..._...

By the time the men from the other trucks appeared on the scene, their leader was kneeling alone on the street, a pistol to his head.

The fifteen men skidded to a halt and brandished their own weapons, unsure of what to do as Kick-Ass was aiming the swiftly appropriated AA-12 automatic shotgun directly at them. He could take most of them down before they could squeeze their triggers. The men each had a family and they each wanted to live. They turned to their boss who was facing public humiliation at the hands of Hit Girl.

"I want you to live, Phillipe. Despite what you represent, you protect your neighbourhood and you look after your people. I would suggest that you leave the Chicago PD alone . . . or I might just choose to come back again for a personal visit."

"Kill me."

"I do that and then these men will open fire and Kick-Ass will be forced to kill them. We don't want that, now, do we?"

The man was incensed. His sniper should have been taking the bitch down but nothing was happening to prevent his public humiliation. He kept staring down at the ground but then after a full minute he looked up as he felt the pressure from the pistol ease. Hit Girl and Kick-Ass were walking down the street like they were out on a Sunday stroll.

"Bastards!"

..._...

By the time Hit Girl and Kick-Ass reached their motorcycles, Phillipe Estevar and his men had dissolved into the darkness.

"Good evening," Wildcat said in welcome as she waved to the two motorcycles. "Your mounts await."

"So, cheesy!" Trojan complained.

"Thanks guys," Hit Girl replied with a chuckle as all four of them mounted their machines. "Leon, stand down."

"Leon is busy, please call back later. . ."

..._...

There!

Movement atop a tower-block, some eight-hundred yards away. Leon adjusted her scope to get a better view and then she zoomed in. It was a sniper with a large-calibre rifle – possibly Russian. Leon grimaced as she saw the muzzle move slightly and she was able to see directly down the gaping chasm as it was aimed in her direction. It was a race for who shot first. Leon held her ground, not rushing the shot.

She took a deep breath and held it before gently squeezing the trigger . . . once . . . twice.

***Chapter 336*: A New Home**

Saturday, September 24th, 2016

Morton Grove

Chloe could hear laughing and giggling.

Both concerned her – in more ways than one, she feared. As she walked into the living room, she saw her mother sitting on the floor with Becky cross-legged beside her. They were both looking through a photo album.

". . . Chloe was about nine in that photo – she loved to wear not very much," Cathy explained.

"I've noticed – Chloe has a very nice body, but she's not as beautiful as you, Cathy."

Chloe tried to hide her giggles but she failed miserably as her mother and dependent looked up at her.

"You showing embarrassing photos, again, Mom?"

"You did tend to get yourself into strange situations," Cathy replied evenly.

"I suppose, I did."

"I liked the one of you lying at the bottom of the stairs, drunk!" Becky laughed.

"I did many stupid things as I was growing up."

"You haven't exactly stopped, honey," Chloe's mother pointed out with a grin.

"Growing up or doing stupid things?" Chloe queried, knowing the answer.

"Both, I would say."

Chloe left them to it and she headed off to get a drink.

..._...

It had barely been two weeks, but ever since she had introduced Becky to her mother, the two had been inseparable. Becky loved going to see Cathy who, in turn, was overjoyed whenever Becky was over. Chloe suspected that her mother missed having a little girl around. Becky was the proverbial breath of fresh air and Chloe could not wait for her to meet her father – he was due home in the next few weeks, an event that Chloe was overjoyed about.

One problem with her mother was that she was enjoying embarrassing her daughter – Becky loved to hear about Chloe when she was a little girl, a time which Chloe looked back on with embarrassment. To make things worse, Curtis would join in with his own memories of the younger Chloe, much to her chagrin. Curtis and Becky got on well like a house on fire and Becky was always laughing at his jokes which he kept clean, once he learned of Becky's hatred of blasphemy and dirty words.

Then, that same day, while Becky had been looking through more embarrassing photos, Mindy and Dave had appeared with Joshua. Chloe smelt a rat – she had seen Dave and Mindy spending a lot of time with her mother since their return from the UK. Chloe had called her mother out on it but she had been put down almost immediately and she had quickly given up. Joshua was a little confused as to why Dave and Mindy had followed him in – they were just dropping him off and rarely came in.

Joshua looked at his girlfriend and he read her expression – he began to smell a rat, too.

..._...

"Shall we put them out of their misery, Cathy?" Mindy asked with a sly grin.

"Nah – I'm enjoying seeing Chloe squirm," Cathy replied fiendishly.

"Mom!"

"It's fun to get my own back on my cousin – she used to like keeping secrets from me," Curtis admitted.

"Spill, brat!" Chloe growled at her cousin.

"Stick it, Chloe!" Curtis growled back with a big grin.

Chloe stamped her foot in frustration causing Mindy to laugh out loud.

"Please!" she begged as she dropped onto her knees and she gave her Mom the puppy-dog eyes treatment.

"This is so pathetic," Cathy laughed.

"Get in the car," Dave said as he picked Chloe up off the floor. "You're lowering the tone of the neighbourhood, Chloe."

Chloe, Joshua, and Becky – all three very confused – climbed into the back of Mindy's new Jaguar F-Pace while Curtis joined Cathy in her Jeep. Chloe's demands for information were ignored as they headed north Glenview but Chloe and Joshua were both confused as Mindy turned left onto Glenview Road instead of continuing north up Waukegan Road. A couple more miles and Mindy took a left and then a right onto Fielding Drive.

Finally, Mindy pulled up outside the second to last house on the left.

Fielding Drive

"What are we doing here?" Joshua asked as Dave and Mindy climbed out of the F-Pace.

Behind them, Cathy and Curtis were heading towards them from the Jeep.

"You moving, Mom?" Chloe asked.

Cathy did not answer as Mindy literally dragged Chloe up the paved path and two steps before inserting a key into the front door of the property. Becky pushed past Chloe and Mindy but she only made it two feet before she stopped dead and her jaw dropped open in surprise. Chloe stopped dead behind the young girl equally mesmerised by what she was seeing.

The floor was a light oak and from the foyer, you passed directly into the living room which was double height and a wooden staircase in the same light oak led upwards before turning back on its self to an open landing. Many windows allowed massive amounts of natural light into the room, making it feel large and airy, despite it only being big enough for a couch and two arm chairs. To the left of the foyer, Chloe could see into a dining room which held a wooden table for six people to sit comfortably. As with the living room, there were large windows to the front and side.

Chloe's curiosity was aroused and she walked through the dining room with Becky and Joshua in tow. They passed through into a kitchen.

"Bloody hell!" Joshua exclaimed as he looked around.

The kitchen had a light tiled floor with medium oak cabinets around two sides with a central island and a stunning bay window with a circular glass-topped table for four people. There was a large five-hob gas cooker, a microwave, and a giant fridge with ice-maker. Through a door was a laundry and utility room which led to a two-car garage at the rear of the property. Then they came full circle into a family room with a door which opened onto the back yard.

Chloe was speechless and her face showed confusion. It was beginning to dawn on Joshua who was just as speechless. Becky dragged Chloe up the stairs onto the open landing with Joshua following.

..._...

The penny finally dropped as Chloe stopped outside the master bedroom at the top of the stairs.

The double doors were closed and there was a small ceramic plaque on each door. The first read: 'Chloe' in sweeping letters. The other door had a plaque which read: 'Joshua'.

"Chloe!" Becky called out as she studied a similar plaque attached to the bedroom at the end of the landing.

The plaque read: 'Becky', and there was a peanut at the end of her name. Chloe could not take anymore and she just burst into tears as she collapsed to the carpeted landing. Joshua was stunned and he just held his girlfriend as she cried.

"Your Mom and me, we talked about you both having a place to call your own a while ago. We found this place, some months ago, and we were saving it for Christmas – but then Becky appeared and that apartment is just way too small for the three of you," Mindy explained. "This house is yours, Chloe and Joshua. You have both done so much for us all and you both deserve this."

Chloe just mumbled as she tried to speak. Instead, Joshua spoke for all of them as Becky appeared struck dumb, also.

"Thank you," the sixteen-year-old said, his voice wavering with emotion.

"You mean this is our house?" Becky asked tentatively.

"Yes, honey," Cathy said. "That's your bedroom."

Becky pushed open the door and she screamed with joy. The bedroom was light and airy with pink walls and a mauve carpet. The bed was just as pink. There was a large collection of stuffed toys against one wall – mostly ponies.

"You even have your own bathroom," Curtis said as he showed Becky into the bathroom which she would use (although it would be shared with the occupants of the next bedroom, should there ever be any).

The little girl squealed with happiness.

..._...

Chloe had finally regained her feet and she pushed open the double doors with Joshua to get a first look at their new bedroom.

The room was painted a pale blue with a white coved ceiling. The carpet was a pleasant beige and a large triple window looked out over the back yard. Chloe had her hand over her mouth as she took everything in. She squealed almost as loudly as Becky had as she took in the master bathroom. There was a large oval whirlpool bath set in the corner with a window to each side. There was also an enormous shower which could easily hold two people at once.

"Show them the basement. . ." Curtis said.

"Basement?" Chloe asked. "There's more?"

"Come on," Curtis said as he took his cousin's hand and lead her back downstairs.

Joshua and Becky followed with Becky holding Joshua's hand tightly. At the bottom of the stairs, they turned right and stopped at a small door which had been completely missed on the first trip around. Curtis opened the door with a flourish and he waved Chloe down the staircase into the basement.

"Woah!" Joshua exclaimed as he took in the large recreation room which was painted in light cream colours to accentuate the lighting and the few windows which let in natural light.

"I don't know what to say. . ." Chloe mumbled.

"That's a first!" Curtis chuckled.

"I love it!" Becky exclaimed as she smiled hugely.

..._...

Chloe, Joshua, and Becky spent the next hour examining every nook and cranny of their new home while Mindy, Dave, Cathy, and Curtis loitered around the kitchen talking and watching as the small family dashed about together at first, but then individually.

Joshua loved the kitchen, as did Chloe, and they both enthused about what they might cook in there. Becky loved her bedroom which was much bigger than that in the apartment and she also loved the back yard which was not large but

adequate. The family room had a large wall-mounted 48-inch flat screen TV which was connected up to several hundred cable channels.

"Do you think we've done the right thing?" Cathy asked.

"Means that the current neighbours can live their lives without hearing bed springs above them, morning, noon, and night," Dave pointed out.

Curtis sniggered.

"They have a little girl to bring up and they all need their space," Mindy said. "They are young, but I trust them and they can behave in a mature fashion. . ."

Mindy paused as Chloe ran into the living room and pounced on Joshua, bringing him down onto the couch. She was giggling as she allowed Joshua to tickle her.

". . . sometimes – just not today, apparently!"

"The looks on their faces are well worth it," Cathy said happily. "Becky has been through a lot and she needs this just as much as Joshua and Chloe do."

"I'm glad that Chloe is happy," Curtis admitted. "We never got on well when we were younger but Chloe has been like a big sister to me ever since we began to support one another in *Fusion*. I love her more than ever and I think she deserves this."

"Well said, Curtis," Dave said approvingly as the boy blushed.

"I agree," Cathy admitted. "It's good to see you two getting along. Now – we need to be getting along. *Chloe!*"

The sixteen-year-old stopped her giggling and she walked into the kitchen. Mindy dangled a set of keys in front of the wide-eyed teenager. Chloe reached for the keys only for Joshua to stop her.

"Me man of house," he stated. "Me get keys."

Chloe giggled and she stepped back as Mindy handed Joshua the keys with a grin. However, Joshua held out his other hand.

"What?" Mindy asked.

"Where's the map to the minefield, the machineguns, and the razor wire?" he replied.

Everybody laughed as Mindy scowled.

..._...

Chloe was still struggling to understand what had turned her Saturday upside down. Only a few weeks before, she had gained her first car, as had Joshua. Now, they both had their first home. Chloe's emotions were struggling to cope with it – she was still struggling with the loss of her child – then there was Becky. For the three of them to have a place which they could call their own was amazing and Chloe was humbled that there were people who loved them enough to do something so special.

Joshua was just as moved and he had hugged both Mindy and Cathy very tightly and there had been tears in his eyes. The young man had been through a lot in his short life, at one stage he had been homeless and living on the streets. A home of his own had always been a dream, but for it to become a reality was almost unreal for him. He loved everybody who was part of his life and as far as he was concerned they were all his family. His old life was gone and his new life was the best that he could ever have wished. He was in love with the most beautiful girl he could imagine and she loved him back just as much.

Becky was loving every minute of her new life. Every morning, she was reminded of her past life as she saw her bruised face and body in the bathroom. But it meant less and less to her as the days went past and she enjoyed her new life of safety where people loved her. While she never really wanted to fight again, she was happy to undergo the training. The training was safe and while there was pain, it was controlled and people were looking out for her safety. A month back, a family and a home had been so far away as to be a fairy-tale. But thanks to Chloe, that fairy-tale was coming true.

..._...

Joshua suggested that they order a pizza or two for an early dinner so that they could christen the new house.

Mindy agreed and she nipped out to get the pizzas and some bottles of coke. Curtis went with her to help, leaving Cathy and Dave to watch over Chloe and Joshua. Becky was in her bedroom enjoying her new toys. Joshua had no idea that he had been nudged towards the suggestion – Curtis could be crafty when he wanted to be. Maybe Curtis was spending too much time with Megan!

Mindy and Curtis were planning something else with which to surprise Chloe – but not just Chloe.

..._...

Forty-five minutes later, Joshua and Chloe were getting annoyed.

"I'm hungry!" Becky complained.

"Should have been no more than twenty minutes," Cathy complained.

"Maybe Mindy got stopped for speeding," Dave offered quite reasonably as he struggled to keep his expression neutral.

Then, a minute later, there was a knock on the front door.

"About flipping time!" Chloe growled as she demonstrated her new-found fondness for the British language.

She jumped up off the couch and she yanked open the front door expecting to see her mentor and her cousin with pizzas and drink. She had the perfect sentiment too – instead, she froze and then her emotions overflowed for the second time that day and she burst into tears as her father stepped through the doorway. Chloe never saw the grinning Mindy and Curtis behind him – her attentions were fixed on her father as the lithe girl jumped into his arms and she wrapped her long legs around his waist.

"Daddy! What are *you* doing here?"

"I came to see my little girl and her new home," Ryan Bennett said as she hugged his daughter.

"Ryan!" Cathy exclaimed as she glared at Mindy and Curtis.

Chloe dropped back to the floor allowing her mother to hug her husband. Ryan and Cathy exchanged a long and sensual kiss together before they both remembered that they had company. Then the ever vigilante Cathy Bennett pulled away from her husband and she scowled. She had noticed something different about her husband's dress blue uniform – instead of three gold stripes on each arm beneath a gold line star, there was a fourth gold stripe.

"When did you make E-6?" Cathy demanded.

"I was frocked two weeks back, honey. Thought it might be a good surprise for you," Ryan replied with a grin.

Cathy smiled enormously.

"You made Captain!" she exclaimed before there was a forced coughing sound from over by the family room. "Oh, hell!"

Chloe quickly turned and she pulled Becky forwards.

"Peanut, this is my father, Ryan," Chloe said. "Daddy, this is Rebecca but she prefers Becky and I alone call her Peanut."

"Hi, sir," Becky said as she smiled up at the tall man who smiled down at her.

Captain Ryan Bennett, United States Navy knelt down and he looked into Becky's deep brown eyes.

"Hello, Becky, you call me Ryan, okay?"

"Yes, sir – err, Ryan."

Becky giggled as Ryan smiled at her.

"You're just as lovely as Cathy described you, Becky."

Ryan stood up, lifting the blushing Becky off her feet and he carried her through into the kitchen, dumping her onto the counter in the centre of the room where Mindy and Curtis had placed the pizzas.

"I'm hungry – let's eat!" Ryan declared.

..._...

"Thank you, Mindy," Cathy said as she forced the teenage vigilante into a reluctant hug. "You knew, Dave?"

"Of course."

"It's so good to have him back, you know."

"I noticed. Chloe's almost overflowing with emotion," Dave replied.

Chloe was talking non-stop as she chatted to her father while stuffing pizza into her mouth. Becky was chipping on with comments about her rescue as Chloe explained everything that had happened over the previous few weeks. Joshua took a moment to talk to Mindy out of earshot of the others.

"Mindy, you are the greatest, you know that, don't you?"

"Of course, I do!"

"I mean you are the best friend anybody could have. You are like a big sister to me and Chloe. You brought us back together and you have helped us through some turbulent times and helped us to be together. We owe you everything."

Mindy was feeling weird inside as Joshua spoke. She hated people thanking her – it made her uncomfortable. She loved to do things for people but they were always so damn thankful!

"You know I love you both. You are the family I never had. For reasons unknown to me, I let Chloe drive all over me but she keeps me sane in my darkest hours and I am thankful for having her around. You are both selfless and you look after everybody in *Fusion*. You care, both of you. Now you can both enjoy some time in your own home with your new daughter."

Joshua hugged Mindy tightly, ignoring her growls.

..._...

It was like a mini party.

Dave could only see happy faces – even Mindy despite all the hugs which she was tolerating. He was very pleased to have been able to help set Chloe and Joshua up with a home. They were a true family and they loved Becky just as much as she loved them. Dave knew that Joshua and Chloe would be just as happy with Becky as he and Mindy were with their own sons and daughters. Being a parent was hard but it was damn rewarding. Ignoring the temper tantrums and the sometimes-bad behaviour, you had wonderful young people who loved you and enjoyed having somebody that they could talk to and spend time with.

Joshua and Chloe would make brilliant parents.

..._...

"You deserve this, Chloe," Ryan said to his daughter as she showed him around the house. "I was horrified, frankly, to hear about your miscarriage and I wish I could have been here for you."

"Thank you, Daddy, I know. It was horrible, but with everybody helping me, I got through it. Becky is not a replacement and I don't see her that way. I see her as a new start to our lives, for all three of us."

"You've grown up so much in just three years, honey, and I am so very proud of you."

"Don't – you'll have me in tears again."

"I mean it, Chloe – you and Joshua make an amazing couple, both masked and out in the open. While I had reservations about the boy you were fucking. . ."

"Daddy!"

". . . I saw how much he loved you. Joshua seems to have curbed some of your more wayward tendencies which can only be good for the world in general and everybody's sanity."

Chloe felt her face turning very red as her father chuckled.

..._...

Becky had refused point blank.

Neither Chloe nor Joshua were surprised.

Eventually, Chloe went with Cathy, Ryan, and Curtis to go pack some clothing. Mindy and Dave left Joshua and Becky to their new home and they headed back to their own where they hoped to find their own wayward children and Hailee keeping them all from blowing up the house. It had not been a surprise that Becky wanted to sleep in her new bed, in her new bedroom, in her new home.

"You leave them a surprise beside the bed?" Dave asked his wife.

"Box of ten – should do them till the morning," Mindy replied with a laugh.

Fielding Drive

It was weird.

It was just Joshua and Becky, alone in the house for the first time.

"You okay, Becky?"

"Yes, thanks, Dad."

Joshua almost missed it.

"What did you call me?"

"Dad – is that okay?"

Joshua just nodded, unable to think of anything to say. It kind of made it official: he had a daughter and he was her father. What was Chloe going to say?

"Can I go for a bath? I really want to try it out."

Joshua found towels in a cupboard in the bathroom and he ran the bath, adding copious amounts of bubbles. Becky was quick off the mark and almost before the water was ready, she had vanished into her bedroom and dumped her clothing before returning to the bathroom where Joshua was just turning off the taps. Becky almost dived into the bath in her haste but Joshua caught her before she could have an accident – that would never do.

Soon she was splashing away while Joshua turned down her bed and closed the curtains. He switched on her bedside light and turned off the main overhead one. After fifteen minutes, he coaxed the happy girl out of the bath and then found a distinct lack of pyjamas so he just wrapped her in a dry towel and then encouraged her to get into bed. Leaving Becky to talk to her ponies, he headed down to the kitchen and he found the relevant supplies to make hot chocolate for them both.

..._...

By the time, Chloe returned on her own with several bags of clothing and other personal effects, she found the house quiet.

Chloe went upstairs to find her boyfriend and Becky watching a DVD on the TV in the little girl's bedroom.

"Hi, guys!"

"Shhh!" Joshua said. "Twilight and the others are about to foil Sunset Shimmer's plan for attacking Equestria!"

Chloe laughed as she sat down to watch the end of the movie. Becky grinned up at Chloe as the movie ended.

"You okay, Mum – I *can* call you that, right?"

Chloe just squealed and she nodded, unable to speak. Tears formed in her eyes as she looked at Joshua. He simply nodded.

"Dad let me take a bath – it was brilliant, although there might have been too many bubbles."

"Dad?"

"Yeah, Dad – him."

Becky felt a little confused and she could not understand why Chloe and Joshua hugged each other tightly. She was also surprised to see Chloe crying again – she had done a lot of that during the day,

"Night, Peanut," Chloe said as she pulled Joshua out of the room. "See you in the morning."

"Night, Mum. Night, Dad."

"Sleep tight," Joshua said happily as she pulled his daughter's bedroom door closed behind him.

***Chapter 337*: Lucy**

Wednesday, April 27th, 2016

00:30

Urban Predator Training Facility, Milan

It was a medium-sized facility, based on a large warehouse.

Entry had been a just a little too easy for a suspected CIA facility. She found out why, very quickly as she burst in, weapons raised. It was no longer a training facility. . .

It was no longer a training facility – it was a fucking tomb.

"How could they. . .?" she exclaimed.

She had never seen so much carnage; at least not of the kind that lay before her. She counted each body, from the smaller ones, up to the bigger ones . . . twenty-six in total. She was not the only one counting, either.

"They killed twenty-six kids. . ." Shadow said incredulously. "Some of them are younger than Stephanie, for fuck's sake!"

They had all been shot and Hit Girl's trained eye saw that many of the wounds had been inflicted as the kids had tried to run away from the danger. She knelt down and she closed the staring blue eyes of a young girl about the same age as Anne-Marie, her beauty marred by the single .40-calibre hole in her forehead.

But then everything changed and the girl changed *into* Anne-Marie. Hit Girl looked up aghast at Shadow – only, Shadow had a bullet in the centre of her own forehead, blood dribbled down her face and then she dropped to the floor, dead. Shadow's body fell beside another body – this one taller and more muscular.

"Joshua!" Mindy exclaimed as she stared down at the boy who had always brought fun and joy to her life; he had three bullet holes in his chest.

Mindy looked around her as faces suddenly became sharp and she saw all of her friends and companions. They were all dead – Megan, Curtis, Erika . . . it went on. Mindy was angry – who could have done such a thing. She had not felt so much anger since...

She had *never* felt so much anger...

The anger, however, had heightened the veteran vigilante's senses and she heard something above her; she recognised the sound of an AR-15 being brought to readiness.

It was an obvious ambush and she reacted, turning her pistol towards the sound and rippling off bullets. Her mind registered the rapid action of the AR-15 cycling and spraying death in her direction. She felt the first bullet as it tore into her side and then she fell to the floor as another bullet tore through her left thigh before finally, a bullet tore her heart in two.

Darkness fell. . .

Sunday, September 25th, 2016

Glenview

Mindy snapped awake in an instant.

But before she could begin to panic, she was suddenly reassured by the strong arms which wrapped themselves around her body.

"Another nightmare?"

"Third one since we went to bed."

"Same every year," Dave commented to nobody in particular.

"I *hate* this time of year."

Dave hugged his wife's naked body which was bathed in a sheen of sweat. It was another one of the annual events which plagued their lives. So many of which were bad, just like the one for that Sunday.

"Seven years . . . but it feels like it was only yesterday. Getting shot by dickwad, waking up all alone. I was so scared but the one thing that kept me going was the thought of finding not just my Daddy but also finding you – and putting a bullet into your stupid skull."

"I did kinda betray you. . ."

"Don't start – it was dickwad; he tricked you. I can still see my Daddy, burning. I can still remember his last words to me. I can still remember that night when I geared up. I can remember your expression when I showed you the jetpack. I can remember how happy I was when you flew into sight and you blasted the fuck out of that bastard with his bazooka."

"Why *did* Damon have a bazooka, anyway?"

Mindy laughed.

"I have no idea – he just acquired shit and hung it on the walls."

"I'm sorry you lost your Daddy."

"In some ways, I'm not. He did his best but he turned me into somebody who I struggle to control. If he had never died then I might never have revealed myself to you. You, Dave Lizewski, are the best thing that has ever happened to me. How the fuck, you put up with me, I have no idea. But, seven years later, and we're still talking to each other."

Mindy paused to turn her head and kiss her husband.

"It's been a wild ride, honey."

"That it has," Mindy mused as she cuddled into her husband, absorbing his warmth and strength.

Without Dave, she would be nothing, she would be dead. Dave kept her alive. Dave kept her human. Dave helped her cope with her ever changing life. Hit Girl really did owe her very life and existence to the dick in a green and yellow wetsuit who almost pissed himself at Rasul's.

..._...

"What's up with Mum?" Stephanie asked, over breakfast.

Dave waved Stephanie to sit down beside him.

"Seven years ago, Mindy's father died – you've seen the video. A lot happened that night. Mindy almost died and so did I. Mindy struggles with the memories every year."

"I understand."

"I know that last weekend was the third anniversary of you and Jamie being taken. I know you tried to hide it but while he did not know the date, I know that you did and I heard you crying into the night. I did not want to intrude."

Stephanie hugged Dave tightly.

"Thanks. I want to forget it, but I can't. The terror. The fear. The hopelessness. Jamie was only five and I don't think he remembers much of what happened."

"We all have bad memories, Steph. But it helps to talk or at least have somebody there to help you and just be with you. Mindy doesn't really talk about it – she just wants me to be there for her and to hug her."

"I'll remember that, next month – I'm scared of how I'll be. October 24th, 2013 – we were separated for the final time and I would not see him again for almost three years."

"Stephanie – we've warned you about reading your *Predator* file. There's nothing good in there, pal."

"I just needed to know what happened. I've forgotten so much. . ."

"Believe me, Steph, there are some things which should remain hidden," Dave said darkly.

Winnetka Road

Summer Frasier cringed as she peeled back the dressing from her right upper arm and shoulder.

The bullet had struck the breech of her rifle, shattering it, before the remains of the bullet had torn through her armour and gouged a furrow through her bicep and then through her right shoulder before stopping against the inside of her suit. Her arm was black and blue with bruising not to mention the blood. There was no permanent damage on the inside – she could move the arm, but she would have a vicious scar on her upper right arm.

That bastard sniper!

They were supposed to have died.

Glenview

The day was not going as badly as it could have, in hindsight.

After their return from Chloe's the previous evening, they had barely managed to get into bed before Mindy's cell had vibrated and Mindy was suddenly on edge as she saw who was calling.

"Chloe?"

"Mindy . . . sorry for calling so late. . ."

Mindy was worried.

"What's wrong?"

"What was it like – you know, the first time that Anne-Marie called you 'Mom'?"

Oh!

"It felt weird – but a good weird. I never knew that a single word could possibly mean so much to someone. I hate to admit it, but I cried."

"It started with Josh – Becky called him 'Dad' while I was out getting stuff from the apartment. Then when I got back, she called me 'Mum' and she asked if that was okay. I couldn't reply – but yeah, I cried."

"Feels good, doesn't it?" Mindy said. "It takes some getting used to but I love begin call Mom – or Mum as Steph puts it."

"Yeah – Becky uses 'Mum' just like Steph does."

"Can I go back to my husband now, Chloe? I want him to bone me," Mindy asked.

"Ewww!"

"I'm sure Joshua would be happy to bone you – did you get my little present?"

Chloe laughed.

"I did – thanks. One's been used already. . ."

"More information than I needed," Mindy growled before firing off a counter blow. "Guess what Mommy and Daddy are doing right now."

"Double ewww!" Chloe groaned at the thought of her parents having sex.

"Night, Chloe."

"Night, best friend, ever."

..._...

Mindy and Dave had found their kids awaiting their arrival home and all were unhurt and the house was suspiciously intact.

Hailee had volunteered (somewhat reluctantly) to look after the kids – although Stephanie 'I don't need looking after' Lizewski had complained bitterly about having a sitter. Normally, it would have been Paige but she was busy looking after little Matty on behalf of Marty and Kim. It was Marty's birthday on that Saturday, and they had wanted to go out for the day so Paige had stepped in and taken Matty for the day which Megan had thought was great.

Marty, it transpired, had had a good day, apparently!

Fielding Drive

Becky was happily forcing pancakes into her mouth, ignoring the maple syrup which dribbled down her chin and then down onto her t-shirt.

The eight-year-old had awoken that morning, full of energy and promptly woken her 'parents' up who were a little tired having been 'up and down' for most of the night. Chloe had finally given in with a barely concealed scream and rolled out of bed. Becky, in turn, pushed her in the direction of the bathroom and told her to 'get a move on, you stink'. Chloe had reappeared ten minutes later to find an annoyed Becky bouncing on the end of the bed with a tired Joshua groaning as he tried to ignore the little girl's bouncing.

Chloe finished drying off after her shower before she pulled on some clean clothes and then Becky dragged her off towards the stairs and then the kitchen.

..._...

Joshua appeared, just as the first round of pancakes were cooking and he slumped into a chair beside his wide-awake daughter.

"Morning, Daddy!"

"Morning, again, bouncy daughter."

Becky giggled as Joshua reached out for the mug of tea which Chloe pushed in his direction.

"Mum's making pancakes – you having some?"

"I could do with the food, yes."

"Were you two having sex *all* night?"

"New rule, Rebecca," Chloe stated. "No talking about sex."

"Understood!" Becky replied with a mock salute.

..._...

By the time, Chloe and Joshua were working their way through their own pancakes, Becky had finished and she was talking non-stop like usual.

"Chloe?"

"Yeah, Peanut?"

"What's 'morning wood'?" Becky asked.

Chloe's face went bright pink and she turned to a smirking Joshua who had struggled not to choke on a forkful of pancake.

"Would you like to take that question, Joshua?"

"Not really, my lovely Chloe," Joshua laughed.

"Where *did* you hear that . . . err, term?" Chloe asked the ever-curious little eight-year-old.

"I heard some boys talking about it at school."

"Well, I would suggest that you go look it up on the laptop – try Google," Chloe suggested – far too embarrassed to explain the term to a young girl of such a tender, innocent, age.

Becky scrambled off her chair and bolted for the laptop which sat on the kitchen side. A few minutes later, she found her answer.

"Found it – it says. . ."

"Becky!" Chloe called out, desperately as Joshua burst out laughing. "We *don't* need to hear it!"

"kay!" Becky shouted back.

Chloe dropped her head onto the table and moaned.

"Was I this bad as an eight-year-old?" she bleated.

"I'll ask your Mom next time I see her," Joshua replied.

"Talk about embarrassing!"

Morton Grove

Joshua was at the apartment with the terror, packing, while Chloe had stopped off to see her mother.

"Mom – did I ever ask embarrassing questions when I was little?"

Cathy laughed.

"Oh, yeah!" she replied. "What has the delightful Becky asked?"

"I'd rather not say. . ."

"About girls?"

"No."

"Boys?" Cathy guessed.

Chloe slumped down onto the couch and nodded. Cathy sat down in a chair facing her daughter.

"Some years back – you would have been about six or probably closer to seven. Curtis was about three and . . ."

"Did little me hear my name?" Curtis said as he came into the living room and jumped onto the couch, snuggling up to his cousin.

"We're about to hear another embarrassing story about your cousin," Cathy explained to her nephew.

Curtis grinned as he looked up at Chloe who scowled.

"You comfy?" Chloe enquired and Curtis nodded – he would never miss a chance to witness his cousin's humiliation.

"As I was saying – a seven-year-old Chloe and a three-year-old Curtis were in the bath together. Chloe was at a stage in her life where she was questioning everything. Well, she was ever the curious little girl and she had noticed that Curtis was differently equipped to her."

Chloe rolled her eyes as Curtis sniggered.

"Chloe pointed at her cousin and she asked, 'Why does Curtis have that thingy between his legs?' Well, I told her what boys have a penis. Chloe wanted to know *why* her cousin had a penis and what it was for. I decided that Chloe was too young for the birds and the bees, so I told her to wait a few more years."

Curtis laughed out loud as Chloe blushed furiously.

"Well," she said. "Curtis appears to have figured out what his penis is for – or at least Megan has!"

"We don't do *that* stuff, yet," Curtis muttered as his face exploded.

"That's okay, sweetie," Chloe teased as she hugged her cousin.

"Don't worry, Chloe – you have many more embarrassing years ahead of you," Cathy chuckled.

That evening

Sheridan Road

Shannon wormed into her father as they sat and watched tv.

"Hi, sweetheart," Patrick Millar said.

"I still haven't forgiven you, Dad."

"I'm just happy I have you back, Shannon."

Shannon was happy to be back – very happy. Twelve-year-old Annabelle and her ten-year-old brother, Iain, were also very happy to have their big sister back. They had both talked about Shannon's anger at finding out that her siblings were trained vigilantes. They also understood her anger. They hated seeing Shannon's anger at her parents and they did everything that they could to give Shannon access to their Mom and Dad. Shannon had missed out on so many years and she needed the quality time with her parents.

Thirteen-year-old Marc felt like a fifth wheel in the house. He had moved in the previous week to be with Shannon. Shannon's mother, Taylor, had decided it would be easier if he lived there as he was spending a lot of money on cabs! Nevertheless, the boy had his own bedroom on the second floor, below his thirteen-year-old girlfriend's bedroom on the third floor. That had been a diplomatic way to allow Marc to live with them, without it looking obviously sexual. There were also rules. There was to be no naked bodies outside of their bedrooms. No loud sexual activities keeping the household awake. No overtly sexual activity outside the house in public. No sexual activity until homework was completed. Any trouble at school, or any rules broken and they would be restricted to their own bedrooms.

While Shannon had believed herself to be beyond rules, her parents had put the proverbial foot down and warned her in no uncertain terms that Marc could always go back to live at the Safehouse. Shannon had given in – under protest – while secretly glad to be treated like a kid again. She enjoyed the discipline from her parents – she knew that they both loved her dearly.

She also did not want to lose Marc.

The following morning ***Monday, September 26th***

Lake View High School

The city was in meltdown.

Despite that, it was to be her first day as a Senior at Lake View High School. Her trip on the bus that morning had been fraught with problems. Two windows of the bus had been smashed as they had been driving down the street but the driver had kept her foot down until she was safely in the clear before slowing down. She also witnessed a mugging and a police shootout along the way which had surprised her greatly. She knew that Chicago had the reputation for being a rough city but it was also a protected city – or so she thought.

After checking in with the school office, Lucy made her way to her first lessons. Despite expecting to see the girl, Lucy was more than a little surprised to recognise one of the Sophomores: Saoirse Doherty – it had been a couple of years

since she had last laid eyes on the bitch (well, face to face, at least); the girl had been about thirteen back then. Lucy was surprised when out of the blue, another Sophomore had caught her eye: Sarah Hampton. Neither of the girls noticed Lucy, they seemed intent on their own discussions as they chatted with some other kids.

Lucy decided that she would have to be careful – both girls knew her . . . and they hated her – enough to kill her?

She wasn't sure.

..._...

Back to the city in meltdown.

Lucy was very attentive to everything that went on around her – a part of her intensive training since she was ten – and she had noticed much since her arrival. The weekend had been spent scouting the city. Russians? Sicilians? And what the fuck were those masked idiots? Her mind remembered something about a fight at some silos: A Corsair. What the bloody hell was going on in Chicago? It was like a goddamn war zone!

Lucy had recognised another face at lunchtime: Marc Ryan, and he was snuggling up to . . . oh, that was unexpected – Shannon? What was going on, it was like the school was *Predator Central*!

The faces brought back memories as she dug into her sandwich and kept her head down.

Thursday, March 31st, 2011

***The Urban Predator Academy
Colorado Springs, Colorado***

It was the second batch.

Lucy was now able to get an inkling of who might and who might not last as a *Predator*. As the eighteen kids – nine boys and nine girls, just as before – stripped off their clothing, Lucy looked from face to face. They were all very miserable; who would not be in the same situation? The group was different to the first; three of the girls and four of the boys looked to be a lot younger than the others. One of those, a thin, pale girl with medium-length dark-brown hair, was sobbing as she reluctantly slid her knickers down and off before she dropped them on the pile of her freshly discarded clothing. The girl gazed over at Lucy who showed no emotion as the younger girl stood there, completely naked and attempting to cover herself up as a couple of the boys glanced over at her body, despite them being just as naked as she was.

"Stop snivelling, brat," Lucy growled as she walked over to the girl only to cause more sobbing. "What's your name?"

"Saoirse."

"Irish?"

"I'm from Belfast."

"An Irish slut – you'll fit in well!" Lucy laughed as she back-handed the nine-year-old girl across her right buttock eliciting a yelp of pain.

The other two, very naked, younger girls cowered together.

"Names?"

"Ra . . . Rachel."

"Kara."

"Leave them alone!" came a voice.

"What?" Lucy demanded of another naked girl, taller than all the others.

"Leave them alone!" the girl repeated.

"You are. . .?"

"Sarah. . ."

Before Sarah could say any more, Lucy punched her in the face. That was followed up by a swift kick between the legs which put Sarah on the ground in agony.

"Fair warning . . . insolence will *not* be tolerated."

Lucy was not to know how much that comment was to come back and haunt her, just a few months into her future.

Monday, September 26th, 2016

**Lake View High School
Chicago, Illinois**

Juno Grant was still as much of a bitch as she always was.

While her credibility amongst the student body had crumbled – ever since her run in with Lauren Edwards, six months previously – she was still making waves by opening her mouth when she should have been keeping it firmly shut. The girl enjoyed causing and stirring shit, simple as that. The turmoil in the city had provided her with a pair of easy targets – the cops and *Fusion*.

She knew full well that there were children with parents in the Chicago Police Department, at the school. It was also no secret that most of the school supported *Fusion* – there were even outlandish and unconfirmed rumours that some of the kids who attended the school could even be *Fusion* members – as if! Juno and her cohorts happily voiced their thoughts over what they believed the CPD to have done the other evening. She also threw in some digs at how ineffective *Fusion* were in the city.

It took a lot of willpower for certain members of the student body to keep their tempers. A certain twelve-year-old girl sat with her boyfriend and she visualised ripping the sixteen-year-old's head off her neck. She hated the girl, and while Megan was not alone, she knew that she dared not do anything to risk exposure of her secret identity. There were other's in similar stages of anger: Chloe Bennett and her boyfriend, Joshua Williams, Brad Murphy and his girlfriend Lauren Edwards. Chloe and Lauren both had personal reasons to rip Juno's face off but they had had their fun months before and Juno gave them both a very wide birth indeed.

There was instant hate for the girl amongst the newer members of the school – all *Predators*. Over in a sheltered corner of the dining room, a sixteen-year-old girl thought that she had escaped drawing any attention to herself that day and that nobody had noticed her arrival at the school.

She was very, very wrong.

**Two days later
Wednesday, September 28th**

Lake View High School

"Happy Birthday, Lucy."

Lucy recognised the voice instantly – it was a voice which she had not heard in a long time but it was a voice which she would never forget. She turned to look toward the voice.

"Instructor?"

"It's Patrick now, Lucy. All that is gone."

Lucy saw two girls step out from behind the man she once knew as Instructor Millar. Both girls held pistols in their hands, pointed at the ground. Lucy smiled.

"Hi, Saoirse. Hi, Sarah."

"What are you doing here, Lucy?" Sarah demanded.

"I'm looking for help."

"The great Lucy Ford is looking for help?" Sarah responded derisively.

"I have to agree with Sarah – sorry, Lucy," Saoirse added.

Lucy took a deep breath before she continued.

"I know you two have no reason to like me. I broke your nose, Sarah, on your very first day and I treated you, Saoirse, like crap. I came to Chicago for help from you in particular; I knew that you were here, Saoirse. I also know that Hit Girl is here. I was made in her image and I know that she is not the woman those bastard instructors – sorry Mr Millar – say she is."

Patrick waved off the insinuation.

"Lucy – we don't trust you," Sarah said sharply. "We can't."

"I know – you have no reason to."

"No, we don't," Shannon growled as she came around the corner and shot Lucy with a Taser.

The look on Shannon's face was pure malice.

***Chapter 338*: Prelude to War**

Wednesday, September 28th, 2016

Safehouse K

When Lucy awoke, she felt cold and uncomfortable.

As her senses kicked into gear, she realised that she was naked and lying on a cold concrete floor. All around her was darkness but she sensed that somebody was watching her. There was also the sound of movement, somewhere in the darkness. Without warning a dazzlingly bright light came on, illuminating her and the immediate area around her.

"Get on your knees!" came an electronically enhanced voice.

Lucy did as commanded, rising to her knees slowly. She shivered with cold as she tried to focus on what was going on around her.

"What do you want in Chicago?" the voice demanded.

"I came seeking Hit Girl."

"Why would you want to do something like that?"

"I need help."

"Why would Hit Girl want to help somebody like you?"

Lucy saw movement ahead of her and a pair of boots came into the pool of bright light – they were lightweight and purple. Lucy knew that she was in the presence of Hit Girl and probably other members of *Fusion*, too.

"I know there is good in her – she is not the wicked, murderous bitch that my instructors made her out to be. I know that she can help me. I am alone. I have nothing. I was trained to be what she is. I want more out of my life now I am no longer under the spell of *Urban Predator*."

Another pair of boots came into the light.

"Why would we want to help you, Lucy – you represent the misery that we all endured and you caused a lot of it."

"Yes, I caused you all misery but I believed in what *Urban Predator* represented – at least in how it was applied to me and Leo. They gave us both a life. They taught us how to look after ourselves. They tainted the programme by what they did to you all. Yes, I helped to create you all. I created Foxtail. I created Stormtide. I created Discord. I created Tempest. I know you are all listening. I don't regret giving you training – I helped to keep you alive. You were all strong and you all survived. I taught you all values and as far as I can see, you've all put those values to good use by joining the one person that you were all trained to kill, despite being trained to emulate her."

There was no response from the assembled masked individuals who had all stepped into the spotlight.

"You think that being naked humiliates me, Hit Girl. I don't like it but I've endured worse – ask Foxy."

"Don't call me that!" one of the masked individuals called out.

"How did you know it was me?" Lucy asked.

"That was Discord," Foxtail replied. "She heard about a girl in P.E. who got in trouble for having a tattoo which showed below her shorts. By the description, it could only have been that damn fish of yours!"

"You can talk, Foxy!" Lucy threw back.

"I told you to stop calling me that!"

There was a snigger from one of three smaller armoured individuals who stood with Foxtail.

"How can we trust you?" Hit Girl growled as she got things back on track.

"You can't. I have hurt them all. They have no reason to trust me. I did bad things – many bad things."

"You were armed," Hit Girl stated as she waved her armoured gauntlet at a table which was covered with Lucy's clothing and weapons. There were several knives and two pistols amongst other items.

"A girl needs to defend herself in a city which you seem to have lost control of."

Lucy saw that she had hit home as Hit Girl braced up.

"If you are not going to help me . . . then I want you to kill me. You were my only hope. KILL ME!"

Lucy shouted the last two words at Hit Girl.

"Okay," Hit Girl replied as she drew her Tanto and strode directly at the unflinching seventeen-year-old.

Lucy stared directly up at Hit Girl's mask as Hit Girl placed the point of her Tanto on Lucy's throat drawing a little blood.

"Do it!" Lucy said as tears of failure ran down her face. "DO IT!"

Hit Girl stared down at the naked girl and she increased the pressure of the blade which allowed more blood to trickle down the girl's chest. It would take just another ounce of pressure to push the blade into Lucy's throat and sever her airway and then her backbone. It would be a merciful death.

"DO IT!"

August 8th, 2011

The Urban Predator Academy Colorado Springs, Colorado

It was the third batch.

Lucy and Leo were much more involved that time around as they had some wild cards in the batch who did *not* want to follow orders. While most of the intake stripped as ordered, one of the girls, an eight-year-old, resolutely refused to strip naked. One of the instructors tipped his head in Lucy's direction and she stepped forwards. The young girl saw Lucy moving towards her and she screamed.

"No, leave me alone!"

Admittedly, Lucy was a forbidding sight. The eleven-year-old wore black combat pants, a sleeveless black t-shirt over a black sports bra, black jungle boots, and her blonde hair was tied back in a ponytail, high on her head. Lucy stood no nonsense as she swept the young girl's feet out from under her and she crashed to the floor of the dining hall.

"Strip, now!" Lucy ordered.

"No!"

People only said, 'no' to Lucy once before the heaven's dropped on their head. The girl had said, 'no' twice . . . and she knew that she had gone too far as Lucy pulled out a Benchmade Model 67 Balisong with Tanto blade. She expertly flicked the blade open before she brought it down towards the screaming girl. With deft movements, Lucy cut off the girl's clothes, ripping off her sweatshirt and T-shirt before attacking her jeans and panties. Once the girl's plimsols and socks were ripped off she huddled herself into a ball on the floor, sobbing.

Lucy grabbed the girl by her jet-black hair and pulled her to her feet. Many saw Lucy as skinny, but there were strong muscles in her body and many had found that out to their cost. The girl screamed as she was yanked to her feet by her hair and she struggled against the iron grip to no avail. Lucy pulled the girl's right arm around and up her back, causing another scream of pain. The girl was frogmarched through the corridors to the changing rooms where Lucy pinned her while her hair was shaved off.

Lucy then threw the girl into the shower area where she skidded and fell to the tile floor in fits of sobbing.

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An hour later, Lucy came face to face with the girl again. She was clothed and looking very scared. Lily O'Brien was her name.

"If you want to survive this, O'Brien, then I would advise you to follow all commands, instantly," Lucy said in a vague attempt at being helpful.

The girl just nodded as she stood with two other new girls in the stores awaiting their main draw of clothing. There were now over fifty Predators at the various stages of their training. The first intake had been there almost a year and some were on the verge of becoming serious *Predators*. Indeed, Lucy and Leo were not all that far away from becoming the very first Phase 2 *Predators* on their twelfth birthdays.

On the way, back to the dining hall, Lucy came across the Abbott twins. Their hair had grown back quite fast and the two eleven-year-olds were progressing well in their training.

"Well, if it isn't our 'queen'," Christina sneered.

"Chrissy!" Sky warned.

"You should listen to your freak sister, 'Chrissy'," Lucy cautioned as she pinned the younger girl against the corridor wall with her left hand.

"Fuck you!" Christina retorted.

Lucy smashed her right fist into Christina's left cheek, allowing the girl to fall to the floor where Lucy kicked her in the stomach.

"Learn respect, you fucking freak!" Lucy growled as she strode off down the corridor.

Wednesday, September 28th, 2016

Safehouse K

"Do it!" Lucy said as she stared at death without fear.

Hit Girl hesitated for a moment but then she decided that the girl was too dangerous – she was a version of herself and that could not be allowed. But before Hit Girl could exert any more pressure on the blade, she felt a hand on her arm. She looked up to see Stormtide shaking her head. Hit Girl looked over at her senior *Predator*. Foxtail shook her head too.

"Far from me to go against the masses – it's bad enough that my own daughter would like to slash my throat when I ground her but to anger a bunch of fanatical *Predators*. . ."

Hit Girl left the rest unsaid as she stowed her Tanto. Lucy sank down onto her heels and she stared at the concrete floor.

"I don't know why I stopped you," Shannon said as she removed her mask. "I hated her – only without her, I would not be alive. She trained me when nobody else would. I owe her for that."

"She was better than many at that place," Saoirse added as she removed her own mask. "She suffered just as much as many of us – probably worse."

"Get her downstairs and return her clothes," Hit Girl directed as she left the pool of light and vanished into the darkness.

"Lucy?"

Lucy looked up to see Shannon holding out her hand. Lucy looked back down to the concrete.

"Please, Lucy – let us help you."

"Why?"

"Just go with it," Sarah said as she too held out her hand.

"What's downstairs?" Lucy asked as she took both of the hands held out to her.

"Warmth," Shannon smiled.

..._...

"Well?"

Mindy looked up at her husband.

"She's fighting demons inside."

"You feel responsible for what she is."

"Yes, dammit! That girl was taken in response to what I was. She was taken in response to what I did when I rescued your fucked-up ass and my Daddy!"

"There was nothing you could do, honey."

"That's what's so fucking annoying!"

"What are you going to do with her?"

"I need to check her out – her former colleagues have vouched for her. I want to know what she's been up to for the past few months and what she did for *Urban Predator*."

"What about her file?"

"We only have a chunk of it, so far. Everything, after she turned thirteen, is missing."

"Remember, she sought *you* out."

"You know I have trust issues and . . . well, she's me and at times / don't trust me."

"At least she has friends," Dave pointed out as they watched Shannon and Saoirse help their former tormentor get dressed.

"Goddamn *Predators*!" Mindy growled.

..._...

Lucy was feeling a lot more comfortable now she was dressed and in a room with heating. It may have been subterranean but it was pleasant. Introductions were made of the younger *Predators* and Lucy was very surprised to see so many in one place. She was also surprised by one codename, in particular.

"Well, if it isn't the mighty Psyche," Lucy commented as she studied the younger girl. "You're a legend in your own time. You're more famous than even I am."

"You know – while I hated the *Predator* reunions where their first thoughts were to kill me; these lovey-dovey ones are just creepy!"

Lucy laughed.

"Just enjoy it, Stephanie. You were just like me – you wanted to tear down *Urban Predator*. But the difference between us? You went ahead and did it. You're an amazing girl, Stephanie – never let anybody tell you differently."

"You know, Lucy – I thought you'd be tougher than this. To be honest, you sound like a pussy," Stephanie commented and Saoirse groaned as Lucy laughed.

"Just trying to be nice. You want me rip your head off and piss in it, then I can do that."

"I'll pass, honey!" Stephanie offered with a smug smile.

Lucy turned to Saoirse who visibly wilted before the older girl.

"Hi, Saoirse. Have no fear; I hold no ill will against you – but I don't blame you for hating me. I made your life into a living hell and I apologise for that – I won't make excuses for my behaviour."

"Lucy, you always did talk shit," Saoirse replied. "We both suffered, and I don't blame you for any of it. We were all caught up in the moment and we did everything that we could to survive. I'm just glad that you're alive. Have you heard from Leo?"

"No – we were on a mission, together, back in May – it went to shit when you guys took down *Urban Predator* and we executed our own breakouts. I've not seen nor heard from him since."

Lucy looked very down at her comment.

It was three days late, but the news had finally filtered through that *Vengeance* had been attacked.

Mindy had spoken with Jasper and been reassured that while Cassie and Kaitlin had been hurt, there were no major injuries and both would be back in action very quickly. It had also been worrying due to the fact that a new faction was on the radar. *Who* had attacked *Vengeance* and how had they known *Vengeance* was to be there in the first place? Those were among many questions that passed through Mindy's mind as she considered everything which had been happening.

Her head was hurting as she tried to think about what was going on in England at the same time as what was going on in her own city. She had a new, and potentially deadly, Predator appearing out of nowhere. Jamie's ninth birthday was on Sunday and he was getting more than a little over excited by the prospect. Even Stephanie was excited about celebrating her brother's birthday as it was to be the first for many years. Then, on Tuesday, a select few were due to fly to that hellhole called Gotham.

Then came the worst of it – October 8th – the deadline!

Two days later
Friday, September 30th

Evening

1714 West Grace Street

"So, are you enjoying your new lodgings?"

Lucy almost shot through the ceiling at the words which seemingly came out of nowhere. In response, she spun, sweeping up a kitchen knife off the side and throwing it at the voice.

"Did I catch you at a bad time?" Hit Girl asked, the kitchen knife grasped in her right gauntlet.

"You fucking bitch!" Lucy exclaimed. "You scared the shit outta me!"

"My bad," Hit Girl said as she sat down in one of the comfortable chairs.

"You're obviously familiar with sneaking into this place," Lucy offered as she sat down opposite Hit Girl. "Coffee?"

"No, I'll pass, thanks. I once snuck in here to kill Foxtail."

"She's still alive," Lucy pointed out.

"I had a weak moment."

"Why are you here?"

"I want to get to know you."

"So, you can kill me in a more efficient manner?"

Hit Girl was impressed with the verbal sparring – Lucy was a natural.

"Lucy Ford, you are not my enemy and, as I understand it, I am not yours. You have no reason to fear me and believe me, if I wanted you dead. . ."

"Point taken – you still scare the hell outta me!"

"Good," Hit Girl responded, her lips curling into a smirk. "Tell me about your first mission for *Urban Predator*."

Lucy thought back over the years.

"That would have been August 2nd, 2013."

"Very good memory," Lucy's visitor commented.

"Thanks – I was sent to Seattle. There, I was picked up by some grumpy bastard and taken into the city. We stopped outside a big hotel."

Friday, August 2nd, 2013

The Sheraton Hotel, Seattle

"What do you want me to do?"

"Room 412 – you will find this man in there. . ."

An 11-inch by 14-inch glossy colour photo was passed over. Lucy ran her eyes over it a few times, memorising eyes, mouth, nose, shape of the face, hair style. She handed the photo back.

". . . kill him."

"How?"

"That is up to you – you have a gun, you have a knife, you have your skills. The bastard had a skin full, last night . . . so, he should be fast asleep. You have thirty-five minutes – we will wait until then and if you are not back down here . . . you are on your own, Lucy."

"I'd better not hang around then. . ."

..._...

Five minutes later, Lucy was on the fourth floor and walking past Room 412.

She needed a key card . . . her mind went into overdrive as she thought through the problem . . . there . . . a maid; female – no good. She smiled and headed to the floor below where she remembered seeing a male hotel employee. As she walked past the maid, she swiped a towel off the pile and made for the fire stairs.

After jumping down the stairs, she paused outside the door to the third floor, checked that the stairwell was clear, and then she stripped naked. She wrapped the towel around her body – it barely covered her, being only an overlarge hand towel. After taking a deep breath, she pulled open the door and she grinned as she saw the male employee, walking away from her. She dumped her clothing and weapons in the doorway to a room and then ran down the corridor.

"Hey!" she called. "You got a bigger towel, there?"

The young man turned around just as Lucy's towel 'kind of slipped'. His eyes went wide as he took in the tantalising sight before him.

"Err . . . of course," he stammered as he turned to grab a bigger towel, tearing his eyes away from Lucy's assets.

"Thank you," Lucy said as she wrapped the fresh, and much larger, towel around her body.

"No problem, ma'am."

Lucy ran off down the corridor, sweeping up her clothes and vanishing back into the stairwell. After dressing, quickly,

she dumped the towel in a laundry chute and she casually flipped the stolen access card over in her hand.

..._...

Lucy returned to the fourth floor and after checking that the coast was clear, she inserted the access card into the horizontal slot near the door handle and the light flickered green and the lock released with a muted click. Lucy pulled the suppressed Glock 26 from the small of her back and then pushed open the door to the hotel room. She cleared the bathroom first and then entered the main room. The man was, indeed, asleep – stretched out on his bed. The man's facial features matched the photo, perfectly.

Lucy levelled the pistol at the man's forehead and without a moment's hesitation, she squeezed the trigger twice. The man would never wake up again. Quickly, Lucy left the room, hanging a 'Do Not Disturb' tag on the outer door handle as she went. She quickly headed back down to the lobby and outside to where her ride was awaiting her return.

"Well?" the man demanded.

"Mission accomplished," Lucy replied.

"Let's go – your flight departs in ninety minutes."

Friday, September 30th

1714 West Grace Street

"How did you feel?"

"Nothing – it was my fourth kill – I saw nothing wrong with killing. By the time, I was twelve, I had already killed an Apprentice *Predator* and two Yellows. You know what a Yellow is?"

"I do."

"They trained me well – maybe too well. It was my second sanctioned kill and my first adult kill. It went like clockwork and I was rewarded."

"Rewarded?"

"I received a steak dinner on my return and two days to myself."

"Not bad, I suppose."

"What else do you want to know about me?"

"Ultimately, everything."

"Until then, you cannot trust me, I understand. Thank you for this apartment – freshly decorated, very nice."

"The CIA burnt it down when they tried to terminate Foxtail – it's been refurbished."

"This was Foxtail's place?"

"It was."

"Great!"

The following day
Saturday, October 1st

Glenview

"What are you two up to?"

Jamie and Abigail looked up as Stephanie peered into the bedroom.

"Just getting changed," Jamie responded. "Brad and Lauren will be here in a few minutes."

Stephanie was already in her swimsuit and Abigail was just pulling on her own. Jamie kicked off his underwear and pulled on his swim shorts. Within another minute, all three kids were jumping down the stairs and racing into the kitchen.

"Wondered where you'd gone," Tommy grinned.

Tommy and Stephanie ran through and jumped into the pool, closely followed by Abigail, Jamie, Danny, and Anne-Marie. Soon, they were all laughing and giggling under the watchful eyes of Dave and Mindy. Minutes later, Lauren and Brad appeared and they both dove in to join the fun. Mindy could see that Abigail was not a big fan of water – for perfectly understandable reasons – but she still joined in the fun. Stephanie and Abigail chose to pick on Jamie and then picked the boy up and threw him a short distance across the water.

All *Predators* were strong swimmers, despite their fears, and those *Predators* present quickly demonstrated their superior performance in the pool. Stephanie was arguably the most powerful swimmer there – she could cut through the water at great speed – and she could hold her breath for a decent amount of time when she swam underwater. Abigail, despite her unease, was also a fast swimmer but Stephanie appeared to have the stronger leg and arm muscles which propelled her through the water with ease.

Lauren and Brad were not bad, when it came to swimming, although they just seemed to spend the time swimming together and chatting with the occasional kiss every few minutes! The twins happily joined in although they were easily the smallest there and often found themselves ducked by the more violent *Predators*. It was a fact of life that the *Predators* played like they fought – hard and without mercy. It wasn't their fault – they were trained to be ruthless and their training had taken over every aspect of their young lives. That came to a head when Abigail and Anne-Marie collided and they both came away with tears running down their cheeks and their heads held in their hands.

There were no lasting injuries and both girls were tougher than they looked. Before long they were back playing with big smiles on their faces.

..._...

For Dave and Mindy, it had been a good day.

The kids had enjoyed themselves while Dave and Mindy had been able to sit and chat – a rare event. After two hours of swimming, the exhausted kids had devoured several large pizzas with the help of Sophia, Razor, Kiara, and the ever-present Horatio. By the time parents arrived to collect Tommy, Lauren, Brad, and Abigail, the kids were still in their swimsuits, so they went home that way with their clothing in bags and a jacket over them for warmth.

Lizzie was appalled to see her sister kissing goodbye to Brad in a manner which she deemed disgusting. Not to be outdone, Tommy kissed Stephanie on the cheek which had her blushing profusely while Jamie and Danny wolf whistled. As was the plan, the kids went to bed early that evening and were soon fast asleep. Dave and Mindy were then able to spend the rest of the evening together, watching a movie and enjoying each other's company.

They also completed their plans for the following day.

***The following morning
Sunday, October 2nd***

The British Sector

Stephanie awoke soon after six that morning.

She was excited. She had not been able to celebrate her brother's birthday since he was five – now, he was nine-years-old. Stephanie thought for a moment about *why* she had been unable to celebrate his previous three birthdays and why they had been separated in the first place. Ever since Jamie had come back into her life, Stephanie had begun to remember things. She could remember that last day together before everything had gone so wrong.

She could not really remember much about her parents, but she could remember Jamie, and she could remember the events leading up to their kidnapping.

Wednesday, September 18th, 2013

Atlanta, USA

"Steph?"

"I'm here, Jamie."

"What are we doing today?"

"Mum and Dad are taking us to see some stuff in the city."

"Where?"

"I think the fish place – you know. . ."

"We're going to the Georgia Aquarium," Mum interrupted.

"Cool! I want pancakes for breakfast."

"You *always* want pancakes, Jamie!"

"I'm almost six; I'm a growing boy."

"You've still got two weeks to go, little brother!"

Sunday, October 2nd, 2016

**The British Sector, Glenview
Chicago, Illinois**

Stephanie smiled as she remembered how happy they had all been.

She remembered how much Jamie had been annoying her. She remembered sniping back at him and annoying him back. She remembered being really mean to her little brother in retaliation for annoying her. Then she remembered the horror and panic as their lives had changed.

Stephanie wiped away the tears from her face and she pulled on some clean clothes.

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Ten minutes later, Stephanie snuck up the stairs which led to the third floor (or second floor as she saw it – damn Americans!) where she nipped across a large storeroom and she stopped by a closed door which was usually kept locked. Stephanie pulled out the key which she had swiped from the kitchen, the night before, and she unlocked the door. With practiced ease and patient, she pulled the door open until she could slip through the gap. There, before her was a bed. Sleeping soundly in the bed was her little brother who was now six-years-old. Stephanie had a plan – it wasn't cruel per se, but it would be fun.

The room was still in darkness which was not a problem to the veteran *Predator* who enjoyed darkness to cover her movements. Stephanie took her time crawling across the floor and around the double bed to the far side where her brother was sleeping. As was usual, the boy was sleeping on his back with the duvet somewhere around his ankles. His left hand was lying palm up on the bed beside his pillow. He was wearing a pair of pyjama shorts but nothing else. With extreme care, Stephanie pulled an object out of a small plastic tub and she gently lifted the waistband of his pyjama shorts and slid the object inside, letting the waistband fall back into place. Stephanie had noticed that ever since his rescue, her brother had been sleeping deeper and deeper in the almost three weeks he had been with them.

His *Predator* skills appeared to be waning – at least at home. Stephanie's next act was to produce a can of shaving foam and then to gently fill her brother's left hand with a good amount of the slimy substance. To finish off, Stephanie produced a feather and she began to tickle her brothers nose. It did not take long for Jamie's nose to twitch and for the boy to squirm. The right hand came up to his face and rubbed his nose before flopping back down to the bed. Stephanie giggled quietly as she continued working with the feather. Then the boy fulfilled Stephanie's mission as he brought his left hand up and . . .

"Ahhhh!" Jamie yelled as he snapped awake.

Stephanie struggled to keep quiet as her brother looked around in the darkness and he wiped his face off, looking very confused.

"Hey, Jamie, you weed yourself?" Stephanie called out, suddenly.

"No!" Jamie exclaimed as a hand checked his groin, only to burst the water balloon which Stephanie had painstakingly inserted into his pyjama shorts. "Fuck, that's cold!"

Stephanie could contain herself no longer as she burst out laughing. A light came on as Jamie fumbled for his bedside light. He glared down at his big sister who was rolling around on the floor, laughing hysterically, barely able to breathe.

"What's going on?" a tired Danny asked as he came up the spiral stairs from the bedroom below.

The boy looked at his new big brother and his big sister, trying to figure out what was so funny at that time on a Sunday morning. Stephanie managed to contain herself long enough to say four words.

"Happy birthday, little brother!"

Mindy's tired eyes flickered open as she heard a combination of excited chattering and giggling, plus the odd excited bark from one of the animals.

With a groan, she nudged her husband.

"The kids are up, Dave."

"I noticed – you go use your obnoxious talents on them," Dave suggested.

Mindy laughed as she sat up and reached for a top but not before Dave had reached out and tweaked her left nipple.

"Ow!"

"Just checking you were definitely awake."

After a pee, Mindy rapidly dressed while her husband dived into the bathroom for a pee of his own. The kids were in the living room chatting animatedly. Horatio and Razor were chasing each other while Kiara sat with her mother and watched the excitement. All four kids were still in their night things.

"Jamie, why do you shaving foam in your hair?" Mindy asked as her eyes travelled down her eldest son before focussing on his pyjama shorts. "Did you pee yourself?"

"No – my adorable big sister decided to play a prank on me."

Stephanie grinned innocently.

"Happy birthday, Jamie," Mindy said with a grin and a chuckle.

"Thanks. It's the best birthday ever – even more because I have Steph with me."

"It's good to have you with us, Jamie. This is your home and you are among people who care about you. Enjoy it."

"Thanks, Mindy."

"Who's for pancakes?" Dave asked as he appeared.

There was an explosion of shouts, barks, and meows as everybody answered in the positive.

..._...

Jamie had a reasonable pile of birthday cards to open which included a massive card from Dave and Mindy as well as a large one from his siblings.

Jamie swore when he counted the small pile of cash which had fallen out of the various cards – there was a little over two hundred dollars.

"Jamie. . ." Dave warned.

Jamie had had a rude introduction to the rules during his first few days at the Lizewski home.

...+...

"For fuck's sake..." Jamie exclaimed on his second morning.

"Jamie – dollar, jar!" Dave said sternly and Jamie looked over at his sister as Dave pointed at the jar.

"But I don't got no money."

"Jamie – you were brought up to talk better than that," Stephanie pointed out to her brother.

"Sorry, I have no fucking money!"

"Two dollars. . ." Dave intoned.

Jamie glared at Stephanie who just shrugged.

"Welcome to *my* world, little brother," Stephanie grinned.

"When you get your first allowance on Friday, we'll take what you owe from it first," Dave commented.

"But then I might get nothing?" Jamie objected.

"Been there," Stephanie groused with a dejected laugh.

"Several times, if I remember correctly," Mindy remembered.

"She owed thirty bucks, one month," Anne-Marie added with a cheeky grin.

Jamie raised an eyebrow at that comment.

"Yes, Jamie, your big sister has a foul mouth on her," Dave commented.

"It's strange – I've never heard her swear before; she was always Little Miss Perfect as I remember it."

"I believe, I was," Stephanie admitted wistfully.

...+...

"Sorry, Dave."

"Just because it's your birthday, does not mean you can get carried away, young man," Dave explained.

Jamie grinned as he ate some more of his pancakes.

"So, how does it feel being nine?" Danny asked his elder brother.

"To be honest, there were times when I never thought I'd reach my next birthday," Jamie replied.

"We're survivors, Jamie," Stephanie said. "We beat them and now we have our whole lives ahead of us."

"Well said, Steph," Mindy commented.

"I have my moments," Stephanie admitted with an embarrassed grin.

When Jamie had finished his pancakes, Dave asked him to go get some more washing-up liquid from the garage. The boy dutifully headed off but then, a minute later there was a yell of joy. Stephanie bolted off her seat and ran for the garage, followed by Danny and Anne-Marie. Dave and Mindy followed more discretely and they found Jamie staring at a new addition to the garage. Sitting beside the Jaguar F-Pace and the XJR was a small-wheel Honda CRF125F in British Racing Green. There was a large blue ribbon on the front with a small sign: 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY,

JAMIE!.

"Is that for me?" Jamie asked.

"Who else is called 'Jamie', doofus!" Stephanie exclaimed.

"I don't know what to say," Jamie muttered.

"Steph and the twins have motorcycles, so we thought that you should have one, too."

Jamie turned and he gave Mindy a big hug.

"Thanks, Mum."

It was the first time for Jamie, calling her that, and Mindy just ruffled the boy's hair in response. Stephanie could see the extreme happiness in Mindy's face – Dave's too.

Jamie was fitting in perfectly, she thought.

..._...

Over the next couple of hours, various visitors arrived to see Jamie.

First to arrive was Abigail with the Murphy family. Abigail gave Jamie a big hug and a kiss on the lips which had Brad wolf whistling, embarrassing the hell out of both youngsters.

"Happy birthday, Jamie," Abigail said.

"Thanks, Abigail – I'm glad to be alive to celebrate it."

Next through the door was Marcus with Paige, Megan, and little Damon.

"Happy birthday, little nephew!" Megan said as she gave Jamie a hug.

"Thanks, Auntie Megan," Jamie replied with a cheeky grin.

"She's only three years older than you, Jamie," Stephanie pointed out. "Can the 'auntie'."

"I hope you are enjoying your new family, Jamie," Marcus said as he handed over a small package and a card.

"Cool!" Jamie exclaimed as he produced a crisp new \$100 bill from the card.

Mindy scowled – Marcus had a reputation for being 'tight' with his cash.

"I'm enjoying having grand-kids," he pointed out.

"Thanks, Grandpa!"

"Happy birthday, Jamie," Paige said as she gave the boy a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"Thanks, Grandma."

"That makes me feel old – I'm nowhere near as old as Grandpa," Paige laughed.

Marcus growled as Mindy grinned. Jamie ripped open the package to find a professional grade collapsible billy club. Jamie expertly flicked it open and brought it down slowly to the ground. Stephanie and Megan nodded their approval – it was a very nice weapon.

Next to arrive, were the Bennett's. Jamie was forced to endure hugs from Cathy, Chloe, and finally Becky. Joshua just handed over a heavy package with a smile. Jamie grinned as he sat down to open the present. He ripped off the Star Wars wrapping paper with ease and then he stared at the wooden box in his hand. It was heavy and he had to place it down on the kitchen counter to open it. Stephanie and Abigail crowded round, curiously.

"Holy, shit!" Jamie breathed as he opened the lid.

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"Bloody hell!" Abigail added.

"You lucky fuck!" Stephanie threw in.

Jamie pulled out the first weapon.

It was a custom Heckler & Koch SFP9 SD, single-action, nine-millimetre pistol with paddle magazine release, SF-Trigger (Special Forces), ambidextrous safety lever, and extended barrel for a suppressor. Below the muzzle, a combined laser sight and flashlight unit was clipped onto the picatinny rail. The pistol frame was the same flame red colour as Rage's combat suit with signal yellow highlights on the grip and slide which were predominantly black. Jamie placed the weapon on the counter and he dug back into the box, producing an identical pistol which he placed next to the first. He reached back into the box and he produced eight empty magazines, the bases of which were signal yellow. The final items out of the box were a pair of short suppressors that were black with red and yellow streaks down the length of the devices. Jamie looked up at Joshua and the boy almost burst into tears.

"Those are from Dave, Mindy, Chloe, and myself," Joshua advised.

"Thank you," Jamie said very quietly, in awe at what he had just received.

..._...

"Cool pistols!" came a voice and Jamie span around and he ran to hug his friend.

"Easy, boy!" Shannon laughed as they hugged. "Happy birthday, Jamie."

"Thanks, Stormy."

Shannon growled but she let it go.

"Happy birthday, Jamie," Iain and Annabelle offered as they handed over a card.

"Not bad!" Patrick commented as he looked at the pistols.

"We can't have our son out there without proper equipment," Mindy observed proudly.

"Daddy," Shannon said sweetly. "My birthday is coming up soon. . ."

Patrick laughed as she looked over at his wife. Taylor just rolled her eyes.

"You want a pair of fancy pistols, too?" Patrick asked rhetorically.

"I'll love you forever. . ."

"Be a good girl, Shannon, and you never know," Mindy grinned.

..._...

For the next hour, the kids generally ran riot around the house and pool. Jamie and Abigail were making Shannon's life hell as they chased the thirteen-year-old around the house and the pool. Shannon was giggling her head off as she tried to elude her pursuers. Brad was enjoying the view as Shannon had chosen to wear a revealing two-piece bikini, much to her mother's disapproval. Annabelle, Iain, and Megan were getting on really well – 'channelling their inner kitties', Joshua had joked to three, glaring, unamused youngsters.

Stephanie took great delight in regaling everybody with the details of Jamie's early morning wake up. Jamie took it on the chin and the boy laughed with everybody else. For him, it was the best day of his life and well worth a small amount of humiliation. Becky enjoyed being back with Anne-Marie but both were banned from going anywhere near a bath or a shower.

It took a little bit of shouting and coaxing from the adults, but eventually, all the youngsters were corralled and it was time for something to eat. Cathy was in charge of the food (Mindy had wanted to cook but Stephanie had politely suggested that Jamie might not want food poisoning for his birthday) and she had produced copious amounts of foods that were suitable for both the adults and the kids. Soon, the boys were wolfing down pizza, hotdogs, and other savoury snacks which were all washed down with various fizzy drinks. The girls tried a little finesse but they

eventually joined the boys in their obnoxious behaviour.

Shannon through all attempts at behaving like a young lady to the wind and she began to demonstrate how to deep-throat a hotdog much to Becky's disgust. The boys began laughing so hard that Brad managed to get Coke flying out of his nose. Megan tried to copy Shannon but she only managed to choke herself and instead she began dipping the sausages into mayonnaise and then licking the substance off the tip with suspiciously practiced ease.

It did not help that the boys and the girls were cheering her on – even Becky.

..._...

The adults had kept well out of the way of the rabid youngsters, but once they were deemed to have had enough fun – or before somebody got hurt – it was time for the birthday cake.

Cathy had made the cake with the assistance of Chloe and Abigail, who had both insisted on helping. The cake was large and shaped like a number 9. It was a chocolate cake with flame red and signal yellow icing and there were, unsurprisingly, nine candles. Jamie smiled hugely as he was surrounded by his new family, with Stephanie on one side of him, Abigail on the other, and Shannon standing behind him. Mindy lit the candles – Dave tried but Mindy had actually growled at him – before stepping back and waiting for her new son to mark his birthday in the proper fashion.

Jamie grinned up at everybody, seeing all the smiles. All the horror and the uncertainty of the past few months fell away as he concentrated on looking forwards with his new family and all of his friends. He hesitated as he thought about what he could wish for. He felt a gentle, but impatient, nudge from Shannon and a squeeze of either hand from Abigail and Stephanie. Jamie took a deep breath and in one go, he blew out all nine candles, watching the wisps of smoke vanish upwards as everybody cheered.

"What did you wish for?" Abigail asked her friend.

"If I tell, it won't come true," Jamie replied cheekily.

..._...

Everybody grabbed a plate of chocolate cake and settled down.

Becky and Anne-Marie sat down in front of the TV and put on a My Little Pony DVD. They slowly ate their cake as they watched. Before long, Stephanie and Abigail joined the younger girls to watch the animated series.

"So much for hardened, professional assassins!" Brad commented dryly as he watched the four girls giggling at the ponies.

"Do you like having balls, Bradley?" Stephanie asked. "Abigail, would you like a sister, instead of a brother?"

"Could be nice," Abigail mused.

Brad laughed, unsure if the girls were just messing with him.

"We are, so evil!" Abigail said as she glanced over at Stephanie.

"We are, aren't we?" Stephanie replied and they both giggled.

"Jamie, why is it all your women are totally nuts?" Brad asked.

"That thought has crossed my mind, once or twice," Jamie replied. "I have no idea – I just seem to attract nutcases!"

"You saying that I am a nutcase?" Shannon asked.

"You're the worst of all of them!" Jamie replied.

"Cool!" Shannon grinned.

..._...

That night, Jamie Lizewski went to bed the happiest boy alive. All his dreams were coming true and his life could not be any better.

"Goodnight, Jamie. Happy birthday."

"Thanks, Mindy – you're the greatest."

"I know," Mindy grinned.

The boy smiled as he closed his eyes, reliving every minute of the most perfect day, ever.

***Chapter 339*: Dark Days in Gotham**

Tuesday, October 4th, 2016

Gotham City

The twins were *very* apprehensive, which was to be expected.

It had been exactly a year since either of them had last set foot in that godawful city and neither of them had smiled since they had set foot off the Gulfstream jet.

"I never wanted to come back here. . ." Danny commented and his sister nodded her agreement.

"You are both safe, okay?" Chloe insisted.

Stephanie had stayed behind with Jamie. She understood that it was a private trip for the twins who needed closure – she was also happy to spend some quality time with her brother, just the two of them. With Mindy, Dave, and the twins for the trip were Megan and Chloe. A small but potent force. There was not much chatter as they drove through the city from North to South; it was like a pall of gloom had passed over everybody. As they drove through Downtown, Chloe peered at a club to the right.

"I see they rebuilt The Velvet Beaver. . ."

Mindy grinned as Chloe looked wistfully at the 'ladies club'.

"That place is disgusting on so many levels," Megan growled as she remembered the DVD which she had shared with Curtis.

"What?" Anne-Marie asked.

"We did an operation there – well, Chloe did."

"First and only operation I ever did while naked," Chloe mused.

"What?" Danny exclaimed.

Megan chuckled.

"That club is a place where women have sex with other women. Chloe infiltrated them and to maintain her cover, she had to go naked while having sex with another woman," she explained.

"Ewww!" Anne-Marie muttered as her face went bright pink to match that of her brother.

"That's what I thought, too," Chloe said. "It was scary, but it was also exciting and it was something *very* different."

"You would never find me doing *anything* naked!" Megan declared.

"Except stripping in front of a couple dozen people, forty feet beneath Chicago," Chloe pointed out with a grin.

"That was different – *you* went naked in *public*!"

"Okay – enough talk about Chloe's eccentricities," Mindy ordered as they crossed over Sutter Bridge and reached their destination.

The twins looked at each other with foreboding etched on their young faces.

Gravesend Cemetery

The graves stretched for hundreds of yards, almost as far as the eye could see.

If Gotham was short of anything, it was not dead bodies. Many of the graves were two-hundred-years-old with some even older. The city was an old city dating back hundreds of years since its inception. The family wove their way in

and out of the gravestones, some of which were a good six feet in height and massive. The grave when they found it, was headed by a large chunk of granite. It had been paid for and installed by Bruce Wayne, almost a year before.

Here Lies an Honourable Man

***Edward Jamieson
died October 4th, 2015
defending his family***

And His Loving Wife

***Emily Jamieson
died January 11th, 2012
a victim of Gotham***

***Loving Father and Doting Mother
to two very special children***

Neither child could say anything for several minutes as they fought back the tears but both eventually succumbed and hugged their new parents, not wanting to take their eyes off the final resting place of their real mother and father.

"We miss you, Daddy. You too, Mommy."

Anne-Marie spoke for her brother as well. Danny was not taking it well and he was still sobbing even as Dave hugged him.

"We're in a better place, now. We have people who love us and they are doing everything they can to protect us. Our lives are really good, back in Chicago, and we've learnt to look after ourselves. Thank you, Daddy, for allowing Dave and Mindy to look after us – they're doing the most amazing job, despite the times when we misbehave."

Mindy looked down at the grave, remembering her pledge to the man before he had died.

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The man hesitated and he looked over at his kids before responding.

"I was told that you would get me and my family out of Gotham."

"You have our word, Mr Jamieson," Mindy replied, looking over at the kids.

"I want you to promise me something . . ." Ed Jamieson began, following Mindy's gaze. "If anything should happen to me . . . they are only seven-years-old and they have nobody else. I can sense when people are good and I can see that you both respect each other. If anything happens to me, I want you to see that they are looked after. Please, promise me."

The man appeared desperate and he was certain that things were not going to end well. Mindy looked over at Dave, who nodded.

"You have our word, Ed. Anything happens to you, your kids will be looked after and taken far away from Gotham," Mindy confirmed.

Ed nodded and called his kids over.

"Dave, Mindy. These are my children, Anne-Marie and Daniel."

Ed turned to his children.

"If I'm late back one evening, Dave and Mindy will look after you, understand?"

They were only seven-years-old, so obviously they did not, however, they responded dutifully.

"Yes, Daddy."

"You do anything and everything that they ask of you and you will both obey them, without question, understand?"

The twins were now looking a little worried, but again they replied in the affirmative.

"Yes, Daddy."

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Dave could remember the night like it was yesterday. The bullet-riddled house. The dying man. The distraught youngsters.

...+...

Blood gurgled from the man's mouth as he forced out his final words.

"Promise me that my kids will be looked after. Make sure that they know about me at the right time. Promise me that you will keep them safe."

"As if they were my own, Ed. As if they were my own," Dave promised.

It was a promise that he would keep, no matter what. He also vowed to avenge the man, maybe not that night, but he would be avenged.

"Thank you. . ."

...+...

Dave felt the anger surging up within him, just as it had a year before.

Mindy sensed the anger but she did not comment. They had talked about it and Dave had insisted on taking the lead. Mindy had agreed without further thought, leaving the task to her husband. She had not been there during Edward Jamieson's final moments but Dave had been and Mindy knew that the moment had affected her husband deeply.

Dave wanted to avenge Edward Jamieson and provide closure for his children.

Two hours later

Wayne Manor

"Welcome, all!"

"Thank you, Alfred," Mindy said as they were waved into the capacious entrance hall of the Gothic manor.

"Mindy!" Selina Kyle exclaimed as she ran to Mindy and hugged her.

Bruce Wayne laughed as he saw Mindy's expression.

"Hi, Dave, welcome back to Gotham," he said, offering his hand to Dave who shook it warmly.

"I can't say I'm glad to be back. . ." Dave breathed.

"It grows on you," Bruce replied sourly. "You remember, Aiden?"

"Hello, young man – you've grown since France," Dave commented.

"Hello, Mr Lizewski."

Dave laughed.

"Mr Lizewski is my father. Call me Dave."

"Hi, Dave," Aiden said with a grin.

After the remaining introductions, they all went through into the study for afternoon tea.

..._...

"Bruce?"

"Hello, Anne-Marie. How may I help you?" Bruce replied.

"My brother and I wanted to thank you . . . to thank you for what you did for our parents."

Bruce smiled down at the little girl and he went down on one knee, looking into her deep brown eyes.

"It was the least, that I could do. I just wish I could have done more."

"Gotham was our home but now our home is Chicago," Anne-Marie continued. "I know that what you, Selina, and now Aiden, do in this city would meet our Daddy's approval. He loved Gotham but he hated what the criminals did to it. We know that our Daddy worked for bad people and probably did bad things but he loved us and he cared for us."

"Not bad, Anne-Marie," Chloe said.

"Thank you, for that, Anne-Marie," Bruce said with a smile.

"We've seen the Hit Cave," Danny grinned. "Can we see the Bat Cave?"

Mindy scowled – she hated *anybody* using 'Hit' before *anything* expect for 'Girl', as in 'Hit Girl'. Joshua laughed, knowing Mindy's thoughts on the subject.

"Calm down, Mindy – you might blow a Hit Artery!"

Mindy closed her eyes and she took a deep breath before forcing a smile and not raising to Joshua's bait.

..._...

The twins looked on in awe as the fireplace vanished. Aiden grinned as he replaced the remote in the book and Selina placed it back on the bookshelf.

"You need something snazzier than that damn remote," Joshua commented.

"I considered a bust of William Shakespeare – tip the head back and flip a switch," Bruce commented. "Selina wasn't so sure."

"That's like something from a 1960's TV show," Selina explained. "I wanted something cool – not sure what at this point. . ."

"How many steps?" Anne-Marie asked as she gazed downwards.

"One-hundred-and-eighty-four!" Aiden announced with a flourish as he looked over at Mindy. "May I escort the famous Hit Girl, below?"

"Who told you?" Mindy asked, good-naturedly.

"You think I'm stupid?"

"No, we don't, Aiden – or should I say, Nightwing."

The boy grinned – he loved the recognition. Very few people knew that Aiden Hutton, a boy by day, was Nightwing, a vigilante, by night.

"You're beautiful," Aiden commented as he grabbed Mindy's hand and led her down the stone steps.

Mindy went along for the ride, ignoring Chloe and Joshua who were wolf-whistling and making crude remarks. The twins followed, counting each step as they went.

..._...

"...180, 181, 182, 183 . . . 184!"

Anne-Marie and Danny were both out of breath by the time they had made it to the bottom of the stone steps. They passed through a door which Aiden held open and into the Vehicle Park. Their eyes went wide at the sight of the

motorcycles and the towering cave.

"Way better than the Hit Cave!" Danny exclaimed.

"Daniel!" Mindy growled.

"Suck it up, Mom – you can't have the best of everything!"

Mindy stalked off towards the Training Area, not trusting herself to speak.

"What are those?" Danny demanded as he caught sight of two very black objects.

"The Bat and The Cat?" Bruce replied with a wink at Selina. "Oooh, you wouldn't be interested in those."

That night

West Side Midtown

The evening's revellers were out on the town – as they were, every night.

It was the usual mix of couples, singles, prostitutes, and God only knew what came out of the Gotham gutter after dark. Many headed for restaurants, while others made for bars and nightclubs. One particular nightclub was located on the corner of Robinson Avenue and West 15th Street. The nightclub was pounding with sound.

It was borderline deafening and definitely an aural health hazard. Sai Maroni was in a happy mood as he sipped his drink. His empire was thriving ever since the death of Carmine Falcone and Fish Mooney. He and that freak, Penguin, had an understanding and they generally kept out of each other's way. He had not been troubled by the emerging vigilantes known as Batman and Catwoman – what a pair! Maroni was not scared of the badly named halfwits – they were making an impact on certain freelance operations but they had not dented any of his own – although Penguin had lost quite a bit of money to them.

Then, Maroni's eyes were drawn to a disturbance, over near the entrance. In the strobe lights, it was difficult to see what was going on. One of his bodyguards went down hard as something large pushed through the security. Above the music, screaming could be heard as people scrambled out of the way of the raging bull which was wiping out Maroni's security like they were nothing.

Whoever it was, they appeared angry, very angry.

..._...

As the raging bull came closer, Maroni chuckled and the mob boss shook his head – he had recognised the person advancing on him.

Another of his men was kicked to one side while another was physically picked up and *thrown* half way across the room. Maroni had to acknowledge the veteran vigilante's moves. The man appeared to be on his own – not that that appeared to be hindering him, in any way, as he made his way directly towards Maroni. Finally, the table before Maroni was thrown to one side, complete with its complement of glasses and bottles, to smash into the wall. Maroni took in the green and yellow markings on the combat suit. It was not hard to tell who it was that was standing just inches away from him.

Now, what could one of Chicago's most famous vigilantes be doing in Gotham? He knew that Hit Girl and her entourage had waged a bloody war, just about a year ago, in the city, and they had killed off most of his 'competitors'.

"Hello, Kick-Ass!" Maroni yelled over the pounding music. "How may I help you?"

..._...

Maroni flinched as the armoured mask came right up to his face.

Kick-Ass did not speak for almost a full minute. Maroni knew the tactic – intimidation – he had used it enough, himself. For someone more used to intimidating, it was not nice being the one on the intimidated side. Yes, Maroni felt intimidated – who would not be when they came face to face with such an accomplished vigilante!

"I want to find the man who ordered the Jamieson hit, last year. You have twelve hours to find the man and then to call this number."

"Or, what?"

"Or, I put the blame on you . . . and I . . . well, I will kill you."

With that proclamation, Kick-Ass turned away and walked towards the exit. Nobody stood in his way – everybody gave him a very wide berth indeed. Maroni followed – keeping a discrete distance between him and Kick-Ass.

Maroni made it to the entrance of his club, just in time to see Kick-Ass jump into the right-hand seat of a four-ton, eighteen-foot long, black monster that sat on a pair of tracks. The 600-horsepower diesel engine roared as the tracks spun on the tarmac before gripping and the black monster roared off, closely followed by a twin which emerged from a side street. Maroni could see markings below the gull-wing doors on each vehicle – or maybe tank might have been a better description. It was them, Batman and Catwoman with a pair of new toys. Very apt, Maroni had to admit. The menacing black vehicles would fit into Gotham very well, he thought as the tracked vehicles vanished around the end of the block.

Maroni returned to his club, shaking his head.

Beneath Wayne Manor

"We're clear!"

Mindy breathed a sigh of relief. She hated it when Dave was out on his own – she worried. It had been an easy mission – but they *were* in Gotham and Gotham was the very *definition* of unpredictability. Actually, Dave had not been alone – he had had Batman, Catwoman, and Nightwing with him. Actually, Mindy had been more than a little jealous that Dave had got to ride in one of the new Ripsaw mini-tanks.

Now, they just had to make it back through the raging city.

Gotham

To say that the city was in a worse state than on their previous visit was not far wrong.

Naturally, the two tracked vehicles attracted attention as they roared through the city, taking mostly backstreets to avoid too much attention. Nonetheless, the citizens and criminals of Gotham were 'connected'. As they roared past the Gotham City Police Headquarters on East 12th Street, they found themselves with a small entourage of vehicles which were not being driven by law-abiding careful drivers. Then, once they had turned up 5th Avenue towards Starr Bridge, they could see a problem, a few blocks ahead.

Their route was blocked at East Trident Street. Kick-Ass braced himself as Batman stomped his foot on the brakes and the four-ton vehicle slithered to a halt on the blacktop with Catwoman and Nightwing following suit beside them. Ahead of them, were well over a dozen of the Penguin's goons. Behind them, came their entourage of five vehicles which all skidded to a halt and unloaded sixteen more fighters – Maroni's men.

They each wanted a piece of Batman, Catwoman, and Nightwing – a chunk of Kick-Ass was just a bonus.

..._...

"We've faced worse," Batman commented.

"No, we haven't," Nightwing replied.

"There's . . . five, ten – err, carry the seven . . . thirty of the cunts!" Catwoman concluded. "Maybe a few more."

"There's four of us," Nightwing pointed out.

"Sounds like an unfair fight," Kick-Ass threw in as she drew his Ko-Wakizashi swords. "For them. . ."

There was the sound of rubber skidding on blacktop and a motorcycle slewed out of Trident Street and came to a rapid halt. Two shapes leapt off and brandished their own bladed weaponry.

"Thought we'd come to even the odds," Wildcat growled as Shadow took up position beside Catwoman.

..._...

A short distance up Trident Street, about a block from the looming fight, an unmarked car sat at the side of the street with two men in the front seats.

Detective Harvey Bullock lowered his burrito and glared at the impending criminal offence just a block away. He looked over at his partner, Detective Jim Gordon who sat in the driver's seat.

"Do you ever feel that you are always in the wrong place at the wrong time?" Bullock complained.

"All the time, Harv," Gordon replied as he started the engine and pulled away from the curb. "All the time."

"Shotguns or AR-15s?" Bullock continued. "Maybe both."

Gordon accelerated down the block before stopping in the middle of the street. He pushed open his door and jumped out.

"GCPD! Put the weapons down!"

He and Bullock dived for cover as bullets pelted their vehicle.

"What the hell, did you do that for?" Bullock yelled.

..._...

They were the opening shots in a war which was going to consume the city.

The fight was harsh as the vigilantes clashed with Penguin and Marconi's men. It was a general free for all as Penguin's men also attacked those of Marconi. Amongst the fighters was a bald man – Victor Zsasz – who blasted away with a pair of chrome pistols, targeting Marconi's men and what he saw as the annoying vigilantes who had caused nothing but trouble in the city he loved.

Kick-Ass was enjoying himself. Two bodies lay bleeding on the blacktop, dead, near his feet. Another quickly joined them as he smashed the back of his armoured fist into the eager face. Bullets struck his armour which the veteran vigilante ignored as he continued his rampage around the junction. Not all that many feet away, Batman was laying out a carpet of Penguin's goons – some got back up, only to be put back down again by the black-clad vigilante. Nightwing had partnered up with Wildcat and they both covered each other as they ensured that they remained in the very centre of the maelstrom of fighting humans. As for the women. Catwoman was lashing out, literally, with her whip and dragging unwilling men within range of Shadow's lethal bō-staff.

As the men dropped, the fight began to wane and those remaining were having second thoughts about their chosen career path.

..._...

As the final man fell to the blacktop to join his pals, the six vigilantes were all who remained standing.

Except of course for the GCPD's finest who had expertly mopped up all those who had tried to escape in their direction.

"Is that it?" Detective Bullock growled as he sauntered up with his pump-action shotgun resting on his right shoulder.

Detective Gordon gave his partner a withering look before he turned to Kick-Ass.

"Always good to have you guys in town," Gordon chuckled. "But you do leave a mess!"

"Sorry about that," Kick-Ass growled good-naturedly as Wildcat strode over, wiping the blood off her highly-polished Katana. "Can't take the girls anywhere!"

"Not my fault they leak blood," Wildcat commented.

"You miss biology in school?" Shadow queried. "Bodies are full of the shit."

"You're just as messy," Wildcat retorted.

Whilst the girls were bickering, Kick-Ass turned his attention to Trident Street where three black SUVs were heading in their direction.

..._...

The vehicles stopped and three men dismounted from two of the vehicles.

The men moved into positions which covered the third SUV. Each of the men was armed with a modern SIG Sauer MPX submachine gun and their demeanour showed them to be professional mercenaries. Finally, a door opened on the third SUV and a slim form appeared from the rear. It was a woman – a strikingly beautiful woman, even by the limited illumination from the street lighting.

"And *who* might you be?" Jim Gordon asked.

"My name?"

"It would be nice?"

"Sophie Falcone, James."

A short time later

Wayne Manor

The fighting in Gotham had taken a toll on Megan.

Not a physical toll, but a mental toll. She hated the city for many reasons. She hated the criminal levels in the city. She hated the darkness that enshrouded the city. Above all, she hated the memories that being back in the city brought to the fore. The girl had suffered at the hands of Falcone's men, Maroni's men. Gotham had changed Megan inside and it had forced her to grow up, fast. She had only been eleven at the time – a daunting series of events for such a young girl to endure.

Curtis had been injured – she herself had been in pain from injuries. Then had come the extreme torture of the man who had tried to kill Marcus.

"I need some fresh air," Megan stated as she returned from a shower and made her way past the living room.

"Don't get lost!" Chloe laughed.

"Funny!" Megan called back as she headed outside.

*This chapter continues in the standalone **Chapter 5: Wildcat Into Darkness** of my other story, **The Trials of Kick-Ass and Hit Girl**. Due to the disturbing content of that chapter it was decided not to feature the content directly in **Forsaken**.*

*However, the events played out in that chapter are deemed critical to future events in **Forsaken**.*

***Chapter 340*: Gotham - Deeper and Darker**

*This chapter is the continuation from the standalone **Chapter 5: Wildcat into Darkness** of my other story, **The Trials of Kick-Ass and Hit Girl**. Due to the disturbing content of that chapter, it was decided not to feature the content directly in **Forsaken**.*

*However, the events played out in that chapter are critical to future events in **Forsaken**.*

Wednesday, October 5th, 2016

Gotham City

The twins were very apprehensive, which was to be expected.

It had been a year and a day since either of them had last set foot in that godawful city. However, they were about to meet the person who ordered the death of their father, one year before. They were not allowed to go with Kick-Ass into the city – he refused point-blank. Their Auntie Wildcat had told them to wait with Catwoman until they returned with their prey. She also hinted that it would be well worth the wait.

Nonetheless, the two youngsters were uneasy as they watched Kick-Ass, Hit Girl, Shadow, and Wildcat climb into an armoured Range Rover before they took off into the city with Kick-Ass at the wheel.

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Maroni was smiling as they pulled up outside his club.

"You not wanting us inside?" Kick-Ass chuckled as he climbed out of the Range Rover.

"They're still repairing the damage from your last visit," Maroni replied dryly. "Now, Kick-Ass, I am only helping you because I respect what you and those bitches represent."

"Or because your men failed to kill us!" Wildcat growled back.

"Kick-Ass – please keep your bitches on their leash," Maroni warned, ignoring Wildcat's body language. "It wasn't easy – nor *cheap*! But, I have her – she wasn't easy to find, but I got 'er."

"Her?"

Maroni chuckled.

"Oh, yes."

"What are you hiding, bastard?" Hit Girl demanded as she moved towards the mob boss.

"Kick-Ass . . . leash!" Maroni reminded the veteran vigilante as he glared down at Hit Girl whose own body language dictated her feelings. "I think you may find the revelation . . . poetic."

"What are you talking about?" Kick-Ass asked in a cautionary growl.

"I'd hate to miss the big family reunion but I see you didn't bring the brats with you. . ."

Wildcat flew forwards, only for Hit Girl to grab her sister by the shoulder and thus save Maroni's pathetic life from a violent and painful ending. Maroni turned towards one of his minions and he nodded. A minute passed before a figure emerged. It was a woman, just as Maroni had advised, only she wore a black hood while her wrists were bound behind her back. Her clothing was smart but a mess – presumably a result of struggling against her captors. Shadow stepped forwards and she opened the back of the Range Rover so the woman could be shoved into the load area before the hatches were slammed shut on her. There had been no sound indicating that the woman was gagged.

"She's a fighter – be careful should you release her," Maroni chuckled as he walked into his club.

..._...

They did not enter the Bat Cave proper – they stopped in one of the outlying buildings of the quarry.

There, the woman was hauled out of the Range Rover and her bindings were cut before she was secured to a prepared framework, her wrists level with her head and her elbows bent at right-angles. Her ankles were secured two feet apart to the same framework. Only then, did Kick-Ass remove the hood. There was something disturbingly familiar about the woman. She had long, light brown hair and blue eyes which matched the hair and eyes of a certain someone else. Shadow removed the gag and the woman took a deep breath, coughing slightly.

"A drink. . ."

Shadow passed up a bottle of water and held it for the woman to drink. After a few pulls, the woman nodded her thanks.

"Who the fuck are you?" Hit Girl demanded.

"My name is Emily. Emily Collins – from what Maroni was bitching about, you may know me better as Emily Jamieson."

The place suddenly turned very cold and there was total silence for over a minute as the assembled vigilantes took in that last piece of information and they processed it through their brains – or tried to.

"There has to be some kind of mistake," Wildcat blurted out.

"No mistake, honey – I married that deadbeat, Ed Jamieson in '07 and had those two brats a year later . . . never did get rid of those blasted stretchmarks. So . . . how are Anne-Marie and Daniel . . . still alive?"

The bitch did not seem to care about her family – not one bit.

"You died in 2012," Hit Girl pointed out and the woman laughed.

"Faked – good, wasn't it? That deadbeat never did find out."

"Why?" Hit Girl pushed on, astounded by the continued revelations.

"I only came to Gotham to hideout – Ed was a cover identity, nothing more – the brats were a mistake resulting from a night spent drinking and fucking. I never wanted kids . . . but then I got twins! Screaming. Shitting. Yelling. Crying. Never did get a moment's peace."

"Why did you do it?"

"What – use Ed?"

"No, why did you kill him?" Hit Girl pushed.

"He was about to rat on Maroni – I was worried that he might know something about me being alive, wrongly it turned out, but it was as good a time as any for him to die."

"The twins?" Hit Girl growled as she barely contained her anger.

"I couldn't have them growing up and seeking vengeance, now, could I?" Emily laughed.

"Leave her!" Hit Girl ordered as she reinstalled the gag before they all left the space and climbed back into the Range Rover.

The Bat Cave

"Where is he?" Danny demanded as Hit Girl climbed out of the Range Rover, in the Bat Cave.

"Err – we need to talk," Kick-Ass suggested.

Hit Girl sat down on the rough-hewn stone floor of the cave and she pulled off her mask. Kick-Ass followed suit and he waved Anne-Marie and Danny to join them. Both youngsters looked worried and apprehensive as they sat down. Wildcat sat down behind them but retained her mask. Shadow loitered, waving Bruce, Selina, and Aiden to stay back.

"What do you two remember about your mother?" Mindy began.

"Our mother?" Anne-Marie echoed.

The twins looked at each other before their faces scrunched up in thought and then Anne-Marie spoke for each of them.

"Not all that much, she died a long time ago. We loved her, but there were times when I don't think she liked *us* very much. Maybe we were just badly behaved."

"What did your father say happened to her?" Dave asked gently.

"We were four when he told us that Mommy had gone away and would not be coming back. When we were six and able to understand things better, he told us that she was dead," Danny explained.

Mindy hated what she had to do next and she reached over to grip Dave's hand while gripping onto her daughter's hand. Dave took hold of his son's hand who then held his sister's hand – that was rare; he didn't think a boy his age should be holding his sister's hand. Mindy struggled with what to say as she felt tears fill her eyes – she had no idea why her tears were there, but they were a mixture of anger and sorrow for what she was about to say.

"Your mother is alive."

..._...

The expressions were mixed.

Disbelief. Surprise. Shock. Happiness. Sadness. They were all there. Both eight-year-olds had tears running down their cheeks at the news. It was almost two minutes before Danny spoke.

"Our Mom is alive?" he asked cautiously.

"She is," Mindy confirmed in a guarded tone. "But . . . there's more."

"What do you mean?" Anne-Marie demanded – guessing that something was *very* wrong.

"Your father was killed on the orders of your mother."

Anne-Marie's mouth flapped open and closed for a moment.

"Would you care to repeat that?" she asked in a decidedly unfriendly tone.

"Your father was killed by your mother," Mindy rephrased. "Not directly, but she ordered it."

"NO!" Anne-Marie shouted. "I refuse to believe it . . . you . . . you're just making it up. You're scared that she'll take us back!"

The young vigilante's eyes were blazing with hate as she smoothly drew her butterfly swords and she pointed them at Mindy. However, Mindy never moved – she couldn't. Anne-Marie looked down at her brother.

"Get up, Daniel."

Danny did not move, he just shook his head.

"Anne-Marie, I love you more than anything, and you are my sister, but you can be so dense."

"What?"

"Look into Mindy's eyes – she's telling the truth, you idiot!"

Anne-Marie looked down at Mindy who looked back up at her daughter.

"I've never lied to either one of you," Mindy said calmly. "You both have the same deal as Stephanie, and now Jamie: no lies."

Anne-Marie looked horror-struck as the realisation of Mindy's claims burrowed into her mind. The tears began to fall

unimpeded and Danny stood up to hug his sister. Mindy stood up, too, followed by Dave.

"Can you put those things away?" Mindy asked.

Anne-Marie stowed her swords and then she dived at Mindy, wrapping her arms around her and sobbing hard. Danny joined in and he was sobbing too. Dave wrapped his powerful arms around his family and he held them tightly.

..._...

It was quite a few minutes before the twins calmed down.

The revelations had been too much for them to handle. The expressions on the other faces – Bruce, Selina, and Aiden – were beginning to move from stunned to anger. How could anybody put out a contract on two then seven-year-olds? How could somebody put a contract out on their own children? It was unthinkable, but then Selina came up with the answer.

"Gotham fucking sucks!" she growled angrily.

Her voice helped to move things along as the tight family group moved apart. Anne-Marie looked at her brother and then up and Dave.

"Where is the fucking bitch?" she growled in a voice which nobody had ever heard before. "Sorry – I'll put a few bucks in the jar when we get home."

"No, honey," Dave said slowly. "Tonight, there's no swear jar."

"So?" Danny scowled. "Where's the fucking bitch?"

The Quarry

"Hello, mother!"

Emily Jamieson looked down at the boy for a moment before she said anything.

"You must be Daniel – you look well."

"No thanks to you!"

"A minor disagreement. . ."

"A *MINOR disagreement!*" Anne-Marie exploded. "You killed our father!"

"Hello, Anne-Marie – you're looking very beautiful."

"*DON'T* you talk to *me*, *BITCH!* You killed our Dad – he gave his life for us. . . He kept us going after you went – after you left Gotham!"

Anne-Marie was seething as she spat the words out at her mother.

"You made us think you were bloody dead!" Danny growled, tears running down his young face. "How could you?"

The woman's face showed a little compassion for the boy, but only for a fleeting second.

"Your father was a soft bastard and I needed him – then I didn't. I had no feelings for any of you."

"Don't you *DARE* call him that!" Anne-Marie yelled as she stepped forwards and she drove her armoured fist into her mother's stomach.

The woman tried to double over, but her bindings prevented it. Instead, she coughed violently as she struggled to regain her breath and refill her lungs. The arrogant smirk had gone – to be replaced by a slightly concerned expression as she regained her composure. She took a moment to look at her flesh and blood properly. They appeared healthy and well cared for – somebody had obviously taken good care of them during the year since their father had died. She frowned as she took in the armoured suits and the weapons. It appeared fairly obvious who their adoptive parents were as two masked individuals appeared behind Anne-Marie and Daniel.

"So, the mighty Hit Girl is going to avenge my husband and kill me, all so that my fucking offspring can sleep better at night."

Hit Girl stepped forwards and she chuckled.

"Oh, no," she growled.

"No," Kick-Ass hissed. "We're not going to kill you."

"We are!" the twins said together in a disturbingly flat tone.

..._...

"You would never hurt you own mother. . ."

Anne-Marie laughed in a disturbingly theatrical manner.

"We have a mother who loves us. We have a mother who cares for us. We have a mother who would do *anything* to keep us safe," she growled up at Emily.

"We have a father who loves us. We have a father who cares for us. We have a father who would do *anything* to keep us safe," Danny added in a cold, icy tone.

"You no longer have any right to call yourself our mother," Anne-Marie continued. "We respect and miss our Daddy, but he has gone on to a better place, as have we. We want for nothing and we don't need you."

"You haven't the *ability* to kill – you're just a pair of kiddies playing dress up!"

Anne-Marie smirked darkly.

"I've killed two men – with these," she stated as she drew her highly-polished, and very deadly, butterfly swords. "I am a vigilante just like my mother before me. I am Rogue."

"I only have the one notch in my belt," Danny stated as he drew his tactical wakizashi. "But I have no qualms about using this blade again. I am a vigilante like my Dad. I am Ravage."

"Qualms?" Anne-Marie queried.

"Read it somewhere," Danny replied with a grin.

Emily Jamieson laughed out loud.

"How adorable!"

Hit Girl could see the bravado beginning to wane but the woman still had plenty of fight left in her.

"Mask up, Rogue and Ravage – time to play," she growled.

Once the two miniature vigilantes were masked and ready, Hit Girl severed the bindings on Emily Jamieson.

"You have twenty seconds. . ."

Emily Jamieson ran for her life.

..._...

She bolted for what she hoped was the exit from the madhouse she had somehow found herself in.

However, as she dodged unidentifiable chunks of machinery, she found herself lost – she had no idea where she was. Was she still in Gotham? Then she saw a glimmer of something – moonlight? She ran for it and she skidded to a stop just before a doorway.

"Not this way, bitch!" Wildcat drawled as she nonchalantly blocked the doorway.

"Let me go – please."

Get running, bitch!" Wildcat ordered as she shoved the woman hard enough to make her fall over backwards onto the ground which was covered in bird crap and other undesirable substances which had built up in the decades since the decaying building had last seen active use. "Get up!"

Fear coursed through Emily Jamieson as she scrambled to her feet and she ran away from Wildcat.

..._...

Emily lost track of time as she dodged in and out of passageways looking for a way out.

She could not believe what was happening to her – she was being hunted by her own children. She was in two minds as to whether she really believed that either of them could kill, despite their claims.

"Hello, Mother!"

It was Daniel – he was standing before her, having appeared out of the darkness with a vicious looking blade in his hand. He ran at her and she dodged the blade which cut into her side enough to soak her blouse in blood but not enough to do any major damage.

The little bastard laughed as he vanished back into the darkness. The pain was sharp but bearable and she could still run. She never saw the pipes which ran a few inches above the concrete floor and she tripped over them, landing in God only knew what and she came to a halt. She froze, listening for any sound – there was none, except for some creaking from the structure and a few drips from leaking water. She slowly regained her feet and just as slowly she moved through the darkness trying desperately to find a way out. After a short distance, she stopped beneath a broken skylight. The moonlight was shining through and she could see a little of what was around her. She heard movement and she turned to see them standing just a few feet away from her.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded as she eyed the pistols on their belts. "I'm your mother – you would never shoot your own mother."

"You are *not* our mother, bitch!" Rogue growled. "No, we would not shoot you."

There was a moment of hope for Emily Jamieson which lasted mere seconds before it was quashed.

"But we would enjoy gutting you," Ravage added as he stepped forwards and he drove his tactical wakizashi deep into the woman's left side, tearing through internal organs before wrenching the sword out.

Rogue followed suit as she expertly drove her twin butterfly swords into the woman's stomach, twisting them savagely and encouraging copious amounts of blood to spill to the floor as the woman fell to her knees. Shock crossed her face which was then replaced with momentary anger before her face went blank as she fell to the floor, dead.

"She *is* dead, this time?" Rogue queried as shadows appeared around her and her brother.

"Yes – she is dead," Kick-Ass growled without any emotion.

"You guys, okay?" Hit Girl asked.

"Never better!" Ravage announced as Shadow and Wildcat appeared out of the gloom.

Thursday, October 6th

Chicago

The flight back had been quiet.

Megan had kept to herself, while the twins had slept most of the way. While Mindy was glad to be back home, she was concerned about what lay ahead. There were two days left to the deadline set by the tri-partite criminal organisation. As they drove to drop off Chloe and collect Stephanie and Jamie, Mindy decided that worrying about it would not alter the fact that Chicago was about to sink into the quagmire of war.

It was a relief to arrive at the home of Joshua and Chloe and not have to worry about any problems.

Fielding Drive

Mindy and Dave were almost mown down by Stephanie and Jamie when they appeared.

Stephanie's hugs were borderline painful. However, the hug which Chloe was forced to endure was of epic proportions and poor little Becky was almost squished as she and Joshua fought to hug Chloe first. Stephanie received enormous hugs from her younger siblings before they dived at Jamie who tried to run but was dragged into a hug – he was still getting used to having younger siblings, not to mention people who cared for him.

"You two been well behaved for Joshua?" Mindy asked as Stephanie appeared a little apprehensive. She welcomed her siblings as well as her parents, but she held back, just a bit.

"I was a *perfect* angel," Jamie reported with a shit-eating grin. "Can't say so much for my criminal sister and her partners in crime."

Mindy scowled at Stephanie who visibly flinched away.

"I have your package from Lucius – should I ask what it is?" Mindy asked her daughter.

"Not really . . . I, err . . . I have an admission to make."

"It wasn't *entirely* her fault," Joshua offered in Stephanie's defence.

"The blame kind of goes three ways. . ." Becky suggested with an uneasy grin.

Safehouse D

Mindy took one look at the Ford Fiesta ST and she growled.

She growled loudly enough that Stephanie took several steps back, away from her mother. The front end of the car was smashed in on the right-hand side, obliterating the headlight and everything back to the wheel arch.

"Were any of you hurt?" Mindy asked.

"No – well, just our pride . . . I'm sorry."

"Were you driving?"

"Yes – Abigail was in the front next to me and Becky was in the back . . . We all had our seatbelts on – the pillar kind of . . . appeared."

Mindy grimaced and just shook her head.

"I'm mad but I'm pleased that none of you were hurt. We can replace the car but we can never replace any of you – thankfully there *is* only one of each of you!"

Stephanie decided not to issue a snarky response.

"Abigail's crapping herself – she thinks that Hit Girl will kill her."

"You were the senior one there, so I hold you responsible, Stephanie."

"I know – that's why I told them both to leave it to me."

"Very mature of you."

"You going to make my life hell?"

"Oh, yeah!" Mindy replied with a smile as she wrapped an arm around her daughter's shoulders. "You're grounded until you're eighteen, for a start."

"Better than I expected. . ."

South Whipple

"Come to see the condemned?" Paul Murphy chuckled.

"Something like that," Mindy replied with a grin.

"She's feeling really bad about it."

"I know – Steph told me. Is she okay?"

"Other than feeling like the sky just fell in on her, yeah."

"Can I see her?"

"Go right on up."

Mindy headed up the stairs and she found Brad on the landing with Lauren.

"Oooh!" he muttered. "So much for having a little sister. . ."

Mindy glared at the boy who grinned sheepishly and then fled downstairs.

"She's suffering, Mindy," Lauren advised before she followed her boyfriend.

..._...

Mindy pushed open the bedroom door to find a very miserable ten-year-old.

Abigail refused to look up at Mindy as she entered the room. Mindy sat down on the bed beside the girl and she lifted Abigail's chin with her hand. Abigail tried not to make eye contact.

"Look, Abigail, I can't kill you just by looking at you," Mindy chuckled.

"I'm really sorry – we shouldn't have been in the car . . . it kind of got away from us."

"Have you learnt your lesson?" Mindy asked.

Abigail nodded slowly.

"You've been through a lot, Abigail, more than the other *Predators*. I would never hurt any of you – even though some of you may deserve it."

"Paul says I'm grounded."

"Yeah – so's Stephanie and Rebecca. Mistakes happen – I've made a lot, myself. As long as we all learn from our mistakes then we're getting somewhere. You're a young girl with your whole life ahead of you – don't let something like this weigh you down."

"Steph said that you'd make our lives a living hell."

"Oh, she's right about that," Mindy grinned.

"You're the best, Mindy."

"Of course, I am."

Glenview

"You're still alive, then?"

"I love you, too, little brother."

"You heard about what happened in Gotham?"

"No."

"Apparently, Danny and Anne-Marie found their mother – alive!"

"Bullshit!"

"No shit."

Stephanie sought out Anne-Marie who was lying on her bed, staring at the ceiling. Daniel was lying beside her.

"You guys okay?"

"Hi, Steph – we killed our mother, yesterday," Danny said.

"Can we join you?" Stephanie asked.

"If you want," Anne-Marie replied as she shifted over to make room on the queen-size bed for Jamie and Stephanie.

"I know what you're feeling – I put a bullet in *my* mother's head, my dad's too."

"I'd forgotten."

"Lucky you!" Stephanie replied darkly.

..._...

When Mindy searched out the kids, that evening for dinner, she found them all fast asleep on Anne-Marie's bed.

She knew why Stephanie was there and that made her feel angry – so angry. That woman had torn apart a family for her own ideals. At least the twins had closure for their father – in a decidedly unexpected manner. She felt Dave's hands around her waist and she reached down to hold them.

"Why do so many bad things happen to good people?"

"It's the world we live in, honey."

"Fuck the world!"

"I love your outlook – it's so straight forward."

"Makes everything easier."

"Only you don't like doing things the easy way," Dave reminded his wife.

"True."

"Never change," Dave whispered into his wife's ear and she giggled.

***Chapter 341*: Chicago - Descent**

Thursday, October 5th, 2016

West Grace Street

Mindy needed an outlet, so she had decided to go visiting.

"Evening, Lucy."

Lucy jumped a mile.

"For heaven's sake!" she growled. "Can't you bloody knock? Maybe, we should put a fucking bell on you!"

Hit Girl chuckled, pleased that she had surprised the prototype *Predator*.

"You're a bit jumpy, tonight," another voice said out of the shadows.

"What did you bring Foxy, for – she homesick?" Lucy fumed.

"Do I need to slap you both?" Hit Girl hissed.

"I'm good," Foxtail muttered.

"Me too," Lucy agreed.

"I'm not asking you both to become fuck buddies – just friends would be a good start," Hit Girl went on.

"Truce?" Foxtail asked, holding out her hand in its armoured gauntlet.

Lucy nodded as she took the hand.

"Sorry – I'm just worried about everything," Lucy admitted.

"You have friends, Lucy – we're here to listen," Foxtail said. "I'm available for you, anytime."

"Thanks. Why the sneaky visit?"

"It's funny," Hit Girl chuckled.

"Ha, fucking, ha!"

"Seriously, though. I need to bring you up to speed with the goings on in this city and the fact that everything goes nuclear on Saturday."

"She is fucking with me, right?" Lucy asked Foxtail.

"I wish she was," Foxtail responded as she pulled off her mask. "*Fusion* is in deep shit, Lucy. While we still don't trust you – not fully – we don't want you getting hurt. We also want to make use of your skills."

"Go on."

The following morning

Friday, October 7th

West Columbia

"Hi, Paige!"

"Morning, Chloe, how are you?"

"Fine, thanks – where's Megan?"

"Up in her room – *still!*"

"That's not like her."

"Tell me about it – she's been up for over two hours. She won't tell me what she's up to . . . but then it is Megan!"

"True . . . holy, shit!" Chloe exclaimed as she looked past Paige.

Paige turned to look behind her and her mouth dropped open as she saw her daughter coming down the stairs. Megan had obviously spent a lot of time getting herself ready for school. Her uniform was pristine, just as it usually was, but it was not the uniform which was the surprise – it was the hair. Megan had cut her long hair short into a bob which was decidedly neat and tidy. She had also dyed her hair black again – but as she turned, Chloe noticed that only a part of her hair was black, the majority was almost white. The twelve-year-old appeared very different than on the previous evening.

"We fucking going?" the girl growled.

"Megan!" Paige exclaimed.

Megan simply slapped a pair of dollar bills down onto the table before stalking from the room and out to the car leaving Chloe and Paige too stunned to move.

Lake View High School

"Fuck me!"

"Knew she was nuts, but. . ."

"Time of the month?"

"Slut!"

"Creepy!"

The comments which greeted the 'new' Megan Williams were varied, to say the least. Chloe just chose to steer well clear of Megan – sensing that something was wildly wrong. She knew that Megan could have a fiery temper and Chloe had too much on her plate, right at that moment, to deal with a petulant tween. Chloe figured that Megan had some bad Gotham-related memories to sort out and Megan was perfectly capable of asking for help if she needed it.

"What the hell have you done?" Curtis demanded.

"You like it, right?" Megan asked.

Curtis, wise to how females changed their moods like colours on a traffic light, wisely kept his mouth shut and he just nodded – "Wasn't her period over a week ago?" he thought to himself.

"Good choice."

Lunchtime

North Park Elementary School

"What's up with grumpy?" Katy asked, tipping her head at Stephanie who was poking at her lunch without much exuberance.

"She broke something at home and Mum isn't exactly over the moon with her," Jamie explained. "She's grounded until she's eighteen, or thereabouts."

"The new girl doesn't seem to happy, either," Ali mentioned, noticing the unhappy look on Abigail's face.

"Abigail was involved," Jamie offered.

"She's quiet, Abigail, isn't she?"

"She has a lot on her mind, I think."

"What are you doing on Saturday?" Jackson asked Jamie.

"I'm busy – I think," Jamie offered – he knew that he could be *very* busy, along with the rest of *Fusion*.

That evening

Safehouse F

"This sucks!" Abigail commented.

"Used to do this a lot when I was in The Cage," Stephanie said as she gathered up some more brass cartridges off the floor of the range and dumped them in a bucket."

"You did this for hours?" Becky asked.

"Yes, I spent four hours a day picking up brass – I was in a lot of pain by the end of it as I had two broken ribs at the time," Stephanie explained.

"How many more are there?" Becky asked.

"Well, Mindy decided to have P90 practice," Abigail replied unhappily. "Each magazine takes fifty rounds, and *eight* people fired off two magazines each – you do the maths."

"Eight *hundred* rounds!" Becky exclaimed as her shoulders slumped.

..._...

A little over an hour later, the three girls relaxed in the showers, washing off the dirt and muck which they had accumulated over two hours of hard graft.

"Why am I always getting into trouble?" Becky asked. "I've only been here a few weeks and I've been in big trouble, *twice!*"

"Tell me about it," Stephanie muttered as she smiled down at the diminutive girl.

"What's about to happen?" Becky asked. "Are we in for a war? Chloe and Josh are worried."

"I won't lie to you, Becky, it's going to get very bad and probably get worse, way before it gets better," Stephanie replied as honestly as she could. "People are going to die, and many are going to get hurt. As long as we stay together, we stand a chance. We are all friends and we will help each other."

"I stand with you, Steph – we might have been sworn enemies, but that is in the past. Where you go, I go," Abigail stated.

"Will I be allowed to fight – you know, if I want to. I don't like to fight, but I don't want to sit and watch while my friends fight and get hurt?" Beck asked Stephanie.

"That's up to your Mum and my Mum – but I would have you by my side, any day, Scamp."

Becky beamed with pride.

..._...

They were as prepared as they could be – Mindy hoped.

She had purchased enormous quantities of ammunition which would last most armies, months. Every vehicle was serviced and ready for action. Every member of Fusion had a combat suit and spare sections. The medical facilities were ready, but Mindy hoped to God that they would not be needed. The Safehouses, scattered throughout the city were all fully stocked with food, water, ammunition, and vehicles. There was nothing more that could be done, except just hope that they would prevail in short order.

She smiled as she saw Stephanie, Abigail, and Becky appear from the showers. All three still had wet hair, which in

Becky's case, was still dripping water from her ponytail. The three girls were often seen together – which probably fitted in with why they had all been together when Stephanie had decided to try some car driving. Mindy was also happy to see them smiling – she figured that smiling would be very limited in the coming days. In the coming days, Chicago was descending into hell. Mindy figured that she could wave to Frank D'Amico as they went past. As long as Chicago rose out of hell, at the end of it all – or did she have a place booked for her, ready and waiting.

Oh, yes, Mindy knew that she would be going to hell, when her time came to pay the piper.

***The following evening
Saturday, October 8th***

Deadline Day

Western Chicago

Hit Girl was wary.

She was fully aware that the timer on the deadline had reached zero. It had been Vito Genovese via his goons back in early July, while Stephanie had still been in hospital.

"A message from Vito Genovese. Hit Girl and her vigilantes have ninety days to leave Chicago. Or hell on earth will descend on both Chicago and Fusion."

The message had been decidedly unequivocal, as far as *Fusion* had been concerned. Since then, there had been a few well-timed 'reminders' from good old Vito, as to the rapidly approaching deadline, too. Therefore, Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, along with Wildcat, Shadow, and Foxtail were waiting at the intersection of North Western Avenue and West Fulton Street.

"Well, well, well, little Miss Hit Girl doesn't listen!"

Hit Girl glared as FEAR appeared on the street before her. Behind her, three SUVs appeared, which proceeded to unload five Sicilian goons a piece. They were backed up by about a dozen, very welcome, Corsairs.

"Where are your Russian pals?" Kick-Ass growled.

"Late, as usual," FEAR growled, just as the sound of more vehicles came from behind the massed *Fusion* forces.

"I think they're here!" Wildcat growled unnecessarily as a round dozen men appeared behind them.

"You have one last chance to avoid bloodshed, Hit Girl – take your team and leave Chicago," FEAR directed. "The odds are not in your favour."

"They never are. . ." Hit Girl hissed. "That's why we brought our friends."

Hit Girl waved her gauntleted hands theatrically and the sound of steel shutters rising echoed from surrounding buildings. Stormtide appeared, leading Tempest, Trojan, Cut-Throat, and Nightmare. They appeared behind FEAR's Corsairs. Jackal appeared behind the Sicilians and he was backed up by Petra, Raven, Discord, Rage, and Fury. The Russians turned to meet Psyche and Splinter, who led Tigercat, Hellcat, Relentless, and Torment. FEAR appeared a little perturbed at seeing her eight to one superiority cut instantly to a fairly even two to one.

"You have one last chance to avoid bloodshed, you fucked up witch – the odds are *not* in your favour."

The twenty-two vigilantes faced off against the forty or so Axis of Evil fighters showing no fear.

..._...

Earlier that evening, Hit Girl and her senior staff had looked down at the gathered members of *Fusion*, from the experienced to the novice, who waited patiently on the mat beneath them, all ready to go into battle.

As Hit Girl scanned the faces below, she could see a few smiles, but mostly blank expressions and one or two showing the beginnings of fear. Would they all still be alive to see the dawn?

"This is it, *Fusion*, the war is about to begin. This is the first battle and I hope it ends the war, only that is rarely the

case. People are going to die tonight, and I damn well hope it's the enemy. You have all trained for this and I know that you are all ready for what tonight is going to throw at us. Use your skills. Use your weapons. Stay alert. Above all, be a team. As a team, we shall prevail."

"*Fusion!*" Wildcat yelled from below and there was a resounding cheer as everybody masked up.

Mindy was unsure as she looked over at Dave.

"Dave. . ."

"Don't say it," he warned.

Mindy looked over at Chloe who was staring down at the mat and more particularly at her daughter who was pulling on her mask, ready for action.

"I know what you're thinking, Chloe," Joshua warned. "Cut it out! To quote somebody famous: 'If you think you're gonna die, then you're gonna die.'"

"I know," Chloe replied.

"Will you stop using my words!" Mindy growled, but she grinned nonetheless.

"Stop coming out with such good phrases, then," Joshua countered.

Mindy knew what he was doing, and she was glad of it. To all those below, they would see their commanders laughing and joking. Moral was already high within *Fusion* and it had just risen a couple of points – after all, if Hit Girl was laughing, what could go wrong.

..._...

"*All teams, standby!*" Battle Guy called over the comms.

"*CPD is cordoning off the surrounding streets,*" Hal advised.

The two veterans were occupying the Command Bunker in Echo – Hit Girl had duly renamed it the Battle Bunker and it was the command nexus coordinating *Fusion's* defence of Chicago. A short distance away, in a separate bunker, *Synthesis* were monitoring the traffic cameras to ensure that nobody was trying to break through the police cordon to backup FEAR and her cohorts. High above Chicago, the drone, EAGLE-1 was sending back high-definition colour images of the road intersection in real time for Hal and Battle Guy to coordinate the fight from.

On the level below the Battle Bunker, Audacious, Lynx and Scamp were standing by for incoming casualties. Medic, Athena, Rogue, and Ravage were standing ready in *Titan*, not far from the intersection, ready to evacuate any wounded. Atop a six-storey building, an easy 170-yards to the north of the intersection, Leon and her spotter, Astute, were preparing to rain down a deadly storm of lead.

"Overwatch – you are cleared for action; execute!"

..._...

With that single command, Leon steadied her aim.

After she took a few shallow breaths and then held the last one, she squeezed the trigger and a .338-calibre Lapua Magnum bullet erupted from the suppressed muzzle of her AXMC sniper rifle. The bullet took less than a second to strike the lead Sicilian in the chest, knocking the man backwards as the bullet continued through him and embedding itself in the man behind – both were dead before they hit the blacktop. Pandemonium ensued as the fight rapidly got underway. Swords flashed in the illumination from the street lighting and bullets flew in all directions. Within minutes, the drains were filling with blood.

Every vigilante had a partner – that had been impressed, forced if you like, on them all. They would watch each other's back as they fought. Indeed, Nightmare and Cut-Throat were doing well as they fought alongside Stormtide and Trojan. Their opponents, the Corsairs, fought reasonably well but they were no match for the highly trained forces which attacked them. It was a first for Stormtide – fighting out on the street in such a free-for-all. It was the same for Cut-Throat. As such, they were partnered with experienced *Fusion* members. Nightmare was young and just out of training, but she had endured, and survived, some of the worst fighting Chicago had seen in many years. Nightmare

had reason to hate the Corsairs and she relished killing them.

Cut-Throat was a relative novice to street-fighting, but he was a seasoned *Predator* who knew how to fight dirty and how to fight to win. The first Corsair he met, found out to his cost how skilled the twelve-year-old was when Cut-Throat's twin combat-machetes first severed an arm and then his head in a procession of swift, calculated movements. The boy was focussed as he supported his more-experienced colleague who was in her element as the fourteen-year-old girl slashed a Corsair to death with her jungle sword. Cut-Throat prevented a cowardly strike at Nightmare's exposed back, from another Corsair, before he killed the offending attacker. It had been months since the boy had last killed and the outlet felt amazing – all the apprehension and emotions since *Urban Predator* had fallen were gone and he felt reborn as he and Nightmare ran to support Stormtide and Trojan.

Stormtide whirled her bō-staff, stabbing into the mass of Corsairs and relishing the blood and screaming. She felt right at home on the street, slashing and killing. It was in her blood after five years of enforced training and she had no way of preventing the bloodlust she felt. There was but one outlet and that was the death of FEAR's cohorts. A short distance away from Stormtide, Trojan was bringing death of his own into the fray. The boy appeared to have some bottled up emotions which he was taking out on the unfortunate Corsairs with his trusty sword making short work of anybody who came within range.

The boy also received two bullets for his trouble, but he ignored their stings and he drove on, using the pain to drive his anger and his killing.

..._...

Jackal was having the time of his life as he fought the Sicilians, many of whom were physically large.

It was mostly an intensive fistfight with the occasional bit of blade work involved. He was working with Petra, who was enjoying the more physical form of contact fighting. She happily used her fists to break ribs and noses, following up with her armoured knees to snap a spine or fracture a sternum. Another female vigilante, Raven, was partnered with Fury. The pair of them were well-matched in their skill levels, with Fury using her amazing manoeuvrability to great effect as she exercised her agility and made use of her slim frame to dodge incoming strikes and deliver her own attacks with her bō-staff. The ten-year-old was fearless and the sixteen-year-old Raven was impressed by the youngster's energy and drive.

That just left Discord and Rage. While Rage demonstrated the same impressive drive and energy as his counterpart, Fury, he also struggled at times to maintain situational awareness – but that was what Discord was there for. Discord was highly skilled and very experienced thanks to her *Predator* training which had seen her complete Phase 3 and move on to active status. The fifteen-year-old apparently had a lot of bitterness inside and she dealt it out, snapping bones and generally hurting anything in her way while keeping an eye open for the nine-year-old who was driving his Messer sword into anything which came close – by anything, that apparently included Discord herself who dodged at the very last second, but she still received a sharp stab into her armour.

Rage yelled a brief, "Sorry!" before moving on.

..._...

As for Psyche and Splinter, they were having great fun with their Russians.

Unlike the other teams, who were in pairs, Psyche led her all-girl team of Hellcat and Torment while Splinter led the boys: Tigercat and Relentless. Each trio faced off against the dozen Solntsevskaya Brotherhood heavies who were all smirking at the limited stature of the vigilantes before them. Psyche was having none of it as she ran forwards with her team and the first pair of Russians were so startled at the spirited attack that they did nothing to defend themselves before it was far too late to do anything. Psyche cut the throat of the first while Hellcat and Torment almost ripped the head off their man before he fell to the ground, his neck viciously twisted and the eyes facing in a very unnatural direction.

The death of their two colleagues did not improve the temper of the remaining ten Russians who screamed the Russian version of bloody murder and attacked. Splinter took the first man while Tigercat and Relentless went to work on two more. Relentless yelled out as he was bodily thrown to the street, but he quickly sprang back up and launched himself at the man who had thrown him. The ten-year-old *Predator* was 'relentless' by character and not just by name. Tigercat ripped into the enemy with his claws, drawing blood from some nasty wounds. However, the Russians were able to take a lot of damage before they actually went down, and Hellcat was the next to be hurt as she was almost trampled by several of the Russians when she fell to the ground. She finally regained her knees by slashing out with her own claws until the legs moved out of her way. Psyche yanked the twelve-year-old up to her feet whilst driving

one of her Sai into the heart of the nearest Russian.

Psyche was enjoying her return to action and she was making good use of her time – her right arm hurt but nowhere near as much as it did. The adrenalin helped a lot as she fought without a care in the world – except maybe for winning.

..._...

FEAR was facing off against Hit Girl, Kick-Ass, Shadow, Wildcat, and Foxtail. Wildcat and Foxtail peeled off to take out two of her bodyguards while Shadow went after the third.

Hit Girl and Kick-Ass went for FEAR who drew a pair of Katana swords instead of her usual war sword which she appeared to have misplaced some time ago. Hit Girl nodded approvingly as she drew her own twin blades. Kick-Ass drew his Ko-Wakizashi blades and he ensured that Hit Girl was not disturbed or stabbed in the back while she concentrated on FEAR.

Wildcat was well, a wild cat. She flew at her selected enemy and she had him backing down from her frenzied attack with her Katana and Wakizashi. The Corsair's Messer sword was heavyweight but that just meant it could not be wielded with as much finesse as the lighter fighting swords which Wildcat had trained for many hours to use as a pair. Naturally, FEAR's bodyguards were very experienced and totally fearless. They did not back down as they were attacked by the female vigilantes.

Foxtail's Corsair was very careful to avoid the expertly-wielded Butterfly swords which flashed through the air. Foxtail was a fast-moving enemy who did not stay still long enough for the Corsair to make a successful strike – all he found was disturbed air. It did not take long before Foxtail had the man spilling his guts down the street before collapsing into a bloody heap. Shadow's kill joined the blood flowing down the gutter enroute for the nearest drain. Shadow's bō-staff left nobody standing when it came into contact with a body. The Corsairs' needed better armour if they wanted to survive a melee fight against *Fusion*.

Shadow and Foxtail watched as Wildcat continued her attack. There was something not quite right about the fight – it should have been over. Foxtail caught on first. Wildcat was pushing her opponent to near defeat before allowing him to regain the advantage and then taking it away from him. Basically, she was playing with her food before she killed it. Shadow figured it out, too, and she was surprised at the behaviour. *Fusion* killed, they did not torture when out on the streets – that was not the *Fusion* way.

Finally, Foxtail had had enough, so she drew one of her Beretta Px4 Storm Compact Type G pistols. She put a bullet in the poor cunt's head, killing him instantly. Wildcat whirled around, and she actually made to drive her blades into Foxtail who quickly stepped back to avoid being stabbed and slashed.

"What the fuck, Wildcat?" Foxtail exclaimed.

"He was mine!" Wildcat hissed angrily.

"We'll talk later," Shadow promised.

..._...

As the fighting continued around FEAR and Hit Girl, the city watched with baited breath.

Much of the fight was being filmed from a distance by news crews and after a short delay was being fed live to the city. There were many who leaned into their televisions and watched barely breathing as the two masters fought. The cold steel clashed as both women twisted and turned to avoid each other's blades. Four swords flashed under the street lighting as the blades moved swiftly through the air. Strikes were made on both sets of armour, drawing unintended oohs and aaahs from those watching.

Every now and then, a Russian, or a Sicilian would break towards the fight and make an attempt on Hit Girl from behind. They were taken down by either Kick-Ass, or by Overwatch, before they came anywhere near.

345 North Western Avenue

Dread was not happy.

She had been put in charge of a very important mission – to keep her sister alive and rescue her if required. Shouldn't

have been a difficult mission to complete, only the seventeen-year-old was in two minds about whether her sister should actually be allowed to live. Her life had taken a sharp turn to the left in recent days and it was all she could do to stick with the plan and not run to Hit Girl begging for refuge. Instead, she was stuck with six of her sister's fucked up minions. They were all teenagers and they were warped enough to freak the hell out of Dread as they climbed up several staircases towards the roof of a six-storey building a short distance from the fight which did not seem to be going her sister's way. The armour she wore was heavy and she hated that it covered her face. She hated the attention that she gained from being FEAR's sister. That first time when she had been paraded before an admittedly awe-inspiring array of armour-clad minions had been humiliating but also exciting – that had been two weeks previously and she had been allocated her own team of six individuals.

As FEAR's sister, she was offered a lot of respect from everybody present – maybe they assumed that Dread was some seasoned killer, rather than a scared young woman way out of her depth.

"You ready, Dread?" Tumor asked. "Or are you too busy in fucking dreamland?"

"Fuck you, you jumped up twat!" Dread growled as she pistol-whipped the fifteen-year-old across his armoured mask. "Now, go kill me that sniper!"

The young man bristled but he knew his place and Dread was 'untouchable', even if she disliked playing the tough bitch to cover herself.

..._...

"You hear a noise?" Astute asked as he rolled over and sat up from his prone position on the roof.

"I did," Leon commented as she brought her lethal sniper rifle around towards the access door to the roof.

The direct line of sight was blocked by the lift shaft, but neither were born yesterday. There was a loud bang and a bright flash as the explosive device rigged to the access door detonated. The bang was followed by several yells and some very bad language. Astute jumped up and he readied a P90, bringing it up to his shoulder and running the corner of the lift shaft. He dived flat at the corner, just in time as submachinegun fire struck the lift shaft, chipping off the stone cladding.

Astute replied with short bursts from the P90 as Leon came up behind him and she readied their escape apparatus. With her rifle across her back, she threw a pair of quarter-inch lines off the rooftop and she clipped the rope into a carabiner at her crotch. The ends of the lines were secured to an eyebolt embedded in the rooftop. Astute passed his P90 onto Leon while he clipped on his own line to the carabiner he wore. The enemy were coming closer, using rooftop fittings to cover their approach – there was something very familiar about the tactics being employed. Beyond them, he could see what he assumed to be their commander. As the person passed through a patch of moonlight, he got a good view of the armour which marked the person out as somebody special.

Astute disconnected the line from his carabiner and he took back his P90 much to Leon's disapproval. There was something he needed to find out about the attackers and the person in the special body armour.

..._...

Leon provided covering fire with her sniper rifle, sending the massive bullets streaking past the attackers.

Astute raced up the far side of the bridge, flanking the attackers. There appeared to be five or six of them . . . fuck! One less – a .338 Lapua Magnum bullet took a poor bastard's head off. The leader was clearly visible as she remained near to the doorway off the roof. She was yelling at her minions, exhorting them to move. The armour was reminiscent of that worn by the Corsairs – at least the combined mask and helmet was, only while the Corsairs generally used grey armour, the armour for that individual was black with vivid red markings. There was no skin visible, but the shape of the body indicated a female.

Panels of body armour covered the chest, shoulders, upper arms, thighs, lower legs, and back. She was much better armoured than her cohorts which indicated her importance. The armour appeared relatively light for its design, too – very advanced. She bore a pair of pistols on her hips – possible H&K pistols. On her right calf, there was a large combat knife and she carried a sword of unknown design on her back. As for her cohorts, they each sported the same armour as the Corsairs, although they all appeared to be . . . no? Astute was certain they were not adults which could only make them. . .

With the death of their colleague, the gunfire intensified and Astute saw the commander turn her head to stare at him

– she pulled a pistol and she fired off several rounds in his direction as she ran in his direction. Leon had her head down due to incoming fire so was unable to assist as Astute took several bullets in his chest armour before he was attacked at close range by the commander. She was a good fighter and they exchanged blows. Astute noticed somebody blindsiding him and he kicked out, putting the new attacker down hard before he found himself grabbed by the commander and thrown to the floor. She pulled her pistol and she was about to put a bullet in his head when the gun clicked on an empty chamber.

"Fuck!" came the electronic growl from the enraged commander who yelled out a warning as Leon dived off the side of the building and abseiled to the ground.

It was all the distraction that Astute needed as he ran for his own rope and rapidly connected on before diving over the parapet and rocketing to the ground, pulling up short at the last moment. Leon covered his descent by sending four large rounds towards the parapet high above them.

"That was engaging," Astute commented as they both ran towards the exfiltration point.

..._...

Further down the street, things were not looking too good for FEAR and her . . . well, there were none of her cohorts left.

There were a smattering of Russians and Sicilians still in the fight, only their confidence was waning, and they were beginning to seriously reconsider their career choice. The five remaining men were moving to protect their principal – FEAR – only they were unable to get anywhere near her, until there was a hail of gunfire from up the street and *Fusion* instantly moved onto the defensive as six people ran down the street towards them, firing off submachineguns. Before *Fusion* could do much more than turn towards the threat, smoke began to erupt all over the intersection as grenades landed and detonated all around.

Vehicles were heard to accelerate away and there was also the sound of high-powered motorcycles departing very quickly. As Battle Guy called for updates – his drone was momentarily struggling to see through the smoke as the hot grenades caused issues with the infra-red sensors. Not surprisingly, when the smoke cleared, Hit Girl glared at a street empty of living bodies, except for those belonging to *Fusion*.

"Let's go!" she growled.

Safehouse E

Hit Girl was fuming by the time she returned to the Safehouse.

Once she was happy that everybody had returned, she finally conceded to sort herself out and she pulled off her armour. After a brief shower, she pulled on panties, a sports bra, and some tight pants before pushing her feet into a pair of sandals. Mindy head for Level 1 and the Medical Centre. There she found Cathy, Taylor, and Paige looking after the wounded with Becky providing much-needed assistance. Mindy, of course, was unhappy to find that anybody required medical attention, but she was being realistic, and she knew that it was unavoidable.

The first to be treated was the young Leo Graves. The ten-year-old was grinning, despite the large bruise on his left shoulder-blade and another on his left thigh. The boy sat on a bed, in just his underwear as Cathy rubbed some gunk onto his bruises.

"He's fine," Cathy said. "He's a growing boy and the bruises will fade over time."

"I've had worse," Leo offered bravely as he winced with the pain.

"Thank you, Leo – you fought well."

Leo grinned at the praise as Mindy moved onto the next bed where Paige was checking out Tommy's chest.

"No big deal," he assured Mindy. "You know I've had worse."

"Not the point, Tommy."

Mindy was interrupted from saying any more as somebody bolted into the Medical Centre and Taylor was pushed to one side.

"Daddy!" Shannon exclaimed. "Are you okay?"

"She cares about me!" Patrick said, and he sounded surprised.

"Don't be an ass, Daddy – of course, I care about you – I forgave you weeks ago; I've just been playing on it."

Shannon was genuinely upset at seeing her father hurt – despite it only being angry red welts, much like Tommy had.

"I'm fine, Shannon – just a little sore."

"Good. . ."

There was a slapping sound and Shannon screamed. She turned and scowled.

"Hi, Stormy!"

"There are times when I dream about having abandoned you in Whitby," Shannon growled.

Jamie grinned hugely but then the grin faded.

"James," Sarah said from where she sat on the next bed. "We need to talk."

"Sorry, Sarah – it was an accident."

"Accident? Shannon, did Jamie ever stab you?"

"He hurt me once or twice, but stab? Not that I can recall," Shannon replied, and she winced at the sight of the large bruise on Sarah's right side.

"Luckily, Mindy's armour protected me."

"You in trouble again, Jamie-boy?" Stephanie asked as she breezed into the Medical Centre.

"Yeah, my women are causing me grief."

"We are *not*, your women!" Shannon and Sarah exclaimed together.

"See!" Jamie said, and Mindy couldn't help laughing.

She was quickly joined by Leo and Tommy and Jamie slunk out of the Medical Centre, his face very red.

..._...

Mindy grabbed her daughter and they followed Jamie.

"Since when was Sarah one of 'your' women, Jamie?" Stephanie asked her brother.

"Thought you dreamed about Abigail," Mindy chuckled.

"Mum!" Jamie growled as his face turned bright red. "Sarah isn't one of my women – she's just a girl that I accidentally stabbed."

Stephanie laughed.

"Jamie – can you go find out if the twins are back, please?" Mindy asked.

"Yes, Mum."

The boy vanished towards the elevator.

"Mindy?"

"Hi, Patrick. You okay?"

"A little sore but Taylor will soothe things in bed, tonight," Patrick grinned.

Stephanie feigned puking by shoving a finger down her throat. Mindy ignored her daughter's antics as Patrick began to speak.

"I met somebody new, today. She appeared to be quite high up in FEAR's organisation – at least by the look of her suit; she had red markings and her armour was of a higher quality than that of the Corsairs," Patrick explained. "She tried to kill me – that was the bullets. But she then went hand-to-hand and it was only when I undressed back here that I found this."

Patrick held out a small USB drive which Stephanie took and examined. She exchanged a look with her mother.

"Something going on?" Patrick asked.

"We need to go see Marty," Mindy said.

..._...

Just as Mindy, Stephanie, and Patrick walked into the Battle Bunker, Jamie came running up.

"The bitches from hell are back," he called out, almost breathlessly.

"Thank you, Jamie," Mindy said.

"What you doing?" the boy asked.

"Above your paygrade, runt!" Stephanie said as she closed the armoured door in his face.

"What is so special?" Patrick asked.

"We secure, guys?" Marty asked Abby and Marty.

"I'll pretend you never asked that," Marty growled as he feigned a hurt expression.

"I am so sorry, Marty," Mindy replied. "It looks like Fortune has sent us a message."

"Fortune?" Patrick asked.

"He cleared for this?" Marty asked.

"He is now," Mindy stated.

"Okay," Marty said as he pulled a rather tatty-looking laptop out of a cupboard. "I am just going to check this stick for anything nasty. This laptop is air gapped, so if it's a trap. . ."

"We only trust our source, so far," Mindy explained to Patrick.

"Who is she?"

"She is FEAR's sister – that's all I'm going to say, right now."

"I can live with that."

"Let me know what's on there, Marty."

"No problem, my purple queen!"

Mindy muttered good-natured obscenities under her breath as she left the Battle Bunker and sought out the Abbott twins.

..._...

"So, how did it go?"

"Hi, Mindy!" Sky exclaimed as she and her twin sister drank hot chocolate in the Dining Room.

They were both surrounded by various other Fusion members enjoying a drink of some sort with some getting

something to eat.

"She did good," Chrissy said. "She did what she was supposed to, and then she headed home."

"She's still there as far as we know," Sky added.

"Did any of FEAR's goons see any of you?"

"Not as far as we could tell," Sky replied.

"Thank you, both of you. Go get some sleep."

"Night, Mindy!"

The two very different, but very similar girls, finished off their hot chocolate before heading off down to Level 2 and the accommodation. Mindy headed in the same direction, but she stopped at another table where Stephanie, Jamie, Abigail, Shannon, Marc, Annabelle, and Iain sat with their own mugs of hot chocolate. They were all laughing and talking animatedly.

"It is getting late – time for bed," Mindy warned.

Several yawns backed up Mindy's comments.

The kids headed for Elevator #2 which brought them out beside the accommodation area. There they split up, with most of the younger kids heading into Cabin #3. There, Mindy was a little concerned to find Stephanie, Jamie, Abigail, Annabelle, Iain, Anne-Marie, Danny, and Becky all sharing the same cabin.

"Sleep!" Mindy ordered as she closed the door to a host of giggles.

Despite Annabelle at twelve-years-old being the eldest, Stephanie took charge in a vain attempt to keep order. Nevertheless, it was well into the early hours before there was silence in the facility.

Two days later
Monday, October 10th

Safehouse F

Mindy stared at the report which Marty had just handed her.

...

Fusion

Status Report

Date: 10/10/16

Fusion Complement: 46

Fit for Combat: 41

Injured (Available): 3 – RAVEN/SPLINTER/TEMPEST

Injured (No Combat): 2 – PSYCHE/TROJAN

Prisoners in Holding: 1

Combat Vehicles: 5

Vehicles Offline: 1 - BEAST

...

Mindy grimaced at the stats – they were barely 72 hours into the fight and they were taking significant damage. It had

been anticipated, but that was not the point. They had given much more punishment than they had taken, but that was not the point. The point was that people were getting hurt . . . because of *her* determination to remain in Chicago at all costs. People were getting hurt, because of her . . . at what point would 'at all costs' become too expensive? Mindy screwed up the piece of paper and she threw it across the briefing room.

Down below her, she could see Wildcat and Stormtide sparring. Both girls were angry as their partners were both hurt – Trojan more seriously than Tempest – and thus they trained to keep their minds focussed on the task ahead, just like the professionals that they were. Cathy had told Mindy about the civilian casualties – the hospitals were filling up with gunshot wounds, stabbings, and other bodily injuries. The morgues were fully employed, as were the morticians and medical examiners. Jack Bay had reported on the status of the CPD – they were unhappy, too, with injuries spreading as they attempted to maintain order in the troubled city. *Fusion* were there to assist, only they were small in number and they could not be everywhere.

Trojan and Splinter had been hurt when out on patrol with Shadow and Petra. The team had run into the Sointsevskaia Brotherhood – the fight had been short but epic and eight Russians were dead at the end of it, however, Trojan and Splinter had both taken significant hits – Trojan had taken several bullets into his left side. None of the bullets had penetrated his armour, but the concussive force had badly bruised his side and he would be laid up for several days as he recovered. Splinter only had some heavy bruising which would clear up quickly and he was ready, and eager, for combat when needed. The two girls had escaped anything major, but they had both been very concerned with the heavy firepower wielded by the Russians.

As for Raven, she had been out in *Beast* with Jackal, Discord, Rage, and Fury. All had gone well – they had prevented the outright murder of two police officers by Corsairs and assisted in keeping the peace despite the varied attempts by the Sicilians to encourage anarchy. Then, just as they had put down three of the Sicilians, encouraging the rest to flee, *she* had shown up! Sunset Phoenix and a handful of Corsairs had ambushed *Beast* just as they were about to leave the scene – the armour-plating prevented any major injuries from the bullets, except Raven got blasted against a wall by some form of explosive device; Foxtail's mysterious Irish bomber back for more? Raven's armour had taken the brunt of the impact, but she was bruised to hell and back and feeling a little stunned.

Mindy had taken it on herself to personally apologise to each of those who were injured. That had not gone down well – all of them, to a vigilante, had told Mindy where she could stick her apology. There were times when Mindy felt herself to be unworthy to lead such an illustrious team, but that was her task and she would lead *Fusion* to the very best of her ability. She knew that every member of *Fusion* would follow her into the deepest pits of hell, should that be needed, only Mindy hoped that she was not leading her team on a one-way trip to hell.

That just left Stephanie.

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Mindy was mad at her daughter for being injured – it had been her own fault, only it had not been.

Jamie had broken the news to Dave that Stephanie was overdue and also why she had broken her own grounding to go out. Even worse, she had gone out into what amounted to a virtual combat zone, alone. Despite the incident, Stephanie had brought back a prisoner and some valuable intelligence which was always a bonus. However, what Stephanie had endured during the attack was keeping Mindy awake at nights. It was made even worse when Stephanie would yell out in pain due to her injuries.

From a certain point of view, it was not even a combat-related injury which had put Stephanie out of action – more her past catching up with her.

Again.

***Chapter 342*: Raider**

Four months previously
June 2016

City of Joliet, Illinois

It was the basic rule of survival in an organisation with little rules.

If you wanted to stop yourself getting picked on and abused, you made damn sure that you were the 'top dog', and that meant taking down the existing 'top dog' on your first day, if you could.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have a newbie, another bitch – meet Raider!"

Raider followed the current leader, Rapine, into what appeared to be a recreational area. There were over forty youngsters in the room, varying in age from twelve up to about sixteen, boys and girls. From their stances, they all appeared to be seasoned fighters; indeed, many bore signs of obvious fighting – cuts, bruises, and the like. They all had one thing in common, however: their heads had been shaved, boys and girls alike. There were a few derogatory comments from those nearby, but otherwise, Raider was ignored.

"Raider – you are now the lowest of the low. You will need to prove yourself to succeed here and work your way up the pecking order – understand?"

Raider smirked at the boy who was about thirteen – Raider knew him, and he knew her; they were old compatriots from a time long past.

"Where do *you* fit in, Rapine?" Raider asked.

"I'm the leader, right now . . . so don't you forgot that. Maybe we can get some sack time. . ."

Raider moved like lightning.

Rapine was struck repeatedly in the face, chest, and stomach. He had no time to react as he was mercilessly beaten to the floor. Even when he was on the floor, Raider continued to kick and punch the boy as he screamed out in pain. Those close by could hear ribs snapping as the beating continued.

"STOP!"

Raider stopped, and she turned to see two men in body armour and masks standing in the doorway. Raider kicked the boy one more time in the side – he screamed out in agony. One of the men stared down at the bruised and bloody former-leader.

"So much for Rapine," the man chuckled. "Looks like the new girl is in charge."

"You and you," Raider ordered as she pointed at two of the larger boys. "Take this sack of shit to the medical wing."

There was no argument as the two boys grinned and nodded. Rapine was hauled up from the floor by the two boys and dragged out of sight.

"Anybody unhappy with the change in leadership?" Raider growled.

"Welcome, Raider – good to have you aboard, I'm Bandit."

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For the first time in several weeks, Raider felt relatively safe.

The organisation she had joined was both worse than the one she had hated since she had been forced into its ranks, and better from a certain point of view. Either way, she had a comfortable bed, hot food, and some exciting distractions to keep her mind occupied. Over the next few weeks, Raider learned much about her new adoptive organisation. She learnt about Corsairs, and she learnt about FEAR and what she represented. She forgot about her previous life – her real name, her codename, they all vanished from her mind and replaced with her current title: Raider. She ruled the forty-odd youths with an iron fist, sending many to the hospital wing. It was not her – she hated

the violence; she always had. Only, it was the only way to survive in a dog-eat-dog world where anything went. She knew that at any time, she could be deposed herself. Surprisingly, her biggest ally was the former leader, Rapine.

Rapine was her lieutenant – at least he took up the position when he emerged from almost two weeks in the hospital wing.

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Urban Predator had had a much more defined hierarchy whereas, FEAR's army had a decidedly fluid pecking order.

The kids looked after themselves while the adults tended to ignore the kids completely, apart from some good-natured verbal abuse and the odd crack around the back of the head. The 'kids' were referred to as *Marauders*, despite the undeniable fact that they were all *Predators*. Raider had discussed this with Rapine and he had explained that the kids had wanted a distinction between what they were and what they were becoming – it had been FEAR's idea to call them *Marauders* in line with her adult *Corsairs*. The 'kids' had jumped at the idea, so FEAR had declared them all to be *Marauders* from that point on.

For Raider, it felt strange – she knew a few of the *Marauders*; Rapine was from her own *Predator* Intake despite him being about seven months her junior. To cement her ascension to leadership, she had taken Rapine to be her own – she had openly seduced the boy and then allowed him to go to town on her body in full public view of the other *Marauders*. Raider was also curious as to why the older *Marauders*, such as Bandit who was sixteen, were not in charge.

"Bandit!" Rapine had scoffed. "She's a lazy bitch – why give orders when you can just follow 'em!"

However, Raider also discovered another very good reason why nobody really wanted to be in charge of anything.

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The girl had been around twelve-years-old when she was hauled onto the stage before one of FEAR's rallies.

The girl was shaking and trembling with fear and while there was silence from the masked *Corsairs*, the *Marauders* were baying for blood – and they got it. Without a word, FEAR drew a pistol and in unison with the girl peeing herself, FEAR put a bullet into the pre-teen's skull.

"Team Seven needs a new leader," FEAR growled as she stalked off the stage without another look at the dead girl.

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Raider slept with a pistol and a knife beneath her pillow.

She was usually joined most evenings by Rapine who would spend several minutes massaging Raider's breasts and gently tickling her nipples with his tongue. Raider could also feel his dick, hard up against her and while she had a rule about how many times a week he was allowed to go 'all the way', he would often explode spontaneously all over her leg or stomach as he preferred to sleep naked, just as she herself often did. For protection, Raider had gathered a small posse who enjoyed her protection in return for their support . . . and their protection.

As for the days, they were spent training and training. If you weren't eating or sleeping, you were training. Training was something which a *Predator* knew all about and to a certain extent. Something which they enjoyed. Training focussed the mind and it detracted that same mind from the oppressive atmosphere in which they were forced to live. Despite being relatively free, the *Marauders* still preferred some form of regimen and training was a key part of that. Raider focussed her mind on keeping herself in top condition. While she did not believe in what FEAR was doing, it was a means to an end – a means to staying alive.

Being a Phase 3 graduate, Raider was highly skilled, and she would spend hours punching bags, kicking practice dummies, and beating the living crap out of random *Marauders*. As leader of the *Marauders*, it was Raider's responsibility to ensure that all of FEAR's minions were trained. Often, Raider would fight the adult *Corsairs* and during those sparring sessions, she would gain many a *Corsair's* respect from the application of her skills.

Out on the streets and doing FEAR's bidding, was something else again.

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Initially, it was just petty thefts around the city of Joliet, about 40 miles southwest of Chicago.

That escalated after a few weeks to muggings, then armed assaults on stores, and finally onto attacks on armoured trucks for their cash. Naturally, FEAR found that her *Marauders* came 'pre-loaded' with all the required skills. As far as possible, the attacks were spread out and each used a different MO, as the police referred to it. Raider figure that it would probably be months before the police began to figure out a pattern of attack. Being a leader also made Raider privy to some of FEAR's plans for 'global domination' – well, maybe just 'Chicago domination'. That was another of Raiders' reasons for being in the top tier – she would be aware of what she was being used for and, if necessary, jump ship before it sank, or she was slaughtered like cannon-fodder.

It was in August when Raider began to get a bad feeling about her new home. It was the same feeling she had felt during May when *Urban Predator* had begun to tear itself apart. FEAR was talking about some deadline or such in Chicago. Raider had been part of FEAR's protective detail whilst she had been off meeting with some men whom she thought to be Italian – so wrong! They turned out to be Sicilians – like Raider could tell the difference. . . Soon after, FEAR had met with some Russians – Raider hated Russians; it was a personal thing. Naturally, Raider was fully familiar with *Fusion* – you had to be blind and deaf not to know about Hit Girl and her little gang of vigilantes. Raider had personal reasons for hating Hit Girl with a vengeance, however, while Hit Girl had indirectly ruined many kids' lives, Raider could see that Hit Girl was not the person portrayed by the *Urban Predator* teachings.

As she saw FEAR's plans unfolding, Raider decided that she wanted none of it. Hurting criminals and ripping them off – that was just sport – but hurting innocent people who were actually working hard for their earnings. . . The final straw was during September when certain younger *Marauders* began to shoot people out of hand: 'he was too slow with the money' or 'I had a bad night' and her personal favourite: 'I was on my period, bitch!'. Rachel had reluctantly accepted *Urban Predator* because she was being trained to help her fellow citizens and her country – something noble . . . but FEAR while providing Raider with somewhere to live, was perverting that training and using her *Marauders* for whatever nefarious scheme she and her sidekick, Sunset Phoenix, had in mind at the current moment.

Kids were dying indiscriminately – FEAR did not care. Then that stupid halfwit in her pink outfit had caused unbelievable tension in Chicago by causing SWAT to kill their own. Things were hotting up in that city and FEAR had chosen to deploy *Marauders* to that city and some were not coming back. *Fusion* had a fearsome reputation – there was even rumour that Hit Girl had had a part in *Urban Predator's* downfall. Either way, Raider had recognised some of the newer masked-faces in Chicago: Psyche and Foxtail – they were both *Predator* codenames. Then, towards the end of September, two more names which had stunned her: Fury and Rage – could they both be alive?

September was a worrying month for Raider and she decided to get out – anyway she could.

..._...

FEAR had a new playmate on display by October.

Ostensibly, FEAR was portraying the new masked individual as her sister – that kind of made her untouchable. Raider had met the young woman, who was known as Dread, and they had talked briefly. There was something about the girl that separated her from her elder sister – assuming they *were* actually sisters. Despite Dread's outwardly brisk behaviour, her body language dictated that she had no desire to be working alongside her 'sister'. Maybe she was coerced – FEAR did not exactly have a retirement plan for her minions, so leaving her organisation was not very practical – if indeed, it was actually possible to leave without a bullet to the skull.

Along with her 'sister', FEAR also began to reveal her 'master plan' for destroying *Fusion* and the sheer scale of the plan gave Raider pause for thought. Destroying *Fusion* meant destroying her friends and that was *not* acceptable.

She had to warn them . . . but how?

Sunday, October 9th, 2016

Central Chicago

It was a fairly normal Sunday morning, just like any other Sunday morning.

Raider had decided to tag along with Bandit and three other *Marauders* – the fresh air would do her good and she fancied a trip to Chicago for something other than killing. Raider had no liking for Bandit, but with Bandit as a supporter, it ensured that Raider's leadership would continue – many were apprehensive when around the skilled sixteen-year-old. It wasn't that she was violent – all the *Marauders* were – it was more that she had a vicious streak. Bandit took great personal joy in making people's lives miserable, be it with simple humiliation, or a crafty punch out of nowhere. More than one *Marauder* had suffered varying levels of injury at her hands 'just for a bit of fun'.

As far as Raider was concerned, the girl was wired wrong, but to be honest, that may not have been entirely Bandit's fault. As Raider understood it, the girl had taken too well to her *Predator* training and it had taken some severe motivation in the instructors' part to get her back on track, narrowly avoiding a bullet to the head instead of completing the end of Phase 1 training. Somewhere around the end of Phase 2 training, the girl had changed psychologically and become somebody very different. From that point, she had enjoyed anything that involved inflicting pain on others, including killing. It was rumoured that she was a lesbian – only, nobody dared ask – as she apparently took more interest in naked females than naked males. Needless to say, the girl had never been seen with a boy during a sexual encounter which did not necessarily mean that the rumours were true.

Bandit may have been a bully, in the worst possible way, but she was beautiful, and, at times, she was fun to talk to.

..._...

True to form, Bandit could not let bygones be bygones – she always had to escalate a situation.

"Holy, crap!" Bandit breathed. "Is that who I think it is?"

"Who?" Rustler asked as they walked down the street.

"Stephanie fucking Walker!"

"Psyche?" Wrecker asked dubiously.

"Fuck me! Yes, Stephanie, I'm a fucked-up bitch, Psyche Walker!"

"So?" Fence wanted to know.

"Give me strength. . ." Bandit breathed. "The bitch killed my friend – I cannot let that go unrewarded."

"Leave it alone, Bandit," Raider ordered.

"Fuck you, Raider!"

"Attacking that girl in broad daylight is *not* one of your better plans, Bandit – now stand down!"

"You're such a weak leader – maybe it's time you stepped aside," Bandit growled back.

"Have it your way – just don't come crawling me to me for sympathy when it all goes to hell," Raider told the older girl.

"Clever, Raider – what could go wrong?"

***Chapter 343*: Ember**

Sunday, October 9th, 2016

Central Chicago

It was a fairly normal Sunday morning, just like any other Sunday morning.

Only, Stephanie was not supposed to be there – she was grounded as the direct result of a slight misjudgement surrounding a car and the manoeuvring of said car. But, she could also argue that she was out of the house *because* of that slight misjudgement surrounding a car and the manoeuvring of said car. Stephanie had felt remorse like she had never felt before. Mindy was the one person she hated to upset – and not just because she was Hit Girl – Mindy was very special to Stephanie. There was nothing in the world that Stephanie loved more than her family.

Despite the goings-on in Chicago in the wake of the deadline passing, there was no reason to expect an attack; it was broad daylight and Stephanie was in a busy part of Chicago with hundreds of people around – and she was just one person. The plan had been to nip into the city, grab what she wanted and get back to D-JAK, preferably without anybody noticing that she had vanished. Only, there were five people out in the city that afternoon, who had *not* received Stephanie's schedule ahead of time, so they had no idea that their intervention would not be welcome. Actually, they knew full well that their intervention would not be welcome, but for very different reasons. Unluckily for Stephanie, if she had stepped out of D-JAK either two minutes earlier, or two minutes later, she would have missed them completely.

Stephanie never saw the five teenagers as she took her usual shortcut down a broad alleyway which would take her to the nearest shops. Nobody else was using the alleyway at that moment, so Stephanie was very much alone. Her senses perked up only when she sensed the presence of people closer than they needed to be, but by then, it was far too late as Stephanie found herself seized by ten strong hands. She kicked, and she bucked. She tried to scream, but her mouth was held firmly shut before it was then taped.

No matter what she tried, to fight off the attackers, Stephanie found herself dragged, kicking and punching, and attempting to scream obscenities through the tape, into another alley.

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The attackers all appeared to be girls, only their hair had been taken right back to a length measurable only in millimetres.

Their expressions were the same for the most part. Three of the girls looked like all their Christmases for the next twenty years had just come all at once. Of the other two, one seemed undecided while the other was noticeably hanging back. Stephanie had a feeling that she knew a couple of the girls but for the life of her, she had no idea where from. Finally, Stephanie found herself being pushed to the concrete that formed the ground in the alley and she was pinned and no struggling on her part would alter her situation. The tape was roughly ripped off her mouth and Stephanie began to holler, at least until one of the girls slapped her roughly into silence.

"Well, well, well – if it isn't the not so mighty, Stephanie Walker! Or should we call you, Psyche?" one of the girls offered happily. "Some of us owe you one for being such a fucking bitch . . ."

"Not to mention that you killed our friend," another cut in.

"You'll have to be a *little* more specific – I've killed a few people," Stephanie tried before adding, "But she probably had it coming to her.

"Now," a third began, ignoring Stephanie's barbed comment. "We have something special lined up for our favourite *Predator* . . . you wanna be a bitch – we're gonna fuck you like a bitch!"

Stephanie had no real idea what the girl was going on about, however, she had correctly worked out that they were all *ex-Predators*.

"First, let us introduce ourselves before we get down to business. You might be thinking that we are *Predators*. Well, you'd be wrong there, Psyche; we are no longer *Predators* – we are much more, so much more; we are *Marauders*. We've taken things to the next level and beyond."

That did not bode well, Stephanie thought unhappily. *Predators* were already at a pretty worrying level to start with.

"I am Bandit – these are my counterparts: Raider, Fence, Rustler, and Wrecker. They are *not* my friends – no fucking way!"

The other girls all laughed.

"We may fight alongside one another but we are our own woman. Now, sweetheart, this is going to hurt you way more than it is gonna hurt me, big time. But before we begin, I want a souvenir. . ."

The girl stepped closer to Stephanie and with a wave of her hand, the ten-year-old was hauled briskly to her feet before they span her around, slamming her face into the wall of the alley. Stephanie recognised the sound of a knife being flipped open and then the cold steel against the back of her neck. With a swift flick of the sharp knife, her head suddenly felt lighter and her neck colder. Stephanie was thrown to the ground as the bitch held up Stephanie's light brown ponytail for all to see.

"I won't apologise; waste of breath – open her up!"

There was more laughter as Stephanie watched the hair she loved vanish from sight while hands reached out for her, one slapping another piece of tape over her mouth.

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With that order, Stephanie's ankles were bound tightly before one girl rested her legs on Stephanie's ankles to hold her down.

Another girl bound her wrists and then yanked the arms above Stephanie's head where they were pinned down by the same girl. A third girl sat on Stephanie's abdomen, pinning her down completely. The remaining pair went to work on Stephanie's pants which were quickly undone before being pulled down to her ankles as far as they would go. They added to the existing restraints as they were then joined by Stephanie's panties. Stephanie screamed as she felt the cold concrete on her backside. She fought as her ankles were forced closer to her body so that she was then forced to bend her knees and spread her legs apart.

"Aww, isn't that sweet – little Stephanie has pubic hair; not very much, to be honest," Bandit sneered. "We can have some fun with that later. She has a tight little asshole, too – we're gonna ram something hard up there and it'll hurt so bad you won't be able to shit for a fucking month!"

Despite the humiliation, Stephanie was not prepared for what happened next as she felt alien fingers on her labia which were none too gently spread apart. Stephanie's eyes went wide as they focussed on a foot-long baton which Bandit produced and held before her eyes.

"One guess where *that* is going," one of the bitches laughed.

Then the baton vanished and within moments, she felt something very cold pushing into and then past her labia and onwards into places that had never before seen the light of day, let alone been touched by anything. Stephanie thrashed – or she tried to. She screamed – or she tried to.

She heard the laughter and the derisive comments as something cold and hard was pushed inexorably inside her.

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Stephanie was not stupid; she knew what was happening to her.

Her brain was rapidly catching up with events and she was working out strategies to escape the torture. The increasing pain coming from her vagina did not help her brain to function. Stephanie had experienced many levels of pain – only the current pain, it seemed to surpass almost everything.

Bandit spoke again.

"Does that feel good, Stephanie? Bet this is your first fuck, huh? Well, honey, we're going to get to work on your front door, then we're gonna flip you over and continue with your back door. This baton is going to be shoved right up your tight British asshole. Once we're done with you here, you're coming somewhere where we can fuck you until you bleed – then we'll fuck you again."

Stephanie rarely felt fear.

Nothing much scared her on a day to day basis, despite her regular nocturnal activities. The *Marauder* known as Bandit had done what many could not; she had put the fear of God into Psyche. It was not the mere attack which scared Stephanie; it was the invasion of her body. Cuts and bruises, even bullets, she could handle – but the invasion of her most private parts cut deep into Psyche's psyche. As the baton was thrust inside of her, her brain struggled to both plan her escape and cope with the unknown sensations which she was feeling from inside her groin. She was astonished to find that part of her was *enjoying* what she was experiencing – what the fuck?!

"You enjoying it, Psycho?" Bandit laughed at the play on Stephanie's codename as she punched Stephanie in the face. "Oh, yeah – she's fucking loving it!"

There was more derisive laughter as blood trickled into Stephanie's mouth from her nose.

..._...

Then one of the girls made a mistake.

It was the girl who was supposed to have been pinning Stephanie's hands. She was laughing heartily and exchanging crude comments about Stephanie's pubescent physique with her friends and her attention was shifting. Stephanie felt the weight on her lower arms shift and she discovered with surprise that despite the bindings, her hands were free. Stephanie looked up at the girl's face and she could see the girl staring past the one sitting on her stomach and almost drooling at the sight of the baton being shoved relentlessly in and out. Her backside and back was raw from scraping on the bare concrete and the enforced position of her right arm was causing pains to shoot across her shoulder. Stephanie psyched herself for a moment, bracing herself against the movements and sensations in her pelvic region, and then she acted.

Her bound hands flew upwards and she grasped the girl's head, either side of her face as she then sunk a finger into each eye and pushed straight through, crushing the eyeball into a squishy pulp. The girl screamed out in agony, falling backwards. Before anybody could react, Stephanie had reached down to her stomach where she grabbed the pistol out of the waistband of the girl who sat there. Without any conscious thought, Stephanie squeezed the trigger three times, killing the girl with the first two bullets. Blood splashed across Stephanie's face and she struggled to see for a moment until she was able to wipe her face. She braced up as she heard three more pistol shots in rapid succession, but strangely, she did not feel any pain, and then the weight on her ankles vanished and a hand reached down with a knife to cut her wrists free.

It was the fifth girl, the one who had hung back, her pistol still smoking from the three shots which had killed the other three girls with single shots to each forehead – including the girl who Stephanie had blinded. The fifth girl quickly went to work on Stephanie's ankles. Stephanie felt relief for a moment as she felt her ankles freed, but then she screamed as the baton was very roughly pulled out of her.

"Sorry . . .!" the girl said, and she actually sounded sincere. "I'm Raider – but I prefer my old codename: Ember."

Stephanie was on the verge of passing out from the combination of the pain, what she figured may have been an 'almost' orgasm, and her other injuries.

"My phone – I need it to call help," Stephanie breathed.

"I'll call an ambulance . . ."

"No! Cannot go to hospital."

Ember passed Stephanie the cell which she had retrieved from the jeans around her ankles and Stephanie quickly activated the panic facility.

"Listen! If you stay with me, you *must* throw away your weapons and you *must not* resist when they come for me – if you resist, they *will* kill you."

"I need to go . . ."

"Stay . . . please . . . I sense good in you . . . please . . . stay . . ."

Stephanie passed out then and Ember did her best to pull Stephanie's panties and pants back into place, restoring some of her dignity. As instructed, she threw her knife and her pistol down the alley and then she leaned back against

the alley wall as she cradled Stephanie's head in her lap. Ember did not know who Stephanie was, even though the others obviously did, but there was something about the younger girl's face which was somehow familiar to the *Marauder*, something in the eyes.

Within twenty minutes, a large dark grey vehicle pulled into the alleyway and Ember found herself hauled to her feet and then thrown bodily against the brick wall of the adjacent building. She felt blood on her face and then she was pulled around and the very last thing that the fourteen-year-old girl saw was a large gauntlet as it was rammed into her face.

Everything went black.

Safehouse K Subterranean Level 1

The girl awoke, and she screamed out in pain as she felt the cuts and bruises on her face.

Her eyes focussed and she found herself lying on a thin mattress over a concrete base. The space was small, about six-foot by four-foot, and the walls were bare poured concrete. A fluorescent light was embedded into the concrete ceiling and the harsh light dazzled the girl as she sat up. Three walls were concrete, but the fourth was made up of steel bars fitted vertically with a horizontal spacing of about three inches. To the left was a vertically barred door which was hinged to open outwards. She reached out and touched it – unsurprisingly, it was locked.

She felt a chill and quickly realised that her clothes were gone, and she was wearing just her sports bra and boy-shorts, nothing else. She looked beyond the bars and she saw a steel table which was bolted to the concrete floor. The place screamed interrogation. There was a steel door which presumably led out of the holding area. No windows were in evidence but her eyes focussed on a dome in one corner of the space, above the door. There was a twin dome in the adjacent corner.

The girl glared at both domes for a moment before lying back down on the bunk. Minutes later, the doors opened and a masked individual with purple markings yanked the girl up off the mattress before shoving her out of the door where she stumbled and fell to her knees, grazing both. Another masked individual grabbed hold of the girl by her left arm, yanking her to her feet, totally ignoring the blood which ran down the girl's pale-skinned legs.

The girl began to shake as she was marched up a ramp into a large open area; she recognised what could only be the place where she was going to die.

Safehouse K Subterranean Level 0

Waking up in a medical facility was really getting old.

Stephanie ached all over. Without thinking, she moved her legs and she almost screamed out as pain shot through her pelvic region.

"Don't try to move, Stephanie," Dr Bennett cautioned.

"Am I okay?"

"Yes – you're going to be a little bruised down below for a while but there's no permanent damage and you should have no problem having kids, later on in life."

Stephanie growled at that.

"You were very lucky; you also have some wicked scratches and bruises on your butt, plus some on your back. As for your hair – it'll grow back in time."

Stephanie had forgotten all about that. She reached her hand up to the back of her neck – it felt weird; she could not remember ever having had short hair before. They had stopped shaving heads by the time she had been drafted into *Urban Predator*.

"Mindy is going mad upstairs and I think she's preparing a lynching for that bitch who attacked you."

"Shit!" Stephanie breathed. "You've got it all wrong, Cathy. That girl saved my life and . . . I need to go see Mindy."

"I kept you sedated for a few hours while I checked you out; you need more rest but if you think you can walk . . . it'll be very painful."

Dr Bennett was not kidding about the pain. It took several attempts for Stephanie to get out of the bed and then another ten minutes for Dr Bennett to help her get dressed. Stephanie swore as she tried a few steps before gripping onto the wall for support as her hips gave way. She was on a lower level of the Safehouse and there were many stairs and a ramp to negotiate which was not easy.

"Mindy needs a bloody lift in here!"

Safehouse K Upper Level 1

The girl was a mess, having endured several sessions with Hit Girl and Wildcat.

While they had gone relatively easy to prolong the agony, they had also relented in their punishment to allow Fury and Rage to have their own session with the girl who had been responsible for hurting someone very dear to them both. Fury dived in with a punch to the face which elicited a scream and some blood while Rage drove a fist into the girl's left side, doubling her over before she sank to her knees.

"Let's get a better look at you!" Fury growled as she pulled her knife and slid the blade underneath the girl's sports bra and deftly cut it away.

Rage followed the example and slipped his own knife into the boy-shorts which fell to the ground beneath their owner. The girl remained on her knees, staring into nothing through her tears and the blood which ran over her eyes from cuts on her forehead. Fury drove her right fist into the girl's bared left breast and the girl screamed out in agony. Fury's left fist drove into the girl's right side and the girl fell forward into her own blood and urine. Rage seized her by the left ear and he yanked her back to her knees, ignoring the screaming.

Then Rage froze, just as he was about to strike the girl again. Her legs had opened as she had struggled to her knees and he had seen something which he had not seen in quite a while. In the cleft between the girl's left inner thigh and her vulva, there was a small birthmark which was partially obscured by her pubic hair. The boy recognised it instantly for what it was. Fury looked into the girl's left eye – the right one was bonded shut by dried blood – and she too froze as she saw the familiar hazel eye look back at her. Both youngsters called out the name as one as they both staggered back in surprise and horror.

"Rachel!"

..._...

At the same moment, Stephanie appeared in the space and she almost fell into Foxtail's arms as she stumbled.

Stephanie took in the scene before her. The space was wide open and all concrete. In the centre of the space was a thick piece of industrial plastic sheeting which covered about thirty square metres. Upon that blood-covered sheeting which reeked of urine, a teenaged girl knelt, completely naked, her underwear torn and scattered around her. The girl was covered in blood and her pale skin was puffy with bruises which varied from blue and black, to red. Her right eye was unable to open and the very short hair on her head was matted with sweat and blood. Standing before the naked girl stood Rage and Fury, with Hit Girl and Wildcat not too far away.

"Stop!" Stephanie called out. "That girl saved my life . . . she doesn't deserve to die. Saoirse, for the love of God, help me!"

Foxtail looked startled at the last few words which were barely audible. Stephanie very rarely called her by her full name; it was almost always 'SD' and never when in her combat suit. Saoirse helped her friend over towards the battered girl.

"You okay, Psyche?" Hit Girl asked as she looked down at her daughter.

"Yes, I am. That girl saved my life and I want her to be given a second chance."

"No fucking way!" Hit Girl growled angrily. "Not after what she did to you."

"So, she tried to hurt me – Foxtail did *much* worse and you gave *her* a second chance *and* a goddamn promotion!" Stephanie pointed out. "Not to mention Fury, over there."

"She does have a point," Foxtail commented but her bravery wavered, and she flinched as she saw Hit Girl's head come around in her direction.

Foxtail feared but one person and that was Hit Girl.

"I'm going to be okay, according to Medic."

..._...

Stephanie hobbled forwards and she all but fell to her own knees as she knelt beside the girl who now lay on the plastic; she had collapsed out of sheer exhaustion.

"Stay still, Ember; you're safe, I promise."

Stephanie looked up at her brother.

"Go get some water – NOW! Fury, go get Medic."

Fury looked up at Hit Girl who nodded and the young girl bolted for the ramp below.

"She's an enemy combatant, Psyche," Hit Girl cautioned her protégé. "She cannot be trusted."

"I know that!" Stephanie growled angrily as she held the girl's left hand. "I want her to live – you can keep her cuffed to the damn bed but she's going to live!"

Hit Girl stepped back as Medic ran over, her bag in her hand.

"What the fucking hell is going on?" Hit Girl demanded as she turned on Fury and Rage.

"That girl is Rachel Ascot; without her . . . well, I would be long dead for starters," Rage revealed.

Ember

The pain was extreme.

Her body hurt from head to toe and she was struggling to stay conscious. She could feel the liquid in which she lay, made up of her own bodily fluids, and she felt disgusted. There was an argument going on between those psychos. Somebody had stopped the beating; it sounded like the girl they had been raping. Before that, though, through the haze of her mind, she had heard a pair of electronic voices calling her by a name that she had not used in many months. She felt somebody holding her hand and saying something to her but her mind would not process the words.

Then she passed out.

Safehouse E Sub-Level 8 Room 22

The pain was still there as she regained consciousness.

Something felt different; she was no longer lying in her own bodily fluids, she was lying in a comfortable bed and she felt clean. Her right eye wouldn't open as if something was covering it. She opened her left eye, but she could not see much; wherever she was, it was dark. She listened, but she could hear nothing more than the whir of fans and the hum of air-conditioning. She tried to sit up, but the pain was too much, and she gave up almost immediately.

Then she passed out.

..._...

She heard a voice, familiar, yet distant.

It took a minute for her mind and then her eyes – she could open her right eye again which was a surprise – to focus properly. Then she heard her name – her *real* name; the girl had not heard it spoken allowed in many months.

"Rachel?"

There it was again. Something shifted in the girl's fogged brain and she saw the mental image of a boy, six-years-old, and wearing yellow joggers. Another image of the same boy taking down a girl, two years his senior.

"Jamie?"

"Hi, Rachel."

Rachel looked over to her left and she saw a face grinning at her. She recognised him easily enough, despite it having been many months since they had last seen one another.

"Thought somebody would have killed you by now."

"Oh, they tried!" Jamie growled.

Then Rachel's eyes focussed on another familiar face.

"Is that little Abigail?"

Abigail grinned enormously.

"I'm not so little now, Rach."

"Can Jamie still take you down?"

"That was a one off!" Abigail scowled.

"Just trying to make a joke."

Rachel's speech was laboured, and she was feeling very weak. The girl whom she knew as Stephanie Walker stepped forwards and she smiled.

"I owe you an apology, Rachel. Jamie's mentioned you – not in detail – but I believe I owe you for saving his life. I'm his big sister, by the way. You will *not* die today; you get a second chance, because of what you did for my brother – and it seems, Abigail."

"Where am I?"

"You are at a classified location beneath the streets of Chicago, Rachel," Jamie offered his friend. "We're both very sorry for what we did to you – we had no idea it was you."

Rachel looked into Jamie's eyes and then over at Abigail Wilde.

"Not your fault."

"We caused you unbelievable pain, before," Abigail said quietly. "Now, we've gone and done it again."

"Not . . . your . . . fault . . ."

The girl passed out again.

Two hours later

"How old are you?" Medic asked.

"Fourteen."

"What are you?"

"I'm a *Marauder*."

"A what?" Hit Girl asked as she entered the room.

"A super-*Predator*," Stephanie replied.

"*Marauders* are *Predators* who refused to go back to a normal life and who just wanted to fight and kill," Rachel explained. "Before you ask – I chose this life; I had nowhere to go and I thought that I could make something of my life. I was so wrong."

"Ember, isn't it?" Jamie asked.

"Yes, that was my *Predator* codename. They called me Raider as a *Marauder* but I hated it. Those girls who attacked Stephanie . . . believe me, I had no idea what they were going to do; I just followed orders. Stephanie . . . I am so very sorry for what happened to you. Jamie, I can't believe you found your sister . . . I thought she was dead."

"Later . . . just rest," Jamie suggested.

Tears spilled down Rachel's cheeks. The boy reached out and he took hold of her right hand.

"You're safe now, Rachel. We'll look after you – right, Hit Girl?"

Hit Girl looked down at her son. Then, with much reluctance, she nodded slowly.

"I would think so. Rachel, you are welcome here . . . only . . ."

"I know; I can't be trusted. I know; I'll need to earn that trust. I promise you that I can change. I used to be good – Jamie can confirm that," Rachel replied with a brief smile as she turned to Stephanie. "I've got some stories for you, Stephanie. I'm sure there's some things from his time as a *Predator* that he's *not* told you about."

Jamie felt his cheeks warming up and he groaned.

"Looking forward to it, Ember – now, you need rest," Stephanie advised.

Everybody left the girl alone and Hit Girl ensured that the door was locked.

"She will need to be guarded at all times. Two people in the Safehouse as a minimum. Once she's healed enough to be moved, she goes to Safehouse Q. She sees no more faces – you three are enough for now."

Stephanie, Abigail, and Jamie nodded.

..._...

Jamie hung back as the two girls went on ahead with Cathy and he turned to Mindy.

"Please don't be mad at her, Mindy."

"She's my daughter and I will discipline her as I see fit."

"She meant well. . ."

"James!"

Jamie shut up, but he glared at Mindy, nonetheless.

"You've been with us barely a month, Jamie. Stephanie has been here almost a year. I know her very well and I know that she knows my rules. She knows what I expect and what I will not tolerate. I will give you some leeway, as I gave her, but that only goes so far. Stephanie put her own life at risk and while she had a noble reason for going out, she should never have left D-JAK. She *will* be punished, Jamie – no buts and it *will* be severe, I promise you – I would advise you to take heed and learn from your sister's mistakes."

..._...

Later that evening, Mindy found Stephanie loitering in the galley.

She did not look happy and Mindy had an idea why – Stephanie knew that was in deep shit, but so far, Mindy had not actually spoken to her directly.

"Okay, I've spoken with Marcus. He's handed the investigation over to Voight and Intelligence. Voight has agreed to keep Rachel out of it – for the moment. She *will* need to be questioned. Voight is very worried. He's worried about three kids being killed. He's worried about a group of kids raping another, younger kid. He's worried about armed kids being on the streets. He's worried about what those kids are about."

Stephanie looked over at Mindy and she nodded but there was a question on her face at the mention of only 'three' dead kids.

"Marty and Abby are looking for Rachel's file and they will see what they can do to check her out. Come on, let's go home. You've had one hell of a day, Steph, and I want you to rest . . . I know; you hate that . . . please?"

Stephanie gave up the fight before it had even begun.

"Yes, Mum. Come on, Jamie."

Glennview
The British Sector

"Sis?"

"Come in, Jamie."

Jamie closed the door behind him and he sat down on the bed beside his sister. He grimaced at her pained expression. She had been sent to her room, the very moment they had got home.

"I have no idea about what you went through but I'm glad you're okay. It must have really hurt."

"It did. I've felt pain – but that was the very worst, I can tell you. Despite what *some* might think, that was the very first object to ever enter my vagina . . . oh, get a grip, Jamie! Nothing has ever passed my labia but some nurse's fingers when she inserted my catheter in hospital, back when I was shot. My vagina was as virgin as the driven snow!"

The nine-year-old boy cringed at the explicit terminology.

"You really are a pussy!" Stephanie laughed. "Tell me about her."

"She was in punishment when we met. I was a Yellow – you know . . ."

"I do; you were a nobody."

"Yes – I had to bring her food and escort her to empty her bucket. I was six at the time. We talked a lot and she taught me things. The Doc saw her teaching me. When she was out of punishment, I was dragged before the Doc and he told me I was to become a Phase 1 *Predator* – probationary, of course. Only there was a catch – Rachel was to train me . . . if I failed, she failed, if you get my drift."

Stephanie looked at her brother and she again felt sorry for him; sorry for everything that he had experienced and endured.

"I do – you would die . . . and so would she," Stephanie replied darkly.

"She trained me. She was my friend. She kept me going when I wanted to just give up. She was the only reason that I could stay alive. Come to think of it, she was the one who told me about you."

"Huh?"

"Rachel came to me one morning and she told me about this twelve-year-old girl. That girl had died; her head caved in. She had been killed by another *Predator* – an eight-year-old – in the shower while both were naked."

"Guilty as charged!" Stephanie admitted with a smile.

"I wish I had known, back then, that my own sister was the famous Psyche."

"Infamous, more like!"

"What can we do about Rachel? Will Mindy take her in? I know it'll be one hell of a risk, considering what Rachel is . . ."

. or was."

"That's up to us and I know that SD and Megan will help."

"Mindy and Megan really love you; they both went to town on Rachel – not their fault; they had no way of knowing."

..._...

Stephanie received a surprise visitor – apparently, the condemned was allowed visitors prior to her sentencing.

"Lauren?"

"Hi, Steph."

"I don't need you here, I . . ."

"Denial is normal – I've been there. It makes no difference whether it was a man's dick or some other object – the fact remains, Stephanie: you were raped."

"No . . . I wasn't . . . I . . ."

Lauren remained calm as she continued.

"Was an object shoved into your vagina repeatedly?"

Stephanie scowled at the vulgarity of the comment, but reluctantly, she nodded, as tears began to fall.

"Don't fight it, Steph. You're going to have nightmares tonight and for many more nights. I let my attack get to me – I want to help you with yours."

"Yours was way worse," Stephanie said.

"Maybe – but you are only ten. There's no good age to be raped, but ten is definitely not a good age. I am three years older than you, but I struggled to cope. Maybe your *Predator* training will help you, but . . . but you are not alone, Steph."

"Thank you, Lauren, you're a great friend."

Lauren held Stephanie as she sobbed.

..._...

Mindy appeared around ten that night.

Stephanie was feeling very depressed as she tried to use the mirror to look at the back of her head. Her hair was a mess and she felt the hot tears running down her face – how could she have been so stupid!? Mindy stood by the door for a few moments, seeing if Stephanie would get herself together – Mindy could not cope with people crying at the best of times. Finally, she pushed the door closed quietly and she walked over to where Stephanie was sitting on the edge of her bed.

"Mum!"

Stephanie stood up and she wrapped her arms around Mindy, tears spilling out of her eyes. The tears were very real and Mindy could feel the remorse that Stephanie felt for her actions as the ten-year-old sobbed and shook. Mindy pulled Stephanie over to the bed and they both sat down, but Stephanie refused to let go of Mindy who was finding it all very uncomfortable. Finally, Mindy pulled Stephanie's arms from around her and pushed her back. For a moment their eyes locked and Mindy kept a neutral expression on her face.

"You went out when you were grounded – I thought better of you, Stephanie. I don't care the reason behind you ignoring me – your brother has tried to plead your case, but there is nothing you can say that will be a valid excuse for going out against my express instructions. Now, as a direct result of your actions, you lost your hair," Stephanie began to sob again, "and you were attacked by people who wanted you dead. Then you suffered something awful and I am struggling to put that act into words."

"Did you ask Lauren to come over?"

"I did – did it help?"

Stephanie nodded.

"I just wanted to get you something nice . . . to say sorry for the car . . ."

Mindy had been beating herself up about it being her fault Stephanie had gone out – until Dave had told her to stop being 'so fucking stupid' and he had threatened to get Marcus on the phone to have a go at her.

"Considering what you endured, I will take your hair and the err, other things, into account when considering your sentence. I was thinking of demoting you until you can demonstrate better judgement . . . however, I am putting you on probation and we will see if you can follow my instructions."

Stephanie was crying again so Mindy decided it was time to leave her to get some rest. Without any further words, Mindy helped her daughter into bed before she turned out the light and closed the bedroom door behind her.

***Chapter 344*: The First Wave**

Monday, October 10th, 2016

Safehouse E

***Sub-Level 8
Room 25***

"This, we believe, is Bandit."

Venom grimaced.

"Willow."

"Come again?" Hit Girl asked.

"Willow Hartman – First Intake. Known as Rampart. She was a good person until she reached Phase 3 and then she changed – don't know why," Venom reeled off.

"She became bitchy – way more than most of us girls – kind of like you, Hit Girl," Bane added.

"Thanks, I think."

The girl in question was unconscious in the bed with various wires and tubes running under the sheet which covered the obviously naked body.

"How come she's alive?" Bane asked.

"Ember shot her, but maybe she moved at the last second; the bullet went through her shoulder – nicked an artery: why she didn't bleed out. . ." Hit Girl tried to explain.

"I heard somebody was brought in wounded – I just thought it was the other girl," Venom commented.

"I had to keep her presence quiet for Stephanie's sake."

"We can understand that," Venom conceded.

Training Facility Echo

Level 2

Dave, Danny, Anne-Marie, and an understandably shy Stephanie exited the elevator into the recreational and briefing space.

A lot of faces turned to look in their direction and others were nudged to turn in her direction. All the faces looked decidedly grim which annoyed Stephanie.

"If any one of you bastards tries to give me sympathy, I will fuck you up so bad!" she growled.

There were a few surprised faces, but then Joshua started to laugh.

"Way to go, Stephanie!" he chuckled.

Everybody started to laugh and there was a round of applause for Stephanie who cringed – it was not the centre of attention she preferred.

"What's with the bruise on Anne-Marie's cheek?" Chloe asked.

Anne-Marie tried to hide her face in embarrassment. Danny scowled at his twin for a moment before he replied.

"She made a joke about Steph's hair: said we should call her Stephen. I slapped her."

Chloe just rolled her eyes and she smiled down at Stephanie.

"You, young lady, are coming with me."

Stephanie had no idea what was going on, but Chloe took her by the hand and then led the girl back into the elevator.

..._...

There was a decidedly dark and sullen mood in the safehouse.

Despite Stephanie's bravado, everybody felt for her. Anne-Marie received a lot of stick for her actions and she was left sitting in a corner, alone, far away from everybody else. The mood had not been helped by those who had been injured the previous evening. Many were worried and as a direct consequence, the morale had begun to plunge. Two hours passed before Stephanie returned to the Safehouse looking very different and more than a little embarrassed by her transformation. Her hair had been professionally trimmed and styled to suit the new length and was now a very fitting pixie cut.

"Fucking, wow!" Joshua exclaimed. "Nice one, Steph!"

Stephanie found herself giggling, and her face began to burn bright red.

"So, hot!" Tommy said next as he ran up and gave Stephanie a kiss on the cheek.

The giggling just got worse as the compliments piled in from everybody present.

"Wow, that is so soft – I love it," Saoirse said with a friendly smile full of support as she ran a hand up the back of her friend's neck.

"Thank you, everybody. . ." Stephanie tried before she felt tears welling up in her eyes.

"You do look great, Steph . . . I'm really sorry," Anne-Marie said as she bravely faced her big sister, ignoring the angry stares from the others.

Stephanie could not hate the youngster – she looked miserable.

"Apology accepted," Stephanie said as she gave the girl a hug.

"Chloe?" Becky asked.

"Yes, Peanut."

"Can I get *my* hair done like that, please?"

"What? Get rid of your lovely long hair?" Chloe asked, dumbfounded – she knew that Becky loved her long hair.

"Becky – that's a big step," Joshua pointed out, appalled by the very idea.

"I like Steph's hair – it's great and well, long hair gets in the way and it takes ages to brush and to stuff into a mask," Becky pointed out.

"She has a point," Stephanie said.

"No, she doesn't!" Chloe corrected. "Not right now, Peanut."

"Okay," Becky said.

"She does look great, though, doesn't she, Tommy?" Saoirse asked suggestively in a very loaded question.

"Hell, yeah!" Tommy replied with a grin. "I've been hard ever since she walked in."

Stephanie's eyes almost popped out as her face went redder than ever.

That evening

Safehouse F

"Welcome, Lucy," Saoirse and Shannon said together as they pulled off the girl's black hood.

"Pleasure's all mine. . ." Lucy said as her eyes became accustomed to the bright lights and she took in the enormous cavern-like structure before her. "Another one of Hit Girl's Safehouses?"

"Welcome to Safehouse F, Lucy."

Lucy turned to see a young woman striding towards her. She wore a uniform with a single gold star on the collar and her name tag read: **HIT GIRL**. Lucy was a little perturbed to see no mask in evidence.

"So, we meet in the flesh, so to speak. I assume I have *you* to thank for the, very thorough," Lucy glared at Chrissy, "cavity search."

"Can't be too careful in the current climate," Mindy offered, nonchalantly. "I *am* taking a leap of faith with you, Lucy."

"I noticed. Thanks."

"We have another job for you."

Safehouse E

Sub-Level 8

Room 25

"We brought her in, last night," Mindy explained as she swiped her access card and pushed open the door.

Lucy walked into what was evidently a hospital room with two beds occupying most of the space. Mindy waved Lucy over towards the one occupied bed. Lucy studied the unconscious form in the bed for a moment before stiffening.

"Willow – the girl who went bad."

"That's what Chrissy and Skye told me."

"What do you want of me?"

"We want you to interrogate her – find out what she is and why she is in Chicago. I have a few more questions, too," Mindy said as she dumped a large folder onto a table.

"A few?" Lucy growled.

"You will be watched – every movement recorded on the cameras," Mindy cautioned.

"I can live with that. How did you come by her?"

"Seems they knew Psyche – who doesn't!" Mindy replied. "She and her team of four girls ambushed Stephanie and they raped her with a baton."

Lucy's face went dark, confirming to Mindy that she had made the right decision.

"The other girls?"

"Dead, but one – she's in the room across the corridor. She killed three of her colleagues and wounded this bitch."

"Second Intake," Skye prompted. "Rachel Ascot."

"Not one to go bad, if I remember right," Lucy stated.

"We believe she might have just fallen in with the wrong crowd," Mindy said. "We want you to interrogate her, too."

"I can do that – can I see Stephanie?" Lucy asked.

"I'll see what I can arrange," Mindy promised.

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

Lucy sat at a table in the dining room.

She had a mug of coffee in her left hand and a pile of paper spread out all over the table.

"You okay, Lucy?" a voice asked.

Lucy looked up into the smiling face of. . .

"Shannon!"

"You look busy – I'll leave you be."

"No – sit down, please."

"I see that Mindy has put you to work," Shannon commented as she ran her eyes across all the papers.

"I'm on interrogation duty," Lucy grouched.

"Something's up – don't lie now, Lucy."

Lucy chuckled.

"After all I put you through, I would have thought that you'd not want to talk to me so readily."

"Lucy!" Shannon exclaimed. "Without you, I would have received a bullet in my skull – I was a fucking screwup."

"Yes, you were," Lucy agreed.

"You want to talk – you come over, okay?"

"What about your dad?"

"What about him?"

"I don't think he'd want me around."

"He cares about you – I know that, Lucy. Besides, he'll do what I want – I have him all figured out!"

Level 4

Mindy was pounding around the 400-metre track on the inside lane – she was on her third circuit of the evening and she was brooding.

The previous evening had been hard on Stephanie and at about one in the morning, Mindy and Dave had been awoken by Stephanie climbing into the bed and forcing her way in between the two of them. Without a word, Stephanie had fallen straight to sleep, cuddling into Dave who had just chuckled and shrugged while Mindy had just scowled in his direction from across the sleeping ten-year-old. Mindy was worried about Stephanie and what she had endured, but Stephanie was strong, and she had been through a lot in her short life – she could handle almost anything. It was the very first time that Stephanie had ever wormed her way into the bed – Anne-Marie had done it once or twice.

They were a close family, all of them; a fact which often surprised Mindy, but then she had been very close to her own father.

..._...

Stephanie lazed around in the swimming pool and she watched Mindy running around the track, her legs striding out.

Mindy was being super-supportive, as was Dave and everybody else. Some were avoiding her to some extent,

appalled by what she had gone through. For solace, Stephanie had retreated into the bowels of the facility to where she could be alone. Her thoughts were on Mindy, Dave, her family – and the girl who meant so much to her brother and Abigail. Rachel was a conundrum, but Jamie and Abigail loved her, so Stephanie was happy to give her the benefit of the doubt – for the moment.

"A penny for your thoughts."

Stephanie looked up to see Abigail slipping into the swimming pool. That was a surprise – Abigail was not a big fan of swimming, but she tolerated it on occasions.

"Sulking," Stephanie replied.

"I want to say that I had an idea of what you went through, but I can't remember any of it."

"It was horrible."

"I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy," Abigail said as she swam slowly around the drifting Stephanie.

"I tried to get you raped, remember?"

"It never happened and if you really wanted me raped, you would have made it happen."

"I suppose. I hate that word."

"It's not supposed to be a nice word in any context," Abigail pointed out.

"True."

The two girls swam around for several minutes without talking.

"You two, okay?" Mindy asked as she dripped sweat.

"Yes, Mum."

"Yes, Mrs Lizewski," Abigail grinned.

"Oh, God!" Mindy exclaimed. "You make me sound old!"

"You are old," Abigail pointed out with a grin which faltered as Mindy glared down at her. "I'll go drown myself – save you the trouble."

Mindy laughed.

"Thank you for looking after my daughter, Abigail."

"Somebody has to," Abigail replied. "She can't keep out of trouble, or away from her past, it seems."

"Tell me about it!" Mindy grimaced as Stephanie just grinned sheepishly.

"Hey!" Mindy yelled into the steam filled showers where laughing and girly giggling could be heard.

"Coming!" came Stephanie's voice before she began giggling again.

Mindy had completed her own shower, just as the two girls had appeared. Mindy had no complaints about seeing her daughter grinning and hearing her laughing and giggling. However, *Predators* laughing and giggling, including former enemies, was worrying.

"What's up, Mum?" Stephanie asked as she appeared with her towel wrapped tightly around her body.

The short hair suited her very well and Chloe had been able to obtain a perfect styling. Abigail was right behind, wrapped up in her own towel. It was hard to see the two girls as mortal enemies as they stood there dripping.

"Get yourselves dried and dressed – Steph: you have a visitor up in the dining room."

Level 1

Stephanie followed Mindy into the dining room, unsure of what was awaiting her.

There, at a table, sat the first *Predator*, Lucy Ford. Mindy waved Stephanie over before manoeuvring Abigail elsewhere and leaving the two girls alone. Lucy waved Stephanie to a seat and Saoirse appeared with two mugs of hot tea which she placed down onto the table before vanishing.

"We are special, you and me," Lucy began as she looked at Stephanie.

"How so?"

"I started *Urban Predator* and you finished it. We are the beginning and the end of something inhuman but also of something that began as something noble only to be destroyed by the limited sight of one man."

"Noah Vossen."

"You met?"

"Yeah – Saoirse killed him in the end."

"Oh?"

"She chopped off his hand, liquidised it and had him drink it. . ."

"Cool!"

"She plucked out his eyes with a knife and then she finished him – blade to the heart."

"I'd have preferred him to have suffered – cushy way out," Lucy commented, and Stephanie grinned fiendishly.

"Hirsch suffered – I enjoyed making him suffer for what he did."

"That man, he made kids kill their families. That was one of the reasons Instructor Millar, err I mean, Patrick, began to revolt against the other instructors – he disagreed with it all."

"I know – he's a good man."

"That he is. He helped to keep me sane in my darkest hour."

"I wish I had had somebody – it was hard. I suppose I had friends, kind of. They called themselves my 'posse'. I was feared by many but that only drew me to the attention of those bastard instructors. Killing that girl in the shower may have stopped the bullying but it made me suffer even worse deprivations and experiences."

"You survived all that, Stephanie and you endured it all from such a young age. I was the age you are now when I was taken and flown to Colorado and I struggled. I suppose my time was easier as I had him, I had Leo. We helped each other and . . ."

"You miss him, right?"

"Yes, I do. I have no idea if he is still alive – we broke contact when the last mission went awry."

"There are times when I hate my life," Stephanie said, gloomily. "But I love my new family – even my brat sister. I have the most incredible stepparents and I love them very much. I have two brothers, one being the boy I thought that I had lost for so long. If I can find somebody dear to me, then I'm certain that you can, too, Lucy."

"I hope so, Stephanie, I really do."

Safehouse E

Sub-Level 8 Room 22

Rachel looked up from her bed as the door opened.

She grinned as she saw Jamie and then Abigail appear . . . but the grin faded as she saw who was next.

"Didn't think that I would ever see you again, Lucy," she growled.

"Yeah – I never thought I would see any of you. Before you start on me, please, let me say. . ."

"Sorry?" Rachel interrupted. "You can keep your fucking apologies!"

Lucy sat down on a chair beside the bed with Abigail and Jamie taking two more seats.

"How are you feeling?" Lucy asked.

"Like I got run over by a truck."

Abigail and Jamie both cringed at the comment.

"Sorry – I had to get that in," Rachel smiled darkly as she grinned down at the two youngsters.

"Bitch!" Jamie grimaced.

"What he said," Abigail muttered as she frowned.

"Can we get down to business, please, I have a lot of questions for you, err – what should I call you? Ember? Raider? Rachel?"

"Not Raider," Rachel replied. "I never want to hear that name again."

"Okay, Rachel. What are you?" Lucy began as she studied her notes.

"Like I said, yesterday, *Marauders are Predators* who refused to go back to a normal life. That woman, FEAR, she had her agents seeking us out. They found me beating up some bastard, somewhere in Virginia. They offered me money and a life, freedom from a normal life, the ability to kill, almost at will."

"You accepted."

"It sounded appealing and my life was shit at the time. I decided to use my skills – thought I could make them work for me, for a change. After *Urban Predator* fell apart, I had nothing – it folded with no warning."

"My Mum did that, along with my sister," Jamie said proudly.

"Oh?" Rachel said. "I heard rumours, but I had no idea."

..._...

The questions continued, moving on from the friendlier questions to the less friendly ones.

"Why did you allow yourself to be taken?" Lucy asked.

"Stephanie thought I might be able to get out of that life."

"What life?"

"As a *Marauder*."

"How do we know this isn't just some elaborate setup to infiltrate us?" Lucy continued.

"It isn't – I had no idea. . ."

"You're after Hit Girl, aren't you?"

"No . . . I . . ."

"You want to kill her?"

"No!"

"You're a fucking mole!" Lucy yelled.

"NO!"

"I know your training! I know what you are capable of! Tell me what you are doing here!"

"I don't want that life. I don't want to be part of that . . ."

"Okay," Lucy offered, softly. "Suppose we believe you . . . you got anything for us?"

"Yes."

"I never liked you – Rachel, isn't it?"

"You know. . ."

"You're here to infiltrate *Fusion*! You are here to kill Hit Girl – maybe make another attempt on Psyche?"

"No! You've got it all wrong, Lucy . . . I . . ."

"You're so full of shit, Ember, I'm surprised you can stand the fucking stench!"

"What!?"

"You're a fucking traitor and I'm going to recommend to Hit Girl that she kills you."

Lucy stood up to leave and Rachel appeared horror-stricken. Her eyes were red with worry and stress. She was breathing heavily and there were tears welling up in her eyes.

"I'm not lying – I know about FEAR's plans . . . PLEASE!"

Lucy walked out of the room, closely followed by a fuming Abigail and Jamie.

..._...

"She's telling the truth!" Jamie blurted out.

"I know," Lucy replied.

"But. . ." Abigail began before Lucy put a finger to Abigail's lips.

"I had to test her – I'm not sorry about doing that; we live in a dangerous world."

"I know," Jamie responded, sounding very relieved.

"Come on, both of you – we'll leave Rachel to rest and go check in with that crazed woman upstairs."

"You mean, Mom?" Jamie asked.

"Yeah, her."

..._...

"Hello, Rachel."

"Hi . . . Steph."

Rachel struggled to wipe away her tears as Stephanie sat down on a chair. Neither spoke for a few minutes until Rachel had composed herself. Then Stephanie stood up and she walked around the bed. She was sore and still getting used to things, so she was not in the best of moods.

"I have to thank you again for saving my life," Stephanie said. "Jamie and Abigail speak very highly of you. They were both very upset about hurting you."

"They got me strapped and sent to the cage, back when they were younger."

"I see. Me and that cage were well acquainted," Stephanie replied with a pained expression. "The strap, too."

"Lucy said. . ."

"Stop – she was just testing you. Tell me more about what FEAR is up to if you please."

Rachel looked very relieved as she settled back onto her pillows.

"Something big was planned for some weeks back, only that pink pansy fucked things up," Rachel explained.

Stephanie chuckled.

"You've met Sunset Phoenix, I assume?"

"Not in person, but our paths *have* crossed – she does seem to love pink!"

"Yeah – well, FEAR has what she is calling: The First Wave."

The Battle Bunker

"... FEAR is calling it: The First Wave," Marty explained as he continued flipping through the document which had been decrypted from the recovered USB drive. "Between FEAR, the Russians, and the Sicilians, there's gonna be around two-hundred enemy to be put down."

"Not good!" Mindy mused.

"Any *good* news, pal?" Dave asked.

"They ain't gonna be in one big group – it looks like they're gonna be scattered around the city and then some, in smaller groups causing mayhem and spreading us about in smaller groups," Marty explained.

"That's good," Abby offered.

"Yeah – great!" Mindy growled as she began to consider the ramifications of spitting *Fusion* up even further than it already was, not to mention those unavailable for combat.

"What else do we know?" Dave asked Abby.

"Things are not going well on the *Fusion* popularity front," Abby reported. "For now, the worst weapon used against us has been rotten eggs. We're working on getting the citizens of Chicago back on our side."

"So, when is this attack expected?" Mindy wanted to know.

"Try Saturday," Marty stated.

"*This* Saturday?" Dave queried.

"This Saturday."

..._...

Mindy was not happy with the state of affairs, but then nobody was.

"What else is there?" she asked, a little worried as to the potential response.

"We know where FEAR is based," Marty offered.

Mindy's sour mood brightened up considerably.

"Joliet City," Abby added.

"Do we have enough to assault the place?" Dave queried.

"We know the location, but we know very little about that location – it's an old jail and plans are scarce. It's a lot of

area to cover with many buildings and levels – it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to mount an assault in just a few days," Marty said.

"We might be able to infiltrate and sabotage them," Abby suggested.

"Anything we can do to impede their attack at the weekend would help," Dave confirmed.

"Okay," Mindy decided. "Let's plan a recon for Wednesday morning and an infiltration for Thursday night."

"Who will you take?"

"I'll take Steph and Tommy on Wednesday. For Thursday, prepare Hailee and Saoirse on primary, with Shannon and Megan on secondary."

The following morning

Tuesday, October 11th

Glenview

Anne-Marie smiled supportively as she came down the stairs and she saw Stephanie appearing from Dave and Mindy's bedroom.

"Hi, Steph!"

"Oh, hi, Anne-Marie."

Stephanie looked embarrassed.

"I'm not judging you, Steph – hungry?"

"Yeah," Steph replied with a forced smile.

In the kitchen, Anne-Marie manoeuvred her big sister towards a chair at the table overlooking the back garden. Stephanie appeared a little confused as Anne-Marie proceeded to bring over a bowl for each of them, a spoon each, a carton of milk, and then Stephanie's favourite Cocoa Krispies, plus her own Cheerios. Stephanie was glad that Anne-Marie stopped there, allowing her to pour her own cereal – she was not an invalid.

"I'm sorry I was nasty to you, yesterday," Anne-Marie began."

"Don't worry about it – I know you're there for me, and that's enough," Stephanie offered in between spoonful's.

Anne-Marie felt her face heating up, so she buried her head into her cereal.

"How are my girls?" Dave asked as he strolled into the kitchen and made for the coffee machine.

"We're good, thanks, Dad," Stephanie replied for them both.

Four hours later

North Park Elementary School

Understandably, Mindy was fuming.

As she walked down the corridor, she could see two small boys sitting on two of five chairs which sat beside a door in a line, over to the left. Both boys stared at the floor, not daring to look up as Mindy approached – they could both sense her anger and they knew that their world was about to come crashing down around them. Mindy was welcomed at the door by the Principal who waved her into her office – both adults ignored the two miserable miscreants. Both boys jumped a minute later when a loud bellow was heard from the other side of the door.

"*They did what!?*"

A few minutes later, Mindy reappeared and without saying a word, she pointed down the corridor. Both boys stood up

and they headed down the corridor, very aware of the very angry Mindy walking a few feet behind. For Jamie, it felt like the longest walk of his short life and the corridors appeared to go on forever.

It was with limited relief that they reached the car park.

..._...

Stephanie noticed the British Racing Green Jaguar XJ parked in the school carpark when she left her classroom for lunch.

Her unasked question was answered moments later as she saw her two brothers being 'escorted' by a ferocious looking Mindy across the carpark. She just shook her head and made her way towards the dining room.

"Where's Danny?" Anne-Marie asked a little later.

"I saw him, and Jamie, being escorted off the premises by Mum – she looked like was going to kill 'em," Stephanie replied.

"What have the idiots done, this time?" Anne-Marie asked, rhetorically.

"Not sure, to be honest."

"Boys!"

That evening

Training Facility Echo

Level 0

Neither Stephanie, nor Anne-Marie had seen the boys when they had returned home after school.

Dave had picked them up, instead of Mindy. They had asked about the boys, only for Dave to simply shrug in response. However, on passing through from Safehouse F, they found the two miscreants engaged in shuttle-runs, from one side of the primary training area to the other, and judging by their sweat-soaked hair and clothes, they had obviously been at it for quite a while. Standing a few feet away, herself drenched in sweat, stood Mindy and she sound very angry as she barked orders at the two boys. Mindy looked up and she saw her two daughters. Stephanie had expected a smile, but she just received a glare and a single barked word of welcome.

"Train!"

Anne-Marie opened her mouth to make a snappy retort, but Stephanie wisely hustled her off towards the changing rooms.

..._...

"What's up with Mum?" Stephanie asked Megan, who was herself, changing.

"The boys fucked up," Megan replied. "As I understand it, they got into a fight with Aimee Grant. Her big sister used to be the high school bully – until Lauren put her down. Aimee was a nice girl – very different to her big sister – only she's changed. Aimee started to spout off the same bullshit that her sister once did, only with *anti-Fusion* crap. Well, she got into an argument with another girl and Jamie went to support that girl. Aimee slugged both the girl and Jamie which unfortunately brought Daniel into the fight."

"Was anybody hurt?" Stephanie asked.

"Nothing worse than some bruising – shame; the bitch deserved worse," Megan finished. "See you guys, later – I've no time for idle chitchat."

"She seem any different to you, since her return from Gotham?" Stephanie asked Anne-Marie as Megan ran out of the changing room.

"Not all that much."

"Okay."

..._...

For next hour they trained under the watchful eyes of Mindy.

The veteran vigilante was in a foul mood and she was pushing everybody to their limits – even Megan. Nobody dared argue; they just pushed on through the pain barrier and continued training. The first to collapse were the two boys who had been pushed beyond normal endurance. Danny went first, with Jamie about forty minutes later. Stephanie, for all her *Predator* training was not far behind, her thighs still very sore. As she sank to the mats, she saw the disapproving look from Mindy, but Stephanie ignored it.

It was only in the dining room that Mindy tried to explain her feelings.

..._...

"Mindy?"

"Hi, Steph."

"I'll leave you be, if you want?"

"I'm sorry for being a bitch."

"You're just being you, Mum."

Mindy smiled for the first time that day.

"I'm just mad at your brothers for causing trouble. I know they were being valiant, but I have enough fucking shit on my plate without two immature little shits causing trouble!"

Stephanie chuckled.

"What?"

"I don't know why, but I find it funny when you're mad," Stephanie grinned.

"Oh, God!" Mindy growled. "You're so much like Dave!"

Stephanie grinned, enormously – that was a massive compliment as far as she was concerned. Before she could come out with some witty remark, Abby came running into the dining room.

"Bandit is awake."

Stephanie's face clouded over and went very dark.

"*Bandit.*"

***Chapter 345*: Battle Ready**

Tuesday, October 11th, 2016

Safehouse E

**Sub-Level 8
Room 25**

Bandit was awake.

And to say that she was unhappy was putting it mildly. The teenager was strapped to her bed by her wrists, chest, waist, and ankles. The straps were very necessary as at the moment she had regained consciousness and she had realised where she was, she had begun to yell and scream, struggling against her restraints. The girl froze as three people entered the room. The first was masked – Hit Girl, the second was a face from her distant past – Lucy Ford, the final one – Psyche, a face from the more recent past.

"You're alive – shame!" Stephanie growled.

"The feeling's mutual," Bandit commented.

"Willow," Lucy said. "We just want to talk."

"That is *not* my name!"

"What went wrong with you, Willow?" Lucy persisted.

"Let me the fuck outta here, dammit!"

Willow struggled against her restraints, turning the air blue as she fought to escape. She also went for the typical 'brainwashed-propaganda' routine.

"You cannot keep me here! You are vermin! She will destroy you and my brethren will come for me!"

"Who are your 'brethren', Willow?" Lucy asked calmly. "*Marauders* or *Predators*?"

"Fuck the *Predators* – they mean nothing to me!"

"Is that so?" Lucy commented. "If *Predators* mean so little to you, why did you go after Psyche?"

"She destroyed everything that I held dear – she caused my friends to die."

"Friends? *Predator* friends?"

"Stop fucking twisting my words!" Willow exploded.

"What are you?" Lucy demanded.

"As I told that little bitch, I am beyond a mere *Predator*, I am a *Marauder*. I may have been formed in your image, Hit Girl, but I have surpassed you; I am better than you."

Stephanie cringed, and she looked up at Hit Girl.

"I thought *your* ego was bad," she commented before clamping up as Hit Girl growled dangerously.

"I am sorry for what you were put through, Willow. I see that you were only ten-years-old when you were taken – that's a hard six years for you. I know what it's like to lose your childhood and be coerced into something heinous," Hit Girl admitted. "We are here to help you – not to fight you. I know that you need an outlet – we can help you."

Willow appeared to be listening to Hit Girl but then she shook her head.

"NO!"

She began to rant again but then she seized up and the girl screamed out in pain. From her expression, it was in no way faked.

"Out!" Medic ordered as she swept in. "Out, or heads will roll!"

..._...

"Well, that went well!" Stephanie commented as Mindy reappeared from under her mask.

"You have a point, Steph – her ego *is* worse than mine."

"Not by much. . ." Stephanie muttered.

"Do you enjoy being in pain, honey?"

"I have somewhere to be, I'm sure of it," Stephanie stated as she headed down the corridor.

"Strange child!" Mindy growled and then she looked at Lucy. "You grinning?"

"No, ma'am!" Lucy replied.

"You think Stephanie's comment about my ego is funny?"

"A little. . ."

For a moment, Lucy thought that she might have just signed her own death warrant.

"You may be a girl, Lucy, but you have balls! Assuming I don't rip your head off, you might go far."

"Thanks – I think."

The following morning

Wednesday, October 12th

They left Chicago behind in the mid-morning, heading southwest.

Stephanie and Tommy were in the backseat of the Jaguar XJ, talking. Mindy was watching them both and smirking.

"Driver!" Tommy called out. "Eyes front, please."

Mindy opened her mouth to respond but she laughed and concentrated on her driving. They had a fifty-mile drive in total which was expected to take around an hour – or 'Twenty minutes as Mum drives,' Stephanie had quipped before Mindy had flicked her left ear and she had squealed in pain. The drive was otherwise peaceful apart from several bursts of giggling from Stephanie. As the hour drew to a close, they passed directly between the jail and the quarry from which the jail was originally built. They did not stop, but continued past into the city of Joliet for lunch – the plan was to look like innocent tourists – but they were hungry, too.

After Stephanie and Tommy had stuffed themselves stupid – Mindy had filled herself, too – they headed north towards the jail. The place covered a large area on multiple sites. It would be a nightmare to assault – if not impossible. The towering stone walls intended to keep inmates in, were equally good at keeping people out. The same applied to the heavy steel-bound wooden gates and the caged catchment areas.

"Will you two stop with the hand-holding and the snogging!?" Mindy growled and the two pink-faced youngsters sprang apart, grinning.

Mindy found it creepy that her daughter, who was barely eight years her junior, was consorting with a boy. Besides, there was a time and a place for everything and a reconnaissance mission was not the place for hand-holding and snogging.

"I've spotted four guards on patrol," Tommy commented, getting back to the task at hand.

"Yeah – I go with four," Stephanie agreed.

Mindy had noticed the four men dressed as workers in hard hats and high visibility vests. They appeared to be 'maintaining' the area around the jail walls, but for a trained eye, they were patrolling, and they were all armed. Not far from each pair there appeared to be a cache of some sort which probably held heavier weapons. They had also spotted three teenagers, all with their heads shaved. Everything that they saw was being recorded by the ultra-high definition cameras mounted on the Jaguar for later inspection. As they watched, they saw the *Marauders* vanish behind some bushes and through a concealed doorway, hidden by the undergrowth.

FEAR's bolthole had been confirmed. The only problem was, what the hell could they do about it? According to Rachel, there were hundreds in there and storming the place would be very costly and *Fusion* did not have the numbers required for such an endeavour.

"The situation sucks," Tommy voiced for them all.

"We could lose a dozen just assaulting the main gate, let alone the unknown within," Mindy commented darkly.

"I agree," Stephanie said. "If we could sabotage them – a few explosions – it would hit their morale by showing them that they aren't safe from us anywhere."

"My thoughts, exactly!" Mindy said in a tone which showed how proud she was of her daughter. "Tomorrow night, the infiltrators can leave a few *gifts* behind."

..._...

"You have a good trip?" Dave asked on their return.

"Not bad – we found out what we needed to know," Mindy replied. "Stephanie and Tommy enjoyed themselves – hope she isn't pregnant."

"MUM!"

"Did you, or did you not, have your hand on Tommy's crotch?" Mindy demanded of her very embarrassed daughter.

"Maybe . . . yes, okay, I rested my hand on his crotch."

"Did he like it?" Mindy teased.

"Never you mind!" a thoroughly mortified Stephanie growled before vanishing up the stairs.

"Steph sure did enjoy the kissing," Mindy said loudly.

"You are so evil," Dave chuckled.

"Yes, I am."

From up the stairs, Anne-Marie's American twang could be heard chanting.

"Stephanie and Tommy sitting in the tree, K – I – S – S – I – N – G."

"I'd better go and prevent a murder," Dave suggested as he leapt up the stairs, taking them three at a time.

..._...

Mindy and Dave spent a couple of hours going through the footage from the reconnaissance.

Marty and Abby had already done so and between the four of them, they concluded that FEAR had done very well when selecting her hideaway. Nonetheless, they would prepare Hailee and Saoirse for the operation with Shannon and Megan as their backup. Mindy knew that it would be very dangerous and there would be a very high risk to the infiltrator's wellbeing. All four girls had agreed to go – they would never back down; they knew what was at stake. Mindy hated having to split her forces, but it needed to be done. To cover the infiltration, they would have to put on a big show in the city to attract FEAR's attention and Mindy had some ideas for that.

If Mindy could chip away at FEAR's resources, along with those of the Russians and the Sicilians, then they might change Saturday night.

Safehouse Q

They had spent near enough four weeks in their temporary home.

Libby Dade missed her own home, her own room, and her own bed. Jesse was much the same. As for their parents; they were still a little wide-eyed by the new world in which they had found themselves. They had been introduced to the famous – or infamous – Hit Girl and they were being protected by the best that Chicago, and arguably the entire USA, could offer.

Libby and Jesse were working their way, providing their skills to *Fusion* via *Synthesis*. Jesse had been forgiven for causing the forced re-homing in the first place – not that Libby mentioned it very often. For Libby, descending into her world of the Internet and the Dark Web was a suitable distraction from her enforced living away from her home. The opportunity to work on the fastest computers with idols such as Battle Guy and Hal was also worth any degradation in other parts of their lives. *Synthesis* had an ongoing task of attempting to crack FEAR's communications and her own computer network. They scoured the Dark Web following traces of FEAR's activities – they also found the Russians in that dark world, too.

Libby and her *Synthesis* colleague, Kate Bradford, were delving into the lives of the Russians, searching for some way to interrupt their operations.

Sheridan Road

"You ready for tomorrow night?"

"Yes, Daddy – I'll be fine."

"So independent," Patrick Millar mused.

Shannon had been getting grumpy with her father's overbearing posture. Her shoulder slumped.

"Okay – thank you for caring."

"I love you very much, Shannon, despite what I did to your childhood."

"Daddy – we've talked about this; what's done is done and we cannot change the past, so let's just look forwards. I'm enjoying being back with my family and I know that you all love me just as much as I love each one of you."

"You double-check everything – I don't care how special a *Predator* you were."

"Lucy is helping me gear up; she won't let anything happen to me."

"She really helped you, didn't she?"

"Yes, Daddy, she did – I owe her everything and despite everything, I trust her."

"So, do I – you listen to that girl," her father cautioned, and Shannon nodded.

The next evening

Thursday, October 13th

Safehouse F

"You've checked your pistols?"

"Yes."

"Clean?"

"Of course!"

"Operative?"

"Please!"

"Shannon – what have I taught you, exhaustively."

Shannon struggled to control her mounting temper.

"Check, double-check, re-check, then start again," Shannon recited.

"Clever girl!" Lucy grinned as she circled the thirteen-year-old.

"Lucy!"

"Shannon, honey, you're going to be fourteen in five days. I want you to still be alive to celebrate that day."

"I know – you and Dad are really getting on my nerves. I know, you both care about me and he trusts you."

"Ever since a certain nine-year-old turned up stark naked on my doorstep, I've taken care of her – even before I found out who your father was. I protected you and I turned a screwup into an awesome young lady who could kill like she was born to it."

"Yes, you did, Lucy, and I love you for it."

"Now – are your pistols one-hundred-percent?"

"Yes, ma'am. Cleaned, oiled, tested, magazines loaded loosely by me. Knives sharpened, bō-staff sharpened and polished."

"Clean panties?"

"Fresh tampon, too," Shannon grinned.

Lucy laughed. Shannon was very special to her for many reasons and being able to help her out before a mission felt good. Lucy mentally thanked Mindy for allowing her to become part of the team – it was still early days, and Lucy knew that she was being watched, but she felt like she belonged.

"Don't I get the personal touch?" Saoirse asked with a hurt expression.

"You are old enough to sort yourself out, young lady," Lucy pointed out with a smile.

"I know – you ready, Stormy?" Foxtail grinned.

"I am going to slaughter that little brat!" Stormtide scowled.

Joliet

Dave had been out with Marty and they had acquired a pair of beaten-up old panel vans – driving in *Fusion* transport would just alert FEAR via the spies she most definitely had.

Tony Morgan had checked the vehicles over and pronounced them sound. He would be driving the first of the two vans while Emily Edwards would drive the second. Petra and Foxtail would ride with Ares while Stormtide and Wildcat would ride with Athena. Astute and Leon were to provide an extra layer of support as required – they would travel independently of the vans and take up Overwatch positions.

It was going to be a highly-dangerous operation, but it was an essential operation, nonetheless, and both girls knew it.

..._...

Later, that evening, the two vans pulled off the 171 Highway outside of Joliet, one to the left and one to the right.

The van being driven by Ares had turned left off the highway. Ares made several turns before he slowed for just two seconds on Englewood Avenue giving Petra and Foxtail the time they needed to jump from the van. They hit the ground, rolled, and came up onto their feet before they both dived into the undergrowth and made their way into the trees.

"Petra, clear!"

"Foxtail, clear!"

Both girls reported in before they pulled out their NVG gear. The displays came to life and the built-in HUD gave them their course and the display showed them a crystal-clear view of what was ahead of them with a hint of green.

"Heading of 208 degrees," Foxtail said as she took point.

Both girls held the same rank within *Fusion* but Petra, despite being older than Foxtail, deferred to the younger girl due to her more extensive training. The two girls moved off through the dark trees, heading towards the jail, a little over twelve-hundred yards away. The long approach was required to protect the two vigilantes from detection.

The two girls kept up a fast pace, moving quietly, checking their surroundings and covering each other as they went.

Thirty miles to the northwest

South Independence Boulevard

Chicago

The roadblock was made up of nine vehicles blocking both sides of the twin bridges over the 290 Expressway.

"Hey!" one of the men on watch called out. "Something's coming."

The throaty roar echoed down the empty street to the north. Most Chicagoans were safely ensconced in their homes, despite it barely being nine in the evening. As the men gazed down the dark street, a very large dark form moved from streetlight to streetlight.

"Fuck!" another exclaimed. "It's their big fucker!"

As *Titan* advanced toward the roadblock, two more vehicles revealed themselves.

"Shit! Two more armoured vehicles – hidden behind the big one."

Sentinel and *Hound* took up position on either side of *Titan*. A moment later, the men began to crap themselves as *Hound* to *Titan*'s left, moved further over and *Iron Hide* appeared. In the load bed of the truck stood Kick-Ass, his hands on a mounted pair of M134 mini-guns. Two motorcycles finished off the masterful display of power.

"We've got Hit Girl and Mist, too!"

With a burst of flame, two-foot-long, the M134s opened fire with the sound of a dozen chainsaws. Three of the cars were chewed up and one exploded.

"Fuck this; I ain't paid enough for this shit!" the leader yelled as he ran to safety.

..._...

Titan made short work of the remaining vehicles on the southbound bridge, smashing them to one side so that the other vehicles and the motorcycles could tear through.

The men had been hired by the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood to cause mayhem and distract *Fusion*, however, they were slaughtered as the 7.62-millimetre bullets shredded steel and flesh alike. Hit Girl and Mist brought their motorcycles to a halt and they quickly joined the fight with blades and whip. The fight did not last long as the hired mercenaries began to rapidly dissipate under the weight of the intensive firepower which was being brought to bear. The leader of the mercenaries was on his cell phone, reporting to his boss.

"Err, Boss – they smashed straight through and we ain't got no cars left. . ."

"Do you think I give a fucking shit? Go get some more cars, you stupid dumb fuck!"

Three thousand yards to the southwest

"The mercs have just been attacked," Sunset Phoenix.

"Don't tell me," FEAR growled. "It was Hit Girl."

Sunset Phoenix just nodded.

"Get the Corsairs over there," FEAR ordered. "Let's move!"

FEAR jumped into a Humvee and her armour-clad Corsair driver put his foot down while Sunset Phoenix followed along, behind, on her motorcycle.

Joliet

The two armour-clad vigilantes had paused at the old firing range which belonged to the prison.

It was almost totally dark and that aided the two girls as they made their way around the small facility and they made for the railroad tracks. To their right, through the gloom, they could make out the long-abandoned quarry building which stuck up tall and proud with a slightly spooky look in the darkness. With a burst of speed, they crossed the twin railroad tracks and they then took the long route around the annex which was located to the east of the main jail, on their side of the 171 Highway.

They ran forwards, towards an old gas station turned store, taking cover in trees beside the forecourt. The guard towers were occupied, although it was only possible to make out there was somebody in there by using infra-red sensors. As the guard in the closest tower turned away, they both bolted across the highway and into the cover of the imposing jail annex building. With a quick check around the area, Petra fired a small rope cannon which sent a thin rope soaring into the air and down onto the roof of the two-storey annex. While Foxtail kept watch, Petra pulled back on the rope until the grappling hook at the end made secure purchase on the roof.

A minute later, both girls were on the roof and hauling up the line before dropping it down the inside of the annex and the inside of the jail boundary.

South Independence Boulevard

Chicago

"Oh, joy!" Kick-Ass growled.

"Break is over!" Hit Girl announced as everybody sprang to their feet.

Corsairs were spilling out of side-streets as they converged on the Fusion diversionary team.

"I hate the fucking waiting!" FRage called out as he jumped up.

"Time for the fuckin' killin'!" Fury confirmed as she too jumped to her feet.

"Leave some for the rest of us – greedy bitch!" Nightmare suggested.

"Bet I get one first, Fury," Cut-Throat challenged.

"Show some decorum, please!" Hit Girl chuckled. "I *always* get the first kill."

"Full of herself, ain't she?" Cut-Throat declared to Kick-Ass who just shrugged.

"Move it!" Shadow announced as she ran forwards with Nightmare close behind.

The fight started in earnest, with Hit Girl drawing first blood, closely followed by Fury.

"Try to keep up, Hit Girl!" she yelled as she attacked the next *Corsair*.

"God, I hate *Predators*!" Hit Girl growled as she artfully drove her blade into a man's heart, cutting through his armour, like a knife through butter.

Rage and Fury covered each other as they dived into the hoards of *Corsairs* as they came together and made for

Fusion. Then Hit Girl smirked behind her mask as she saw FEAR arrive along with the pink abortion.

"Oh, how sweet!" Sunset Phoenix preened. "Hit Girl's brought the kiddies!"

Rage and Fury did not take kindly to being referred to as 'kiddies' and they both made for the pink princess.

"She is *such* a cock!" Fury growled as she parried away the incoming blade with her bō-staff, spinning so that Rage could lay his Messer sword on the bitch.

Sunset Phoenix screamed out in pain as the sword struck her armour and she caught Rage on his back with her double-bladed ninja sword staff sending the boy reeling. Shadow cut in, clashing blades with the pink-clad menace and driving her back, away from Rage and Fury. Shadow hated it when the younger members of *Fusion* were targeted – irrelevant of whether those younger members enjoyed being targeted or not.

Fury was annoyed at having her trophy removed from her grasp by Shadow but rather than let it get to her, she just hacked off a *Corsair's* leg instead.

Joliet

It was ominously quiet.

It was also obvious that they were not expecting an assault on the facility – FEAR probably assumed that her facility would never be discovered. Foxtail did not trust FEAR and she never took anything for granted. Both she and Petra moved slowly but purposefully towards the main building, located just inside the east wall of the jail. Just as they reached the wall, they froze as a door opened and two youngsters spilled out into the darkness. They were chatting animatedly as they left the dining hall and they headed directly towards what used to be the jail commissary.

Foxtail darted forwards and she caught the door before it clicked shut.

..._...

Inside, they found that FEAR had not wasted any money on redecorating – the place reeked of damp and the paint was mainly in flakes on the floor instead of on the walls and ceiling.

The same care had gone into the lighting which was spotty to say the least – not that the pair minded; it assisted them in their stealth as they made their way towards what used to be the three-storey hospital building. Infra-red had shown a concentration of bodies in the building, so it was probably where most of the *Corsairs* and *Marauders* lived. They followed a long corridor which led past a large dining hall – with several kids and adults stuffing their faces – and on a bit further before they paused. There was some form of a ruckus going on a few doors down. As the pair came closer, they were able to hear the words.

"I didn't *do* anything – get your fucking hands off me!"

As they approached, they stopped as soon as they could see through a partly opened doorway where there was a bad scene evolving before them. A young girl, of maybe seventeen, was being hounded by seven teenaged youths, all with shaven heads - *Marauders*. The girl did not appear to be a *Marauder*; she had long blonde hair which was tied up in a ponytail for a start. The girl was being forced up against a wall by six of the kids while a seventh stood off to one side.

"What's she supposed to have done?" the seventh demanded.

"Hey, Zealous – we caught her accessing a secure computer terminal," another voice replied.

"You know *who* she is, don't you, Defiant?"

"She was copying data onto a USB stick – she tried to hide it, but I got it."

"My sister will hear of this!" the first voice growled.

To Foxtail, the voice was somehow familiar.

"Oh, yes, she *will* hear of this – you betrayed FEAR and she *will* kill you," Defiant responded, his tone full of glee.

"You, Dread, you are fucking finished!"

..._...

"Dread!" Foxtail growled – now that was a target worth taking out. "Let's take 'em down, Petra!"

"On your six, Foxy!"

Foxy growled at the comment as she drew her twin Butterfly swords while Petra drew a pair of Tanto blades from her back. They both moved quickly, Petra kicking open the door and Foxtail diving into the room. The nearest *Marauder*, a girl, never knew what hit her as Foxtail drove the hilt of one of her swords into the side of her head – she dropped like a sack of potatoes. Her compatriots turned on the two attackers and a vicious fight ensued. To a *Marauder*, they each drew a blade from various places and they moved to attack. It was seven against two as the pony-tailed girl had also drawn a blade and moved into an attack position.

Foxtail and Petra had both been briefed by Hit Girl to keep any killing to the adult *Corsairs*, and where possible, to incapacitate the *Marauders*. Foxtail had agreed, as if things had turned out differently, she might very well have ended up as a *Marauder* – even Psyche had conceded that point for herself, too. However, the *Marauder's* had only brought knives to what was really a sword fight, so they were overreached in a big way. Petra flipped a young girl over and ensured that she smacked her head into the wooden floor – enough to knock her out but not enough to cause any permanent injury. Foxtail was taking them down two at a time as a boy and another girl received strikes to the heads simultaneously putting both out cold. Foxtail was then physically thrown across the room by a large boy who appeared more than a little angry.

"Foxtail!" he growled as he kicked Foxtail back down as she tried to regain her feet.

Foxtail's armour protected her, and she fought the boy who was remarkably strong which gave him an edge – only he was a boy and that fact was confirmed when an armoured gauntlet found something delicate, a pair actually, and the boy yelled out in agony before Foxtail put him out cold with a punch to his face. The final pair went down to Petra leaving Dread backing up against a wall. Foxtail drew one of her Beretta Px4 Storm Compact Type pistols and screwed on a suppressor – Dread had to die. The veteran *Fusion* vigilante raised the pistol up towards the supposed leader of the *Marauders* and she aimed directly at the bitch's cringing face.

She squeezed the trigger.

South Racine Avenue and South Blue Island Avenue

The bullet struck the police officer dead centre in his chest.

The nine-millimetre round was what cops colloquially referred to as a cop-killer; the bullet was designed to pierce body armour and therefore, the round was illegal, but that was no consolation to Sergeant Paul Murphy as the bullet tore through his high-end body armour, clothing, his body, and then the reverse as it powered out of his back and continued on its way into the brick structure of the 12th District headquarters, a dozen yards beyond.

His sternum was smashed and both lungs were punctured causing blood to erupt from his mouth as he fell to the road. The bastard, who had fired the deadly round, was falling to the ground a mere second later, his head mushrooming into a cloud of blood, bone, and brain matter as Sergeant Sam Fellowes fired off three rounds from his Glock. Once the man was down, and while keeping the suspect covered, he keyed his radio.

"Ten-One, squad! Officer down, South Racine and South Blue Island! Suspect, code nine!"

Joliet

The girl stared into the gaping muzzle and then past it into the dark brown and light orange mask which obscured the wearer's features – only one thing might save her life at that moment, and she hoped that the vigilante before her had been well briefed.

"Stardust! Stardust!"

The codewords registered on Foxtail's brain and her eyes went wide as she instinctively tipped up her pistol just as her finger squeezed the trigger, sending the bullet into the wall an inch above Kelly's head. Kelly breathed out in relief as she sagged to the ground amidst the fallen *Marauders*. Petra had frozen at the codewords and she was trying to figure out what the hell was going on and what to do next.

Foxtail holstered her pistol and she reached down to the girl whom she had almost shot dead.

South Independence Boulevard

Chicago

Hit Girl was feeling more than a little pleased with herself as FEAR and her cohorts retreated down a side street.

Amongst the fallen bodies, another body stood out, its body armour like a beacon amongst the dark greys of the *Corsairs*. Hit Girl strode over, and she rolled Sunset Phoenix over onto her back. Finally, one of their adversaries was no more. Then Hit Girl heard something, and the lips moved imperceptibly below the mask,

"Medic!" Hit Girl bellowed.

Then everything began to happen, all at once.

"*Hit Girl!*" Hal called over the communications.

"Go ahead."

"*We have an officer down outside 12th District – it's Murphy.*"

"Fuck!" Hit Girl breathed at the revelation.

"*We've also had a report from Joliet – Stardust.*"

"Fuck!"

"*Foxtail and Petra are making their escape with Stardust.*"

"Send in Wildcat and Stormtide – ensure Stardust is kept safe; delouse and bring her to Foxtrot," Hit Girl ordered.

Beyond the increasingly distressed vigilante, Medic was hard at work with Mist and Hawk as they stabilised Sunset Phoenix for transport in *Titan*.

Joliet

Foxtail moved towards the door, leading Dread, but then Dread pulled away and she ran over towards a boy lying on the floor.

Petra moved to intercept Dread who raised her hands.

"He has something of mine – please."

"Slowly," Petra warned.

Dread knelt down beside the boy and she rapidly frisked him before grinning broadly as she held up a USB drive.

"My sister's plans for 'global domination!'"

"Let's move, Dread. . ." Petra announced.

"That is not my name – I am Fortune from this point on."

"Okay, Fortune – we need to move," Petra directed as Foxtail checked the corridor, outside.

"Clear!" Foxtail announced as she moved out into the corridor.

Fortune followed with Petra guarding their behind. The three girls ran down the corridor towards the exit. Before they could reach it, two *Corsairs* appeared out of the dining room without warning directly in between Foxtail and Fortune. Without hesitation, Fortune took out the closest man, snapping his neck with a loud snapping sound. The other man fell to Petra.

"I hate those bastards!" Fortune exclaimed as she glared down at the dead man.

"Let's move, girl!"

..._...

Wildcat and Stormtide broke cover and they made for the jail.

They were both a little confused to find that there would be an additional person to exfiltrate, but that was the name of the game and they could cope with undocumented changes. The two vigilantes paused under the cover of the last trees beside the castellated gatehouse of the jail. Two hundred yards to the south, Ares waited in his panel van, with Athena in the other van, two hundred yards to the north of the jail. They were all ready to assist in the extraction as soon as their colleagues requested help. Wildcat was itching for some action – there was a bloodlust building within her which needed attention, and soon.

Stormtide had her own bloodlust but for very different reasons – her past had given her a lust for killing which she had been able to fulfil while in London, however, the lust was being satisfied but only so far under her new regime as a *Fusion* vigilante.

"You ready, partner?" Wildcat asked as they waited.

"Always, Miss Wildcat."

Shannon and Megan got on well together. Neither knew why, but they enjoyed each other's company and they were comfortable when together as a team, fighting the enemy. At first, Shannon had felt considerably superior to the younger girl – Megan was not yet twelve and she had nowhere near the training that Shannon, a *Predator*, had under her belt – but events had taken care of that and Megan's skills, not to mention her courage, were obvious. Stephanie had assured Shannon that just because they had not been trained as *Predators*, did not mean that the younger members of *Fusion* were not fully capable.

"Any idea on our extra body?"

"Not a damn clue!" Stormtide replied.

"Where the fuck are they? Surprised they haven't been detected. . .?"

Wildcat was interrupted by the sound of shouting coming from within the compound.

"Never mind," Wildcat growled as she broke cover and made for the exterior annex wall.

..._...

Back within the jail walls, things had gone a little bit awry.

"I think we have company," Fortune pointed out as six *Corsairs* and three *Marauders* came running towards them from another building.

Pistols appeared, and the ground around the feet of the three girls began to react to the bullets striking it, sending puffs of dirt and grass into the air. Foxtail and Petra engaged with their own pistols, but the *Corsairs* and *Marauders* were finding good cover which neither Foxtail nor Petra could impinge from where they were. Neither could they escape without being shot and their accomplice wore no armour.

"Overwatch – a little help here!" Petra called over the comms.

"By your command, Petra," came the cryptic response.

..._...

A little over a thousand yards to the northeast, Leon was comfortably placed to assist on one of the very few stable high-points for miles.

Her optics allowed her to see directly into the compound and the nine warm bodies might as well have been floodlit for all the darkness mattered. She targeted the *Corsairs*, steadying her breathing, just as three moved forwards and they crossed over. With a smirk, she squeezed the trigger.

"Bet you never did that, Leon," she muttered to herself.

..._...

Foxtail was stunned to see three *Corsairs* suddenly fall forwards and drop to the ground before lying still. She had heard the muted rifle round, but only one – *three* with a *single* shot?

"Damn!" she growled.

A head exploded on the shoulders of another *Corsair* drenching a nearby *Marauder* with blood and a lot of other bodily crap. The *Marauder* fell back, disorientated but diving for cover, as were his compatriots. The chaotic environment allowed Foxtail and Petra to get Fortune up the rope and onto the of the annex. Petra followed behind while Foxtail covered. Then with Petra providing covering fire, Foxtail scaled the same wall before yanking up the rope and throwing it over the other side, towards safety.

"*Fire in the hole!*"

Petra yanked Fortune down to the roof just as the guard tower to their left exploded seconds after a loud whooshing sound came to an end. Stone, tiles, glass, and body parts rained down all around the girls. Petra covered Fortune with her own body and armour to protect her from the fiery shrapnel.

"*Southeast tower disabled,*" came Astute's terse explanation.

Foxtail shoved Fortune to the roof edge and handed her the rope.

"Go – others will meet you on the ground."

Fortune vanished over the edge, rapidly roping down the side of the annex and glad to finally have solid ground back under her feet.

"This way," an electronically enhanced voice growled out of the darkness.

Fortune recognised Wildcat and one other, following them both towards the parking lot. With a squeal of tyres, a panel van appeared from beyond some trees and headed directly for them, coming to a halt, the side door open. Fortune was bundled inside, followed by Wildcat and Stormtide.

"Ares is loaded – we're outta here – three pax!"

Just as Ares exited the parking lot, another panel van appeared. Foxtail and Petra dived through the open side door and that van followed the first.

"*Athena loaded and heading north – two pax.*"

An hour later

Safehouse M

The woman had been stripped enroute within the confines of Hound.

Her wounds were not serious, but her armour and weapons were all removed and encased in Faraday bags to protect from trackers. Nonetheless, she was being held in a secure steel facility which blocked all communication and electronic signals. The, as yet unidentified, woman was young, maybe nineteen-years-old. Apart from the large bruise on her forehead, she was very beautiful. Hit Girl's blade had pierced the woman's armour and driven into her left side, narrowly missing anything important.

For added security, she was strapped to the hospital bed while Medic treated her wounds. They had searched her armour and weapons, but they had found but one thing which pointed towards anything. Around her right wrist, there was a simple silver bracelet inscribed with a name: *Kara*. That got Hit Girl thinking – that name had cropped up some months before around the time that Stephanie had been attacked while in the hospital.

Her finger prints were being run at that very moment.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Stephanie and Mindy entered unsure of what they might find.

They found Rachel Murphy struggling to keep it together while Abigail and Brad sat on chairs, hugging each other for comfort. Stephanie made straight for her former nemesis and allowed her to sob on her shoulder for several minutes. Mindy did her best talking with Rachel, but Mindy was not the best when it came to major-league emotional scenes. Her husband was in surgery being operated on by the best the hospital had – his chances were slim, but they were going to do everything possible to ensure that two kids did not lose their father.

As far as Abigail was concerned, Paul Murphy was her Dad, and that was what she was calling him. Just as she was getting her life back together, the ten-year-old – she was to be eleven in just a few hours – now faced her life being torn apart. She was angry that despite her skills, she could not have prevented the attack on a man she respected and looked up to.

"I finally had what I wanted, Steph; I had a Dad, just like you."

"I know, Abigail, I know. He'll pull through, I know it," Stephanie replied.

Despite their past, Stephanie wanted only the best for her former enemy. Abigail was a great girl, now they had got to know each other as friends rather than as two damaged children determined to destroy one another.

"Whatever you need, Abigail, I'll be there for you."

Mindy was angry. The city needed to be brought back under control, and soon, to prevent such a disastrous event from reoccurring. Rachel needed to stay at the hospital, so Mindy had suggested she take the two kids back with them. On the way out of the hospital, Brad stopped Mindy and he glared up at her through his tears.

"I want in."

"Welcome, Rapier," Mindy replied.

***Chapter 346*: Interlude**

Author's Note: *This chapter brings the total words for all my stories to 2,000,000!*

Friday, October 14th, 2016

Glenview

The following morning was not all that much fun.

Being Abigail's eleventh birthday, the day should have been full of joy, only it was one of sadness and apprehension. Abigail had not slept well, and she looked a mess when she found her way down to the kitchen along with a tired looking Stephanie.

"Happy Birthday, Abigail," Mindy said with a supportive smile.

"Thank you, Mindy," Abigail replied as she sat down at the table in the kitchen and proceeded to stare out of the window.

Horatio jumped up onto her lap and he curled up with a muted meow. Abigail forced a smile and she stroked the feline who was now more cat than kitten. Dave placed a plate of pancakes down in front of each of the two girls who dived in with gusto. Brad arrived next, his eyes red. He went straight over to Abigail and he gave her a hug.

"Happy Birthday," he said.

"Thanks, Brad."

"Your Mom rang," Dave advised the two youngsters. "Your dad is out of surgery and in ICU."

"Will we be able to see him?" Brad asked.

"Maybe, later – we need to wait and see what the doctors say."

..._...

After breakfast, Mindy sought out Brad and Abigail, drawing them into her study.

"Abigail, I know you're looking forward to tomorrow, but if you want to withdraw. . ."

"No, Mindy, I need to be doing something. Besides, it looks like I have a useless runt to train," Abigail replied coldly with a smirk in the direction of her step-brother.

"Okay," Mindy said. "I had to ask."

"Thanks, I know," Abigail replied.

Safehouse F

Level 0

They had left the barred door to the cell open, but the outer door was locked.

After two stops on the way back to Chicago – during one stop, Kelly had suffered the indignity of a very thorough, but familiar, strip search performed by Foxtail, before she was handed a set of joggers and a black hood – they had stopped, and Kelly had been hauled out. The hood had been removed after she had been guided down a set of steel steps, which had been very cold under her bare feet, and then into her 'cell'.

"Welcome," an electronic voice offered. "There's some food and drink for you. Get a good night's rest."

Then the door had been pulled closed behind her. The food had actually been really good, and she had slept well.

..._...

On waking, she had sat on the bunk awaiting a visitor - it had not taken long.

"Good morning, Kelly, hope you slept well."

Kelly examined her visitor who had breezed in through the door with a big smile on her face.

"Come with me – I'll show you where you can clean up and I've got some clothes for you."

Kelly followed the girl with long, light brown hair who appeared to be full of energy. They emerged into a large cavern.

..

"Holy, shit!" Kelly breathed as she took in the towering rock roof above her.

"We'll get to that, later . . . oh, I'm Lauren, by the way."

"Hi."

Lauren led Kelly to a far corner and then into a bathroom.

"Go take a shower and get cleaned up – I'll get your clothes together."

..._...

"I hope we got your sizes right," Lauren called out while Kelly showered. "I picked out the colours, so I hope you like them."

"I'm sure they'll be fine," Kelly called back as she finished rinsing her hair.

To Kelly, it was all part of some dream. Just the previous evening, she had been rescued from certain death by people who she saw as friends – did they see *her* the same way? Kelly took her time, enjoying the hot shower. For a few moments, she stopped to consider immediate events, then she spared a thought for her sister – what was she feeling?

Did she even care?

Joliet

To say that FEAR was pissed would be the understatement of the century.

On her return to the facility, she had lost control completely, as evidenced by the four dead *Corsairs* and the two dead *Marauders*. Their explanations, concerning the infiltration and the taking of her sister, had not gone down well with FEAR. Her sister was her life and her sister was gone. The two dead *Marauders* had come forward with some story about Dread going rogue. Their admission had resulted in their deaths.

FEAR swore vengeance on Hit Girl, she swore to find her sister, to get her back.

Safehouse F

"You done?"

Kelly looked up to see Lauren peering into the shower and she instinctively tried to cover herself. Lauren laughed.

"I've seen it all before, Kelly – I'm Nightmare, by the way."

Kelly scowled as she dropped her hands.

"Yeah – you had a thing for my snatch," Kelly commented dryly as she grabbed a towel.

"Sorry," Lauren offered honestly.

"No harm done," Kelly grinned as she dried herself off.

The Battle Bunker

"I've found the link!"

Mindy chuckled at Marty's geeky expression of success.

"Okay – bear with me. The prints came back to one Summer Frasier – retrieved her Drivers Licence and guess where she lives?"

"Que us in," Dave said as the image of a young woman appeared on a large screen.

"2275 Winnetka Avenue, Glenview – almost exactly 80 yards from your front door.

"What!" Mindy exclaimed.

"You know you do you little 3.5 miles run a couple times each week? Well, you run straight past her front door."

"Fuck!" Mindy exclaimed.

"Okay – Summer Frasier. Born November 18th, 1998 – aged eighteen. Lives alone. parents are dead – they went missing March 2011 and they were found dead a few months later – a single bullet to each head. Miss Frasier was twelve when they went missing and she had been away with relatives in Canada at the time. Dug a little deeper and I found out Miss Frasier had a younger sister. That girl went missing at the same time as her parents – she was nine-years-old, and her name was Kara Frasier."

"Get on with it, Marty!" Mindy exclaimed, the suspense getting to her.

"Did some searching through the *Urban Predator* data and I found a Kara Frasier. Her name had been subsequently changed to Kara Newton which was why we had trouble finding her. She was also missing from current *Urban Predator* records as she died in 2014. According to those records, Kara Newton was murdered on October 12th of that year – she was murdered by a younger girl during a fight in a shower. Ring any bells?"

"Stephanie!" Mindy exclaimed.

"She's quick today!" Marty quipped.

Mindy growled dangerously, so Marty sped up his presentation.

"I sent Abby and Mathilda over to her address – her house keys were in her suit. Well, in the basement, they found a 'Stephanie Walker Must Die' wall. It appears that Sunset Phoenix AKA Summer Frasier had a thing about Stephanie and wanted her dead. There is a good case for her being the sniper who shot Stephanie, too."

Mindy was silent as the thoughts of Stephanie and the memories of the young girl's struggle for life flooded through her mind. She could see Stephanie bleeding in her arms. She could see Stephanie dying, again and again, in the hospital.

Had they finally caught the person behind Stephanie's suffering?

Training Facility Echo

Level 0

"This place is unbelievable!"

"You enjoying yourself, Kelly?"

Kelly turned to see a girl coming towards her.

"Hi, I'm Chloe – you knew me as Shadow."

"Another one who had a thing about my snatch!" Kelly growled.

"No comment," Chloe chuckled. "Let me show you around."

That afternoon

Level 3

After a lot of thought, Mindy decided it was time for Stephanie to be told about Summer Frasier.

Mindy found her daughter sitting with Saoirse in the capacious armoury, cleaning their pistols. They were both giggling about something which was fine with Mindy; anything which gave Stephanie a distraction from recent events was good. For Mindy, seeing the short hair was an instant reminder of those events, and after almost a year, seeing Stephanie without her ponytail just seemed weird and wrong.

"Hi, Mum."

"Steph – got a moment?"

"Yes."

"You want me to go?" Saoirse asked.

"No – I think you can help with this, Saoirse – why don't you come around and sit next to Steph," Mindy suggested.

Once Saoirse had moved, Mindy continued.

"Something has come up concerning Sunset Phoenix. We've identified her, and we believe we might have found out why she is fighting *Fusion* and why she may have had a hand in you getting shot, Steph."

"Okay," Stephanie replied as she subconsciously rubbed her right shoulder.

"Would the name, 'Kara Newton', mean anything to either of you?"

Stephanie's eyes closed, and her hands balled into fists. Saoirse scowled, and she looked up at Mindy with anger in her eyes. For Stephanie, it was the cue for a vicious flashback of a fight that she had never expected to survive, let alone win. She remembered the water, the spray, the hard tile walls and floor. She remembered the other *Predators* baying for blood. She remembered the anger she felt towards her adversary. She remembered the pain as she was punched and thrown to the tile floor. Between the water from the shower and the tears in her eyes, it had been difficult to see what was going on around her. She remembered punching out at the other girl, striking wherever she could, searching for the more sensitive areas of the other girl who was just as naked as Stephanie was.

Stephanie remembered the anger as she had forced the older, bigger girl down to the tiles and begun to punch her in the face, the chest, the face, the chest. Then as Kara Newton had begun to lose consciousness, Stephanie had seized her head and smashed it repeatedly into the tile floor . . . again . . . again . . . again . . . until bright red blood had begun to flow in huge amounts across the tiles, gurgling into the drain.

Kara Newton had never moved again.

"Yes, that name means a lot to me," Stephanie replied after almost two minutes. "That was the girl I killed in the shower. That was the kill which gained me my codename: Psyche. That was the single event which stopped the bullying, but which also thrust me into the spotlight."

"I had never seen so much blood in one place," Saoirse said slowly as she rested her hand on Stephanie's. "At the time, I had hoped that Stephanie was the one who had died, but she was just a victim of circumstance. Kids were bullied. Kids bullied. It was a fact of life as a *Predator*. Stephanie made a lot of enemies that day, only many of them were too scared to stand up to the little eight-year-old. Some saw her reward as giving Stephanie Walker carte blanche to kill again – so everybody left her alone; including me."

"So, why are you dredging all this shit up, Mindy?" Stephanie asked.

"Kara Newton was previously Kara Frasier. Sunset Phoenix is Summer Frasier. Kara was her younger sister. Somehow, she received her sister's *Urban Predator* file, including details on her death. Abby and Mathilda found it when they searched Frasier's house. There were autopsy photos of Kara after you killed her. I saw the photos and while I knew what you had done – seeing the results . . ."

"I did go to town on her," Stephanie admitted.

An hour later

Safehouse M

Stephanie paused at the door for a moment before pushing it open.

Summer Frasier was conscious and sitting up in the bed. Standing beside her was Medic. Stephanie was not wearing a mask, although Mindy and Saoirse were, as was Medic. Frasier's expression changed as she recognised Stephanie from the photos which she had studied and from the view through her sniper scope, some months before.

"You!"

"I used to be Stephanie Walker. I killed your sister."

"I know. That is why you had to die."

"I am sorry for what I did – I did not set out to kill her. To this day, I have no idea how I managed it. Right up until the moment that I killed your sister, I was bullied. I was bullied for being seven. I was bullied for being small. I was bullied for speaking with an English Accent. I was bullied for being British. I was bullied for crying myself to sleep at night. I was bullied for being a girl. I was bullied for being me. I was bullied just for existing. I did not choose to be there and neither did the girl I knew as Kara Newton."

Tears were spilling down Stephanie's cheeks.

"May I chip in?" Foxtail asked.

"Foxtail? What the hell has this got to do with you?" Frasier demanded.

"I was a Predator, just like Stephanie. I was there. I missed the fight, but I saw the aftermath. I saw Stephanie standing there, naked and covered in blood, with the girl we knew as Kara Newton dead at her feet. Kara bullied Stephanie a lot. So, did I, whenever I could. If I had gone to shower five minutes earlier, then it might have been me who pushed Stephanie over the edge. I would have liked nothing better than to torment the girl. In that case, I would have been dead ay her hands. We were all bullied – me, Kara, everyone there. It's no defence, but there is no guarantee that Kara would be alive today or survived her training. There were many nasty ways for a *Predator* to die. Believe it or not, Stephanie suffered for what she did. While we were all too scared to bait her, the instructors took over and they pushed her and pushed her. They didn't care if she died, nobody did, they just wanted a product that could do their bidding. Stephanie was just a victim, just as much as your sister. I was a victim too, plus hundreds more."

"If I could go back, I would probably kill her again. I had no choice. I look back and there were so many times that I wish I could have taken my own life, only I was too chicken," Stephanie offered when Foxtail had finished her speech.

Summer Frasier considered everything she had been told, looking at Stephanie, then Foxtail, and finally at Hit Girl.

"I don't want excuses. You killed my little sister. I don't care what she was or what she had done. I don't care that you 'had no choice'. The fact remains – you killed my Kara and for that you are going to pay, Stephanie Walker. I will pursue you. I will hunt you. I will destroy you and everything which you hold dear. I will never rest. NEVER! YOU – WILL – DIE! I WILL NOT STOP. I DON'T CARE IF IT TAKES ME THE REST OF MY LIFE . . . BUT YOU – WILL - DIE!"

"Foxtail!" Medic ordered. "Get her outta here!"

Foxtail grabbed the sobbing Stephanie and she hauled her out of the room.

..._...

It took several minutes for Stephanie to calm down.

Foxtail was furious with Hit Girl for putting her friend through that.

"Don't blame, Mum," Stephanie said. "She was hoping I might get closure. I hoped so, too. I was foolish enough to expect forgiveness."

"Despite everything you can do, Steph, you are still barely in double figures. There is so much which you cannot hope to grasp. Not your fault; you are young."

"Everybody wants to kill me. Newton. You. Her. Why does the world hate me so much?"

"As Saoirse said, you did not bring this upon yourself," Mindy said as she pulled off her mask once the door was firmly closed behind her. "Nobody that matters, hates you, Stephanie. Anybody that matters, loves you."

Stephanie grinned.

That evening

Safehouse E

Sub-Level 8 Room 22

Nobody was going out – they could not afford for anybody to get hurt.

It seemed that FEAR and her friends were staying home, too. Nobody was complaining as it gave everybody time to prepare for the fight of their lives. Mindy and Dave had talked long about adding to their ranks and both had come to the same decision.

"Ember?"

"Hit Girl."

Rachel turned to see Hit Girl standing at the door to the room where she had been recuperating. She had been allowed to get out of bed and she even had clothes to wear.

"Can I trust you?"

"Yes."

Rachel flinched as Hit Girl removed her mask. She knew that seeing Hit Girl's face was a route from which there was to be no return.

"You can call me, Mindy. We have a major battle ahead of us and I need boots on the ground. I would like to offer you a place on our team as an Operator."

"I'm not in any condition to fight," Rachel pointed out.

"I want you in the Battle Bunker with Battle Guy and Hal."

"You would trust me?"

"You put a foot wrong, you get a bullet in the head," Mindy offered with a nasty grin.

"That's fair."

"I'll send Abigail and Jamie to show you around."

Training Facility Echo

Level 0

"Hi, Lucy, what's up?" Shannon asked her friend.

"I'm looking for the evil one."

"That would be me," Mindy chuckled as she emerged from the Battle Bunker.

Shannon laughed.

"Glad you could make it, Lucy – come with me," Mindy suggested as she made her way towards the elevator.

"Nice knowing you, Luc!" Shannon called out.

"Is she kidding?" Lucy asked but Mindy just smirked as she pressed the button beside the steel doors. "I mean it – should I be worried?"

"Probably."

The doors closed, and Mindy pressed the 'LEVEL 3' button.

Level 3

"You can be so damn infuriating!"

Lucy was getting annoyed with Mindy. Being taken down into the bowels to God only knew where by Hit Girl worried the veteran *Predator* more than a little. They exited the elevator into the main equipment store.

"Nice!" Lucy commented as her eyes took in all the equipment piled on racks.

Mindy led her over to the armoury, to the left and beyond the shelving. With a swipe of her access card, Mindy shoved open the heavy steel door, waving Lucy inside. Lucy stepped forwards as directed and her eyes went wide as she saw every conceivable weapon system and then some. Mindy moved towards a table in the centre of the room where two sets of body armour were laid out on a table. Mindy pointed to the left-hand set.

"Piranha – your new armour; use it well."

"Mindy . . . I . . ."

"I am going to trust you – besides, I need somebody with your skills; I don't have any choice: don't let me down."

"You're really scraping the bottom of the barrel, huh?"

"Oh, yeah!" Hit Girl growled.

..._...

There was a buzzing sound and Mindy looked up at a screen before pressing a button to release the access door.

"Hey, Lucy!"

Lucy turned to see Jamie and Abigail heading towards her with Rachel.

"Hello, Lucy," Rachel offered, a little stiffly.

"You look a little better," Lucy offered.

"I'm coping."

The door opened again, and Chloe entered, followed by . . .

"What is *she* doing here?" Rachel demanded as she recognised Kelly. "You know who she is?"

"Yes," Mindy said quickly. "She reports to me. She was a mole in FEAR's organisation."

"Hello, Raider," Kelly said.

"I am Ember – *not* that name," Rachel pointed out nastily.

"Sorry," Kelly tried.

"So, you're a turncoat, are you?" Rachel asked.

"I offered myself to Mindy when I found out what my sister was – who she was."

"We pulled Kelly out, Thursday night," Chloe explained. "I know you two won't see eye to eye, but the past is the past and we cannot change that. Please, you must learn to trust one another and look forward instead of back."

"She has a point, I suppose," Rachel said. "I've accepted Lucy, why not you?"

"Kelly goes by Fortune, now," Mindy said. "Speaking of which – Fortune, your new combat suit."

"Cool!"

"Let's get you both changed," Chloe suggested as she grabbed Lucy and her new combat suit while Mindy assisted Kelly.

Jamie looked up at Rachel.

"We have body armour you can use, plus a mask – at least until your real combat suit is ready. You will, however, need a weapon – take your pick."

Rachel gazed around the armoury, then focussed on the racks of pistols. She pulled a few off and checked them over, feeling them in her hand. She was surprised to be trusted with a weapon – it had only been a week.

She finally selected a pistol she liked, and she began to field-strip it.

..._...

"Kelly – you feel up to fighting your sister's forces?" Mindy asked as Kelly tried on her new combat suit.

"I need to end this."

"It won't be easy, but we're all there for you."

"Thanks."

Kelly finished pulling on the combat suit and then turned to look in the full-length mirror. She was stunned. The suit appeared skin-tight but wasn't. It was black with dark blue markings on the arms and legs. The mask covered her entire face and the eyes glowed the same dark blue. Around her waist, a dark blue utility belt held a pair of SIG Sauer P229 Legion compact pistols along with the usual *Fusion* fittings. On each thigh, below the pair of pistols which sat on her hips, were a trio of titanium throwing knives. Her right calf held a scabbard in which a Fairburn-Sykes fighting knife sat. On her back, a twenty-inch Gladius sword sat in a scabbard angled over to her right shoulder. At the top her chest, a clip was mounted so she could clip on a P90 Personal Defence Weapon.

"I don't know what to say," Fortune commented as she turned and twisted.

"Go and try it out . . . just don't kill anybody," Mindy suggested.

Level 0

Everything stopped when Fortune set foot out of the elevator.

Megan, Annabelle, Anne-Marie, and Lizzie were training nearest the elevator and they stared at the sight of a new vigilante. Her armour was of a new design which none of them had seen before, but they were impressed. Fortune had barely set foot on the mat when the elevator doors opened again, and several people emerged. First Mindy stepped out, followed by Jamie and then Abigail. Rachel appeared, a pistol in a holster on her left hip. Behind them came another armour-clad individual with Chloe closing off the group.

The armour was very similar to that which Fortune wore, only, the markings were a vivid opal colour. The weapons were the same and although Piranha was taller, the two complimented one another well. Space was cleared on the mat to allow both vigilantes to test their new suits and get used to them prior to the following day's activities. For some, it was the first time seeing Lucy in action. Mindy knew that Lucy had been keeping fit in her apartment, so the impromptu sparring should not be an issue for the senior *Predator*. For Mindy, it was crucial that other members of *Fusion* were able to see Piranha and Fortune at work and to see what they were capable of when engaged in a fight.

First, the pair of them limbered up with some basic martial arts movements to test out the flexibility of the combat suits. The pair made a good team as they exchanged blows which appeared to increase in force and speed. Some

knew Kelly from D-JAK and they knew that she was very skilled. Though few knew Lucy, they all assumed her to be highly skilled due to what she was and the training which she had endured. Those *Fusion* members who were not *Predators* were always cautious about sparring with those that were as they were unrelenting with their stamina and skills.

Once they were warmed up, the swords were drawn, and the pair worked up their movements, starting slow and working up to fast movements. The cold steel clashed and echoed around the concrete facility entralling everybody who was watching. Chloe and Joshua were impressed as they watched for mistakes of which there were very few. After twenty minutes, Mindy called a halt to the proceedings. Both girls pulled off their masks and allowed their sweat-soaked hair to get some air. There was a round of applause for their sparring to which both girls grinned.

"Lucy and Kelly will be fighting tomorrow," Mindy explained. "Piranha and Fortune will join the teams and I expect them to be treated properly, irrelevant of past actions."

Mindy glared at the *Predators* present and they all nodded.

"Lucy is one of us and we've all put our past behind us," Shannon pointed out. "She is very welcome."

Glenview

"I wish I could be there with you."

"I know, honey, I really do. You will be with us, but not on the streets – I have put you with Ryan, so you take part. I expect you to be masked and suited with your weapons. If you feel you can join in and the situation arises, then I will not object to you seeing some action. I know you are still in pain; I can see it in your eyes."

"It still hurts but I can fight through the pain."

"I know you can, but I don't want you to. Your siblings will be out on the streets and they will fight well, I know it."

"I'm going to be speaking with them, next."

..._...

Stephanie headed straight upstairs to where her younger siblings were getting ready for bed.

She made straight for Danny's room where she found the boy sitting on his bed, in his pyjamas, reading a book on gun maintenance. She looked upwards, at Jamie's room up above.

"Jamie!" she called out. "Down here, now!"

Jamie scrambled off his bed immediately and made his way down the spiral staircase to Danny's room. The boy recognised the tone of his sister's voice and it brooked no argument. In the weeks since he had been with Stephanie, he had learnt the hard way that when Stephanie gave orders in a certain tone of voice, disobedience resulted in pain. Jamie had also learnt that Stephanie could inflict pain without causing *any* physical injury. Therefore, he dutifully sat down beside his new brother.

"Anne-Marie!" Stephanie called out and less than a minute later, the final Lizewski child appeared from the shared bathroom – she also knew when not to test Stephanie's mood.

"Tomorrow will be the fight of your lives. I will miss fighting alongside you, therefore, I want to pass on some of my hard-won wisdom."

All three kids could see the anger in their sister's eyes and the tears which she was holding at bay.

"Jamie is a *Predator* and as such, I expect him to have the skills he needs to survive tomorrow – Shannon assures me that he can look after himself. As for you two, you both have kills under your belt, and you have faced limited combat. I trust you both to use your skills correctly. Whatever you all do, look out for yourself. Look out for each other. Watch out for some cunt sneaking around you to attack from the rear. Tomorrow, not one of you will leave that Safehouse until I have personally checked your armour, your weapons, everything. If at any stage you are worried, concerned, even scared – and you will be scared – you talk to your team and you can talk to me, too, by asking Marty for a discrete channel. Now, each of you, bed – no talking, no fucking about; you each have a big day ahead of you tomorrow and you need every minute of sleep you can get. Good night."

The two boys and one girl jumped up as one. They hugged Stephanie tightly before they each ran off towards their own bed.

"Night!" they all yelled as they went.

..._...

Stephanie stepped out of Danny's room, closing the door behind her.

"A very good pep-talk, Steph, I'm impressed," Mindy said honestly.

"I had to say something; I'm worried about them all."

"So am I. I couldn't bear anything to happen to either one of you. I never thought that I would take to motherhood so readily – it's surprised the hell out of me."

"You're good at it, Mum."

"It's so alien to me, seeing you with short hair. I miss your ponytail and . . ."

"I miss it too but that is in the past – don't worry about it; I'm getting used to it."

"I myself have a pep-talk to put together and I hope it's as good as yours – night, Steph."

"Night, Mom."

The following afternoon

Saturday, October 15th, 2016

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"Maggie!"

"How you doing, Jen?"

"Fine. I need another trauma kit; can you find one for me. Damn, it feels like I'm back on patrol in Afghanistan."

Doctor Jennifer Staite was a rising star at the hospital. She specialised in emergency medicine. Her task for the day was to preposition herself in a fully-equipped SUV, out in the city and await the fighting to begin. She was strapping on a flak-jacket and there was a Kevlar helmet on the table beside her. Overall, she looked very warlike as she prepared for her excursion into the city.

"Here you are, Jen," Maggie said as he handed a pack to Jennifer. "Stay safe out there."

"I will. *Fusion* will take down those bastards and we will have our city back."

"While there are some aspects to Hit Girl which I dislike, she did keep this city in order and the criminals kept to a kind of code. With these new, whatever's, it's total anarchy out there," Maggie pointed out.

"See you later!"

16:00

Level 3

The collective Safehouses were heaving with activity.

All around, people were scattered, cleaning weapons, dressing, sharpening knives and swords, checking communications equipment, and mentally preparing themselves for the fight of their lives. Morale was as high as it ever was and there was plenty of joking from the boys. The girls, generally, just made crude comments about whatever came to mind. On Level 2, Mindy was surprised to hear quite a bit of giggling which somehow appeared out of place. On closer inspection, there was a group of girls, all wearing their combat suits, minus their masks, sitting on

the floor outside the cabins. Saoirse, Stephanie, Shannon, Sarah, Lucy, and Abigail were busy cleaning their pistols and loading spare magazines from a large pile of nine-millimetre bullets piled on the floor.

"Do you remember when they made us pick up brass for almost an entire day?" Sarah asked Saoirse.

"That was bad," Saoirse grinned.

"An entire day. . ." Stephanie growled. "I did it for four days straight when I was in The Cage – that sucked on no breakfast and no lunch."

"As I understand it, you did sorta deserve it," Saoirse pointed out. "Pass me a cleaning patch, Sarah."

"Maybe I didn't deserve it!" Stephanie growled as she forced bullets into a magazine.

Saoirse laughed.

"Stephanie was starting La Révolution!" Lucy chuckled.

"See, SD, Lucy gets it," Stephanie grinned cheekily.

"Why, I put up with you, Stephanie, I have no idea," Saoirse complained.

"You tried to kill me, three times."

"I really should have put more effort in," Saoirse muttered darkly.

Mindy smirked as she left Stephanie and Saoirse bickering and she peered inside one of the cabins.

..._...

Sitting on a bunk, she found Lizzie and Lauren, each sharpening knives.

On the floor sat Annabelle, Anne-Marie, and Sophia. All three were in their combat suits, without masks. The two girls were sorting through a pile of bullets and loading various different sub-machinegun magazines. Sophia looked up at Mindy and she woofed.

"Hi, Mindy!" Lauren called out.

"You girls, okay?"

"Oh, yeah!" Annabelle called out with a broad grin.

"Keep doing what you're doing and don't mind me," Mindy directed as she left the cabin.

She made her way past the group of *Predators* – Saoirse was now bickering with Lucy who was grinning – and she headed for the recreational area at the opposite end of the level.

"Well, the man had no choice but to stick his dick . . . oh, hi, Mindy!"

"Joshua."

"Josh is telling us a really cool joke where a man gets his dick bitten off by a . . ."

"Thanks, Daniel, I don't wanna know," Mindy replied with a horrified look on her face.

Joshua just grinned foolishly as Mindy rolled her eyes at him. Mindy tried not to laugh – his jokes were crude, and they creeped her out, but Joshua had his own ways of keeping morale high amongst the younger members of *Fusion* and she was grateful for it. As Mindy looked around at the assembled boys she noticed that somebody was missing – where was Megan? She left the boys to their obnoxious behaviour and headed upwards to Level 0.

Raucous laughter followed her to the elevator as Joshua delivered his punchline.

Level 0

Mindy found Kelly with the twins, Chrissy and Sky.

"What are these two teaching you?" Mindy asked.

"Just a few pointers," Sky replied.

"We're not *always* up to something," Chrissy grumbled.

Mindy chuckled.

"Watch out for these two, Kelly."

"They can be a real nightmare," Cathy confirmed as she exited the elevator.

"Not fair!" Sky complained bitterly.

"I think they're okay," Kelly commented.

"So innocent," Cathy chuckled as she went on her way.

Mindy made her way to the changing rooms and she found Megan – with Becky.

"This is ominous," Mindy commented.

"Megan's helping me with my combat suit," Becky responded.

"Just helping," Megan commented.

Megan wore her full combat suit with swords and she exuded menace even without her mask. Her new, self-inflicted, hairstyle was taking longer to get used to than Mindy had expected it would. There was also something about her step-sister which worried Mindy. Ever since her return from Gotham she had been a very different girl. Needless to say, then was not the moment to discuss such things; Megan was one of Mindy's best fighters and she did not need any distractions. It was also strange seeing the diminutive Becky in her full combat suit with a Balisong on her belt, plus a Walther P22 Nickel pistol in a holster. The girl could shoot, there was no doubt on that – she was also wicked with a knife. Scamp had been allocated to Medical Team Alpha where she would be under the watchful eye of Medic along with Ravage, with all three very safe in the bulk of *Titan*.

"See you both later," Mindy said as she left the changing room.

..._...

Mindy swiped her access card in the slot beside the armoured door and it released with an audible click. On entering the Battle Bunker, Mindy found a hive of activity with Marty and Abigail working feverishly with the assistance of Rachel and Dave.

"Hi, Mindy," Marty said. "The two UAVs are up and patrolling the city. We have identified two units of Russians and three of Sicilians – nothing from FEAR as yet."

"Mixed news but better than nothing," Mindy commented.

"We're ready here, honey," Dave confirmed.

"Settled in, Rachel?" Mindy asked.

"Yes, Mindy – and thank you for trusting me."

"As long as my trust is not misplaced, Rachel," Mindy replied darkly as she took the spiral staircase down into the Server Facility on the level below.

..._...

Dave followed, and they took a few moments to talk together about their impending evening.

"You stay safe, Dave."

"You too, Mindy – we've been through a lot together and we're always going to be together. So many have tried to destroy us both – it's never worked."

"How much of that was due to good planning and how much was down to dumb luck?" Mindy queried.

"Good question," Dave allowed. "Everybody knows what they are doing, honey. We have almost fifty people working on this operation and nothing has been left to chance – you would never allow it."

Mindy grinned sheepishly as she hugged her husband. Everything was different. So many things could go wrong, with such a complex situation, with so many people involved. When it had just been her and Dave, or even just with Chloe, there had been much less to think about and worry about. Mindy felt safe when Dave was close – he had kept her safe for so long – and his warmth felt so reassuring in situations where things began to get on top of her.

"I have a speech to make – you stick with me, you hear," Mindy directed as she headed back up to the Battle Bunker.

"On your six, Hit Girl!" Dave chuckled.

17:25

Battle Guy handed Hit Girl a headset and he swiftly punched a few buttons before he nodded, and Hit Girl's voice echoed throughout each of the *Fusion* facilities.

"We have a momentous task ahead of us, tonight. The combined forces of FEAR, The Sicilians, and The Sointsevskaya Brotherhood are arrayed throughout Chicago. They are pitting everything that they have into a last-ditch effort to destroy *Fusion* and take Chicago for themselves. *We will not* let that happen – *we shall* meet them, and *we shall* destroy them on *our* terms. This time tomorrow, it will all be decided, one way or another. *You will* all survive, or by God, I will hunt you down in the afterlife.

"Protect each other. Protect the city. Protect the people who live in this city. Stay true to what makes *Fusion* special. The enemy do not care who they hurt and who they trample on as they make their way into this city. They will not take our city away from us. Whether we are fucked up superheroes. Whether we are corrupted children turned into *Predators*. Whether we are just people who believe that what we are doing is right. Whatever your motivation for being who you are, use that motivation to get through the night.

"This night will be the longest of our lives. Do *not* put yourselves at unnecessary risk. Remember, he who runs away, lives to fight another day. Pick your fights – ensure that you have the edge *before* you engage. We are few in number, and the enemy is large, but we have faced large numbers before and *we have prevailed*. As long as we stand together, united in our task, the enemy *will not* win, this night.

"The battle for Chicago begins right now, in the next few minutes. We will fight, and we will keep fighting. We will keep fighting until the battle is won and Chicago's enemies are destroyed, once and for all. **WE – ARE – FUSION!** We are a single entity formed from many. We are each joined by the very same nuclear fire in our hearts and we will fight from our hearts to protect this city from those who wish to do it harm.

"Go, take up your positions out in Chicago and listen for guidance from the Battle Bunker. We have two UAVs up, tonight, and we have activated every camera in this city to provide us with the intelligence we need to counter the Axis movements. Battle Guy, Hal, and *Synthesis* will be watching our backs, tonight. You all have a direct link to call for help – *do not* feel afraid to use that link; it could save your life."

Hit Girl's voice was replaced by that of Kick-Ass.

"*Fusion!* Roll Out!"

***Chapter 347*: Battle Chicago - Part I**

Today my world was quite literally blasted apart.

These chapters are the account of the action which led to me losing the most important person in my life. I am broken, and even now, I have no idea how I can continue.

Saturday, October 15th, 2016

The preparations that afternoon had started just like any other.

Although, there had seemed to be a higher purpose to the evening. That purpose had buried the underlying fear which everybody felt when they pulled on their combat suits and prepared their weapons. For the veterans, it was just another night and their brains automatically filed away the fear. Not so, for the newer members. For those who had only been a *Fusion* vigilante for a few months, gearing up was daunting enough without worrying about what might be going on beyond the safety of the Safehouses. People were actively out to get them, that night, and that thought was in everybody's minds – just pushed back in some.

Naturally, the nutcase *Predators* were looking forward to the night's action. To a small extent, the 'normal' youngsters enjoyed gently teasing the 'weird' youngsters who appeared to get off on all the action. Secretly, though, some of the youngsters were pleased to have the *Predators* with them as it made them feel safe. All the training. All the preparation. It had all come to a head and they would all sink or swim together.

Anne-Marie had cringed as her big sister had undressed. She saw the scars on Stephanie's right shoulder, not to mention the other scars on her body. The short hair was also weird. But Stephanie was smiling and joking with Saoirse as they both pulled on their dark grey undersuits. Everybody joked – it was their way of ignoring the imminent danger that they might be about to face. As far as Anne-Marie was concerned, if Stephanie wasn't worried, then there was no reason that she should be.

As Mindy looked around at all the smiling, laughing faces, that afternoon, the thought that by midnight – just five short hours away – one of the team would be fighting for their life, and that by dawn, another would be dead, with others injured, was non-existent.

Emerald Alpha Team: Kick-Ass, Splinter, Torment

Grant Park, beside Lake Michigan was surprisingly empty for thirty minutes past six in the evening.

The reason behind the emptiness soon became apparent as a group of fourteen Russians appeared out of the trees to the north of the fountain. They appeared to be enjoying themselves, like it was just a night out on the town. Each was armed with some form of melee weapon, but firearms were also in evidence and the heavily built men wore obvious body armour on their torsos.

They were most definitely out for a fight.

Less than a mile to the southwest

Emerald Bravo Team: Petra, Stormtide, Relentless

Ruby Alpha Team: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune

Ruby Bravo Team: Mist, Piranha, Trojan

The intelligence information had been right on the money.

As Emerald Bravo emerged from beneath West Roosevelt Road, they saw a large group of *Corsairs* gathered beside some tall undergrowth. Beyond them, a group of *Marauders* were arguing amongst themselves. There were upwards of forty *Corsairs* with a round dozen *Marauders*, but Petra was not worried about the numbers; she had help coming from the south where Shadow and Mist were moving north with their teams.

The battle was about to be joined.

The Battle Bunker: Battle Guy, Hal, Ember

The calls were coming in back to back.

"Bunker, Emerald Alpha – contact, contact, contact – we have Russians!"

"Bunker, Emerald Bravo – contact, contact, contact – Corsairs and fucked up Predators!"

Ember and Hal moved to update the status displays to show where and what each team were doing.

"Bunker, Ruby Alpha – moving to support Emerald Bravo!"

"Bunker, Ruby Bravo – moving with Ruby Alpha!"

"And it begins!" Battle Guy mused.

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower

Intelligence information had placed FEAR near McKinley park, so that was where Hit Girl had placed herself, with a backup team located less than a mile away.

They moved slowly across the grass at the east side of the boating lake, checking out the trees which in the fading light were creating perfect ambush points. As they closed on the north end of the lake, Eisenhower began to growl, and Hit Girl halted the approach. Eisenhower moved forwards into the looming darkness, sniffing out the threat.

Beneath a small grouping of trees, the dog found a juicy threat.

..._...

Six men were hiding in amongst the trees.

They knew that Hit Girl and her team were out there, only they did not want to tip their hand until the trap was set. Their boss, Joseph Valachi, would not be very pleased if Hit Girl slipped away - again. The men never heard Eisenhower approach, but they heard the menacing, blood-curdling growl as the veteran hound loomed out of the darkness. The men were all of Sicilian ancestry and they all deemed themselves to be beyond manly. They had each killed, maimed, and tortured aplenty during their lives – and been rewarded well for it – but while men were easy to kill and none of them feared man, like all men, they had a deep-seated fear of being torn apart or eaten while still alive. To a man, the men raised their weapons and aimed at the menacing form before them. Eisenhower ignored the weapons, and she stood her ground, growling at the six men.

"It's just one wild mutt – who gives a fucking shit?"

"Err – you might wanna reconsider that, Jake."

From out of the darkness behind Eisenhower, came seven very similar dark shapes all clad in body armour and with protective masks over their faces. They were identical apart from the coloured markings on their armour. Four of the animals moved to Eisenhower's left, the remaining three formed up to her right. All of them were growling in a decidedly unnerving way and saliva dripped from the bared fangs.

"Holy fuck!" one man almost whimpered at the sight of eight sets of very sharp teeth.

Slowly the seven new dogs began to encircle the men. Eisenhower was in her usual navy-blue armour and mask while her kin wore an updated version of her armour. Each dog wore a custom-made combat vest, based on the Special Forces Aerial Insertion Vest. The vest provided Threat Level IIIA ballistics protection, as well as protection against single and double-edged blades. It protected each animal's chest, sides, and back. There was also a mask which protected their faces and heads from injury. The combat vest had a GPS tracker, so it would be possible to keep an eye on where each dog went should they be pursuing somebody. The only differences between each dog were the markings on the back and sides of each vest.

Sampson bore blue markings, Loki was purple, Kes had pink markings, Blade bore light brown, Ardent had grey markings, which left Siren with yellow markings, and Dart with orange.

..._...

One of the men drew his pistol and he sent a bullet towards Eisenhower.

That was a very bad move – despite the bullet missing completely. He never saw Siren, nor the look of feral anger in her eyes as she attacked the man. Her fangs sunk deep into his right arm and he dropped the pistol as he fought for his very existence. Siren dragged the unfortunate man to the ground and then she went for his throat.

"Siren!"

The dog instantly released the man and jumped back. However, she stared intently at the wounded man, eager to finish the job. Another shape emerged from the darkness. This armoured individual wore purple and the remaining five men made a decision – one which ended their lives. Before any man could bring their own weapons to bear on the vigilantes, they each received a single bullet in the head from Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, and Tigercat – Bane dropped two. The remaining man living glared up at Hit Girl with furtive glances at Siren who was drooling over sinking her teeth into a chunk of very rare Sicilian steak.

"Go tell your boss that you have failed," Hit Girl growled down at the man.

"No way; he'll fucking kill me."

"Siren!"

The man saw death approaching in the form of some very sharp teeth and his courage left him – being shot dead by Joseph Valachi suddenly seemed much more appealing to the man than having his throat ripped out by a dog.

..._...

Hit Girl spun around as she heard gunfire rip out across the darkening park.

"Leave him!" she growled as the team headed southwest around the southern tip of the boating lake.

"Diamond Alpha, Bunker, Large group of fighters, three hundred yards to the west of you – we believe FEAR is amongst them."

"Copy that – send in Diamond Bravo," Hit Girl ordered as she ran.

Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

"Diamond Bravo, Bunker – move to support Diamond Alpha."

"Moving now," Foxtail responded.

The four vigilantes had been hiding on some wasteland just to the south of the park. They each sprung up and then ran forwards, across West Pershing Road and into the park, attacking FEAR's group from a flanking position. There appeared to be some consternation amongst FEAR's fighters as they found themselves attacked from the right flank by four armour-clad vigilantes, then from the left flank by Hit Girl and three more armour-clad vigilantes. To make things even worse, eight armour-clad canines suddenly dove amongst them, attacking anything which moved.

It did not take long for the grass to start turning red.

Opal Alpha Team: Jackal, Tempest, Cut-Throat

Five and a half miles to the north of Hit Girl's attack, her trusted Lieutenant was not happy. He was miles away, literally, from all the action.

Humboldt Park was large and not what Jackal would see as much of a target, however, those were his orders, along with those of Opal Bravo Team, half a mile to the north at the opposite end of the park. Jackal knew that there were valid reasons for him being stuck so far away from his partner and the main teams. He also knew that Hit Girl trusted him out on a limb, so to speak. He was also very aware that his daughter was stationed much nearer the dangerous fighting than he was . . . and that scared him.

"You got your ears on, Jackal?" Raven called over the communications.

"I try not to take them off," Jackal responded dryly.

"We have nothing to report in the north – you got anything down there?"

"Not even a cockroach fucking."

"Jackal, Bunker – you have incoming west entrance to the park . . . break . . . Raven, Bunker – you have incoming from your north."

The voice was new – Jackal assumed it to be Ember. They were out of position, so they scrambled aboard Sentinel and Jackal flooded the accelerator.

Opal Bravo Team: Raven, Wildcat, Nightmare

They came across Luis Munoz Martin Drive like a flood.

"Stay together!" Raven ordered as the three vigilantes faced down better than twenty large Russians and a round-dozen Sicilians.

'Ten to one was fair,' Wildcat thought to herself but only for the first few minutes as she found herself being overwhelmed.

"Opal Bravo, Bunker – SWAT has been diverted to your location; they're less than a minute out," Hal called.

"They better fucking hurry!" Nightmare growled as she fought off men twice her size with her Jungle Sword.

Raven was in her element, as was Wildcat – both vigilantes enjoyed a big fight, only, their experience was beginning to tell them it was time to extract themselves from the fight and get to safety. The three girls had never moved further than a few feet from one another, so as to provide mutual support. Buried as they were, deep within the throng of Russians, they almost missed the roar of diesel engines as a pair of SWAT vehicles roared onto the grass and each vehicle mowed down several of the enemy before stopping and deploying the SWAT teams.

The fight was back on, Wildcat was very pleased to see.

18:53

Emerald Alpha Team: Kick-Ass, Splinter, Torment

Grant Park

It had only taken about twenty minutes to put down all fourteen Russians.

For Torment, it had been the biggest fight of her young life and she had been very worried at one point that she was going to struggle, but she followed her training and where necessary, she called for help from her fellow team members. Kick-ass had waded in with relish, assisting the younger members where necessary. However, Splinter had no problem laying waste to the Russians. The boy had a deep-seated hatred for Russians in general, and any opportunity for revenge in return for his kidnapping and conditioning was welcome.

Splinter fought dirty and he fought hard which surprised some of the hardened Russian fighters. Even Kick-Ass was a little surprised, but otherwise he was very impressed by the youngster's forceful attacks.

The Battle Bunker

Battle Guy was not happy.

"None of this makes any sense," he said. "FEAR's plan is running like clockwork – only she doesn't seem to be putting much into the fight – yes, people are going down but FEAR herself is not engaging . . . see?"

Ember followed Battle Guy's finger as he pointed to where FEAR was believed to be, behind a cordon of her best Corsairs.

"She's holding back her best fighters and allowing the skirmishes . . . no, she couldn't be."

"What?" Ember asked.

"FEAR isn't this stupid – she's up to something," Hal agreed.

"She's trying to wear *Fusion* down ready for something big?" Ember ventured.

"I hate to say it, Ember, but you've got it in one. We're spread way the hell out and everybody will be tired by now."

"What are you going to do?" Ember asked, aghast at the idea of *Fusion* failing.

"Hit Girl plans for everything," Battle Guy grinned. "Hal – execute Plan Charlie."

Chicago PD, District 21 Communications Room

Captain Marcus Williams had been awaiting the order but had hoped that it would not be needed.

"Chicago PD, Chicago PD, this is Fusion – execute Plan Charlie, repeat, execute Plan Charlie."

The captain nodded towards the senior watch officer who proceeded to pass orders to his radio operators. All over the city, Chicago PD units began to move from their hitherto concealed locations. Each unit was manned by four volunteer officers, all equipped with body armour, AR-15 rifles and automatic shotguns. Their role was to provide close battlefield support for *Fusion* and allow the *Fusion* fighters to withdraw and regroup. It had been expected that FEAR's plan was to wear Fusion down, so a contingency plan had been put into place and the CPD would take over the fight until FEAR could be manipulated into a final battle.

"I'm outta here – keep me informed of what's happening," Marcus ordered as headed out onto the streets with a very pissed off Sergeant Sam Fellowes.

The Sergeant was determined to get payback for his injured partner who was even then at death's door.

The Battle Bunker

"*Fusion!*" Battle Guy announced over the communications circuits. "Prepare to disengage. Break off all actions. CPD will intercede on your behalf. FEAR is trying to wear us out – break – Wildcat, that applies to you, too!"

The response from Wildcat would have had the FCC going to war, had it not been an encrypted channel. Nobody liked retreating, or breaking off an action, however, the reasoning was sound. Battle Guy, Hal, and Ember watched their screens as each of the twenty-plus engaged operators expertly disengaged and pulled back. There were many unhappy rumblings over the radio, but venting was allowed.

The CPD put themselves between Fusion and the enemy, pushing FEAR's people back, surprisingly easily, and confirming their hypothesis. FEAR had no desire to waste her forces on police officers.

***Emerald Bravo Team: Petra, Stormtide, Relentless
Ruby Alpha Team: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune
Ruby Bravo Team: Mist, Piranha, Trojan***

Piranha and Stormtide exchanged looks – they were pissed.

"Fucking yellow bastards!" came the bellow from the *Marauders* they were turning their backs on.

"Come back when you've grown some balls, bitches!"

It went on and on until they were out of earshot. What rankled more was that both of them would have loved nothing more than to turn and put a bullet in their heads.

However, they had received specific orders from somebody that both were scared of.

Earlier that evening

Safehouse F

Every Predator was gathered on the mat: Saoirse, Stephanie, Sarah, Chrissy, Sky, Jamie, Abigail, Shannon, Leo, Lucy, Marc, Hunter, Rebecca, and Rachel.

Mindy and Dave faced the fourteen youngsters. They were both very serious and the expression unnerved the kids arranged before them.

"You were brought up as *Predators*. We have the very first, Lucy, and the very last, Rebecca. While some see you all as cracked up nutcases. . ."

There was proud laughter from those assembled.

"There are times that I disagree. Despite some of you being bitter enemies and despite the fact that some of you went out of your way to try and kill one another, you have all put your past behind you and become firm friends – some of you have even managed to share the same bed without killing one another!"

There was more laughter – and some uneasy looks from Stephanie, Saoirse, and Abigail.

"We have recently taken onboard somebody who I know has still to build up some trust amongst her former *Predator* companions. She took the wrong road, but when the opportunity presented herself, she did the right thing and she saved the life of somebody close to many of us. I think some of you can see where I am going with this. Out there, under the control of FEAR, there are many more youngsters, just like yourselves – I know some will be like Willow while others will be like Rachel. I want you to think about that when you face off against a *Marauder*, tonight. Before you run them through, or put a bullet through their skulls, think about who they are. You may know some of them – they may be salvageable like Abigail and Rachel – hell, we even turned Chrissy and Sky around. They may be whacked-out nutcases and unsalvageable like Stephanie and Saoirse. . ."

"Hey!"

"Bitch!"

". . . But, seriously, I am determined to help each and every *Marauder* out there and I will do everything that I can to help them see things the way you guys have. I want each and every one of you to give them that chance – however . . . that does not mean that you put yourselves at any unnecessary risk. Several months ago, Shadow had to put down Bane and Venom – she had no choice as it was them or her. I backed her up in her decision, but she beat herself up about it."

"Err, Mindy. . ." Chrissy interrupted.

"Go ahead, Chrissy."

"My sister and me, we fought almost to the death to protect *Urban Predator* – we were fanatical about it . . . and very, very wrong. Chloe beat herself up about it for weeks and it took both of us to stop her blaming herself for our wounds. We were both very thankful that Chloe used her skills to put us down without killing us. We both wish that we had surrendered before we were put down, but we would not allow ourselves to do it. Those *Marauders* out there will be just the same. It goes against everything we were trained to do, to surrender. Some will see sense, but I know some won't . . . just like Willow."

There was general agreement amongst the *Predators* and they began to converse amongst themselves about options open to them.

Dave and Mindy left them to it.

Later that night

20:20

All was *not* going well.

Everybody had been able to rest for anywhere from half an hour to almost an hour, but then the call to arms had gone

out again – why?

FEAR!

She had turned her attention away from attacking *Fusion*, to attacking the city infrastructure. Buildings and powerlines were her targets – she was even ignoring the CPD. First, a substation went offline – coincidentally one which fed Safehouse F. Battle Guy was notified by the computer systems and he began to receive calls from the CPD that FEAR was attacking substations and power distribution nodes within the city. Entire blocks were being plunged into darkness. City workers had deployed immediately under police escort to repair or bypass the damage caused by explosive devices placed by FEAR's people. It did not help that the substations would have to be checked for more explosive devices before the city workers could start repairs. It was all a ploy to use up precious resources from within the CPD and the city. While city workers were being protected, the CPD could not assist *Fusion* – it was a very carefully laid plan on FEAR's part.

"The 48th Street substation is down," Battle Guy reported. "Secondary supply is still up; backup generators are on standby."

"We have reported *Marauders* on South McDowell Avenue at West 46th," Hal advised.

"Make that *Corsairs*, too," Ember added. "Just crossing West 49th on South Racine."

"Copy that," *Hit Girl* replied. "Show *Diamond Alpha* and *Bravo* in route."

"Acknowledged!" Battle Guy responded.

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower
Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

South Ashland Avenue and West 46th Street

Hound and Sentinel pulled up into the shadows of the street.

All the streetlights were out, providing a perfect cover for the black SUVs and their cargo of vigilantes.

"What are they doing?" Bane asked as she studied the assembled group of eight *Marauders*.

"Good question," Foxtail responded as she too studied the warped *Predators*.

"Shouldn't they be prancing around like dicks?" Tigercat asked.

"You saying we *Predators* are dicks?" Venom asked as Tigercat received glares from Discord, Bane, Rage, Fury, and Foxtail.

"They are *Marauders* – I thought they were different," Tigercat responded carefully.

"Only because Stormtide loves you, do you get to live," Fury advised the boy.

"Gee, thanks, Fury!"

"Focus!" *Hit Girl* growled dangerously.

The *Marauders* were standing in the middle of the cross-section where three streets crossed, talking animatedly. Their weapons were stowed, and they could have just been a group of normal teenagers, only they wore masks and body armour.

"It's a trap," Venom stated.

"I don't trust them," Bane added.

"Me, neither," Rage conceded.

"Let's lead *them* into a trap," Discord suggested.

"Not just a nice set of tits," Tigercat commented approvingly before he wisely hid behind Foxtail.

"Battle Guy – we have a plan," Hit Girl began.

..._...

The *Marauder* known as Hydra peered down West 46th Street and she frowned.

"You see what I'm seeing?" she asked the nearest *Marauder*.

"Hey, Hydra's found something," Savage called out to the others.

Less than forty or so yards away, a Fusion vigilante stood in the middle of the street alongside a pair of armour-clad animals. The vigilante looked surprised to have been caught out. Then one of the *Marauders* identified the vigilante.

"Foxtail!" Firebrand announced. "After her!"

All eight *Marauders* gave chase as Foxtail and her animals bolted down an alleyway which crossed over towards South McDowell Avenue. The *Marauders* were smart and four of them ran down McDowell while the rest remained in pursuit of their prey. Nobody considered for a moment that it might be a ruse – they all wanted blood and Foxtail was fair game in their book.

"Get the fuck back here, you fuckin' bitch!" Firebrand yelled.

..._...

Foxtail was not convinced that she had the easy part of the tasking.

The mutts were having the time of their young lives as they ran along on either side of Foxtail, crossing through a parking lot onto West 47th Street. But Foxtail did not have to run the full 750-yards to the ambush site. At South Ada Street, she took a right and dived behind some trees before she was relieved by Bane who bolted out and took her place with a pair of fresh canines.

"Fun?" Venom enquired.

"Not bad," the out of breath Foxtail growled.

Bane had longer legs and she relished the run along West 47th Street – as did her canine escorts. The pursuing *Marauders* did not appear to notice that their target had changed but that was *their* problem. At South Racine Avenue Bane slowed and she stopped in the centre of the street. Eighty yards south of her, about a dozen *Corsairs* loitered under the closest working streetlight.

"Hey!" one yelled and they all ran at Bane.

"Bet you can't catch me, you dumb fucks!" Bane yelled as she sent a half-dozen bullets in their direction just to piss them off.

"Predators, *Marauders* – God, I hate them all!" the leader of the *Corsairs* growled.

The man hated fighting alongside the obnoxious and often conceited teenaged little shits. He had joined FEAR when his prison transport aircraft had been brought down into Chicago. He and dozens of his kin had readily signed up to a new life as a mercenary – the pay was good. He ran up the avenue, chasing the young vigilante bitch who had dared to shoot at him and his men. It wasn't until they had crossed West 47th Street and turned off the avenue into a container yard that the man had hesitated. His team had been joined by the damn *Marauders* and they were baying for blood.

He had no choice but to go along with them – he wanted a cut of *Fusion*, too.

Chicago Harbor

VIGILANTE

It was very cold out on the water.

However, Psyche was in her element and she was enjoying the night as they raced across the waves at speed. While

she was wearing her full armour with face mask, she imagined the cold air on her face along with the stinging spray. Her groin hurt each time the craft crashed down into the waves, but she tolerated the pain as vigilantes and *Predators* were conditioned to ignore pain. Mindy would give her hell for it, but it was worth a little just to be out with the rest of the teams.

At the helm, Neptune sat in the right seat with Athena as his navigator. Aft, Ares stood in the well-deck with his hands resting on the triggers of a mounted M6E4 general-purpose machine gun. The purple-hulled craft tore across the waves at twenty-five knots leaving a churning wake of white water behind. They had had a fairly peaceful evening – their main job to ensure that FEAR could not escape via the lake.

"Vigilante, *Emerald Alpha*, we have business for you, *Chicago Harbor*, over."

..._...

Kick-Ass, Splinter, and Torment were back near the Buckingham Fountain.

Splinter was struggling – he had been wounded before the night's action had even begun – but the boy did not know *how* to quit. They were faced with armour-clad *Corsairs*, and they were outnumbered. Normally that would not be an issue, but Kick-Ass knew that pushing his younger counterparts would not be a good idea. They had support from the CPD, but several CPD officers were pinned down behind their SUVs. With the roar of powerful marine diesel engines, a sleek-hulled watercraft emerged out of the darkness from the direction Lake Michigan. The roar of the engines was closely followed by the staccato chatter of the machine guns mounted fore and aft.

The *Corsairs'* body armour was no match for the 7.62-millimetre bullets which tore into them, shredding them. Gunfire was returned, bullets from the *Corsairs'* weapons ripping through the air and narrowly missing the wildly jinking watercraft. The distraction provided by *Vigilante* aided the CPD in extracting themselves from the death-trap in which they had found themselves. Kick-Ass and Torment escorted the officers out of harm's way while Splinter added to the *Vigilante's* gunfire. For a few, very brief, moments, Splinter thought it was over and he could rest, but then the youngster's eyes were drawn to a bright flash in the darkness, six hundred yards to the northwest, then a flaming streak as a missile zoomed the very short distance towards *Vigilante*.

Splinter had no time to say anything as two more streaks appeared in the darkness, heading for the jinking vessel.

Six miles to the southwest

South Normal Boulevard

Ruby Alpha: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune

Ruby Bravo: Mist, Piranha, Trojan

Opal Alpha: Jackal, Tempest, Cut-Throat

Opal Bravo: Raven, Wildcat, Nightmare

"It's a fucking trap!" Wildcat repeated for the sixth time in as many minutes.

"Yeah, I think we've got that, thanks," Shadow growled as she led the combined teams deep into the abandoned neighbourhood immediately to the south of the giant Norfolk Southern intermodal container terminal on 47th Street.

The forty-five-acre neighbourhood within the railroad tracks consisted of only a dozen or so dwellings, with the rest of the space left to grass. Most of the streets were in semi-darkness, with limited street lighting. As for innocents and collateral damage, it was the perfect place for an ambush.

"Why are we even here?" Wildcat persisted.

"There are times that I wish I'd just ignored that little nine-year-old girl," Jackal muttered.

"No one can resist me," Wildcat responded as she looked up at her pal.

"Creepy," Jackal commented as he returned the twelve-year-old's look. "While Wildcat is generally as nutty as squirrel poo, I think she might have a point."

"Of course, I do!"

"Christ, talk about an ego!" Piranha commented.

"Get to fuck, fish girl!" Wildcat growled.

"Gobby, bitch."

"Cats eat fish," Wildcat pointed out.

"Lesbian, huh?" Piranha chuckled. "Not been eaten out by a cat before."

"You fucking. . ."

"Another word and I slap the fuck outta both of you!" Mist growled as she glared at both vigilantes. "We keep moving. Intel shows something here and we're going to find it."

Hellcat and Fortune moved forwards, side by side, their blades held out before them, ready for anything appearing out of the darkness. After another minute, there was a sound – Hellcat barely heard it, but it was definitely something that wasn't just background noise. Then her sixth sense told the young girl that something was wrong – very wrong. Instinctively, she brought up her Wakizashi to her right in readiness . . .

"I think I've found something," Hellcat whispered into her communications as her senses went wild.

The girl turned to where she believed there was danger just as a Katana emerged silently out of the darkness, aimed at her head.

..._...

Fortune had noticed Hellcat stiffening up she had braced her own blade ready for an attack.

Adrenalin surged through her body, heightening her senses and blocking out the fear which had come to the fore as they had entered the dark and foreboding area. The two girls were reasonably well matched in skill-level, but Hellcat had more combat experience than Fortune, so the older girl deferred to the younger. Fortune's senses were going wild, just as they were for Hellcat; she could feel something close by – she could feel the danger. Then she heard the blade sweeping through the air and she intercepted it, just as Hellcat's blade came into contact with a very similar blade.

Whomsoever was in control of the blade – they were good.

..._...

Mist caught the same vibe in the air.

Her four-foot long, seven-section chain whip coursed through the air, catching the neck of some unfortunate, causing the unseen person to yell out in pain as his neck was torn apart by the viciously sharp tip of the whip. His scream, which faded very quickly, woke everybody up to the threat which rapidly emerged out of the darkness.

It was something new – very new!

Emerald Bravo: Petra, Stormtide, Relentless

The night sky was lit up for a few seconds as the rumble of a loud explosion spread across the city.

The three vigilantes were about a mile from the explosion, but each turned to see what had exploded. They could not see the source of the explosion, of course, but they all felt that something was very badly wrong. For a moment, they faltered and the Sicilians whom they were fighting momentarily gained the upper hand, but the three vigilantes soon rallied, and they pushed back against the Mafiosos.

Then it came, the announcement that none had ever wanted to hear.

The Battle Bunker

Ember was hard at work maintaining the status boards when suddenly one of the ginormous wall-mounted screens began to flash in the bottom right corner.

Simultaneously, a klaxon sounded within the bunker. Hal raced over to the console and her face drained of all colour as she identified the source of the alert. Neither she, nor Battle Guy wanted to voice the beginning of a nightmare. But announced it had to be.

"*Fusion*, *Vigilante* is down hard . . . repeat, *Vigilante* is down hard!"

South Racine and West 47th Street

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower
Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

As the team fought amongst the containers, pursuing the marauding *Marauders* and fighting off the *Corsairs*, the announcement was a rude awakening to the seriousness of the night's activities.

Hit Girl and Foxtail exchange glances across the action, as did Rage and Fury. It was an unwelcome distraction in the middle of a difficult fight. All four of them now had the mental image of at least one person close to them in danger . . . or worse. However, they were all professionals, and they pushed their worries to the backs of their minds. The fight was difficult enough as *Corsairs* had to be put down while the *Marauders* had to be put down – but kept alive. Neither task was proving easy but there were already two unconscious *Marauders* littering the container storage site, with more to come.

From an outsider's point of view, the container site appeared to be out of control – armour-clad dogs dashed everywhere, along with armour-clad vigilantes, armour-clad *Corsairs*, and semi-armour-clad youths, otherwise known as *Marauders*. However, it was a major battle with many trying to kill the *Fusion* vigilantes from all sides. Yes, it was a *Fusion* trap, but it was also a perfect free for all.

Fusion, though, was winning.

Chicago Harbor

The decidedly soggy vigilante drifted in the water for a moment, her special-forces lifejacket fully inflated and keeping her afloat.

Then her mind snapped back to life and the noise, the cold, it came back to her. She could hear gunfire coming from her left, onshore. Ahead of her, the high-rise towers of Chicago towered above her. The waves lapped at her body as she floated, and she felt herself being pushed towards the shore. To her right, the fiercely burning hulk of what had once been a luxuriously appointed watercraft-turned-assault-vessel crackled and spat as the flames touched the cold waters of Lake Michigan. Psyche span around in the water as she felt a hand on her shoulder. She levelled her pistol at the man looming out of the darkness, but she quickly calmed down as she recognised Neptune. The naval officer was floating in his own lifejacket, with Ares and Athena beside him.

"You, okay, Psyche?"

"I'm fine – you?"

"We're all good. Let's get to shore."

..._...

A *Corsair* saw movement at the water's edge and he grinned at the sight of four people climbing out of the water.

Easy targets. . .

"Fucking bastard!" Psyche growled as she double-tapped the man in the head with her pistol.

She released her inflated lifejacket and abandoned it to fall to the ground, as did the rest of her team. On water, Neptune took charge, but on land, Psyche was the ranking vigilante. All three drew pistols and they followed Psyche up towards Highway 41. Four *Corsairs* saw them and they changed course to intercept. But before they could get off a round, one grew a blade out of his chest while another grew a blade through the front of his neck. The final pair? They both rose into the air before being smashed together and then thrown bodily to the stonework which covered the sidewalk. Each then had their skulls almost smashed in by a pair of green/yellow armoured gauntlets.

"Good to see you alive, pal," Kick-Ass called out as he ran his glowing yellow eyes over his daughter, looking for injuries.

"I'm fine – no injuries," Psyche offered quickly, assuaging her father's fears.

"Good to hear it – Neptune?"

"We're all fine, Kick-Ass," Neptune replied.

"Nothing like an invigorating swim," Ares commented.

"Shame about the boat – Hit Girl'll be pissed, I'll bet," Athena added.

"She'll get over it," Kick-Ass chuckled as he nonchalantly waved his gauntlet before turning to Psyche. "You'd better announce to everyone that you are alive," he suggested.

Psyche nodded, and she keyed her radio.

"Reports of my demise are very much exaggerated," Psyche announced over the *Fusion* communications channel.

"Damn!" Rage commented after a few seconds. "I thought I was going to get her room, too."

"Little shit!" Psyche responded tartly.

South Racine and West 47th Street

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower
Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

The fight was winding down.

The dogs were each paired off with a vigilante and the pairs searched the containers for any hidden stragglers. Three *Marauders* were unaccounted for, as were two *Corsairs*. Foxtail followed Blade as he followed a scent towards a small group of large containers stacked three high but with a narrow alleyway between two stacks. It was pitch dark, but Blade indicated that something, or somebody, was down there. Foxtail raised her P90 and pressed the button for the LED flashlight attached beside the muzzle. The dark alleyway was illuminated for twenty feet and Foxtail moved forwards, cautiously. After forty or so feet, Blade began to growl, and he slowed down, sniffing. Then a voice called out.

"I don't want to fight anymore . . . please, I give up."

It was the voice of a young girl and Foxtail turned to the right slightly and she illuminated a *Marauder*. The girl, who appeared to be very young, pulled off her mask and weapons, dropping them to the ground. Blade sniffed and growled as the weapons fell. Foxtail could see the fear in the young girl's eyes.

"I am Foxtail – get down on your knees."

The girl followed instructions and she allowed Foxtail to pat her down, looking for any hidden weapons.

"I am not a *Marauder*, I am, or was, a *Predator* like you, Foxtail. They forced me to fight and I hated it."

"We shall see. I will not kill you. Should your story be true, then you will survive this."

By the time Foxtail emerged from the alleyway between the container stacks with her prisoner and Blade, there was a row of kneeling *Marauders*, their hands on their heads, masks and weapons on the ground before them. Most looked pissed, but some appeared relieved. Their eighth compatriot was pushed down to her knees at the end of the line.

"You will all be restrained and taken somewhere safe – your status will be evaluated at a later time," Hit Girl announced as she paced before the *Marauders*. "You resist, then you will suffer. You do as you are told – and you have my word – you will live."

Tigercat, Bane, and Discord finished securing each *Marauder's* hands behind their backs with flexicuffs and Duct tape. Each was given a thorough pat down before being hauled to their feet and pushed into a pair of waiting CPD

vans – four to a van. Hit Girl watched until the last of them were secured and placed in a van. The vans would go to a special location so that the kids could be screened and logged – Marcus would take care of that with Vicky. Hit Girl was feeling a little happier about events – her daughter was alive, as was the entire team, despite her having lost a valuable asset. But assets could be replaced, people could not. She was also very pleased that despite some injuries, the *Marauders* were all alive. The next problem was the new threat a couple of miles away.

Ninjas?

A little over a mile to the southeast

Ruby Alpha: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune

Ruby Bravo: Mist, Piranha, Trojan

Opal Alpha: Jackal, Tempest, Cut-Throat

Opal Bravo: Raven, Wildcat, Nightmare

"They aren't ninjas," Shadow commented over her communications to Hit Girl as she fought.

"*Why do you say that?*" Hit Girl replied.

"They don't fight like the ninjas we've fought – they're just different; I can't explain it any better."

"Hit Girl?" Mist cut in. "You heard of Shinobi?"

"*No – we have enough problems,*" Hit Girl growled in response.

"Suit yourself!" Mist replied as she battled against a sword-wielding man who wore conformal body armour.

"We need help, here!" Wildcat growled. "The fuckers are multiplying."

Indeed, they were. What had started as a mere dozen attackers had quickly doubled and then trebled in number. The dozen vigilantes were surrounded and despite their skills, they were becoming overwhelmed by the unknown attackers. Mist was worried, as was Shadow. They were seasoned fighters and very disciplined – nothing like FEAR's rabble of *Corsairs* and crazed *Predators*. They weren't anything like the Sicilian Mafia, nor the Russian heavies, they exuded skill and purpose, rather than just muscle.

"Reinforcements are less than two minutes out!" came the radio call.

South Wentworth Avenue

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower

Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

The avenue ran north-south above and along the edge of the Dan Ryan Expressway.

Hound and *Sentinel* flew down the avenue at speed. Fury looked behind her from the backseat in *Sentinel*. She could see *Titan* several yards behind, and beside the giant vehicle, as escort, came Foxtail on her motorcycle. Then, just as the gigantic vehicle and the diminutive motorcycle passed a large building to their left, there was a rumbling sound and as Fury stared transfixed, the building beside *Titan* began to disintegrate. Foxtail noticed, and she accelerated hard just as the façade of the building collapsed across the street.

Titan was buried under tons of masonry and the last the astounded and horrified girl saw of Foxtail was her motorcycle as it spun across the blacktop and smashed into a parked car. The sound of the collapsing building was deafening, and the convoy skidded to a halt as bricks and chunks of concrete bounced down the street and down onto the Dan Ryan Expressway.

"*Titan*, Hit Girl, over. . ."

"*Titan*, Hit Girl, over. . ."

"*Titan*, Hit Girl, over. . ."

There was no response from anybody in the fourteen-ton armoured vehicle that had completely vanished under the

onslaught of collapsed building.

***Chapter 348*: Battle Chicago - Part II**

This night, my world was quite literally blasted apart.

These chapters are the account of the action which led to me losing the most important person in my life. I am broken and even now, I have no idea how I can continue.

Saturday, October 15th, 2016

22:28

South Wentworth Avenue

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower
Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

"Titan, Hit Girl, over. . ."

"Titan, Hit Girl, over. . ."

"Titan, Hit Girl, over. . ."

The silence over the radio was deafening, almost as bad as the collapsing rubble a few yards away, not to mention the screeching of brakes and grinding of metalwork as vehicles collided on the Dan Ryan while they tried to avoid the rubble which had crashed down amongst the traffic – thankfully thin for the time of night. Hit Girl was in a quandary. Buried under tons of rubble was a vehicle belonging to her and deep within that armoured beast, her mentor, her son, and her best-friend's daughter. Also, a few hundred yards away, her sister, best-friend, and others were in mortal danger fighting some new foe.

Not to mention that a valuable member of her team was badly hurt, if not killed by the collapse.

TITAN

The explosion had been dulled by the heavy armour, but the crashing of masonry onto the hull had been deafening and for the two youngsters onboard, terrifying.

Ravage had hugged Scamp tightly as she had shaken with fear. Medic had dived out of the driver's seat, the moment that the route became blocked and the vehicle buried. She had grabbed both kids and covered them with her own body. All three wore body armour, but hers was the heaviest. The crashing and banging went on and on. The massive vehicle shook on its suspension as the hull was knocked from side to side and from above. When the noise finally ceased, Medic was astounded to find that they were each still alive and totally unhurt. The vehicle was intact, even the armoured windscreen showed little more than scratches from the crashing brickwork.

"You guys okay?" she asked.

"I'm good," Scamp replied. "Ravage – let me go."

"Sorry – just looking after my friend," the boy responded as he released the girl and allowed her to get back to her feet. "Are we buried?"

"Seems so," Medic replied as she went from viewport to viewport and she found every viewport blocked by masonry. "Let's . . ."

Medic paused as she heard a metallic clanking sound from near the base of the rear hatch.

"Somebody's come to get us!" Scamp announced happily.

"I don't think so," Ravage replied. "Nobody's moved the rubble yet."

South Wentworth Avenue

An SUV sped on South Wentworth Avenue from West Garfield Boulevard, siren screaming and a blue light flashing on the dashboard.

The SUV stopped beside *Sentinel* and a woman appeared – she bore a large red cross on a white background worn prominently on her flask vest.

"Doctor Staite – you got wounded?"

Hit Girl studied the new arrival.

"We don't know," she replied simply.

Fusion members were feverously digging through the immense pile of rubble and they had been at it for nearly ten minutes since the explosion. Then the rubble began to shift on its own as a deep-throated roar could be heard from beneath the shaking pile. More masonry shifted and something big, black, and very ugly began to emerge. With a monstrous roar from the titanic 6.7-litre V8 turbo diesel, the monstrous truck heaved itself out of the masonry, crunching over broken glass and brickwork before it came to a stop on a clear stretch of road. The paintwork was scratched and gouged, but the bodywork was otherwise intact.

Not so, for Foxtail – she was in a very bad way.

..._...

When Hit Girl hauled open the rear hatch, she was aghast at the sight before her.

Foxtail was lying on her back with most of her armour removed. To say she was bruised would have been a major understatement. Almost every inch of the teen's body was bruised. Beside her, Scamp and Ravage were keeping an eye on the unconscious vigilante. Medic climbed out from behind the wheel and she made her way towards Hit Girl.

"Heavy bruising across front, back, and sides of her body. Her helmet protected her head, but she has a considerable concussion. I think her left thigh has been injured in some way, not to mention what might be a broken tibia – there may be more."

"Can I help?"

Hit Girl growled at the doctor who had appeared behind her. Medic nodded, and Hit Girl waved Doctor Staite forwards.

"The mask stays on," Hit Girl growled. "We have somewhere to be."

With that remark, Hit Girl nodded to Ravage and Scamp before she dived out of the vehicle.

South Normal Boulevard

Ruby Alpha: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune

Ruby Bravo: Mist, Piranha, Trojan

Opal Alpha: Jackal, Tempest, Cut-Throat

Opal Bravo: Raven, Wildcat, Nightmare

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower

Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

The situation sucked!

Hit Girl could see exhausted vigilantes fighting fresh . . . Shinobi. Damn! Shinobi were bad news – a variation on the ninja theme, only much deadlier. The new enemy were oriental, too; another bad sign. No way could FEAR have them teamed up with her. Venom took over command of Diamond Bravo and the seven fresher vigilantes tore into the enemy, relieving the beleaguered Ruby and Opal teams. The enemy did not openly show any concern with the numbers of their opposition rising to twenty, not including the rabid mutts. The odds had evened in Fusion's favour and their new enemy *were* dropping, just much more slowly than in a normal fight against brawn and muscle, rather than brains.

Hit Girl found herself fighting one of the men. He wore a dark-coloured set of loose-fitting overalls – they might have been dark blue or even black; it was difficult to tell in the semi-darkness. His swordsmanship was dignified and

disciplined – a ninja trait. He showed no outward emotion – another ninja trait. He used smooth, planned movements – the ninja way, too. Then, Hit Girl identified the sign of the man's 'office', so to speak. The highly-polished wooden riveted hilt of what could only be a meat cleaver sat in a custom leather holster on his left hip beside what appeared to be the butt of a Beretta pistol.

For a moment, her mind drifted.

February 9th, 2008

Safehouse A, New York

The ten-year-old girl was getting bored . . . the lesson had been going on for nearly two hours.

"Daddy. . ."

"Yes, child."

"We finished, yet?"

"Now, look here, Mindy – you need to know what you might come up against. This is real important, child."

"Okay – we have Japanese ninjas and they can be bad – so, I just kill 'em."

"As God is my witness, you push things, child. Yes, the Japanese ninja is very disciplined and very good at what they do – you have to be better, Mindy. But there is a worse ninja – those from China. They are ruthless, and they are incredibly disciplined."

"I'm disciplined," Mindy pointed out.

"Not always, child – you have been known to slip up."

Mindy rolled her eyes, then her shoulders slumped.

"I didn't see the cunt in the darkness – I bumped into him."

"While a Japanese ninja might allow you to bump into him before killing you, the Chinese version, the Shinobi – well, they would have killed you long before you were close enough to 'bump' into them."

"They that bad?" Mindy asked as she cringed at the news.

"I would never want to face one – they are stealthier than the most silent cat stalking its prey. They are rare, though, and that is good."

"How so?" the ever-inquisitive pig-tailed Mindy asked.

"Only one organisation uses them today – can you guess what that might be?"

Mindy thought for a moment.

"Mafia?"

"Worse."

"The Sicilian Mafia?"

"Damned Italian ponces!" Damon chuckled as Mindy screwed up her face in concentration for a few moments before giving up.

"No idea."

"The Chinese Triads."

Mindy paled at their mention.

"The Hong Kong Triad known as the 14K is believed to use Shinobi – that is unconfirmed as nobody who has met the Shinobi has actually survived to talk about it. While it is bad to have *any* Chinese Triad on your tail – the 14K are by far the worst, and the largest. If you ever find yourself fighting a Shinobi, child, you be damn careful, and you better have eyes in the back of your skull – they are devious, and they often work in pairs."

"I'll remember, Daddy, have no fear."

Saturday, October 15th, 2016

23:14

South Normal Boulevard, Chicago

Ruby Alpha: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune

Ruby Bravo: Mist, Piranha, Trojan

Opal Alpha: Jackal, Tempest, Cut-Throat

Opal Bravo: Raven, Wildcat, Nightmare

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower

Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

As the Safehouse dissolved in her mind and the dark street materialised around her, full of people fighting, her Daddy's comments came to the fore and they saved her life as she instinctively drew her second blade and checked her six.

She was being stalked. While her attention had been on her single attacker, his partner was closing in for the kill, a razor-sharp meat-cleaver poised to hack off her head at the neck. The man showed a moment's irritation at being found out but that did not prevent him from attacking, along with his partner. Hit Girl put everything she had into defending herself from the two attackers. She had to put them down as other members of her team needed help. She could see three armoured shapes on the ground – were they . . . she couldn't even bring herself to *think* the fateful word.

What the hell, was happening in their city?

..._...

Nightmare was lying on the ground.

She was exhausted and the man whom she had been fighting had fairly easily put her down – he was highly skilled, and she was not. Only, he had not killed her as she had expected but simply stepped over her and moved onto the next vigilante. A few feet away, she could see Trojan and Tempest on the ground too – injured, but alive, just like her. Nightmare had felt the Katana blade strike her left shoulder, and while the armour had held, the pain of the strike had been like nothing she had ever endured before. As far as she could tell, Trojan and Tempest were similarly struggling with painful injuries.

Hit Girl's arrival had been both fortuitous and very welcome.

Safehouse K

"Christ!" Stephanie exclaimed as she ran into the medical bay.

Her friend was lying on a table, stripped of her combat suit and underwear. Cathy was busy tending to the visible injuries which seemed to be mostly heavy bruising.

"Is she going to be okay?" Stephanie asked.

"I had help from another doctor, on the scene. We managed to stabilise her, but she has a serious concussion and we have internal bleeding which has been contained. She will be a very sick girl for quite a while and I am sure you understand what that means," Cathy replied.

"I do," Stephanie replied as she remembered her own recovery. "She's got hell ahead of her. Is she going to hospital?"

"Yes, in the next few minutes."

..._...

Once Saoirse had been taken off to hospital by Emily, Ryan appeared, and he hugged his wife briefly.

"*Fusion* is taking a hammering," he said.

"The night is not over," Cathy cautioned. "Plenty of time for everything to turn about."

"I hate not being involved," Stephanie complained.

"I know, you do," Ryan offered calmly. "You still played your part, Steph."

"I know, I know."

"I need to get back out there," Medic said as she pulled her mask into place. "Ravage and Scamp are waiting in *Titan*."

South Normal Boulevard, Chicago

Ruby Alpha: Shadow, Hellcat, Fortune

Ruby Bravo: Mist, Piranha, Trojan

Opal Alpha: Jackal, Tempest, Cut-Throat

Opal Bravo: Raven, Wildcat, Nightmare

Diamond Alpha Team: Hit Girl, Discord, Bane, Tigercat, Eisenhower

Diamond Bravo Team: Foxtail, Venom, Rage, Fury

Wildcat could not understand it.

They were beaten, only they were still alive – why? The thirty attackers had withered – eight were dead – the attack faltering once Hit Girl had arrived with fresh blood, but even so, the attackers could have caused much more damage than they had. Wildcat was struggling with the pain of two nasty slashes which had not penetrated her suit, but were painful, nonetheless. Then, as if by a single command, they vanished into the darkness, just as stealthily as they had arrived.

"What the fuck!?" the girl exclaimed.

Bane stared at Wildcat, unnerved by the vanishing act. Hit Girl strode over.

"Where did they go?" she demanded.

"Fuck knows!" Bane responded angrily.

"They took their dead," Venom pointed out.

"Who the bloody hell does that?" Fury wanted to know.

"A fucking mystery," Shadow finished.

"I want everybody back to Safehouse K – now!" Hit Girl growled.

An undisclosed location in Chicago

Lieutenant Vicky Richards glared down at the eleven miscreants kneeling before her.

They were all kids. Their ages varied from eight to sixteen. Six were girls, the remaining five, boys. While most appeared relieved at their change in circumstances, at least four still showed vehement anger at their capture. None were to be trusted, and as such, they were still secured with various physical restraints.

"You will each be taken, one by one, onto the next room. There you will be stripped, searched, and you will receive a brief interview. You are no longer *Marauders*. You are no longer *Predators*. You are just kids in the wrong place at the wrong time. None of you are in any great trouble and should you cooperate, you will all get new lives. If you do not

cooperate, then you will not enjoy your new home," Vicky announced. "We are not here to hurt you – we want to help you."

"Go fuck yourself, lady!" a fourteen-year-old girl shouted out.

Vicky turned and faced the delinquent teenager.

"You must be Firebrand," Vicky began and there was a hint of surprise in the teenager's eyes. "You *will* follow instructions, young lady."

"No – I won't!"

"Take her," Vicky ordered, and a pair of female police officers seized the girl.

Firebrand resisted, fighting the two officers, however, both were bigger than the fourteen-year-old and they easily dragged her through into the next room where the door was shut, and the girl was held down on the floor.

..._...

Eight minutes, and a lot of screaming and yelling later, Firebrand emerged.

The girl was more subdued, and she was wearing a set of matching grey jogging top and bottoms with white running shoes on her feet. Her long hair was a mess and she was struggling to put it back up in a ponytail.

"You done?" Vicky asked the girl who nodded more meekly than before.

Once the girl was ready, the restraints were secured, and the girl was allowed to sit against the far wall of the warehouse. Vicky then pointed at one of the boys.

"Inciter – you're next."

The boy who had been kneeling beside Firebrand was seized and taken through into the next room. His shouts ceased very quickly. On the boy's return, wearing the same set of joggers as Firebrand, he was restrained as before and with a rather dejected look, he was sent to sit beside Firebrand. Vicky waved at her colleague, Sergeant Trudy Platt.

"How did you subdue them?" she asked with genuine curiosity.

"Simple," Trudy replied. "I explained the facts of their situations to them in plain language and I then told them in explicit detail what I would do to them if they did not obey."

"Ouch!"

Safehouse K

While Mindy was pleased to see everybody alive, there were injuries.

Titan sat in the middle of the first-floor level of the Safehouse with injured vigilantes receiving medical attention, sitting on the ground around the mammoth vehicle. The wounds were superficial but very painful. Lauren, Curtis, and Marc all bore nasty elongated bruises on their upper bodies – the bruising would hurt for many days, Mindy knew.

"Mum!"

Mindy turned to see Stephanie running towards her. They both hugged.

"Are you. . ." Mindy began.

"I'm uninjured – just some bruising."

"When I heard about. . ."

"I know."

"I cannot lose you," Mindy said as she knelt down to look into her eldest daughter's eyes.

"She has nine lives," Jamie commented as he came over to give his sister a hug.

"She must be overdrawn by now," Shannon commented as she walked past with her arm wrapped around her father.

Stephanie grimaced.

Razor came bounding over and he almost knocked his owner over. Stephanie giggled as she was licked by the overexcited animal. Anne-Marie and Danny were sitting with Dave and they watched the antics from a few yards away. Next, to that group, Chloe, Joshua, and Becky were sitting together, glad to be alive. Becky was giving an animated presentation on her brush with death in *Titan*, just an hour previously. Chloe was trying to put a brave face on, but she failed miserably, and she was exchanging dark looks with Joshua. The attack had scared Becky, at the time, however, the little girl was very brave and considering she was unhurt, she had brushed off the attack and now thought of the event as just a bit of fun. Mind you, she looked very unhappy when she began to describe how Foftail had climbed aboard *Titan* and then collapsed.

"You appear to have enjoyed yourself," Chloe conceded with a look of concern.

"Between you and me, Mum, a little wee did escape," Becky whispered into Chloe's ear.

Chloe chuckled as the eight-year-old blushed furiously.

..._...

Forty minutes later, Mindy looked around at the despondent vigilantes.

Morale had quite literally plummeted, and their fighting spirit was ebbing.

"We can do this. . ." Mindy began but her words appeared to be having very little effect.

Mindy herself was feeling just as despondent which meant that she was unable to produce a rousing speech, encouraging her people into battle. Joshua rested his hand on Mindy's shoulder and Mindy pressed her own hand on top of his, glad of the human contact. Then Joshua began to make sounds, sounds which turned into words. The tune was familiar, Mindy thought.

*I've paid my dues
Time after time
I've done my sentence
But committed no crime*

A few ears perked up and then Stephanie grinned, as did Abigail. Both girls began to mutter the words with encouragement from Joshua before all three began singing.

*And bad mistakes
I've made a few
I've had my share of sand
Kicked in my face
But I've come through
And we mean to go on and on and on and on
We are the champions, my friends
And we'll keep on fighting till the end*

Others joined in with the singing, emboldened by the music.

*We are the champions
We are the champions
No time for losers
'Cause we are the champions of the world*

*I've taken my bows
And my curtain calls
You brought me fame and fortune
And everything that goes with it
I thank you all
But it's been no bed of roses*

*No pleasure cruise
I consider it a challenge before
The whole human race
And I ain't gonna lose
And we mean to go on and on and on and on*

"Come on!" Joshua shouted as tired vigilantes began to get to their feet, smiles spreading – the despondent, dazed looks vanishing, the singing was filling the Safehouse and Mindy was loving it.

*We are the champions, my friends
And we'll keep on fighting till the end
We are the champions
We are the champions
No time for losers
'Cause we are the champions of the world*

"Come on!" Joshua yelled. "Cheer up, you old buggers!"

*We are the champions, my friends
And we'll keep on fighting till the end
We are the champions
We are the champions
No time for losers
'Cause we are the champions*

"Worse things happen at sea, you know," Joshua commented as he looked over at Stephanie and winked.

Ryan just shook his head while Stephanie rolled her eyes. Everybody finished off their food and drink, singing and laughing as they did so. Masks were pulled back on and weapons were checked. The *Fusion* fighting force was back and ready for action. Hit Girl gave Jackal a big hug, followed by a hard punch before she began directing her forces.

"You lot are fucking crazy!" Lucy growled as she pulled on her mask.

01:05

They had barely left the Safehouse when the alert came through.

"*Fusion* – we have a major situation alert," Hal announced to all. "*Synthesis* has detected the enemy massing at South Wacker Drive, Lower Wacker Drive, West Harrison Street, South Wells Street, and West Jackson Boulevard."

That was a first – normally, all the disturbances took place well away from the centre of the city, but FEAR had escalated things somewhat. Hit Girl could sense the endgame approaching. It was just after one in the morning and she knew that by dawn, it would be all but over – but who would be the victor?

Assignments were issued, and the massed forces of *Fusion* altered course towards the centre of the windy city . . . and towards potential oblivion. Battle Guy had already adjusted the courses of his airborne drones, redirecting them over the designated battle zone. He was not happy with what he found, and it matched up with what *Synthesis* had discovered. There were thermal blooms in the darkness at all locations – except for Lower Wacker Drive, of course – which matched up with the images being received from traffic cameras.

FEAR's forces were out in force – *Corsairs*, *Marauders*, Russians, and Sicilians.

02:04

The battle was raging.

The CPD had initially been overwhelmed by the opening attacks – they had not expected such a gathering of force in the normally quieter part of Chicago. To add to the problems, there were still many civilians around as they poured out of bars and clubs, looking to make their way home to bed. Bullets flew in all directions, striking buildings and shattering glass. *Fusion* had arrived on the scene within twenty minutes, just minutes after the first shots had been fired. Their first task was to protect the CPD and get the injured officers to safety along with a few civilians who had

strayed into the line of fire. While protecting the innocent, *Fusion* had one hand tied behind their proverbial backs. It was another tactic of FEAR's to hobble *Fusion* in their attacks on her people.

There was still no sign of the bitch and Hit Girl was very keen to put an end to the woman – to put an end to the entire sordid affair which had ultimately culminated in the current night of action. Hit Girl was angry; she had missed seeing Saoirse before she was taken to hospital. The girl was one of her senior operators and she had been badly hurt – Medic had not been gentle in her appraisal of Saoirse's chances when she had suggested that Saoirse may not survive her internal injuries.

Fighting in amongst the skyscrapers posed a problem for both the drones and the sharpshooters. CPD snipers and Leon were having issues finding good perches from where to cover the fighting. Hit Girl was certain that FEAR had chosen the site for this battle with care and planning. It did not help that FEAR appeared to have fighters pre-sited with high-powered rifles at strategic points along Wacker Drive. Armoured shields were much in evidence as police officers, medics, and civilians were protected by *Fusion* operators. The area echoed with the sounds of gunfire, small explosions, and the screaming of the terrified and the wounded – of which there were many. Ambulances were deploying to the scene, only to be targeted before they got close to the wounded. CPD armoured SWAT vehicles and *Fusion* vehicles were being used as makeshift ambulances, ferrying the wounded to safe zones where paramedics could take over and take the wounded to hospital. However, for many, the options for escape were limited as they were pinned down within the 'red zone' as it was being called.

For the immediate moment, FEAR was in control of the borders surrounding the 'red zone'.

At the east end of the West Harrison Street Bridge, a man lay dying.

Medic ignored the gunfire that flew all around her and she pushed the ever-present danger out of her mind as she concentrated on the tasks before her. To her left, a female CFD paramedic had her hands pressing deep into the gunshot wound of a uniformed CPD officer. Medic was busy suturing ruptured organs and fighting to stop the internal bleeding so that the man could be moved. The CFD ambulance had been immobilised by the gunfire and it had been abandoned. The paramedic and the vigilante were working side-by-side in the lee of the wrecked ambulance, using it as a shield. Ten feet away, the other paramedic from the same wrecked ambulance was working alongside another uniformed CPD officer who was seeing to a fallen civilian.

A few yards away, Raven and Hellcat were firing on gunmen, across the far side of the Harrison/Wacker intersection. They were well-stocked with spare magazines but even so, they husbanded their rounds as the morning was still very young. For both vigilantes, it was a new style of fighting. Street fighting was their thing, not combat that was fresh out of a computer game. Both of them were also very tired – they had already been 'on shift' for almost eight hours. Adrenalin was keeping them going and neither wanted to let down the rest of the team. A little over 170 yards to the east, at the next intersection, Petra, Stormtide, and Tigercat were engaged in their own gun fight. Eight Russians were using a parking lot as cover while they engaged the three vigilantes. Beyond them, at least three sharpshooting *Corsairs* were atop the La Salle Street Station.

They sent lead down towards the three vigilantes, adding to the danger at the intersection.

La Salle Street Station

Hit Girl and Shadow ran along the three-hundred-yard roof towards the sharpshooters.

"Two to one – I think we have things in our favour for once," Shadow commented as they ran.

A hatch opened, fifty yards or so ahead of them – six . . . no, seven . . . eight – men climbed out of said hatch and they moved to protect their sharpshooters.

"Why do you have to open your big mouth?" Hit Girl groaned.

"So, what – two to one, six to one; what's the difference?" Shadow retorted.

"Just remember, Shadow, *you're* taking down your own fair share."

"Bet I get more than you do, Hit Girl – you're getting old!"

"Fuck you, half-pint!"

"I'm almost the same height as you."

"You saying that I'm short?"

"Yeah!"

Shadow bolted ahead and kicked an assault rifle out of the hands of the nearest Sicilian. She followed up the kick with a punch to his face, breaking his nose.

"I got first blood!" Shadow yelled.

Hit Girl ignored her annoying Lieutenant as she proceeded to put a bullet in one man and then kicked another off the roof.

"Two down. . ." Hit Girl growled.

"Hey!" a voice called out over the radio. "*What fucker dropped a body almost on top of me?*"

"Quit your fucking moaning, Jackal, women working here!" Shadow chuckled as she broke the arm of a large Sicilian before breaking his trachea with the heel of her boot.

"*What, you and Hit Girl?*" Jackal called back derisively. "*Don't make me laugh!*"

"That's not what you were muttering as you licked me out, the other night."

"So disgusting!" Hit Girl commented as she slashed open a man's throat with her Tanto before kicking him off the station roof.

"Like Kick-Ass never licked you out," Shadow retorted.

"*Time and a place for labia licking, girls,*" Mist commented from down below.

"True," Shadow replied as she fought off a pair of mafia scum.

"Let's get them!" Hit Girl called out and the last pair of men moved back, towards the sharpshooters.

One turned, and he fired a high-powered bullet directly at Hit Girl. Shadow was horrified to see her mentor stagger backwards before she tumbled backwards over the edge of the roof and plunged forty feet to the roadway below.

Lower Wacker Drive

Kick-Ass charged forwards, his Ko-Wakizashi glinting in the lighting.

Behind him, came Eisenhower leading Loki, Dart, Kes, Ardent, Siren, Sampson, and Blade. They were followed by Discord, Bane, Rage, and Fury. Ahead of them, sprinting full tilt towards them, were two dozen *Corsairs* and maybe eight *Marauders*. On the far side of the subterranean drive, Fortune, Relentless, Torment, and Venom moved to flank the attacking *Corsairs* and *Marauders*. When the opposing forces came together, there was an almighty explosion of yelling, the clashing of metal against metal, and the snarling of rabid canines.

Most of the *Corsairs* were unnerved by the presence of the armour-clad dogs – many of them were ex-military, and they knew only too well what attack dogs were capable of accomplishing with their pearly-whites. The dogs moved fast and in pairs, attacking *Corsairs* as they went. Bane and Venom went for the *Marauders* with the single aim of putting them out cold with as little injury to their persons as possible. It was not easy for them to fight without maiming, or killing, but they had no choice; they wanted those kids to have a chance at a new life, just as they both had.

Kick-Ass in comparison was out for blood. Those *Corsairs* were accepting money to hurt people in Chicago and they had been part of hurting Foxtail – that was unforgiveable. The veteran vigilante cut through the armour-clad mercenaries taking blows on his armour and fending off blows from batons and swords with his own blades. He was angry and every blow against one of the bastards chipped away at his anger, bit by bit.

As far as Kick-Ass was concerned, no *Corsair* was going survive the fight.

La Salle Street Station

Jackal heard the yell from Hit Girl as she fell.

He looked up and he tried not to laugh. Hit Girl hung by her legs from the horizontal section of a lamppost.

"Just hang around, don't mind me," Jackal chuckled as he, Cut-Throat, and Fortune covered the other team's back.

The verbal response from Hit Girl was very unladylike as she built up momentum and swung around the horizontal pole, swinging herself upwards until she was able to stand on the pole. From there, she threw herself forwards, landing on the station roof and jumping over Shadow who appeared to be fighting two of the sharpshooters, hand to hand. The other two sharpshooters were aiming their weapons at Shadow, ready to take her down, only they each received two bullets in the forehead, courtesy of Hit Girl.

"Always having to clear up after you, Shadow!"

"I was doing fine!" Shadow growled as she punched out the last man, and shoving him out of her way.

"Pull the other sword, it's got bells on," Hit Girl growled as she ran and dived off the rooftop, swinging on the same light pole and somersaulting to a casual touchdown on the street below.

"Very pretty," Jackal conceded.

Hit Girl chuckled. Very few could openly tease Hit Girl, but Jackal was one of those – besides, she'd get the Brit back later. . .

Off West Jackson Boulevard

The tripartite agreement and the ensuing battles, along with the violence and destruction, the disinformation, the propaganda; it had all gone a long way to discredit *Fusion*. As a direct result, many of the 2.7 million citizens openly admitted to *Fusion* being bad for the city and questioned their future existence.

Wildcat was having the time of her young life. Maybe not so much on the part of Nightmare and Piranha. Nightmare was still very sore from her earlier injuries while Piranha was very tired and a little unsure of herself as a result, much to her surprise. The fighting was fun, but very tiring, and she was not conditioned for the type of fighting that *Fusion* went in for. Wildcat, well, she was not easy to keep up with as she appeared to have unlimited energy, as did Nightmare. Nevertheless, Wildcat was in charge, and Piranha deferred to the younger girl in action.

Wildcat made short work of anybody who challenged her, either with her Katana, or the companion Wakizashi. One thing Piranha had noticed about the youngster was that Wildcat was fanatical about being a vigilante and in many respects, Wildcat was a mirror image of Hit Girl, herself. However, Piranha recognised a troubled girl when she saw one, and the very first time Piranha had seen Megan as herself, she had recognised something dark within the twelve-year-old's eyes . . . not to mention the bizarre haircut – but it was something which the seasoned *Predator* could not broach with the much younger girl who she barely knew.

As Piranha took on her own Russian Brotherhood soldier, Wildcat was performing some amazing somersaults as she used her speed and manoeuvrability to outfox the much stronger Russians who would be able to snap the girl's frame in two, should they get their muscular hands on her body. Wildcat was like an angry bird as she bounced from shoulder to shoulder, driving one of her blades down into the same shoulder and killing the man before diving towards the next target. As for Nightmare, that girl was disturbed in a seemingly different way to Wildcat, although Nightmare also had a darkness to her eyes.

Nightmare fought well for such a slightly built young girl with a barely concealed bloodlust and a small amount of recklessness which would never have been tolerated within *Urban Predator*. Piranha moved to protect Nightmare's back as the girl appeared very preoccupied with drawing blood with her jungle sword. Then Piranha jumped a mile when the head of a man exploded a few feet away, the pistol aimed at her head dropping to the ground.

"Overwatch has your back, Piranha!" Leon called over the communications as she selected a new target.

Lower Wacker Drive

Carnage.

That was the only word for it. Bodies, the remains of bodies, blood – it was all there. Standing in amongst it all, the dogs sniffed at anything which moved – they growled – and someone, usually Bane or Venom, would put a bullet into the head, speeding them along on the dark road to hell. There appeared to be but one serious injury on the part of Fusion, beyond the myriad of bruises. Fury sat on a concrete partition, cradling her left arm.

"You get yourself off with your right hand, right?" Venom teased.

"Fuck you!" Fury replied, raising the middle finger of her right hand.

"I use that finger, too," Venom persisted.

"I can help," Rage suggested.

Fury glared at the boy deciding whether or not to stab him with her bō-staff. Kick-Ass chuckled, pleased to see morale soaring. He was certain that the writing was on the wall for FEAR and her fucked up Axis of Evil. It had to end, and soon, before *Fusion*, the CPD, and everybody else was too tired, or injured, to fight.

"Let's move!" Kick-Ass yelled, and he waved at the animals who quickly bolted up the roadway, towards the open air.

02:38

Off West Jackson Boulevard

Wildcat was appalled to see a man with his young family emerging from between two buildings.

What the hell, were they doing out at almost three in the morning!? She moved towards them at almost the same moment that a pair of *Corsairs* saw the same family. Nightmare and Piranha were over the far side of the block and out of position to help Wildcat who ran forwards only to find herself flipped into the air by a baton. She crashed onto her back, yelling out in pain, but quickly regaining her feet. She found herself facing *another* pair of *Corsairs* armed with machete-style swords. Wildcat threw down her shield and she unsheathed both of her swords, showing her teeth. The *Corsairs* moved apart, making *their* job easier, but the young vigilante's job *much* harder.

There was a small crowd gathering, watching the fighting. A few of them were actually cheering on the *Corsairs*, instead of cheering on the *Fusion* vigilante. It did not help that a group of firefighters were there putting out a small fire caused by the fighting. The civilians were fed up with the fighting, the damage, the injuries. Many had come to the conclusion that *Fusion* were no longer in control and nobody wanted a vigilante civil war, demolishing the city and taking down innocent citizens as collateral damage. It was deemed better to throw in with the more powerful, even if it was organised crime. Wildcat hated being jeered – she was there to *protect* the city from people like the Russians, FEAR, and the Sicilians.

There was actually a loud groan from the assembled watchers when Wildcat skewered a *Corsair*, killing him. A firefighter's glare said it all – contempt . . . for *her*. That just made Wildcat angrier and she attacked the second *Corsair* even harder, then, as Wildcat put down the second *Corsair* with a blade to his heart, she saw something that made her blood run cold. The other pair of *Corsairs* were looking to raise the stakes and one of them pulled out a small cylindrical device. He proceeded to pull out the cotter pin before chucking the grenade towards Wildcat. The grenade was aimed at Wildcat, but it would also take out the civilians including the young family when it exploded. The grenade rolled across the sidewalk towards the crowd of civilians, none of whom had properly understood the danger which was just seconds away.

Without a moment's hesitation, the twelve-year-old female vigilante leapt forward, swept up her shield and she covered the grenade with the armoured shield. Barely a second later, the high-explosive grenade exploded, the explosive force striking the shield and forcing the lightweight vigilante into the air. The shield took the full force of the blast, protecting the man and his young family. The vigilante flew through the air before she collided with the unyielding concrete wall of the nearest building. A second later, she hit the ground hard and lay still.

The two masked *Corsairs* approached the fallen vigilante.

***Chapter 349*: Heroes**

This night, my world was quite literally blasted apart.

These chapters are the account of the action which led to me losing the most important person in my life. I am broken and even now, I have no idea how I can continue.

Sunday, October 15th, 2016

02:49

Off West Jackson Boulevard

The two masked *Corsairs* approached the fallen vigilante.

However, before they could come too close, the man, whose family had almost died, pulled the SIG Sauer P250 Compact from the young vigilante's holster and he pointed it at the two attackers.

"Don't come any closer. . ."

"Or what?" the nearest *Corsair* growled back.

"I'll . . . I'll shoot you both – this young girl saved the lives of my family and I ain't about to let her be killed by you fuckers!"

"Yeah!" a burly firefighter announced in agreement as he stepped forwards.

"These vigilantes do so much for us, and thanks to you bastards, we forgot that for a moment. They are what keeps Chicago ticking and they protect us all."

An immediate swell of support echoed from the assembled crowd as many swept up improvised melee weapons. The burly firefighter seized a large metal device from his fire truck and along with a colleague, similarly armed, stepped forward to stand beside the man.

"Fuck!" Wildcat growled as she sat up with a hand to her head.

"Let me help you, young lady," the burly firefighter – the one who had previously shown her contempt – suggested as he offered his left hand to Wildcat.

"Thanks," Wildcat replied as she hauled herself to her feet.

"Ma'am?" the family man said as he offered Wildcat her pistol, butt first.

The two *Corsairs* now felt a little unsure of their status and continued safety.

"Let's fuck 'em over!" a voice called.

"My sentiments exactly," Wildcat growled as she deployed her claws with a flick of her wrists.

The two *Corsairs* began to move backwards, towards their own lines, when Wildcat attacked and went for the nearest one. The other *Corsair* thought that he might have been in the clear . . . until he saw something moving towards his head, but he had no time to dodge the business end of the three-foot, aluminium stand-pipe as it collided with his head.

"Fuck!" Battle Guy announced over the communications. "*Wildcat's incited a damn riot!*"

"I do what I can!" the young vigilante responded.

The Russians, the Sicilians, and the *Corsairs*, all found themselves facing further adversaries in the form of civilians, firefighters, and anybody else who fancied chipping in.

Wildcat was re-joined by Nightmare and Piranha. Together, they led the charge, pushing the evil forces back towards their own lines. A group of *Corsairs* were chased down West Jackson Boulevard and onto the bridge where they were caught between two *Fusion* teams. The *Corsairs* took refuge behind cars and buses as Wildcat, Nightmare, and Piranha caught up and pinned them down from the east end of the bridge. The west end of the bridge saw Raven, Tempest, Hellcat, and Fortune entering the fight.

Gunfire erupted around the bridge as the *Corsairs* attempted to fight their way out of a very bad situation.

03:14

West Congress Parkway

The enemy were constantly shifting their positions and making it almost impossible to maintain the safe haven for the injured cops and for the civilians who were being forced out of their places of refuge.

Dr Jennifer Staite was deep in the centre of the action, patching up wounded CPD officers. Beside her, Lynx was covering the doctor with a large armoured shield. Bullets struck the shield repeatedly as Lynx braced the carbon-fibre composite device while her back was covered by Ravage. A few feet away, Medic was seeing to a wounded firefighter, Hawk covering Medic with another shield while their backs were protected by Ravage. A few feet away, TITAN sat with the hatches guarded by Scamp toting a G36K and remaining well within the protective citadel of the vehicle.

The young girl had dug very deep for courage and bravery, but still she jumped each time a bullet slammed into TITAN's armour. While she was determined to prove her worth to *Fusion*, and despite her limited *Predator* training, all the noise and fighting had scared the little girl to her core. Each bullet, each bang and crash, it made the little girl jump and squeeze the grips of her weapon ever tighter. She was no stranger to killing and death, but that had been in self-defence only and not amidst a raging battle. She was scared for herself, she was scared for her friends, and she was scared for her new family, all of whom were fighting to the death within a very short distance of where she herself sat in relative safety.

The eight-lane parkway, usually bustling with traffic in the daytime, was devoid of moving traffic, but full of wrecked vehicles and dead bodies, with a handful of wounded screaming for help. The air wreaked of gunpowder and explosives. The coppery smell of blood was everywhere along with the stench of death.

Then, amidst all that chaos, *she* appeared.

FEAR in her full battle armour, resplendent with her battle sword.

Around her, a phalanx of battle-hardened *Corsairs* in red battle armour escorted their queen. She had climbed out of an armoured Humvee at the intersection of South Wacker Drive and West Van Buren Street. She had not been alone, either. Five more Humvees had pulled up around her, disgorging her personal guard of twenty *Corsairs*.

She did not immediately dive into the fight, however, but instead, she waited, and she appeared refreshed and eager to fight.

..._...

The Sicilians arrived at about the same time.

Six large SUVs appeared from the east, blasting their way through the CPD roadblocks which had cordoned off the battle zone. Each vehicle carried five or six heavies, amounting to thirty-two men spilling out onto the road at the east end of the West Harrison Street Bridge. For the first time, their leaders were out with their men. Anthony Geno, son of Carlo Genovese, son of Vito Genovese, was in command. He was not alone; his wife, Helen Geno, was also providing support. Both wore masks, but it was undeniably them as they had brought along their kids, too. Lawrence and Teri, both masked, were seen running west, across the West Harrison Street Bridge towards a low-rise building.

Lawrence was carrying a sniper rifle while his sister carried ammunition and a sighting scope.

..._...

The final team to arrive at the party, arrived at about the same time as the Sicilians.

The Solntsevskaya Brotherhood had found some fresh soldiers for their fight and three large trucks had dutifully appeared. Forty men jumped down from the rear of the vehicles, some armed with heavy weapons. They quickly made for the West Congress Parkway intersection of South Wells Street and arranged their defences.

The final Battle for Chicago was about to begin.

The Battle Bunker

Battle Guy, Hal, and Ember were struggling with all the information coming in, but *Synthesis* was cutting out the crap, lessening the amount which made it through to the decision makers, but it was still a lot.

"Diamond Alpha – make for FEAR at the West Van Buren Street Bridge. Diamond Bravo – cover Alpha and guard Hit Girl's back," Battle Guy directed.

"Emerald Alpha and Bravo," Ember directed. "You've got the Sicilian bastards at West Harrison. Ruby Bravo, provide backup for Emerald. Ruby Alpha, move to intercept the Russians at South Wells Street. Opal Alpha and Bravo – you have the Russians, too."

Ember kept the status board updated, showing where each and every member of *Fusion* was at every moment – it was vital to keep track and not lose situational awareness. The three of them were all there were to provide critical assistance to the teams on the ground should they get disorientated during the heavy urban fighting. Ember was amazed by the state-of-the-art equipment and systems used by *Fusion* – she was still struggling to take it all in. For the young teenager, her life had been a train-wreck and headed directly for oblivion. Somehow, she had been in the right place at the right time, to do the right thing, much like she had been with Jamie. Now, she had saved the life of his big sister after having kept the young boy alive. She was very pleased to see that Jamie was alive and well. She had been very surprised to see Abigail, too. It seemed that Stephanie had been gathering *Predators* from around the globe. There was a strange atmosphere where she saw these *ex-Predators* who were now friends despite having been trained to view their fellow *Predators* as competitors to be beaten at all cost – both figuratively and literally. To see all those kids smiling and laughing while they went about their lethal business of killing and maiming was weird but satisfying.

Hit Girl had successfully harnessed the skill and energy of those *Predators* and turned their deadly skills into something which could be used for good, just as they were doing at that moment across Chicago, putting their lives on the line to protect the city. Hit Girl had given Ember a choice – she could keep out of the way, or she could help fight in any way that she could, considering her injured state. Ember had shrewdly opted to assist – she had to; she wanted to prove that she was no longer Raider, that mercenary who would go out and main innocent civilians. As Raider, she had done a lot of that. She had terrorised adults, children, old people. She had extorted money from shop owners. She had stolen. She had destroyed property. She had murdered. She had hurt the innocent. Why had she done those things? She felt that she had to channel her bloodlust, just like her compatriots and FEAR had seemed to be that channel – only she had made a very bad choice, but until Stephanie had blundered across their path, she had had no way out. No way out of the life she had chosen, but no longer wanted.

She had been trapped, but now she was free, and she was going to do everything that she could to seek repentance for her actions.

Her eyes focussed on two of the dots on the giant screen before her – Rage and Fury.

West Van Buren Street Bridge

The two friends were in the thick of it.

They were back to back as they provided support for Diamond Alpha and principally Hit Girl who was focussing on her adversary: FEAR. Neither FEAR, nor Hit Girl, had said a word since they had laid eyes on one another. The hate and the desire to rip out the heart of the other was strong, and the extreme emotions could be literally felt by all those close by. Discord, Bane, Venom, and Tigercat were facing off against a round dozen of FEAR's personal guard. The remaining eight were ensuring the safety of their principal and watching her back as she fought Hit Girl.

For Discord, it was strange fighting alongside Venom and Bane. The twins had never had a very good reputation for playing with others and most avoided the two girls who could be vicious and spiteful without provocation or reason. Somehow, the twins attitude to others had changed dramatically and Discord enjoyed spending time with the girls – they had a vicious sense of humour which she had not previously been aware of. Discord also trusted Venom and

Bane with her life and they her. The three girls fought alongside the much younger Tigercat who was very skilled and Stormtide had ensured that everybody knew who her siblings were and what might happen if anybody fucked with them. Despite Stormtide's difficult beginnings in *Urban Predator*, she had excelled against adversity. Even Venom and Bane respected the younger girl's skills and were very wary of her – the girl had a stormy temper which once unleashed was very difficult to quench.

Tigercat was young but he had courage, lots of it. The fighting scared him – what *normal* person would *not* be scared by such fighting – but he had been taught by his father to bury that fear deep and only unleash it if the fear was to be an asset. The boy was learning fast. His big sister was imparting her own knowledge and both he and his sister were taking her instructions, just as they had been taught. Despite having been apart for so long, they explicitly trusted their elder sibling and would obey any instruction without question. They had great respect for Shannon and for what she had accomplished in the face of so much horror. He was pleased to be fighting alongside such accomplished *Predators* as Discord, Venom, and Bane. He was paying attention to their movements as they moved without wasting energy or advantage. He missed fighting alongside his sister, but she was with another team, fighting another foe. He knew that she would be safe; she was older than he was and her skill level was beyond his own.

Around the entire group of *Fusion*, *Corsairs*, and FEAR, Eisenhower and her children prowled, ensuring total security, watching for interlopers hoping to cut in on the fight.

..._...

For Fury, the fight fed her need for danger and that underlying bloodlust.

The girl, only just eleven-years-old, enjoyed the fear that danger brought to her. The emotion was like a drug to her and nothing felt better than being in harm's way. She had first felt it in the forest, years before. That feeling of being hunted generated a special type of fear in human beings and somehow Fury *enjoyed* that feeling of being hunted. Later, knowing that the person who was most likely to corner her was just as skilled as she was, only made the emotion more enjoyable. Okay, the girl was deeply psychotic, a trait which her handlers within *Urban Predator* had seized upon and fed to produce the ultimate assassin that the program was designed for. The girl had been groomed to become something special, as was her counterpart, Stephanie Walker. While Stephanie was also psychotic, her psychosis was not as developed as that of Abigail Wilde. Not that they had not tried to deepen Stephanie's level of psychosis – hence the improvisation in that same forest which had led an even younger girl to be hunted by Fury, producing yet another psychotic youngster now known as Rigour.

For Fury, she had only one care in the world; looking after number one: Abigail Wilde. However, that instinct was changing. She cared for somebody more than she ever thought possible. The boy, who even at that moment had his back to hers. A boy who was the brother of her most hated adversary. A boy who she loved more than anything or anyone on the planet. A boy who she would die for – and almost had. She also had a family. She had a big brother who she cared about and who cared about her. She had a mother. She had a father – at least for the moment. Her new father was in hospital and loitering at death's door. Deep inside her, she felt anger. Enormous anger. That anger fed her need for bloodlust and danger and it focussed her mind acutely, allowing her to respond to threats with a lightning response that often shocked her adversary.

Indeed, a *Corsair* came too close, seeing the diminutive youngsters as easy prey: he received two rapid slashes to his stomach from Fury's bō-staff, for his trouble, and the last thing he saw was his own entrails spilling out of his abdomen. He had dropped his own weapon and tried to gather up the masses of sausage-like intestine which steamed as it came in contact with the very cold air of the dark night. The coppery smell of the blood was another drug which all *Predators* recognised and one which all but a very few enjoyed. The smell often drove the youngsters into a rabid frenzy of fighting as they quickly became intoxicated on the metallic scent.

Fury took a brief glance at the bloody entrails and the dying man, smirked behind her mask and then quickly put the man out of her mind as she guarded Rage's back while he fought his own *Corsair*.

..._...

Despite his tender age, Rage was an accomplished fighter who was constantly striving to prove himself a better fighter.

The boy always felt that he had to do better. He always felt that he had to justify his position and within *Urban Predator*, considering his lowly beginnings, he had not wanted to provide any excuse for himself to be demoted back to being a *Yellow*, or worse. Thus, he had always pushed himself – with the help of his two very unlikely friends; Abigail and Rachel. Without them both, he would never have survived, let alone acquired the skills which had kept him alive when he was very much alone. The same skills had helped to keep him and Shannon alive once they had

found each other and they had generated a bond between themselves which was ultimately unbreakable. Shannon was always welcome around the Lizewski home, as was Jamie at the Millar household. They regularly sparred, much to the entertainment of their friends.

The one thing he had craved for years had happened; he had his sister back. That one event had made him whole again and it had given him an edge that he had never known before. That edge was keen and very lethal. He may only have been nine-years-old, but the youngster was an accomplished fighter, something which the *Corsairs* were discovering to their cost. Rage whirled around, fighting a man more than twice his size, but Rage was quicker, and he darted left and right, avoiding the heavy sword with which the *Corsair* was armed. Rage would dart in with his own sword, striking the red armour and attempting a strike into unarmoured sections of the man's body. Naturally, the *Corsair*, being part of FEAR's personal guard, was highly skilled and he did not take kindly to being struck by a little shit in a combat suit.

In fact, the *Corsair* took it personally, and he went to town on the youngster.

West Harrison Street Bridge

The bullets pounded into the abandoned vehicles.

Glass shattered, and metalwork pinged with the sound of high-powered rounds which flew in all directions. Three SWAT members returned fire with their AR-15 rifles while taking cover behind a panel van which was loaded with furniture – the furniture proved to be good at stopping bullets. Taking refuge behind a large Jeep SUV, four CPD officers added to the gunfire being thrown back at the Sicilian fighters. On the bridge itself, Kick-Ass, Splinter, Torment, and Petra were taking cover behind the steel barrier which ran alongside the roadway. The Sicilians themselves were occupying the corner opposite the bridge using concrete barriers for cover. Directly across the street from the Sicilians, Stormtide and Mist lay on a grassy knoll, sending accurate gunfire into the enemy from a flanking position. They were supported by Relentless, Trojan, and Piranha.

Piranha was not regretting her decision to come to Chicago and seek out Hit Girl. Okay, the first contact had not quite gone according to plan, but despite the pain and humiliation, she had been accepted by the *Predators* whom she had helped train and by extension, the *Predators* whom she had caused to have a miserable childhood. She knew that very few would have any reason not to hate her, both for what she represented, and for how she had treated them. They had worked her over, and Hit Girl had rightly seen her as a threat, however, Lucy had had an ally – two really – in Saoirse and Shannon. Why Lucy had taken to Shannon, guiding her, keeping her alive, Lucy was not certain, apart from her link to Shannon's father. As for Saoirse, they had fought many times, but Saoirse was one of the few people who had been kind to Lucy when she had really needed a friend.

Either side of her, the two boys were taking aimed shots at the Sicilians, saving ammunition and dropping the targets slowly, but steadily.

..._...

The Sicilians were no match for the deadly fire coming in from the well-trained vigilantes.

Men were struck by the incoming bullets, some by more than one, falling to the ground in a pool of blood, the blood congealing in the cold as it intermingled with the blood of the other dead. The wounded screamed out in agony as their wounds were tended to by their comrades. Many of the Sicilians were aware that the end was getting close, but some still held out for a rapid turn of events to bring the fight back around with *Fusion* on the losing side. Ultimately, the turning of the tide had come from the civilians aligning themselves with *Fusion* and the CPD. That single act was to bring about their downfall and many of them knew it, despite not wanting to accept it. They were very exposed, and they had civilians taking pot-shots at them from overlooking buildings. While the gunfire was not all that accurate, it was plentiful and taking its toll.

Snipers and counter-snipers were busy sending high-powered bullets at their counterparts while trying to assist their forces on the ground. Leon as Overwatch was keeping an eye on her friends as they fought. She knew that there was at least on sniper team operating out there but they were not making her task easy as she attempted to find them. However, her current targets were Anthony and Helen Geno. They would appear and disappear as they kept their troops in order and guided their gunfire. Leon knew that she would only get one good shot before they kept themselves out of sight. Leon was also aware of the Sicilian's own sniper team who had vanished into buildings at the start of the fight. They would be looking for her and the moment she took her shot, they would track her down.

Leon lined up her shot a few minutes later, just as Anthony Geno came into view, a set of binoculars to his eyes. He

was scanning the area for any weaknesses in the *Fusion* lines which he could exploit. The man was highly-skilled when it came to strategic planning, hence he had appeared to lead for the front.

'Well,' Leon thought. 'He would die from the front, too.'

As she adjusted for the breeze and for the difference in relative altitude, Leon steadied her breathing and she held the final breath before squeezing the trigger.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

"We need to work fast if we're going to save the lower leg – the damage to the muscles and ligaments is bad; I'm surprised the damage wasn't much worse."

"The arm is salvageable to. . ."

The voices faded in and out as Saoirse's medication flowed through her body. She had moments of lucidity where she heard words and sentences – some complete, most partial – but where she also felt pain; intense pain.

Her mind was playing tricks on her and she kept regressing to her past.

..._...

March 2011

She could remember walking the streets of Belfast one night, and then a moment's distraction while she had burrowed inside her handbag.

Her friends had moved off ahead of her and then she had felt a hand over her mouth followed by a whirlwind of activity which had resulted in her reluctantly sliding her knickers down and off before she dropped them on the pile of her freshly discarded clothing, leaving herself completely naked and sobbing while several boys examined her nine-year-old body.

"Stop snivelling, brat," a girl in black fatigues growled causing her to sob even harder. "What's your name?"

"Saoirse."

"Irish?"

"I'm from Belfast."

"An Irish slut – you'll fit in well!"

Saoirse yelped as she was back-handed across her right buttock. Next, came the indignities of a shower with boys, watched by adult males. Saoirse thought that that might be the end of it, but then she was seized, and her hair was shaved off.

She could not believe what was happening to her and she was in a state of borderline hysterics by the time she was finally left alone, and she sank onto her bed where she cried and cried.

..._...

June 2013

"Hey, look – Doherty's got pubes!"

"Nice!"

For Saoirse, it was the start of another shitty day in hell. It was getting too much for the eleven-year-old Phase 2 *Predator*. She hated the humiliation of showering with boys. She hated the humiliation of being pushed around. She wanted control of her life back. So, after breakfast, she made her way to the vehicle garage and she found herself standing by the controls for the main door.

"This is not the way, Saoirse."

"Fuck off, Lucy."

"Saoirse – you don't want to do this. I don't want to have to come after you and kill you."

"I hate it. I hate it all."

"You've survived more than two years of shit, Saoirse. It can only get easier and I know that you're made of sterner shit than you let on."

"Why do you care, Lucy?"

"I don't know – maybe there are some of you that are worth it."

..._...

October 2017

The building was coming down.

She twisted the throttle, her motorcycle responding instantly but not instantly enough as the collapsing wall outpaced her machine and she found her world turning upside down and her body being struck by large objects which pummelled her into the roadway.

Then darkness as something struck her helmet and she felt nothing more.

..._...

Consciousness returned, and the vigilante found herself staring at the underside of . . . *Titan*?

Foxtail pulled herself along the hull, towards the rear. The pain was extreme, but she fought through the pain, just as she had been taught, all those years ago. She banged on the rear hatch until it opened.

Then she passed out.

West Harrison Street Bridge

The bullet flew straight and true.

The breeze nudged it slightly to the right, but Leon had accounted for that and every other possible factor affecting the bullet's trajectory through the Chicago night.

Anthony Geno's hearing caught the sound of the bullet as it cut through the air, but by the time his brain had processed the information, the bullet was just carving its way into his right temporal bone before burrowing into the man's brain, turning the meaty substance into mush as it continued through and out the opposite temporal bone and on into the forehead of his lieutenant, killing both men instantly.

"A twofer!" Leon grinned excitedly as she chambered her next round.

..._...

Helen Geno froze as her husband's blood and brains splattered across her face.

The gooey substance was hot against her skin in the early morning chill. She turned to see her husband of fourteen years slumping on the ground, his head all but destroyed by the large-calibre bullet. She screamed out in anger and loss as she surveyed his rapidly cooling corpse.

Her anger was quickly translated into action as she martialled her troops and she planned a counterstrike.

..._...

Lawrence and Teri froze in shock as they heard the bullet and they saw it strike their father.

"Find that damn sniper, Teri!" Lawrence growled as the young teenager fought back the tears and he focussed on the task of taking down the sniper who had deprived them of their father.

Teri used her spotting scope to scan the nearby buildings and further afield for suitable sniper perches. There were a lot of windows and dark areas to be searched by her scope which had night capabilities.

West Congress Parkway and South Wells Street

The Russians held a good position, overlooking the battles from the elevated, multi-lane roadway.

They were disciplined and skilled. Their gunfire was very accurate as it plunged bullet after bullet into the vehicles behind which Shadow, Hellcat, and Fortune took cover. Beyond the three girls, Jackal, Tempest, and Cut-Throat were providing covering fire in an attempt to allow the girls to move forward in a flanking manoeuvre. So far, the manoeuvre was going nowhere. Whilst two large groups of Russian fighters took on Fusion, others were busy raining down hell on anybody close by and to hell with collateral damage. The bastards were targeting the paramedics directly as they worked, and one was already dead and two more were wounded on the streets below the parkway. Despite the direct attack, the paramedics bravely continued to work, despite their own wounds.

Wildcat, Nightmare, and Raven were tasked with paramedic protection and they had dropped down from the parkway and were using their armour and shields to protect the paramedics and their patients as they worked.

..._...

For Hellcat, it was a dream come true.

She was fighting alongside her heroine: Shadow. The twelve-year-old ignored the bullets, planning ways out of their predicament. Despite her tender age, she was a seasoned vigilante, although all out battle was something new and very scary to the youngster. She knew that her brother was fighting not too far away, along with her sister. They were both at the back of her mind where she was dreading something happening to either one of them.

She felt Fortune's hand on her shoulder and she nodded to say that she was okay.

..._...

Fortune was scared out of her wits.

Nothing that her sister had taught her could have prepared her for such chaos. She knew that her sister was a few streets over, fighting Hit Girl. She wanted to confront her sister and try to put a stop to the fighting before things went too far. In fact, she had discussed that with Hit Girl but things had taken a different turn and a carefully planned confrontation was no longer a possibility. They had all been awake for many hours and Fortune was struggling to keep her awareness in check. She knew full well that any lapse could mean certain death for her and her colleagues who were depending on her.

"Stand by," Shadow shouted out as she gripped her P90 tightly.

..._...

Shadow moved out from behind the wrecked truck with her team behind her.

All three sent automatic gunfire into the Russian barricades as they ran forwards. Fortune and Hellcat dived down behind a badly damaged Ford, but Shadow was caught out as two bullets struck her chest armour in rapid succession and the vigilante was shoved over backwards, crashing down onto her upper back before rolling off to one side and into cover underneath a bullet-ridden police car.

Shadow struggled with her breathing and the pain of the bullet strikes as she lay on her front.

..._...

Jackal saw his girl flipped over by the bullets and he feared the worst, but he saw her moving and breathed a sigh of relief.

Nonetheless, he poured accurate fire from his P90 into the Russian barricades seeing at least one cloud of red bloom into the air. Tempest and Cut-Throat followed suit, angry at seeing one of their colleagues struck down. Without warning, something blazed past Jackal and exploded behind them, shoving him into the back of a panel van with enough force to make him yell out in pain. The RPG had powered in and struck a long-abandoned patrol car. The car had, in turn, exploded, sending red-hot shrapnel in all directions. The shrapnel tore through anything which got in its

way as physics guided the ragged projectiles on a parabolic arc. Then there was a scream and Jackal turned to find Tempest writhing on the ground behind them, his left side was smoking where there was a large gash in his armour. The shrapnel had dug into his armoured back and burnt through the armour.

"Medic!" Jackal radioed.

It was a war zone; there was no better description.

BRUTE drove fast down West Harrison Street.

Audacious was keen to get to the where her skills were required. Beside her, Rogue was wide-eyed at the bright explosions and gun fire. Silently, the eight-year-old was very scared about entering the battle zone, but she knew that it was her duty. Her sister was there, as was her elder brother. She had spent most of the night assisting Audacious with walking wounded left over from the earlier attacks. Audacious took a right at South Financial Place to avoid the Sicilians before turning left on the parkway and making for where she could see black smoke pouring from a destroyed vehicle.

Rogue's keen eyesight was drawn to a bright light to her right and she turned to see something very bright heading in their direction.

..._...

Fifty yards to the east, *TITAN* was approaching the battle with Lynx at the wheel.

Behind her, Hawk, Ravage and Scamp were preparing to provide protection for Medic when they arrived onsite. Then, they were stunned to see a bright light streak from the right and terminate very close to *BRUTE* which was thrown forwards. The rear end of the armoured Range Rover Sentinel left the roadway as the vehicle was flipped over onto its roof, crashing down in a shower of sparks before cannoning sideways into the onramp from Lower Wacker Drive, just yards from where Jackal was tending to the screaming Tempest while Cut-Throat provided covering fire. Lynx brought *TITAN* to a halt close by Tempest with the rear hatch away from the Russians as much as was possible. Astute was pouring accurate gunfire from his sniper rifle into the location of the RPG launches from his position on a building across the river. Hawk and Medic dived out, Medic making for Tempest, while Hawk made for the crashed *BRUTE* closely followed by Lynx and Scamp.

Ravage went after Medic with a shield on one arm.

..._...

Rogue had found her world turning over and then upside down as the vehicle had crashed onto its roof before crashing into something with a resounding crash.

"You okay, Rogue?" Audacious demanded as she hung upside down from her harness.

Rogue hung from her own harness as she replied.

"That was fun for a moment," she commented as she willed back the tears. She also felt comforting warmth in her groin where her bladder had let go at the moment of becoming airborne.

Audacious released her harness, falling down onto the roof of the SUV. The armour had prevented the roof from collapsing, although the roof was not designed to support the entire vehicle, so Audacious knew a quick exit was required. Rogue followed the example and she released her harness, landing like a cat on the roof. They both heard banging from the left side of the vehicle and a door was heaved open just enough for Hawk to stick her head in.

"You guys okay?"

"Never better, Hawk!" Rogue reported.

"Like she said," Audacious added as she pushed Rogue out, through the opening. "Let's move."

Hawk yanked Rogue out and passed her towards Lynx who pulled her down behind another abandoned vehicle where Scamp provided cover with her G36K. Audacious squeezed out, reaching back in for her own G36C and also Rogue's G36K.

..._...

With the injured having been ferried out of harm's way, Wildcat, Nightmare, and Raven had returned to the Parkway, providing covering fire for the medical teams as they worked.

Rogue and Audacious were both checked out with no major problems found, releasing them both to assist. Tempest was the major problem. With the help of Lynx and Wildcat, Medic was able to force the writhing Tempest flat onto the ground and pin him face down. After deactivating his mask's safety measures, Medic injected the boy with morphine sulphate to calm him down and to dull the pain as she pulled up the top of his combat suit to expose the wound. The area sizzling with the piece of hot shrapnel partially embedded in the small of his back, just a few inches to the left of his backbone. The boy's movements eased as the morphine took hold and very carefully, Medic eased the jagged piece of metal out of the boy's back, dumping it on the blacktop before spraying a sterilised water solution into the wound. The water sizzled and steamed for a moment before the last of the shrapnel was washed out of the wound and the burning ceased.

Bullets clanged against the nearest vehicle while more dug into the blacktop, but Medic was more concerned with her patient who was in a bad way. Beside her, Scamp assisted with supplies while supporting a heavy armoured shield. Ravage stood over Scamp, firing off individual rounds at the Russians while Jackal and Cut-Throat tried to move closer to Shadow who was still lying beneath the police car. She had reported in that she was okay, but Jackal was worried as she had not emerged.

Scamp too was fully aware that Shadow was lying hurt, only a short distance away from where she knelt beside Medic as they tended to Tempest.

..._...

Four hundred metres to the southwest, Astute focussed his sniper scope on two men reloading an RPG.

He fired off a succession of rounds, all striking the sheltered position, the heavy bullets bringing down masonry onto the man with the rocket launcher. The loader fell as a bullet struck him full in the chest. Then Astute lined up on the remaining man, firing his bullet, just a second before the man squeezed his own trigger.

The man died as his head exploded, just half a second after the rocket projectile had left the launcher.

..._...

"RPG inbound!"

The radio call had everybody diving for cover as the projectile roared in, striking the overhead gantry, bringing the structure crashing down onto the police car beneath which Shadow had taken shelter. There were screams from some of the Russians who had been struck by debris and shrapnel, the RPG warhead having sent its devastating load, out ahead of it, carving through the gantry and sending pieces of aluminium scything through the air. The crash of the gantry had suspended the firefight for a few precious minutes, allowing Jackal to run forwards in search of Shadow. Raven went after Nightmare who had screamed out and fallen to the roadway. Nightmare gritted her teeth against the pain of the jagged piece of metal that jutted out of her left thigh. The pain was extreme, and it was all she could do not to pass out.

Audacious ran forwards, escorted by Rogue. They stopped at Nightmare, Audacious administering morphine sulphate to the girl to ease the pain while she lay on her right side, tears flooding the inside of her mask. Rogue was horrified by the sight of the blood and the trauma that she was witnessing. Her friends were hurting. She thought that while they might get banged up, she never thought that they could be hurt so badly in their seemingly impregnable body armour. The shouting, the screaming, Rogue was struggling to cope with it all. The eight-year-old beneath the armour was frightened, very frightened.

Minutes later, the bleeding was under control and the teenage vigilante had passed out from the pain and the shot of morphine sulphate.

..._...

The police car with Shadow beneath it was squished under a large amount of structural steel and aluminium.

Shadow was stuck – she had not been crushed, but she could not move and no matter what she tried, she could not get out of her predicament. She could hear the sounds of explosions, gunfire, yells, and screams. Then she heard scrabbling and she could hear the sounds of somebody moving towards her. She turned her head to find someone

family squirming beneath the car.

"Hi, Mum, err Shadow."

Shadow chuckled.

"Hello, Scamp, fancy meeting you here."

"Are you alright?"

"Yes – I'm just a little bit stuck."

"Jackal is working on that – with Wildcat."

"Oh," Shadow growled. "I bet Wildcat is just loving this."

"Huh?"

"Wildcat and I have a history."

"I see," Scamp responded, not really seeing anything.

"Shadow, Wildcat, you receiving me, over?"

"Hello, my little kitty?"

"We're about to lift the cop car – then you can slide your big old ass out of there, 'cause it ain't your tits keeping you under there!"

"So fucking funny, bitch!" Shadow chuckled.

"She's being nasty," Scamp pointed out.

"Nah – she's just trying to keep my spirits up."

"You feeling unhappy?"

"Honey, I'm jammed under a cop car after taking two bullets in the chest at close range – what the fuck do you think?"

"Cranky!"

Shadow chuckled again.

"I'm sorry, honey – I'm just not feeling myself, okay?"

"Scamp! Stand clear!"

Scamp scrambled out of the small space and Shadow could hear metalwork groaning and then she could feel the police car moving slightly. Then she felt herself being moved and she realised that Scamp had attached a line to the carabiner in her combat suit. And as the police car lifted up further, she was yanked out and she found herself looking up into the mask of Jackal.

"Enjoyed your little siesta, Shadow?" he asked.

"Just what I needed!" Shadow growled as she held up the thumb of her right hand before Jackal hauled his woman to her feet.

Scamp ran up and disconnected the line for Shadow's carabiner before throwing the line into *TITAN*. Shadow took in the enormous vehicle with a triangular frame attached to the front bumper and the winch cable which was gently lowering the police car back to the ground. All around, bullets flew from Fusion weapons into the Russian barricade which was steadily weakening, not least when Raven fired off several 40-millimetre grenades in the Russians' direction. Wildcat held up Shadow's P90.

"Locked and loaded, Shadow!" the youngster growled.

"You just going to stand there looking like a chump?" Shadow retorted as she grabbed the weapon from her friend.

"Lead on, my master," Wildcat responded with a wave.

"Ruby Alpha . . . let's move!" Shadow called out as Hellcat and Fortune formed up on her.

..._...

Ruby Alpha moved to the left while the remnants of Opal Alpha and Bravo moved to the right.

The flanking movements overpowered the Russian defences which were recovering from the grenade bombardment. The remaining men chose to die rather than surrender as they entered into hand-to-hand combat with the *Fusion* vigilantes. Shadow had a personal score to settle as she expertly punched the living daylights out of a man twice her size while kicking out at anybody who came to his aid. A few feet away, Wildcat was allowing another Russian to experience her claws at close range as she plunged them into his neck, severing arteries and various other important features before she ripped the blades clean out of the man's neck. The blood had barely splattered across the Parkway before the wild Wildcat had buried her other set of blades into the chest of a large Russian, chopping his heart into three pieces, killing the man instantly. Raven dived after the marauding Wildcat, covering her back and dealing out her own form of justice to the Russians. Her razor-sharp bō-staff cut through limbs and torsos as she whirled around, avoiding knives and bullets alike.

The final Russian fell to Fortune as she thrust a blade into his throat, leaving the man to gurgle out the rest of his life as he sank to the ground.

West Van Buren Street Bridge

With the Russians gone, Ruby Alpha moved to assist Diamond while Opal formed into one team and they headed to support Emerald and Ruby Bravo with the Sicilians.

Fortune found herself moving closer to the fight between Hit Girl and FEAR. It was a big fight, too. While Diamond kept the *Corsairs* at bay, Hit Girl and FEAR whirled around clashing blades, neither backing down. No quarter was being given in the winner-takes-all fight for the city of Chicago. For Hit Girl it was the fight of her life. She had everything to lose and so much to gain. The weight of an entire city sat squarely on her shoulders along with the lives of almost fifty vigilantes who fought under her command. The veteran vigilante had no choice but to allow the weight of *Fusion* to rest on other shoulders so that she could put everything into fighting FEAR. She trusted her team explicitly and she knew that they would guard her back.

Fortune passed easily through the canine lines, watching with interest as Razor hauled an errant *Corsair* to the ground, but she ignored his pleading as the dog attacked the man's armour with gusto.

West Harrison Street Bridge

The Sicilians were beyond angry.

Their leader was dead, and they wanted blood. Helen Geno had them riled up with her rallying call and they were ready to move out of their defensive positions. They had a target in mind, too. They caught *Fusion* on the hop as they fired off a dozen smoke grenades towards both groups of vigilantes, totally obscuring the already dark street. A dozen men erupted out of the concrete protection and they took advantage of the swirling smoke as they took off towards the east and South Wells Street where fate had placed a most unwelcome target directly in the path of the armed men who were hellbent on gaining revenge for their fallen boss.

The outflanked *Fusion* had no idea where the enemy were headed as they lost sight of their quarry in the swirling mists.

..._...

TITAN was parked immediately to the north of the intersection and Medic was treating a firefighter who had received a bullet to his left leg.

Beside *TITAN*, an ambulance sat, ready to whisk the firefighter to hospital. Her own paramedics were occupied with two other firefighters who were injured. It was Ravage who sounded the alarm as the smoke drifted towards them and seconds later, armed men burst out of the smoke and began shooting at anything and everything. Medic literally

shoved the injured firefighter into the ambulance and she slammed the rear doors while one of the paramedics scrambled into the driver's seat and she accelerated away as bullets struck the escaping vehicle.

With the ambulance gone, the Sicilians turned their attentions to *TITAN*. Ravage took out a pissed off fighter with his Walther P22 pistol while Medic drew her own Beretta firearm and she fired into the mass of anger which ran towards them. Scamp, guarding the rear hatch drew her own Walther P22 and she levelled it at a giant who ran at her. A brief squeeze of the trigger and her bullet struck the target, centre mass – only the man continued coming. Scamp continued firing off rounds at the man until the ten-round magazine was exhausted, by which time, the bull of a man had crashed to the ground at her feet, very dead.

Scamp ejected the empty magazine and she inserted the full replacement, only not fast enough as another man came at her. With a scream, Scamp was struck across the chest and thrown bodily against the side of *TITAN*. The young girl slid to the ground as the Sicilian strode towards her, a large machete raised to strike. No vigilante was close enough to defend the fallen girl. A dozen yards away, Jackal roared with anger as he bolted for his daughter.

Only, the machete was a lot closer to his daughter than he was.

***Chapter 350*: Dawn**

My name is Chloe Bennett and my world has quite literally been blasted apart.

I have lost the most important person in my life. I am broken and even now I have no idea how I can continue.

Sunday, October 16th, 2016

04:50

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

The injured were just arriving back at the facility.

Brad had been awaiting the arrival of Lauren who was in a lot of pain. He was instructed to remove what he could of her combat suit and they would cut off the rest. Taylor prepared for the surgery with the assistance of Emily. Ares was on hand to take away Lauren's weapons and equipment. By the time Taylor came for her, the girl's boots, socks, and upper combat suit was gone, leaving just a sports bra covering her upper body. Tears streamed down her face as Brad helped her to her feet and Taylor assisted the girl onto a bed where she lay on her back while the lower half of her combat suit was cut off. All the time, Lauren squeezed tight on Brad's hand refusing to let him go. Lauren had glared at her mother when Emily had suggested that Brad should leave until the surgery was over.

Once the combat suit was removed, along with Lauren's underwear, the girl was rolled onto her right side, so that Taylor could clean around the wound in the girl's left thigh. It was not the first time that Brad had seen Lauren naked, but he did his best not to look anywhere his eyes did not belong which had Emily grinning and the boy blushing. Once the wound had been cleaned, a surgical cover was placed over the girl's thigh exposing just the jagged piece of aluminium. A mobile X-ray machine was pulled over and Taylor took her time taking careful images of the area prior to any removal – she was concerned about an artery having been nicked.

Lauren received a large dose of local anaesthetic while Brad continued to hold her hand and she stared up into his eyes for comfort while Taylor probed the wound.

05:15

West Harrison Street Bridge

Jackal was nowhere near his daughter when Scamp made her move.

She drew her Benchmade Model 62 Balisong, flicking it open, and slashing the bastard's stomach open as he brought the machete down towards the little girl. The men bellowed in pain, but the slash was nothing as far as the raging killer was concerned, only Scamp reached up and she rammed a small object into the gash before she dived underneath *TITAN* while shouting four words over the radio.

"Fire in the hole!"

Jackal dived to the ground, pulling Cut-Throat with him as he caught onto what Scamp had done. With a loud bang, the V40 mini-frag grenade detonated inside the over-sized Sicilian's stomach, blasting the asshole to kingdom come in a cloud of blood, guts, and body parts. A good-sized chunk of large intestine slapped down onto *TITAN*'s windshield while a section of what could have been a lung slapped Jackal around the face. He glared down at his daughter as she emerged from under the giant armoured vehicle.

"Really!?" Jackal growled as he flipped the chunk of flesh onto the roadway.

Scamp just shrugged innocently.

05:30

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

While Lauren was undergoing surgery, Marc lay two beds over, unconscious.

The boy lay on his front and apart from the sheet covering his body, he was naked, a large dressing on his lower back. Paige had undressed the boy with the assistance of Anne-Marie and Stephanie. For the moment, the boy was stable, but he would have a painful recovery ahead of him. It was with great satisfaction that they had heard about the end of the Russians. It was even better news to hear that the Sicilians had finally ceased to be a viable threat.

"Stephanie, Anne-Marie; go get yourselves cleaned up – especially you, Stephanie; you stink of Lake Michigan," Paige directed.

"I did kind of get dumped into said lake," Stephanie pointed out as she and Anne-Marie headed off to tow their weapons, remove their combat suits, and shower.

It was not yet over – the city still had pockets of resistance remaining to be mopped up, not to mention FEAR.

05:35

West Van Buren Street Bridge

Hit Girl was blind-sided by FEAR as the larger and stronger fighter smashed Hit Girl's Katana from her left hand.

There was no time to sweep up the fallen blade as FEAR pushed forwards, forcing Hit Girl to rely on a single blade. FEAR's sword was heavier, and it struck with a large amount of force. With a single blade, Hit Girl would struggle to fight back without damaging or snapping, her remaining blade. FEAR decided to fight dirty as she kicked out and her foot caught Hit Girl in the left thigh. Hit Girl maintained her balance, but the strike had been a hard one, hurting Hit Girl. She filed away the pain until a later time and she continued to fight. The fight had been ongoing for over an hour and the pair had moved a distance from the bridge. FEAR had to be struggling as Hit Girl was digging deep to find the very last of her energy reserves. The actual sword-to-sword fighting had been measured in minutes as they had spent time taunting each other, an important time where both could rest their arms and other muscles.

The fight moved towards the Lower Wacker Drive underpass entry at its southern point. There the fighting intensified, and Hit Girl was able to shove FEAR backwards against the guardrail. FEAR became unbalanced and another kick sent her over the edge. Hit Girl dived after her, closely followed by Fortune, Rage, and Fury. By the time Rage and Fury had dropped themselves down, Hit Girl and FEAR were re-engaged with Fortune guarding Hit Girl's rear. The clash of the blades resounded around the concrete roadway echoing from end to end. A *Corsair* appeared out of nowhere and he levelled a weapon at Hit Girl – Rage dropped him with a perfect pistol shot between the eyes.

Another interloper appeared, and Fury moved to intercept the *Marauder*.

..._...

It was a female *Marauder*, that was certain.

Fury fired off three rounds from her Heckler & Koch P30SK pistol narrowly missing the girl who appeared to be a year or so older than Fury. Several bullets missed the diminutive Fury by a whisker as the youngster dove over the concrete barrier which separated the two roadways.

"Who are you, bitch?" Fury shouted, her yell echoing around the concrete structure.

"They call me Intrepid and you must be Fury," came the reply. "You look a little stunted, but I can handle that."

"Go fuck yourself, you mother-fucking lesbian!" Fury retorted as she brought her bō-staff around and she entered into Battle.

Intrepid produced a wicked looking pair of combat machetes and she stood her ground. She wore dark grey body armour very similar to that of a *Corsair* with an armoured mask over her face and protecting her head. The cold steel clashed, adding to the echo of steel clashing from fifty yards away where Hit Girl and FEAR were engaged. Fury could tell that the older girl was tired, but then so was Fury. Intrepid was no more than Phase 2 by her age and skill set, but Fury was better, and she had better armour allowing her to take some added risks.

"Give it up!" Fury instructed.

"I can't – she'll kill me."

"She's all but dead, Intrepid – join us."

Intrepid did not respond, instead she dove at Fury, driving both machetes towards the younger girl's neck. Fury responded and blocked the heavy attack, falling backwards under the weight of the strike. Intrepid took advantage of that and she struck again, and again. Fury yelled out in pain as a blade struck her left arm, causing some painful bruising but no damage to her suit. Fury was angry, she hated to be on the defensive, so she lived up to her name and she rolled away from Intrepid before flipping back to her feet and surprising the older girl.

Intrepid went on the defensive as the double-ended bō-staff with the razor-sharp blades and pointed tips came dangerously close as it was expertly wielded by Fury. Then the girl was struck on the right shoulder, the blade digging into what she had believed to be heavy armour. The strike had shaken Intrepid and she momentarily considered Fury's offer, only she was uncertain as to whether she might still die in the hands of *Fusion* – or get sent to prison for the rest of her natural life – so she opted to continue the fight. It was not the best decision that the young British girl had made that day as Fury struck her armour for a second time. Only, the blade went clean through the armour and Intrepid screamed out in pain as she felt the blade cut into the soft flesh of her left shoulder before the blade was yanked back out and Fury spun around cracking the older girl around the head with the handle of the bō-staff knocking the girl to the ground.

Fury pushed the attack as Intrepid brought up her pistol which Fury kicked out of her gloved hands and she brought the tip of a bō-staff blade down in an attempt to scare Intrepid into submission, only the older girl shifted, and the keen blade cut through the weaker abdomen armour and neatly sliced open the twelve-year-old's belly. Intrepid screamed an unearthly scream which echoed around the underpass. The combat machetes clattered to the roadway and the girl's gloved hands grasped at her armour in an attempt to get to the wound. Fury dropped her bō-staff and she tried to calm the wounded girl down.

"This is Fury, I need medical support Lower Wacker Drive!" she radioed.

Fury found the clips for the body armour and she flipped off the front section, revealing a combat shirt soaked in blood. Fury drew her combat knife and she slit the shirt away to reveal the girl's belly, fresh blood oozing out of the precision wound. Intrepid attempted to reach her wound so Fury cuffed her with flexicuffs and secured her wrists to a suitable piece of equipment nearby. The girl screamed in agony and she begged for help.

"I'm trying to help you – what's your name?"

The girl continued to scream.

"What's your name?" Fury repeated as she pulled out a field dressing and then realised that it wouldn't be big enough.

"Charlie. . ."

"Okay, Charlie, you're going to be fine – time to take a page out of the Psyche book of First Aid."

Fury jumped up and she ran over to an abandoned police car and she opened the trunk (she called it the boot) and she rummaged around before finding what she was looking for. Fury rushed back to the screaming, struggling girl and she knelt down beside her. Fury cleaned off the wound with the field dressing and then she grabbed up the item which she had appropriated from the police car.

"This was good enough for Psyche and Rigour, so. . ."

Fury ripped off a long length of black Duct Tape before gently applying it the length of the wound on the girl's belly. A few more pieces of tape were added before Fury was satisfied and she stayed with the girl to await medical assistance.

..._...

A couple dozen yards back down the roadway, Hit Girl stumbled over a road fitting and she fell back.

FEAR attempted to take advantage of the fall, but Fortune moved into the fight, parrying her sister's strike before it came near to Hit Girl. The pair of them fought, FEAR seeing just another young vigilante for her to put down – she

knew that none could defeat her. Hit Girl had done well, but it was only a matter of time. The operation had gone badly but she was still alive and on the verge of defeating the obnoxious purple vigilante known as Hit Girl. However, her latest adversary was not a bad fighter with good skills when it came to sword fighting. FEAR decided to enjoy the fight as Hit Girl appeared to have stepped to one side for a few moments.

"A fresh one, eh – who might you be?" FEAR growled

The swords clashed, echoing around the lower level. FEAR was impressed by the power behind the blows – was there something driving the vigilante? Maybe she had lost somebody close to her?

"Me?" Fortune growled back as she parried another strike. "I'm Fortune."

FEAR actually laughed at the name – to her it appeared so perfect.

"Well, Fortune, you've met your end – very *un-fortune-ate*."

FEAR brought her sword down towards the interloper whom she knew as Fortune, but the young vigilante did not hesitate as she brought up her own blade. FEAR frowned as she realised that she would need to up her game – she had underestimated the youngster. The youngster had jumped up onto the concrete structure which separated the two sections of roadway, gaining a height advantage on FEAR. But FEAR responded with a dive forwards, striking hard at Fortune and forcing the girl backwards while FEAR continued over the barrier hitting the roadway and coming up onto her feet and striking at Fortune from the rear. Hit Girl made a move forwards, but she stopped at a single order from Fortune: "No!"

"You want to know *what* I was called *before* I was Fortune?" the girl inquired as she came close to FEAR, forcing the seasoned fighter backwards with her sword.

"Don't see why?" FEAR responded offhandedly as she pushed back and brought her sword around and down towards the girl.

Fortune dived to one side, rolling on the ground before returning to her feet, and turning off the speech synthesiser before she responded. Fortune picked the moment to speak again, just as FEAR was closing on her.

"I was known as Dread, dear sister."

It was like FEAR had just been slapped across the face by a wet kipper. It was the very last sentence she could ever have imagined, not to mention the very last voice she had expected to hear. She was certain that her younger sister had sided with Hit Girl, but for her to be *fighting* alongside Hit Girl!? FEAR hesitated for a moment as the name sunk in and her sword missed Fortune by a wide margin, however, the hesitation had cost FEAR gravely and Hit Girl quickly took advantage. Hit Girl's blade drove hard into FEAR's left side, cutting through the armour. The blade pierced flesh and internal organs, sealing FEAR's fate. FEAR tensed up and she screamed out in agony as Hit Girl twisted the blade viciously causing massive internal bleeding. Hit Girl looked over to Fortune and the veteran vigilante took a step back, away from FEAR.

Fortune stepped in and without hesitation, she drove her own blade into her sister's stomach. FEAR dropped to her knees and her war sword clattered to the road surface as her hands went to her stomach, gripping Fortune's blade which had impaled her. FEAR looked up at her sister.

"Why? How could you side with *her*? She killed our father and she caused the death of our mother. *She* is the enemy – not *me*. I am your sister!"

Fortune yanked at her sword, dragging it out of her sister's stomach.

"You betrayed our parents' memory with what you have done to this city, Katrina. I am too ashamed to see you as my sister. You have to die; it is the only way that I can save you," Fortune said as she drove the blade accurately and savagely into her sister's heart, severing the organ in two.

"Kelly. . . I . . .," FEAR tried as she fell onto her back.

"From this moment on, I have no sister," Fortune growled as she again yanked her sword from her sister's body.

FEAR never made another sound as she lay perfectly still but Fortune wanted to make absolutely sure that her sister would never hurt another soul. Fortune picked up her sister's heavy war sword and raised it upwards before bringing it down and severing the head of Katrina Wright, finally ending FEAR's five-month reign of tyranny. Hit Girl knelt down

and she moved FEAR's head a few inches from the body. She then looked up at Fortune.

"I think she might be dead," Hit Girl said.

"Good," Fortune said without emotion.

"We have one more task," Hit Girl explained as *HOUND* arrived with Hawk to attend to Fury and her captured *Marauder*.

Together, Hit Girl, Fortune, and Rage hauled the parts of FEAR up to ground level so that all could see that FEAR was no more.

06:36

The dawn was breaking on a new day.

As the light began to force its way between the skyscrapers of the windy city, the palls of smoke curled their way skyward. The fighting appeared over. The survivors, be they *Fusion*, CPD, CFD, or just average Chicago citizens, they were exhausted and more than happy to see the dawn. It took several moments for those standing in the dawn's early light to notice that the guns had fallen silent and the sounds of steel clashing on steel were no more.

When FEAR had died, the fight had gone out of her *Corsairs*, not to mention the remaining Russians and the surviving Sicilians who all chose to flee for their lives. An unexpected bonus was the capture of one Helen Geno. Kick-Ass appeared very happy with himself as he stood guard over his prey who lay hogtied on the blacktop. He would be insufferable, Hit Girl thought as she savoured the feeling of supremacy. She had dominated FEAR and she had won back the city of Chicago which had returned to the protection of *Fusion* – and *Fusion* alone.

Twelve hours of fighting was over.

..._...

The victorious city was jubilant.

Fusion was being fêted by all, as were the CPD and the CFD. The Chicago Police Department had things under control, so *Fusion* demobilised and returned to the Safehouse. Hit Girl, Medic, and Jackal remained out on the streets to maintain a presence of order and for Medic to treat the wounded. Kick-Ass was eager to incarcerate his prisoner in a holding cell at the nearest police station so that Voight could begin interrogating the woman.

The enormous task of clearing up the city was able to get under way.

07:15

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

Lauren was asleep, following her operation, and Brad was busy assisting the returning vigilantes.

Food was available in the dining room, under the watchful eyes of Stephanie and Anne-Marie. The food was being prepared by Rachel Murphy and Sharon Fellowes. Kyle and Tony were on hand to collect weapons and equipment from each returning vigilante. Most just dumped their combat suits and went for food in their underwear prior to taking a shower and then finding a bed. Some fell asleep part way through their food, their heads resting on the table tops. Due to the backlog at the hospitals and the security implications, Fury's *Marauder* was brought back to the Safehouse. To complicate matters, a second *Marauder* had surrendered to Fury. The boy had been beside himself with worry about the girl whom Fury had almost killed, and he had thrown down his weapons in an instant, hoping for the chance to go with his friend. Fury had forced him to strip down to his underwear before taking him aboard *HOUND* in cuffs. The boy was kept in the holding cell in Safehouse F while his friend – apparently, she was called Charlotte Grey – was stripped of her armour and clothing before being laid on the operating table.

Taylor had had a few choice comments to make about the Duct Tape, but nonetheless, the girl received a general anaesthetic and Taylor got to work repairing the damage caused by Fury's bō-staff.

..._...

Fury had headed for the armoury and equipment storage area to dump her kit.

The eleven-year-old girl was thoroughly exhausted, and she felt like collapsing but just as she was stumbling up the steps towards the elevator, she felt strong hands under her arms and she looked up to see her friend.

"Where you headed?" Stephanie asked. "Food? Shower? Bed?"

"I don't know," Abigail breathed, unable to make the simple decision.

Stephanie helped Abigail over to the elevator at the opposite end and they went up one level to the cabins. Stephanie laid Abigail down on a bunk and covered her with a duvet. Abigail was asleep within a second. Jamie and Danny appeared next, both very tired. Stephanie put each one to bed before they fell down. They could shower and eat later.

"Sleep tight," Stephanie whispered as she turned out the lights to their cabin.

08:05

The John Hancock Center

Hit Girl stood 343.69 metres above the city of Chicago.

In the early morning sun, she surveyed the city which stretched off into the distance. The city belonged to her, once again. It was a hard-won victory, but won it had been. Beside her, Kick-Ass stood as if on guard. His presence always made her feel safe – not that Hit Girl was ever worried about her personal safety! A few feet away, Jackal stood with his arms wrapped around Shadow who stood in front of him. The four senior *Fusion* members savoured the sight of a peaceful city.

"Got a nice view up there?" Battle Guy asked.

Hit Girl chuckled as she waved at the UAV which was cruising past at the same level as they stood.

"Hi, Battle Guy – it's just perfect," Hit Girl responded.

"Enjoy the time, guys," Hal cut in.

"Oh, we will," Jackal announced.

"It's a perfect day," Shadow said as she leaned into her man and watched the UAV circle.

Shadow could not have been happier. Despite some close calls, her little family was intact. Jackal was with her and she knew that Scamp was at the Safehouse enjoying breakfast.

08:13

Out of the blue, the 12.7x55-mm STs-130VPS 76-gram bullet cut its way through the air at over three-hundred metres-per-second.

One minute, Medic was finishing off wound dressings on the corner of West Van Buren Street and South Franklin Street, the next she was lying on her back, a gaping wound in her chest. The last thing she saw was the blue sky above the city which was her home. Her last thoughts were for her family.

Then nothing.

09:05

USS CHURCHILL

New York

Captain Ryan Bennett was on the bridge of his command, having just returned from Chicago on the 6am flight that

morning.

He hated having to leave his family on a pivotal night, but he had his own responsibilities. He was enjoying his new rank – he imagined that he could feel the additional weight of the silver eagles on his collar. His crew had been extremely proud to have their commanding officer promoted. He had also been assigned an additional lieutenant for his wardroom – a privilege accorded his rank.

"Captain – phone call, sir."

"Thanks, yeoman . . . Captain Bennett."

"Ryan?"

"Mindy?"

"I have bad news for you, Ryan."

The also freshly promoted Executive Officer, Commander Wes Edwards, saw his commanding officer go very pale as all the blood rapidly drained from his face.

"XO, you have the bridge. I will be in my cabin and I do not wish to be disturbed for the next two hours."

"Aye, aye, sir! XO has the bridge!"

..._...

Ryan Bennett barely made it to his cabin.

He almost slammed the cabin door in his haste as he entered before he collapsed to the deck, just as his personal cell phone rang. He pressed the button to accept the call and he raised the device to his ear.

"Daddy?"

"I'm here, honey."

"Daddy . . . Mommy's dead. . ."

"I know. . ."

Father and daughter both sobbed, despite being almost a thousand miles apart, and they mourned the loss of their loved one together.

***Chapter 351*: Last Will and Testament**

Sunday, October 16th, 2016

Chicago

Everything was in turmoil.

The happiness from the victory had faded almost instantly. For many, the news of the death had only reached them when they had awoken that Sunday afternoon. Jamie, Abigail, and Danny had appeared in the dining room after a luxurious shower, only to find the place full of moping individuals. They had then learned of the death of someone very important to all. Abigail had not known Cathy very long, but she had still evaporated into tears. Many of the girls bore signs of having been crying.

Chloe and Becky had been in a corner of the recreational space most of the day. Joshua appeared and disappeared as he focussed his mind on his duties. Becky was in a state, almost as bad a state as Chloe. Megan had spent a long time sitting with Chloe and Becky, even though neither were talking very much. While the tasks of cleaning weapons and combat suits would have normally been accomplished with chatter, joking, crude comments, and some decidedly immature behaviour, instead, there was professionalism – especially from the Predators – but also an underlying sadness.

There was no single person unaffected.

The following morning

Monday, October 17th

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Room 32

Stephanie had visited the previous evening, but she had not been allowed to stay long.

Saoirse was not ready for visitors, but Dr Manning knew Stephanie, and her relationship to Saoirse, so Stephanie was allowed in as 'family'. Saoirse had not regained consciousness since her accident on the Saturday. Stephanie sat beside the bed and she held onto Saoirse's intact right arm. The girl was a state. Her lower left leg was immobilised and in plaster, as was her lower left arm to the wrist. Her face was bruised, but intact – her mask and helmet had prevented anything worse. It was the crush injuries that had caused the most damage as her combat suit had prevented anything from piercing her skin.

"Please, SD, I need you."

Stephanie had tears running down her cheeks. Saoirse was her best friend and without her, Stephanie did not think that she could survive.

"Hi, Steph," a voice called from the door.

Stephanie turned to see Morgan along with her aunt and uncle – Saoirse's legal guardians. They all smiled at Stephanie, knowing how much Saoirse meant to the ten-year-old. Morgan stepped forwards and she hugged the younger girl.

"It's Saoirse; she'll pull through," Morgan whispered.

"I know – just, why Saoirse?"

"Life sucks, Steph."

"Don't I bloody know it."

Glenview

Mindy had forgotten all about it, but Dave had not.

"Happy Anniversary, honey."

"Today?" Mindy asked.

"Yes, we were married one year ago, today."

"Oh, hell; I forgot – sorry, Dave."

"We've had a lot on our minds – how about we postpone it until after the weekend, huh?"

"You sure?"

Dave grinned as his wife looked up at him with her beautiful green eyes full of worry and just begging for him to say yes. She was so adorable and totally irresistible.

"Already done. Marcus and Paige will take the kids, next week for the night."

Mindy scowled.

"I love you, so much, Dave Lizewski."

"I love me, too!"

"Ass!"

The following morning

Tuesday, October 18th

Training Facility Echo

Level 1

Lauren was dressing after having been released from the medical facility by Taylor.

Brad was 'on hand' to 'assist'.

"Brad, I can pull up my own pants, thank you," Lauren groaned.

"Just want to help."

"You didn't get enough when I was naked on Sunday?"

Brad blushed furiously.

..._...

Next door, Shannon was the proverbial mother-hen for Marc.

The girl had been horrified when she had found out that Marc had been hurt. She had rushed up to the medical centre within minutes of her return.

"Have no fear, Shannon," Taylor had chuckled. "He's still fully functional – he just has a hole in his back."

Taylor had smiled as her daughter had blushed at the implied suggestion.

"Shannon, I'm not immobilised," Marc complained that morning.

"I don't mind helping you with certain activities," Shannon grinned.

"Playing with my dick is not a requirement, although it has its moments."

"I miss having you . . . well, you know."

"Inside you?"

"Stop it!"

"Does that turn you on – me talking about being inside of you?"

"Yes. . ."

..._...

"Gross!" Fury commented on hearing the conversation between Marc and Shannon.

The curtains were drawn in the next cubicle and the patient had not seen anybody without a mask.

"You don't have to be here, you know," Charlotte 'Charlie' Grey commented.

"Yes, I do. I feel guilty for almost killing you."

"So much for a ruthless *Predator*!"

"I only kill when I need to, and I had no need to kill you."

"Thanks for not killing me, and thanks for allowing Jake to visit."

"He your boyfriend?"

The redness on Charlie's face was enough to answer Fury's question.

"When do I get released?" Charlie asked as she rattled her left wrist which was secured to the bed by steel handcuffs.

"When we are happy that you are healing and are not about to cause any trouble."

..._...

Marc was actually very annoyed – it was Shannon's fourteenth birthday and he had wanted to show her how much he loved her.

Instead, he was stuck in a hospital bed for a few more days. Shannon had conceded to a minor fumble where she had closed the curtains and pulled off all of her clothes before sliding into the bed with him completely naked. He might only have been able to lie leaning over to his right, but the reaction of his dick to Shannon's striptease had reassured the girl that Marc was still functional. She happily allowed herself to be fondled all over by Marc before – despite it being *her* birthday – she gave the boy a blowjob right there in the hospital.

"Honestly, the dirty bastards!" Fury had been heard to growl while Charlotte had entered into fits of giggles which had the girl crying from the pain of her wounds which were still very tender.

The yell of ecstasy from Marc on his climax also had Taylor ordering her very embarrassed daughter out of the medical centre.

"Err, Shannon – what's that stuff in your hair?" Annabelle asked her big sister a few minutes later.

Her very red-faced sister shrugged as she ran her hand through her fringe and she cringed as the hand picked up something gooey.

"Is that Marc's cum?" Megan asked as she walked past with a smirk.

"Ewww!" Annabelle growled as she ran off. "Disgusting, bitch!"

"I'd wash it out while it's fresh – much easier," Megan commented.

"Thanks," the slightly humiliated fourteen-year-old muttered.

Shannon had had a very busy morning.

Her siblings had woken her up at the crack of dawn, pleased to be able to celebrate her birthday for the first time in five years. They had each produced a gift, but Shannon's favourite was her father's present. He had remembered her comment during Jamie's birthday and he had bought her a matching pair of SIG Sauer P320 TACOPS Carry pistols with azure-blue highlights to match her combat suit. He had also thrown in a matching SIG Sauer MPX SBR rifle in the same colour scheme. All three weapons came with suppressors, spare magazines, flashlights, and laser sights.

She had almost crushed Patrick in her attempt to say thank you.

Wednesday, October 19th

Memorial Park Cemetery

As far as Mindy was concerned, it ranked among the very worst days of her life – and that was saying something.

Chloe was standing over with her father, Curtis, and Rebecca. Ryan had dashed back to Chicago the moment he had been relieved. Curtis was just numb with shock – the boy had already lost his own parents, now he had lost his aunt. As for Chloe, the sixteen-year-old girl had not smiled once since she had broken the news to her. Joshua was struggling to put a brave face on everything – at least in public. Becky was resilient, but she was simply stunned by the dramatic turn of events. Mindy stood with Dave and the kids as the family members, of which Mindy and Dave were counted as being part, gathered around the grave. There had been a large turnout to the funeral, many of those present had no idea that Doctor Catherine Bennett had died serving the city of Chicago as Medic. She was just seen as yet another victim of the battle.

Mindy hated funerals – the most recent one which she had attended had not exactly ended well – and so did Dave for the very same reason.

Glenview

The wake was at Glenview as there was the space for all.

There was food and drink for the mourners. Everybody had good things to say about Cathy. There were former colleagues from her time in the US Navy, doctors and nurses from the hospitals where she had served, and many friends. Chloe had not spoken all day and she was getting visibly annoyed by everybody's platitudes – no matter how well-meaning. Ryan chose to accept the same platitudes, steering people away from his distraught daughter. Joshua was remaining strong for Chloe and Becky. Curtis was with Megan and she growled at anybody who came close. It was during the funeral that a tall man strode up to Mindy.

"Melinda Lizewski?"

Mindy scowled – she hated any reference to what she called her 'legal' name.

"Yes."

"I am Xavier Heart. I am Catherine's lawyer, and I have a letter here which I am directed to pass to your hand should Catherine die."

The man held out a thick manila envelope which was sealed with wax. Mindy took the envelope and she was surprised to find her hands trembling.

"My condolences, Mrs Lizewski."

The man took his leave and headed over to speak with Chloe, to whom he handed a similar envelope before he moved to Joshua, then Curtis, and onto Becky. Mindy stepped outside, and she broke the seal on the envelope. Inside, she found a thick piece of paper covered with Cathy's handwriting.

Mindy began to read.

...+...

My dearest Mindy,

If you are reading this letter, then I am dead.

I hope I died valiantly and not in some seemingly mundane way. Ever since I joined the military, I have written letters to my loved ones and then updated them over time. I stopped when I left the Navy, but I restarted again after I joined up with you other nutcases. I knew that one day, my time would be up.

I have written similar letters to Ryan, Chloe, and Curtis – also to Joshua and Rebecca. Even though you are not my own, I have always seen you as a daughter, Mindy, so you also deserve a letter.

First, business. With me gone, you are now short of somebody to provide medical support within Fusion. As such, I have a recommendation for you. Her name is Doctor Jennifer Staite, and she works at the same hospital that I did. She is young, but she is a fully qualified doctor and she has had combat experience in Afghanistan as an Air Force medic. Though she is not aware of what I used to do, she is a firm believer in what you and Fusion represent. I know that you will do your usual background checks, but I am certain that she would be very useful to you.

Enough, about that. Please take care of Chloe. She listens to you if nobody else – she has never listened to me, nor her father. You are the big sister that she never had, and you are more than a best friend to her. I know that you will also help Curtis, as you often have in the past – he sees you as the big sister he never had. I am very sorry that I will never get to see my daughter or nephew get married, nor have kids of their own – although Rebecca is very special to them both. Ryan is strong, and I know that he will get through this trying time with the support of you all.

Please stay safe, all of you. While I will miss you all, I have no desire for any of you to join me for many more years, yet.

All my love.

Cathy

October 2nd, 2016

...+...

Mindy was sobbing long before she had made it past the first paragraph.

Later that afternoon

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Room 32

They had come straight from the funeral.

Stephanie was in a very emotional state and tears streamed down her face. Not that Morgan was much better.

"She was there for me, and I'm damn well going to be there for her."

"You've been there, Steph."

"I know. It was dark. Your mind plays tricks on you as you lay there. Being a *Predator* gives your mind so much more shit to dig up and mutilate. You feel so hopeless and you just want it to end, any which way. I want to be there to help her when she awakes."

"I know you do, Steph."

The two girls hugged as they shared their grief of losing somebody and of having someone else close to death's door.

..._...

"What the fuck are you two blubbering about, then?"

Stephanie almost snapped her neck as she twisted around to see who had spoken. She grinned enormously as she saw Saoirse with her eyes open.

"SD!" Stephanie exploded.

"Saoirse!" Morgan threw in.

"Who died?" Saoirse asked as she saw the black dresses. "I'm not dead yet – far from it."

"Fuck!" Morgan exclaimed. "She has no idea."

Saoirse scowled.

"Who?"

Stephanie looked directly at her friend as she spoke.

"Cathy."

Saoirse struggled to find words. She just stared at the two girls, tears falling down her cheeks just as they were for Stephanie and Morgan.

"Sorry, SD – not what you were wanting to find out when you awoke."

"At least tell me some good news."

"FEAR is dead – Fortune chopped her head off. *Fusion* won the battle."

"Thank God for small mercies," Saoirse commented. "Anybody else hurt?"

"Yeah – a few; nothing bad. Marc was hurt, but Shannon was pleased to see his dick was still functional," Morgan replied with a grin. "Fury managed to save a *Marauder's* life by closing up her belly with Duct Tape."

Saoirse grinned at Stephanie who just shrugged her shoulders.

"How are you feeling, SD?" Stephanie asked.

"I'm in a lot of pain," Saoirse admitted, and Stephanie could see that her friend was holding back the tears.

Stephanie reached out and took her friend's right hand.

"Don't hold it in, SD – let it out; it helps, believe me."

Saoirse did, and Morgan felt wretched as she watched her sister suffer. She so wanted to help, but she knew that Stephanie and Saoirse had a bond which she could never have with her sister.

Summit Drive

Kelly stood at the doorway to her sisters' bedroom.

She felt alone, haunted by her actions. Her mind was in torment as it tried to come to terms with what she had done.

'It had to be done.'

'But it was your sister.'

'Katrina was beyond the point of no return.'

'You never even tried.'

'Nothing could bring her back – she was hellbent on her own destruction.'

'She did it for Mom and Dad.'

'No! That was her warped excuse. She used our parents to justify her criminal activities.'

'She loved you.'

'Maybe she did.'

'You miss her.'

"I miss her."

"You will, Kelly," Mindy offered.

The seventeen-year-old girl – she would be eighteen in two weeks – had walked around the house in silence for almost an hour. Mindy had given Kelly her space, knowing that she was struggling with all the emotions which Mindy could see passing across the girl's face. They had just returned from Joliet where Hit Girl and Fortune had assisted the local authorities with clearing the jail. Nobody was found – everybody had fled, or they had already been captured . . . or they were dead.

"The house is mine, but should I stay here?"

"That is up to you, Kelly."

"I'd be alone."

"Get somebody to move in with you – maybe Lucy, or one of the other girls. You got a boyfriend?"

Kelly's cheeks turned pink for a moment as she shook her head.

"Take your time and don't rush into any decisions, okay? Go stay at the Safehouse, or with somebody else for a few days. You're welcome at Glenview, anytime – besides, Dave might need a hand while I'm out of town."

"Thanks, Mindy."

The following afternoon

Thursday, October 20th

Blue Star Memorial Woods

Doctor Jennifer Staite was unsure of why she had agreed to the meeting.

But there she was, standing beside her car, on a chilly October afternoon. At dead on 3 P.M., a dark grey Jaguar F-Pace pulled up and parked beside her. Two people climbed out. One was a young blond-haired woman, her hair tied up in a ponytail. The man was tall and muscular with dark curly hair.

"Good afternoon, Doctor," the woman offered. "I'm Mindy Lizewski."

"Jennifer Staite."

"I'm Mindy's husband, Dave," Dave added. "You like dogs?"

"I've no problem with them."

Dave opened the rear of the luxury SUV and two large dogs jumped down.

"The larger one is Sophia – the other is Razor, Sophia is his mother."

After leashes were fitted to the two dogs, Mindy turned to the Doctor.

"Let's walk while we talk."

"I'm sorry about Cathy – she was a very dynamic woman and a good friend," Jennifer said.

"Thanks," Mindy replied. "Cathy suggested to us that you might be a suitable replacement for her."

"Replacement?"

"We need a doctor for our team. Somebody who has seen combat. Somebody who can keep their mind when all around is going to hell."

"Who are you?"

Mindy handed over a card – Dave rolled his eyes and muttered something that Mindy did not catch. Jennifer looked at the card which was purple on one side and embossed with 'HG'.

"You, are her?"

"And I, am he," Dave chuckled.

"We thank you for your assistance during the battle," Mindy said. "You saved a lot of lives, including that of Saoirse.

"I thought that girl's injuries looked familiar, but I didn't say anything."

"That is why we believe that we can trust you."

They chatted for a while longer before finding themselves back at the cars. The dogs were reluctantly loaded into the SUV and Mindy turned to Jennifer while Dave climbed into the passenger seat of the SUV.

"Do I get time to think about it?"

"Yes, Surgeon, you do."

Training Facility Echo

Level 4

The two girls were racing to the top of the climbing wall.

It was their second ascent – Abigail had won the first go.

"I still can't believe that you used my trick on that *Marauder*," Stephanie growled as she overhauled her friend.

"It worked on Electra after I slashed her, right?" Abigail responded.

"Yes, it did," Stephanie admitted. "You've spent a lot of time with that girl."

"It's my fault she was hurt so badly."

"You admitted that you had no choice."

"I know – but I've changed, Steph – I don't just hurt people for no reason."

"Me, too, but sometimes it has to be done. Considering the choice – I'm just glad it wasn't you. . ." Stephanie almost choked. "Did I just say that out loud?"

Abigail laughed, "Yes, you did – thank you, best-friend."

"It was a slip of the tongue," Stephanie growled, horrified by her admission.

"They'll be making out, next," Shannon grinned as she raced past the two youngsters.

"That would be worth watching," Marc commented from the mat below, his eyes never moving from Shannon's backside as she swung from grip to grip.

"Let's get the bitch!" Abigail growled.

Shannon screamed as she moved faster with the younger girls closing fast.

..._...

Hailee, Morgan, and Megan stood with Marc, holding the ropes which would prevent serious injury should somebody slip.

Megan was struggling with her own emotions which were beginning to get the better of her. The events of Gotham were not easy to bury and now Megan had a major hole in her life which just added to her increasing mental instability. She knew that those she lived and worked with suspected something, but she refused to let anybody get

close to her – even Curtis was kept at arm's reach. They had 'played', but not like they had before Gotham. Curtis tended to complain when Megan got too rough or she insisted on using her teeth where they did not belong.

For the first time, Megan had consented to a sixty-nine position with Curtis – something which she had wanted to try but had always felt too disgusting. To that point, only Curtis' fingers had ever explored her lower regions. Curtis had been a little surprised at the suggestion, knowing Megan's feelings concerning her 'kitty', but he had consented to Megan lying on top of him with her crotch at his mouth while she took him into hers. One benefit was that he would slap her bottom hard should she use her teeth on him – although he got the feeling that she actually enjoyed the often-painful slap.

Curtis, currently over by the pool, watched his girlfriend as she chatted with Hailee and Morgan. He was concerned with her more recent antics both when out as Wildcat and when inside with him and naked. He knew that something had occurred in Gotham, but he had no idea exactly what, and he had no idea how to approach the subject with Megan who was getting increasingly violent at the least little thing. Megan apparently had a reserved seat outside the school principal's office and Paige was getting very annoyed with the increasingly regular post which arrived with school's postmark on it.

Curtis' time with Megan distracted him from the obvious hole left by Cathy's death. His uncle had returned from New York the very same day and he had spent time with Chloe while Curtis had felt a little left out. That was made up for when Ryan had spent the following day with the boy.

..._...

For Shannon, the battle had been hard, but all had survived.

While she had worried about Marc, she had also worried about the rest of her family, all fighting in harm's way. Her siblings were hurt, but mainly bruises and nothing major. She had laughed when she had found the youngsters comparing bruises and counting each other's injuries to see who had the most. It was a typically *Predator* thing to do and Shannon had laughed when she had found her two siblings standing stark naked in Annabelle's bedroom counting each and every bruise which they could find on their bodies. Annabelle seemed to have none of the modesty which you might expect of a developing twelve-year-old when her ten-year-old brother was counting bruises on her body while she stood naked for all the world to see.

"Can we count yours?" they had asked, but Shannon had declined the offer.

"She's saving her body for Marc," Iain had commented slyly.

Annabelle had giggled at the suggestion as Shannon had fled. Later that evening, Annabelle had proudly declared herself as the winner with the most bruises.

"Honey," her father pointed out. "The winner would be the one with the *least* bruises."

Annabelle thought that one through for a minute before her face turned pink and she grinned sheepishly.

"Yeah – that sounds right," she muttered as Shannon burst out laughing.

"I win!" Iain declared as he smirked at his sister. "Loser!"

..._...

For Lauren and Lizzie, things had calmed down.

Lizzie was getting annoyed with Brad fawning over her big sister, despite Lauren's injury.

"It is disgusting how much you are naked, Lauren."

"My body is my body and I will expose it to whomever I so wish."

"What?"

"If Brad wants to see my body, then he can," fourteen-year-old Lauren reiterated for her younger sister. "You have boobs too – nobody is stopping you from showing them off."

"I am not a slut!" Lizzie retorted, horrified at the very thought.

Brad stepped in between the two girls.

"Lizzie, that was uncalled for – please apologise."

"Sorry, Lauren."

"Lauren – stop being bitchy; you on your period?"

Lizzie grinned.

"Yeah – plugged herself up just this morning," Lizzie declared with a broad grin.

While Lizzie had not endured her first period, Lauren hated any reference to that hellish time of each month. Lauren blushed furiously, and she suggested that she and Brad should go for a walk.

Two days later

Saturday, October 22nd

"This really sucks!"

"We're off to sunnier shores," Sky said as she hugged Stephanie.

"You won't even notice we're gone," Chrissy pointed out as she wiped away a tear.

"True," Marc commented. "Less bitches will be better . . . ow!"

Shannon scowled as she lowered her left hand from the back of Marc's head. Sky laughed as she hugged Shannon.

"You both take care, now," Megan said.

"We'll be fine."

The hugs and goodbyes continued until it really was time for the twins and Erika to leave the city. For Marty, saying goodbye to Erika was difficult, considering their past relationship, but he had Kim to give him support.

"God, I hate all this sappy shit!" Mindy growled as she waited by the car.

"Heartless, bitch!" Dave chuckled.

He alone knew that Mindy was very sad to be splitting up the team but there were some very good reasons behind it. He would also miss Mindy as she went with the twins and Erika.

She would be needed for other reasons too.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This storyline continues in* **CHAPTER 1: THE PALISADES** *of my new story:* **FUSION: LOS ANGELES.**

***Chapter 352*: Upcoming 2018**

Coming soon in 2018 for the **Forsaken** universe.

Please be advised that some of what you see below may not actually appear in the story, or may be changed considerably. Most of the below will be out of context (usually, on purpose) and not necessarily in the right order.

Also, the below spans many chapters, so you may not see certain sections for quite a while, if at all.

VENGEANCE

*Deep inside, Keira wanted to kill the girl who had betrayed them all.
More importantly, she wanted to kill the girl who had cost her Harper.*

...+...

*"Jason, Nicky, please meet my sister, Sarah, and our friend, Keira Sharp.
Sarah, Keira, please meet Jason and Nicky Bourne."*

...+...

*"I think she's telling the truth."
"She's either a very good liar or she's scared to death."*

...+...

*The yell was full of fear and distress.
Then came the sound of cracking and screaming as two of the
four fingers on the girl's left hand were broken at the second knuckles.*

...+...

*They were at 70 hours and 24 minutes;
Harper's life expectancy was quite literally ticking down to oblivion.*

...+...

*"She needs to suffer," Kaitlin growled. "I am going to make her suffer,
just like Harper has suffered. First, we're going to break her fingers."*

...+...

*There was no challenge, just machinegun fire
which came as a rude awakening to the watch on the bridge.*

...+...

*Sarah checked the starboard beam to find a larger yacht,
flying the French Tricolour closing fast, tracer rounds
striving to strike the pristine hull of CALEDONIA.*

...+...

*Five thousand tons of submarine heaved itself to the surface,
shedding the tons of water from its hull as men appeared atop the conning tower.*

...+...

*Keira stepped out of the shadows from forward,
a pistol in her hands. Debbie looked directly at her.*

"We know where your sister is."

...+...

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

...+...

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

...+...

*Her mind was losing focus and she could not think.
She just lay there in the mud and she thought of her
sister and how much she wanted to be with her.*

...+...

The door opened, and a tray was brought in and placed before her. The man stood up.

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

The man returned as promised, just as Harper had finished eating – he was smiling no longer.

...+...

*For a moment, Harper forced a grin, but fear soon overtook her. The woman was
a face from her past; one which she hated – one which scared her to her core.*

...+...

They came for her soon after ten o'clock.

Harper screamed as her badly-damaged left hand came in contact with something hard.

...+...

*She screamed, and she screamed as she writhed but the man had her neck in a vice-like grip from which she could
not escape. The pain was enormous, and Harper was being pushed very close to her pain threshold which was much
higher than that of the average nine-year-old child.*

...+...

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

"The wonders of modern medicine."

...+...

*My team are under intense suspicion at the moment.
You are all not exactly welcome on the mainland, either."*

"Screw that – we can sneak ashore and do what we need," Cassie commented.

...+...

Harper was beside herself with fear and desperation.

"Keira! Keira! Don't leave me! Please . . . KEIRA!"

...+...

"As you can see," the familiar voice sneered,
"Little Harper has served her purpose. Have a good day."

...+...

The Police BMW overtook and for a moment, the young vigilante thought that it was all over, but instead, the BMW raced ahead and stopped the traffic at the next junction, allowing their vehicle to blast through the red light at speed while another police officer waved them through the junction with a broad grin on his face before the BMW moved to block the pursuing vehicles.

...+...

"We thought that you might be needing these."

It was a simple statement from the Army officer as the covers were hauled off the vehicles being hauled by the Royal Logistic Corps low-loaders. The first trailer was carrying Sabre and Scimitar. The second trailer bore two humps at each end, but the shapes soon became familiar once the covers were removed. Twilight and Scourge were present and correct, rotors folded.

...+...

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

"Just what I was going to say!" an electronically enhanced voice countered as a dark blue shape dove out of the darkness and put himself between the woman and the pistol.

Both hit the ground as another form, this one crimson, followed the other and put several bullets into the gunman who fell into a pool of his own blood. The man in dark blue armour stood up and helped the woman to her feet.

"Are you injured, Prime Minister?"

...+...

The gated entrance to Downing Street was cordoned off by four red BMW X5 police 4x4s but two of them moved smartly to allow Sabre to sweep through with just the DPG Range Rover following.

...+...

The Corporal pulled back a dusty, dirty blanket, and he indicated for the Marine with the torch to bring it closer. Then he looked more closely at the shape.

"Medic!" he bellowed.

...+...

The Mondeo's left front corner lifted, rolling the car over and thrusting it upwards. The front end of the car crashed down, bending the entire engine compartment backwards towards the windscreen.

...+...

"Hello."

"Hello."

"I'm Diana."

...+...

She looked downwards, and her eyes went wide as she noticed that the girl who rested on crutches was missing something – quite a bit, really.

...+...

Stephanie sank to her knees at the graveside.

She held her head in her hands and she sobbed loudly for over a minute as Jamie hugged her, tears running down his own face.

...+...

Stephanie turned on Electra and the eyes burned into Electra's, causing the girl to shake with fear.

...+...

Vengeance faced off against the close on sixty enemy and the eight armoured vehicles.

...+...

A pair of giant Challenger 2 main battle tanks roared up the beach, escorted by four Warrior armoured fighting vehicles.

...+...

Prowl did not answer.

The girl looked up at Nemesis for a moment but then she fell to her knees, hesitated, and fell the rest of the way to the ground.

...+...

"Is something wrong, Lucius?" Bruce enquired.

"That is the armour of a Vengeance vigilante. The girl wearing it almost died. My armour failed."

...+...

Without warning, there was a chain of ear-splitting explosions and Scimitar appeared to fly through the air. The heavily armoured vehicle was pushed upwards and outwards by the explosive force before it came crashing down onto its roof, the support pillars of which telescoped under the weight of the large vehicle.

FORSAKEN

It had been almost a week.

They had won a great battle, but they had suffered a great loss.

...+...

"Why would Tommy have a pair of your panties?" Mindy asked with a raised eyebrow.

...+...

"Well, well, I never thought it might come to this . . . goodbye, you Irish slut."

...+...

"This level hasn't been used for decades."

"But it is the only place where we can house sixteen troubled kids."

...+...

There was an equal split, seven girls and nine boys. The boys were all in the large space, together, while the girls were split into two groups, of four and three.

...+...

Jake sidled up to Stephanie.

"Hi, hot stuff – how about you and me. . ."

"Do you want to lose this pathetic excuse for a dick?" she growled.

...+...

"You are all here under punishment, so expect a lot of crap over the next few weeks."

...+...

Shannon was just ten-years-old. Willow was just twelve-years-old. For Leo, who was thirteen-years-old, it was a struggle. Christina and Sky were ordered to strip each offender – a task the twins from hell relished.

...+...

Joshua came back into the room and he shook his head angrily.

Summer Frasier aka Sunset Phoenix was gone.

...+...

Her Predator sense told her that something was wrong. She checked the bathroom – it was empty. The bedroom door was open, so Stephanie headed out onto the landing and then down the stairs. She found Rachel in the living room. She sat on the couch, a pistol in her right hand.

...+...

Stephanie couldn't think of anything to say, so instead, she just ran forwards and gave Mindy a big hug.

...+...

"Her stature speaks volumes and that man behind her? He's CIA, a minder . . . much like Miranda was for me . . . he's worried . . . if I didn't know any better . . . yes – I'm sure."

...+...

"Is this wise?"

"I . . . well, I think so."

"You have concerns, though."

"What makes you think that?" Mindy asked.

"Every adult is carrying at least one Taser – you are carrying a pair."

...+...

Mindy had cringed at the amount spent but she saw it as well worth it and after Christmas, they could replenish the money spent in a couple of evenings when some drug dealers donated their income to Fusion.

...+...

Willow's dress was off the shoulder and above the knee, showing off the sixteen-year-old's ample breasts and thighs. As with the other ex-Marauders, the hair was growing back slowly.

...+...

*"I last saw you with Electra, in the woods . . . you . . .
you cared about us Yellows. You used Duct Tape on Electra's wound."*

"That's good enough, Billy – it's him. You want to get out of this place?"

...+...

*Stephanie seized Billy's right hand with her left and she bounded forwards out of cover
sprinting directly at the exit with Chloe and Mindy providing covering fire as they followed.
The boy was all but dragged forwards, keeping up with his rescuer.*

...+...

*"Move it!" Mindy yelled at the pilots who immediately firewalled the
engines sending the jet accelerating down the runway and into the air.*

...+...

"Rachel – what did you say your greatest Christmas wish was?"

...+...

*Rachel simply froze as a young boy appeared from behind Stephanie.
Jamie looked up at his sister in surprise; Stephanie just grinned.
The fourteen-year-old girl was struggling to speak, to move, to do anything.*

FUSION:LA

"Who are you?" Maddie asked.

"You hacked a file which got you pinched. You want to know what is in that file?"

"How would you know what is in that file?"

"Me, is in that file."

...+...

*"I want you two girls to meet me at the location which Marty has
uploaded to the satnav in the Yukon – have fun!"*

...+...

*Just days before, she had been in FBI custody on a serious charge of Cyber Hacking,
then, she had been awoken at 5am from a troubled sleep in the detention facility.*

...+...

*"I am trusting you to do everything in your power to help my team
and to never reveal anything that you see, that you hear, that
you think, or even what comes to you during that moment of
euphoria as you work your clit to orgasm."*

...+...

"You having a midlife crisis or something, Erika?"

"Or something. . ." Erika replied coolly.

...+...

*"Hello, Mrs Tyler. Your daughter is working off her misdeeds for me. She makes a mistake; she goes back to the FBI.
So far, she has been true to her word and I trust her."*

...+...

It looked like any other entrance to any number of businesses where the boss had no interest in spending money on non-essential parts of the building – like the reception.

...+...

"You guys do not fuck around when it comes to Safehouses, do ya?"

"Hit Girl has a thing for being prepared – she must have been a boy scout in a previous life!"

...+...

She sat at her computer station and her eyes flew around the various windows that she had open across the giant display screens. The most important of which was a display showing three flashing dots on a zoomed in section of Los Angeles. The dots were blue, red, and yellow. They represented, Mist, Venom, and Bane, respectively. Their lives were in the thirteen-year-old's hands and she was petrified of what they might do to her should she screw up.

. . . and something else

What, you may ask, was she doing wading through a leech-infested swamp in Asia with the rancid water lapping at her snatch?

For the past six hours, Mindy had been asking herself the same goddamn thing.

...+...

"Apparently, the powers that be have other plans for the British arm of Fusion. In fact, they have been forbidden from taking part – a direct order, if you will."

...+...

Each and every punch sent pain shooting throughout her body. The man obviously knew his stuff as he pounded into her. All thoughts of being concerned about her dignity as she hung there, naked as the day she was born, were replaced by the thoughts required to keep her mind running so that she could resist and keep resisting

...+...

Mindy glared up at Chloe.

"We're in deep shit."

"Tell me about it!" Chloe growled.

"Could be worse," Stephanie added.

"How the fuck could it be any worse!" Joshua questioned.

"We could be dead," Stephanie pointed out darkly.

"Ah, Steph," Mindy chuckled as she gave Stephanie a hug.

"You're a dark horse, but we all love you."

...+...

The temperature was approaching minus twenty-five, and the eleven-year-old girl was almost buried in Artic clothing, with not a single piece of flesh visible. Suddenly, she dived down into the soft snow and raised her binoculars.

...+...

"You don't have a Safehouse in the Dakotas, do you?" Joshua enquired.

"No, I don't," Mindy replied. "Not yet, anyway. Besides nothing ever happens in what has to be two of the most boring states in the entire Union. Both could drop off the face of the earth and I doubt if anybody would actually notice for six to eight months that they had gone. Even those living there probably wouldn't notice if they suddenly ceased to exist for a week or two."

"Ooh, scathing!" Dave laughed.

...+...

Mindy threw down her pistol and she glowered at the Russians.

She was so angry. She felt tears in her eyes with the utter frustration of what was happening. She felt anger at the knowledge that she had failed. She felt sadness as she realised that she might never see her kids or family again.

...+...

The pair of General Electric GE90-115B turbofan jet engines increased power to produce over 500kN of thrust, driving the Boeing 777-300ER down the runway at ever-increasing speed. The countermeasures systems scanned the area around the aircraft, searching for signs of incoming missiles, gunfire, or tracking lasers. With a bump, the giant aircraft leapt into the air and climbed steeply, clawing for safety in the skies, well away from the ground threats.

... and maybe something else again

The other vessel began to emerge from the early morning mists.

The vessel was a deep blue from bow to stern with a light-grey superstructure. A bulbous bow was visible each time the vessel rose on a wave and a large anchor was housed on each bow. The superstructure rose four decks, the top three able to clear the containers on the foredeck. A mass of small masts and antennae mounted on the bridge roof were overshadowed by a mini pyramid mast rising about fourteen or so feet above the bridge roof before being terminated in a flat top on which was mounted a rotating egg-shaped structure with four spikes emanating from the top of the egg. Immediately below the spinning egg were several spiked protrusions which encircled the eight-sided main mast. A light flickered from the port bridge wing.

The captain read the Morse Code signal in his mind, letter by letter.

V ... A ... L ... I ... A ... N ... T

...+...

"Damn, it's cold out there!" Captain Ryan Bennett announced as he pulled off his mittens and was handed a steaming mug of coffee by the duty bosun's mate. "Any news from our friends in their icebox?"

"No, sir," Lieutenant Mayhew, the duty officer, replied.

"Damn crazy to be out on that bloody ice – it's approaching thirty below! I want them back aboard by 1600."

...+...

"What's out there, Wes?"

"I have no idea, skipper."

...+...

"Air contact! Approaching at speed, attack profile . . .
second contact! Same speed, same profile!"

...+...

"First contact, coming down the starboard side, zero feet!"

Captain Bennett ran out onto the starboard bridge wing and with the engine's off, he could make out the sound of gas turbines and rotor blades and a helicopter blazed past at 150-knots, barely a dozen feet above the waves. Captain Bennett found himself looking down on the Royal Navy attack helicopter as it blazed past.

"Port side!"

Captain Bennett appeared outside just in time to see an identical helicopter streak past the starboard side of his ship. The weapon pylons were heavy with ordnance.

...+...

The vessel was large. The masthead was visible long before the rest of the ship which began to come into visual sight despite the large waves. The masthead was reminiscent of the older Type 23 frigates, but the radar was of the Type 26 frigate. After the radar became visible, the white top of a Phalanx gun system appeared mounted above the superstructure. The bridge atop the forward superstructure was massive with obvious gun platforms at each bridge wing.

...+...

Life-giving fuel flooded into the dry tanks of the destroyer and she sank lower in the water as 140,000 gallons of fuel filled the tanks. Only twenty minutes into the refuelling, the GTGS units were cranked and they began to provide electrical power to the ship, relieving the emergency generators and the all but exhausted battery backup systems.

...+...

"What's that flag flying on the British vessel?" Jamie asked.

"I don't know," Abigail responded. "The flag keeps bunching up in the wind – hold on. . ."

The wind had changed, and the flag suddenly went taut.

"You seeing this?" Abigail asked incredulously.

"What're you two up to?" Mindy asked.

"Look at that flag, Mum," Jamie insisted, passing the binoculars to Mindy.

Mindy focussed the binoculars on the blue flag, assuming it to be an ensign, only it wasn't the naval ensign that she had been expecting. It was dark blue with a pair of sabres forming a 'V' in the centre.

"Vengeance!" Mindy exclaimed.

Chapter 353: After The Battle

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This chapter follows on from CHAPTER 1: THE PALISADES of my new story: FUSION: LOS ANGELES.*

"My name is Dave, Dave Lizewski. . ."

"They know that, dumbass!"

"I was just trying to be conversational, is all."

"Look, Dave: if they've been reading this Forsaken shit for what . . . err, three-hundred-and-fifty odd chapters, you would think they'd've figured out your name by now."

"What are you two going on about – this is supposed to be a narrative for fuck's sake!"

"Stephanie – you butted into *my* last narrative, back in Chapter 302, so be a good little brat and stay the fuck outta this one."

"Talk about an intergalactic ego!"

"Stephanie! Show Mindy some respect, please."

"Hah!" Mindy declared.

"Mindy," Dave cautioned.

"Okay, dumbass, do your fucking narrative . . . jeez!"

"It has been a week since FEAR died on the streets of Chicago. Sunset Phoenix is gone, too. So are friends – one permanently. Mindy has since returned from fucking around in L.A., setting up a new team. . ."

"I was *not* 'fucking around', asshole!"

"Prancing around the beach in next to nothing, from what I hear. . ."

"Stephanie!"

"Hey, guys! What's going on?"

"Tommy, sssh – we're doing a narrative."

"Cool! Just wanted to bring these over."

Stephanie quickly snatched something out of Tommy's hands – just not fast enough for Hit Girl's eagle eyes.

"Why would Tommy have a pair of your panties?" Mindy asked with a raised eyebrow.

"It is *not* what your sordid mind is dredging up from the gutter which flows through that fucked-up brain of yours," Stephanie growled.

"I think it's time for you, me, and Chloe to have a chat," Mindy grinned.

"Like fuck, we do!"

"If you two are getting down to the panty level. . ."

"Dad!"

"You're on your own, pal!"

Mindy and Stephanie began to bicker while Tommy looked on, enjoying the verbal sparring match.

"Anyway!" Dave continued, ignoring his wife and daughter. "Chicago has calmed down and people have gone back to enjoying their lives in peace. In some respects, people were happier to be mugged by real thieves rather than the mafia, or worse."

ABC7 Eyewitness News

Chicago appears to have returned to normal with their very own true vigilantes – eat your heart out, New York! Normal service has returned with the death of FEAR and the total disappearance of the Russians and the Sicilians. A more streamlined force of vigilantes has been seen out on the streets immediately following what has become known as The Battle of Chicago. Hit Girl was conspicuous by her absence, but her partner, Kick-Ass, was readily visible as he patrolled with Wildcat by his side. Even the Chicago Police Department have left their armoured vehicles at home as officers patrolled wearing their usual stab-vests with only pistols to hand. There have been many who openly condemned the city-wide battles which took many lives, on both sides, including that of the vigilante known only as Medic. Some have called for the vigilantes to be stood down while others have openly thanked the armour-clad individuals who have selflessly risked their very lives to keep the city which we all love, safe from tyranny and oppression. Tributes have been laid at the spot where Medic was callously gunned down while treating a wounded Chicago police officer. The corner of West Van Buren Street and South Franklin Street has seen flowers, gifts, and accolades appear steadily over the past few days. The City will mourn those who died for a long time and they did not die in vain. The work to rebuild the damaged parts of the city and the destroyed infrastructure will go on for many months. The ripple effect of the battles will remain but the brave Chicagoans who occupy this fair city will rise to the occasion and continue on with their day to day lives. As for this mild-mannered reporter, I have but one thing remaining to say:

'Thank you, Fusion. Thank you for remaining by our side. Thank you, also, to the forces of Law and Order which continue to protect the great city of Chicago against those who wish to do its citizens harm.'

Friday, October 28th, 2016

It had been almost two weeks.

They had won a great battle, but they had suffered a great loss. In general, the moral was suffering and there was a lot of focus on anything but past events. There was a lot to prepare for and a lot of clearing up to do. A lot of *Fusion* equipment had been lost or damaged and there was a major inventory underway to find out what needed to be replaced. There was everything from bullets and weapons, through combat suits, and onto motorcycles and SUVs to be replaced or repaired. The damage to physical bodies and to minds was ongoing and would take time. Most schools around the city had been closed for over a week which made things easier and it allowed a lot of tell-tale bruises to heal.

For some, the end of the battle and the deaths of certain villains had allowed them to return to their homes in the certain knowledge that they would be safe from harm. First among those was the Dade family who were released from their enforced protection. Mindy had thanked them all personally, including all the members of *Synthesis*. They had not been in harm's way, but their value had been invaluable. One positive was an upsurge in memberships at D-JAK which occupied certain members of *Fusion* and gave them something else to focus on. Chloe, in particular, was focussing her energies there along with Curtis. Ryan had returned to his ship and relative normality. It would be a difficult time and Mindy knew that handling death was difficult for all and she wished it upon nobody – except, of course, for certain people who *did* deserve to die.

Dave was a constant comfort for Mindy who shouldered much. She was only eighteen-years-old, and her slim shoulders had to bear everything. From time to time, Dave insisted on his own shoulders taking some of the weight off his wife's own shoulders. The one thing that Mindy was perhaps selfish about was her own family who had come out of the battle almost unscathed. Stephanie's dunking in the lake had caused no negative after effects. Although, Mindy was a little sour about losing her attack craft. However, she was pleased to be able to go shopping. Mindy was spending a lot of time down at Safehouse Zulu where she had taken over the operations area as her office with paper strewn all over the place. Indeed, she was not alone as she was often joined by various canines and a few vigilantes while she worked.

As for Stephanie, she was not enjoying her Saturday morning.

Training Facility Echo

Stephanie was feeling distinctly uncomfortable as she lay on a hospital bed, naked but for a bed sheet with her legs spread apart and a pair of hands prodding at her lower parts.

Dr Jennifer Staite was chatting away like it was perfectly normal to be giving a ten-year-old girl a pelvic exam. Stephanie just felt weird and she kept shifting her bottom around on the table.

"Stephanie, please keep still, or I cannot finish. Pelvic exams are not fun for any girl, let alone one of your age. I understand this is not your first."

"I was unconscious the last time," Stephanie pointed out.

"A desirable state, I will admit, Stephanie. Dr Bennett was very colourful in the description of your attack in her notes. Are you sexually active?"

"Do you want to be shot on your first week?" Stephanie growled, and Jennifer laughed.

"I had to ask – it's part of the check-up and well . . . your mom dropped a hint."

"Okay – I was at my boy – err, my friend's place and I accidentally dropped a pair of knickers. The idiot was bad with his timing when he returned them. They were clean and unworn. Megan suggested that I carry a pair just in case my first period crept up on me."

"A very prudent suggestion, Stephanie. Okay, first periods are almost impossible to predict, so it's a good idea to be prepared. However, you are only ten, so you could wait another two years, or it could happen tomorrow. Okay – all appears present and correct. These exams are important, young lady, and you will have many more should you wish to remain healthy. Your body is changing. . ."

"So, I've noticed."

"My job is to keep you healthy, Stephanie, and I intend to do my job to the very best of my ability. You can close your legs now and get dressed."

"Thanks, Doc."

"This place is truly amazing, and I have some large shoes to fill," Jennifer said as Stephanie pulled on her clothing.

"My Mum is a born leader, and everybody would follow her to hell and back. Some of us have suffered bad things as we grew up and we have become child assassins. I lost most of my childhood, but Mum has given me a new childhood and we respect each other. We have freed many others and now we have more that have been freed but who must be punished for what they have done."

"This life is going to take a lot of getting used to but I'm all for it. I still have a lot of you to meet but I like what I've met so far."

"Oh . . . you ain't seen nothing yet . . . Surgeon!"

..._...

As Jennifer watched the youngster finish her dressing, she saw the vicious-looking scar on her upper right chest and she was amazed that the girl had survived so much.

It was only her third visit to the subterranean facility and she was struggling to comprehend the sheer magnitude of what was existing beneath the streets of Chicago. Mindy had mentioned many things, including something called *Urban Predator* which had featured prominently in Stephanie's files. Her full induction was still awaiting her and she was dreading what she might find out. For the moment, her primary task was treating those who had been injured during the battle. Learning how *Fusion* worked could wait for another day, Mindy had suggested – the medical support came first.

"Thanks, Doc – see you soon, no doubt," Stephanie offered cheerfully as she left the room.

There was a muted knock on the door and the next patient entered.

"Hi, Doc!"

"Lauren Edwards?"

"That's me!"

Jennifer chuckled at the happy, smiling, bubbly teenager.

"Please take a seat, Lauren."

That afternoon

"Have you no shame?"

Abigail looked up from where she was lying on the tiles, surrounded by rushing water. She grinned up at the equally naked Stephanie.

"I'm showering," Abigail pointed out to her friend.

"With your legs wide open like a . . . whatever," Stephanie pointed out to her friend.

Abigail laughed at the suggestion.

"I'm a girl – that's what a girl looks like down there."

"It's unseemly," Stephanie persisted as she pushed Abigail's legs together.

Stephanie found it a little strange, but she was wanting to regain control over her own body. For years, she had been forced to show her body off to all and sundry during punishments and worse. Maybe it was just her growing up, but she wanted privacy and she wanted to control who saw her naked body. Other female *Predators*, like Saoirse, had been forced to endure puberty and the inevitable changes to their bodies on public show – but Stephanie had had enough.

Her life was *her* life and her body was *her* body; she was in full control of it.

..._...

Abigail had visited Charlotte every day.

Was it guilt? A little, but Abigail knew how lonely it could be as an *ex-Predator*, so she chatted with Charlotte or she just sat there providing some sort of comfort for the girl. Charlotte appeared to appreciate the company considering the alternative. She was young, twelve-years-old, and if it were not for the slight bumps on her chest, and with the shaved head, you could have been forgiven for seeing her as a young boy. Twice, Fury had escorted the boy, Jake, from his holding cell to see Charlotte, and the girl had significantly brightened up during each visit. While *Urban Predator* had strongly discouraged relationships, those relationships still occurred. It also surprised Abigail how the survivors of *Urban Predator* sometimes bonded with each other, creating surprising relationships – take her and Stephanie as an example. Charlotte seemed to look on Fury as a friend, so after nagging Mindy to pieces, Abigail was allowed to forgo the mask.

"Who are you?" Charlotte had asked guardedly as she saw the young girl slip through the curtains.

"My name is Abigail, Abigail Wilde."

The girl appeared relieved to hear a British accent for a change.

"Fury, right?"

Abigail nodded.

"I'm in a real bind, aren't I?"

"Yes, Charlotte, you are."

Charlotte was very depressed. She regretted everything, all the way back to her decision to sign on with FEAR as a *Marauder*. Abigail saw the tears forming – the girl often cried during the night, she had been told.

"What's going to happen to us?"

"Honestly, Charlotte, I have no idea."

That evening

South Whipple

Abigail returned home that evening to find a very morose looking Brad sitting with Lauren on the couch.

It was fairly obvious that Brad had just returned from the hospital and his Dad. Abigail looked directly at Lauren who grimaced. Then Lauren jumped up and she pulled her morose boyfriend to his feet.

"Brad, come with me. Abigail, please see to it that we are not disturbed."

"What are you going to do?" Abigail asked.

"Do you really want details, little Abigail?" Lauren smirked, and Abigail cringed as her sharp mind grasped what Lauren meant.

..._...

Brad was on autopilot as he allowed himself to be led upstairs and thence into his own bedroom.

Lauren shut the door and she turned the key in the lock. She pulled Brad down onto the bed and she looked into his eyes.

"Brad, you need a distraction. How about that distraction being me?" Lauren suggested as she undid the buttons on her blouse.

Brad noticed, and his eyes came to life but otherwise, the boy did not react.

"Do you want me, Brad?"

"I love you, Lauren; you know that."

Lauren lifted Brad's T-shirt up and off. She liked the boy's developing muscles. He had always been strong, but since he had been properly working out, his body had developed nicely. However, other parts of his thirteen-year-old body had been developing too, and Lauren enjoyed those parts – not that she had done more than stick her hands down his shorts and then get her hands all sticky a minute later. The boy had been there when she was in pain – she still was in pain but that was not the point – so she was going to be there for him. Lauren kicked off her shoes and she popped the button on her jeans. Brad shook his head.

"It's way too soon, Lauren," he said.

"Bradley, I decide when is too soon," Lauren retorted with a little anger. "It's been nine months and I want to lose my real virginity to the boy I love."

"Lauren, I . . ."

"I'm not forcing you, Brad, but I want you to be my first."

Brad grinned as he blushed slightly, and he stood up. Lauren kicked off her jeans and she stood there in just bra and panties. She knelt down and she pulled open Brad's belt and then his jeans. As she slid the jeans down, she noticed that one part of the boy was up for it. It was the first time that the fourteen-year-old had been 'up close and personal' with her boyfriend's 'equipment'. Lauren eased down his shorts – not an easy task with something sticking out, but with some gentle manipulation, Brad was naked. Lauren stood before Brad and she turned around, so the boy could release her bra. The bra slid down Lauren's body and off her arms, all the way to the floor. She could feel Brad's warmth as his body touched up against her own.

Lauren shuddered as she felt fingers moving carefully across her bare shoulders and then down across her chest. Then those fingers began to gently massage her breasts before one finger touched Lauren's right nipple and she squealed. She giggled as Brad kissed her on the neck before he pulled her down onto the bed where he lay beside

her, kissing the girl on the lips. Lauren loved kisses on the lips – they tingled. When Brad kissed her, she felt warmth inside her and the kiss had other parts of her body tingling too. They were feelings which she had never felt before she had met Brad. He was gentle, and he exhibited caring in his touching and his kissing. He would always treat Lauren with the greatest of respect and she loved him for it. She giggled as she watched his dick throbbing slightly where it rested on her left thigh. She loved it when she could tease him, and she enjoyed how her body could cause his body to react.

Brad was messed up with his Dad being in hospital at death's door. Everything had been going so well for his family. His Dad was doing well at his job. His Mom was happier than she had been in years. Then Abigail had come along, and he had gained a little sister whom he loved to bits – she was damn weird, and she was British, but she was awesome. He had been very upset when Lauren had been injured and he could still see the medical dressing below her panties. The boy stared down at the panties. Beneath them was the forbidden fruit as far as he was concerned. He had seen it, of course, only he had never touched it. His eyes flicked up to Lauren who nodded. Brad's eyes flicked back to Lauren's white panties and he sat up, so he could reach them properly. Both hands shook as he reached for Lauren's silky-soft skin which was hot to the touch.

Lauren giggled as Brad's fingers touched her skin and then the waistband of her panties. Without conscious thought, Lauren lifted her butt off the bed to allow Brad to pull down her panties. Brad swept the panties down Lauren's long legs and over her feet with the pink-painted toenails. Brad stared down at the small inverted triangle of dirty blonde pubic hair.

"What do I do with it?" he asked stupidly.

"Oh, Brad!" Lauren exclaimed, and she giggled uncontrollably.

Brad grinned sheepishly as he gently moved his fingers through the until that moment, forbidden pubic region.

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The two youngsters emerged forty minutes later, and they headed down the stairs.

"You two enjoy yourselves?" Rachel Murphy asked gently, a smirk on her lips.

"We never did nothing," Lauren tried, her face very pink.

Brad just stood there an enormous grin on his face.

"Honey, Brad's standing there grinning like a Cheshire cat. Abigail looks appalled to the brink of a breakdown . . . and as for that scream."

"You heard that?" Lauren winced.

"Yeah!" Abigail growled as she looked up at Brad.

Abigail held up her left hand, the thumb and forefinger forming a circle and she stuck her right index finger into the circle. Brad nodded happily.

"You two are so disgusting!" Abigail almost shouted as she bolted up the stairs and Rachel shook her head as Abigail slammed her bedroom door.

"Never a dull moment around here!" Rachel commented. "You take it gently now, Lauren – but thanks."

Wagner Road

Lauren left Brad arguing with Abigail about something incredibly trivial – which was still an improvement over his previous state.

"Well, well, well," Emily chuckled as her daughter set foot into the living room. "The frisky filly returns."

Lauren froze, and her face turned a deep red.

"Mrs Murphy called you, huh?"

"Oh, yeah. Standard for when two youngsters have sex for the first time."

"Ewww!" Lizzie exclaimed as she followed her sister into the room and overheard her mother. "You've just fucked?"

"Lizzie!"

"Sorry, Mom."

"Brad was so low, and I wanted to help. I only had one thing to give him and that was me."

"It's okay, honey, just take it slow and be careful."

"We used a condom – that bit was kinda fun; putting in on him."

"I'm outta here!" Lizzie squealed as she began to feel nauseous.

"Rachel Murphy was very thankful for what you did – he's like a different boy. Although he and Abigail are still arguing as far as I can tell, things have lightened up over there," Emily went on.

"I wanted to lose my virginity the right way at a moment of my choosing."

"I understand, Lauren; I really do."

Glenview

Stephanie was relieved when her friend finally called.

When Mindy had told her that her friend had been shot, Stephanie's response had been one of outrage and worry. She had wanted to get on a plane directly and fly to London. Only Mindy had made Stephanie see sense. By the time Mindy had found out about Electra's injury, three days had passed, and Electra was healing. For Stephanie, she hated hearing anything happen to her little friend, but *Vengeance's* ordeal had been awful. However, Electra appeared to have been in the thick of it and she had survived – even saving the life of a Royal Princess! Stephanie knew that Electra was very brave and very skilled. She also knew that Electra would have been annoyed to know that Stephanie was worried about her when Stephanie knew exactly how capable Electra was.

Still, seeing *Vengeance* appearing on television, escorting the British Prime Minister had filled Mindy with pride at how the organisation which she had sowed the seeds for, had risen to the call and stuck to their principals. They had pulled off the most amazing resurrection, pretty much saving an entire government and maybe a country. Needless to say, Stephanie was itching to see her friend, come what may. Mindy said that it would have to wait a few weeks until sometime in November when she was planning some event or other – Mindy refused to let Stephanie into what was apparently a big secret. Stephanie had threatened all sorts of sanctions on Mindy, from violent torture, up to and including death, should she not divulge the secret to her eldest daughter.

Naturally, Mindy took great delight in allowing her daughter to suffer.

The following morning

Saturday, October 29th

Glenview

"Dad?"

"Yes, my little puff adder."

Stephanie grinned before responding.

"Dad – can you give me a lift into town – I need to go buy stuff?".

"Clothes maybe?" Dave suggested as he noticed his daughter's jeans looking a little tight.

"She had to suck her tummy in real tight to get the button done up, this morning," Anne-Marie commented as she kept well out of arm's reach while she rounded her big sister.

"You do seem to be filling out in places, Steph," Dave conceded.

"Yeah!" Anne-Marie exclaimed, bravely prodding Stephanie's left bump with her forefinger.

Stephanie growled but before she could attack her younger sister, Dave stepped in between them.

"Okay, you two – Stephanie, go get ready."

..._...

About four hours later, Mindy heard the front door opening and closing.

"Hi, Dave – where's Steph?"

Dave turned and Mindy grinned at Stephanie's attempt to stride across the hallway and then up the stairs. Stephanie paused as the two sets of eyes caught her mid-stride.

"In here, young lady," Mindy directed.

Stephanie knew there was no avoiding it, so she reluctantly altered course for the kitchen. Mindy could see immediately what Stephanie was trying to avoid people seeing, but she put that to one side as she took in the new clothes. Stephanie had new jeans which had space for growing and were turned up at the end of the legs. She wore a new blouse and a new winter jacket, as well as a new pair of lightweight boots. Mindy was very impressed by the girl's new look.

"I am very impressed, Steph – you look good."

Stephanie grinned but then she faltered as the conversation turned to the elephant in the room. Stephanie's chest appeared fuller than before and more rounded.

"How does it feel?" Mindy asked gently.

"Like something alien."

"I'm a little surprised you came back with it," Mindy stated.

"Well," Stephanie explained. "Dear old Dad gave me three choices. Go get a bra myself, let him take me to get a bra, or let you take me. As if I would go bra shopping with Hit Girl!"

"Hey!"

"I wasn't about to go on my own, either, but Dad made me go. So, I'm now fitted with a size 30-AA bra. Got a whole load of spare's too."

"Well done, Stephanie. It gives you a fuller figure. I know you hate it – most girls do. Megan refused point-blank for ages. Anyway, I'm proud of you for proving how grown up you are – and you are growing up, honey."

Stephanie grabbed Dave and Mindy in turn and hugged each of them.

"You two make the best parents," Stephanie informed them happily.

"Go – before you make me cry," Mindy said and Stephanie grinned enormously. "No – I mean it; go before I cry."

Stephanie vanished speedily as Dave hugged his wife.

"Did she really mean that?" Mindy asked. "Are we good parents?"

"Well, she would know," Dave replied.

That evening

"Mommy?"

"Yes, honey."

"Stephanie's wearing a bra!" Anne-Marie exclaimed and she giggled along with her brothers.

"Yes, Stephanie is wearing a bra – I'm wearing one too; is there something funny about that, Anne-Marie?"

The eight-year-old scowled as her plan to humiliate her big sister exploded and fell totally flat. Stephanie's scowl changed to a grin and only Dave noticed her sitting up straighter and exuding an air of maturity. The two boys were still muttering between themselves and giggling but they were ignored as usual. Anne-Marie was annoyed but she let it slide – the devious little girl had other ways to embarrass Stephanie.

However, Stephanie had a plan for that.

The following afternoon

Sunday, October 30th

Training Facility Echo

"Anne-Marie! Danny! Jamie!"

The three kids lined up behind their sister, a little unsure about unfolding events. With Dave's assistance, Stephanie had assembled most of *Fusion* around the giant mat on Level 0. Naturally, there had been some good-natured goading once Stephanie's new undergarment had become general knowledge with Anne-Marie's assistance. However, Anne-Marie's assessment of who might enjoy winding up Stephanie had fallen flat, yet again, as many of the females present wore bras and knew how unsettling the first bra was from first-hand experience – especially the *Predators*. Stephanie glared at everyone present – especially the male variety.

"Now – as my sweet sister has informed the entire world, I am now wearing a bra, so all the hints and snide comments can STOP! For the perverts amongst you, I am wearing a 30-AA bra – however, I will NOT be providing size updates. But let me be very clear: any bastard who talks about my bras . . ."

Without warning, Stephanie turned, and Anne-Marie was seized and thrown across the mat where she landed with a scream in a small heap.

". . . my boobs . . ."

Danny received a severe punch to his chest and a kick to his left thigh which sent him reeling across the mat in a different direction to his twin.

". . . or any other part of my body . . ."

The very apprehensive Jamie received a spinning hook kick to his side which sent him flying after Danny where he landed in a messy heap on the mat.

". . . and I may just lose my temper. AM I CLEAR?"

Stephanie ignored her whimpering siblings as she headed for the elevator. Megan was impressed, and she wished that she had been more forceful about her own first bra. Many grinned at Stephanie's demonstration but most gave her a wide berth, knowing what she was capable of when angry.

Mindy and Chloe simply applauded enthusiastically.

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"Little sis?" Brad asked Abigail a short while later.

"Yes, Brad."

"You're older than Steph, right?"

"About six months, why?"

"Shouldn't you be wearing a bra too?"

Abigail laughed.

"You've seen me in a swimsuit, Brad – me and pancakes have a lot in common if you hadn't noticed and I'm about as hairy down below as the average pancake too."

"Please, don't hold anything back on my account, sis!" Brad growled.

"See!" Abigail grinned as she lifted her top for Brad to see.

"Thanks for that," Brad grimaced, then he grinned. "They are flat, I'll grant you that!"

"Told you!"

"Give it three months and I'm sure you'll have something," Brad challenged.

"I dunno – they've still got a long way to go; maybe more like six months."

"Care to place a bet on that?"

"You're on, big brother."

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Chloe was in the equipment storage area on Level 3 when she was tracked down by Becky.

"Hi, Peanut!"

"Hi."

"Something wrong?" Chloe asked as she sat down on the steps which led up towards the main armoury.

Becky sat down next to Chloe before looking up at her.

"Mum . . . can I ask you a personal question, please?"

"Of course, honey," Chloe replied.

"You . . . well, Anne-Marie said that shortly before you found me, you were pregnant."

"Oh."

"Am I the alternative?" Becky asked. "Did you take me home as a replacement for losing your baby?"

"No, honey. I genuinely love you. A lot went through my mind that week – losing my baby was still very raw. Okay. Would I have taken you home if I was still pregnant? Yes, I would. You are my child for as long as you want to be my child, Rebecca."

"That makes sense. I do want to stay with you and Dad – I love you both. I just wanted to be sure that you really wanted me."

"You will always be my little Peanut."

"Will I get a little brother or sister, one day?"

"You never know – but not until I'm older."

"I can live with that," the eight-year-old commented as she gave Chloe a hug.

"Love you, Mum."

The following morning

Monday, October 31st

South Woodlawn

"Sabrina!"

"Yeah, Mom!"

"Give your brothers a nudge, please!"

"Ewww, their room stinks – do I have to?"

"Yes, please, honey."

Eight-year-old Sabrina gingerly pushed open the door to the bedroom that her two eight-year-old brothers shared. As she had prophesied, it stank . . . she reached an arm in and flicked the light switch.

"Turn the light off . . ."

"It's too early . . ."

"Time to get up, boys!" Sabrina yelled at the top of her voice then she let out a little scream as a couple of pillows struck her in the face. "Honestly!"

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Slightly less apprehensively, the eight-year-old headed for the bedrooms of her cousins, Leo and Hunter.

They were both awake and Sabrina gave each of them a morning hug. She had been very concerned at seeing the bruises sported by both boys, not to mention the signs of injuries from two weeks previously. There were many things which she and her brat brothers were not allowed to know about concerning Leo and Hunter. They were cousins which meant they were family, so she felt safe around them, but there was something she could not quite fathom about the two boys. Neither had ever hurt Sabrina, but they had accidentally hurt her brothers, Samuel and Simon a couple of times. But that had been before their move to Chicago. Sabrina may have been young, but she was not stupid, and she had one or two ideas as to what the boys were and how they might have gained their bruises and injuries.

Unbeknownst to the young girl, she was about to find out so much more than she would ever have thought possible.

***Chapter 354*: London Anniversary**

Author's Note: *This chapter follows on from Chapter 46: Alive of my other story: Vengeance.*

Dave and Mindy have travelled to the United Kingdom, along with Stephanie and Abby. After visiting young Harper Sharp in hospital, Dave and Mindy are heading off to belatedly celebrate their first wedding anniversary as well as Mindy's nineteenth birthday.

Please be warned that this chapter will include dubious, salacious, and downright crude activity.

Tuesday, November 2nd, 2016

London, England

After leaving Stephanie in the willing hands of Keira, Dave and Mindy headed a short distance across the city to their hotel for the night.

After a very brief check-in, they were led up thirty-eight floors to their suite for the night. The London Suite, on the thirty-eighth-floor of The Shard, cost over £3,000 a night and was exquisitely appointed. The view alone was worth every penny. Not that either of them was interested in the view outside as they both took a little longer than usual together in the shower. Once they were thoroughly clean, they dressed for dinner. Mindy eased her tender nipples into a crimson bra which matched the very limited crimson panties which could almost have been described as a thong. Over those sexily revealing items of lingerie, Mindy slipped into a below the knee evening dress in a dazzling purple. On her left hand, she wore her diamond wedding ring plus a stunning solitaire diamond bracelet on her left wrist which Dave had bought for her that very afternoon. That was joined by a matching set of diamond sleeper earrings and an eye-catching diamond pendant which nestled close to Mindy's cleavage.

The entire ensemble had checked in at £14,500 – but worth every pound as far as Dave was concerned. He assisted his wife with the necklace, fastening the device around her slender neck. His fingers gently caressed her silky-soft skin and he felt Mindy shudder beneath his gentle touch. He bent down and kissed her on the neck causing another shudder and a groan as Mindy fought back certain sensations which began to grow deep within her. As Hit Girl, she could fight men twice her size or even an army of men – and win - but her husband could reduce her to a giggling amoeba with just a simple touch or a kiss. Once her jewellery was in place, Mindy sat down on the edge of the bed and she pulled on a pair of purple open shoes with low heels – Mindy had never really mastered walking on high-heels.

Dave was dressed in a black tuxedo with a white shirt and a fetching black bow-tie which Mindy had assisted Dave in tying. He looked perfect, all the way from his dorky grin, down to his polished black shoes. Mindy reached up and she gave him a deep kiss on the lips. The man she loved looked down at her with his deep eyes and she felt her legs weakening beneath her.

"Let's go before I orgasm everywhere," Mindy suggested as she broke the kiss.

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Their transport for the evening had been provided by none other than Commander Haig.

At exactly 7:45 P.M. the jet-black Rolls Royce Phantom swept into the access road which led to The Shard and it pulled up smartly at the top beside the curb. Four metres away, a similarly jet-black Range Rover Sentinel pulled up without fanfare and disgorged two large men in baggy suits. As the doorman pulled open the door to the Phantom, the two men nodded at Dave and Mindy – they were to be the vigilantes' armed escorts for the evening. Mindy grinned, allowing her right hand to confirm that her hidden Glock 43 and the small knife were secure. Dave was not exactly unarmed either – only he could hide something a lot bigger than a Glock 43. In his pants, he had an awesome loaded weapon. NO! Not *that* – it was loaded alright and it was awesome, but it was reserved for Mindy and only Mindy. Blushing at the thought of what Dave had in his pants, Mindy climbed into the back of the Phantom and moved over to the far side. Dave followed, and he took her hand as she rested it on the armrest between them.

Mindy grinned as she firmly squeezed her partner's hand – Mindy scowled; it had been a hard squeeze, only Dave did not even flinch – he just grinned.

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The Rolls Royce swept into the access road for their restaurant and took a wide berth around the tight roundabout at the top where the doorman opened the rear door within a split-second of the enormous vehicle stopping.

"Welcome to The Savoy, sir, ma'am."

"Thank you, my good man," Dave replied in the most perfect English accent.

Mindy scowled, but she was enjoying the attention and as they were escorted inside by the Maître d' and then directly into the Savoy Grill and through to their reserved table. They sat at a table cum booth where they had a comfortable bench seat at right-angles to each other. Mindy was grinning fit to burst and her cheeks were very warm. Just about every male – and some females – in the restaurant were gazing at Mindy. Dave could understand why. She was showing a lot more of her perfect skin than was usual while the dress with the sparkling jewellery just set everything off perfectly. After they were seated, they were brought the extensive menu and Dave was passed the wine list. While Mindy and Dave did not drink as a rule – they were determined to enjoy the evening. Dave selected a £52 bottle of Prieure de Montezargue Rosé wine while they flicked through the menu. Mindy ordered a Cornish crab salad with brown crab mayonnaise and toast for her starter followed by a 10.5-oz Hereford beef sirloin steak with béarnaise sauce for her main course. Dave countered with Severn and Wye smoked salmon with soda bread for his starter and a slightly larger 14.1-oz Shorthorn rib-eye steak with a peppercorn sauce for his main course.

"This is awesome, Dave."

"Just the two of his – first time in a long time."

"It's been hell on earth these past few months. Between Stephanie being shot, FEAR, the pink bitch, then *Vengeance* – it's really pushing my sanity."

"You have sanity to push?" Dave quipped, receiving a nasty glare in return before Mindy giggled.

"Funny!"

"It's been hard, but we've got through it as a team; just like always, honey."

"Yeah," Mindy mused. "You've always had my back, Dave – ever since I was eleven. Here we are, eight years later, and I've been married for a year. When we married, we had just acquired a pair of little kids – now, we have four little monsters."

"You got that right!" Dave replied with a chuckle.

"What might Daddy think of me?"

"Poor old Damon – I think he'd be very pleased with how his only daughter has turned out . . . despite him turning her into a psychotic nutcase."

In a place between Heaven and Hell

"Psychotic nutcase!"

"Yes, Damon – you turned our daughter into a psychotic nutcase."

"I helped her learn to look after herself."

"She was five-years-old, Damon!"

"She has a point, Damon, old pal."

"Stay out of it, James."

"Hey, Damon, my boy is there too, remember?"

"One little mistake and I'm never allowed to forget it – maybe I should have taken the damn blue pill and gone straight to hell."

"Despite your 'mistake', Damon, Mindy has grown into a beautiful and amazing young woman," Kathleen Macready

commented.

"So, what's the big deal?"

"What did I ever see in you, Damon!"

The Savoy

London, England

The starters were perfect, and Mindy was savouring every mouthful along with the precious time alone with her man.

Alone wasn't quite the term, considering that they were surrounded by dozens of other diners, however, everybody was busy at their own tables, paying attention to their fellow diners. Nobody paid any attention as Dave rang his fingers gently up Mindy's right arm causing her to giggle and drop a chunk of Cornish crab off her fork. For Dave, seeing Mindy smiling and carefree was a rarity. Mindy carried so much on her young shoulders that she rarely had time to herself. When she was not planning the downfall of an enemy such as FEAR, she was chasing around after four wild kids, three mad dogs, and a crazy cat. There was a lot going on in Chicago, but just as much in Europe. Just taking one night off was worth its weight in gold. From a more serious point of view, Dave was worried for what remained of his wife's sanity and he was concerned that she was taking on far too much. The stress of the previous months had taken its toll on Mindy, and Dave knew that at some stage, she might collapse under the burden placed upon her.

The lovely young woman who sat to his left was the most perfect female he had ever laid eyes on. She had the most gorgeous green eyes he had ever seen, and they entranced him – they always had. He could remember those same green eyes glaring up at him in Safehouse A when they were preparing to assault the D'Amico penthouse. Though he had been scared out of his wits back then, those eyes had been mesmerising. It had been them that had given him the strength to overcome his abject fear at what lay ahead that night. As the years had passed and Mindy had grown, the eyes had remained the same – mesmerizing. Even when there had been a period of time where they had rarely seen one another, those eyes had still filled him with warmth each time Mindy had passed him in the school corridor – on the few times she actually attended while she was upgrading young Hit Girl to the teenaged Hit Girl at Safehouse C.

Dave had always been a geek – one of those kids who only had other geeks as a friend – and as such he had rarely come into contact with the opposite sex. Somehow, he had managed to land the most outrageous female possible. Okay, she was a geek too, but she was so much more. Beyond Mindy being Hit Girl, she was also so very unlike any other girl Dave had ever met. Whereas every other girl Dave had met was normal, Mindy was . . . well, she was different – but in a very good way. Dave loved her more than anything and he would protect her with his life. Everything which she did was perfect and executed with precision – Mindy did nothing without a plan which considered every conceivable outcome. He could see her mind working as she ate, enjoying each morsel. He could see her eyes darting about the restaurant and he knew that she was gauging the other diners, looking out for every conceivable problem. He knew that Mindy had scoped out all routes of escape should things go wrong. He also knew that most of the time, Mindy had no idea she was even doing it – it had been ingrained into her psyche so perfectly by her father during her training which had begun fourteen years before.

Mindy grinned up at Dave as she finished the very last of her Cornish Crab.

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Dave was no longer the young man she had met, all those years ago, frightened to death as she had happily sliced and diced at Rasul's.

He may not have taken the leap of faith on the roof of that apartment, but he *had* taken a ginormous leap of faith that night after her father had died. Without him, she would no longer exist. From the very moment she had first laid eyes on Kick-Ass, she had been mesmerised by him – not that she had been able to figure out why, back then. Of course, she had been too young to understand crushes and such like. She was trained to maim and kill, not to understand emotions - she was trained to bury emotions or, where necessary, to use those emotions against her foes. She knew nothing of the outside world or how to live. Her Daddy had fed her, and he had always taken care of anything and everything outside their safehouse. Then it had all crumbled and she had been thrust into the real world where she had discovered that while she was highly skilled and could kill a man in any one of a hundred different and creative ways, she could not care for herself. Her time with Marcus had shown her that she could not even cook. Making hot chocolate had been her limit. She had even struggled with the damn microwave – that had taken some getting used

to – and she had quickly learnt never to put anything metallic into the microwave.

Dave's hand touched hers and it was like she had been electrocuted. She could not understand how his simply touching her could have such an effect as almost rendering her unable to move. However, she enjoyed the touch more than she could ever know. Dave gave balance to her life, a balance that prevented her from regressing into something horrible. That had been allowed to happen, just the once – never again. His scintillating blue eyes flickered around the room and back to her – always back to her. She loved having Dave look at her. She loved having him focus on her. Her skin tingled, and she felt pangs of longing for him. He was everything that was good about her life. He kept her sane and he prevented her from taking on too much. She could not help it – she had to act, and she had to see things through to the very end, that was her nature. With Dave by her side, she had risen from the orphaned child of a man who had allowed the death of his wife to take over his life, to a powerful young woman who commanded a decisive force of vigilantes and protected not just a single city but also stretched her influence across the Atlantic Ocean. Mindy Lizewski née Macready was a young woman with the world at her feet. She had everything which a woman might want. She had an awesome home, a gorgeously handsome husband, four perfect(-ish) kids, a hoard of wild animals as pets, and many friends – not to mention gaining a mother who came with a little sister who was nuttier than a fruit cake with extra nuts.

The starter had been consumed with little in the way of speech – they had mastered the ability to communicate with each other silently, a long time ago.

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The steaks came out exactly two minutes after they had finished their starter.

"Oh, wow!" Mindy exclaimed as she saw her meal arrive. "Damn, that smells good!"

"Yes, it does," Dave agreed emphatically as he examined his own steak.

Mindy dived in like she had not eaten in a month – the girl had a large appetite and she could pile away enormous meals without putting on a pound. As they ate, they chatted, until about mid-way through their steaks when Mindy put down her knife and fork. She took a large sip of wine before looking across at her husband. Dave instinctively put down his own eating irons and he took the opportunity to gaze into the gorgeous green eyes of his wife knowing that she had something to say.

"Dave."

"Mindy."

"I love you with all my heart and you have made me the happiest woman alive. I just want to thank you for taking me as your wife. I want to thank you for putting up with me all these years – I know it cannot have been easy . . . I don't give a crap about what my Daddy thinks about you – I love you and that is all that is important. The day our lives first crossed was the best moment of my life and don't regret a moment – well, maybe a few moments when you weren't there to protect me. No matter what you do, you make me the happiest I can be. Whenever I am blue – you are there to talk to, or just for me to cry on. Whenever things get too much, you are there to ease the burden on my shoulders. You make me so proud to be your wife and I know that no matter what, you will be there to protect not just me, but our entire family. More than once you have put yourself bodily between me and danger – at the time, I may sound ungrateful, but right now, I want to say I thank you for each and every time you have saved my life. I love you Dave Lizewski. The day you pushed this ring onto my finger was the best day of my life. Happy Anniversary, Dave."

Mindy held up her left hand and the diamond ring on her third finger twinkled in the lights. Mindy's smile was enough to make Dave wish for the meal to be over so that they could return to their hotel room. He reached out and clasped Mindy's hands. His own wedding ring, a simple gold band, evident on the same finger of his left hand.

"Mindy, you are the catch of a lifetime and I have never regretted my time with you – even the parts where you almost broke my ribs! You've taught me so much and I am still learning things from you. You are the strongest person I know, and you are beautiful. I would always put myself between you and danger – most of the time it winds you up and I love that. I can never get enough of you, Mindy, and I will never get tired of you. Every month we face a different challenge and you rise to that challenge without complaint. I married a woman powerful in her own right. I married a woman who is never afraid to speak her mind – even if what she has to say is often crude and unbecoming. I love you for your little tantrums – whether that is over a Chicago pizza or because you find yourself doing something you are not very good at. If simply being obnoxious featured in the Olympic games, you would always get the gold medal. There is nobody I would rather have by my side, no matter what the occasion. Mindy Lizewski, I love you more than anything else and I would not trade you for anything. Happy Anniversary, Mindy."

Surprisingly for Mindy, she was lost for words and her face had gone very pink.

In a place between Heaven and Hell

Damon and James were playing cards while their wives, Kathleen and Alice, were chatting.

There was a tentative knock on the door of their shared apartment. Neither man moved. Alice just shook her head as she got up to answer the door.

"Welcome, we've been expecting you," Alice said as she waved in the newcomers.

"It's getting damn crowded around here, Damon!" James observed as three people entered the living room.

"We're gonna need a goddamn hotel at this rate, James," Damon chuckled in reply.

"For goodness sake, James!" Alice growled. "They never asked to be part of our little club – let them be."

"Behave, Damon – if you know what's good for you!" Kathleen added.

"What you gonna do, honey?" Damon laughed before continuing in a sarcastic tone. "Kill me?"

"If only I could," Kathleen muttered as she turned to the first two newcomers. "Welcome! You must be the parents of Stephanie and Jamie – the eyes match perfectly."

"And you must be the father of Anne-Marie and Daniel," Alice said to the other newcomers.

The newcomers appeared a little unsure of themselves.

"Where exactly are we?" Jocelyn Reeman asked.

"You are the latest members of the 'my kid is a fucking nutcase club'," Damon offered with a chuckle.

"Damon!" Kathleen growled.

"To be honest, I have no idea where we are," Alice replied. "I believe that we are here to oversee our children and ensure that no harm comes to them."

"Yeah – I stopped them getting blown up a few months back," Damon threw in, ignoring the unamused expression of his wife.

"Any space for me?" a voice called from the door and a tall woman entered.

"You got a nutcase for a kid?"

"DAMON!"

"I have actually. She sees your daughter as her best friend, Mr Macready."

"You know who I am?" Damon asked.

"You and Mindy share many features and traits. However, she makes a much better parent."

Damon scowled while Kathleen just chuckled at the cruel put down which had shut her husband up – no mean feat in itself.

"Oooh!" James chuckled. "Right in the kisser!"

"Sorry about my dick of a husband," Kathleen said bluntly. "I'm Kathleen, Mindy's mother."

"The resemblance is uncanny. Catherine Bennett – please call me Cathy."

"Could somebody please tell me what is going on?" Ed Jamieson demanded.

"It seems that there is a special place, between Heaven and Hell, that is reserved for the likes of us – we are ghosts, I

suppose," Kathleen replied. "We watch over our earthly kin and protect them where we can. We cannot intervene – at least not directly, only Damon has managed on at least one occasion."

"I do what I can to protect my psychologically damaged daughter."

"You want to check on your children?" Kathleen asked the newcomers, ignoring Damon completely. "Ed – you first."

...++...

The apartment faded, and a young girl became visible.

"Anne-Marie!" Ed exclaimed.

The youngster was in a bedroom and she was evidently searching for something. The bedroom did not appear to be that of a little girl – more it appeared to be a boy's bedroom.

"That is *not* her bedroom," James observed.

"What are you doing in here?" a voice called out.

"Daniel!" Ed exclaimed.

"You have two super kids there, Ed," James commented.

"They've really grown," Ed replied – he had not seen them in over a year.

"They are doing really well, and they love their new family," Cathy commented.

"Jamie is going to kill you," Danny commented as she watched his sister ferreting around for something. "What are you looking for?"

"He took my headphones – I want them back."

"You certain he took 'em?"

"Who else?"

"You looked down in the living room where you usually leave all your junk?" Danny asked.

"I don't leave everything down there," Anne-Marie replied indignantly.

"I would suggest you go check first, *before* invading somebody's privacy," Danny suggested.

"He'll never know. . ."

"That's what *you* think," Jamie commented as he appeared behind the smirking Danny.

"Oops," Anne-Marie commented as the eight-year-old fled down the spiral stairs into her brother's bedroom and then out the door.

"That was Jamie!" Mark Reeman exclaimed.

"Where's Stephanie?" Jocelyn Reeman asked.

...++...

The view faded again and reformed into that of a hotel room.

Stephanie was seated on a couch beside a young woman and both were laughing hysterically. They were watching a movie on the television and there was popcorn scattered around what appeared to be the remnants of a Chinese takeaway.

"Oh, my God!" Jocelyn exclaimed. "What happened to her hair?"

"Long story," Cathy commented.

"She appears to be having fun," Mark observed. "Who's she with?"

"That's a young Royal Navy pilot, Keira Sharp," Cathy explained. "She is a part of *Vengeance*, the British arm of *Fusion*."

"You've lost us," Mark commented.

"That would be what my old partner would call 'the fucked-up superhero club!'" Damon chuckled dryly.

"What about *my* daughter?" Cathy asked.

...++...

Again, things faded, and they found themselves in a kitchen.

A small girl of maybe eight-years-old was seated at a table and awaiting her lunch – a knife and fork held vertically in eager anticipation. She was not to be disappointed as a steaming plate of food was put before the youngster.

"Dig in, Becky," Joshua directed.

"What is it?" Becky asked as she prodded the tall item on her plate.

"Steak and kidney pudding – try it," Joshua replied.

"I am *not* eating kidneys!"

"No kidneys – no ice-cream," Chloe directed.

Becky groaned, and she pouted.

"It's chocolate ice-cream," Joshua offered as he sat down and dug into his own plate.

Becky prodded the pudding until the sides split and dark gravy spilled out over Becky's chips and peas. The youngster grimaced as she spied a kidney.

"They call these 'babies heads' in the Royal Navy," Joshua commented. "My Dad called them that too."

"That's disgusting!" Becky commented as she took a tentative nibble at a piece of kidney before eating the whole thing.

"Was that okay?" Chloe asked.

Becky grinned.

"It was good," the girl commented as she dug around for another piece of kidney. "Do I still get ice-cream, Mum?"

"Yes, Peanut."

Cathy wiped away a few tears from her eyes as she watched her daughter with her family.

"A perfect little family, Cathy," Damon commented. "I've seen your daughter in action and I've watched her keeping Mindy in line. I apologise for my comment earlier. Chloe's alright in my book."

Cathy appeared surprised, as did Kathleen, and the two women exchanged an approving glance.

Author's Note: *If you get squeamish where graphic sexual references are concerned then please read no further and I would suggest that you go read the My Little Pony fan fiction instead.*

The Shard

London, England

Mindy giggled as Dave swept her off her feet and through the door to their suite.

Dave dropped her – yes, he dropped her – onto the thick rug on the floor in the living room. Mindy let out a little scream as she fell the two feet, but she had no problems with rough handling and she just lay there as Dave took off his jacket and threw it onto the sofa along with his bow-tie. Mindy groaned as she stared up at her man – was that his pistol or was he just pleased to see her, Mindy thought? Mindy kicked off her shoes as Dave knelt down, a knee either side of her legs. She felt her heartbeat quickening and her breathing increased – she moaned, audibly, and Dave grinned. Dave knew exactly what he was doing, and Mindy knew it. She knew what was ahead of her and the mere thought of what Dave was going to do to her both scared her and enthralled her. She jumped as his fingers touched her legs, just below her knees. The mischievous look on his face filled Mindy with foreboding and unbidden she squeezed her thighs together, trying to control the irresistible feeling which was growing between them.

Dave's fingers moved over her knees and she trembled. God! What was he doing to her? Mindy just lay back and she focussed everything on controlling her arousal and making it last as long as possible before that crippling orgasm engulfed her. The excitement was building – that was an emotion she had never been able to control and right at that moment it was taking control of her body and her thoughts. Mindy moaned as she felt her body changing in response to Dave's foreplay. Her bra was feeling a little tight as her breasts began to enlarge and she was sure her rock-hard nipples were going to drill through the soft cotton of the bra. She squeezed her thighs even tighter together as she felt the blood pounding into her clit, erecting the organ and increasing its sensitivity ten-fold. Her body was on automatic and Mindy had no control over what was happening on her chest, nor what was happening between her legs where she could feel her labia tingling as they adjusted, and the wetness began. Her breathing was quickening, and her heart was threatening to pound its way out of her chest. Her hands dug into the thick rug beneath her while her toes flexed and twisted as she fought through the sensations which her husband was causing.

Mindy yelped as she felt fingers moving under her dress and up her thighs. However, Dave did not stop at her groin, he continued upwards and her tummy trembled at the touch of his hands. Mindy had not noticed it, but Dave had been gathering up the dress and he was gently sliding it up her body, exposing his wife's long and shapely legs, then her thighs, her groin, and her stomach. She closed her eyes as she suddenly became aware of the dress' movement and she gulped as she realised how much she was exposed. She could feel goose bumps on each section of freshly exposed skin as the fresh air touched it. Then she felt the dress pass over her head and she allowed Dave to pull the dress off her arms and he threw it onto the sofa, on top of his jacket and bow-tie. Mindy trembled at the thought that she wore nothing but skimpy panties and a bra. Her nipples actually grew harder – if that were actually possible – and her arousal was like nothing she had ever experienced before.

With her eyes closed, she had to rely on her senses. She could feel Dave close to her. She could feel his clothing on her skin. She could smell him – his scent was a major turn-on for her. Then she felt his lips on her own and she pushed her tongue into a conflict with his own and they kissed for several minutes like they were one. As they broke apart, Hit Girl turned up and Dave found himself lying on his back with his scantily-clad wife beaming down at him. Mindy gripped him tightly between her thighs, her aroused vulva just inches from the large bulge in his pants. She licked her lips as she carefully unbuttoned his white shirt, exposing his chest to her fingers. She ruffled the hair on his manly chest, gently caressing his own nipples. Dave, in turn, reached up and he gently massaged Mindy's breasts through the bra including the nipples which were readily visible despite being covered. Dave expertly reached behind his wife and with a singularly deft movement, he released the catch and the bra fell off, joining the dress and other discarded garments.

Dave grinned as his wife's uppermost assets became visible above him – damn, she really was aroused, he thought as he tentatively touched a bare nipple. Mindy yelped and groaned. She threw back her head as Dave grasped both breasts and he ran his thumbs over the deeply-red nipples. Dave could see her chest moving quickly with each breath and the breathing increased in rhythm as he tweaked the nipples and massaged the breasts. The breasts were very warm and despite their compact size, Dave loved them, and he caressed their silky softness beneath his hands. Mindy was fighting through the ecstasy of Dave's movements, so she was unable to prevent him from twisting her and pushing her down into the rug. He quickly pulled off his shirt, throwing it away and kicking off his shoes. He returned to the breasts with their pert nipples and he began to kiss them and gently nuzzle each nipple with his lips before taking in Mindy's left nipple into his mouth and gently licking the tip with his tongue.

Mindy strained as she struggled with her increasing arousal. Then she felt a moments relief as Dave moved from one nipple to the other and it began again. Mindy loved the moistness of her nipples as the cool air in the room swept across them, stiffening them enough that Mindy thought they might explode. Dave released the nipple, much to Mindy's annoyance and relief. The conflicting emotions were suddenly replaced by intrigue as Dave moved down to her stomach, kissing as he went. Mindy knew where he was headed and that thought appeared to increase the wetness between her legs and she knew that her panties had to be soaked through. Dave himself was intoxicated by Mindy's scent. Her body smelt and tasted so good. The aroma of Mindy's nether regions lured him ever closer. He could smell her wetness and he knew that she was lubricated as hell and ready for the next phase of the operation – only, Dave was not giving her that . . . not straight away.

Dave laid a hand on Mindy's groin – damn! She was hotter than the fires of Hell. She was also as wet as a pussy that had just fallen in a river. Dave dug his fingers into the waistband of her panties and he peeled the sodden garment from her skin. Mindy lifted her bottom off the rug for Dave to remove the panties completely. They swept down her long, long legs, over the pistol which still sat in its slim holster strapped to her left thigh, and then flew across the suite to strike the capacious floor to ceiling windows where, for a brief moment, they stuck before slowly sliding down the glass before they landed on the writing desk. However, nobody was watching the soaked panties, Mindy was staring straight up at the discretely lit ceiling as Dave stared straight at Mindy's exposed vulva with its covering of dark blonde pubic hair. He grinned as he ran his fingers through the pubic hair, coming very close to Mindy's labia but not quite touching them. The teasing caused Mindy's midriff to buck in Dave's direction, desperate for more. Dave relented, and his finger ran down Mindy's labia causing an explosion of movement and moaning.

Dave's fingers traced circles on the soft skin of Mindy's muscular but understated thighs, moving upwards and instinctively, she spread her legs to allow Dave better access. Dave's finger pushed through the moist folds of Mindy's labia and onwards. He could see her thighs tensing and trembling as he gently ran his finger upwards and Mindy screamed as he touched her clit.

"Please!" she begged.

Dave leaned down and he kissed Mindy just above her clit causing her to shudder as he gently moved lower and he began to tease her clit with his tongue – God! She tasted so good, he thought. Each thrust of his tongue had Mindy moaning and her thighs bucking, and after a full minute, Mindy screamed as the orgasm built and built, deep within her loins. Dave leapt backwards as Mindy's powerful thighs snapped together and the naked young woman curled up into a ball as the orgasm struck her full force. Dave gently ran his fingers down his wife's bare spine as she shook, his hands moving down her body and then across her firm but soft buttocks and onto her thighs.

It was another few minutes before Mindy carefully unfolded herself and she looked up at her husband.

..._...

"I thought . . . I was going to fucking . . . snap in two, Dave."

"I think they heard your scream in Edinburgh!"

Mindy giggled, out of breath from all her exertions. She sat up and Dave chuckled. Mindy's thighs were still shuddering from the muscle spasms and her discrete breasts jiggled slightly as the rest of her body tried to contain its shuddering. Yet again, she knew that she had selected the right man to be her lifelong partner. Her love for him grew every day and right at that moment, her love for Dave was at its highest ever. She also knew that she had to return the favour as the bulge in Dave's trousers had to very uncomfortable. So, with a few deep breaths to compose herself, she forced herself onto her knees and despite the shaking of her legs, she began to attack Dave's trousers as he too knelt before her. Her tingling fingers fought to remove his belt and then undo the button of his trousers.

For Dave, Mindy looked awesome. There she was, naked, but for her wedding ring, engagement ring, jewellery, a pistol in a holster on her left thigh, and a small knife attached to the same holster. She was the epitome of Hit Girl – armed and lethal, despite being completely naked. She was beautiful as she knelt there, sweat glistening on her perfect skin. Dave could see the various scars which littered her otherwise unblemished body. She was an example of the perfect woman. Her body was lean with very little fat and large amounts of muscle. Just the mere sight of her as she was, naked and beautiful, was having a major effect on him and he was glad that Mindy was about to release that which was threatening to thrust out of his trousers. It was with great relief that his trousers sank to gather around his knees. He saw the corners of Mindy's mouth twitch and her hands tremble with anticipation as she gently eased Dave's boxers over the organ which threatened to poke out on of Mindy's eyes.

The twitching of Mindy's mouth turned into a full-blown grin as her husband's genitalia were laid open for her inspection. There were times when she struggled to understand how something so large could fit inside her. Indeed, Dave did fill her, each and every time. His dick glistened at the tip as a thin liquid seeped out. Mindy did not hesitate as she took him in deep, stopping before she choked herself. She could feel his fingers teasing her hard nipples as his breathing increased and she could almost hear his heart beating harder, pumping blood into his penis as she sucked and licked it into submission. Mindy loved being in control and she knew that Dave had significant concerns about Hit Girl's teeth being so close to something so very important to him. However, Mindy would *never* hurt something so very important to herself – she not only loved her husband, she also loved his penis and what it was able to do to her. She had been penetrated by knives and bullets, but only Dave's penis caused her to almost die out of erotic pleasure.

Within her mouth, she could taste the salt of Dave's sweat, and the sweet taste of the seminal fluid which was leaking

out. She felt her man trembling as her ministrations brought him closer and closer to his explosive climax. To Mindy, it was like disarming a bomb and not knowing when it might explode in your face without any warning. Dave's penis was just the same. No matter how she tried to predict the moment of orgasm, she had never managed it and was almost always caught unawares as either her throat was filled, or her face was covered. Mindy enjoyed the feel and taste of semen – it was icky and sometimes gross, but she loved it. The only substance she enjoyed better than semen was the feel and smell of blood. She almost missed it as Dave groaned loudly and then suddenly, her throat was burning from the hot fluid which erupted from Dave's penis. She pulled backwards in shock and received a second burst directly into her face. Quickly, she swallowed what was already in her mouth, so that she could breathe and then she took his penis back into her mouth and she sucked it clean before releasing the almost limp penis as Dave fell onto his backside on the rug.

Mindy cuddled into Dave and before they knew it, both fell asleep, right there on the rug in the living room.

The following morning

Thursday, November 3rd

Dave stirred first, feeling the slight chill on his naked body.

Beside him, his equally naked wife lay fast asleep, her face covered in dried semen. He needed to pee, so he got to his feet and shrugged off the last leg of his discarded trousers. He pulled off his socks and emptied his bladder into the toilet. He figured that he needed a shower, so he dived under the hot water in the enormous shower. He had barely rinsed off his sweaty body before he felt hands on his chest and Mindy hugged him from behind.

"Hi, hunk!" she said as she quickly washed her face under the stream of hot water before kissing her man full on the lips.

Dave could still taste the saltiness of his semen on her tongue – not that he cared any. They kissed and kissed, and Dave could feel his penis getting into the act as blood was diverted south. Mindy grinned and giggled as she gently rubbed her hand up and down his vertical member. After several minutes of foreplay, Dave picked Mindy up and allowed her to slide onto him, his penis slipping easily into her already aroused vagina. Mindy's long legs wrapped around his waist tightly, her arms around his neck. Dave carried Mindy out of the shower and slammed her against the floor to ceiling window which overlooked the River Thames. His pelvis flexed as he pushed his penis in and out of his wife's vagina, increasing the pace as Mindy moaned. Dave followed suit, still tender from just a few hours previously. Then they were on the heated marble floor of the bathroom, Dave pounding into Mindy like there was to be no tomorrow. Mindy's fingernails dug deep into Dave's back, adding to the myriad of similar markings from the night before.

Mindy screamed and screamed as an orgasm hit her like a freight train into a truck on a railroad crossing. As she orgasmed, her vagina contracted onto Dave's penis and the extra force caused him to ejaculate his load into Mindy. Dave groaned with the force of the ejaculation and he kissed his wife on the lips.

"Happy Birthday, Mindy."

"I love you . . . so very much," Mindy panted.

*This storyline continues in **Chapter 47: Moving On of Vengeance.***

***Chapter 355*: Redemption**

Author's Note: *This chapter follows on from Chapter 47: Moving On of my other story: Vengeance.*

Saturday, November 5th, 2016

Chicago, USA

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Room 32**

Stephanie had ventured into the city with Shannon before eight that morning.

There was a lot to get done during the day, but Stephanie did not want to miss visiting her best friend in the entire world. Shannon also saw Saoirse as a best friend but for different reasons. Stephane and Shannon got on well, despite the age gap. They both had something, or rather someone, in common.

"I spent months with Jamie and now I'm spending time with his big sister," Shannon commented.

"You can't stay away from us, can you?" Stephanie replied.

"At least you're not as annoying as he is," Shannon pointed out.

"I can be . . . Stormy."

"Steph!"

"Sorry – I'm in a weird mood."

"She's going to be okay – she always survives."

The girl in question opened her eyes and she smiled as she recognised her friends.

"Hi," she said simply.

She was obviously tired and strained. Stephanie knew what it felt like to wake up in the same dreary hospital room and then having to face another day of pain, drugs, people smiling, pain, drugs, people being nice to you, pain, drugs, and a bit more pain followed by some more drugs. Stephanie took a moment to peer under the duvet.

"How do I look, down there," Saoirse asked.

Stephanie's cheeks went a dark shade of pink.

"Just seeing if you were still plugged in," she said quickly. "I was just curious as I never saw what they did to me, but I did see Harper and wanted to compare. Looks the same really apart from Harper doesn't have any hair."

"Yes, I am still plugged in. I've not left the bed since I woke up here a few weeks back."

"How are your legs?" Shannon asked.

"Right one is painful – that's got the broken tibia, four inches below the knee. That's in plaster and is heavy. My left thigh is sore when I move but the bruising has subsided quite a bit. They say that I can try walking later this week."

"Great!" Stephanie announced.

"Yeah – really great news," Shannon added.

"Would you both be here when I try . . . please?"

Stephanie and Shannon both nodded. They could see the pain in Saoirse's eyes and they knew that their presence would give her the boost which she needed to push through any pain.

"Whatever it takes, SD," Stephanie replied with a cheeky grin.

"What she said," Shannon added. "You were there for the both of us, when we really needed you, so we want to return the favour."

"Thanks . . . I hate it in here. I miss you both. I miss my friends."

Shannon winced as Saoirse began to cry.

Later that morning

Training Centre Echo Level 0 – Primary Training Area

The massed forces of *Fusion* stood around the raised walkway which surrounded the capacious mat.

Everyone was in their duty uniform with all carrying a sidearm. Even the animals were present – Wildcat included. Hit Girl stepped forwards with Kick-Ass. Behind them, Shadow and Jackal stood as their lieutenants, representing the authority within *Fusion*. Also, present, were Battle Guy and Hal. To the left, was Leopard Squad, currently led by Wildcat in lieu of the injured Foxtail. To the right, was Jaguar Squad, led by Petra. On the mat, facing the two squads, and their leaders, Panther Squad, led by Torment stood with the dogs, led by Eisenhower.

"Some of the more astute amongst you will have noticed the promotions. We welcome Shadow and Jackal to the rank of Commander where they will provide tactical support to the squads. That leaves gaps in the lower ranks, therefore, Petra and Foxtail are promoted to Sub-Commanders and in command of Jaguar and Leopard respectively. Then, I suffered a major lapse in judgement and promoted Wildcat to Senior Operator . . . along with Raven – who actually deserved it."

Laughter greeted Hit Girl's announcement and Wildcat scowled as everybody looked in her general direction. Once the merriment had calmed down, Kick-Ass stepped forwards.

"You may also have noticed a successor for Medic. We welcome aboard, Jennifer as SURGEON. She will head the Medical Support Department here. Please make her feel welcome as the newest member of *Fusion*. "We have also brought aboard three others who all participated in the battle with distinction. The *Predators* amongst you will know of Piranha. She will be a senior operator and she will head the new Cougar Squad. Her direct subordinate will be Stormtide. Stormtide will be replaced in Leopard by Fortune, another of our new members. The third new member of Cougar will be Ember. Over time, we will add more members to Cougar as they are promoted."

Kick-Ass stepped forwards.

"As many of will know, we fought a group of former *Predators* who we knew as *Marauders*," he began.

There was some very unpleasant murmurings and crude comments from most present, not just the former *Predators*.

"This afternoon, we will be taking custody of sixteen *Marauders*," Dave continued. "We have been asked to rehabilitate them. After a lot of thought, and discussions with senior *Predators*, we have decided to see to their punishment and rehabilitation. It will be hard on them, very hard, and we ask for all of you to assist. For most of you, masks will be worn whenever a *Marauder* is on deck. Certain of you are known to them, for varying reasons, and you will interact with the *Marauders*, unmasked. Now, we come to the unpleasant part. Any *Marauder* who attempts to escape will be dealt with most severely and lethal force is authorised to prevent their escape. Some of them will be happy to be rehabilitated but we are certain that some will not. This will be a long road but if it means that these sixteen youngsters can regain what is left of their childhoods and live to a good old age, we have to try."

"Psyche and Piranha will be leading the rehabilitation," Hit Girl went on. "If there are any volunteers who would like to help, please see either one of them. Now, we have a city to protect and we have a job to do. Jaguar will be deploying at eight tonight."

With that, Hit Girl strode towards the Command Bunker.

That afternoon

Safehouse E

Level 8 – Detention Level

"This level hasn't been used in decades," Mindy explained. "But it's the only place I could find that was both secure and where we could house sixteen troubled kids."

"Troubled?" Stephanie queried.

"Predators are troubled, right?" Mindy responded.

"I suppose we are, yes?" Stephanie replied, looking up at Lucy.

"I'd go along with that," Lucy confirmed.

The elevator 'dinged' as it stopped.

"Predator Level," Stephanie quipped as Mindy scowled.

"I'll be watching – you two behave and play nice with the other kids," Mindy chuckled as she pushed open the door to a monitoring suite.

"Ignore her," Stephanie said to Lucy. "She likes to be a funny bitch from time to time."

"You're fucking nuts, Steph!" Lucy laughed.

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There were three spaces which were suitable for a very rapid conversion into secure accommodation and within that accommodation, sixteen youngsters awaited their fate.

There was a fairly equal split, seven girls and nine boys. The boys were all in the larger space, together, while the girls were split into two groups of four and three. The group of three girls included the still mildly simmering Willow who was still recovering from her injury, and the two other sixteen-year-old girls, Carrie Milligan and Kate Fincham. All three had been pressed into the First Intake, back in September of 2010, at the tender age of ten. The remaining girls varied between the youngest of all the recovered *Marauders*, eight-year-old Xiāngxìn Lau, through her eleven-year-old sister, Lin Lau, and onto the wounded Charlotte Grey who was twelve-years-old and Dakota Warlow-Davies who was fourteen-years-old. The boys varied in ages from twelve-year-old Jake Wistrum to sixteen-year-olds, Joel Burnell and Jay Hilton. In between, there was a pair of thirteen-year-olds: James Todd and Jesse Dolan, and four fourteen-year-olds: Kieran Brennan, Dylan Page, Ewan Campbell, and Lucas Charlton.

Lucy and Stephanie both ignored the mixed expressions that greeted them as they entered the communal space which connected the three accommodation spaces.

..._...

Throughout the early afternoon, the kids had been collected from their various prison accommodations, throughout Chicago, and brought to Safehouse K, blindfolded and via dubious routes.

At Safehouse K, they had each received an independent and very invasive strip search at the hands of Nightmare and Shadow. Each youth had then been transported to Safehouse E and their new accommodations – blindfolded, of course. None of them had taken to their new accommodations which were basic, to say the least, but they had limited privacy, hot showers, clean toilets, and no obvious guards.

All in all, it was much better accommodations than any of them actually deserved.

..._...

Jake Wistrum sidled up to Stephanie.

"Hi, hot stuff – how about you and me. . ."

The boy stopped talking as Stephanie seized him between the legs – he squeaked.

"Do you want to lose this pathetic excuse for a dick?" she growled.

"No," the boy squeaked as Stephanie's face went pink.

"Are you getting hard?" Stephanie hissed before she punched the twelve-year-old in the stomach and she took his legs out from under him. "Dirty fuck!"

"Is there. . ." Jake coughed. "Any other kind. . .?"

"That is a prime example of behaviour which *will not* be tolerated!" Stephanie shouted. She was angry, and she recognised minor embarrassment in some of the faces before her. "Most of you will know who Lucy Ford is, and some of you will know who I am."

Stephanie ignored the very unfriendly glare from Willow as she continued in an angry tone.

"Over the years, you have all been hurt and you have all been forced to do bad things. All of you have killed and I know that some of you regret your actions – deep down. Now, I don't give a flying fuck if you detest Lucy, here . . . or if you want to kill me – everybody wants to kill me; I'm used to it. Anybody wants to damn well try; I'll take the bastard on and I *will* fucking tear them limb from FUCKING LIMB!"

Stephanie took a deep breath as she forced herself to calm down.

"I won't demand respect from any of you, however, I am one of those who will be watching your progress and I will be part of the team who will decide if any of your dumb fucks should be allowed out of here, this side of forty. Another thing; you will each be tagged."

That generated muttering.

"That is *not* negotiable. Don't try to remove them, either. Hit Girl designed them, herself. However, should you feel you won't miss your left foot then, please, go ahead and remove it. Now, Lucy will hand each one of you a bag. Inside that bag you will find three T-shirts, three pairs of shorts, six sets of underwear – boxers for the boys and boy-shorts/sports-bras for the girls – six pairs of socks, two pairs of trainers – running shoes for you Yanks – two swimsuits: one piece, no bikinis, two pairs of joggers, and two sweatshirts. Now, you all have twenty minutes to go get your sorry arses changed and to report back here. You are here under punishment, so expect a lot of crap over the next few weeks. You fuck up, we hand you over to the Federal Government – they want to try you idiots as adults and then incarcerate you in an adult jail. We are here to give you all a chance at enjoying what's left of your childhood and the rest of your godforsaken lives. Have I got your full attention, now?"

There were muttered 'yes' comments.

"Well?" Stephanie yelled. "FUCKING MOVE!"

Even the sixteen-year-olds bolted for their bags and ran back to their accommodation.

Training Centre Echo Level 4 – Exercise Area

The location had been carefully selected due to its proximity to the Training Facility, more specifically Level Four.

The route for the kids was short and would be of no use to them should they wish to escape their enforced captivity. The sixteen *Marauders* were lined up bedside the climbing wall. There was a mixture of awe and concern as they looked around the enormous space. Over to one side, beside the #1 vehicle elevator, a small portacabin rested. One at a time, each *Marauder* was taken into the portacabin by a male or female vigilante where they met Surgeon and were then fitted with their ankle monitor during a brief medical check-up.

Carrie Milligan was sixteen-years-old and one of those taken in the First Intake. She knew Lucy from first-hand experience. She could remember the girl who had controlled them. Now she was much older, but obviously still a bitch. The girl pulled her sports-bra back on after the humiliating medical – she was used to them; she was a *Predator*. She laughed at herself – she was no longer a *Predator*; she was a *Marauder* and she was not about to let her life be decided by Lucy, nor that jumped up ten-year-old bitch. After pulling on her trainers, the American teenager placed her left foot on a chair as indicated and a masked girl secured a black ankle monitor to Carrie's ankle.

"Don't try to remove it," the masked girl advised in an electronically enhanced voice.

"I won't!"

"Thank you, Carrie," Surgeon said as she looked over towards Hal who ignored the other girl's attitude.

Hal was armed and there to protect Surgeon should anything get out of hand. As far as the sixteen-year-old veteran vigilante was concerned, the *Marauders* could all rot in cells for the rest of their miserable lives. She had several of them marked as trouble-makers already and as such, Battle Guy and Ember were watching the sixteen kids, like a pair of hawks observing their potential prey, from the Battle Bunker three stories above them.

..._...

Carrie was jeered by her fellow *Marauders* when they saw her appear with her new ankle accessory.

However, the jeering was short-lived as Dakota Warlow-Davies was ordered in the direction of the portacabin. The fourteen-year-old was watched from a few yards away by the masked form of Wildcat. The body language of the young vigilante was enough for the Marauder known as Firebrand to behave herself. Dakota was one of those who had decided to get her life back on track – whatever it took. None of the remaining Second Intake girls had survived – that she knew about, anyway. Three of the original nine girls were dead – one at the hands of that jumped up ten-year-old out there. One of the original nine boys was also dead, while another was a *Marauder* awaiting his fate just like she was. Four out of eighteen kids dead. However, Dakota had no idea that four more girls were accounted for, three in Chicago and one in San Diego along with another boy from the same intake.

There had been a lot of talk amongst the *Marauders*, once they had been allowed to mingle. There were some outspoken ones that wanted to escape, and Dakota had identified six trouble-makers. She had no idea what to do about them – she could not turn on them and tell, however, they could fuck it all up for everybody who wanted their lives back. Dakota, for one, never wanted to handle a weapon again, much less take another life. She was not alone in that sentiment, either. The Police had treated her like scum – but they were right; she was scum.

"You must be Dakota," Surgeon announced as the girl entered and closed the door behind her. "Strip to the skin, please."

Without a word, Dakota pulled off her clothing.

..._...

As the *Marauders* emerged from their medicals with their ankle monitors fitted, Psyche directed them onto the track for six laps each.

Part of the security was to keep them tired and exhausted – a *Predator* had a lot to give, even when exhausted, but not when incarcerated with nowhere to go. The youngster knew that some of those present would try to escape – it was in their blood and totally expected. The only question was when. Psyche knew that with her own training, things could have turned out differently and she could be one of those running around the track wearing a tracking monitor around their ankle, not knowing what lay ahead or if they might ever be free again. Part of her had sympathy for them – after all, they had had no choice when they had been pressed into service as preteen assassins. Only, they had had a choice when it came to becoming a *Marauder*. Only, their bloodlust would have controlled them. FEAR had offered them unlimited killing – something a *Predator* lived for. The temptation to join FEAR had been impossible for most to ignore.

Goddamn *Urban Predator*! Goddamn FEAR!

..._...

The two Seventh Intake girls had gone together - they were sisters, after all.

"Hello," Surgeon said.

The youngest *Marauder* was Xiāngxìn and she was only eight-years-old. Her sister, Lin, was just eleven-years-old. Neither girl fitted the image of a *Marauder*. Surgeon was certain that both girls had just been caught up in the situation. Indeed, both girls had surrendered rather than fight which was a positive mark for them both.

"If you would rather be seen individually, please say so," Surgeon advised the two youngsters.

"It is fine," Lin replied for both of them and her younger sister nodded.

"Okay, strip to the skin, please."

..._...

As they completed the six laps – 2,400-metres – they were each given a bottle of water and allowed to sit down to rest for a few minutes as their colleagues joined them.

The final *Marauder* to be seen was Jake, the youngest boy. Psyche knew that the boy was going to be trouble – the permanent shit-eating grin on his face said it all.

"Wistrum!" Psyche called out.

"Yes, ma'am!" the boy called out as he jumped to his feet.

Psyche just chuckled as she led the boy over to the main elevator.

"All of you, here!" she ordered and the remaining fifteen headed over.

Psyche took the bottle off the boy and threw it into the crowd of *Marauders* where a boy caught it.

"Wistrum, press the call button for the lift."

"Okay," the boy replied as he pressed the button and he immediately yelped.

"What happened, shit for brains?"

"I was shocked by my ankle monitor," he explained with a frown.

"Press the button again."

Wistrum winced as he followed instructions.

"Yaaah!"

"That shock was stronger, yes?" Psyche laughed.

"Yes."

"Press the button again."

Wistrum shook his head.

"The boy is a quick learner!" Psyche pointed out. "Press the button or we fit the monitor to that tiny dick of yours."

The boy's hand trembled as he reached out for the button and he pressed it.

With barely a sound, the boy crumpled to the ground as his legs folded beneath him. He glared up at Psyche, tears in his eyes.

"That was the first three levels – the monitor goes up to level eight. Jake, would you like to see level four?"

"No, ma'am," the boy replied in almost a mumble as he struggled to his feet, his left leg partially asleep.

"All of you, another lap," Psyche ordered as the *Marauders* laughed at Jake, although their expressions showed concern.

A few hours later

Safehouse E Level 8 – Detention Level

The sixteen kids were all but dead on their feet as they were finally released back to their accommodation.

It was easy to tell those kids who were not quite as fit as the others. Stephanie and Lucy followed them back.

"All of you – shower and get yourselves ready for bed. Food will be delivered in forty minutes. You will eat and then you will hit the sack," Lucy directed.

"No late-night TV?" Willow asked sarcastically.

Lucy walked up to Willow and just shook her head. Willow wisely backed down and stalked off for her shower. Forty minutes later, sixteen ravenous kids were seated at a long table with eight chairs on each side. Stephanie was standing in a corner, watching and ensuring that everybody was behaving. They each wore T-shirts and shorts, and most were barefoot. They all looked tired and Stephanie was pleased to see that some of them showed signs of having been crying. Lucy appeared just then, with Shannon and Sarah in tow. Neither were masked, and both received some nasty looks from several of the *Marauders* present; especially from Dylan Page and Kate Fincham, both of whom had enjoyed bating Shannon during her early weeks as a *Predator*.

"I don't give a flying fuck what you bastards think of me – however, if you want to eat then you'd better be nice!" Shannon growled as she passed out double-cheeseburgers and chips to all those present.

..._...

After ensuring that they had eaten, Shannon and Lucy ensured that each one of them made it to their bed.

Not surprisingly, all sixteen fell asleep within minutes of their heads hitting the pillows. After a brief check to ensure that they were all safe, the accommodation was secured. And the two girls headed up to their own accommodation for the night.

Elsewhere that same evening

Goose Island

Almost the moment that the *Marauders* had begun to eat, Stephanie had bolted over to Safehouse F and she had finished off preparing for her first night out on the town in a while.

It was suitably dark as she hit the streets alongside her partner for the evening. Psyche was an old hand with her red over blue Honda CRF250L motorcycle. On a scarlet but otherwise identical machine, her fiery friend, Fury, rode beside her. The pair had been trusted to go out alone – well, with backup about two minutes behind. Backup for the night was Hit Girl on her Ducati Superbike 1199 Panigale R and Shadow on her Ducati Superbike 899 Panigale.

The two girls rode side-by-side down North North Branch Street. Most of Goose Island was given over to commercial and industrial activity – the manmade island was also somewhere which produced a different product after dark. They took a right up North Cherry Avenue and proceeded past the factory and commercial units.

"This is fun, right?" Fury commented.

"It's great to be out," Psyche agreed.

For Fury, it was good to be out with her new friend. Not that long ago, she would never in her wildest dreams have ever expected to be out on patrol as a *Fusion* vigilante, let alone with her single most hated person on the planet, Psyche. Somehow, Psyche had gone from most hated person to most revered friend.

"Look!" Psyche called out as they approached West Division Street.

Fury followed her friend's pointing finger and she grinned as she saw activity in the darkness over to their left. She pulled up beside her friend and they both dismounted, removing their helmets as they did so.

"Battle Bunker, Psyche – Fury and I are checking something out."

"Copy that," Hal replied. "Stay safe, kiddies!"

Psyche scowled behind her mask, but she ignored the jibe. She waved Fury forwards and they both climbed then threw themselves over an aluminium mesh gate.

..._...

There were four men becoming visible as they moved slowly through the shadows.

Each carried their melee weapons ready to engage the enemy. Fury held up her double-ended bō-staff while Psyche had her twin Sais to hand. The four men were large and well-armed. One of them appeared to be talking to a fifth

man who had not been visible until they had come closer. Psyche recognised the man from somewhere, but it took a moment for his identity to click in her mind: Worm. The man was Hit Girl's number one snout. That fact was known by many, but it was also well known that Hit Girl protected her snouts. You took on one of Hit Girl's snouts, you took on Hit Girl and basically signed your own death warrant.

Psyche moved closer while Fury kept her eyes open and covering her friend's back for any other men they had not seen. Psyche's eyes narrowed as she saw the obvious signs of distress on the man's face including blood on his clothing which appeared to have originated from his nose. The man was being interrogated. Psyche's measure of the situation was accurate as she watched Worm being punched in the stomach and then slapped around the face. The man was tough, Psyche thought; no wonder her Mum spoke highly of him. Psyche also knew that without Worm, some very unsavoury people might still be alive in Chicago.

"Hit Girl, Psyche."

"Go ahead, Psyche," Hit Girl replied.

"Worm is in trouble. Permission to engage."

"Go – stay safe . . . both of you."

..._...

The men were intent on their target and nobody was watching their flanks.

Fury swiftly jumped onto a small container and then onto the roof of the building. She deftly ran towards the edge above the men while Psyche remained on the ground, circling into the darkest part of the facility. Both vigilantes awaited their moment to strike.

"Do you know who I work for?" Worm hissed as he spat a glob of blood onto the ground.

"Oh, yeah," a man growled. "We know – only, the purple bitch ain't here."

"There is nothing that can save you, Worm," another man chuckled.

"We need information, and only. . ." the first man began, but then he paused.

"What's up, Benny?" the first man asked his mate as Benny swayed slightly, his eyes glazing over.

Benny tried to speak, but a look of incredible pain crossed his face and he faltered, sagging to his knees. There was a shocked intake of breath from the three other men as a masked vigilante appeared from behind Benny, a pair of bloody swords in her gauntleted hands. Psyche kicked Benny to the ground.

"Howya doing, cunts!"

There was a mad scramble for weapons with one man deciding that the better part of valour was making a clean escape while you were still alive. Only, his escape was blocked by another masked vigilante who seemed to drop out of the darkness before slashing him across the chest with her bō-staff. The man screamed as his blood splashed across the ground and he fell into that same blood. A quick stab from the opposite end of the bō-staff and the bastard never moved again. Fury ran forward to assist her friend who was comfortably driving a Sai into the heart of another man with seemingly little effort. Fury drove her bō-staff into the remaining man who fell to the ground, her blade still embedded in his chest cavity.

"Problem?" Psyche asked.

"It's stuck!"

"Twist it, slightly," Worm suggested as he rose up from his knees.

Fury did so, and her blade came more easily out of the corpse.

"Thanks – I think," she muttered.

"You, okay?" Psyche growled in her electronically enhanced voice.

"I am now," Worm chuckled. "Thank you – both of you."

"How did you get yourself wound up with these dicks?" Fury asked in her own electronic voice.

"There is trouble afoot, my young vigilantes," Worm warned. "FEAR may be gone, but nature abhors a vacuum, and someone will always fill the void."

"Cryptic," Psyche commented.

"I've spent too long talking with Hit Girl," Worm mused. "She's cryptic as hell."

"That she is," a voice growled out of the darkness.

Worm chuckled.

"My Queen," he said in welcome as Hit Girl emerged from the darkness.

"What's with all the bodies?" she enquired. "Can't I let you two girls out into the city without you making a mess?"

"They were in our way," Psyche replied with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Be off with you, while I have a word with Worm," Hit Girl growled.

..._...

Shadow was waiting for them beside their motorcycles as Fury and Psyche arrived.

"Having fun, girls?" she asked.

"Bit slow," Fury commented as she mounted her motorcycle and pulled on her helmet.

"Yeah," Psyche acknowledged as she did the same.

"Stay safe," Shadow warned as they both sped off into the darkness.

Safehouse F

"That was brilliant fun!" Abigail announced as she pulled off her helmet and mask.

"Had fun, huh?" Megan asked as she took the two helmets from the younger girls.

Returning vigilantes always got looked after and Megan enjoyed looking after her niece.

"Thanks, Megan," Stephanie said as she and Abigail passed through the armoured glass shield and through to the training centre next door in Safehouse E.

After they each showered, they dressed ready to go home – both were very tired, however, they had to wait for Mindy to return before they could leave – they would drop Abigail home on the way. While they were waiting, they both headed up the Battle Bunker.

"Hi, Abby!" Stephanie called out.

"Hi, Steph," Abby replied.

"Where's Rachel?" Stephanie asked as she looked around.

"She took off about an hour or so ago – she's been a bit maudlin since her former friends appeared," Abigail explained. "Oh – Mindy's back."

Stephanie watched as Hit Girl and Shadow rode into Safehouse F and stopped.

..._...

They found Rachel down a corridor on Level 1.

"Rachel – you're spending the night in this place," Stephanie announced as she pulled the older girl to her feet. "You're coming home with me."

Rachel made to argue but Abigail just shook her head. Stephanie dragged Rachel off to find Mindy who was just leaving the changing rooms with Chloe.

"Mum, can Rachel stay with us, tonight?"

Mindy chuckled at the big, ingratiating smile on her daughter's face and she nodded.

"Of course."

Glenview

Stephanie pulled Rachel bodily into the house where they found Jamie in the living room.

"Hi, Rachel!" the boy called out, sounding a little surprised to see her.

"You can sleep in *my* bed – you're *not* sleeping with my brother!" Stephanie quipped.

"Done that!" Rachel laughed but then she rapidly rephrased as she saw Stephanie's eyes narrow. "We've slept in the same bed – and while we *have* been naked together, we have never . . . you know. . ."

"I should think not!" Stephanie growled as Jamie's face went very pink.

..._...

Stephanie awoke some time later to find herself alone in the bed.

Her *Predator* sense told her that something was wrong. She checked the bathroom – it was empty. The bedroom door was open, so Stephanie headed out onto the landing where she peered down into the living room from the library.

"Oh, shit!" she muttered as she ran down the stairs. She found Rachel in the living room. The girl sat on the couch, a pistol in her right hand.

"Rachel," Stephanie began. "Don't . . . please."

Rachel looked up at Stephanie and she forced a weak smile.

"I hate my life – I hate what I was – I hate what I've become – I can't be like this."

"You don't want to do this, Rachel. Jamie has told me a lot about you, and as far as I can tell, this isn't you. Jamie says you *never* take the easy route. He says you are passionate and brave. What you are about to do is cowardly."

"Why do you care?"

"I care because of what you did for Jamie. Up until a few weeks ago, I battled with the demons of killing my own parents and my little brother. Then I discovered that he was alive and back in my life. Without you, that would never have happened, and I would never have known that I did not actually kill my own brother. I owe you more than anything – not just because you saved my brother's life, but you also save my life."

Rachel did not respond as she stared down at the pistol and gripped it even tighter.

"Please, Rachel – don't put me in the position where I have to tell my little brother that you have taken the cowardly way out . . . with my own pistol. You are as much a part of my life as Jamie is."

"I hurt you. I was one of. . ."

Stephanie cut her off.

"I don't care that you were part of that group of girls who raped me with that baton. You've met SD – she was my Nemesis. She was sent by the CIA to kill me. For a while, we went back and forth trying to kill each other . . . but she's now my best friend and I cannot even consider life without her. She's been there for me whenever I've needed

her, and in return, I have been there for her. If I can forgive her; then I can forgive you."

"I don't want to go back to being a *Predator* – I don't want that life."

"Then don't. That is what is so special about my life; I can choose what I do – I can choose when I kill. If I wanted to hang up my guns and live my life as a normal little girl, then I know that I would have the full support of my family and friends. I see no reason why you can't just choose that same option."

"What would Mindy say? Won't she expect me to become a vigilante like the rest of you? To pay my way. I saw what was happening to my fellow *Marauders*. I felt so guilty when I saw their harsh treatment at your hands – but then I felt even worse when I considered that I should have been down there with them, suffering, just like them. I made that choice. I made that conscious choice to become a *Marauder*. That makes me a bad person."

Stephanie shook her head – she had her work cut out.

"No – she respects choice. Have no fear, Rachel, Mindy is very special to me, and I love her more than anything. I also know that she loves me, just as much, and she has proved that, time and time again. You want her support – just ask. Since I left *Urban Predator*, I have learnt the importance of communication; you talk things through – it means a lot, I promise you. I even talk to my dog and the damn cat – must drive them nuts listening to me . . . come to think of it, maybe that's why they do such nutty things together. Anyway – just talk. If not to me, or to Jamie, then there are a lot of people who will sit down with you and just listen. Nobody will judge you for your past, or current, misdeeds."

Rachel thought that over for several minutes before she then she passed Stephanie the pistol, butt first. Stephanie swiftly removed the magazine and ejected the chambered round.

"You know – I would have been dead meat if you had blown your head apart. This thing was loaded with hollow-points and that wall would have turned red and grey with blood and bits of brain, not to mention a spattering of bone fragments," Stephanie pointed out. "I would have been scrubbing that damn wall for weeks!"

Rachel laughed – she could not help it – and she gave Stephanie a hug.

"Thanks, kid – you are so much like your brother; you both annoy the fuck out of me!"

"We do, don't we," Stephanie grinned, then she frowned. "How'd you find my pistol, anyways?"

"Stephanie, you're a *Predator* and I'm a *Predator* – we kind of attended the same schools."

Stephanie laughed as they both headed for the stairs. However, she hesitated as she caught sight of a slim shadow in the darkened kitchen. "I'll be up in a moment, Rachel."

"Okay."

..._...

Mindy loomed out of the darkness and Stephanie expected the sky to fall in on her.

"Well done, Steph. You never cease to amaze me with your talents. The way you talked that girl down . . . I'm really impressed and that's coming from Hit Girl!"

Stephanie beamed happily.

"I am *never* going to regret the day that Dave found you. I will never regret the day that we invited you into our little family. You grow in stature every day, Steph. Each day you mature and grow, you turn into a better person. Dave and I are really proud of you."

Stephanie couldn't think of anything to say, so instead, she just ran forwards and gave Mindy a big hug.

"Oh, yeah – I would have made you scrub each and every damn drop of blood off that wall," Mindy deadpanned.

***Chapter 356*: Naked**

Author's Note: *This chapter brings the story of FORSAKEN to ONE MILLION words!*

The next morning
Sunday, November 6th, 2016

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

It was an easy start – for those not under punishment, at any rate.

Shadow and Jackal went through the sleeping accommodation like a tornado, yanking duvets off beds.

"Get up! You have five minutes to make use of the bathrooms before you begin your day," Shadow shouted.

"Get up!" Jackal bellowed, his electronically enhanced voice striking fear into some of the younger Marauders.

Some of them had heard that very same voice in battle and they feared it. All sixteen kids scrambled for the beds and they made for the bathrooms. They were all very tired and it was Joel Burnell who noticed the time as he looked up at the large digital clock mounted high up above the communal area.

"It's five past six!" he groaned.

"Are we regretting our actions, yet?" Jackal growled and the sixteen-year-old nodded forlornly. "Let's go, people!"

Shadow led the sixteen tired youngsters back to the Training Facility.

Training Centre Echo
Level 4 – Exercise Area

While Shadow and Jackal were masked and wearing their duty uniforms, the *Marauders* were wearing just shorts, T-shirts, and running shoes. The cavernous room was cold, and the kids shivered. Their mood was sullen, and the next command did not amuse them one bit.

"They seem tired, Jackal," Shadow commented.

"Yes, Shadow, they do – maybe a wake-up swim. All of you, one width of the pool – jump in, cross, climb out – MOVE!"

The glares which the pair of senior vigilantes were very unfriendly, but neither were worried about their safety. The *Marauders* all jumped in and there were many screams as the water was cool, to say the least. Shadow and Jackal watched carefully to ensure that all sixteen crossed without difficulty, especially the youngest, Xiāngxīn. After two minutes, sixteen shivering youngsters stood soaking wet on the side of the pool.

"Two laps – MOVE!" Jackal yelled.

The kids were eager to run as the movement would warm them up very quickly. Running in wet shoes was not comfortable but the *Predators/Marauders* had endured far worse.

..._...

Eight-hundred metres later, the panting youngsters came to a halt.

The distance was easy for them; they had been trained to run much further. They all turned as Shadow and Jackal approached them. Without a word, the kids were pushed into two groups of eight by Shadow, then she spoke.

"There are three support pillars on each side of the pool. One at a time, you will run to the first pillar and back, then the second pillar and back, then the third pillar, and back. Understand?"

There were nods all around.

"Go!" Shadow called out.

The *Marauders* sprinted the distance well – their fitness was exemplary, Shadow thought. However, the shuttle runs absorbed the last of their energy and they were all exhausted by the end. They were also very hungry.

"You've done well," Shadow said. "Now, if you all hurry and get yourselves showered and changed, you'll get a hot breakfast as a reward."

Jackal chuckled at the smiles which spread throughout the group as the kids bolted for their accommodation.

Safehouse E Level 8 – Detention Level

The smell of the hot food was enough to speed the kids on and there were angry comments as everybody jostled for a shower.

The kids who appeared back into the communal area were clean and tidy, although their haste was obvious as some were still damp from their shower. Each was dressed in their much warmer joggers and sweatshirts plus some dry running shoes. They each grinned as they queued up at a foldup table loaded with steaming food. It was a full English breakfast with hash browns thrown in. Sarah and Shannon served each *Marauder* as they came past, giving each one a choice of what they wanted to eat from what was on offer. As the *Marauders* sat down at the long table, there were looks of surprise on their faces.

"Look, guys," Shannon explained after the last had sat down. "We're not here to hurt you. We are here to punish you for your choices. You will be rewarded for good work, but you will receive extra punishment when you fuck up. You want food like this, then you better think before you act, or you'll be getting bread and water each and every morning."

Shannon could see them all thinking about her words; even her former comrades who hated her guts.

That same time

Glenview

As was usual, the house had descended into anarchy.

"Jamie!" Dave called out as the boy bolted past in pursuit of a canine which Dave thought was Razor.

There was a loud bang as boy and canine collided with something hard, a yelp and a yell followed. Anne-Marie scrambled out of the living room to look at the carnage, followed by the ever-curious Horatio. Dave peered out of the kitchen to see Jamie and Razor getting back to their respective feet having skidded on the marble floor and then collided with the wall.

"Boys!" Anne-Marie exclaimed as the two sheepish-looking males looked at the exasperated girl.

"I wasn't part of it," Danny commented as he appeared on the scene from the stairs.

"Did we learn something from that, Jamie, Razor?" Mindy commented with a chuckle as she walked past the incident.

"Yes, Mum," Jamie grimaced as Razor whined.

That afternoon

Safehouse E Level 8 – Detention Level

Stephanie and Lucy were back on shift.

They arrived soon after lunch to watch as the *Marauders* were sat down in the communal area for a lecture from two Chicago police officers. Hank Voight and Alvin Olinsky were there to ensure that each and every *Marauder* felt guilt for their actions. After a morning of heavy physical activity, the kids had been grateful for their lunch of cold sandwiches and hot soup. Hank and Alvin were highly skilled at eliciting soul-searching in those they interviewed. The

group had no choice but to listen and absorb what they were being told as they had observed fourteen-year-old Lucas Charlton reduced to a sobbing wreck by Alvin without him even raising his voice in response to the boy's decision not to listen to the lecture.

Hank and Alvin both believed in second chances and they wanted the kids to have a chance at a normal life.

Training Centre Echo ***Level 4 – Exercise Area***

Despite the positive treatment, including demonstrating what they could receive when they cooperated, there was a growing dissent among some of the *Marauders*.

They were concerned that they were not going to survive. They were also worried about having somebody else in control of their destiny. There were six key trouble-makers who were determined to make a bid for freedom, but to do that, they would need weapons and a route to safety. They had seen what had happened when Jake had tried to use the elevator – that had been a blatant demonstration to them all. The ringleaders decided to make their play during the afternoon physical session. There, they found Psyche, Piranha, and Wildcat on duty. Ignoring Piranha, the other two girls were physically smaller which made them ideal for their plan.

Carrie Milligan and Jay Hilton made their play while the group were spread out meaning that it was more difficult for the three vigilantes to watch them all.

Level 1 – Dining Room

Mindy had just finished a late lunch and was sipping a coffee when the call came through.

"Hit Girl?"

"Hi, Hal. What's up?"

"Could you come up to the bunker, please?"

Mindy headed up one level and she checked into the Battle Bunker. She found Hal and Ember examining an image on one of the large screens.

"What's up, girls?"

Rachel was still getting used to being up close and personal with Hit Girl – somebody she feared greatly.

"Something's going down – I know it," Rachel commented.

Mindy examined the image for herself. Two of the older *Marauders* were coming close to Wildcat who had her back turned while she checked on another pair of *Marauders*. Alarm bells began to ring in Hit Girl's mind but before she could say anything Ember stabbed a radio key.

"Wildcat, right elbow, up and back . . . NOW!"

Level 4 – Exercise Area

Wildcat responded instantly, bringing her right elbow backwards.

The elbow stuck Jay in the face and he stumbled back in shock just as his hands grasped Wildcat around the neck. They both collapsed to the ground where Carrie kicked and punched the fallen vigilante, reaching for the holstered Taser. Behind them, Kieran and Dylan attacked Psyche, dragging the girl to the ground with their superior bulk and strength. Lucas made for Piranha who had her back turned while Jake did the same, running in hard and taking the veteran *Predator* off her feet. The remaining *Marauders* stood their ground and watched in astonishment as the attack unfolded. Some considered the attack and figured that they would jump aboard should it be successful while others wanted nothing to do with the bid for freedom.

The fighting did not last long as Piranha drove her fist into Jake's stomach, winding the boy. She spun around and sent Lucas flying backwards where he struck a concrete column and collapsed to the ground. Psyche flew into a wild

rage, kicking and punching at the two boys who had attacked her. She found one of the boys yanked off her and she heard a yell of anger. With only a single attacker, Psyche was able to put Kieran out of his misery as she forced him to the ground and cut off his breathing until he passed out. Psyche stood up to find Kate Fincham standing over Dylan, a foot pressed to his throat. Psyche ran towards Wildcat who had kicked Carrie backwards, but the girl reengaged for a moment before she froze, as did Jay. The two teenagers had stopped dead as each of them had found death barely an inch from their jugulars. Wildcat had deployed her claws, each hand aimed upwards at the taller kids. After punching Carrie hard in the chest, Stephanie stood back and then turned on the *Marauders*. Tears were running down her red face.

"What the FUCK?" she yelled. "Why are you doing this? When it was suggested that I should help you motherfuckers, part of me said you should all fucking rot in prison for the rest of your sorry lives. Only, I got a second chance, as have other *Predators*, therefore, I said that I would do all that I could to help all of you. I even offered to help the bitch who fucking raped me!"

Stephanie glared at Willow who visibly shrank from view as many eyes looked at her – obviously, Willow had kept that little titbit from her colleagues.

"I am giving up almost all of my free time to help you lot out. I want you to get a second chance at a life. Don't you want to be free? Free to do anything you want with your lives? Do you want to find somebody, marry, have kids? Do you want to grow old and die when you're a hundred? I want to give you that chance, as does Lucy. However, you bastards *chose* to become *Marauders* and there are times when I struggle to get past that single fact. What I really want to do is put a bullet into each of your bloody skulls! You have just made hell week into something which will make the *Predator Gauntlet* seem sodding tame – but you only have yourselves to blame; you sorry dumb fucks!" Stephanie finished off.

Lucy groaned.

"What's the *Predator Gauntlet*?" Wildcat asked as she saw some very miserable expressions.

"The next punishment beyond The Cage," Lucy explained. "Only three people have ever endured it – the punishment is worse than anything ever thought up by those *Urban Predator* bastards."

"Who?"

"Leo, Willow, and . . ."

"Me."

Wildcat looked up as Stormtide appeared with Hit Girl close behind.

"I went through it with Willow and Leo."

"Leo took the punishment for me," Lucy growled. "I was already in enough trouble, at the time, and he suffered – badly – but then so did Willow and Shannon."

"All of you – back to your accommodation," Hit Girl roared, and the *Marauders* not involved in the attempted breakout fled.

"Thank you, Kate – please return to your accommodation," Psyche directed the older girl who had assisted in putting Dylan down.

..._...

The six *Marauders* were lined up, two feet apart, and forced onto their knees.

Hit Girl strode up and down before them. She was beyond angry. Psyche and Wildcat both recognised the body language and they knew that anything was possible. The six *Marauders* stared at the ground, not daring to look up into the masked face of Hit Girl. Jay Hilton was close to his seventeenth birthday and he feared that he might never actually reach that day. Carrie Milligan was not all that far behind him. Hit Girl seized them both by the necks and pulled them to their feet. She stared into their faces but neither looked at her.

"Look at me!" she growled.

Both youngsters did as they were told. Hit Girl could see real fear in their eyes as they stared at her mask despite the

boy being a few inches taller than her.

"You dare to hurt my people. You dare to put my people at risk. I ought to snap your worthless necks."

Carrie was shaking with fear and she could not stop the tears which overflowed from her eyes.

"Please. . ."

"YOU DARE TO TALK TO ME?"

Carrie shook violently, and she began to sob. Hit Girl released both sixteen-year-olds and she pointed to the doorway which led to their accommodation. The two ringleaders led the way back to the accommodation.

They were escorted by Psyche, Wildcat, Piranha, Stormtide, and Hit Girl.

Safehouse E ***Level 8 – Detention Level***

The mood was sombre, and the other *Marauders* were all seated at the long table.

All six offenders were led in and forced to kneel before their colleagues. There was real fear felt by all sixteen *Marauders* as Hit Girl came amongst them. In her hands, she held a pair of TASER X3 devices. Without preamble, she calmly shot each of the six miscreants in the chest. She kept the triggers held down for fifteen seconds causing the six youths to writhe in agony on the floor. Then she yanked out the wires from the TASERS and left the room without a word passing the spent TASERS to Stormtide as she went.

"Such behaviour will not be tolerated," Psyche growled.

"You don't care about us," Willow commented. "We're just meat to be abused."

"We don't care, huh?" Psyche growled angrily as Surgeon entered the room. "Surgeon will check each of them out and ensure that they are unhurt. I expected Hit Girl to use bullets – next time, she just might."

Psyche left the room, unable to face them any longer.

That evening

Northwestern Memorial Hospital ***Room 32***

"I'm doing everything that I can, but . . . I just want to shoot the bastards and be done with them!"

Saoirse grimaced. She knew that Stephanie was not happy about dealing with the *Marauders* and Saoirse could not fault her friend there. Lucy did not appear so happy, either. She had seen many *Predators* go bad, but they had always been 'handled'. FEAR had manipulated the young minds of already damaged children and turned them into the very worst a *Predator* could become. Her first thoughts had been to kill them – she was a killer of *Predators*, after all – but that was in her past. She had to help them – somehow.

"They are nasty – some of them," Shannon commented as she sat with her friends. "I want to be hard on them, but I don't want them to resent us so much that we turn them against us. We could turn them into real *Marauders*."

"Or they could just do a Lucy: freak out and kill people," Saoirse grinned.

"Very funny, Saoirse!" Lucy growled. "Maybe that knock on the head did some more serious fucking damage."

"Am I missing something, here?" Stephanie asked, and Lucy groaned.

"You mean, you don't know about Lucy's nude week?" Saoirse chuckled.

"No," Stephanie admitted.

"I heard about it, but just not the juicy details," Shannon added, much to Lucy's annoyance.

"Up until that week, Lucy had been all but untouchable – kind of got on all our nerves," Saoirse explained. "I had been at Urban Predator for seven months and Lucy had just turned twelve a month before. She was a real bitch – worse than Mindy."

"I thought I was something real special," Lucy added.

"Not her fault," Shannon said quickly. "She was their star *Predator* and I think her status went to her head."

Lucy grimaced.

"She's not wrong," she admitted. "I had had enough. I had been there for almost two years and it was taking its toll on me and to a lesser extent, Leo."

Monday, October 31st, 2011

Colorado, USA

The day was not going well – not well, at all.

She had awoken that morning in a foul mood, and even Leo was keeping his friend at arm's length. After a fractious morning training, the girl had headed for the showers where she had found that the hot water was iffy – her mood was steadily heading downhill and building up a head of steam. The fact that two *Yellows* were stationed to observe her every move, naked or otherwise, was getting under her skin and she was not going to take anymore.

"I am so *sick* of this!" Lucy yelled as she stormed out of the shower, wrapping a towel around her body.

"You're pushing your luck, girl," Instructor Morris pointed out, stopping Lucy from moving more than six feet.

"Why are you treating me like an animal?"

"You won't do what you're fucking told – that is why we're having you watched."

"Fuck that!" Lucy yelled back. "Killing in the shower is really *passé*, but I will *not* be followed around by these yellow fucks!"

With that proclamation, she seized hold of the male *Yellow* and in a lightning move, she smashed the seven-year-old's head against the tiled wall of the showers – the boy died instantly as his skull was smashed and his brain matter scattered across the changing room tiles. The female *Yellow* was quick on the uptake and she tried to run but Lucy grabbed the youngster by her left arm which was quickly snapped at the elbow. The girl screamed out in agony as Lucy threw the luckless girl against the wall, knocking her unconscious. Without any show of emotion, Lucy picked up a fire extinguisher and she rammed it into the girl's face, smashing it. Before Lucy could do anything else, she was seized from behind by Instructor Morris and despite her violent struggling and increasingly foul language, she was quite literally dragged, kicking and screaming down several corridors and then into the gymnasium where there were two classes consisting of about twelve or so *Predators* training. All movement and sound stopped as the naked girl was thrown down onto the training mat – the towel had been lost several corridors before.

It was the very first time that any one of them had ever seen Lucy in such a subservient position of any kind. Normally, it was *they* who were naked, and *she* who was there watching and enjoying their misery. Now, the girl who had only just turned twelve was herself completely naked and being publicly humiliated. But that did not prevent Lucy from attempting to leave the gymnasium. Only, two male instructors seized hold of the naked girl by her arms and legs, then they pinned her down on the mat, face down while Instructor Morris produced a wicked-looking leather strap and she proceeded to take that strap across Lucy's bare backside. Lucy just closed her eyes, at least initially, refusing to give in and scream out. But the abuse and the pain quickly became far too much, and she screamed out as the strap bit repeatedly into her tormented skin. She was sobbing in agony by the time the twelfth strike came down and then she was released. She lay on the mat, sobbing her heart out, but she received no sympathy whatsoever from anybody watching. Some even smiled as they saw the only Phase 2 *Predator* female disciplined before them.

Lucy felt anger. She felt humiliation. She felt hate. She blocked out the laughter and the gleeful comments as she lay huddled on the mat and her body shook with the pain and the sobbing. Then her head was pulled back by the hair and Instructor Morris glared into Lucy's tear-filled eyes.

"We will not tolerate insolence, Ford . . . as such, you will remain naked for the next week as a reminder of what you

have done and of what we will not tolerate. You touch a single item of clothing and you'll receive the strap again. You will continue with your lessons and your instruction as normal." Morris laughed. "Enjoy your week."

There was some giggling from the other girls present as Lucy struggled back to her feet. She tried to maintain her dignity and poise, but walking was very painful thanks to her burning buttocks. However, it was the burning sensation of humiliation and failure, clearly evident on her face which was so much worse as she made her way out of the gymnasium and back to her room.

Along the way, the senior *Predator* received many strange looks as she passed several *Predators* and Instructors.

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It seemed to take forever to return to her room.

She ran through the recreational space and straight through into her bedroom. Leo was watching TV as he ate a sandwich and he was stunned to see the completely naked girl run past him. He dropped his plate and he ran after her. Her found his best friend lying face down on her bed, sobbing. He sat down beside her, and he cringed as he saw her badly bruised buttocks. The girl was beautiful, and Leo had seen her naked many times before, but now her perfect skin was marred by the vicious red welts from the strap.

"Luc. . ."

"I had it coming, Leo – I killed a pair of fucking *Yellows*."

"I'm with you, no matter what stupid and fucked up thing you decide to do."

Lucy turned her head to look at Leo and she forced a smile.

"Thanks."

She knew that she had no choice but to go to her next class – she groaned to herself; the class was physical training and she knew that they were going to be outside. It was instructional – she was taking the class of Phase 1 *Predators*. That bitch, Morris, she knew how to make Lucy suffer. Lucy struggled to see how she was going to live it down – a whole fucking week of remaining naked. Nobody had seen her naked in months and not since she had started puberty. Her privacy had been a reward for her continued obedience, only she had fucked things up, rather badly.

Lucy rolled off her bed, cringing with the pain as her bottom touched the bedding.

..._...

As Lucy pushed open the door which led out into the enclosed quadrangle, she caught sight of the twelve smirking faces standing waiting for her to arrive.

They would have all heard of Lucy's punishment and they were obviously looking forward to their lesson. Six girls and six boys. The boys were, quite naturally, staring at her naked body as she strode confidently towards them. It felt really strange walking bare foot on the warm, rough concrete and she could feel the warm sun on her bare back – at least she'd get a tan, she thought dismally.

"Before we begin," she growled as she glared at the smirking boys. "You dickless bastards get a good fucking look at my twat, then we can get on with the lesson. You want a closer look?"

Lucy ran at one of the boys, hooked a long leg around his neck, and dragged the surprised boy down to the concrete. His eyes went wide as he found his face just inches from the dark pubic hair which covered most of Lucy's labia. Lucy shoved him away and she returned to her place in front of the class. As she turned towards them, she realised that she had shown them her still very red, and very sore, backside. That Irish bitch and one of the twins were smirking.

"Abbott, Doherty – get your fucking backsides out here!"

As they approached, the two girls continued to smirk and they both made a point of staring at Lucy's exposed breasts and pubic region. Their smirks faltered slightly when Lucy just smiled at them both.

"I want you both to take your clothes off – right the fuck now!" Lucy growled.

"What?" the twin exclaimed.

"Take your fucking clothes off before I get those boys to rip them off you."

The two girls quickly pulled off their T-shirts, toed off their running shoes and pushed down their joggers and boy-shorts – neither wore a bra. They both glared at Lucy as they stood before the class, just as naked as Lucy was before the other kids.

"Get back in line, bitches!" Lucy growled and both chastened girls abandoned their meagre piles of clothing and they reluctantly returned to their places.

The boys appeared much happier now that there were *three* naked girls in the class.

"Space out, all of you – two lines; boys facing girls." Once the kids had sorted themselves out, she gave her next order. "Let's see twenty jumping-jacks."

Ten-year-old Doherty and eleven-year-old Abbott shot nasty glances at the smirking Lucy as they began their exercises before the drooling boys.

..._...

All through dinner that evening, eyes were on Lucy's naked body as she ate.

Leo kept talking to her, in a vain attempt to keep her mind off the muttering, the smirking, and the giggling. From his point of view, he had no problem staring at Lucy's breasts which had pretty much grown from nothing in the preceding twenty months or so that they had been together. They were not big, but there was enough there to show that Lucy was becoming a young woman and he secretly thought that her cherry-red nipples looked cute.

"Stop looking at my nipples – I know you like them," Lucy grinned.

"Where did you get that idea?"

"You told me, back when I first started getting breasts – you said that my nipples looked awesome the way they stuck out. I only got a bra to shut you up."

"You have an awesome body – you should be proud of it. Who gives a fuck what those bastards think? You are the most beautiful girl here."

Lucy blushed wildly, but for a good reason, and she felt the blush go almost as far down as her breasts.

"I just hate all the boys staring at my fucking twat all the time. It's covered in hair for fuck's sake; there's *nothing* to fucking see!"

Leo had other ideas on that and the raging erection in his trousers reminded him that she was gorgeous. Not a single boy in the place had yet reached puberty, so it was only the girls who exhibited any pubic hair and Lucy herself had started growing hair and developing breasts a few weeks before the arrival of the First Intake, none of whom had reached puberty at the time of their arrival. Most of the time, the two sexes showered separately, but at times, either for expediency's sake or just because the instructors were in a particularly vindictive mood, both sexes were forced to shower together. That allowed the boys to keep an eye on the girls as they had each begun puberty, much to the girls' annoyance as the boys were very quick to comment on those girls without any outward sign of development.

Lucy was very happy to return to the privacy of her room and away from the prying eyes of the other *Predators*.

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Leo was in heaven.

While neither of them had ever been shy about nudity, they didn't exactly go out of their way to wander around nude. Lucy remained covered up as a rule and Leo enjoyed the odd view of her naked. So, for the twelve-year-old boy to have a naked girl sitting beside him while they watched TV together was slightly off-putting. He had also noticed that Lucy was distinctly uncomfortable, even when alone with him.

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?" Lucy growled.

"Who wouldn't, Luc."

"I don't mind you looking, Leo."

"I know."

"Thanks for being with me."

"Always, Lucy – I will always be there for you."

"As I will be for you."

Sunday, November 6th, 2016

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago
Room 32**

"That was nasty – even by my standards," Stephanie offered.

"Thanks, Steph," Lucy acknowledged. "I know what you went through; I've been briefed." Lucy laughed. "Those bastards wanted rapid bitches, but they hated it when those same rabid bitches periodically turned on them."

Stephanie grinned, and Saoirse chuckled. Shannon scowled.

"Cheer up, Shan," Saoirse said. "I know you hate talking about the past, but it happened, honey."

Shannon closed her eyes, visualising the degrading treatment she had suffered from minute one, all the way through to the day when *Fusion* had found her and returned her to her family. She had suffered just as badly as the others, although she saw a lot of her degrading treatment as worse than what the others had endured. She hated rehashing the past and hearing about the worst of what *Urban Predator* had represented.

"I know. Without you and Lucy, I would not have survived, and I would have probably topped myself. Even little Jamie kept me looking ahead instead of behind. I owe all of you for my life and for the continued support that you give me. You've all suffered in so many horrible ways but you all stay sane. . ."

Stephanie laughed insanely.

"Well, as close to sane as is humanly possible," Shannon grimaced as she looked over at the little short-haired blonde girl with the insane grin on her face.

Stephanie was a miracle. Shannon had heard almost every story there was about the brave little ten-year-old and her own suffering was nothing compared to what Stephanie had endured. Somehow, that girl kept suffering and enduring, but she continued on and on. They all ultimately owed Stephanie their lives – every damn *Predator* and every damn *Marauder*. Without Stephanie falling into the hands of Hit Girl and her vigilantes, *Urban Predator* might never have folded, and she might never have found her family.

"Cheer up, Shannon," Stephanie offered as she put an arm around the older girl's shoulder. "It will get better – slowly."

"Thanks, Steph."

Lucy spoke up, uneasily.

"I've never spoken to anybody about my missions for the CIA . . . but . . . I think I have to come clean about a couple of things. When Stephanie turned on the CIA, they were more than a little bit pissed about their super-*Predator* going bad on them. They activated one of their best operatives – Foxtail. Only Foxy was not good enough. . ."

"Don't call me that!" Saoirse complained from the bed.

Lucy grinned fiendishly.

"As I was saying, *Foxy* was not good enough and she fucked up three times – okay, it wasn't like she lacked skills; I taught the bitch . . . only, Stephanie is one of the best *Urban Predator* ever turned out – and I should know; I *am* the

best *Urban Predator* ever turned out. In fact, after Foxtail failed to terminate the young Stephanie Walker AKA Psyche, *the best* was sent to terminate Saoirse Doherty AKA Foxtail."

Saoirse winced.

Wednesday, February 10th, 2016

Colorado, USA

"Yes?"

The man looked up at the insolent expression on Lucy's face. He was used to the moody teenager – she was sixteen-years-old, but she might as well have been twenty-one for all the respect he got from the girl. She always went out of her way to figuratively stick her middle finger up at the instructors, *Urban Predator*, and the CIA, whenever possible. The insolent teenager did not wait to be asked, but instead, she sat down in a chair on the other side of the desk and got herself comfortable.

"Comfy, Lucy?"

"Yeah . . . I think so."

"We're having a problem with a *Predator*. . ."

"Another one?" Lucy asked sarcastically, rolling her eyes.

"Less of the attitude, Lucy!"

"Yes, *sir!*"

***Two days later
Friday, February 12th***

Chicago, USA

The mission had two potential targets.

Target number one had been a surprise while the second one had not. She had not received a go order, yet, so the girl was still alive. Lucy had selected a perfect location from where to take the girl down, should she not carry out her mission satisfactorily.

As Lucy watched, she saw a short person appear. The female was wearing some sort of outlandish vigilante outfit. Lucy's target approached.

"Well, well, I never thought it might come to this. . ." Lucy mused as she studied her target through the high-powered sniper scope. "Goodbye, you fucking Irish slut."

Then, just as Lucy was squeezing the trigger, Foxtail fired off three bullets into the masked vigilante who went down like a sack of potatoes. Lucy paused while Foxtail moved over to the dead vigilante and . . . holy shit! The dead vigilante shot Foxtail, three times in the chest – Foxtail, who was obviously wearing body armour, fell onto her back before struggling back to her feet. Then a man appeared out of nowhere and he choked Saoirse into unconsciousness.

Lucy sat back, away from the sniper rifle – what the *fuck* was going on!

The early hours of Saturday morning

1714 West Grace Street

Lucy made an easy entry into the apartment.

When the CIA got pissed at you, then you had a very nasty future ahead. In the case of one Saoirse Doherty AKA

Foxtail, her life was about to be destroyed completely. The apartment was smart and cosy – shame really, but it had to go. An example had to be set, and Foxtail had to suffer. After a brief tour around the apartment, Lucy placed half-a-dozen sealed glass jars in strategic locations with at least one jar in each room. In the bedroom, the jar sat on the bed. In the living room, the jar sat on the couch. Each jar was filled with a potent highly-flammable mixture of liquid and various other chemicals. It was a concoction of Lucy's own making – chemistry was a staple part of *Predator* training and every *Predator* by Phase 3 could make simple explosive and incendiary devices from just about anything they could find. Each jar was also fitted with a small remote detonator attached to the glass which when triggered would shatter the glass and ignite the liquid. With a quick check around the apartment, Lucy left, and she returned to her motorcycle. Once she was ready to leave, she pulled out a small black detonator and she flipped up a switch before stabbing a red button.

In the apartment, six glass jars shattered, and liquid flooded out, igniting and six independent conflagrations began, swiftly spreading across the apartment.

Sunday, November 6th, 2016

***Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago
Room 32***

"You, torched my place?"

"Sorry, Saoirse – but you know how it works."

"I do. Thanks for telling me."

"You're my friend – not my enemy."

"You're our friend, too, Lucy – always remember that."

***Five days later
Friday, November 11th***

Fielding Drive

"What's up with Dad?" Becky asked Chloe.

"Three years ago, Josh's Dad was killed, and Josh ended up in a coma. That was the start of me travelling down the road to becoming Shadow. I thought I'd lost my soulmate – only, I found him again when Mindy almost cut his head off for breaking into one of her Safehouses."

Becky walked over to where Joshua was sitting on a chair at the table, nursing a mug of tea. Becky wormed her way onto his lap and she wrapped her arms around him. Joshua smiled, and he reciprocated, hugging the diminutive little girl.

"I'm sorry to hear about your Dad," Becky whispered.

"Thanks, sweet pea."

Chloe smiled as she watched Joshua and Becky hugging. The two had become very close of late and for Chloe, it was lovely to see them both together. They were her life – her entire life. Since the death of her mother, Chloe gave all her attentions to her family. Becky helped her sanity and Joshua kept her focussed. Together, they were getting through their collective loss. Joshua was so happy to have a mother figure in his life and he loved Cathy. For him to lose that mother figure had struck him hard. Many a night had passed with all three sharing the same bed. Each of them was suffering and they each needed one another. Joshua and Becky were inseparable – something which irked Chloe at times as they would often be laughing about something and then go quiet the moment she walked into the room. She figured that they were doing it on purpose, but she tolerated it.

"You okay, honey?" Chloe asked Joshua.

"I have you two, so I'm fine; I have my girls," Joshua replied as he hugged them both.

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There was a knock on the door.

Becky squirmed out of Joshua's arms and the little girl scampered to answer it.

"Mindy!"

"Hi, Becky!"

"You come to see Mum and Dad?"

"Yes, Becky."

"Mum said you tried to cut Dad's head off, in New York."

Mindy glared at Chloe for a moment before scowling.

"You're never gonna let that one go, are you?"

"Not a chance!" Chloe grinned as Joshua rolled his eyes.

***Chapter 357*: Trust**

Saturday, November 12th, 2016

They were all exhausted.

Totally exhausted. Psyche had not lied to them, although some wished that she had. She had promised them hell – and she had delivered. Nobody dared resist or fight back. They each agreed to take their punishment and move on. It was harsh on the younger members, but they were all managing to get by. The food was good. The accommodation was better than could be expected. If they behaved, then they were treated with respect. That was hard, very hard. Each one of them was pushed to their physical and mental limits, and that caused tempers to fray and things to be said. Surprisingly, the vigilantes supervising them took the abuse and allowed it to wash over them – at least until someone took things too far. Twelve-year-old Jake Wistrum just could not keep his mouth shut and each time he opened it, he managed to say something which earned him some punishment or other. The punishments were not hard, but they took their toll and more surprisingly to them all, they began to bond. Bonding had not been allowed in *Urban Predator*. Bonding was a weakness – to a point. Some of the *Marauders* knew that they could only get through the dark days ahead with mutual support.

Though they hated one another, they began to talk, and they began to see the other person as a human being, suffering just as they were. Twelve-year-old Charlotte tended to spend time with the two youngest girls, Lin Lai and her sister, Xiāngxin. She was joined by Jesse and James when they sat down to eat. The girls tended to be stronger than the boys at controlling their emotions but there were times when even the boys succumbed. Despite the hardships that the *Marauders* endured, they were looked after, and they had each been introduced to a pair of psychiatrists, Dr Charles and Dr Reese. Each youngster had been through a pair of sessions – for some, the sessions had ended in tears as they had truly realised what they had done. Remorse was a key factor in helping the kids endure their punishments. None of them had the faintest idea of what lay ahead of them and that scared some.

On that Saturday, the *Marauders* found themselves joined by *Fusion* vigilantes – and some other *Predators*.

Training Centre Echo ***Level 4 – Exercise Area***

"Okay, boys and girls," Wildcat explained. "It's time you guys were given something to work for. If you can beat your opponent, you earn yourself some extra rations and maybe some time off. As you can see, we have been joined today by some *Fusion* members. Some have faced off against them in combat and some are known to you as *Predators*. This is a friendly competition and if anybody abuses that then we will not offer anything like it again. Do you all understand me?"

"Yes, ma'am!" came the unified response; each *Marauder* wanted to better a *Fusion* vigilante and their former compatriots.

"We start with the climbing wall – Joel will race Jackal; get ready, boys," Wildcat directed.

Watching from the sidelines, Lucy chuckled. She had read Joel's file and he was an ace climber – not that she had let on to Joshua. There was cheering from both sides as their climbers stood at the base of the climbing wall and prepared to race to the top.

"Ready . . . set . . . *CLIMB!*" Wildcat roared.

The two sixteen-year-olds ran at the wall and jumped up as high as they could, their hands reaching for handholds and their muscles rippling as they pulled themselves upwards. Jackal was good, and he was very strong, but Joel scrambled up the wall like he was a human spider. His arms were longer than Jackal's and he was able to reach further, increasing his lead. At the very top, Discord awaited the climbers' arrival. She grinned as Joel's right hand struck the top of the wall, just two seconds ahead of Jackal's. There was an enormous roar from the *Marauders* as Discord indicated the winner.

"Well done, Joel," Wildcat laughed as she clapped. "Next up, let's see if his arms can move as fast as his mouth – Jake, you will race Hellcat."

Jake stepped forwards, grinning at the applause and then scowling at Hellcat as she stepped up. He took in the younger girl's figure and he guessed at what she might look like underneath her mask.

"Eyes on the wall, cunt!" Hellcat warned to general laughter.

Surprisingly, Jake was good, and he was level-pegging with Hellcat all the way up the wall, but just as Hellcat put on a final burst, so did he and Discord struggled to see who the winner was – but she finally indicated Hellcat after a short deliberation. Again, there was cheering, even from some of the *Marauders*.

"Hard luck, Jake – you'll have to toss yourself off, tonight!" Wildcat chuckled to more laughter. "For the final wall race, Xiāngxin, you will race Scamp."

The two young girls faced off and sized one another up – they were about the same age and size.

"Ready . . . set . . . *CLIMB!*" Wildcat roared.

The youngsters began to climb to enormous support from those below, *Marauder* and vigilante alike. The youngsters were nimble if not fast and Xiāngxin was pronounced the winner. As soon as she reached the ground the bewildered youngster was pounced on and congratulated by the other *Marauders*. The eight-year-old forced her way out and faced Scamp, holding out her hand.

"Good race – well done," she said to Scamp who took the offered hand and shook.

"Next, we go to the track," Wildcat announced.

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"Okay. Ewan, Lucas, Kieran, Dylan, and Dakota – you will race against Splinter, Stormtide, Discord, Nightmare, and Tempest. Please line up – you will run two 400-metre laps," Wildcat directed. "That would make a total distance of, Willow?"

"Eight-hundred-metres!" Willow replied with a scowl.

The ten runners arranged themselves on the track. It would be a free for all as there were only four lanes.

"Runners, are you ready?"

"Get with it, Kitty!" Splinter chuckled as Wildcat gave him the finger.

"Ready, steady . . . *GO!*"

The entire cavern was filled with shouting as the ten runners moved off at a steady run. The discipline was there from the *Predators* and the *Marauders*, not to mention those who were lucky to never have been both. Hit Girl appeared at the edge of the track just as the runners passed three-hundred-metres. She was impressed by the cheering and the fact that her people and the *Marauders* seemed to be working together. The nasty shock the previous weekend appeared to have struck home and even the more difficult *Marauders* were going along with their punishment. She was also pleased that the *Fusion Predators* were assisting in the rehabilitation of their former comrades. Stephanie had reported back about the *Predator* feelings towards the *Marauders* and at first Mindy had been unsure about letting them mix. There was a lot of hate between *Predators* as it was, let alone when you had the older *Predators* who had gone rogue. So far, things were going well without any injuries. Talking of which, the injured *Marauders* were healing. Willow was struggling to integrate with her former colleagues and there was a lot of hate towards her for unknown reasons. Her bullet wound was all but healed but she was suffering from migraines according to Doctor Staite. Then there was Charlotte with her stomach wound. Abigail kept a close eye on the girl and she was usually present for medical examinations and also there to provide comfort during Charlotte's time with the shrinks. Charlotte was almost healed too which was good and she was among the rising stars amongst the *Marauders*.

There was one more thing; Rachel. She had shot Willow, but no *Marauder* knew that she was alive – that would have to be sorted out before too long and Mindy feared a significant backlash against Rachel from those who might see her as being just as guilty as them. Maybe Rachel should have been punished with her fellow *Marauders*, but that point was passed, and Mindy owed Rachel for Stephanie's life and the girl had shown remorse for her actions. For the moment, there was no plan of what might happen to the *Marauders* once they were deemed to be 'rehabilitated'. There had been some talk about homes for some, but not for the majority. They had discussed shipping some over to L.A., and maybe the U.K., but no plans had been made. There had also been questions about whether the *Marauders* could ever be trusted enough to allow them to join *Fusion* – that had been a fun conversation with Stephanie – *not!*

Hit Girl cheered along with the rest as Kieran and Dakota fought for first place along with Splinter . . . before Dakota took the imaginary tape.

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After a brief discussion with Wildcat and Discord who had been running the activities, Hit Girl turned to face the gathered *Marauders* and *Fusion* vigilantes.

"Considering the behaviour last weekend, things have moved on. I am impressed by the teamwork which is appearing, and I am also pleased to see that the *Marauders* and the *Fusion Predators* are able to be in the same room without anybody actually getting killed," Hit Girl lectured and there was some uncomfortable laughter from those present. "It has only been a little over a week, but you are all making progress in your own way. You are all very different and as such, we are going to be handling each of you independently. All of you, please remember: there *is* an end to this, and so far, you are all doing very well. As time moves on, I can promise you more trust and more freedom – but you have to earn it. As for today, you all did well and you all worked as a team, so, from 22:00, you will not be disturbed until 06:00 on Monday morning. Enjoy your rest – but do not abuse my trust," Hit Girl growled.

There were smiles across the board as the youngsters congratulated one another.

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

"How are they doing?"

Shannon turned to see Stephanie entering the communal area.

"They're bonding better. The games idea of Wildcat's was very successful. She wore them out, but Hit Girl was impressed, too."

The *Marauders* were enjoying a veritable feast. The rewards given to the winners had been granted to them all and morale was very high as they contemplated an entire day of relative freedom.

"Despite my feelings about them, I want them to get through this. I detest the very air they breathe, but I was allowed a second chance, so I have to allow them a chance to show that they can change."

"You carry far too much on your shoulders, you know," Shannon replied.

"I know, but that seems to be my lot in life. How's Willow doing?" Stephanie asked as she noticed the sixteen-year-old sitting alone, playing with her food.

"They all shun her. It got around what she did to you – and that seemed to have been too low even for *Marauders*."

"That's something, I suppose."

Stephanie walked over to where the older girl was seated, and she sat down. Willow visibly recoiled away from Stephanie.

"They all want me dead because of you; why don't you just fucking shoot me?" Willow hissed.

"Don't tempt me, Hartman. Come with me."

Stephanie stood up and she left the space, several pairs of eyes burrowing into her back. Shannon gave Willow a supportive grin, but Willow blanked her, just as she was the evil looks she was receiving from the other *Marauders*. Stephanie led Willow down the corridor, away from the exercise area and deeper into Safehouse E. Willow was very unsure about what was happening, and she was a little worried that Stephanie was going to seek revenge on her. Finally, they stopped at a room with a steel door. Stephanie swiped a card through a slot and the electronic door lock was released.

"Inside," Stephanie directed the older girl.

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Stephanie was enjoying herself – the expressions crossing Willow's face were worth all the cloak and dagger.

Willow looked around the room, ignoring the grinning ten-year-old bitch. It looked like a den and suspiciously that of a ten-year-old bitch. There was a pair of fairly comfortable arm chairs which were in appalling condition with copious

amounts of Duct Tape holding them together. Some new-looking cushions helped to make the chairs a little more appealing. In front of the two chairs was a low table covered in gun magazines, motorcycle magazines, and several newspapers – a mixture of U.S. and U.K. tabloids and broadsheets. There was a leather couch off to one side with its own Duct Tape pattern hinting at its age. The room itself was dingy and what there was of the walls which was not covered in rust and damp, was covered in maps and posters – and a large Union Flag. Stephanie stepped over to a small fridge and she pulled open the door.

"Coke?"

"What?" Willow replied.

"You want a Coke?" Stephanie asked as she held up a can from the fridge.

"You fucking with me?"

"No. I just want to know if you want a can of Coke – simple question."

"Yes . . . please," Willow replied hesitantly.

"Sit down."

Willow did so.

"What are you doing, Walker?"

"I am no longer known by that name – call me Steph or Stephanie. Look, Willow, I am not exactly enthralled by having you in my private hidey-hole, but we need to talk."

"What about?"

Stephanie moved some of the magazines around and she uncovered a length of blonde hair secured in what appeared to be a pony tail but severed just above the trebled up elastic band. Willow's expression hardened at the sight of the hair which she herself had cut off. Then she felt that sense of remorse coursing through her. She regretted every part of the past few months. She hated Stephanie Walker and everything she represented but she was also wise enough to realise that Stephanie Walker – or whatever she was calling herself – was her only way out of hell.

"I know that many people hate me – for reasons which are probably quite reasonable, to be honest. I know that you hate me, and you tried to get your revenge in the worst way that you could imagine. So many times, I considered either shooting you . . . or just raping you as you did me. You ever been raped, Willow?"

"What sort of a question is that?" Willow demanded.

"You ever had something shoved up your vagina without your permission?" Stephanie persisted. "A penis or a baton?"

Willow closed her eyes and Stephanie saw the pain in her face – she had struck a nerve.

"I did not want to do it, but I had no choice – the bastard is dead now and I never told a soul. It was something so horrifying that I thought you should suffer in just the same way."

"How old were you?"

"Twelve – he was one of the instructors. You are the first person I've ever told . . . Stephanie, I am really sorry for putting you through that."

"I survived – I think of it every time I wash my hair."

"I deserve to suffer . . . I deserve to die."

"Okay."

Stephanie stood up and she walked over to a large steel cupboard. There, she punched in a code and pulled open the steel door. Willow's eyes went wide as she saw an enormous array of weaponry before her eyes. Everything from pistols, through submachine guns and onto assault rifles, hand grenades, and mines. Stephanie pulled out a small

Glock 26 pistol and she inserted a magazine of ten rounds.

"Don't tell Hit Girl I have this little stash – it's my private collection. Here, if you deserve to die – kill yourself."

With that proclamation, Stephanie pulled back the slide to load a round in the breech before she handed the loaded pistol to the amazed Willow.

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Willow held the pistol in her hand.

She had not held a weapon in weeks. Now, she had a pistol in her hand . . . and her nemesis standing before her. She had a choice – she could kill Stephanie and make her escape, or she could just kill herself. She studied the pistol closely. She knew the specifications like she knew her own name. Just 5.5-pounds of pressure on the trigger and the bullet would be fired down the barrel with the right-hand, hexagonal rifling. A handgun bullet travels at more than seven-hundred-miles-per-hour. Her life would be over within a blink of an eye. But could she do it? Then a thought occurred to her and she chuckled.

"As if you'd give me a functioning weapon," she said as she placed the pistol on the table. "You think I'm *that* stupid, Stephanie?"

Stephanie nodded as she picked up the pistol and then nonchalantly fired two rounds into the carpet-covered concrete at Willow's feet. The sixteen-year-old screamed as she jumped backwards. Then she grinned.

"You fucking bitch!"

Stephanie just grinned as she cleared the weapon.

"How did you know I wouldn't just shoot you and escape?"

"Because you're intelligent, Willow, and you feel more guilt than you have ever felt in your life."

"You think you know me!" Willow exclaimed angrily. "You thought you had me figured out? You were that certain that I would not just blow that smug look off your Brit face?"

Stephanie ignored the raging – she knew all about raging; she was a certified expert at it – and she sat down in one of the chairs and pulled out a card-covered folder from the pile of magazines. She opened the folder and she began to read aloud.

"Willow Olivia Hartman. Born: September 8th, 2000 to Drew and Bethany Harrison in the quaint city of Minot, North Dakota. Only child. Did well at school and then you were seized by *Urban Predator*, September 12th, 2010 as part of the *First Predator Intake*. You endured the very worst that the system had to offer at just ten-years-old. You excelled, though, and you formed a few friendships. One of whom was Kara Newton – I'm really sorry that she had to die. If I had not done that then maybe, I would not have become what I am today – or I might have died way back when. *Urban Predator* was shit for everybody involved, Willow, but that abomination is gone – I saw to that. You've seen the *Predators* who are now part of *Fusion*, right? I'm doing everything that I can to rescue every kid who got caught up in *Urban Predator*. Forty kids are now safe – and that includes the sixteen of you. We've all done bad things that we regret, and we just have to look forwards."

"You talk like you've done this shit before – talking *Predators* down."

"Willow – please, sit down and drink your Coke."

Willow did so, taking a long pull of the cold fizzy drink.

"I had to talk a gun out of the hand of a *Marauder/Predator*, just the other night. She wanted to kill herself as she could no longer handle the guilt of what she had been part of."

"You stopped one of us from dying?" Willow asked, a little surprised.

"Just because I think you should all die for what you did, does not mean that I will let that happen. I have a conscience, Willow, and I know you do, too. You all need protecting from yourselves and I want to help."

"Who was it?" Willow asked.

Stephanie took a deep breath before she responded.

"Rachel."

***The following morning
Sunday, November 13th***

Glenview

"Stephanie – before you open that little mouth of yours and start belly-aching, Dave and I would like to go out. We also want to come back to our home which would still be intact," Mindy explained.

"I'm ten-years-old and I've done a lot more than most adults," Stephanie growled. "Besides, I handed back the Claymore mine and the C4 explosives."

Mindy laughed.

"Yes, you did, sweetie," Dave confirmed.

"We know you have your own personal stash on level 7 – a cute little den," Mindy admitted.

Stephanie scowled.

"You're not mad?"

"No, honey. I look after my *Predator* daughter, and I allow her to have some space when she needs it. I'm not going to argue when you squirrel away my weapons – I'd have done the same thing."

"Okay, time to use the boobs! Don't these mean that I am mature and able to stay at home alone?" Stephanie asked as she pointed at the small bulges on her chest.

Dave laughed out loud, and Mindy rolled her eyes.

"You are so like Mindy!" Dave exclaimed, ignoring the indignant look his wife threw at him. "So, little lady, you want us – two sane adults – to leave a ten-year-old assassin in charge of the house and her younger siblings, not to mention four, not so normal, animals."

"That about sums it up," Stephanie replied. "Although, I would not refer to Mindy as being 'sane', exactly."

"You are *not* helping your case, sweetie," Mindy growled dangerously.

"Aw come on!" Stephanie exclaimed in a broad American accent reminiscent of Anne-Marie. "I can be the perfect little angel and I promise the house will be in the same state you left it – trust me, dammit!"

That same time

West Columbia

Marcus grimaced as he walked past his stepdaughter's bedroom.

Naturally, Marcus had taken young Curtis in after Cathy had died – it had seemed the natural thing to do. Megan had been over the moon – naturally. Only, she had insisted that her single bed was replaced with a double. Marcus was having none of it and he had obtained a twin bed, but he had not stopped there – he had ensured that the beds were screwed down to the floor. Megan had known better than to argue as Marcus had reminded her that the spare room was available. . . For Paige, having another mouth to feed was not a big problem and Curtis enjoyed helping out with little Damon. She also knew that the youngsters cared for each other, greatly, and they had known each other for a couple of years.

Marcus would just have to stop being so old-fashioned.

A few miles away

Fielding Drive

Joshua was helping himself to some tea as an aid to waking up.

The boy was alone in his kitchen, enjoying the peace of a quiet morning. Then, his solitary tea sipping was interrupted by the padding of bare feet on the wooden floor. They were small feet, so it had to be Becky. Only, as she walked past Joshua, something appeared off – it was not only the feet which were bare.

"Morning, Dad!"

"Becky, are my eyes deceiving me or is something missing?"

"You noticed, huh?"

Becky continued to collate the components of her breakfast: bowl, cereal, spoon, and milk. Joshua *had* noticed what was missing – clothes.

"Yes."

"I'm butt naked," Becky offered, unnecessarily.

"Yes . . . why?"

"I was told that you and Chloe are nudists and you liked to cavort around naked."

"Cavort?"

"It means. . ."

"I know what it means – who told you that?"

"Curtis," Becky replied as she sat down to put her breakfast into the bowl. "He said you two liked to be naked, so I thought I should let you both know that it was fine by me. I've seen Chloe naked before, and I've seen your thingy, too."

"I don't think. . ." Joshua began, unsure of what to say.

Chloe entered the kitchen and she did a double take.

"Why's she naked?" Chloe asked simply as she grabbed a coffee.

"She wants us to know that it's fine for us to be nudists," Joshua explained. "She's showing solidarity."

"Is she, now," Chloe growled, then she grinned. "You going outside, naked, Peanut?"

"You think I'm daft?" Becky pouted. "It's bloody November!"

Chloe just chuckled.

Later that morning

Paige, Megan, and Curtis walked up the path and Megan knocked on the door.

"Hi, guys!" Chloe exclaimed as she opened the door. "Come in."

Paige walked in and she sat down, pulling off her jacket. Megan followed suit, as did Curtis.

"Why is it so warm in here?" Paige asked.

"Hello!" came a voice and Paige turned to say hello back.

"Why is she. . .?" Paige began with a glance up at Chloe.

"Don't even ask," Chloe grimaced.

Megan laughed as the still naked Becky sat down beside her, ignoring the fact that there was a boy on the other side of her.

"Becky – you've got no clothes on," Megan pointed out.

"I know."

"Becky," Curtis said. "I know I said Chloe and Josh like to go around naked, but I did not mean that you should."

"It's quite liberating, really," Becky replied.

"Megan used to run around naked – until she was about eight or so," Paige commented.

"Mom!" Megan growled, her cheeks turning pink.

That evening

Glenview

Dave looked down at Mindy who just shrugged.

The three Lizewski kids appeared unnerved by the situation.

"Do you hate us?" Anne-Marie asked Mindy.

"No, honey," Mindy laughed. "I trust Stephanie and so should you. A bit of advice for each of you: don't annoy her or piss her off. She speaks with the same authority as me – understand?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Yes, Mom."

"Yes, Mum."

As the front door closed, Stephanie appeared in the entrance to the living room. All chatter ceased, and the three youngsters looked very apprehensive.

"Right, kiddies! I am in charge. . ."

Razor and Kiara both whined and covered their faces with their paws.

"Traitors!" Stephanie hissed before she refocused on her uncomfortable siblings. "Anne-Marie – you and me will order pizzas while the boys will go walk the dogs."

That was not as bad as they had thought it might be, so the boys scurried off to find the leads for Sophia, Razor, and Kiara. As the three excited dogs vanished out the door, dragging the two boys with them, Stephanie and Anne-Marie settled down at Stephanie's laptop to order food.

"How much you got?" Anne-Marie asked as she looked down the list of pizzas and extras.

"Let's keep it under a hundred bucks," Stephanie suggested.

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An hour later, two boys, two girls, three dogs, and a cat were happily munching on pizza, sides, and drinking enormous quantities of Coke.

Danny and Jamie had been planning to make things go wrong for Stephanie, but they decided that having angry parents and an angrier big sister, who was a just a little bit insane, was not worth the potential gain. As they ate, they watched TV and just enjoyed each other's company. Apart from some minor squabbling between Razor and Horatio over some pepperoni, things were going well, and Stephanie was pleased that everybody was cooperating. Once the pizza was finished, she stood up.

"Anne-Marie and Jamie – can you both clean up the pizza boxes, please. Danny, upstairs, shower, and get into your

pyjamas, then you can come back down to watch TV until Mum and Dad get home."

Amazingly, the three youngsters followed instructions without complaint. When Danny returned from having taken a quick shower, he was in his pyjamas. Stephanie handed the boy a steaming mug of hot chocolate with marshmallows and he went to sit down on a couch. Anne-Marie and Jamie were then sent upstairs for their showers and to get into pyjamas. On their return, they both received their own steaming mugs of hot chocolate with marshmallows and then joined their brother on the couch. Stephanie then took the opportunity to run upstairs to her bedroom, where she stripped off and dived into the shower recently vacated by Jamie. On her return downstairs in her pyjamas, she found Jamie waiting for her.

"Here."

The boy handed over a fourth mug of steaming hot chocolate with marshmallows. Stephanie was a little surprised as she joined her siblings who were all smiling.

"What are you lot up to?" Stephanie demanded as she curled up with Horatio.

"We thought you might be a bitch – like your reputation," Jamie explained. "But you've been really nice; so, we decided to be good and not cause trouble."

Stephanie smiled.

"Thanks, guys."

Much later

"I should have called. I should have checked in."

"Mindy, calm the fuck down!" Dave chuckled from the driver's seat. "Stephanie and Jamie have both survived alone. The house is a fucking fortress, honey, and two of our kids are trained assassins."

"I worry," Mindy bleated. "I'm trying to be a good mother. . ."

"Give me strength," Dave muttered. "I see no flashing blue or red lights."

"So far."

"Come on, Mindy. I know you trust Stephanie with our lives and we both know that she would die before letting anything happen to those kids."

"Yes, I know. But they're only young, and kids fuck up – I did."

"Mindy – shut up!" Dave suggested, and Mindy glowered as she stared out of the side window.

Mindy's apprehensiveness only grew as they pulled into the garage. Yes, the house was intact and not burning down. However, the silence as she climbed out of the Audi R8 was killing her. Dave's cautious expression prevented her from pulling her pistol but even then, she braced up as she entered the house. All was suspiciously quiet – too quiet for a house currently occupied by two eight-year-olds, a nine-year-old, a ten-year-old, three dogs, and a demented cat. Something was very wrong, Mindy thought as she pulled her pistol and slowly moved towards the living room from where she could hear the TV. She stepped through the arch, her pistol held ahead of her. Then she grinned as she saw that all, but Stephanie were fast asleep. Stephanie looked up from where she had been dozing.

"Really?"

Mindy sheepishly put the pistol away as she peered through into the pristine kitchen.

"You call in cleaners?" she teased.

"They were all well behaved and they did what I asked of them – surprised the hell out of me."

Dave chuckled from behind Mindy.

"Well done, Stephanie. I'm sorry for not trusting you – I was wrong."

"Thanks."

"Let's wake the little buggers up and get them to bed," Mindy grinned as she poked the three sleeping kids awake.

***The following morning
Monday, November 14th***

North Park Elementary School

"For the love of everything, Jackson: what are you staring at?" Stephanie demanded.

Katy Evans giggled as she watched her twin brother just stare at Stephanie and Abigail.

"He's freaking me out," Abigail confirmed.

"I'm going to slap him," Stephanie decided.

"You are the two women in my life and I love watching you both," Jackson explained in a cringeworthy tone.

"Ewww!" Abigail groaned as Katy giggled even more.

"It is a bit creepy," Ali Johns agreed.

"He likes those bumpy things on your chest, Steph," Craig commented, attracting glares from all the girls present.

"Steph's are the biggest. Katy's getting some – but they're really small," Jackson went on. "Yowwww!"

"Stephanie Lizewski!"

"Hi, Principal Rooney," Stephanie grinned.

"You lay a hand on another student, young lady, and there will be trouble. Now, apologise to Jackson, please."

Stephanie rolled her eyes but stood her ground.

"He deserved it, sir; he keeps talking about my boobs."

"Will you apologise for hitting Jackson around the head?"

"No."

That afternoon

Glenview

"Hi, Mum!"

"Hello, young lady – do you have something for me?"

Stephanie's shoulders slumped. Then she dug into her pack and pulled out an envelope.

"Letter. . .s, Principal. . ."

Stephanie fled, and she was about to bolt up the stairs. . .

"Stephanie Lizewski! Get your sorry butt back in this kitchen, *NOW!*"

Stephanie groaned as she considered racing up to her bedroom and locking the door. However, she turned around slowly and walked the short distance – it felt like a mile – to the kitchen.

"Nice knowing ya," Danny chuckled.

Stephanie paused a few feet from Mindy, averting her eyes and staring at the floor.

"Okay, Steph – either the Principal was very bored, this afternoon, or he printed out a few too many copies of his letter."

"I suppose."

"One . . . two . . . *three!* Even *I* never got three letters in *one day!*"

"There was a little misunderstanding. . ."

"Was that before or after you told Principal Rooney to – and I quote – 'go procreate with yourself'. Ran out of swear words, did we?"

"No."

"Thought it would get you into less trouble?"

"Kind of. . ."

"You hit Jackson?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He was talking about our boobs."

"Did you ask him to stop?"

"No."

"Wouldn't that have been more diplomatic?"

"In hindsight. . ."

"When will you learn, Steph? Check your surroundings, *before*, you hit somebody."

"Mindy!" Dave commented with a frown.

"When will you learn, Steph? You should never hit somebody – when the Principal's watching."

Dave glared pointedly.

"When will you learn, Steph? You should never hit somebody . . . period!"

..._...

Stephanie had been sent to her room to do her homework.

Forty minutes later, she was summoned back downstairs. She found Mindy and Dave in the kitchen with Katy and Jackson, plus their mother, Deborah.

"I am so sorry, Deborah," Mindy said.

"Don't be silly, Mindy" Deborah Evans replied. "They are the very best of friends and Katy explained why Stephanie hit him. He got a blast from his father when he found out. Jackson."

"Sorry, Steph – I shouldn't have been so rude."

"Thanks."

"Stephanie – apologise to Jackson, please," Dave said forcefully.

"Sorry, Jackson – I overreacted," Stephanie said as she offered her hand.

Jackson shook the offered hand. "Apology accepted, although I'd have preferred a kiss. . ."

"Jackson!" Deborah exclaimed in exasperation.

***Chapter 358*: Escape**

Later that evening

Monday, November 14th, 2016

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Room 32

"Are you both enjoying the view, girls?"

Shannon and Stephanie both looked up from where they were observing the removal of Saoirse's urinary catheter. They were both captivated by how it functioned – however, Saoirse was not.

"The only thing that should be passing my labia is a tampon or a penis," Saoirse growled as she felt the thin plastic tube being removed from her urethra.

"Sorry – we were just curious," Shannon offered with a grin.

"Nothing wrong with curiosity, girls," Nurse Kittiwake commented with a chuckle as she covered up Saoirse's remaining dignity with her gown. "Okay, Saoirse, let's try and get you off the bed and onto your feet. It will be sore and remember that your right lower leg is encased in a cast, okay?"

Saoirse nodded, her face full of apprehension.

"We're here to support you, SD – no matter what," Stephanie grinned supportively.

"Okay," Nurse Kittiwake directed. "Let's get you facing the edge of the bed."

Saoirse grimaced as she twisted herself around the face her friends and the nurse. Nurse Kittiwake eased the cast over the side of the bed allowing Saoirse to slowly take the weight of the item attached to her lower right leg. The movements were painful for Saoirse and tears were visible on her face. Her face also showed determination and each of her hands was held by the hand of one of her best friends.

"Now, ease yourself forwards . . . good. Rest your weight on the good leg first."

"Ow!" Saoirse exclaimed as her left leg took her weight for the first time in a month. "That's sore . . . aaaah!"

"Focus, SD," Stephanie directed. "Look at me."

Saoirse looked directly into her friends' eyes as she stood up properly before tentatively resting weight on her damaged right leg. Saoirse almost fell forwards as her right leg buckled but the fifteen-year-old found herself supported by a ten-year-old to her left and a fourteen-year-old to her right.

"Thanks, guys," Saoirse grinned as more tears spilled down her face.

The tears turned into sobbing as Stephanie recognised the *Predator* inside coming to the fore. Shannon recognised the extreme determination which meant that Saoirse would try, try, and try again until she completed the task – or she would die trying. Saoirse moved her left leg and she took a small step. After a short pause, there came her other leg with another step, it was a smaller step, but it was still a step.

"Keep it coming, Saoirse," Shannon whispered encouragingly as she supported her friend. "Every journey begins with the first step."

"I can't – it's really sore."

"And I thought that / was the loser!" Stephanie growled. "Move!"

Saoirse growled, praying for the willpower to not throttle the annoying girl to her left. Stephanie would willingly allow Saoirse to ring her scrawny little neck if it helped her friend to get back on her feet.

"You want more words of motivation, you soft bitch?" Shannon added.

"Fuck!" Saoirse breathed as she forced her legs to move, tolerating the pain. "I hate you both!"

Stephanie and Shannon exchanged a grin as they supported their friend over several difficult steps.

"You've down very well, Saoirse," Nurse Kittiwake commented with a smile for all three girls. "Let's get you back onto the bed before you fall and cause yourself some more damage.

After Saoirse was settled back in her bed, Nurse Kittiwake left the three girls alone. Saoirse smiled up at her friends.

"Thanks, guys."

Three days later
Thursday, November 17th

Glenview

"You didn't do anything special for the anniversary of *us* coming into your home," Anne-Marie groused.

"Why would anybody want to celebrate *you* coming to stay?" Danny pointed out, quite reasonably, he thought.

"Why don't you go fu. . ."

"Anne-Marie!" Dave challenged and the fiery little eight-year-old simply glared at her twin brother.

"Okay!" Mindy exclaimed. "You know that we love you all – equally! Stephanie quite literally fell into our lap after being shot as collateral damage during a *Fusion* firefight. We took her to Safehouse F and she was checked over by Cathy and Chloe."

"Yeah," Stephanie muttered. "I discovered Wildcat's claws, too!"

"Yes, you did – you had a bad time, too, that night."

"The next day, Joshua gave me Marmite – first time in a while. Then I met you two. You were really nice to me, Anne-Marie."

"You looked like you needed a friend," the youngster admitted with a smile.

"Mindy slept with a pistol under her pillow that first night," Dave chuckled.

"Don't blame her, really," Stephanie admitted. "I was an unknown."

"I'm glad you came, Steph," Danny said. "You became our big sister and we never regretted it."

"Yeah – we love you," Anne-Marie admitted as she hugged Stephanie.

She was quickly joined by Danny.

"That was a special day," Jamie commented. "It was the beginning of the end for *Urban Predator*."

"That it was, Jamie, and the beginning of the hunt for my brother," Stephanie grinned as she pulled her brother into the hug.

Mindy was next before Dave wrapped them all in his muscular arms.

The following afternoon
Friday, November 18th

Safehouse F

Mindy hated leaving Chicago.

She also hated seeing her teams going out without her. But, she had an appointment many miles away in Los Angeles. She and several others were due to fly out that very night. Mindy was to be joined by Anne-Marie, Danny, Megan, Curtis, Paige, Abby, and Hailee. There was also the problem of her separation from Dave, but she knew that she could survive for a few days.

"Stephanie, Jamie – listen to Dave and do not blow anything up," Mindy cautioned as she gave each a hug.

"I am in full control of my emotions and I don't cause accidental explosions," Stephanie pointed out.

"I do not blow things up without reason," Mindy countered.

"Not from what I've heard," Jamie chuckled.

"Just behave, right?"

"Love you, Mum."

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

Stephanie was determined to continue her task and prove to Mindy that she was Hit Girl's daughter in every way.

It had been all but two weeks since the *Marauders* had come into their custody and things were progressing well. With the assistance of Doctor Daniel Charles and Doctor Sarah Reese, a clinically accurate psychological profile had been built up for each *Marauder*. Doctor Reese was coldly clinical with her questions and she had reduced several of the older *Marauders* to tears in no time at all. It was cruel – to a point – but it was necessary to understand what was going on inside their heads. *Predators* by design were programmed to hide their emotions, so those emotions had to be dug out and inspected to find out how the child within was really feeling. Most importantly, it helped to identify those who were expected to be recoverable and those who might not be. Five *Marauders* had been identified as being honestly remorseful and those five were destined to receive special treatment to help them along. On the flip side, three had been identified as having deep psychotic issues, with another suffering from a severe case of self-loathing and anxiety.

That evening, the *Marauders* were all at the point of virtual collapse from having been kept on the go continuously. The harsh regime had been important to condition the youngsters so that they could be properly vetted. Stephanie and Lucy had some special events planned for the next day which they hoped might help the offenders want to succeed. One task which Stephanie had not been relishing was about to happen. After the evening meal, Stephanie had taken custody of sixteen-year-old Willow and escorted her back to her hidey-hole.

Only, there was somebody waiting there for them.

Level 7 – Room 708
The Psyche Den

Willow scowled as she laid eyes on Rachel for the first time in many weeks.

"Willow – before you explode, please help yourself to some Coke," Stephanie directed.

Willow complied, somewhat reluctantly, and sat down without being asked.

"Why isn't she in hack with us?" Willow demanded.

"Rachel suffered for the part she played in hurting me. Believe me, Willow, Rachel spent time two doors away from you while her injuries healed. My friends beat the living crap out of her before I stopped them. Since then, Rachel has shown us that she can be trusted. She has also shown remorse to the extent that she stole a pistol from me and tried to blow her brains out."

Willow thought that one through for a few minutes.

"The bitch shot me."

"I'm sorry, Bandit, but I was not about to let you carry through your attack on Stephanie."

"Don't call me that – ever!" Willow growled dangerously.

"Would you prefer we call you, Rampart?" Stephanie asked.

"I don't deserve that name – not yet."

Stephanie was about to speak, but Rachel raised her hand.

"Willow . . . I . . . we both got involved with a bad crowd and we got caught out," Rachel said. "Life for us has been shit, but its time to put that behind us and move on. It's not easy – I can vouch for that. I have people who care about me – no idea why – but that helps. You are alone. . ."

"NO!"

"Willow. . ."

"NO! Don't think that you know me! That little bitch tried that . . . oh, fuck. . ."

Willow began to grasp her head and her face went very red.

"What is it?" Stephanie asked.

"My head – it hurts."

Stephanie hit an alarm button by the door before she grabbed up a radio. Alarm klaxons sounded throughout Safehouse E.

"Surgeon to Level 7 – medical emergency!"

By the time Surgeon appeared minutes later, Willow had collapsed onto the floor. Behind Surgeon came Kick-Ass and Stormtide. After a few moments of examination, Surgeon proclaimed Willow fit to be moved and Kick-Ass swept her up and carried her off to the Medical Centre.

***The following morning
Saturday, November 19th***

***Training Facility Echo
Level 1 – Medical Centre***

Willow Hartman opened her eyes to find herself somewhere new.

It took a moment to understand where she was but then she remembered her head hurting and then collapsing in Psyche's den. What was wrong with her? She braced up as the curtain around her bed moved and Surgeon walked in accompanied by Stephanie and Rachel.

"Hi, Willow," Surgeon said. "How are we feeling?"

"Better – my head hurts, just not as much."

"It appears that you had a swelling in your brain which was causing the headaches. We're treating that, and the swelling is already subsiding."

"Told you she was brain damaged," Rachel quipped.

Willow scowled.

"Just kidding," Rachel said quickly with genuine concern. "I'm just glad you're okay – you scared the crap out of us."

"Why do you care about me – after all I have done?"

"Until you figure that out, you are going to be down here a very long time," Stephanie replied darkly.

Later that morning

Level 4 – Exercise Area

"What have you done with Hartman?"

"Is she dead?"

"Did you fuck her up?"

"Are we each going to vanish, one by one?"

"Good riddance?"

Stephanie shook her head.

"Willow Hartman collapsed, yesterday, as a result of her previous injury. She is being treated in the Medical Centre."

"Right, back to today's agenda," Lucy said loudly. "Today, we are going to fight."

"Huh?" Dakota asked.

Lucy threw a pair of thirty-inch-long Escrima sticks at the girl's feet. Dakota did not move – she saw it as a trick.

"As I remember, you were very good with these, Arbiter," Lucy pushed.

"I don't fight anymore, Piranha."

"Your loss!"

Piranha dived forwards, the other *Marauders* scattering as the solid sticks came around towards Arbiter's head. As expected, Piranha's strike was met with force and her sticks clashed against those of Arbiter who had deftly swept up the weapons and blocked the strike.

"So, you *do* have some spirit left," Piranha grinned as she stepped back before sticking again.

The fight became more and more heated as the two girls span and struck at one another. Yes, Dakota Warlow-Davies, AKA Arbiter, was an accomplished Martial Arts fighter as would be expected from a Phase 3 graduate who had endured four years of intensive *Urban Predator* training. Stephanie could see the anger in Dakota's eyes. She had been unwilling to fight, but when forced, she would fight. There was also some hatred there, as could be expected by Lucy's former status as their direct overseer. It was a calculated risk giving them weapons, but it was also a method of monitoring their progress, while also seeing who still had an inclination to fighting.

While the two girls sparred, Stephanie handed a pair of sticks to Charlotte Grey who stood there looking stupid until Fury slapped her on the arse with her own sticks – they began to spar, slowly, working up to a steady pace. Lin Lau was paired off with her younger sister, Xiāngxìn, and they began to spar together. As for the rest, Stephanie pointed them all to a pile of Escrima Sticks and they readily paired off. Stephanie, herself, faced off against Jake Wistrum, a boy two years her senior – in age, but not in skill level, Stephanie thought.

"Move it, arsehole!" Stephanie growled as she brandished her Escrima sticks.

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"What do you want out of all this, Jakey?" Stephanie asked as they circled one another.

"I don't know, Stephy?" the boy replied with a grin.

Stephanie rapped Jake across the knuckles with one of her sticks, causing the boy to yell out in pain. He still grinned, though. The boy was tough, Stephanie had to give him that. He was a Phase 2, just as she had been, only he had been in the program for a lot longer than Stephanie had. His file indicated his strengths were Martial Arts and subterfuge – he was also a joker and he loved to make people laugh. In another life, Stephanie might have liked him, but he got on her nerves and there was something about him which freaked her out a bit. Without Stephanie's knowledge, Lucy and Abigail had hatched a plan which was unfolding around Stephanie, right at that moment.

Stephanie noticed the people around her moving subtly to box her in. She noticed the grin on Lucy's face – she was being set up and so was Jake. Without warning, Fury and Charlotte came at Stephanie and Jake, attacking hard. Jake instantly moved onto the defensive, as did Stephanie. They both joined as a team, automatically, without conversation, as was their training. Threats changed and that was something which was hammered into the newest *Predators* during Phase 1 training. Very smoothly, Jake attacked Fury while Stephanie took on Charlotte. There were yells of support from the *Marauders* and from the *Predators* present. Some supported their own, others just supported

whomever they thought might win.

Stephanie fought well, landing several strikes on the older girl who was taller and stronger. Charlotte got her own strikes in, however, much to the enjoyment of the watchers. But Charlotte was tired, and she soon fell prey to Stephanie's underhand tactics as she was tripped and slammed to the floor. Jake managed to get entangled with Fury and they both crashed to the floor with a grinning Jake on top of Fury.

"Do I get a kiss from the magnificent, Fury?" he muttered.

For a moment, Fury did not know what to say, but she was glad that her mask hid her blushes.

"Get your little dick away from me, arsehole!" Fury growled as she kneed the boy in his groin.

There was laughter as the boy rolled around with his hands clutching at his boyhood. Stephanie helped Charlotte back to her feet and she then congratulated the twelve-year-old on her fighting style.

"That was fun," Charlotte admitted. "Thanks, Fury."

"We all like to gang up on Psyche, once in a while," Fury chuckled.

"I can take it – I'm not a pussy like some," Stephanie replied. "Jakey – get up. Stop playing with your dick; it'll be fine. You fought well, Jake – well done."

"Thanks," the boy groaned from the floor.

That afternoon

After lunch, the Marauders were asked to remain at their tables.

Stephanie, Lucy, Shannon, and Marc sat down before them all. Willow had re-joined her compatriots and she was sulking at the back.

"We want to hear what you think," Stephanie began. "Ask us anything you like, and we will do our best to answer your questions. Let's put aside our animosity towards one another for a while, okay? This time is for you guys."

"Who wants to go first?" Shannon asked. "Okay, Jake – go ahead."

"What size bra does Stephanie wear?" Jake asked with a cheeky grin.

"I wear a 30-AA; happy?" Stephanie offered, and Jake stammered a surprised thank you. "That shut *him* up! Any *serious* questions?"

After a rippled of laughter at the pink-faced Jake's expense, the *Marauders* conferred amongst themselves for a few moments before Charlotte Grey stood up.

"What's going to happen to us?"

"I'm sure that is a question on all your minds," Shannon replied. "You will all be rehomed somewhere. You have a choice, all of you. We can find you a family to live with – especially you younger kids. The older kids may not want that, and we can arrange for you to have your own apartment in a secure environment. If you want to leave Chicago, then we can arrange something. All of this depends on when we think you have been suitably reformed. All of you have made significant improvements and some of you are showing remorse for your actions."

"Everything we do to you tells us what is going on in your vivid minds," Lucy explained. "You have all had your privacy taken away and suffered humiliations since you have been here, but it is all for your safety. We don't want anything to happen to any of you. I know you all find it difficult to understand, but we all care. I for one was unsure when I first came to Chicago looking for help. Nobody was happy to see me, and I suffered, but the past is the past, and my time here has been amazing since I came in from the cold. Is till have my skills, but I am now using them for good as opposed to what *Urban Predator* wanted."

"I only kill when I want to," Marc said. "Only those who I think deserve to die, die. If I don't want to fight, I don't want to. But I enjoy having a purpose. I am among friends who care for me. I have adults who guide me and care for me. I have a wonderful girlfriend who loves me."

Shannon blushed furiously.

"I remember you two – at a sex demo," Jay Hilton commented. "You were amazing, Shannon."

Shannon's blush somehow went even redder and there was a lot of laughter.

"All joking aside," Marc went on, "I put my life into the hands of *Fusion*, and they looked after me. I did bad things – ask Wildcat – and so did Sarah, but they welcomed us and they now I have the best life ever."

"Forty of you have been rescued," Stephanie concluded. "We want that number to rise. We still have no idea how many died as part of *Urban Predator*. I saw some die before my very eyes, even as we tried to rescue them. We are not doing this to recruit more into *Fusion*, we are doing this to save the lives of kids who were ripped from their families and put through hell. I know many of you hate me, but you all know that I went through hell and endured pain and humiliation like nobody should ever have to endure. I am only ten-years-old, but I have seen and suffered things that would scare most adults. I know what you have all been through – and I care."

"Thanks for telling us that," Kate Fincham said. "I know that some here would rather break out on their own, but you are all putting your time into helping us, and I for one thank you for that. I hope we don't let you down. I am almost seventeen and I really want to have a life. I want to get married and I want to have a family. If I am in prison, I won't get that. But here, I have a chance, and I won't pass that up."

"Me, too," Charlotte Grey agreed.

"Me, too," Dakota Warlow-Davies added.

"Us, as well," Lin Lau said for her and her sister.

Jesse Dolan, Joel Burnell, and James Todd each added their own comments in agreement. Lucy nodded her acceptance of the comments.

"How long are we going to be here?" Jay Hilton asked.

"As long as it takes," Stephanie replied. "It could be as little as a month, or it could be much longer. We will keep this going as long as necessary to keep you all out of the adult prison system."

"If we do well, what happens?" fourteen-year-old Dylan Page wanted to know.

"If we believe that you are honest in your remorse and that you are not a flight risk, then we may allow you to live outside of this bunker, but under house arrest. Those tags on your ankles will be there for many months until we are one hundred percent convinced that you are safe to join civilised society," Stephanie explained, and she saw many expressions of guilt and shame, but also of desire.

That evening, seven of them would be given a ray of hope.

Training Facility Echo Level 1 – Dining Room

The seven *Marauders* were dumbfounded.

"Where are we?" Dakota asked.

"You are in the dining room for the Fusion Training Facility," Shannon commented.

The space had been cleared and only the seven *Marauders* and the four *Predators* were present. A selection of food was laid out on a table for them.

"Please, dig in," Marc said.

Charlotte Grey, Dakota Warlow-Davies, Kate Fincham, Lin Lau, Xiāngxìn Lau, James Todd, and Jesse Dolan grabbed a plate of food and then they sat down at one of the large tables. Stephanie grabbed her own plate of food before joining them along with Lucy, Shannon, and Marc.

"You seven are the first to be offered hope," Shannon explained. "Should you each stay out of trouble for the next two

weeks, then you will all be allowed to move out of your dungeon and into a house, in the real world. You will get a chance to decide what you want from your lives and we will do what we can to accommodate you. As Stephanie mentioned, earlier, those fashionable accessories on your ankles will remain as a reminder to avoid temptation."

"It is advised that you do not go back to your colleagues and start bragging about this. Keeping quiet may be a good idea," Lucy advised. "However, between now and then, start to think about what you want to do. Do you want a family? Do you want to live in peace as normal people? Do you want to put your skills to use for good? Do you want to stay in Chicago? Four of you are British – do you want to return to the UK? These are all questions that only you, personally, can answer. We will help, and we are here whenever you need us, but we cannot make these decisions for you, beyond providing guidance."

"The most crucial thing here is that *you* are in control of your destiny," Shannon went on. "Only you can decide what happens to your lives from this moment on."

The seven youngsters finished their evening meal with limited chatter as they contemplated what they had been told.

The following day
Sunday, November 20th

Glenview

Dave was happy for Stephanie and Jamie to have some friends over.

Therefore, Lizzie, Leo, Hunter, Tommy, and Abigail had come over for lunch. Dave was a little concerned with having so many youngsters on hand – especially as most were of the unpredictable *Predator* variety. However, after they had consumed a pile of cheeseburgers, they all chatted merrily before the three girls and four boys ran off to change for swimming. Lizzie, being the only female non-*Predator*, was not all that comfortable with stripping before others, despite Stephanie and Abigail pulling off their clothes and then chatting while still naked before they pulled on their costumes. Lizzie was twelve and not all that comfortable with the new bumps and other things that her body had sprouted over the previous year. Unfortunately for Lizzie, the other two girls had noticed.

"I don't know what you are worried about," Abigail commented. "You've got boobs and you've got the beginnings of hair down there – I have nothing!"

Just to make Lizzie even more uncomfortable, Abigail dropped her swimsuit and held out her arms so that Lizzie could see that Abigail had nothing to see. Lizzie grimaced.

"I just feel awkward."

"I'm comfortable with my body," Abigail commented. "I am what I am – Stephanie doesn't care either."

Stephanie's expression said otherwise but she simply shrugged, wondering what Abigail was up to.

"Give me those," Abigail said as she grabbed all three swimsuits, throwing them to one side.

"What are you doing?" Stephanie groaned, having a shrewd idea.

Abigail simply grinned as she then grabbed the hands of the other two girls and pulled them out of Stephanie's room and out onto the landing.

"What are you doing!?" Lizzie exclaimed as she yanked her hand back to cover her bumps while the other hand went between her legs.

"I don't care who sees me naked, and neither does Stephanie. Learn to be comfortable with your body."

Lizzie looked over at Stephanie who seemed anything but uncaring. Stephanie simply shrugged and rolled her eyes. Nonetheless, she grabbed Lizzie's left hand, pulling it away from her chest while Abigail grabbed Lizzie's right hand from lower down. Lizzie moaned as she was walked towards the stairs and then down to the hallway and through into the pool. Dave turned to see their arrival – he groaned.

"Whose clever idea was this?" he asked the three naked girls.

"Not mine," Lizzie replied as she tried to cover herself up.

"You think I'd go naked voluntarily?" Stephanie asked.

Dave just shook his head as Abigail grinned enormously.

"Oh my God!" came a voice and the three girls turned to see the four boys standing a few feet away.

It was Tommy who had spoken, and he was grinning as he checked out each girl in turn before levelling his eyes on Stephanie's chest and then her groin. Hunter seemed transfixed by Lizzie and her own equipment which was on display before his eyes.

"Really, Stephanie?" Jamie groaned.

"This was not thought out very well, Abigail," Stephanie announced as she ran past the wide-eyed boys and scampered up the stairs – Tommy watched her all the way with a hand covering the bulge in his crotch.

Stephanie reappeared a few seconds later, and she threw a swimsuit at Abigail and Lizzie before she pulled on her own. There was a collective groan from the boys as the girls' bodies quickly vanished.

"We had enough of the Full Monty crap?" Dave enquired.

"Yeah," Stephanie growled as she shoved Abigail into the pool.

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About twenty minutes later, Dave noticed that there did not appear to be a lot of swimming going on for Stephanie and Lizzie.

Stephanie was loitering around the middle of the pool with Tommy and they appeared to be kissing and Tommy's hands were not readily visible. The same could be said for Lizzie and Hunter. They had exchanged kisses and then a few more. Lizzie was giggling as they talked, and Lizzie appeared to have her hand in Hunter's groin. Stephanie giggled at random moments as Tommy whispered into her ear. The other kids were happily swimming and playing, although Leo, Abigail, and Jamie were giving the cavorting youngsters a very wide berth . . . as well as some very dirty looks.

Oh well, Dave thought, the kids of today.

That evening

South Chicago

Chloe, Joshua, and Becky were on the way to Safehouse W to pick up Shannon who had been on duty guarding Sunset Phoenix and Chloe would remain overnight.

They were only a few miles away when the cell phones for Chloe and Joshua began to beep. Chloe was driving, so Joshua checked his cell. His face frowned.

"Step on it!" he ordered. "Security breach at Whiskey."

Chloe stamped her foot to the floor and her Mini accelerated hard. A few minutes later, she slammed on the brakes, skidding to a halt in the darkness. The wire-mesh access gate was partially open, indicating a problem. Mindy grabbed a pistol, as did Joshua and Becky. All three moved slowly through the darkness after locking the car, with pistols raised. They found the actual building secure, the main access door closed, however Marty had advised that the access door had been opened and then closed, about two minutes previously. Unfortunately, the Safehouse was designed to keep people out – not in. As they moved through the Safehouse, they found all the watercraft present and accounted for. As they approached the room being used as a cell for their prisoner, they found Shannon lying in the doorway. Shannon was nursing a large bump on the head.

"I don't know how she got out of her restraints – she got the better of me. . ."

Joshua and Chloe dashed off while Becky remained with Shannon, her pistol covering them both. They both returned a few minutes later. Joshua shook his head angrily.

Summer Frasier aka Sunset Phoenix was gone.

*Mindy's trip to Los Angeles is covered in **Chapter 5: D-JAK Heads West** of my other story: **Fusion: Los Angeles**.*

Chapter 359: Night of the Predator

Author's Note: *This chapter follows on from Chapter 52: Steeplechase of my other story: Vengeance.*

Saturday, November 26th, 2016

**Training Facility Echo
Chicago, USA**

"Is this wise?"

"I . . . well, I think so."

"It's like having almost two dozen mini Hit Girls and Hit Boys running about causing chaos," Dave commented dryly.

Mindy laughed as she watched the massed group of *Predators* mingle on the mat. They all wore their 'duty' uniforms. There was a round dozen US *Predators*, with half-a-dozen UK *Predators*. Though there was a fairly even mix of the dark grey uniforms of the *Fusion* members and the dark blue uniforms of the *Vengeance* junior members which included five non-*Predators*.

"You have concerns, though."

"What makes you think that?" Mindy asked.

"Every adult is carrying at least one Taser – you are carrying a pair."

Mindy's cheeks coloured slightly as she muttered a response.

"Nothing wrong with being prepared. . ."

..._...

It was both amazing and very worrying to see so many *Predators* in one place.

Eighteen *Predators* were present – a dangerous number to have in one place, but all had promised to behave. It was also special as two wounded members were out of hospital and while nowhere near operational, at least they were with their friends. It was also a first for one of them. The list of those present was impressive.

Fusion Predators

Stephanie Lizewski AKA Psyche
Saoirse Doherty AKA Foxtail
Lucy Ford AKA Piranha
Shannon Millar AKA Stormtide
Rachel Ascot AKA Ember
Marc Ryan AKA Tempest
Sarah Hampton AKA Discord
Hunter Graves AKA Cut-Throat
James Lizewski AKA Rage
Abigail Wilde AKA Fury
Leo Graves AKA Relentless
Rebecca Wren AKA Scamp

Vengeance Predators

Craig Montgomery AKA Stripe
Harper Sharp AKA Polaris
Naomi Perrin AKA Prowl
Kaitlin Perrin AKA Glide
Electra Haig AKA Rigour
Jordan Hanley AKA Viridian

They were also accompanied by the *non-Predators* from *Vengeance*:

HRH Princess Mary AKA Belle
Jeremy Lai AKA Harrier
Olivia Kensington AKA Ajax
Jessica Kensington AKA Overrun
Christopher Collins AKA Forager

And the long-suffering *Vengeance* adults:

Cassie Perrin AKA Nemesis
Keira Sharp AKA Scorpion
Trevor Lai AKA Raptor

And of course:

Ginny Turner AKA Minder

All told, the two organisations, combined, were seventy strong – a formidable force for fighting evil across the globe.

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For Jordan Hanley, it was all a bit of a shock.

While the attention was great – and he had a temporary family – finding himself thrust into a famous, but clandestine, organisation was something he still needed to get used to. He was also not alone in being more than a little concerned to be meeting Hit Girl and Kick-Ass. He had noticed Overrun and Ajax positively fangirling over Hit Girl which was amusing. Meeting Kick-Ass had been amazing and as for Shadow – damn!

Lunch was - well – it was rowdy. *Vengeance* was joined by most of *Fusion* which just added to the increasingly rowdy behaviour. Wildcat, Fury, Nightmare, Hellcat, and Ajax were all competing for who could be the most unladylike when it came to deepthroating a hotdog.

"Ajax has been practicing that with Stripe," Overrun pointed out.

"Wildcat enjoys deepthroating Trojan," Foxtail threw in as she added two more embarrassed faces to those of Ajax and Stripe.

For the boys, it was who could burp the longest and the loudest – much to Shadow's annoyance, Jackal won that. Even the adults were getting in on the fun as Hit Girl tried to see how many cheeseburgers she could Taser from her own seat. That ended after the third cheeseburger turned out to be Rogue's left hand – Hit Girl apologised to her infuriated daughter once she had reloaded her Taser and Rogue had stopped shaking long enough. Scamp – being a scamp – was enjoying causing trouble along with her new friend, Glide.

It was Nemesis who first noticed that her youngest charge was not visible amongst the thirty-odd people present. Then Shadow sidled up to the Brit.

"You seen my Scamp?" she asked.

"You seen my Glide?" Nemesis countered.

"Two eight-year-old *Predators* are missing, huh?" Shadow contemplated as her eyes scanned the dining room before narrowing. "I spy two little bitches about to get themselves into trouble."

Nemesis followed Shadow's gaze and she chuckled.

..._...

It had been Scamp's idea – maybe she was showing off to her new friend from the UK, or maybe she was just having some fun, either way, she knew that she was in trouble.

Glide, on the other hand, she was enjoying herself and any excuse to cause trouble just had to be taken – she liked Scamp, a fellow Brit; she was fun. The pair of them had snuck into the armoury and made a small withdrawal with the help of Shadow's ID card which Scamp had lifted, and then returned. They were a pair of training flash-bang

grenades which the two girls were intending on rolling underneath the dining tables – just for some explosive fun, of course. However, what the pair did not know was that the grenades were special and multifunctional for training use. They also had no idea that they were capable of being remote-controlled. Therefore, Shadow made a swift call to Battle Guy who was able to identify the grenades which the two girls had just activated. With a swift command, he switched them from 'flash-bang' to 'electro-shock' and triggered them both at a command from Shadow.

Many eyes turned to check out the left-hand corridor from where there were two screams as Glide and Scamp fell to the dining room floor, twitching from the low-level electric shocks.

..._...

"Okay!" Hit Girl called out. "While those two little shits finish their twitching, Scorpion and Nemesis have some announcements to make."

There was laughter as Glide and Scamp gingerly regained their seats, looking thoroughly miserable. Scamp received a hard slap on her backside from Shadow and an expression which promised so much more later on. Glide kept her head down and remained out of reach of any adult.

"Polaris," Scorpion began, "it is very good to have you with us again, and I am very glad to be back with *Vengeance*. I enjoy wearing this uniform and I am extremely proud to represent the very best that the UK has to offer. Now, back to Polaris. You, young lady, should not be in that uniform; you are no longer our Senior Trainee Operator."

Polaris' bubble of happiness suddenly popped, and she looked very worried, but then she saw the evil smirk on her sister's face.

"You should be wearing these. . ."

Scorpion held out a fresh *Vengeance* epaulette bearing two pips rather than the single pip of Polaris' current rank. Polaris' grin grew enormously as tremendous applause rang out. With uncharacteristic slowness, Polaris rose to her feet and she made for her sister. Scorpion made no attempt to make her sister's route shorter; she knew that the youngster would not thank her for it. The nine-year-old was forcing down the pain as she braced up before her big sister, standing at attention while her rank was switched out and she was presented with her new *Vengeance* ID card.

"Congratulations, Junior Operator Polaris!" Scorpion announced amid more applause and raucous noise.

Polaris took her time returning to her seat, feeling happier than she had been in weeks.

..._...

Once the shouting and applause had died down, Scorpion then looked over at the two relative newcomers.

"Belle and Rigour – get your sorry behinds up here!" Scorpion ordered.

There was more cheering as the two girls stepped forward, Belle blushing furiously at all the attention, not that Rigour was less pink in the face.

"Rigour, in recognition of your actions while *Vengeance* was on the run, and especially for your actions above and beyond when it came to protecting one of those silly Royal Princesses," Belle grimaced as she recognised the sarcastic laugh of her protector, "we have decided it right to promote you to Senior Trainee Operator. As the person whose life was saved, would you like to complete the promotion, Your Royal Highness?"

Belle blushed furiously as she took the rank slide and she fitted it to the grinning Rigour's uniform amid huge applause which took a while to calm down – Psyche was the loudest when it came to the cheering for her friend.

"Rigour – would you please return the favour for Belle – our newest Trainee Operator," Scorpion directed as she held out another rank strap with a single stripe.

Belle brought herself to attention and she struggled to contain her grin as the rank was fitted and she suddenly felt very different.

..._...

For Her Royal Highness Princess Mary AKA Belle, it had been the most fantastic trip.

It had almost taken an act of God to actually allow her, a Royal Princess, to visit the United States of America, in total secrecy as her alter ego. As she understood it, her Grandmother had intervened and authorised the trip. She was so happy to be back amongst those she called true friends. They had all fought side-by-side, quite literally, in every sense of the phrase. When on the plane, Mary had looked over at Olivia and with a grimace, she had remembered the teenager, cuffed, hooded, and naked. She could remember giving the restrained girl, who was her own age, stern orders – she felt sad for the girl, but Olivia appeared to have overcome. After reaching Chicago, the drive had been amazing – she had never been to 'the windy city', before. Then had come the rabbit hole. She had felt like Alice as she had quite literally vanished dozens of feet beneath the city into a subterranean wonderland full of vigilantes. It was a place that she had only ever visited in her dreams and even her wildest dreams had been nothing like what she had experienced. If 'Fort Fusion' was amazing – it was nothing compared to the massive facility next door.

Mary herself would readily admit that it took something really amazing to have her lost for words – but there she was, lost for words as they had toured the massive facility. She had barely said a word in over the space of forty minutes. She had finally regained her ability to speak during their meal. While *Vengeance* was very familiar with the Princess in their midst, the Americans saw her as something special. Apparently, Americans loved everything about royalty and to have a Royal Princess before them was amazing. Or as Splinter had put it: 'She's a real princess and she packs a pistol – there is nothing sexier and I am damn hard at the thought – eat your heart out Princess Leia!' Mary had not known where to put her face at that moment, but she had enjoyed the comment – sort of . . . ewww! Everybody was so friendly but a part of her showed concern for how many there were who had suffered as *Predators*. She had no idea of their stories, nor the stories of the other members of *Fusion*, but she was certain that those stories would not be pretty.

The confirmation of her status as a member of *Vengeance* along with the ID card with 'BELLE' printed on it had been amazing, not to mention being able to reward the long-suffering Electra – the poor girl was still very sore where the bullets had struck. After her promotion, she was welcomed back amongst her friends and congratulated by everybody. She felt like she only felt when she was with *Vengeance*. All the Pomp and Circumstance of her life suddenly vanished, and she was a normal human-being enjoying the camaraderie of her friends. It was a feeling that she relished and one which she had missed while she had been back at school.

At least having Electra with her was a bonus – they could talk about things that only they were privy to.

..._...

"Okay, people," Nemesis called out. "We have a surprise for all you wretched, badly-behaved. . ."

"Don't forget: foul-mouthed, precocious, infuriating, tiresome, irksome. . ." Hit Girl cut in.

"You swallowed a dictionary, Mummy?" Psyche interrupted.

". . .Disagreeable, antagonistic, and downright vexatious," Hit Girl finished to applause from all the adults present and some of the non-*Predators*.

"All good," Nemesis grinned as she received nasty scowls from Prowl and Glide. "Now – as I was saying; we have a surprise for you petulant little rats. Hit Girl has deigned to take you little buggers out for a night on the town. . ."

Nemesis was interrupted by a roar of approval. Scorpion had seen her sister's face drop like a lead balloon at the pronouncement.

"You, young lady, will be in the Command Centre with Foxtail. I want you to learn how to command. I understand that Psyche spent several weeks 'commanding the troops', so to speak, after her incarceration in hospital. You think you can do that?"

Polaris smiled.

"I know you want to be out there, but I'm sorry – no fucking way!"

"It's okay, sis – I understand," Polaris said as she pulled her sister down for a hug.

..._...

"Do you think I am fucking stupid?"

Belle backed down as Hit Girl glared at her.

"No."

"Do you really think that I would allow a Royal Princess of the Realm to prance about Chicago with every chance of said Princess getting hurt? I have no desire to spend the rest of my sorry life in the Tower of London!"

"They don't put people in the. . ." Belle began.

"What are you in line to the throne?" Hit Girl went on.

"Twelfth."

"I know who your Grandmother is, and I know that she would not think twice about ordering an invasion of the United States of America to rescue her granddaughter or to capture Hit Girl and imprison her as a traitor to the Crown!"

Belle gave up.

"Okay."

"But, if you are a good little Princess, then you can ride shotgun in *Critter*."

"*Critter*?"

That Afternoon

Safehouse E Level 8 – Detention Level

Stormtide pushed open the door to the female accommodation and yelled a name.

"Here!" Charlotte Grey announced as she appeared seconds later.

Stormtide grinned at the eager-looking twelve-year-old. The girl was always punctual and never caused a moment's trouble. Stormtide knew that the girl had suffered at the hands of Fury, but that was in the past – sort of.

"Time for you to see the Doc."

"Stormtide – could you find out if Fury is about, please?"

Stormtide nodded, knowing that they were friends.

"Fury, Stormtide; you got your ears on?"

"*Stormy!*" came the response a few seconds later.

"Don't call me that!" Stormtide hissed, angrily, ignoring the laughter in her earpiece. "I'm taking your friend to see the Doc – she requests your attendance."

"*I'll meet you there.*"

..._...

"Hi, Charlotte."

"Thanks for coming, Fury."

"I'll leave her in your custody," Stormtide said.

"No problem – and thanks," Fury replied as she knocked and then pushed open the door into Surgeon's office.

After a ten-minute examination of Charlotte's wounds and a general check of her physical health, the girl redressed.

"The wounds are looking good, Charlotte," Surgeon advised as Fury looked down at the floor.

"Look, Fury – if you keep thinking you are to blame, then I will break my streak of perfect behaviour just to kick your

arse," Charlotte growled.

"Don't mind me – I won't tell," Surgeon chuckled to Charlotte.

Fury pulled off her mask – she had hoped to hide her expressions with it.

"Okay – I won't say another word about it."

"Now, Charlotte," Surgeon said to get things back on track. "Should you be allowed to leave here, where do you see yourself ending up? What do you want from life?"

After only a few second's thought, Charlotte smiled.

"I want to go home. I want to return to England. I don't belong here, and the United States has too many bad memories for me. I want to be amongst my own kind – Brits. I'm sorry, Abigail, but I don't belong here."

"Okay," Surgeon responded. "Where in England? You are too young to go it alone – would you want a family?"

"Yes. I want people who care about me. I want to have a childhood – I'm only twelve, so I have a long way to go and time to enjoy being a child again. However, . . ."

"You have an urge – an itch. You want to hurt somebody. You want to hit something. You feel the urge to run, to kick, to scream. You punch the pillows. You punch the mattress. Then you punch the doors. You escalate. You need an outlet for that feeling inside of you that surges up," Abigail offered quietly.

Surgeon looked at Abigail and Charlotte nodded.

"I want to join *Vengeance* – if they'd have me."

Abigail mulled that one over.

"You think you're good enough?" Abigail asked, knowing the answer.

"I am as good as you, Fury, probably better."

"I did put you down," Abigail pointed out with a slightly pained expression.

"I was having a bad day," was Charlotte's excuse.

"Any excuse is better than none, I suppose," Abigail laughed.

..._...

Surgeon finished off updating her patient notes after the pair of giggling girls had left her office.

Then there came a knock on the door. In came Stormtide with Dakota Warlow-Davies. Stormtide had to stay – she hated it; seeing another girl undergoing a medical examination was not exactly fun. However, it was brief as Dakota was in perfect health with nothing more than fading bruises on her skin.

"Now, Dakota," Surgeon said to the girl. "Should you be allowed to leave here, where do you see yourself ending up? What do you want from life?"

Dakota mulled that over for a bit.

"I don't belong in the US – I hate it, to be honest. No offence, Stormtide, and nothing against you Americans."

"No offence taken, Dakota," Stormtide replied with a grin.

"Can I go back to the UK?"

"That is certainly possible," Surgeon advised. "Anywhere in particular? You are still a little too young to go it alone – would you want a family, maybe?"

"I suppose. It would be nice not to be alone all the time."

"We can find something for you. We'll do everything we can, I promise you that."

"Thanks, Doc."

"Keep up the good behaviour, Dakota; you are doing really well."

The fourteen-year-old beamed as she stood up.

..._...

"You're not a bad person, Dakota," Stormtide said in support as they walked back to the *Marauder* accommodation.

"You're a good person, Shannon – you always were," Dakota replied. "I'm sorry about what happened to you – it sucked. I always liked your Dad; he was kind to us – is he okay?"

"He is, thanks for asking," Shannon replied.

"Stormtide – am I going to survive this, really?"

"Yes. You keep your nose clean and you'll be out of here. Just because you were a *Predator* does not mean that you are a bad person. You made a stupid decision and became a *Marauder*, but that is not you, Dakota."

"Thank you for talking to me – stay safe, Shannon."

"You too, Dakota."

That evening

The Battle Bunker

It was a new experience for Polaris.

Normally, she was in the thick of the action, but not while she was so fragile that a two-year-old could put her down, permanently. It was not a nice feeling being so vulnerable, but events had taken their course and there was nothing that she could do to change things. The same applied to Foxtail, to a certain extent. The girl was hurting, that was evident, but she was also just as immobile as Polaris was. Neither girl had really spent much time taking in what went on behind the scenes. Foxtail had received command training during her Phase 3 training. For Polaris, she knew little about actual command, but she knew the basics. There was another *Predator* who appeared to be allocated to the Command Centre – Ember. Between Hal and Ember, Polaris and Foxtail were shown the key systems and how to monitor the teams who were going out. Battle Guy kept overall watch as they were going to have a lot of people out on the streets of Chicago.

On the monitors, CCTV images showed the teams preparing equipment and themselves for the night out.

Training Facility Echo Level 2

There was one amongst them who was struggling to prepare herself.

It appeared that Olivia was getting her own back on the girl – or so it seemed. Olivia, Harper, and Mary were in one of the cabins with the door firmly locked. Mary was standing naked before both girls and feeling more than a little stupid. Olivia was smirking, and it had occurred to the girl that the tables had turned.

"Put these on," Harper insisted. "You look ridiculous!"

Mary happily took the black boy-shorts and black sports bra from the smirking nine-year-old and she quickly pulled them on, regaining a smidgen of dignity. Arrayed on the bed beside Harper was a pile of garments in various yellow hues. Next, Mary was handed a two-part under-suit. She pulled on the bottoms which came to her waist and included 'feet'. The top pulled on just like a jacket, although the zipper ran from bottom left to top right. Both sections were a dark grey in colour and made of a soft material which cocooned Mary's body as well as providing basic armour protection for her body – a first layer if you will. Next, there came actual body armour which felt slinky to the touch but was also very light. Each section clipped onto the under-suit and interconnected with the next section forming a

complete covering for the thirteen-year-old's body. The body armour had a dull yellow hue with a gold trim accentuating Mary's developing curves. A pair of armoured gauntlets protected her hands and came partway up her wrists and secured to the lower arm body armour. The gauntlets were black with medium yellow and gold highlights. On her feet, she gained a pair of lightweight, armoured boots which were the same dull yellow as her body armour and which came up past her calves.

Around her waist, a utility belt in medium yellow carried communications, spare magazines, and various other accoutrements. Hanging from the utility belt, and strapped to her right thigh, there was a holster for her Glock 26 Gen4 pistol. On her left thigh, were mounts for a pair of Nanchuka. Each boot carried a mounting for her Tonfa on the outside. Also attached to the utility belt was a yellow and black mini-kilt. On top of the ensemble, a lightweight, calf-length coat with a high collar was pulled on. The coat was black on the outer, with a canary yellow trim. On the inner-side, the reversible coat was a canary yellow. The coat was also bullet-proof and flame retardant. There was one thing missing, Mary thought, until Olivia revealed an all in one mask and wig. The wig was of dark brown hair which hung in a single pony tail, reaching to the middle of Mary's back. The mask completely covered her hair and face. Around the eyes and the bridge of her nose, a gold masquerade ball mask with black highlights gave her a look of menace. The eyes glowed yellow in varying intensities. Harper handed Mary her pistol, Nanchuka, and Tonfas. Each was checked and placed securely in their mountings.

Belle was complete.

Safehouse D

Belle was amazed as she came face-to-face with *CRITTER*.

It was black – matte black – and it had massive tyres providing enormous ground clearance. The vehicle was over 6-metres long and 2.5-metres wide. It weighed in at almost nine tonnes and was armoured to resist armour-piercing rounds of up to 7.62-millimetre calibre. It had the highest armour rating available for standard vehicles – the next level up was basically a fucking tank. There was seating for five, including the driver – six at a pinch. The rear load bay was open and there was a roof hatch. Multiple lights adorned the roof above the windshield.

Belle jumped as the massive 6.8-litre V8 turbo diesel rumbled to life, revving as it produced over three-hundred horsepower, ready to thrust the giant vehicle into action.

"Get in!" Kick-Ass directed as he opened the front passenger door for Belle. "We don't stand on ceremony here, Princess!"

As she climbed into the leather seat, she looked behind her to see three of her friends: Prowl, Glide, and Rigour. They were each strapped in and ready to go, all in their body armour and fully armed.

"Maybe we should have got this in pink!" Kick-Ass complained sarcastically as he surveyed his female cargo.

"It would look really cool," Glide confirmed.

Kick-Ass growled as he shifted the vehicle into gear.

..._...

A few yards away was *IRON HIDE*.

Piranha gunned the huge engine as she slipped the transmission into Drive – it was her first time driving the giant pickup truck, but she was up to the task. Beside her, Stripe sat watching out the armoured windshield, excited for what lay in wait for them. In the rear seats, a happy Psyche, an apprehensive Viridian, and a pensive Tempest sat awaiting their imminent fates on the streets of Chicago. The fully refurbished *TITAN* was being driven by Lynx who, for some reason, wanted some action. She was joined by Stormtide in the passenger seat beside her, and then by Surgeon, Discord, Cut-Throat, and Relentless in the back. The balance of *Vengeance* piled into a virtual twin to *TITAN*, another Pit Bull VX which was known as *HERCULES*. That vehicle was being driven by Raptor with Minder beside him. They were joined by Ajax, Overrun, Harrier, and Forager.

As everybody signalled their readiness, Battle Guy checked everybody off, before issuing the final order: "*Predators – roll out!*"

With a roar, the vehicles departed Safehouse D.

..._...

As the convoy of four heavy vehicles took a left onto South California Avenue, they were joined by five motorcycles and the final pair of *Predators*.

Hit Girl on her Ducati Superbike 1199 Panigale R, with Rage riding behind her, raced past. She was followed by Scorpion, on a borrowed Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R – actually borrowed from Jackal who rode his Triumph Tiger 800 XCA motorcycle. Alongside Jackal, was Shadow on her Ducati Superbike 899 Panigale with Scamp clamped around her waist. The final machine was Shadow's Suzuki V-Strom 1000 ABS being ridden by Nemesis with Fury behind her.

The motorcade headed north for the industrial zone to the east of Douglas Park.

..._...

Hit Girl, being Hit Girl, had decided not to leave anything to chance.

She wanted the *Predators* to 'have some fun' and be able to 'kick some ass' without having to hunt for some cunt hiding down a darkened back alleyway. As such, she had paid a visit to Worm who had 'arranged' for some low life scum to be 'available' by spreading a rumour, via an untrustworthy third-party to keep himself out of trouble, of course. The rumour? Drugs, money . . . whatever was necessary to get the cunts out of the woodwork and onto the streets around Douglas Park.

Hit Girl had asked for a 'target-rich' environment, and that was what she was going to get.

Western and 16th Street

The metal-clad building was 500-feet long and currently occupied by eight men.

Those eight men were busy preparing the night's cache of drugs. They hoped to make a killing, figuratively, at least. As far as they were concerned, the building was secure, and nobody knew that they were there.

The boss – Jay – looked around for his lieutenant.

"Hey! Where's Frank?"

"He went out back, I think."

"Well, go find the fucker!"

One of the men vanished to find Frank. The man was back a few seconds later – his face full of fear.

"Run!" he yelled, just as the entire side of the building exploded inwards and the rear of an armoured vehicle suddenly appeared a few feet from Jay.

The rear hatch burst open and four armour-clad individuals leapt out. Jay was not stupid – he knew that he was the proverbial 'dead man walking'. However, it was not a *Fusion* vigilante which took him down, it was another armoured vehicle smashing through the wall a few yards down the building and quite literally squishing Jay against a steel pillar.

"Sorry!" Lynx yelled out.

"*You are fucking cleaning that when we get back!*" Stormtide growled as she stared at the red mush on her side of the windshield. "I'm not fucking touching it!"

"Just get the fuck out there, Stormy!" Lynx growled.

The fourteen-year-old assassin scowled behind her mask, but she dutifully jumped out of her seat and ran towards the rear door.

"Move you little assholes!" she growled at Relentless and Cut-Throat.

Stormtide, the two boys, and Discord jumped out of *TITAN* and they joined their *Vengeance* colleagues from *HERCULES* as they all attacked the drug dealers.

The Battle Bunker

For young Polaris, it was a viewpoint which she had never seen.

She was on the sidelines, which she hated, but she was professional enough to know that she had no choice. However, she was amazed by everything which went on behind the scenes to coordinate the attacks and to keep the vigilantes safe. While Polaris, like the other operators, saw the likes of Eric, Abby, and Marty as uber-geeks and at times unworthy of being acknowledged as equals, her mindset was permanently changed as she saw with her own eyes how crucial their technical support was to ongoing operations. Her mind also drifted for a few moments and told her that if *Vengeance* had had that kind of support while they had been on the run, then so many things might have been different. She took a moment to study her bandaged left hand and she winced at the painful memories attached to those injuries. They had lost their technical support and they had paid dearly for it.

"You okay?"

Polaris looked up into the surprisingly caring eyes of Foxtail. The paths of the two *Predators* had crossed a few times in the past, but neither had spoken – the *Urban Predator* hierarchy had forbidden it at the time.

"Just some painful thoughts," Polaris admitted.

"Tell me about it," Foxtail grimaced.

Both girls went back to watching Hal, Battle Guy, and Ember as they each controlled a sector of the fighting.

Western and 16th Street

"Okay – this looks like fun," Kick-Ass commented from *CRITTER*.

"It does?" Belle queried as she watched four large black SUVs pull up and each vehicle divulged four rather large men.

"I think Worm's invitations went a little bit viral," he added dryly.

"Can we go kick some arse?" Rigour asked.

"*Iron Hide* – let's deploy," Kick-Ass directed, and he ignored the cheers from behind him. "And you, Belle – you stay in car."

"Woof!" Belle responded despondently as everybody dashed towards the fight.

Belle watched as Hit Girl skidded to a halt a few yards off. Rage jumped off the motorcycle and he dived into the fight. Hit Girl followed seconds later while Scorpion raced past as she went after a runner. Jackal and Shadow dived into the action as the sixteen recent arrivals found the tables turned on them in rather a spectacular fashion. Belle thought that Scamp looked very sweet as the little girl fought men more than twice her size, width, strength etc. Amazingly, she fought very well, wielding a short double-ended bō-staff with wicked blades at each end. She had never seen such fighting, nor so much blood as Scamp emptied the abdominal cavity of a man before stabbing him in the chest and probably chopping his heart in two. She was amazed by the teamwork as the vigilantes fought alongside one another with no distinction between the British and American vigilantes.

However, as she scanned the fighters, she saw two missing.

..._...

A significant distance away from the action, Nemesis and Fury observed the fighting from a raised vantage point.

As they watched, they saw two men bug out of the long building and race through the darkness on foot, heading directly for them. Nemesis and Fury dismounted from their motorcycle and removed their helmets.

"You ready for this?" Nemesis asked.

"I am," Fury replied confidently.

Fury had insisted on riding with Nemesis. Part of Abigail would always be British, and she would forever be grateful

for everything which Cassie had done for her after she had been recovered by *Vengeance*. As such, she remained at Nemesis' side as they both took cover behind an empty railroad container flat-car. The two men came closer and it was obvious that both were armed. It was also very obvious that neither one of them expected to be attacked, considering that they were almost three-hundred yards from the intensive and bloody fighting.

"Evening, gentlemen – have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight?"

Both men started as a shape stepped out into the pale moonlight wearing a combat suit which was full body and, as far as the two men could see, no skin was visible although they could both see some ample feminine curves which were very obvious through the armour. The man took in the pistol on her right thigh, the 18-inch Tanto on the outer side of her left boot, and the 42-inch Katana Saya angled over to her right shoulder.

"Hey, honey," the first man drawled. "You might not be the best at math, but there are two of us and just one of you."

Nemesis chuckled.

"Well, in that case, say hello to my little friend."

Another shape appeared to stand beside the first. The frame was slim but was covered from head to toe in flexible body armour. She too bore a pistol on her right hip but her primary weapon was a double-ended bō-staff.

"What's with the kid?" the second man asked.

"The kid, really?" the kid demanded.

"You're a short girl," the man pointed out helpfully.

"Short!" Fury growled.

With a flurry of activity, Fury span and twirled before coming back to face the man. The man's smirk had vanished, and he found himself lying on the ballast beside the railroad tracks.

"Now, I think you're a damn sight shorter than me!" Fury pointed out. "You might want to get somebody to look at those wounds."

The man barely had time to register his own severed legs lying beside him before he passed out from the blood loss. The first man never had a chance to react to the dismemberment of his partner as he shuddered violently. He looked down to see the hilt of a Tanto extending out from his chest. Nemesis watched without emotion as the man sank to the railroad tracks beside his colleague.

Both turned at the sound of running feet coming from behind them.

..._...

During the fighting, Hit Girl glanced over towards *CRITTER* – then she looked closer and her eyes registered the empty front passenger seat.

"Where the hell is Belle!" Hit Girl exclaimed.

Kick-Ass quickly drove his fist into a man's face before looking around, his towering bulk giving him a look over the heads of most of those present. His eyes focussed on a running form a few hundred yards distant. He pointed.

"Fucking bitch!" Hit Girl growled before adding rhetorically. "What do they call it when you kill royalty?"

"That would be regicide," Scamp called out as she scampered past. "Read it somewhere. . ." she yelled over her shoulder.

Hit Girl shook her head and chuckled as she bolted for *CRITTER*.

..._...

Four men were heading up the slight incline towards the railroad tracks.

Neither vigilante flinched as they brandished their weapons and ran directly at the men. Nemesis raised her Katana while Fury had her double-ended bō-staff. The men were large and they each produced wicked-looking machetes. It

was two-on-one – not very sporting, but neither girl flinched as they fought. Steel clashed on steel and the men realised that despite the two female vigilantes having limited statures, they were no pushovers. However, Nemesis was fighting three of the men while Fury was facing one. The man attacking Fury was strong, and Fury was struggling against his heavy strikes which pushed her away from Nemesis. The man was intending on using his strength to defeat the slight vigilante before him. Fury span and she used every trick she knew to get ahead of the machete-wielding arsehole.

Nemesis was keeping them at bay with her sword, but it was hard work and energy-sapping to be constantly aware of her three attackers and where they were in relation to herself. The first fell to a strike in the abdomen, spilling his guts. One of his colleagues slipped on the squishy, bloody intestines and fell to one knee. He never regained his feet as his head sailed through the air. The fight was rapidly one-on-one, but Nemesis could see that Fury was struggling against her own attacker and that she would need help – and soon. Fury was holding out and she knew that Nemesis would come to help her in due course, but then Fate intervened as Fury tripped on a steel rail and she fell down, catching herself, but not before her attacker closed and he brought his machete down towards her chest.

Fury brought her bō-staff up, but she knew that it would not be in time.

..._...

Hit Girl raced towards the railroad.

She could see a fight underway and she recognised Nemesis and Fury fighting. Then, the veteran vigilante got the shock of her life as a severed head bounced off the hood directly ahead of her and bounced off into the darkness. Then she saw a form down on one knee – shit, Belle was hurt! Then there was a double flash and the double crack as two bullets were fired off. Belle was not injured, she was taking up a stable position from which to fire off aimed shots. Hit Girl saw a man about to slice and dice Fury with his machete, but then he faltered as two bullets entered his chest cavity, tearing apart his windpipe and his heart. Blood gurgled from his mouth as he fell atop Fury. At almost the same moment, the distraction of the pistol shots had allowed Nemesis to drive her katana into the stomach of her opponent. He sank to his knees, his face grimacing with the pain. Nemesis drew her Tanto and she drove the blade deep into the man's chest. As she withdrew both blades, the man was dead before he hit the ground.

"You two okay?" Belle asked as Fury shoved the dead body off of her, so she could stand.

Nemesis nodded as did Fury.

"They're fine," Hit Girl growled. "However, *you* are not!"

Belle gulped involuntarily.

..._...

As everybody remounted the vehicles, Stripe and Ajax were dragged off and shoved into the newly arrived *BRUTE* being driven by Leon.

"What's happening?" Ajax demanded.

"We need you and lover-boy," Leon responded, somewhat cryptically. "Get changed!"

Stripe and Ajax exchanged a worried look as they were each handed a bag containing their own normal clothing.

West Grand Avenue and North Sacramento Avenue

"You want me to do *what!*?" Olivia demanded, astounded by the very suggestion of what she was being asked to do.

"It's not like you haven't been seen naked before," Craig pointed out.

"True, but that was with friends – which actually made it worse, in hindsight – and just because every member of *Vengeance* knows what I have between my legs does not mean that I want all of Chicago to know!"

Mathilda laughed at Olivia's indignation at the task she had been saddled with. Then Mathilda tapped her watch, indicating that it was time to go. Olivia groaned as she pushed open the door and stepped out into the alleyway. Without being told, she began sliding her jeans down her shapely legs, followed by her knickers.

Craig just grinned as he followed suit.

Safehouse E

The two girls were very unnerved by their situation.

Without any warning, they had been ordered to dress in warm clothing – joggers and a sweatshirt – and then they were led through the maze-like concrete structure which incarcerated them and finally, after taking various staircases, they had emerged into a large warehouse-type structure. There, they were handed off by Petra to a man that they both recognised. Though Charlotte had never met the man, Dakota had, and both knew that he was trustworthy and on their side.

"Hello, Dakota, it's good to see well," Patrick Millar grinned.

"Hello, Instructor."

"Call me Patrick, please."

"You're Shannon's Dad?" Charlotte asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Why are we here?" Dakota asked.

"We're going for a ride – mount up."

The two girls were waved into an ordinary-looking Jeep SUV with tinted windows.

West Grand Avenue and North Sacramento Avenue

Thirty minutes later, Patrick pulled over and he turned to the two confused young girls in the backseat.

"You two stay here," Patrick announced as he jumped out and ran off down the street.

"What the . . .?" Dakota asked no one in particular.

Both girls sat in their seats and they looked around, taking in their surroundings, their Predator training taking over as they monitored anything and everything. Dakota saw it first, a movement in the alleyway adjacent to them. She pointed it out to her friend.

"We were told not to leave the car, 'kota."

"Yes . . . but are we really going to let something so heinous happen before our very eyes?" Dakota responded.

"We can't, I agree . . . but . . ."

"Well, I'm going to help," Dakota said as she slipped out of the SUV.

"For fuck's sake!" Charlotte growled as she quickly followed.

..._...

The girl began screaming as she was shoved against the wall of a building.

Her jeans and underwear were around her ankles and her top had been raised to expose a bare pair of breasts. Those same breasts were being manhandled by a youth, who also had his jeans and underwear around his ankles. His dick was sticking out and it was very close to the pubic hair of the girl who fought him off with decreasing vigour. Neither saw the two girls racing down the alleyway at top speed and both were very shocked as the boy was attacked without warning. The almost naked girl could only stare in amazement as her boyfriend found himself thrown to the ground and then kicked into submission, all with his dick out and waving around. However, Craig was not going down without a fight, and he used all his strength to push both girls off him and haul up his trousers. Once he was no longer impeded by his trousers, he bolted off into the darkness.

By the time Dakota and Charlotte turned to the girl, she was struggling to cover herself by pulling down her top and trying to pull up her trousers. Charlotte knelt down, and she assisted Olivia with her trousers. Olivia was doing everything she could not to laugh, but she played her part to the best of her ability as she allowed the younger girl to help her dress. In her mind, she hoped that Craig was okay. Once she was decent, she muttered her thanks to her 'saviours' and then bolted in the same direction as Craig while the two girls returned to the Jeep and climbed back in.

A few moments later, Patrick reappeared, and he climbed back into his seat.

"Hi, girls – all okay?" he asked with a grin.

"Yeah – kind of weird," Dakota commented.

"You think?" Charlotte added.

Training Facility Echo

It had been a very successful evening, and all had returned safely to the Safehouse.

Everybody vanished to change and shower. Abigail had sought out Mary, but the Princess was not readily visible. After asking around, Olivia waved for Abigail and she pointed into the showers. A miserable-looking Mary was huddled in a corner where it was steamy with the hot water streaming down. Olivia wondered what was wrong with her friend as she sat down to one side, with Abigail on the other.

"Hi," Olivia said. "Penny for your thoughts."

"I fucked up," Belle admitted.

"You saved my life," Abigail pointed out.

"But you broke the bloody rules, Mary!" Electra growled as she sat down to join the group. "Mindy told me what you did, and I am just as angry as she is."

Abigail scowled at the sight of Electra naked – the scars scared her.

"What happened?" Olivia asked.

"The Princess was told to remain in *Critter*, but she ran off to fight," Electra elaborated.

"That was stupid, Mary," Olivia admitted.

"What is she going to do to me?" Mary asked dejectedly.

"Well, technically, you are *Vengeance*, so Mindy will leave punishment to Cameron and Natasha, back home," Electra stated.

..._...

After a light supper of sandwiches and some hot chocolate, everybody went to bed.

That was not so easy with a couple dozen *Predators*, but they eventually calmed down after a few threats from Dave and Mindy. Keira was left to prowl the cabins and ensure that the giggling youngsters kept out of any major trouble. After half an hour, Mindy, Cassie, and Ginny slipped into the cabin where Mary, Electra, Saoirse, and Stephanie were staying.

"Mary, would you please come with us?" Ginny asked.

Mary looked thoroughly miserable as she slipped out from under her duvet and followed the three women. They walked around the server facility's concrete edifice and into the recreational area.

"Shannon, Mark – go fuck somewhere else!" Mindy barked and the two kids rapidly unravelled and vanished just as quickly. "Mary, sit down."

"What the blood hell did you think you were doing?" Ginny roared at the girl. "Did you stop to think for even one damn second?"

"Did you stop for one moment to think of the consequences of your actions, Mary, or was this just the self-centred Princess coming to the fore," Cassie continued. "You could have been hurt, or even killed! Is your memory so short, that you forgot about what happened to Harper? She was highly skilled, better than you, but she got taken. Could you have prevented yourself from being taken? WELL?"

Mary was shaking as she stammered out excuses.

"I saw those men going towards you and Abigail. I wanted to help."

"You could have called it in," Mindy said. "Maybe I would have let you go up there – but with escort. We shall never know now. You have let me down, Mary. You have let everybody down. I have discussed this with Cassie, and she will speak with Cameron and Natasha to discuss your punishment. Unless of course, you want to kick *Vengeance* into touch. . ."

"No! Never!" Mary blurted through her tears.

"Your punishment will be difficult. Your punishment will be painful. You will suffer embarrassment, but I am certain that you will pull through as a better person. You are a tough young lady and your friends will help you through this," Mindy explained.

"I am really sorry . . . I . . ."

"We all make mistakes," Ginny said calmly. "But while you had good intentions, you potentially put many people at risk. You helped save Abigail from serious injury, and I know that she is grateful for that, but that does not excuse you from what you did."

"I'm sorry and I will take my punishment."

"Go to bed, please," Ginny directed. "You can enjoy the rest of your visit here, and we will talk about this again when we get back to blighty."

..._...

Saoirse was asleep when Mary returned to meekly clamber into her bed.

Neither Stephanie nor Electra said a word, but they both exchanged dark looks, knowing that Mary had not enjoyed her time with Mindy, Cassie, and Ginny. They both knew very well the consequences of breaking the rules, and while *Fusion* and *Vengeance* tended to use more benign punishments compared to those used by *Urban Predator*, the punishments were still severe. The consequences of making mistakes, no matter how small, could spiral into something so much bigger – just as *Vengeance* had discovered to their cost . . . and Harper's.

Mary cried herself to sleep for the first time in many years.

***The following morning
Sunday, November 27th***

***Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level***

They were used to Hit Girl visiting – to a point.

It still unnerved most of them to have the arch-vigilante visiting. However, she was not alone on the current visit. In a contrasting uniform, another female stood beside Hit Girl. Her uniform was a dark blue and the nametape read: NEMESIS while another nametape read: VENGEANCE. It was obvious who she was, and that fact simply unnerved the *Marauders* even more. That just got worse as Hit Girl read out some names.

"Grey, Warlow-Davies, Fincham, Campbell, Wistrum – outside, now!"

The three girls and two boys showed real fear as they got to their feet and headed out of the door, followed by Hit Girl and Nemesis. They were walked around a corner before Hit Girl motioned for them to line up against the concrete wall of the corridor.

"Sound off with your ages! Charlotte Grey!"

"Twelve, Hit Girl!"

"Dakota Warlow-Davies!"

"Fourteen, Hit Girl!"

"Kate Fincham!"

"Sixteen, Hit Girl!"

"Ewan Campbell!"

"Fourteen, Hit Girl!"

"Jake Wistrum!"

"Twelve, Hit Girl, ma'am!"

Hit Girl could not resist a chuckle at the twelve-year-old boy's exuberance.

"You are all British, right?" Nemesis asked.

There were nods from each of the youngsters.

"You have all indicated a desire to return to the UK, yes?" she continued

The nods were repeated.

"I have been sharing your behaviour with Nemesis," Hit Girl explained. "I will be keeping her informed of your behaviour. Nemesis takes the security of the United Kingdom very seriously. If you are deemed a threat to her homeland, then she will deny you access and you will remain here, in America. If you should be allowed access to the U.K., and you are then deemed a threat, Nemesis will not think twice about slitting your throats. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, ma'am!" came five voices.

"Keep your noses clean and I promise that I will find each one of you a home in the U.K.," Nemesis advised the youngsters. "But I will not hesitate to take all necessary steps to protect my country from little bastards like the five of you – mark my words, I am not fucking about. I will put myself out for five children who have had a rough time, but I will *not* put myself out if you just want to cause trouble back in blighty. Do you each understand?"

"Yes, ma'am!" came the responses.

"Thank you – off you go," Hit Girl directed, and she watched as each of them returned to their accommodation. "So?"

"Jake is a little shit!" Nemesis chuckled "But I like him – he's very much a male Glide."

"You think you can rehome them?" Hit Girl asked.

"Definitely – I can see three of them fitting in perfectly."

Training Facility Echo Level 1

Abigail saw the false leg over breakfast that morning and she looked very closely at the boy's face.

"Shit!" she breathed.

"Problem?" Stephanie asked.

"My past just caught up with me."

"Story of my life!" Stephanie muttered.

"You remember the forest?"

"Hard not to," Electra admitted, and Stephanie grimaced.

"That boy – Viridian – I caused him to lose his leg. You think he knows that I am the one who did it to him?"

Abigail looked wretched. Stephanie went over to Jordan and she whispered in his ear. The boy nodded, and he followed Stephanie back over to the table. He immediately saw Abigail's expression, but he said nothing as Abigail's cheeks were covered with tears.

"I'm sorry, Jordan."

"I wondered if you recognised me," Jordan replied. "I promised to kill the girl who made me lose my leg – only you are not that girl anymore."

"What?" Abigail asked.

"You are not that cold bitch who would do anything to win. Since I've been with *Vengeance*, I've learnt a few things about what happened in the past. We had no choice, but now we do, and you are a very different girl. Also, if you could sit at the same table as the magnificent Psyche without killing her. . ."

"We've had the odd set-to since," Stephanie commented.

"But they kissed and made up," Jamie commented as he came over to sit down.

"They did?" Jordan replied.

"They were butt naked when they kissed, too!" Jamie grinned.

"Not the best thought out plan, but we are the best of friends," Abigail conceded.

Jordan held out his hand and Abigail took it.

"Friends?" he asked.

"Friends!" Abigail replied with a grin as she shook his hand.

Safehouse E ***Level 8 – Detention Level***

For the two girls, it was business as usual.

No one had explained the previous evening. Instructor Millar had simply bought them a McDonalds before returning them back to their accommodation. Neither girl had spoken about what had happened, worried about their fate should anybody find out that they had disobeyed orders. Dakota figured that it might have all been some sort of test, but it wasn't as if you could just summon up a rape . . . could you? Hit Girl had not said a word during their meeting with the *Vengeance* vigilante, earlier that morning. They both so desperately wanted to leave their dungeon and they both wanted to earn their freedom and hopefully return to their homeland. Both regretted their hasty decisions which had led them to fight for FEAR, and now they hoped that their decision to help that girl would not backfire on them.

Only time would tell.

Safehouse F

The goodbyes were never easy.

It was very rare for a *Predator* to cry and they usually sucked it up very quickly when they did. However, goodbyes were something everybody hated, no matter what you were inside. There were hugs. There were tears. There were giggles and laughter. There were soft, cuddly words exchanged which would normally never pass a *Predator's* lips, but their friendships were something very special and something to be treasured. They all knew that one day, a goodbye may be the last time that they saw one another – their lives were that dangerous. Even lifelong sworn enemies hugged. Electra was mobbed by Stephanie and Abigail who almost fought over their little friend. Even

Cassie had tears running down her cheeks as she hugged Mindy goodbye.

"I'll be in touch," Mindy said to her friend from across the pond.

"You do that. Take care and look after your family," Cassie replied.

"You look after yours," Mindy said as she eyed Kaitlin and Naomi who were talking with Anne-Marie and Rebecca.

"Harper's healing well," Jennifer commented to Keira. "By Easter she'll be back to normal, I'm certain of it."

"I know. This trip has been like a breath of fresh air for her. She's seen all her friends, and she's got to wear her uniform again," Keira replied as she watched her little sister like a hawk.

Harper was talking with Saoirse and Rachel.

"Thanks to both of you for helping me and teaching me a bit about command – it was an eye-opener, and it was fun."

"You're welcome, Harper," Saoirse replied. "You heal up, and fast, okay?"

"I promise to behave."

"Like a *Predator's* promise is worth shit!" Olivia grinned.

For the non-*Predators*, the trip had been amazing, and they had been amazed at what operated beneath the streets of America's windy city. For one, in particular, while she was going back home to face an uncertain punishment, she was going home with a real combat suit, not her half-arsed concoction – it kind of made the punishment worth it. For young Jordan Hanley, seeing so many of his kin alive had given him a different outlook on life, even to the extent of forgiving the girl who had caused him to lose his leg.

"Okay, mount up, Vengeance!" Cassie called out. "Queen and County awaits!"

***Chapter 360*: Probation**

Monday, November 28th, 2016

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

"Grey, Warlow-Davies, Fincham, both Laus, Todd, and Dolan!"

The seven youngsters all turned to look at the voice which had called out their names – it was Stormtide.

"Go and pack your kit – you are all moving onto pastures new."

The youngsters hesitated for a moment before heading off to their accommodation. A few minutes later, they each reappeared with their kit packed in holdalls. They each looked worried and there were some envious looks from their colleagues who were remaining behind.

"Follow me," Stormtide directed.

Stormtide stopped the group a few yards down the corridor where Hit Girl was waiting.

"Grey and Warlow-Davies – I want a word with you two," Hit Girl growled. "Stormtide – take the rest up to the vehicles."

..._...

Charlotte and Dakota found themselves seated in a comfortable recreational space with a massive TV and soft chairs.

"Anything happen the other night," the purple-masked vigilante enquired evenly.

The two girls exchanged a glance – they had both agreed to tell the truth if anybody asked. Not that that was helping as both shook with fear.

"We had to help," Dakota explained as she took the lead. "That girl was being . . . you know."

"We could not just sit there and watch!" Charlotte bristled. "So, if you're going to punish us, then fucking get on with it, because I have a clear conscience for the first time in many weeks."

Dakota nodded her agreement to the fiery twelve-year-old's comment. They both expected the Heavens to come crashing down on their heads. Hit Girl just sat there for almost a full minute without any hint of movement which was scary to say the least. Then the bitch laughed.

"You both did very well. You bent the rules, slightly, but you did it for the right reasons. You also returned to the vehicle when you could have run," Hit Girl explained.

"Yeah," Charlotte growled as she pulled up her trouser leg. "And you would have taken our feet off!"

"Yes, I would," Hit Girl conceded. "It was a test. We wanted to see how you might react in an extreme situation. Putting your fear of me to one side to assist that girl was the best decision you two have made in a long time. You are both about to embark on the next stage of your young lives. You have everything ahead of you. Follow instructions over the next few days, and I promise you that things will get even better."

Hit Girl grinned inside as she saw the looks of hope on the faces before her. The two girls were working out perfectly and it was no lie that things would get better for them. They both deserved a new life and if they behaved, then that was what they were going to get. A lot of money and resources had been invested in rehabilitating those youngsters and it was beginning to pay off with dividends.

"I gather you both fought a half-naked boy; must have been fun!"

Dakota grimaced and her face turned pink.

"I'm . . . well, I'm not into boys. . ."

Charlotte appeared startled. *Urban Predator* screened out (killed) those with certain sexual preferences, preferring to produce controllably bi-sexual orientations where possible. Dakota had done well to hide her orientation.

"No one is going to judge you, Dakota, nobody," Hit Girl said firmly. "Anybody does, well, you point them in *my* direction. Let's get you both to your friends and onto your new residence."

The two girls had calmed down and they were both grinning.

Safehouse Q

"My name is Sarah – some of you will know me as Discord and yes, I am a *Predator*. My job is to run this safehouse and I do to the best of my ability. You little shits will be living here until you are deemed worthy to re-join civilised society. You will have much more freedom than you did at your last place, but that can all be taken away very quickly and I will send you back. Upstairs, for the girls, and downstairs, for the boys, you each have your own bedroom with your name on the door. If I tell you to remain in your bedrooms, then you will do so. Meals will be served at a set time each day. If you are late to meals, then you go hungry. However, attending meals is important and part of your rehabilitation. You will each have tasks to perform around the safehouse. You will be responsible for yourself. You will be expected to shower daily and wear clean clothing. I expect you to help each other, if needed, and I want no animosity for previous acts as *Predators* or *Marauders*. Nobody leaves this house without permission – if you do, I slit your throats. Are any of these instructions unclear?"

"No," came seven responses.

"In your bedrooms, each of you will find new clothing. If any of it does not fit, let me know. If any of it is not to your liking, let me know. If something you need is missing, let me know. You need a toothbrush, toothpaste, or tampons – you let me know. For the moment, I want you all to go upstairs and unpack. Settle in and yes, you can come downstairs and make use of the family room or the rec room in the basement, as well as the kitchen. Please do not make a mess and do clean up after yourselves. Go."

The seven youngsters headed up and down the stairs as directed.

..._...

The new clothing was a shock to them all.

It was all expensive and all in the correct sizes. They had expected cheap, basic clothing, but for the very first time in many years, they were all able to wear comfortable clothing that did not stand them out from the proverbial crowd. The Lau sisters had been given a larger room to share and both rapidly changed out of their bland clothing, grinning as they did so. For the older girls, it was a blessing to be able to wear comfortable underwear which again, was expensive – but oh, so comfortable. After a short while, they each ventured down to the rec room in the basement, where they found beanbags and a large-screen TV. Before long, all seven kids were happily being kids for the first time in many years.

Sarah appeared, and she brought with her a tray of cold soft drinks and some snacks.

Glenview

"You okay, honey?"

Dave peered down at his wife, who was elbow deep in paperwork in the study.

"Yeah – I gotta get this shit done."

"Why won't you let Marty or Paige help you?" Dave asked, knowing that he was waging a losing battle before he even started.

Mindy refused to allow others to do work which she felt was hers to do. She was insistent. Some of the work related to their various cover stories – taxes had to be paid correctly, for example; Mindy did not want to go the way of Al Capone! It was just Mindy and the way in which she had been brought up. If she could do it, then she saw no reason to bother anybody else. Dave loved her for her stubbornness which he found very funny at times, much to Mindy's chagrin. She always had to plan things herself, double-checking, treble-checking. There was more to being a vigilante than just shooting people, being obnoxious, and blowing things up. Dave had witnessed that himself when Mindy had

reinvented Hit Girl when she was just fifteen. He could remember it like it was yesterday.

...+...

"Hey! What you doing?"

"Real superheroes modify their costumes."

"Oh yeah? Thought mine was kinda working for me."

"Like I said: real superheroes."

...+...

Dave decided to have a little fun and he began to tickle Mindy.

"Dave . . . I need to finish this. . ."

"No, you don't."

"Dave!"

"Kick-Ass wanna play."

Mindy groaned but she stood up nonetheless.

"What do you want me to do?" Mindy asked.

"Hit me!" Dave demanded.

Mindy didn't flinch as she struck out at her husband only for her fist to be caught by a much larger hand and twisted. Then Dave slapped her right cheek, gently.

"What the hell?"

"Act like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch!"

"Come again?" Mindy demanded.

"Act like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch!"

"You calling *me* a bitch?"

Mindy and Dave exchanged several strikes, none reaching their target. Each strike was intercepted by the other.

"Weak!" Dave chuckled. "Don't hurt your vagina."

Mindy's mouth dropped open as she scowled.

"So, quit slapping me like one, then!" Mindy exclaimed.

Dave prodded Mindy's chest and Mindy backed out onto the landing.

"I'm not interested in a half-assed Hit Girl. You stop behaving like a little pussy!"

"I thought you liked my little pussy," Mindy chuckled.

"Did she just say what I thought she said?" Anne-Marie asked as she watched Dave and Mindy move between her and Stephanie.

"I wish she hadn't, but yes," Stephanie confirmed.

"What are they doing?" Anne-Marie asked.

"Good question," Stephanie replied as both girls followed their parents along the landing. "Foreplay maybe?"

"What's foreplay?"

"You *don't* want to know. . ."

..._...

It was nothing out the ordinary for the girls to see their parents sparring, although, it was usually on a mat, and sometimes in the pool, but never around the home, however, their mother was Hit Girl, so there was no such thing as surprising in their home.

Mindy and Dave continued to exchange strikes, either from hands or feet, as they moved down the corridor past Danny's bedroom and towards the open living room on one side and the open foyer on the other. Stephanie's expert eyes noticed that the sparring was not even remotely serious, despite the bodily contact. Both were capable of seriously hurting the other, and Dave had the strength to quite literally snap Mindy in half, or to simply rip her head off, should he choose to. Stephanie figured that they both simply wanted to let off a little steam. Then they stopped kicking and punching, and Stephanie's eyes went wide for a moment and she cringed as Mindy shoved Dave up against the wall of the library and she kissed him before jumping up and wrapping her long legs around his waist. Stephanie's trained eyes saw the subtle set of Mindy's hips and she knew what was about to happen second before Dave found himself viciously twisted to the side as Mindy threw him down to the floor.

Dave simply laughed as he stared up into Mindy's green eyes which sparkled insanely.

..._...

"Catch me if you can, lover boy!" Mindy called out as she grinned and threw herself over the balustrade and down into the living room.

"What the fuck!?" Anne-Marie exclaimed.

"Dollar, jar!" came Mindy's voice from down below.

"What's going on?" Danny demanded as he and Jamie appeared on the landing just as Dave jumped after his wife.

"Awesome!" Jamie exclaimed in an American accent that sounded suspiciously like Anne-Marie's.

As the four kids watched from above, they saw Dave tuck and roll as he hit the living room floor. Mindy kicked him backwards onto a couch, just as Jamie began to fiddle with his mobile phone.

"What are you doing?" Stephanie asked.

"Hold on. . . got it!" the boy responded as music began to blare from the living room sound system.

*Love, love is strange
Lot of people take it for a game
Once you get it
You never wanna quit, no no*

Stephanie cringed at the implications of the tune which she knew well enough and she was appalled by the look on Mindy's face as she looked at Dave with a cringe-worthy expression on her face which appalled the young girl.

*After you've had it, yeah yeah
You're in an awful fix
Many people
Don't understand, no no*

*They think loving, yeah yeah
Is money in the hand
Your sweet loving
Is better than a kiss, yeah yeah*

*When you leave me
Sweet kisses I miss*

"Quick! Turn it off, right the hell now!" Stephanie yelled at Jamie who petulantly shook his head.

It was too late.

"Sylvia?" Dave lay on the floor and he mimed to the soundtrack, looking up at Mindy who stood above him.

"Yes, Mickey," Mindy mimed back with a sultry look on her face.

"How do you call your lover boy?"

"Come here, lover boy!" Mindy beckoned with her finger.

"And if he doesn't answer?"

"Oh, lover boy!" Mindy replied with a look of absolute hunger on her face.

"And if he *still* doesn't answer?" Dave asked as Mindy sank to her knees and she crawled over to him as he crawled over to her.

"I simply say: Baby, oh baby, my sweet baby, you're the one!"

Then they both mimed to the music as they hugged and mauled each other.

"Baby, oh baby, my sweet baby, you're the one!"

Then, they kissed . . . and they kissed.

"I want to scratch my eyes out," Stephanie groaned as she fled towards her bedroom.

"That was truly disgusting," Anne-Marie added.

"That was fucking awesome!" Jamie grinned as Danny nodded his agreement.

"Dollar, jar!" Dave called out in between the kissing.

***Early the following morning
Tuesday, November 29th***

West Columbia

Megan awoke with a start.

Despite her bedroom being very dark, her keen eyes noticed that the bed beside her was empty. She listened, expecting to hear activity in the ensuite bathroom. It was nothing out of the ordinary for Curtis to get up for a pee. Megan's exceptional hearing detected nothing – maybe he had gone downstairs for a drink. She was fully aware of what the date meant for Curtis, and that meant she was doing her best to keep an eye on him. The twelve-year-old slipped out of her bed and she headed downstairs. Stretched out in the living room, she found Piper.

"You seen Curtis, Piper?" Megan asked the sleepy German Shepherd.

Piper simply looked over towards the front door. Megan frowned. Where might Curtis have gone?

"Got it!" Megan exclaimed. "Go back to sleep, Piper."

Memorial Park Cemetery

The boy huddled in the darkness, trying to keep warm.

He wanted to be in Washington D.C. but that was slightly out of his reach, but he also needed comfort from the person who had taken over from his parents. That person had taken him in when he had been alone, and she had kept him safe from harm. The twelve-year-old boy stared down at the marble grave marker, tears pouring down his cheeks.

Catherine Bennett

b. June 8th, 1974
d. October 16th, 2016

Beloved Wife, Mother, and Aunt

*Gone from this mortal earth
But never to be forgotten*

Curtis Bennett sank to his knees, his emotions taking over as he sobbed. There were so many things that he wanted to ask her. There were so many things which he wanted to tell her. It had been two years since his life had been torn apart so violently. For two years his Aunt Cathy had cared for him and treated him as her own. Why? Why did he have to suffer? First his parents. Then his aunt. And now, the person he loved was keeping something from him. His mind was telling him what it probably was, but his heart refused to accept it. He thought that he meant something to her. He thought that they could tell each other anything. They had both been through so much. He wanted to push for information, but he did not dare, should things go bad and she pushed him away. He could not bear to lose somebody else – it would tear him apart. He pulled his coat closer and he gazed down at the simple words which, despite their simplicity, gave him solace.

He had no idea how long he had been kneeling there, sobbing his heart out, when he felt soft hands on his face and as he looked up, he looked into the gun-metal-blue eyes of Megan. She sat down beside the boy whom she loved, and she hugged him tightly. He sobbed, and he wrapped his arms tightly around the person he saw as his soulmate. He could not consider life without her, but there was something between them which was pushing them apart. He looked up into her eyes and he willed her to tell him. He could see hurt. He could see darkness. He could see Wildcat. He had been seeing a lot of Wildcat. He alone could recognise the subtle changes in her eyes. The subtle changes in her body language and her mannerisms. As far as he could tell, even Mindy was unable to recognise the difference between the wild, funny, engaging Megan, and the deadly, brave, bloodthirsty, ferocious, ruthless vigilante which was Wildcat. Recently, they were becoming one. Normally, when the suit came off, and the claws were stowed, Megan came to the fore. Not anymore, the suit and claws came off, but Wildcat remained.

Curtis had no problem with Wildcat, but he was concerned by what she might become if she could not go back to being Megan. He had heard about what Mindy had become when she had left New York. He had heard about how she had almost died. He was trying everything to prevent such a thing happening to the girl he loved. Only, Wildcat was not who he loved. He loved Megan . . . and Megan appeared to have gone. It was that hell-hole. It was that sick, malevolent city – it had to be.

"Talk to me, Megan. Talk to me!"

..._...

Curtis saw the eyes close and he saw the tears.

"I can't."

"I need Megan. I don't need you."

"I *am* Megan!"

"No, you are not. You are Wildcat."

"Why do you care?"

"I love Megan. I love her for who *she* is. I don't have those kinds of feelings for Wildcat."

The eyes changed, and Curtis knew that it was Wildcat who was pressing her finger against his lips.

"What. . .?"

"No talking."

Curtis found himself dragged away from the grave and over into the dark shadows from a large tree.

"What. . .?" Curtis repeated, not knowing what in hell was going on.

"I said, no talking!"

Megan pushed Curtis to the ground and she reached for his belt, pulling it open. Curtis could see where things were going – he recognised her body language and he figured that he may as well play along. Part of him sensed that it was the right path and that maybe there were answers at the end of the journey. Megan was being rough – very rough; just as she had been for weeks. He felt his trousers and his underwear pulled down to his ankles and then removed, along with his shoes and socks. He felt the cold of the surrounding air on places that never normally felt that sort of cold. His jacket was pulled off his arms, and his jumper and T-shirt removed. With a jolt, he realised that he was lying completely naked, under a tree, in a graveyard, at night. However, he was not alone.

A part of him had shrivelled up with the cold, only, Megan began to create a reaction as she shed her own clothing, her soft skin visible despite the darkness. Curtis felt his groin reacting to what he knew was there and Megan's fingers encouraged even more movement. Then Megan, her eyes boring into Curtis' own, gently settled her own groin onto his. It was an event which he thought might never happen, but definitely not before they were thirteen. Megan kissed him and as she moved her thighs slowly, she groaned. Curtis had mixed thoughts about what was happening, but he figured that 'the deed' was done, so to speak, so why stop. He loved her, and she loved him. With a kiss on Megan's lips, Curtis flipped her over and he remained both on top and within. Megan wrapped her arms around his torso, and her legs around his thighs. For Curtis, the pressure was restricting, but not enough to prevent what appeared to come naturally for him.

For Megan, it was a dream come true, but deep within her (not Curtis), there was a deep sorrow which was causing her emotions to rage within her. Curtis yelled out as her fingernails dug into his back. Then Megan felt those very same emotions which she had felt at the hands of that bastard, only they felt better; there was a difference, she realised. Then she began to cry with happiness which startled Curtis as he moved his thighs as quickly and as firmly as he could.

"It's okay – keep going," she smiled.

Curtis had not seen that smile in a long time – the smile belonged to Megan, not Wildcat. He reacted to that by increasing his pelvic movements and he saw the grin grow as the tears thinned. Then it happened, and he felt his body tensing up as the biggest orgasm ever hit him full strength at the very same time as Megan's fingernails dug even deeper and he stifled a yell as he emptied himself into Megan who then tensed up herself in a way which was very familiar as she screamed out in pure ecstasy.

For several minutes, they both simply laid there, wrapped in their jackets as rain pelted down beyond the tree's cover.

..._...

It was Megan who broke the silence.

"It happened in Gotham."

"*What exactly* happened in Gotham?" Curtis asked, almost scared to ask the question which lurked in the darkest recesses of his mind – the place reserved for those things which you know are true, but you refuse to accept.

"The last visit . . . well, I went out alone."

"You did what!?" Curtis exclaimed, anger in his tone.

"I was stupid. . ."

"Too fucking right, you were!"

Curtis was not all that surprised to hear sobbing in the darkness. Megan rarely felt guilty, no matter what she did, but for once, she was feeling it, badly. Curtis was not ready for what Megan said next, despite what lurked deep in his mind.

"They cornered me. They stripped me. They touched me. One ejaculated over me. Another was hard and he . . . he pushed it inside me and he . . ."

While part of Curtis was astonished at the revelation, he also felt relief that Megan had opened up to him. Megan crumbled into him, sobbing her heart out, and he gripped her tightly. How could Megan have kept something like that so quiet? Did nobody notice? Somebody must have noticed. It was many minutes before Megan finally looked up at Curtis. Curtis could see that the eyes were one-hundred-percent Megan – Wildcat was in abeyance.

"I've not told anybody. Please don't tell Mom."

"I won't tell a soul. I am so very sorry, Megan – I really am."

"I wish I could have told you sooner, only . . . I felt so ashamed. I felt embarrassed and humiliated. I felt that you might not want me. It was horrible. I wanted you to be my first. Only . . . you were my first. It felt so different. I felt your love. I saw the love in your eyes. I felt your warmth. If I had known how I'd feel after us both making love, I would have had us fucking weeks ago!"

Curtis laughed.

"I love you, Megan, I really do. I've missed the Megan that I've known since I was ten. Now, I have you back."

Then the tears flowed for them both as they hugged under that tree in the dark graveyard.

Later that same morning

West Columbia

"Morning, all!"

Paige almost dropped the plate of pancakes in shock and surprise.

"Who are you, and what have you done to my daughter?" she demanded as she studied the immaculately dressed person before her.

Her short hair was still cut into its neat bob, and it was still white in the majority. However, the black section was back to her natural auburn colour with a pair of thin stripes, one purple and one brown, on her right side. Her school uniform was perfect, and she was wearing the correct tights instead of the ones which she knew would annoy her mother and the school principal.

"Morning."

Curtis, on the other hand, appeared a little dishevelled and tired as he shuffled into the kitchen. There was something, but Paige could not put her finger on it. However, her daughter had changed, quite literally overnight. Gone was the sullen pre-teen who went out of her way to make life hell for her mother and step-father. Instead, there was a model young lady, ready for school. Marcus appeared, and he frowned – he smelt a rat.

"What's with the hair?" Marcus asked – he was not complaining; it was a much-preferred colour.

"Normally, I might say: 'Bite me, Dad!' – but instead, I'll just ask if you like it."

"Yes, I do."

"Thank you."

Marcus knew that he should be mad about something, but he had no idea what. Megan was just like Mindy; they both got up to things behind his back, but they were both just too damn good at covering for themselves.

"Love you, Mom! Have a great day, Dad!" Megan said as she hugged Marcus before bolting out the door.

"What's with her?" Marcus asked, resigning himself to a chuckle. "Do I even want to know?"

"Probably not," Paige considered, still clueless as to why her daughter was suddenly behaving like the perfect child.

"But let's just enjoy it."

Curtis simply shrugged.

"She's Megan, what else can I say?"

Safehouse E

Level 8 – Detention Level

"You have *no* idea *what* I've been through!"

Doctor Sarah Reese nodded, her expression neutral as she studied the fourteen-year-old youth.

"You're absolutely right, Lucas. Why don't you tell me?"

"I was nine when they took me. They turned me into a monster. They filled me with drugs and they made me do bad things. I hated it, but I had no choice, or they would put a bullet into my skull. Either that or send another *Predator* after me."

Lucy grimaced. It was her turn to chaperone the *Marauders* for their weekly sessions with either Doctor Reese or Doctor Charles.

"You had no choice, Lucas."

"I did later on."

"What do you mean? When FEAR offered you a new role?"

"No. In London. After *Urban Predator* folded, I was in England, somewhere outside Oxford. I ran from my handlers - they didn't chase me - and I found myself in London. Probably not the best place for a thirteen-year-old boy on his own, to be honest, but I had skills, and I used them. I found myself with a gang - they liked my skills and I used them to hurt people. Then they offered me a reward. I had never had sex to that point in my life. She could only have been ten-years-old. The girl was out of it - they'd given her a drug of some sort, I think . . . I . . ."

The boy was struggling to articulate the necessary words and he had to take a deep breath as tears spilled down his cheeks.

"I raped her."

***Chapter 361*: Admissions**

Tuesday, November 29th, 2016

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

"Willingly?" Doctor Reese asked.

"Yes. I'd had some alcohol, but that was all. I knew what I was doing."

"Do you know who it was – the girl?"

"No – I never saw her face, but she was one of us – she was a *Predator* . . . I saw the tattoo behind her right ear. I tried to apologise, but the girl was out of it. I felt horrible afterwards – two others went in after me, and then they congratulated me for losing my virginity, but I felt dirty, so dirty."

Doctor Reese was stunned by the revelation, although she could tell that the boy's remorse was genuine, and she suspected that he may have been drugged also. She looked over at her protector. Lucy was seething with hate and she glared at the boy.

"Look, Lucas . . . I need to escalate this."

Lucas simply nodded.

Lakeview High School

"Oh, sorry! Are you okay?"

The boy looked up to see who he had collided with, about to remonstrate, but then he saw it was that girl, Megan Williams. He felt fear shoot through him and he backed away,

"Are you okay?" the girl repeated.

The boy was more than a little surprised. Megan Williams had a proclivity towards violence, almost at the drop of a hat. Normally, the boy might have expected to be verbally abused in some crude manner, but no, the girl was *apologising!*

"I'm okay – err, thanks for asking."

Megan smiled, but then she felt a strong hand around her left bicep and she was shoved hard against the wall of the corridor.

"Hi, Chloe."

Chloe proceeded to rest the open palm of her hand on Megan's forehead for several seconds before then checking the younger girl's eyes before squeezing her cheeks.

"Open!" she ordered and Megan opened her mouth. "Tongue!"

Megan stuck out her tongue as Chloe finished her examination.

"You're normal, why?" Chloe demanded.

Megan grinned.

Chloe was not buying it, so she grabbed a boy out of the passing throng of students and slammed him against the wall beside Megan.

"What's going on, little cousin?" Chloe demanded as Curtis simply grinned at his cousin.

Curtis simply shrugged.

"I *will* get to the bottom of this, mark my words!" Chloe growled.

"Bennett!"

Chloe released Megan and Curtis as the school Principal glared down at her.

"Hi, Principal McClusky, I was just checking on my cousin, and my cousin-in-law," Chloe tried.

"Morning, Principal McClusky!" Megan announced happily.

"What's wrong with her?" a frowning Principal McClusky asked as she studied the smiling girl who usually caused more trouble than almost the entire student body combined to the point where the Principal had the girl's mother on speed dial.

"Do you like my hair, Principal McClusky?" Megan asked politely.

"It's better."

"Thanks. Excuse me, I need to get to class – don't want to be late!" Megan exclaimed as she gave Chloe a hug and she scampered off with Curtis trailing along behind.

"I know I should be angry about something, but. . ." the Principal muttered as she looked to Chloe for help.

Chloe simply shrugged, and she left the confused principal standing in the middle of the empty corridor.

That evening

Training Facility Echo The Battle Bunker

For Abigail, it was like being called to the principal's office.

"Hi."

"Come and sit down, Abigail," Mindy said as she waved the youngster toward the back room which Mindy used as her private office.

Abigail looked around as Mindy closed the door. Mindy sat down without a word and then she stared at Abigail for a few moments.

"Something has come to my attention concerning events in England. I believe that those events involve you, but I could be very wrong."

"What events?" Abigail asked, unsure of what was going on.

"When you were found by *Vengeance*, you had suffered a traumatic experience," Mindy explained slowly – she was finding it very difficult considering the events in question.

"Oh," Abigail replied as she understood what Mindy was referring to.

"One of the *Marauders* has come forward with information relating to his time in London after *Urban Predator* folded, but before he came to the US and met FEAR. He intimated that he raped a *Predator*."

"You think he was my attacker?"

"It fits. I am heading below to speak with him. I wanted to inform you of what was happening . . . I also wanted to ask if you wanted to listen in – from behind a two-way mirror."

Abigail thought about that for several minutes before she responded.

"Can Stephanie come with me?"

"Of course."

"Do you think Lauren might come too?"

"I would expect so – let me get hold of them; I think they're training somewhere."

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

Stephanie knew all about Abigail's attack, but Lauren did not.

"I'm really sorry, Abigail – I never knew."

"Thanks."

"We're both here for you," Stephanie said as they all turned to look through the glass. "Do you recognise him?"

"I don't remember much of anything, to be honest," Abigail responded.

..._...

"I need to make you aware of a few things, Lucas," Hit Girl stated for the record. "You have been given a legal dispensation for anything which you did while with *Urban Predator*. The same applies for your time with FEAR, pending your rehabilitation. However, that dispensation does not cover events that fall in between. Therefore, you can be charged with rape, and we intend to transfer you to the relevant authorities for extradition to the UK where you will face trial for your crime. Do you understand what I just said?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"I remember raping the girl, but not all of it. I definitely did something bad. I knew what I was doing, and I should have stopped. I wish I had . . . that girl did not deserve it."

"Had you ever seen the girl before?"

"No."

Lucas was sobbing again.

..._...

Stephanie had listened to every word the boy had said.

"He's guilty," Stephanie proclaimed to the room. "Huh, Abigail?"

There was no response, so Stephanie turned to look at Abigail. Abigail had gone very pale and she was shaking. Then, before Stephanie could say anything further, she looked down and she saw a puddle of fluid expanding around Abigail's boots, a dark patch expanding around the crotch of her trousers.

"Abigail?"

"That voice."

Abigail was shaking even harder and tears began to pour down her cheeks. Lauren manoeuvred the younger girl over to a chair and sat her down.

"Try and talk to me, Abigail," Lauren prompted.

"I remember bits . . . he was there . . ."

"Bastard!" Stephanie growled.

"No . . . he was forced . . . I remember other boys pushing him onto me . . . I felt him pushing into me . . . then there was another . . . and another."

Abigail broke down completely and the two girls hugged her as she sobbed.

***Training Facility Echo
Level 2***

Curtis emerged from the bathroom feeling a little annoyed.

Twice in twenty-four hours, he had been attacked by Megan. The first time wasn't too bad, but the current attack – it was just plain wrong! Megan, of course, was grinning. Chloe stared at her cousin, and then at the grinning Megan.

"What the fuck?" she demanded.

"What was I supposed to do?" Curtis retorted.

"Fight her off," Chloe suggested as she studied her cousin's hair. "Why?"

"It suits him, don't you think?" Megan asked.

"No."

"I think it does," Joshua chuckled.

"Nobody asked you," Chloe growled.

"Why do you care?" Joshua asked. "You never used to like Curtis."

"That was then – this is now," Chloe pouted.

"Way cool!" Becky announced as she appeared in the accommodation. "Can I get my hair done, too?"

"Now look what you've started!" Chloe exclaimed. "No, Rebecca!"

"Harsh, much!" Becky responded to the use of her proper name.

Curtis found a mirror and he studied his fringe – it was a medium green which matched his body armour. While he had consented to just a tiny bit of colour, Megan had decided otherwise.

"Megan. . . I . . . I'm not talking to you, right now!"

Megan was still grinning as Curtis stormed off.

***Safehouse E
Level Seven***

"I am sorry, Lucas, but you cannot join the others . . . it's for your own safety."

Lucas looked up at Hit Girl.

"I understand, and I am sorry for what happened to that girl, and for letting you down."

Hit Girl nodded.

"Stay positive, Lucas."

With that, Hit Girl closed the door which locked automatically.

Glenview

Mindy grinned happily as she welcomed Marcus inside.

"What can I do for you, old man?"

"Why do I have two insane nutcases for daughters? First, I get a partner who goes wacko and then I inherit his daughter, who is just as wacko. Then, I marry a beautiful woman who turns out to have a daughter who is totally wacko. What did I do wrong in my past life?"

"You poor old man," Mindy laughed as they both headed into the living room.

"Hello, Marcus," Dave waved from the couch.

"How do you cope, Dave?"

"Huh?"

"Living with a wife who is wacko, a daughter who is almost off the wacko chart, a son who is not far behind, then twins who are quickly developing their own wackiness – not to mention the four-legged nutcases!"

"Hey!" Stephanie exclaimed. "I am not wacko – just a little bit nutty."

"Like a fruitcake with extra nuts!" Jamie laughed, much to his sister's annoyance.

"What has Megan done, now?" Mindy asked.

"That's just it," Marcus replied. "We had a call from the Principal."

Mindy winced – she'd been there, often enough.

"The Principal wanted to know if Megan was feeling alright – I understand that she was perfectly behaved and very polite."

"Megan? Polite?" Stephanie asked, surprise in her tone.

"I was well behaved and polite at times," Mindy commented.

"Yeah – in your sleep," Marcus replied.

Stephanie laughed out loud while Mindy scowled. Dave grinned at his scowling wife.

"Marcus. I think that being married to a normal woman must be so boring. Being married to Mindy is a challenge, but I would not swap her for anything, no matter how nutty she is."

Mindy grinned sheepishly.

"As for the ten-year-old wacko – she's another challenge, but she makes all other kids look boring in comparison. It's a parent's dream to have their daughter wire her bedroom door to an explosive device when she's angry," Dave finished.

Jamie laughed his head off at that.

"I have to admit, having a cheerful little girl around is much better than the moody alternative," Marcus admitted. "I suppose I'll just have to live with it."

"You're a good father, Marcus," Mindy said as Marcus stood up to leave. "You were strict and tough, but I needed that."

"Thank you, Mindy," Marcus replied as he hugged his eldest daughter. "I just hope I do right by Megan and Damon."

"You will, old man."

South Woodlawn

"Well, this can't be good," Hunter chuckled.

"A lynching, maybe?" Leo added.

The pair of Predators had found themselves facing their triplet cousins and they each meant business, at least by the

expressions on their faces.

"We want information," Sabrina Travers demanded.

"Yeah," Samuel and Simon added.

"What about?" Hunter asked.

"You two are not normal," eight-year-old Sabrina went on. "We don't mean anything bad, but we just want to know why you get covered in bruises, and we want to know where you vanish off to each night. We know that you had a part in the battle."

Hunter and Leo sighed. They had discussed the eventuality with their Aunt and Uncle, as well as with Mindy and Dave.

They also had a plan.

***The following evening
Wednesday, December 30th***

D-JAK Prime

The three Travers children had visited the dojang before, and they had even taken introductory classes.

They had seen their cousins sparring, although nothing like their true abilities. The three eight-years-olds knew that there was something about their cousins, and at times, their cousins had scared them with their, often violent, tempers. However, all that the youngsters had, were ideas . . . and none of those ideas was even close to what they were about to experience. They smiled as they recognised their instructor.

"Hi, Megan!"

"Hello, guys – you ready for me to blow your little minds?" Megan asked with a friendly smile.

The triplets frowned at the comment, becoming even more confused as Megan pointed at a doorway.

"Beyond that door is another dimension – a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You're moving into a land of both shadow and substance. A land of things and ideas."

The triplets' parents, Jeremy and Nicola Travers, were just as confused as their offspring. Nevertheless, they followed Megan through a normal-looking doorway which led to a corridor. The corridor turned to the right before stopping at a door which looked very heavy.

"You are about to meet your dreams and your nightmares," Megan growled somewhat theatrically as the steel-clad door swung open on well-oiled hinges.

Each stepped through the doorway into darkness, apprehension gnawing at their minds. As the door swung closed, silently, before audibly latching, Megan chuckled. The small group followed a path which felt like that of a labyrinth, and which concluded with a ride downwards in an elevator. Once the elevator had stopped, Megan spoke again.

"You've just crossed over into what some might call the Twilight Zone . . . however, you could refer to it as the Vigilante Zone."

The family group was astonished as they emerged into a steel and glass enclosure before passing through into a subterranean space with comfortable seating and a massive television.

"Welcome to Zulu," a voice announced, and five pairs of eyes went very wide as they found themselves face to face with the queen vigilante, herself.

..._...

"Mommy, I'm scared."

"Have no fear, Sabrina Travers," Hit Girl said.

Sabrina Travers felt anything but reassured.

"How does she know my name?" Sabrina asked with fear in her eyes.

"I told her," came an electronically enhanced voice.

Unlike Hit Girl, who wore a dark grey uniform with her mask, the vigilante who had spoken wore a full *Fusion* combat suit.

"I am Cut-Throat," the vigilante announced.

While Sabrina was scared by the sight of Hit Girl, Samuel 'Sam' Travers was amazed to be so close to the famous vigilante. He was also transfixed by the armour-clad vigilante standing before him. The suit was a deep blue with highlights of a pale blue. The utility belt held twin pistols and various pouches for his equipment. On his back, were visible his twin combat machetes. Jeremy and Nicola Travers both had shrewd ideas who stood before them. They knew that their nephews had been out fighting with *Fusion*. Just once, they had asked the boys if they knew who Hit Girl really was, and the boys had answered in the affirmative – the question had never been asked again. Though neither of them had ever bargained on meeting Hit Girl face to face.

"And I am Relentless," came another electronically enhanced voice as a shorter vigilante appeared to stand beside Cut-Throat.

For Relentless, the weapons were the same, as was the combat suit, only the colour was different; a dark green with pale green highlights. With a nod from Hit Girl, both vigilantes reached up and they removed their masks. The three eight-year-olds flinched but then their eyes somehow just got even wider in amazement at the grinning faces revealed before them.

"Hunter!" Sabrina exclaimed as she gazed up at her thirteen-year-old cousin.

"Hi, Sab."

"Wow!" Sam announced as he took in his eleven-year-old cousin's combat suit.

"This is amazing!" Simon added.

"Hello, boys," Nicola Travers said.

Glenview

Dave's patience was getting stretched to breaking point.

While Mindy was off at Zulu supervising a reveal for the Travers family, four smartass youngsters were going out of their way to be nasty to one another. Anne-Marie was doing everything she knew to annoy Stephanie and the yelling was getting beyond a joke. The boys were also goading one another, but they would then take a break and annoy the girls. Dave could tell that Stephanie was at breaking point and when she snapped – well, she snapped, and things tended to explode. It did not help that when Stephanie bolted from her bedroom, her foot found Horatio who had decided that Stephanie's doorway was a good place to stretch out and enjoy a snooze. The cat's howl, Stephanie's scream as various needle-sharp claws dug into her ankle, followed by quite a bit of swearing was enough to have Dave bolting up the stairs to see what was going on. The cat had been the final straw as Stephanie had stumbled and fallen onto her backside, causing Jamie to burst out laughing. Stephanie snapped!

"I want my Claymore back!" Stephanie demanded as she regained her feet, her fists clenched.

"Blowing up your siblings is *not* a solution, Steph," Dave responded reasonably.

"Isn't it?" the ten-year-old demanded angrily. "They won't leave me alone and I am sick of it!"

"They are just letting off steam, Steph, and I am sure that they are doing it out of love for their big sister."

"Love! My Claymore would be *full* of love as it detonated and blasted their worthless bodies into a cloud of bloody mess. They wouldn't annoy me after that. That would teach them a lesson they would *never* forget."

Dave chuckled as he struggled to defuse the simmering *Predator*.

..._...

"I'm home!" Mindy called out as she closed the door to the garage.

"That's fucking obvious!" Stephanie growled as she strode past and vanished down into the basement.

"Am I missing something?" Mindy asked as Dave stepped out from the kitchen.

"The kids wound her up just a little too much," Dave explained with a chuckle.

"Any injuries?"

"Just pride . . . and Horatio got trodden on."

"I'm sure he'll survive!" Mindy chuckled as her keen eyes spied a pair of yellow eyes peeping out from under the couch in the living room. "I'd better go talk with our little hand grenade before she goes off again."

"Good luck."

..._...

Mindy found Stephanie laying into a punchbag in the basement.

The punches and kicks were strong and violent. Stephanie's body language showed that she was very angry, and that anger went into every punch. Mindy walked over, and she stood behind the bag, holding it in position.

"What do you want?" Stephanie growled.

"I just wanted to spend some time with my eldest girl."

"I'm sorry for being angry with you upstairs."

Another savage kick followed up by a punch shoved the bag to one side and Mindy had to reposition it for the next strike.

"It appeared warranted, I suppose," she replied.

"I just want time to myself, but they won't leave me alone."

"Did Jamie wind you up when you were little?"

Stephanie stopped punching the bag for a moment as she thought back several years. Then she grinned.

"Yes. He used to think all of my toys were his and we'd fight over the stupidest things. But I loved him, and Mum used to say that he looked up to me which was why he was always annoying me."

"I know that you are not a normal girl, and your siblings are nowhere near normal. Dave and I are not normal and as a family we lead a very abnormal life. We all have a lot to cope with from our past lives, but we have one another and that is what matters."

"I know. I would never hurt them, and they know that – which is the problem."

"Yes. You'll happily rip the head off a total stranger and not think twice about his death, but as far as your siblings, I know that you would protect them with your life and never hurt them."

"I owe Dave an apology, don't I?"

"Horatio, too."

..._...

Mindy and Stephanie found Dave and the kids watching TV in the living room.

Stephanie immediately went to cuddle up with Dave where she smiled up at him before apologising for her behaviour. The other kids each appeared and sheepishly apologised for winding Stephanie up.

"I can take it. Sorry for losing my temper with all of you."

"Do you still love us?" Anne-Marie asked, worry etched into her expression.

"It'll take a lot more than anything you are capable of for me to stop loving you, Anne-Marie," Stephanie replied. "That applies to you boys, too."

"I'm glad that's over!" Mindy exclaimed.

"Can I get my Claymore back, please?" Stephanie asked Dave.

"No."

"Just a little anti-personnel mine?"

"No."

"Flash-bang?"

"No!"

***The following evening
Thursday, December 1st***

Safehouse Q

"Charlotte! Dakota!" Sarah bellowed up the stairs. "You have visitors!"

The two girls came down the stairs looking a little apprehensive – who could be visiting them?

"Office," Sarah directed as she followed the girls down to the end of the house.

Sarah waved the two girls inside before closing the door and heading towards the kitchen. Charlotte and Dakota found themselves facing Lucy and Stephanie.

"We didn't do anything. . ." Dakota began.

"Sit, both of you," Lucy directed with a grin.

"Please don't send us back," Charlotte added.

Stephanie sighed.

"Stop being idiots!" she growled. "We are sending you both back – just not to *that* hellhole."

"What do you mean?" Charlotte asked.

"Both of you have proved to us that there is more to you both than being *Predators* or *Marauders*," Stephanie began to explain. "You can never undo what we were made – we will always be *Predators*. What matters now, is how you use those skills which you went through hell to learn. Now, this is your big break. A second chance. A chance to make something of your lives. There will be no third chance – just death."

"Where are we going?" Dakota asked.

"Home," Stephanie replied.

South Whipple

For Abigail Wilde, the past couple of days had not been fun.

She had barely spoken to anybody and she spent most of her time just going about her daily tasks. School was a blur, as were mealtimes. The revelations had brought her mixed emotions. Memories which she had hoped would remain buried, were now at the fore and she could remember almost everything which had occurred that afternoon in

the East End of London. It had not been the boy's fault – he had been coerced, only it had been him who had taken her virginity and that was something which she could never get back. She felt a little sorry for the boy as he was going to suffer and then spend the rest of his life in prison. Part of her wanted to kill the boy, however, another part of her wanted to forgive him.

Then, she remembered something else from that night.

Two days later
Saturday, December 3rd

The two girls received a rather special visitor that morning.

However, before that visit, Sarah had gathered them both from the basement where they had been playing on a Sony PlayStation with Lin and her sister, Xiāngxin.

"What's wrong?" Charlotte asked tentatively.

"It is time for you two ladies to go pack," Sarah explained.

Sarah barely covered her ears as the two girls screeched happily before they both bolted for the stairs. An hour later, their visitor awaited them both in the office.

It was not whom they had expected.

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"Oh, shit!" Dakota exclaimed as she laid eyes on Hit Girl.

"Sit!"

Both girls sat down straight away almost making Hit Girl laugh.

"You have both exceeded expectations, and as such, I am sending you both home, and on to better lives."

Both girls grinned broadly.

"You will both travel, by air, to Scotland," Hit Girl explained as she handed each girl a cell phone. "These phones are keyed to your personal thumbprints. On each phone is a step-by-step guide for your trip. You deviate, for even one second, and I will hunt you both down."

Charlotte yelped as Hit Girl's tone got darker.

"If required, I will hunt you both down to the ends of the earth and when I find you, do you think I will be in a happy mood?"

The two girls had both gone very pale and they quickly shook their heads. Hit Girl could see that she had got the message across. She was pleased; the two girls were the first pair of *Marauders* to start a new life.

*The future for Charlotte and Dakota is covered in **Chapter 54: New Girls** of my other story: **Vengeance**.*

***Chapter 362*: Freedom**

Author's Note: *This chapter follows on from events in Chapter 12: Hunted Creatures of my other story: Creatures of the Night and Chapter 8: Escape from San Diego of my other story: Fusion: Los Angeles.*

Sunday, December 4th, 2016

Training Facility Echo Chicago

All four youngsters were very tired, and they had each slept for most of the flight.

After they had landed, they had been whisked to Echo and there they had each received a full medical from Doctor Staite before being allowed to rest once again. For each of them, it was the very first time that they had felt *really* safe in months. All four slept in the same cabin, having fallen asleep almost instantly. The four youngsters slept for a good number of hours before stirring early afternoon. They each found clean clothing waiting for them: T-shirts, shorts, and jogging pants. All four made use of the showers before dressing.

On their return from the showers, they found Mindy and Megan waiting for them outside their accommodation.

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Training Facility Echo Level 1

Food was available along with plenty of drink.

All four kids were very pleased to see the food as they were very hungry and still exhausted from their narrow escape, their injuries, the flights, and the differing time zones. They wolfed down a burger each – two in Nicholas' case – and washed it down with plenty of soft drinks.

"That feels so much better!" Logan exclaimed.

"I ate like a pig!" Nicholas added.

"You *are* a pig," Guinevere groaned as she patted her own stomach.

"I feel whole again," Juno added.

Around them, Mindy, Megan, Lucy, Hailee, and Lauren sat to keep the San Diego Team company as they ate. Megan had studied Logan's bruises and she chose to comment on them.

"I'm fine," Logan replied. "I had much worse after Leo went to town on me."

"Leo!" Lucy exclaimed in surprise as she jumped to her feet. "Where? When?"

"San Diego," Logan explained. "He got the better of me and Juno."

Lucy turned on Guinevere.

"You knew about Leo?"

"Yes."

Lucy then turned to Mindy.

"What about you?"

"Yes, I knew Leo had surfaced."

"Why did you not tell me?" Lucy demanded as she advanced on Mindy, her face contorting with anger.

"Because I knew that you'd go racing off to the west coast looking for him," Mindy replied calmly.

"Now his trail is cold, dammit!" Lucy declared as she shoved Mindy in the chest.

A collective 'Oooh!' arose from everybody watching. They all expected Mindy to rip Lucy apart. But Mindy did not retaliate, despite the blazing eyes which indicated that Mindy was a hair away from Armageddon.

"You think Leo would leave a trail?" Mindy asked with anger creeping into her tone. "Is he as good as you?"

"After you, there's me, then there's Leo," Lucy growled back. "He is top-notch."

"So, tracking him would be a waste of time, huh?"

"Yes," Lucy admitted somewhat reluctantly.

"I think we need to talk," Mindy decided as she glared at those around her. "I want the room!"

Twenty seconds later, after a mad scramble from those who desired a long and healthy life, the two girls were very much alone.

"Have you ever loved somebody more than anything, Mindy?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever lost somebody like that?"

"Yes, I have."

"Have you felt the utter misery of being alone and just wanting that person back in your life?"

"Yes, I have."

"Would you have done anything to get that person back into your life?"

"Yes, Lucy, I would."

"I miss him. We were taken at the same time, more or less. He was all I had for the first year before the First Intake arrived. He kept me sane – and me him, I suppose. Do you know what it is like to need somebody close to keep you sane?"

"Unfortunately, I do."

"You are so damn infuriating, Mindy!" Lucy exploded.

"So, they tell me," Mindy responded with an evil smirk.

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Training Facility Echo Level 0

There was feverish activity on the mat and a lot of shouting.

Mindy chuckled as she caught sight of what was happening, and she simply shook her head as she watched the ferocious behaviour. Megan, Joshua, Marc, Curtis, Tommy, and Hunter were arranged in a line on the mat and they were engaged in a push-ups race. Megan's face was beet-red from the exertion. Joshua simply appeared to be enjoying himself. Marc and Curtis were red-faced, but not excessively. Tommy and Hunter both seemed fairly content. All six were sweating profusely as their arms pumped. Mindy noticed that the girls appeared to be enjoying the rippling muscles while Jamie and Iain Miller appeared to be checking out Megan's chest as she tried to keep up with the boys. Chloe pulled Megan out of the competition before she killed herself, leaving just the boys. It was several minutes more before Marc and Curtis rolled out of the game, leaving just Joshua, Tommy, and Hunter. Two more minutes saw Hunter give up. The cheering and chanting threatened to lift the roof of the safehouse as everybody shouted support for the two boys.

It was Tommy who folded first, leaving Joshua as the clear winner. Mindy sat down next to a sweating Megan who

was still breathing heavily. She grinned up at Mindy, too puffed to speak.

"You are a sorry excuse for a human being, Megan!" Mindy laughed. "What were you trying to prove?"

"She thinks she has bigger balls than us boys," Tommy responded with a grin.

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Safehouse E
Level 7

Stephanie was examining her latest acquisition – an AT4 anti-tank rocket launcher.

"You're a little thief," Abigail advised her friend. "Mindy will only tolerate it so far," she pointed out.

"I like to call it 'appropriation'," Stephanie retorted with a smirk.

"I call it '*mis*-appropriation'."

"Whatever; it was shiny, and it looked cool."

"Why do you need this stash, anyway? Didn't Mindy give you full access to the main armoury?"

"Yes, she did; I just like to keep a few useful weapons close at hand – you never know when they might be needed."

Abigail laughed out loud.

"Mindy's going to lock you out, one of these days."

Stephanie placed the rocket launcher into her 'armoury' and she sat down facing Abigail. It was the first time that Abigail had laughed in days.

"I'm her daughter – I'll be fine. What about you?"

Abigail looked very uncomfortable.

"Can we go back to talking about your light-fingered approach to Hit Girl's armoury?"

Stephanie laughed. "No."

"It's difficult – I feel ashamed."

"So, do I. So, does Lauren. Abigail – please."

"I can't really remember much of the actual act. I felt something inside me, but that was it – nothing really registered, and I don't remember an orgasm or anything like that."

"Lucky you."

"Huh?"

"I felt it all. I know it was not a cock, but it still hurt, and it made me feel so horrible," Stephanie responded.

Abigail was surprised to see tears running down her friend's cheeks. Stephanie had never spoken about her ordeal, although Abigail knew about what had occurred – most in *Fusion* knew about it, but nobody dared say anything.

"You've never spoken about it," Abigail tried as she moved over to sit beside her friend.

"I can remember everything. I can remember how they stripped me. I can remember the cold of my backside on the concrete. I can remember them pulling my legs open. I can remember the shock of something cold being rammed up where nothing had ever been before. . ."

Stephanie did not say any more as she began sobbing and Abigail hugged her friend, her own tears mixing with Stephanie's. It was what Abigail had needed – a shoulder to cry on. She had been avoiding everybody who could help, and that had included Brad and Lauren. She had felt weak – always crying about what had happened. But that

had stopped when she had seen Stephanie breakdown over her own rape – she had thought that Stephanie was hard-as-nails, almost superhuman. It took almost fifteen minutes for the two of them to calm down.

"I think about what I set you up for, back in the forest. I am so sorry, Abigail."

"It never happened, so let's not go back there, okay?"

"I feel so much guilt for every bad thing I did to people. I feel nothing for those bastards that deserved to die, but I killed people who just wound me up. I killed to improve my standing within *Urban Predator*. I tried to kill you – and you would have just been another statistic in my file."

"I tried to kill you, too, remember – and I failed," Abigail pointed out.

"Yeah – you sucked!" Stephanie grinned as she wiped away her tears.

"You failed, too, remember?"

"I got to tan your bare arse."

"That hurt," Abigail scowled.

"I can relate," Stephanie commented

Safehouse Q

"I miss them," Xiāngxìn Lau said as Sarah swapped over her ankle monitor to one which was decidedly more compact.

"I know. We've been through a lot together, but we all have to go our separate ways eventually," her sister, Lin, commented as she examined her new fashion accessory.

"Will we stay together?"

"Yes, sister, we will."

"I hope we get a home with parents who want us," Xiāngxìn said.

"You will," Sarah commented. "I am certain that you will find a home very soon."

"Are we getting replacements for Charlotte and Dakota?" Lin asked.

"Yes. They are being notified at the moment."

Training Facility Echo Level 1

"Yes!"

Hit Girl actually grinned as the young boy jumped up and down in excitement. Fourteen-year-old Ewan Campbell and sixteen-year-old Kate Fincham exchanged a look as the excited twelve-year-old finally sat back down again.

"I think he's happy," Kate deadpanned as Jake Wistrum grinned facetiously.

"I get that impression, yes," Hit Girl chuckled.

"When do we leave?" Jake demanded.

"Monday," Hit Girl replied.

"Thank you," Jake said.

"You're welcome, Jake."

The next morning
Monday, December 5th

Safehouse Q

Jake Wistrum could not have been happier.

He had endured Sarah's lecture and threats of death, but he was happy just to have freedom, no matter how small the change. He lay on the bed in his allocated bedroom, just staring up at the ceiling. Daylight streamed in from the window – that was a major improvement after a month in a subterranean hellhole. He may have only been twelve-years-old, but he had witnessed a lot in his four years as a *Predator*. There were so many things that he wished he could unsee. So many things which he wished that he could just forget. His brain was overloaded with how to kill, how to maim. He wanted none of it, but it was there and would be there until the day he died. He had killed – several times – and that was something which he hated and bitterly regretted. He had been deluded to think that FEAR might provide him with a route to a life of money and privilege. She had promised training and support in return for his services. He had become enamoured with the idea of becoming a highly paid assassin, roaming the world as an anonymous killer, killing for the highest bidder.

He had visualised himself as a millionaire by the time he was twenty-one – only that bubble had burst in a most spectacular fashion once FEAR's operation had become to come apart. She had held up one part of her bargain – each of them had been paid a large sum of money. His pile of cash was stashed away in a secret place which only he knew about, but it was blood money, and he wanted nothing to do with it, so it would remain hidden for all time. He was determined to lead as normal a life as was possible for his kind. He wanted to leave a life of violence and murder behind him. He wanted to enjoy his life. He might have only been twelve-years-old, but the boy was highly intelligent, and he was able to figure out for himself what he wanted – to a point.

As part of gauging his new status, he had asked Hit Girl questions while she was removing his explosive ankle monitor and replacing it with one that was not so lethal.

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Training Facility Echo
Level 4

Jake and Hit Girl were off to one side of the giant subterranean running track which was occupied by the remaining *Marauders*.

"Do you think I can put all this behind me . . . you know, and move on?"

Hit Girl had looked up at him and smiled – that had crept him out, just a bit.

"You can do anything that you put your mind to, Jake. You are strong, intelligent, and you have already made great strides to prepare yourself for a new and positive life. You have a long road ahead of you, and some of that road will be hard, but I am certain that you will succeed."

"Thanks. Err, Hit Girl?"

"Yes."

"Those monitors weren't really fitted with explosives, where they?" Jake asked tentatively, and he did not like the smirk he received in response to his question.

Without saying a word, Hit Girl dropped his foot and she walked off, leaving him seated. She returned a few minutes later with a six-foot piece of circular timber which looked very much like a fence pole and was about four inches in diameter. Hit Girl secured Jake's old ankle monitor to the stake and she beckoned Jackal over to hold it in a vertical position.

"Battle Guy – trigger Jake Wistrum's explosive charge," Hit Girl ordered over her earpiece.

Everybody – except for Hit Girl – jumped as a loud double crack echoed through the chamber. The first crack was the doubled-up det-cord which had detonated violently, closely followed by the wooden stake which had split at the point of detonation and fallen to the floor. Jackal glared at Hit Girl who just chuckled insanely. Jake looked appalled, as did all of the *Marauders* who were still wearing the explosive-laced ankle monitors.

"You are evil!" Jake exclaimed.

"You get used to it," Jackal growled as he stalked off.

Hit Girl ignored them both as she waved over Kate Fincham who almost ran to get her own ankle monitor removed.

"Anything else, Jake?" Hit Girl asked as Kate sat down.

"A signed picture of Psyche?" Jake ventured. "Naked would be good."

Hit Girl growled as Kate rolled her eyes.

"Clothes would be good, too."

"I'll see what I can do, Jake, but don't blame me if she hits you," Hit Girl chuckled.

Monday evening

Safehouse Q

Jake was rubbing his shoulder like mad but otherwise, he was smiling happily.

"You got the photo, then?" Kate asked rhetorically.

"A dead arm, too," Jake responded. "It was worth it, though."

The boy held up a signed, framed photo of Psyche in her combat suit. Kate just laughed as the happy boy ran up the stairs to put his most prized possession away.

"You're just encouraging him, Stephanie," Sarah pointed out as she watched the exchange.

"He's a good kid," Stephanie replied with a grin. "Anyway – he'll be three thousand miles away from me . . . thank God!"

"I heard that!" Jake's shrill voice called down the stairs.

Stephanie and Sarah just laughed.

A little later that same evening

"Okay, settle down!" Hit Girl bellowed.

Everything went quiet and they all looked up, expectantly, at their leader.

"The brighter amongst you will have noticed four new faces in our midst. They are Team San Diego and they will be staying with us for a while. Please make them feel welcome. Some of you may recognise two of them. The leader is Guinevere Murdoch AKA Lilith and she is a *Predator*. Her boyfriend is also a *Predator* – Nicholas Hyde AKA Trauma."

"Watch out if you're in the shower with Nicky, girls," Stormtide commented, "he likes to see how far he can pee or ejaculate."

"Is that a *Predator* thing?" Wildcat asked Tempest with a sly grin.

"No!" Tempest responded as his cheeks went slightly pink.

"Logan Dark AKA Riptide is also a *Predator*," Hit Girl continued, ignoring the interruption. "However, he has a new face and to some of you, he used to be known as Kai Wynter. Finally, we have Juno Saunders. Juno is an enigma, and while she is not exactly a normal girl, she is not a *Predator* either. Despite that, she has been trained by one, and as far as I am concerned, she is not a pushover and she has proved that she can hold her own in a fight, earning her codename: Lilim."

Juno blushed at the accolade from Hit Girl which was totally unexpected but otherwise very welcome.

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The four youngsters were actually very surprised by their welcome.

The three *Predators* were also a little surprised to see how many of their kin were still alive and that they were thriving. Although, after a while, thoughts turned to their futures and, more importantly, where they were going to be living.

"I'm sure that you guys must still be very tired," Mindy said. "How about we get you to your new home?" she suggested.

Twenty minutes later, they were bundled into Mindy's SUV and they were soon heading east on the I-55 before heading north up the coast on the famous Lake Shore Drive.

Safehouse L Rogers Park

Despite it being winter, and the outside temperature being only a degree above zero, the view out onto Lake Michigan was stunning and the four visitors from San Diego enjoyed the view.

The drive took barely twenty minutes and Juno was very pleased when they finally stopped as it had probably been the fastest car ride of her entire life. They had left the coast a few hundred yards ago and as they got out of the car, Juno could smell the lake. They had pulled into the driveway of a very unassuming property and they were very surprised to see who was holding open the front door for them as they walked around to the front of the house.

"Welcome!" Lucy Ford grinned.

"How did you get here so damned fast?" Guinevere asked as she was fairly certain that Lucy had vanished from sight very soon before they themselves had left the safehouse.

"Mindy isn't the only one with a love of speed," Lucy smirked as Mindy just growled.

Once the front door was closed behind them, Mindy turned to the new arrivals from San Diego.

"Welcome to Safehouse L," she proclaimed. "You have the place to yourselves. Lucy has made sure that the place is fully stocked. Anything you need – ask Lucy and she will get you sorted out. The lake is a couple hundred yards that way – a beach, too."

"It's fucking December!" Nicholas pointed out.

"Your loss," Mindy chuckled. "Now, I need to head home. Lucy has new phones for each of you, so call if you get into trouble. This place is nothing special, but you should be comfortable – and safe. Shannon and Marc live closest, so they can help should you need any."

"Thank you, Mindy," Guinevere said, genuinely lost for words.

It would be their home for the foreseeable future.

"Get a good night's sleep, guys – see ya!" Mindy said as she nodded at Lucy and headed out the door.

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"I'll let you guys wander around – kitchen is through there. Upstairs, you will find a room with your names on the doors – I figured that you'd want two rooms, rather than four," Lucy grinned, and she could see four faces turning slightly pink. "We can go shopping in the morning for any clothing you might need, or other stuff – tampons, condoms . . . you know."

"Thanks, Lucy," Nicholas laughed.

All four kids ran upstairs to find their bedrooms. Juno pushed open the door to the bedroom at the top of the stairs with her name and Logan's name on it. The bedroom was nicely decorated and there was a double bed. Logan peeked into the ensuite bathroom.

"We could get us both in there, no problem," he grinned, and Juno giggled.

For Nicholas and Guinevere, they had the room past the master bedroom which had a 'No Entry' sign on it. Again, there was a double bed and it was tastefully decorated. There was also a large sitting room with windows all around beyond the ensuite bathroom. After a brief look around the first floor, Lucy explained all the various security features for the safehouse to Guinevere and Nicholas.

They were all very tired, so they decided to head to bed.

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"You tired?"

Guinevere looked over at Nicholas who was gazing intently at her exposed chest as she lay partially covered by the duvet. She grinned as she felt her nipples hardening while he watched. It was an event which was not under her control, but she loved it when Nicholas watched it happening.

"A little," she replied with a smirk as she reached down to check something lower down – she grinned. "You seem wide awake," she commented.

Nicholas grinned back – what else could a male teen do when he was in bed with a beautiful and very naked girl? His body tended to react on its own and it had done. Not that Guinevere could talk, she was just as blood-engorged in certain places.

"You're not too sore?" he asked with genuine concern, seeing some of the bruising which still covered most of his partner's body.

"I think full-on is out . . . maybe some activity which doesn't involve much movement," she suggested.

Nicholas grinned as he worked out what she was suggesting. He threw back the duvet, revealing their naked bodies and he moved so he lay diagonally across the bed. Guinevere cringed as she moved, the bruises still hurting, but she relaxed as she lay down into Nicholas. She could feel his warm skin against her own, the touch intensifying her feelings of arousal. Before her face, she saw the effects of Nicholas' own arousal and she grinned before she took an involuntary intake of breath as she felt herself being violated by an eager tongue.

In response, she took Nicholas into her mouth.

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On the other side of the house, sex was a long way from Juno's mind.

She was being hugged by Logan very tightly. She was naked, as was he, but intimate relations were miles from Logan's mind too. Juno was struggling with that fine line between life and death which had so violently pervaded her new life. She knew that people died – she had seen it through her own eyes. She had even caused people to die. Her young mind had been able to process the deaths in her life as well as those which she had induced. However, there had been one death which her mind was still struggling with – although, it had not actually ended in death; Logan had survived. Every night, the nightmare had been there, the horror of watching Haven burn. The horror of somebody dying. When awake, she knew that Logan was alive, but every time she closed her eyes, he died again . . . and again.

She enjoyed his touch – but not in *that* way – as it gave her solace and she felt so safe when he was nearby. His touch on her skin, even if it was simply a hand on her cheek, felt so caring and like nothing which she had ever experience before. She had almost lost that because of that bastard. She had sworn never to allow her mind to be controlled by anger – she saw that as how the *Predators* were formed – but that man had almost succeeded in taking Logan away from her and that was something which she could never get past until that bastard was dead.

In her mind, Dieter Mannheim's days were numbered.

***The following morning
Tuesday, December 6th***

Sheridan Road

"Daddy! Daddy!"

"Yes, sweetie."

"Can I borrow twenty bucks?"

Patrick Millar peered over at his wayward daughter.

"Sweetie, you get one hundred and fifty dollars a week from your *Predator* fund – what have you been spending it on?"

"Condoms, I'll bet," Annabelle grinned.

"Not helping!" Patrick replied, and his youngest daughter ran out of the room laughing.

"I'm sure she just needs a good fucking," Shannon pointed out.

"She's twelve-years-old, Shannon, so as I said: not helping. My original question stands."

"A few movies and stuff."

"You need to learn to control what you're spending, Shannon – I'll give you ten dollars."

"Daddy!" Shannon exclaimed.

"Nine dollars."

Shannon opened her mouth to respond, but she quickly decided better of it and she closed her mouth, smiling sweetly. Her father chuckled as he handed over ten dollars.

"Love you, Daddy!" Shannon called out as she bolted out the door.

Just a few months back, Patrick never thought he'd ever have his little girl back, now he was arguing with her over her allowance like nothing had ever happened. His eldest daughter could kill without a second thought, but she had absolutely no idea how to manage money – just like most fourteen-year-olds.

How the hell had she ever survived her time in England while on the run with Jamie Lizewski, he could not fathom.

Safehouse L

Guinevere awoke feeling sore, but otherwise, she was reasonably well rested.

After weeing and pulling on a pair of shorts and a loose T-shirt, she made her way down the stairs and into the kitchen which was empty. However, on closer inspection, there was an empty bowl with small milk on the side, plus an open packet of cereal and various flakes scattered along the counter as well as some split milk. It was obvious that Juno was awake – the remnants of her breakfast proved that and were normal for the teen. Guinevere looked around, but there was no sign of the youngster – maybe she had gone back to bed.

But then, she heard sounds coming from the basement, and she followed those sounds to find her mentee pounding a punch bag which hung from the ceiling.

..._...

Guinevere could tell that something was wrong.

Juno was focussed on the punchbag and she was laying into the device with all the strength that the young teen could muster. Juno wore a sports bra and tight shorts, but nothing else. She was barefoot, but she wore a set of padded sparring gloves to protect her hands. Guinevere could see some of the various bruises scattered across the teens slim body, and the sight appalled her. Her mind drifted back almost seven months – actually six months and 21 days, but who was counting – and she thought of the first time she had laid eyes on Juno.

And the promise she had made to her Aunt.

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Sunday, May 15th

San Diego

"Aunt Rachel?"

"Guinevere? My God, you look so much like your mother."

Rachel Saunders was just able to look around her devastated living room which was now filled with death. Her face was filled with sorrow as she took in her husband's dead body a short distance away. Then her eyes fell on the huddled, naked form of her daughter. Rachel quickly turned her focus back to Guinevere.

"Guinevere . . . please take care of Juno. I place her into your care . . . Juno?"

"Mom. . ."

"You will go with Guinevere and she will take care of you – do everything that she tells you."

"No, Mom, I can't leave you. . ."

"Guinevere, promise me . . . promise me that you . . . that you will take care of my daughter. . ."

"I will, Aunt Rachel; I promise."

With one last look at her daughter, the eyes glazed over, and Juno's mother died.

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Thursday, December 6th, 2016

Chicago

Had she failed her Aunt?

Had she failed Juno?

It was obvious that Juno had been at it a while as sweat poured from her brow and the sweat running down her back was equally obvious.

"Juno?"

The teen ceased pounding the bag and she turned to look at her mentor. She forced a smile, but it faded quickly.

"Hi, honey," Guinevere offered.

"Hi, Guinny. Sorry, I had some things to work out of my system."

"Has it worked?"

"No, it hasn't. That bastard has to be made to pay for what he did to us – for what he almost did to Logan."

Guinevere could recognise the fire in the girl's eyes, reminiscent of her own. Juno felt the same way she did, but she knew that.

"When are we going back home?" Juno asked.

"I don't know, Juno. We need to find somewhere new to live and we need to setup a new safehouse."

"When is *that* going to be ready?" Juno demanded with anger in her tone.

"Mindy says she's taking care of it."

"Fuck Mindy! We need to do something or that bastard will think that he's won!"

"Juno, please – we have to do this properly, yes?"

Juno calmed down slightly as she thought about it.

"I want to get back there, but we can't just turn up without defences in place. We are going to have to up our game. When things are ready, I promise we shall get back out there."

"Promise?"

"Have I ever lied to you, Juno?"

"No."

"Have I always had your best interests at heart?"

"Yes," Juno admitted.

"When everything is in place, we shall return to San Diego, and we shall really kick some ass!"

"Fuck, yeah!"

***Chapter 363*: A Difficult Weekend**

Sunday, December 11th, 2016

Mindy was exhausted after what had to have been one of the most difficult weekends in a long time.

By six, that evening, she had:

A *Predator* in the medical centre at Echo with a stab wound.

A *Marauder* at large with no real idea why or where they were headed.

A daughter who had all but barricaded herself in her bedroom and would not be coming back out any time soon.

But, on a less depressing note, though, she also had:

Three more *Predators* who had been dispatched to Scotland.

Two *Predators* who had found a new home in Chicago.

One *Predator* who had successfully jetted off to a new life in Los Angeles.

And . . . a lead on a possible *Predator* in Atlanta, of all places.

So, let's go back to the previous morning.

Saturday, December 10th

That morning

Longmeadow Road

Doctor Jennifer Staite was pacing backwards and forwards, her hands twisting themselves into knots.

She had never felt so nervous – it was a huge decision, but one which she was determined was correct. It had taken much soul-searching, and a lot of two-way chatter with her husband, but they had both agreed that they needed something more in their lives. Her husband was a wonderful man – a bit eccentric, maybe – but he was the centre of her life. However, her focus was due to change . . . right at that moment. Jennifer had not been masked when she had seen each and every *Marauder*, and therefore, the two young girls immediately recognised her.

"Hello, Doctor," the eldest said with a smile.

Lin Lau was eleven-years-old. She was short, with jet-black hair, and she had the usual visual indicators of her Chinese ancestry. She had spent two-and-a-half years being abused as a *Predator*, and then six months as something worse. She had thrown down her weapons at the very first opportunity during The Battle, and she had been thankful for her arrest. The only thing that she had left in the entire world was her little sister.

Xiāngxìn Lau was almost identical to her older sister, only the nine-year-old was quite a bit shorter, but she was also very full of life and the youngster was always grinning. She looked up at Jennifer, and she smiled. Despite having been taken at the tender age of six and having endured the same punishing time as her elder sister, she had somehow coped better and now that she was free from everything, she was very much the normal child.

The two girls were inseparable, and Jennifer had rarely seen the pair apart. As she looked at them both, she knew that she had made the right choice. The two girls had climbed out of Mindy's Jaguar F-Pace and Mindy came up behind them. The veteran vigilante could see Jennifer's distraction and she could relate having only gone through the whole children thing about fourteen months previously herself. Finally, Jennifer snapped out of it.

"Come on girls, inside."

..._...

Jennifer led the way through a pair of grey wooden doors, each glazed with an upper and lower glass pane.

The two girls followed, wide-eyed, as Mindy came up behind with the girls' holdalls and backpacks. Mindy grinned: how far Hit Girl had fallen; nothing more than a mere porter, she thought. Jennifer led them all through a library, a sun room, and into . . .

"This is the family room, right next to the kitchen – make yourselves comfortable, girls. You too, Mindy. Would you like a drink Xiāngxin, Lin?"

"Yes, please."

"Yes, please."

Both girls spoke with a slight English accent having been born in the former British colony, and now Chinese autonomous territory, of Hong Kong and they had both been taught English from an early age. The two girls were stunned by the size of the house and a little overawed by everything. They both sat down on the enormous U-shaped couch and just simply gazed at one other. Jennifer came over and she handed each of the girls a can of Coke and Mindy a bottle of water.

"Ah, they've arrived!"

The two girls turned to see a man standing in the doorway. He was grinning, and he appeared very friendly.

"Girls, this is my husband, Rodney," Jennifer said happily. "Rodney, the tall one is Lin while the grinning one is Xiāngxin."

"Hello, and welcome to your new home, girls," Rodney Staite replied.

..._...

Jennifer had insisted on Mindy staying for lunch.

Mindy had things to do, but Jennifer was very persuasive, as was Rodney. Mindy had not met Rodney before that day, but she found him cheerful and funny, but with a sometimes-condescending personality.

"What do you do, Rodney," Mindy asked as they tucked into hotdogs which the two girls were enjoying hugely.

Thankfully, Mindy thought, the two girls were below the usual disgusting adolescent behaviour common of the *Predator* species, despite their past, and they were both able to eat hot dogs politely and quietly.

"I have two doctorates: physics and mechanical engineering. I work for Pearson Aerospace in Chicago where I am deputy-head of their Science and Research Division. When I am not at work, my hobby is researching the 'Lost City of Atlantis'," Rodney offered proudly and slightly arrogantly, before he paused briefly. "Oh, and I'm mortally allergic to any form of citrus."

Jennifer simply rolled her eyes.

..._...

That afternoon

Training Facility Echo Dining Room – Level 1

"Mindy? Out of Chloe and you, who is the most acrobatic and the most flexible?"

Mindy gave the diminutive Becky a condescending stare before ginning.

"Chloe is good, I'll give her that, but I am very flexible, and I have been known to hold my own without touching the floor."

"Can you do the splits?" Becky continued as Chloe just shook her head in exasperation.

"You challenging me?" Mindy asked from her seat at the next table.

Becky decided that she was pushing her luck, but she stood her ground as she leaned on Chloe.

"Yes."

Mindy stood up, and with all of Fusion watching and without any hesitation, she pulled her pistol from its holster, ejected the magazine, and then passed the package to Dave, who placed them onto the table. She unbuckled her

belt, then she sat down and unlaced her boots, before kicking them off and she dropped her pants, stepping out of them. As usual, Mindy wore boy shorts underneath and she ignored the grins from the boys, all of whom had seen her sparring in much less. Mindy proceeded to demonstrate a perfect front split, sliding gently to the floor under perfect control.

"Wow!" Becky announced, impressed.

"Please!" came another voice and Dave received another pistol as Stephanie half-stripped and joined Mindy on the floor in a perfect front split.

"Okay, enough of this!" Mindy growled as she pulled her pants back on.

"Thanks," Becky said. "Other than you and Chloe, who else is really good at acrobatics?"

"Can I answer this one?" Chloe asked, and Mindy nodded. "That would be Megan – she is ultra-flexible, and she outshines me, and she is not far behind Mindy when it comes to being able to use acrobatics in a fight."

Megan grinned from where she sat opposite Curtis.

"Is that true?" Becky asked.

"I suppose it is," Megan admitted reluctantly.

"Believe me – Megan is very flexible!" Curtis confirmed. "However, I think Mindy's backflip is better."

"Than you, Curtis," Mindy chuckled. "Megan is very good and if you want to learn backflips, then she is good enough to teach her moves."

Megan grinned at the unexpected accolade. Becky opened her mouth, but Chloe shut it quickly.

"Just not today, Peanut!" she cautioned.

"D-JAK, next week," Megan promised a grinning Becky.

Safehouse E Level Seven

The boy had endured two very lonely weeks.

He had been allowed out of his accommodation (cell) for three hours each day and he had been supervised every minute. He had not fought against his enforced incarceration – he had been the model prisoner, to be honest. Mindy had ensured that he had had books to read, plenty of food and drink, and some limited entertainment via an iPod. In Mindy's eyes, the boy was innocent until proven guilty – it could all be a case of mistaken identity, even though it seemed cut and dried. There was no actual evidence, physical or otherwise, linking Lucas to Abigail – just his word, and there was the Fifth Amendment to protect the boy; he was an American National after all. Mindy was way out of her depth as she normally had but one method of dealing with rapists – only this was much closer to home and that disturbed her.

Vicky Richards had been down in her capacity as a CPD Lieutenant to hear the boy's words and to figure out if there really was a case to be answered. She had been joined by Detective Erin Lindsay as a neutral observer who was well versed in the boy's situation. Unfortunately, Vicky and Erin had come away very worried for the boy's future. They had both spoken to Marcus in his capacity as a CPD Captain, and Marcus had reluctantly agreed with their supposition of the boy's guilt. They, in turn, had gone to see Jack Bay in his capacity as CPD Superintendent. With the assistance of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the facts of law were identified, and a case was compiled. Peter Stone, the Assistant State's Attorney for the Deputy Bureau Chief of the State's Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Bureau, was brought on board and he had suggested contacting the British Authorities. The British Authorities, in turn, had passed the awkward issue onto Special Branch considering the sensitive and classified nature of the potential defendant's past.

Naturally, Special Branch had despatched somebody intimately familiar with the world of the *Predator*.

That evening

**Training Facility Echo
Bathroom – Level 2**

It had been a strenuous day and Stephanie was desperate for a shower.

She stripped off and stepped under the hot water, enjoying the heat on her strained muscles and bruised skin. She turned her back to the changing room as she soaped up her body and she had just stood up and was rinsing off when she felt an arm wrap itself around her neck and something very sharp press into her left side.

"Don't fucking move a muscle, Steph – I've been waiting many years for this; you killed Kara. I needed her; she helped me stay sane. Then you had to go and kill her."

"Guinevere?"

"Yes, Steph – I know, you all trusted me, but I can't let this go. Kara was my friend in a place where nobody had friends. We needed each other. I hate to do this, but you know the *Predator* unwritten code: 'An eye for an eye'."

"I know where you're coming from, G, but please, you don't want to do this."

"You begging?"

Stephanie felt the point in her left side shift slightly, and she reacted instantly.

..._...

"You still in the shower, Steph?" Saoirse called out as she entered the changing room. "You want to . . . holy shit!"

Saoirse suddenly got flashbacks to a young naked girl standing in a shower, another equally naked bigger girl lying under the streaming water, blood swirling into the drain.

"I know what this looks like," Stephanie began with a forced smile as she turned off the water.

"Talk about fucking déjà vu!" Saoirse announced as she threw Stephanie a towel. "Cover yourself up – have you no dignity!"

"Funny, bitch!" Stephanie retorted, wrapping the towel around herself as Saoirse grabbed for the phone mounted on the bulkhead just outside the showers.

"Surgeon to the level 2 changing rooms! Surgeon to the level 2 changing rooms!" Saoirse called out over the tannoy before she grabbed a first aid kit.

Saoirse could see what had happened – kind of. There was a bloody wound in Guinevere's side and a small knife lay on the tiles. Saoirse applied a field dressing to the wound and Stephanie held it in place. The sound of running feet could be heard and various faces appeared in the changing rooms.

"Re-enacting your glorious past, Stephanie?" Mindy commented dryly as she took in the scene while Jennifer began to check over the naked Guinevere.

"What's going on?"

Saoirse grabbed Juno as she ran through the door. She saw her mentor lying on the tiles and she quickly pulled her pistol. But before she could level it at anybody, Stephanie had stripped it out of the older girl's hand and then Stephanie shook her head.

"No, Juno; Guinevere did this to herself . . . Logan – get Juno out of here."

"What the fuck?" Nicholas demanded as he watched Guinevere being secured into an aluminium frame stretcher with a blanket wrapped around her.

Saoirse intercepted the angry *Predator*.

"Confucius said it well: 'Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves'," she said.

Nicholas recognised Guinevere's knife, and he saw Stephanie looking a little bewildered. He put two and two together very quickly and he got four as the answer.

"Oh, shit!" he groaned.

..._...

Medical Centre – Level 1

Once Guinevere had had her wound treated and sown up, she was tucked up in a bed to rest.

"There's no lasting damage," Jennifer explained as she took a moment to check out Stephanie. "The blade missed anything important."

"Pleased to hear that, I am," Stephanie breathed. "I'm fine, okay."

"Just needed to check – that nick will leave a small scar, but you'll be fine."

"Christ, Stephanie!" Mindy complained as she studied her daughter. "You really do pick your times to cause shit – I need to go pickup Electra's grandfather and I'm going to have to put my foot down now."

"Since when have you been bothered about putting your foot down?"

"Smart-ass!"

..._...

Chicago O'Hare International Airport

"Mindy!"

"Commander."

"Patrick, please."

Mindy grinned – she loved the British accent and Patrick's was smooth, refined, and perfect.

"Of course, Patrick – this way."

They walked back to where Mindy had parked her SUV and very soon they were on I-90, heading into the City. They talked, mainly about England, Scotland, Electra, and Patrick's family. After a very short trip, Mindy dropped the Commander off at a hotel for the night. They both knew that the following day was to be rather harrowing and neither was looking forward to it.

"Have a good night's sleep, Commander, Marcus will be by to pick you up in the morning."

"Good night, Mindy."

A little while later

Glennview

"Steph?"

"Go away!"

"Let me in . . . please?"

There was movement and Mindy heard the lock turn, but the door remained closed. With slight apprehension, Mindy turned the handle and she nudged the door open a centimetre. She checked the gap for any signs of a trip wire or other tell-tales.

"It's clear – I've no mines, remember," Stephanie growled from the bed.

Mindy closed the door behind her and she sat down on the bed next to her daughter. Stephanie was wearing her usual bedtime attire of an overly large T-shirt. It was obvious that the youngster had been crying.

"Bad day, huh?"

"Once upon a time, it was funny – now it sucks . . . I hate it; why does everybody want me dead?"

Mindy could understand Stephanie's feelings. The past year had been hell for her and so many people had tried to kill her – one coming so close. Mindy lay on the bed and she pulled Stephanie close to her. She had no idea what else to do, or what to say. For Stephanie, though, just having somebody to cling to was all she needed. She had shrugged it off for so long, only for it to come back with a vengeance. Abigail, Saoirse, Summer Frasier, FEAR, Willow – so many people had made a concerted effort to kill her and all had come very close. She knew why – and she knew that there were others out there that wanted to do her harm – and she was sick of it. She just wanted to lead a normal life and be in control of that life, but no matter what she did, she failed, and somebody else tried to kill her.

Everything stemmed back to that girl, Kara Newton. Stephanie could picture the girl in her mind. It had not been her fault; she had been a victim of her situation. It was survival of the fittest at its worst and most depraved. Somehow, Stephanie had survived as the fittest – God only knew how. She had been noticed. Stephanie knew that she had probably been only days away from receiving a termination bullet in her skull. At the time, she had wished for it . . . anything to end the daily abuse and the never-ending suffering. Everything that had occurred from that point had stemmed from her killing Kara Newton.

"I wish I had never killed that damn girl in the shower!"

Mindy actually laughed, and Stephanie sat up, looking really annoyed.

"What's so fucking funny about that!"

"You're playing the same 'if' game, Steph – don't."

"I know – we've been through it before, but. . ."

"No fucking 'buts', Stephanie!"

"Thanks for being there for me."

"Always, Steph."

"Night, Mindy."

"Sleep Tight, Steph."

..._...

Dave could see his wife's distress, and he knew why she was distressed.

"That damn word!" Mindy growled. "So damn small, but so enormous."

"If, huh?" Dave asked rhetorically. "The biggest word this world has."

"Tell me about it!"

"Fate has a nasty way of causing shit at the worst possible time. No matter what we do – or think we could have done – it cannot be changed. We've both played the game and it got us fucking nowhere."

"If she isn't out of there, tomorrow, then I'm sending in the big guns."

"Big guns?"

"Oh, yeah!" Mindy confirmed.

***The following morning
Sunday, December 11th***

Safehouse Q

Stephanie would not come out of her bedroom, so Mindy had just left her to her solace – she could wait as Hit Girl

really had enough to deal with including a day of hell ahead of her.

Instead, Hit Girl had headed down to the safehouse to see the outgoing *Predators*. Four more of them were about to find new lives – leaving Sarah with but one *ex-Marauder* in her custody. Not surprisingly, Hit Girl had found Jake Wistrum waiting for her. The look of hope on his face was enough for Hit Girl to forget any ideas of winding the boy up.

"Are we going somewhere?" the twelve-year-old boy asked happily.

"Yes, Jake, you are."

"Please tell me I don't have eight hours on a plane with 'Jakey'," sixteen-year-old Kate groaned.

"Yes, you do," Hit Girl chuckled.

"Can't we check him into the hold?" Kate persisted.

"He's not *that* bad, Kate," fourteen-year-old Ewan commented.

"I promise to be good . . . Katie."

"Don't call me that!" Kate breathed.

Jake just grinned and Hit Girl laughed.

"Oh, Jake has two lovely little girls waiting for him, Kate. I think that they will both give him a run for his money – assuming they don't cut his balls off on day one," Hit Girl explained.

"Are they *Predators*?" Jake asked.

"Yes."

"Girl *Predators* are bitches!" Jake scowled.

"Fear us!" Kate growled, and Jake bolted up the stairs to start packing.

Hit Girl handed them their passports, personal papers, and cash for the trip. Kate took custody of Jake's packet.

"Good luck to all of you," Hit Girl said. "You will both be very safe in Scotland, I assure you."

"Thank you, Hit Girl," Ewan said with genuine conviction.

..._...

Attention was then turned towards the fourth *Predator*.

James Todd appeared more than a little uneasy as he stood before Hit Girl. The fourteen-year-old was British, however, he had opted to remain in the United States.

"You ready to head somewhere a little warmer, James?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You will be joining a house full of girls, but I think you can tolerate that. Los Angeles will be a change for you – hopefully for the better. I am trusting you not to let me down."

"I promise not to let you down, Hit Girl."

"Here are your travel documents, your passport, and your personal documents. You fly out tonight. Stay safe, James."

"Thanks."

Hit Girl departed for her next meeting which was not to be so nice and friendly.

**Training Facility Echo
Medical Centre – Level 1**

"A few minutes, please, Jennifer."

Jennifer frowned, but she headed off to her office, nonetheless, closing the door behind her.

"How are you feeling, Guinevere?" Mindy asked.

"Fine, thanks," Guinevere responded, wondering if she was about to die.

Mindy correctly read her expression.

"I trusted you. I gave you everything you might need to survive."

Guinevere was beginning to shake with fear; the voice was ice cold, if not colder. Mindy did not raise her voice – she did not need to.

"I put my people on the line to save your sorry ass. Then, how do you choose to repay me? YOU FUCKING TRY TO KILL ONE OF MY OWN!"

The bellow scared Guinevere to her core. That only got worse as Mindy produced a wicked looking blade, about eight-inches long.

"Have you felt *real* pain, Guinevere Jones?"

Guinevere could not keep her eyes off the glistening point of the combat knife which Mindy was rotating in her hands. The fifteen-year-old girl had never felt so scared in her entire life.

"I have had my fill of you fucking *Predators*! I have spent weeks looking after a bunch of you little bastards who decided to go one step further and become fucking *Marauders*! You all make me sick! For some damn reason, I felt sorry for you all and I decided to help you bastards have a better fucking life. But do any of you motherfuckers show one tiny hint of gratitude? Like FUCK! Maybe I should incarcerate you with all the other little bastards, down below. Believe me, you little bitch, I'd keep you down there until you were fucking forty! Don't worry about Juno – I would have looked after her, and I'm sure Nicholas could handle San Diego without his fuck-buddy."

The glistening point of the knife was mesmerising to Guinevere and she could only stammer out a simple response.

"I'm sorry. . ."

"SORRY! You went after my *daughter*!"

"She's not your daughter!" Guinevere found herself responding as her anger built up inside of her. "You just felt sorry for the little bitch!"

"HOW FUCKING DARE YOU!" Mindy roared, a full head of steam building up. "She is my daughter for as long as she damn well wants to be, and no fucking trollop is going to tell me otherwise. Fuck you, you little cunt!"

Guinevere screamed as the knife flew in her direction and she closed her eyes, expecting never to see anything ever again.

..._...

Guinevere still had her eyes tightly closed, her body shaking with fear.

"I will admit, you put on a good show," Mindy said calmly.

"What!" Guinevere exclaimed as she opened her eyes and she looked above her head to where the knife was embedded in the plaster an inch from where her head had been.

"The only reason that you are still living is because you had no intent to kill her," Mindy went on.

"What do you mean by that?" Guinevere demanded.

"You're not stupid, Guinevere – far fucking from it! You're a fucking Phase 3 *Predator* who was activated. Now, that

tells me that you know your shit – but you failed to take down a Phase 2 *Predator* in a successful ambush. No – Stephanie would be very dead if you had wanted it . . . you would have been dead too – I would have blown your head apart. I know the little bitch has previous for killing in a shower, but I'm certain that you could have held your own . . . if you had wanted to. You are alive, right now, for one reason, Guinevere: you have a conscience."

"I suppose."

"Many of you do. I was intending on killing Foxtail, in response to her trying to kill Stephanie, but I saw that she had a conscience and I let her live – got hell from Stephanie, I can tell you! Stephanie had no choice in killing that girl and you know it – that was why you could not kill her."

Guinevere nodded.

"Is she okay?"

"She won't come out of her bedroom, thanks to your little attack."

"I wasn't thinking. I've fucked things up from end to end. I put my team at risk. I almost got them killed. Then I attacked Stephanie and put everything at risk."

"Fight it, Lilith, fight it."

As Mindy left the Medical Centre, Guinevere collapsed into tears and she sobbed as everything swamped her. On the next level, Mindy sought out Juno.

"Go to Guinevere – she needs you."

Nicholas made to follow, but Mindy stopped him.

"Guinevere needs Juno, right now – give her some space."

"I understand. Thank you for not killing my girl."

"I only kill bad people. Guinevere is not a bad person – and neither are you, Nicholas Hyde. Look after your team and support your girl."

"I will."

That afternoon

South Whipple

Abigail was already in tears as Mindy pulled up and things did not improve as she walked out of the house.

"I don't want to go. Do we really have to do this?"

"Yes, Abigail," Mindy replied as they both climbed into the SUV.

"Will I have to talk to him?"

"No. You don't even have to see him."

"I don't want to see him."

"Captain Williams, Lieutenant Richards, and Commander Haig just need to hear your side of events."

"It wasn't his fault."

"Yes, but he did something really bad, Abigail."

"I know."

Office of Captain Marcus Williams

The office was full to the brim.

As well as Marcus, Vicky Richards, Erin Lindsay, Patrick Haig, and Assistant State's Attorney Peter Stone, Mindy and Abigail were present. For the ten-year-old, it was all quite nerve-racking. Surprisingly, Mindy found Abigail holding on very tightly to her right hand.

"You are Abigail Wilde?" ASA Stone asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You are eleven-years-old?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are what is known as a *Predator*, am I correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"As I understand it, somewhere between July 29th and August 28th, this year, you got taken in London, England, yes?"

"I think so – it's all a bit fuzzy. I was with my friends: Shannon and Jamie. I went out to get a takeaway – I wanted to get Jamie something special."

Abigail stopped as her cheeks turned pink.

"Carry on, please," ASA Stone said politely.

..._...

After Abigail had given her evidence, they all took a break.

"So, how are things at home," Vicky asked Mindy.

"Stephanie's refusing to leave her bedroom," Mindy admitted.

"Mindy tried that when she was younger – I just ordered in a pizza and grabbed some beers from the fridge; best damn movie night ever!" Marcus chuckled as Mindy scowled.

"She'll get over it," Vicky confirmed with a laugh. "Hailee was a little bitch when it came to doing things like that until she was about fourteen!"

When the break was over, Mindy took Abigail downstairs and away from Marcus's office – it was Lucas' turn.

..._...

The boy was understandably very nervous, and he felt the vestiges of fear as he saw the people seated before him.

"You are Lucas Charlton?" ASA Stone asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You are fourteen-years-old?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are what is known as a *Predator*, am I correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"As I understand it, somewhere between July 29th and August 28th, this year, you were in London, England, yes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Between those dates, you have admitted to sexually assaulting a female – is that correct?"

Lucas stared at the floor for a moment as his body trembled with fear. He looked up at the ASA and he nodded.

"Yes."

"Do you recall who that female was, Lucas?"

"She was naked when they brought her in . . . very young, maybe nine or ten. I never saw her face, but she was not resisting the men who brought her in. She was facing away from me . . . I saw the dagger."

"The dagger?" ASA Stone enquired.

"Every *Predator* who passes basic training receives a tattoo behind their right ear in the form of a commando dagger."

"Thank you, Lucas. What happened next?"

"I was not fully aware of what was going on – they'd given me alcohol . . . Vodka, I think. They pulled off my clothes so that I was naked, and I just did it – I had sex with the girl. After the event, I was horrified once I realised what I had done. I was shoved to the floor and two men both attacked the girl."

"Sexually?"

"Yes, sir. They raped her."

"Was that the first time you had experienced sexual intercourse?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are your feelings about it now?"

"I hate myself for what I did, and it made me angry and it put me on a bad road which led me to make bad decisions – I saw myself as a bad person."

Lucas had lost control of his emotions and he was sobbing as he spoke.

"Thank you, Lucas – we'll call it a day there," ASA Stone said.

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Lucas was escorted downstairs for some food while Abigail returned to the office.

"As I understand it," ASA Stone stated. "You tried to kill yourself once you found out what had happened to you. Is that correct?"

"I felt horrified by what had been done to me, so I stole a kitchen knife and I slit my wrist – it was a stupid idea and very painful!" Abigail responded. "That boy did not force himself onto me – he was forced to rape me."

"That is yet to be proven," ASA stone pointed out.

"You have no proof that he was even there – it could have been some other girl."

"We know, but we have to go with the facts."

"What will happen to him?" Abigail asked with genuine concern.

"He will be put on a plane, tomorrow afternoon, with Commander Haig who will take him back to London . . . and trial."

"Will what I think be taken into account?"

"Yes, it will, Abigail."

Forty minutes later

"This came in from Washington, on Friday," Marcus commented as he pressed play on the video.

Vicky had not seen the video and she was intrigued.

"What does it mean?"

"All we know is that the girl is a *Predator*," Marcus responded as his eyes were drawn to a disturbance outside the glass windows of his office. "She is located in Atlanta. . ."

Sergeant Fellowes had been escorting Lucas Charlton past Marcus' office, on the way back to the safehouse when the veteran officer suddenly found himself slammed against the glass bulkhead, banging his head before his feet were kicked out from under him. Once he was able to focus on his situation, he saw Lucas smartly jump in the air, bringing his handcuffed hands to his front and he bolted for the staircase.

Marcus bellowed out a warning.

..._...

"What happened?"

Sam Fellowes looked up at Mindy.

"I don't know. The boy saw something as we passed Marcus' office and then the next thing I know, he knocked me down and he bolted."

"We can track him," Mindy said. "I did not see this coming, I will admit. I thought he was going to stay the course."

"He admitted to rape, Mindy. The kid is facing some serious jail time."

"Considering the evidence, he was not entirely at fault, Sam. Even the person he attacked has admitted that. He also helped her to escape. Did he say anything as he attacked you?"

"Yes. He kept saying it was her. He kept saying he had to help her. I had no idea what he was talking about."

Mindy looked through the glass walls of Marcus' office and she saw the frozen image on the screen.

"I think I might have an idea," she mused.

Six o'clock that evening

Training Facility Echo The Battle Bunker

Mindy studied the boy's track on the giant screen before her.

It made no sense; he was meandering a bit, but he was generally headed in a north-westerly direction. Maybe he was headed to Canada? No – that did not seem right. Minneapolis? There was something which was preventing Mindy from pressing the button which would sever his left foot – the screen was loaded, and the red button pulsed on the horizontal touchscreen. She was also not sending a posse after him – not yet.

"Where are you going, Lucas?"

*The future for Jake, Ewan, and Kate is covered in **Chapter 57: Dick of my other story: Vengeance.***

*The future for James is covered in **Chapter 9: Dawn of my other story: Fusion: Los Angeles.***

***Chapter 364*: Marauder Missing**

***Washington Navy Yard
Washington D.C.***

Naval Criminal Investigative Service

The girl was perhaps thirteen-years-old.

Tears streamed down her face. It was a typical 'proof of life' video and it was typically disturbing. The youngster held up a newspaper for the camera: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* – and it was dated: *THURSDAY, DEC 9, 2016* – the previous day. The girl turned away from the camera and the video stopped.

"Why do we have this?" NCIS Special Agent Timothy McGee asked as he turned away from the large stand-mounted screen.

"Came through in the mail," NCIS Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs responded from his desk. "No idea why."

"It's not Navy, so we pass it onto the FBI?" NCIS Special Agent Ellie Bishop asked as she replayed the video before stopping it as the young girl turned away from the camera.

"Suppose so," Special Agent Gibbs responded.

"What is that?" Forensics Specialist Abby Sciuto asked as she stepped closer to the screen. "McGee – can you zoom in and enhance?"

"One sec."

The image blurred, then zoomed and sharpened.

"The girl has a tattoo!" Special Agent Bishop commented with a surprised tone.

"A dagger behind her right ear," Abby mused.

"I've seen something on that – a BOLO from a few months back – let me see. . ." Special Agent Bishop said as she ran over to her computer and she began to type. "Got it! We need to notify a Captain Williams in Chicago."

"Chicago!" Abby grinned. "The plot thickens. . ."

August 2014

***Somewhere in the
United States of America***

The little scrap of a girl was huddled in the corner of the gym.

To the eleven-year-old, the little eight-year-old was the very image of herself at that very tender age. While the little girl had only been part of the program for a year, Lily O'Brien had endured three years of it. She was a rising star and she was progressing through Phase 2 training with little problem. However, compared to many other *Predators*, she had retained some of who she had been. A large part of that was her compassion for others. For three years she had hidden it, dishing it out only where nobody else would see it. Many *Predators* did not give a shit about their fellow trainees. It was not their fault; it was just the way in which their drug-induced mentality and training had decreed. However, certain *Predators* did not see compassion as a weakness as others saw it. In fact, Lily saw compassion as an asset. She hated humiliation like that which she had suffered on her very first day.

"Hello – what's your name, girl?"

The little scrap of a girl looked up at the older girl with the Irish accent.

"Stephanie Walker."

"I'm Lily O'Brien. I've seen you about."

"I've seen you, too. So?"

"You want to survive in this shithole, Stephanie Walker, then you need to get on your fucking feet and get with the fucking program, now."

The little scrap of a girl rose to her feet. She wore the usual T-shirt and shorts as were expected of her in the gym. Her thin pale arms were bruised, as were the equally thin and pale legs. As with most younger *Predators*, she was developing muscles in her thighs and biceps as her training progressed. Lily dragged the younger girl onto a training mat.

"Hit me!" Lily ordered.

She did – it was pathetic. Lily did not see the girl lasting much longer. How the little scrap had even gained her dagger, she had no idea. However, she was not the first child in that place to begin losing the will to live. Lily did not really give a crap about the other children – it was live and let live, to a point, but Lily saw no point in unnecessary nastiness. She saw it as counter-productive to what the instructors wanted. They wanted killers, but the way they beat the children under their care, they were creating monsters. Lily was doing her best not to become a monster, but the training, the drugs, the regimen – she had no choice but to comply or face the nine-millimetre alternative. If Stephanie Walker did not sort her life out, she would be meeting that alternative very soon.

"Hit me like you fucking mean it!" Lily yelled. "Hit me! Keep hitting me until I go down – fight like your shitty life depends on it; because it fucking does!"

Lily smiled as the gun-metal blue eyes began to shine and the girl took up a proper fighting stance – just like she had been taught.

The Present Day
Sunday, December 11th, 2016

The Battle Bunker
Chicago

Mindy had stayed at the safehouse.

She had been joined by Dave and Stephanie – yes, the girl had wanted to help and that had apparently overridden her fear of being murdered by some vengeful *Predator*, however, Stephanie had hinted at a simple postponement of her self-imposed house arrest. There had also been 'stipulated conditions' – more on that later. Therefore, along with Dave, Stephanie, and some select others, Mindy had wanted to be on hand to see what Lucas was up to. She had also received an unwanted visit from an angry Captain Williams. Naturally, he had been very unhappy about the three police officers who had been injured by Mindy's prisoner during his escape to freedom. The escape had also been seen as guilt on the part of Lucas until Mindy had pointed out that the boy had volunteered his guilt in the first place. Marcus had growled and grumbled his way home once Mindy had reassured him that the boy would be recovered in due course. Marcus had given Mindy thirty-six hours before he would put out a full BOLO for the boy.

According to the computer tracking system, the boy had headed northwest to the city of Madison and he had loitered around the central portion of the city for about an hour before the signal had been lost, completely, and never regained.

"Fuck!" Mindy had exclaimed.

Marty had simply chuckled.

"Mindy – you know a million ways to block a GPS signal; just admit it."

"Okay – I admit it!"

"Stephanie, I assume a Phase 2 munchkin like you would know how to block a GPS signal," Dave suggested.

Stephanie gave Dave a patronising look before rolling her eyes.

"In a fucking heartbeat," she growled.

"Don't forget," Marty reminded them. "We have a fourteen-year-old Hit Girl running around out there – well, one with a

dick."

Mindy scowled while Stephanie giggled.

"Don't worry, honey," Dave said soothingly as he ran a hand over Mindy's groin. "I know you don't have a dick."

"Get off!" Mindy growled as her cheeks went very pink under the gaze of her daughter.

"So," Stephanie wondered. "If he's a fourteen-year-old Hit Girl . . . with a dick . . ." Mindy growled at the comment. ". . . does that mean that I am a ten-year-old Hit Girl?"

Dave laughed.

"Not even close, short fry!" he replied. "You're nowhere near as psychotic, foul-mouthed, or self-loathing."

"Or scary, angry, and downright cruel," Marty added.

"Cunts!" Mindy scowled.

"So, we've lost him," Marty said, getting the conversation back on track.

"No," Mindy said as she covered up her groin from Dave's hand. "We know where he is headed."

"Where?"

"Atlanta."

That afternoon

Atlanta

Stephanie closed her eyes and she focussed her mind.

She had last been in Atlanta, exactly 1,181 days ago – almost three years and three months. It had been the last time she had been free as Stephanie Reeman. It had been the day when her life had changed forever.

"I know, Stephanie," Mindy said, seeing her daughter's apprehensiveness.

Their flight had landed just an hour previously and they were driving into the city, about ten miles to the north. Along with Mindy and Stephanie, the vehicle was also occupied by Dave, Megan, Abigail, Lucy, and Shannon. Mindy had not wanted Abigail along, but the young girl had insisted – considering that she was 'involved'. Lucy was coming along due to her intimate knowledge of most *Predators*; knowledge that might prove useful. As for Megan and Shannon . . . well, they were on protection detail. It had been one of Stephanie's 'stipulated conditions' for leaving the 'perceived safety' of her bedroom. She had insisted on having her own personal protection detail.

"Told you she'd taken on royal airs!" Saoirse had laughed derisively when Mindy had mentioned Stephanie's demand. "Princess Stephanie!"

However, Saoirse had understood Stephanie's worries and she had suggested Shannon while Mindy had suggested Megan. Both girls were highly skilled, very resourceful, and totally trustworthy. Stephanie had agreed on the spot, although Megan and Shannon had had other ideas, despite having accepted their protection postings without hesitation.

By the time they had reached Atlanta on the G6, Stephanie was beginning to regret her demand for protection.

...+...

"Hold on, Stephanie," Megan had said as she had seen Stephanie grab a bag of peanuts on the jet, "We need to check that the peanuts aren't poisoned."

Megan had then proceeded to down the entire pack and then the next one.

"I think she's safe," Shannon commented as she downed a third pack of peanuts. "We'd better strap her in – wouldn't want anything to happen to her."

"I'll check out the Cokes," Megan suggested as she reached for the fridge.

Shannon had then proceeded to fasten Stephanie's lap belt, much to the younger girl's annoyance and humiliation. Abigail had seen all this as extremely funny – until Mindy had swiftly put an end to Megan's and Shannon's fun. After take-off, Stephanie had made for the toilet, only to be intercepted by Shannon.

"What?" Stephanie had demanded.

"Just keeping my protectee under my watchful eye," Shannon had grinned.

"You going to watch me wee?"

"Can you manage that without getting killed?" Megan had quipped.

"I know who is going to get killed, and it ain't fucking me!" Stephanie had growled as she had slammed the door to the toilet behind her.

...+...

Dave pulled in alongside the curb on Martin Street South East.

Stephanie made to climb out of the large GMC SUV, but Shannon shoved her back into the seat. Mindy chuckled as Shannon and Megan made a big show of pretending to be Secret Service agents guarding the President of the United States of America. Mindy left them to it as she checked around the area herself.

"Ten months – is that all you could manage?"

"Gibbs!" Mindy chuckled, recognising the voice instantly.

"You could not even make it through a whole year without dragging us back into one of your dubious schemes."

"It wasn't intentional," Mindy responded as she saw three more agents climb out of the Federal sedan.

"You remember Abby," NCIS Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs announced, indicating NCIS Forensics Specialist Abigail 'Abby' Sciuto.

"Of course," Mindy replied, as Abby came running up.

"Hi, Mindy!" Abby exclaimed as she hugged the vigilante.

"Abby."

"Hello, Mindy," NCIS Special Agent Timothy McGee said, extending his hand.

"Hi, Tim. Ellie."

"Hello, Mindy," NCIS Special Agent Ellie Bishop said with a grin.

"Okay," Dave grinned. "This is Stephanie, as you probably remember. Then we have Lucy, Shannon, and Abigail."

"I am Commander Patrick Haig, Special Branch."

"A Brit, huh," Special Agent Gibbs observed. "Welcome."

Once all the pleasantries were over, Mindy briefly went over the events involving Lucas without mentioning Abigail by name.

"So," Abby concluded. "The boy is guilty of rape, but it was under the influence of alcohol and he was probably forced to do it. But, you want to give him a second chance?"

Abby did not appear amused.

"We all make mistakes and sometimes we find ourselves forced down a road we do not want to follow," Gibbs commented. "Okay, Mindy, you want to give the boy a second chance – we can help you with that, but first, we need to find him."

"He's going after that girl in the video – hence, Atlanta," Mindy replied.

"Hence?" Stephanie laughed. "Big word for you!"

"Shannon, if you please," Mindy directed.

"Yeow!" Stephanie exclaimed as Shannon slapped her around the head. "I thought you were supposed to be protecting me?"

"We are – we're preventing you from encouraging somebody to kill you," Shannon replied.

"A Gibbs slap!" McGee chuckled, ignoring the disapproving look from Gibbs.

"So, how do we find this boy," Gibbs asked impatiently.

"We don't," Mindy replied.

"You lost me, Mindy," Gibbs commented.

"He's too well trained," Stephanie cut in. "You could search the world from now until eternity and never find him."

"For once, gobby bitch is right," Mindy growled. "The boy ran after seeing that video. He is coming after the girl – that is why we are in Atlanta. Some think I took leave of my senses a long time ago, but I am as sane as Gibbs here."

Gibbs raised an eyebrow at that comment, but he let it pass.

"The boy will come to Atlanta – he has to. The girl should prove easier to find."

"Okay," Patrick said slowly. "We need to find the girl – so, where do we start?"

"We contact the kidnapers and arrange a meet," Bishop suggested.

"I'm still concerned as to why the video was sent to NCIS," McGee commented.

"As am I," Patrick replied. "It doesn't make any sense to contact a Federal Agency and ask for a ransom. Could they be drawing us out?"

"A nasty thought," Gibbs agreed. "NCIS has enemies and so does Mindy."

"A kidnapper's video gets sent to NCIS," Bishop summed up. "We check it out and follow protocol when we see the tattoo which is very obvious, to be honest, and we notify Chicago PD – everybody with me?"

"I think you've just hit it on the head, Ellie," Lucy said, speaking for the first time. "She's calling for help."

Everybody looked at Lucy like she was totally nuts.

..._...

Lucy went into instructor mode.

"Her name is Lily O'Brien. She was part of the Third Intake. Back then, part of the basic training covered what to do when everything went to shit and one of the methods was to do exactly what she has done. You create a bogus ransom video and ensure that the Predator dagger is prominently displayed. The plan was that the video, or the image of the dagger, should find its way to somebody who was part of *Urban Predator*. The idea was scrubbed from training after a few months and nobody after the Third Intake was taught it," Lucy explained. "Looks like it worked – kind of."

"So that girl *isn't* in trouble?" Abby enquired.

"Yes – and no," Lucy replied helpfully.

Gibbs gave her an annoyed glare and Lucy flinched slightly.

"Yes, she could be calling for help – or she's in with somebody else (her 'kidnappers') and they are setting a trap for somebody."

"You a so full of good news!" Mindy growled.

"You insisted on bringing me," Lucy retorted.

"Anyway!" Dave cut in before Lucy and Mindy started fighting it out in broad daylight on the streets of Atlanta. "You two can bitch-fight later on. Where do we start bitch one and bitch two?"

Mindy and Lucy both glared at Dave who simply shrugged it off which annoyed both girls who were very used to others bowing before them. Dave chuckled.

"Girls?" Mindy said, directing her comments at Shannon, Stephanie, and Abigail. "Where might your delinquent kind hide out, should they want to keep a low profile?"

The three girls grinned at the unintended compliment before they began conferring between themselves.

"Anytime now," Mindy suggested.

"Gimme a map!" Shannon ordered, and McGee brought up Atlanta on a tablet before passing it to the thirteen-year-old girl.

Shannon ran her fingers over the screen, moving the map around as Abigail and Stephanie whispered in her ear. Then Shannon stopped, and she zoomed in on a section of the east side of Atlanta.

"Krog Street Tunnel," Abigail announced happily. "I'll bet Stephanie's weapons cache it has drainage tunnels extending under the container yard."

Stephanie scowled at Abigail.

"You're on," Mindy chuckled.

Lakewood Heights, South Atlanta

Jonesboro Road South East & Lethea Street South East

It was getting very dark and cold as the afternoon turned into evening.

Everything had gone wrong in a very short period of time. The young girl ran through the melee and destruction which rained down all around her. What had started as a minor altercation over a simple arrest for a minor traffic stop had exploded into a major riot and the girl was caught up in the very centre of it. She should not have even been there, but she needed to find a better place to hide. She had no one to help her. She was scared. She was barely alive. She was only alive because she willed it. She kept telling herself that she was unstoppable – it was all that had kept her going for the past several months. However, she also had responsibilities – two of them – and she had to get back. The damn bus stop was just there, a dozen yards away, but no buses were running thanks to the damn riot. Her confidence willed herself forwards, dodging the fighting and the detritus of the riot as she made a valiant effort and fled to safety.

The thirteen-year-old had not run so hard in a long time. Her body had always been trim and fit, but months of hard living and neglect made the running painful as she dodged debris and people. A car burst into flames, just a few yards away and the girl fell to the ground, instinctively balling herself for the landing, rolling on the pavement and regaining her feet, still moving steadily forward. Only positive thoughts in her mind and the need to return to her lair gave her the ability to keep moving. Her keen eyes identified threats around her and she prioritised them quicker than an AEGIS computer aboard a navy warship could prioritise inbound missiles. A man falling to the ground – she leapt over him with ease before dodging left to avoid a cop with a raised baton who was striking out at anything moving, fear causing the rookie police officer to lose sight of his task. The noise was epic; people shouting, things crashing to the ground, the wounded screaming. The scared screaming just as loudly. Every now and then, a gun would go off and a bullet would fly through the air.

She took a flying leap on to the hood of a wrecked car and she bounded onto the roof of the next. Her eyes selected an opening in the battle lines and she hoped to escape through that opening and make it back to the city five miles north of her. Something grabbed her jacket and she lost balance, crashing to the ground and she rolled into a car, screaming out in pain. Whatever had grabbed her was gone and she scrambled back to her feet. She elbowed a woman out of her way before flipping over the top of a black man who appeared just as scared as she was. Then she

saw several items flying through the air – rocks, bricks, glass bottles . . . she could not avoid all of them.

Then out of nowhere, something cannoned into her and she felt herself being enclosed in strong arms as she and her rescuer crashed down to the ground.

Krog Street Tunnel

"Nice graffiti," Shannon commented as they looked around the tunnel.

The tunnel was a magnet for the city's graffiti artists and it made for a colourful tunnel which would otherwise be just boring concrete. The lighting sucked as many of the light fittings were dark. That just made the tunnel more appealing for people who wanted to be invisible.

"I like this place," Abigail commented. "Kind of reminds me of some of the tube lines I used in London to hide in."

"It is appealing," Stephanie agreed.

"Great place to get mugged," Ellie commented as she fingered the butt of her service pistol.

"The raised walkway," Lucy said as she leapt over the rail, dashed across the road and then over the opposite rail along the walkway.

She was followed by the posse of people across the subterranean street.

"Bingo!" Lucy grinned as she pointed down at a horizontal steel drain cover.

There were scratches on the concrete indicating recent movement of the cover. Mindy grinned, and she waved everyone out of the tunnel. As they walked back towards the parked cars, Mindy outlined her plans for that evening.

"Are you nuts?" Gibbs asked. "Never mind."

Lakewood Heights

Whoever it was, they quickly scooped her off the ground and almost dragged her down a side street which ultimately led towards an auto salvage yard.

Finally, they stopped, and the girl was shoved down behind a dumpster onto a soft blanket.

"Get the fuck off me!"

The girl glared up at her assailant/rescuer.

"Lucas! What the fuck!?"

"Lily – thank God!"

The two youngsters hugged each other before they sat back, and Lucas spoke again.

"What are you doing here?"

"I found out you were here, and I had to come find you."

"How did you find out that I was here?"

"I saw your face in some video on a screen at a Chicago police station and I came after you," Lucas explained.

Lily's eyes narrowed, and she looked worried.

"Why were you in a Chicago police station and what was my video doing on a Chicago police station screen – this whole thing fucking stinks!"

"I got myself in the shit again."

Lily's eyes narrowed even further, and she stood up, reaching behind her back.

"*What* sort of shit are you in?"

"This sort of shit!" an electronically enhanced voice responded.

Lily turned around in shock, but she recovered quickly as her hand came around from behind her back.

"No!" she yelled.

"No!" Lucas yelled for a totally different reason as Lily produced a pistol and she fired off seven rounds into Hit Girl's torso, sending the famed vigilante flying backwards. "What the fuck!?"

Lily had bolted, and Lucas ran after her.

"What the hell, Lily!?"

"I just killed Hit Girl – not a good idea to hang about," Lily retorted angrily.

"Ha! Yeah, right!" Lucas exclaimed. "What you did do, was piss off the one person who could give you a new life."

"Hit Girl – like fuck, Lucas; she's here to kill us."

"You are so fucking stupid!"

Hit Girl

"Well, it wasn't exactly a trap."

"*Did you get yourself shot again?*" Psyche enquired over the radio from two hundred yards away.

"Seven fucking times!" Hit Girl growled unhappily.

"*Bet that stung!*" Psyche quipped with a sly snigger.

"I am perfectly happy for you to experience the seven bullets," Hit Girl responded as she regained her feet while rubbing her chest and wishing that she had mounted her heavier chest armour.

"*I'll pass!*"

Five miles north Cabbagetown

"Are they always like this?" Gibbs asked impatiently as he listened to the bickering over the radio.

"More or less," Kick-Ass conceded "Actually, more."

"*Where are they headed?*" Hit Girl asked.

"As we expected, the tracker is moving north, back into the city," Abby responded as she examined her tablet. "Bit surprised he kid allowed it to transmit again."

"Not really," Stormtide suggested. "He just wanted us off his back while he found Lily. He found her, so he's kind of calling in the cavalry."

"Only, Lily don't want no cavalry," Fury added.

"That was a good idea, getting facial rec.," Abby conceded. "Once we could limit the cameras that we needed to search, finding the girl was easy. The boy helping us pinpoint his position was a big help."

"What was the girl doing in the southside?" Gibbs wanted to know.

Abby looked a little uncomfortable as she turned the tablet around and she passed it over to her boss. The still image

showed the young girl talking to a man and Gibbs flicked to the next still image – the girl handed the man a package and she received a smaller package in return.

"Who is he?" Patrick asked. "A druggy?"

"Yeah," Abby confirmed. "Tony Ramon – he's the lieutenant for a drug dealer who calls himself 'Magic'. He's the biggest in Atlanta."

"Oh, *shit!*" Piranha growled over the radio.

"She didn't," Stormtide countered.

"She fucking did," Psyche confirmed.

"Stupid bitch!" Fury added.

"*What are you damn Predator Princesses fucking on about?*" Hit Girl demanded as she jumped into her rental.

Hit Girl

The 2015 Ford Mustang in gloss black burnt rubber as Hit Girl accelerated hard, working up through the six-speed manual gearbox connected to the five-litre B8 motor.

Hit Girl had to take a slight detour to get around the simmering riot and onto the main route heading north. She sensed danger and Piranha's explanation made her blood run cold.

"Straight out of the fucking Predator Playbook," Lucy groaned. *"You rip off drug dealers and sell their dope straight back to them before they even know it is missing. Gets you a lot of cash – but it can also piss of said drug dealer when he finds out he's just been fucked over."*

"So, Lily is in danger – and by extension, Lucas," Hit Girl growled as she put her foot down.

"What's new," Kick-Ass threw in. "Damn *Predators!*"

Lily and Lucas

"You're not telling me everything, Lucas," Lily growled unhappily.

"I was Hit Girl's prisoner and I escaped," Lucas replied.

"How did she find you – she obviously wasn't looking for me."

"Look, Lily – I thought I might never see you again. When I saw you in that video, I just legged it and came to find you. Okay – time to come clean . . . I have a tracker."

Lucas stopped, and he pulled up his trouser leg.

"You fucking traitor!" Lily exclaimed as she threw a punch at Lucas, bloodying his nose. "Stay aware from me!"

Lily ran ahead with Lucas running behind.

..._...

Lily was too busy running away from Lucas to see the danger only a few yards away.

She was not far from her hidden lair and she was beginning to feel safe. Her mind was on the shock of coming across Lucas, rather than on her safety. She never saw the parked SUV. She never saw the six men moving towards her.

"Lily!"

As the girl turned her head towards the sound of the yell, she saw the men. Her pistol came out and she fired off a single shot before a tirade of gunfire raged in her direction. Lily had no choice but to run for safety and she bolted for the alternative entrance to her lair, dodging the bullets as she scrambled up a tree to the right of the tunnel entrance

and she dove over the concrete wall into the container terminal.

She continued running until she vanished beneath a row of container cars.

..._...

The boy turned as he heard the roar of a V8 motor approaching.

The Mustang turned broadside across the road, sending one of the gunmen flying as the back fender smacked into him. Lucas froze as the car skidded to a halt just a foot away from him and a voice yelled at him out of the open window.

"Get the fuck in, asshole!"

Lucas felt raw fear as he hauled open the door and dived into the car, trying to ignore the bullets and the thought of what lay ahead from him, unsure of what was worse – the bullets, or facing Hit Girl. He had barely slammed the car door when Hit Girl slammed her right foot to the floor and the vehicle slithered on the blacktop, before diving into the tunnel, bullets striking the rear of the car, smashing the rear window. They drove hard for less than half a mile before Hit Girl took a hard right into a parking lot and slamming on the brakes, cutting the engine.

"What are doing, Lucas?"

"I had to come after her – you must understand."

"Why didn't you come to me?"

"I couldn't take the risk that you'd stop me."

"What is she to you?"

Lucas paused as he took a deep breath.

"She's my half-sister."

"There's nothing in her file . . . or yours."

"We never let on – they'd have killed one or both of us."

"Not easy to keep such a secret, huh?"

"I'm sorry about the officers I hurt. I just lost it when I saw her face on the video."

"What I am I going to do with you, Lucas?" Hit Girl growled. "I'd slap you, but it looks like somebody already has."

Lucas looked very low as his eyes dropped.

"I need to help her – she's in shit."

"Yeah – she's been stealing from those drug dealers and selling their shit right back to them."

Lucas groaned.

"Stupid bitch!" he growled, echoing Fury's sentiment.

..._...

Hit Girl started the engine and she headed away from the tunnel before pulling into another parking lot a short distance down the road.

There, Lucas found a pair of SUVs parked up and a group of people waiting – some of them masked. Hit Girl stopped and turned off the engine before opening her door.

"Get out."

Lucas climbed out and he walked towards the group. He was approached by a short female in body armour who

pulled off her mask.

"Hello, Lucas."

Lucas froze for a moment and as he studied the girl before him, his eyes lowered, and he would not look at her.

"I'm Abigail Wilde."

"They would not tell me your name."

"I don't blame you, Lucas – we both went through hell of every kind."

"I deserve to die for what I did."

Abigail looked up at Hit Girl who nodded. Abigail then knelt down and with the assistance of a small tool, she removed Lucas' ankle monitor.

"I will not allow you to be treated like a criminal," Abigail said as she handed the device to Lucas.

They all stopped speaking as a tow truck pulled into the parking lot and stopped a few yards away. A man climbed down, and he called out.

"This here is private property – I have to boot your vehicles if you don't leave."

"Fucking hell!" Hit Girl growled as she turned towards the man.

"Holy shit!" the man exclaimed. "I – err . . . fuck!"

"We were never here," Hit Girl growled.

"Yeah – I mean no, I never saw you," the man stammered as she scrambled for his truck.

Hit Girl chuckled as the tow truck performed a shaky U-turn before shooting out of the parking lot and down the street.

Lily O'Brien

The lair was dank, smelly, and not all that appealing.

Lily sat on a pile of dirty newspapers which were a makeshift seat for the thirteen-year-old girl. She knew that she had fucked up, but she had had no choice – she had needed the money. Then Lucas had appeared and, yes, he had saved her from certain injury, but then *she* had appeared! The fucking traitor had led her straight to him. The video had been created with much effort for somebody from the CIA who could help her, but somehow the Chicago PD had got their hands on it. There was so much at stake – much more than her simple life.

"Not a bad place."

Lily jumped up, her pistol aimed at the intruder. It was a girl – maybe ten-years-old and the face was familiar.

"Stephanie Walker?"

"That's me, Lily O'Brien."

"How are you doing, Lily?" came another voice.

"Lucy," Lily growled as another girl appeared.

"We are not your enemy, Lily," Lucy said. "Trust us, please?"

"I don't have a damn choice, do I?"

"Yes, you do," Stephanie replied. "You have a choice – I just hope you make the correct one."

Lily tried to process all that was happening, but her mind was overloaded already, and it could not cope with these faces from her past.

"I need to know that I can trust you both."

"You helped me to survive, Lily," Stephanie admitted. "I owe you for that."

"I know we've had our differences, Lily," Lucy said. "But I always had your best interests at heart. I am not going to apologise for stripping you that first day. Nor am I going to apologise for the times after that when I humiliated or hurt you. The very fact that you are alive now, tells me that I did the right thing by you."

Reluctantly, Lily nodded.

"I'm going nowhere without Mackenzie."

"What, or who is a Mackenzie?" Stephanie asked.

"Lily?" came a small, timid voice.

Stephanie and Lucy were stunned to see a small girl of about nine-years-old emerging from a steel culvert.

"This is Mackenzie," Lily said. "She and her brother are homeless and I am responsible for them."

"Brother?" Lucy enquired.

"Who's that, 'kenzie?"

Lucy and Stephanie were stunned to see small boy appearing from out of the same steel culvert. The boy was covered in dirt as was the girl.

"Bloody hell!" Stephanie exclaimed.

The boy was tiny and he could have been only about four, maybe five-years-old.

..._...

Lily agreed to speak with Hit Girl and while Stephanie remained with the two youngsters, Lucy led Lily above ground.

"So, you found my little hideout, huh?" Lily said, making conversation as they walked.

"We think alike, Lily – that's how we found it and tracked you," Lucy explained.

"It takes a *Predator* to hunt a *Predator*, right?"

Lily stopped talking as she saw Lucas waiting beside Hit Girl. Lily forced a smile and she approached the boy who would not look her in the face. Lily gave the boy a hug which was lamely returned.

"Hug me, or I slap you again," Lily whispered and Lucas did so. "I'm sorry for striking you."

"That's okay," Lucas replied. "You had good reason."

"Enough of the sibling bonding," Hit Girl growled. "It's time to leave before your drug dealing friends attack."

"I did kinda cause that – sorry."

"Never say you're sorry; it's a sign of weakness," Special Agent Gibbs suggested.

"Rule number six," Special Agent McGee clarified.

"NCIS?" Lily asked.

"We are," Gibbs replied. "Why us?"

"My Mum and Dad were in the Royal Navy – I couldn't exactly send the video to the Admiralty in London, could I?" Lily replied. "I knew that I could trust NCIS – and I was right, I suppose."

"We got problems!" Abby Sciuto announced as she studied her tablet. "Men – many men - approaching from all directions."

..._...

They all scattered into defensive positions.

There was no time to run – it was fight or die. For Hit Girl and Kick-Ass, it was business as usual – just as it was for the *Predators*. Hit Girl rummaged in the trunk of the damaged Mustang and she produced a Glock 19 pistol along with a pouch of magazines.

"Lucas!"

"Yes, Hit Girl."

"You know how to use one of these?" she grinned.

Lucas expertly cleared the weapon before loading it and preparing it for use.

"Good," Hit Girl growled. "What about you, Styx?"

"Not heard that moniker in a while," Lily chuckled. "Yes, I have a weapon and a few spare magazines."

"Here!" Piranha called out as she threw a ballistic vest to Lily and Lucas.

"Do you need a piece, Commander?" Special Agent Gibbs asked.

"No need, Special Agent Gibbs," Commander Haig replied as he pulled out a pistol from beneath his jacket.

Gibbs nodded approvingly at the FN Browning Hi-Power semi-automatic pistol.

"I figured you for a .38 revolver," Gibbs chuckled.

"I am not that old, Special Agent! I fell in love with the Hi-Power during my army days and I've always preferred one. Many bastards have met their end at the muzzle of this very weapon."

Gibbs grinned as he drew his SIG Sauer P228 pistol.

..._...

The drug dealers were not used to taking on experts.

The first men into the kill-zone died violently with bullets to the head. Commander Haig was enjoying himself as he put one down with ease. Gibbs grunted and dropped a pair. Commander Haig was having none of it as he dropped another, then another. The attacking drug dealers quickly altered their attack before they lost too many and the incoming gunfire became more accurate causing McGee and Bishop to duck.

"Warming up, just nicely," Commander Haig commented.

"Not the best, are they?" Gibbs commented as a bullet struck the roof of the SUV a foot from his head.

Hit Girl just shook her head as she fired aimed shots at anything that moved and somethings that did not. Kick-Ass kept overall watch, ensuring that nobody attempted to outflank them. He saw Lucas and Lily expertly firing their weapons at the enemy. They both behaved just like any other *Predator* which he had witnessed fighting. Professional. Coolheaded. Dangerous. Lethal. Lily and Lucas fought alongside Piranha, Stormtide, and Fury like they had been doing it forever. He lost sight of Lucas and then Lily as the fighting progressed and cooled. The attack began to dissipate as the surviving gunmen chose to abandon the fight before silence descended on the area as the last gun went quiet. Kick-Ass sighed with intense relief as he realised that it was over, and he strolled over towards his wife. He looked around and then his face went pale beneath his mask.

He could see a body on the ground.

..._...

Hit Girl and Kick-Ass knelt down beside the body.

"Fuck!" Hit Girl growled.

"The fucking bastard took the bullets for me," Lily growled, tears flooding down her face as Lucy tried to treat the bullet wounds with help from Ellie Bishop.

"I deserve to die; my life is forfeit, Lily – you stay safe, you hear?"

"Lucas. . ."

"Hit Girl – promise me that as I die, you will look after my kin. She is good, despite what she was taught to be. Save her."

"You have my word as Hit Girl, Lucas."

The boy's expression changed, and Hit Girl saw momentary relief on his face before it contorted in obvious pain.

"Oh, God – it hurts . . . it hurts." The expression quickly changed to one of fear. "I'm so scared . . . please."

Hit Girl held one hand while Lily held the other. The boy squeezed tightly, then he smiled up at Lily for one last time before he fell back, dead. Lily bent down, sobbing steadily as she hugged her half-brother. Hit Girl stared down at the boy for a moment before she stood up. Kick-Ass saw the body language and he stepped back, giving his wife her space.

"I am sick to death of innocent people dying," Hit Girl breathed angrily, her fists balling and flexing open as she turned to Lily and the others. "Go with Piranha, Lily – you are safe; I guarantee it. But for now, somebody is going to die. Lucas may have done some bad things, but he was not a bad kid – he deserved to live. Gibbs, please see that Lucas' body is recovered and taken back to Chicago. Stormtide, Fury – we have work to do before the dawn."

"What's she going to do?" Lily asked through her tears. "Take on the whole damn organisation?"

Fury chuckled as she responded coldly.

"The streets will run with blood, tonight, Styx."

***Chapter 365*: Marauder Avenged**

Sunday, December 11th, 2016

Atlanta, USA

"Stormy – go get Psyche and the kids," Hit Girl growled.

Stormtide bristled, but she did not dare respond as she wished with Hit Girl on the literal warpath – she liked breathing. Not surprisingly, Hit Girl glared at Stormtide when she reappeared with just the boy.

"Can you not follow simple orders, Stormy?"

The tone brooked no argument but Stormtide stood her ground, glad that her emotions were hidden beneath a mask.

"Tell Hit Girl what you told me, Isaac."

The five-year-old boy hesitated for a moment as he stared up at Hit Girl.

"They took 'kenzie."

"Where is my daughter?" Hit Girl demanded.

"They hurt her, and they made her go with 'kenzie."

Hit Girl began to shake – but not with fear. Her chest heaved as her breathing increased and she lashed out, her armoured gauntlet shattering the side window of the Mustang before leaving a sizable dent in the adjoining body panel. Hit Girl marched directly over to where McGee was standing over a wounded gunman. The wounded man looked up at Hit Girl and he went very pale as Hit Girl grinned fiendishly, pulling the 18.5-inch purple-hilted Tanto from her right greave.

"I think we need to talk."

..._...

While what Hit Girl was doing went against what the Federal Agents were sworn to uphold, Gibbs sat with Patrick and they nonchalantly reloaded their expended magazines.

The local police were far too busy with the expanding riot to respond to the firefight – at least not immediately. Abby and McGee were busy collating everything that knew about the drug dealer known as 'Magic' and his lieutenant, Tony Ramon. When the red and blue flashing lights heralded the arrival of an Atlanta PD Crown Victoria, McGee halted the officers with his Federal credentials and officially took custody of the scene. The police officers left the scene to look after more urgent problems.

Behind Hit Girl's Mustang, Hit Girl ripped off the duct tape from the man's mouth.

"You ready to talk, yet?"

"Yes. . ."

Hit Girl slapped the tape back into place and she rammed her Tanto into the man's leg for the umpteenth time. The man braced up as he screamed, his sounds muffled by the duct tape. After waiting half a minute for the man to calm down slightly, Hit Girl ripped off the duct tape.

"Anything – I'll tell you fucking anything . . . just don't stab me again."

The man was begging as Hit Girl grinned.

"Let's hear it, and it had better be good or I come back to finish you off, you fucking pussy."

The man nodded as he began to spill the proverbial beans in copious helpings.

***Seven miles to the southeast
and just north of the airport***

North Martin Street, East Point

It took them less than an hour to reach their destination and formulate a plan of attack.

The armour-clad vigilantes would go in while the others covered the outside of the building to prevent anybody escaping. Hit Girl had vowed that nobody would survive the encounter that night. Abby and McGee had been able to hack into the building's security system and they had also been able to confirm the presence of Tony Ramon. The man was seen talking to a tall, thin man who appeared to be the boss – 'Magic'. The plan was simple: Kick-Ass and Hit Girl would hit the building with a frontal assault while Piranha, Stormtide and Fury would gain entry via a side entrance. Hit Girl had given one final order before they moved off to their start positions.

"No mercy."

The Bedivere Group

It was a name used to cover the building's true use.

The group was used to generate legal income for Atlanta's largest drug dealer. He worked almost unopposed as Atlanta was free of vigilantes and he had paid off key senior officers in the Atlanta Police Department. He operated a slick organisation which was perfect in every way from the legally employed staff, to his impeccable taxes. As far as he was concerned, he was untouchable, and nobody knew what his people did after hours.

At almost nine that night, the final employees were just leaving for the night after a long day at the office. They all worked hard, and they enjoyed their large salaries. The security guard at the reception desk in the lobby, who had taken over from the receptionist at six, stood up as a tall, well-built man pulled open the door and stepped inside.

"Sorry, bud – we're closed until eight, tomorrow morning," the security guard said.

"No problem," the man said as he looked around the lobby area and then took a moment to examine the glazed frontage of the building. "I'll be back."

The first-floor conference room

"I'm fucking certain of it, man."

"Certain of what," Hank 'Magic' Bedivere asked.

"It was a Chicago Vigilante!" the man exclaimed in a voice bordering on hysterics.

"This is Atlanta – we're over seven-hundred miles away from damn Chicago," Bedivere pointed out with more than a little disdain for his employee.

"He had that yellow and green mask, too."

Bedivere was about to respond when the building shook violently. He looked up to see glass and aluminium flying across the lobby and what could only be an SUV parked on top of the lobby reception desk. As he watched, a large form stepped out from the driver's seat.

"I fucking told you!" his employee yelled over the noise of falling glass and masonry. "It's him!"

"Fuck!" Bedivere observed unnecessarily as a very nasty thought struck him. "If *he's* here, then so is his bitch."

"That would be me!"

Bedivere spun around to see a purple-clad armoured form at the doorway behind him. The man fled out of the conference room via another door as his men poured bullets at the purple bitch in their midst.

"Stop fucking shooting me, you fucking bastards!" Hit Girl roared as she returned fire with her twin Glock 19 Gen4 pistols.

The warehouse

The 160-foot warehouse which extended out the back of the building was split in two along the length, with one being almost twice the width of the other.

Towering racks of equipment filled both warehouses and fulfilled the legal business needs of the organisation. Underneath the right-hand warehouse, the not-so-legal business needs were fulfilled by a classified basement which did not exist on any plans. A good chunk of the space was occupied by drug-related equipment and stores of product, with literal stacks of cash. But that was not all; a seventy-yard tunnel led to the south and came up inside a decrepit, rusty warehouse which was seemingly abandoned and condemned. As you moved up the steps from the tunnel, you found yourself in an area made from bricks. There were seven doors – all wooden, and very solid – which led into seven rooms. One was a room with couches, a television, and a compact kitchen. The other six rooms were little more than cells. None of the rooms had natural light and they were all soundproofed against yells and screams. At that point, only one of the rooms was occupied. The room stank of sweat and semen, both of which were overridden by the stench of urine and faeces. However, all that was hidden beneath the reek of fear and human distress.

The girl was naked, and she lay on a musty old mattress which, in turn, lay on the bare concrete floor. A dirty rag was tied behind her head, and it then passed across her mouth and was pulled tightly back into her jaw. Her wrists were bound above her head as she lay on her front and then tied to a ringbolt embedded into the concrete. Her ankles were spread and secured to a pair of ringbolts at the foot of the mattress. The girl's skin was dirty, and she did not appear to have been properly washed in days, if not weeks. The young girl was probably very beautiful beneath all the dirt. Her long hair, a pleasant light brown where the dirt was not embedded, also hinted to her previous beauty. The girl was tall with a well-formed body which hinted at her age which placed her in the late teens. She was asleep, mercifully. She had no idea how many men had visited her. She had no idea how many organs had penetrated her. The pile of fairly fresh, used condoms just within her line of sight hinted at maybe half a dozen visitors that afternoon. It was the same, three days a week – yes, they allowed her time off to recover between sessions of rape.

Not that she was allowed much rest as the other four days were spent with men staring at her body as she sat tied to a chair, or strung up, spread-eagled for all to see. Men paid good money to see young flesh. A cursory hose-down in the central area where there was a drain was all that kept the girl vaguely clean. Her brain had long ago shutdown, ignoring what was happening to her human body. Her human mind was stored, safe and sound deep within her head. She had no idea how long she had been there, nor how long her torture would go on.

All she heard was silence as she slept the sleep of the dead.

Piranha, Stormtide, and Fury

While Kick-Ass and Hit Girl were terminating the drug dealers at the opposite end of the building, the three girls were attacking from the west end of the south side.

At precisely the same moment that Kick-Ass parked his SUV in the front lobby, Fury bolted to one side of the large entry door and flattened herself against the steel siding. There was a large explosion and the roller shutter crumpled to the ground. Four men turned in surprise, raising their weapons . . . just not fast enough as Stormtide coldly gunned them down with her Heckler & Koch MP7A1 PDW. She ran past their bodies as blood streamed across the concrete floor. The girl cared less for the men – they were the enemy and responsible for hundreds of deaths through their drug trade. She was followed by Piranha and Fury, both similarly armed. They ran down the rows of shelving, clearing each row, gunning down another seven men, all armed.

The three *Predators* moved and though as one with very little in the way of communication. No energy was wasted – all was spent on doing what they were trained to do . . . to kill.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl

Kick-Ass kicked down the door to a corner office.

"Knock, knock!"

Two men fired off shotguns, the pellets rebounding off of Kick-Ass' heavy chest armour. He strode forward, ignoring the blasts and he yanked one of the weapons out of the hands of a gunman before turning the weapon on both men and adding some colour to the back wall of the decidedly boring office décor. He dropped the weapon and he stepped

out of the office to where he found Hit Girl standing before Tony Ramon. The man was a good foot taller than the infamous vigilante, but he was rooted to the spot as Hit Girl produced one of her balisong blades flicking it open.

"Do you wanna know why I use a knife? Guns are too quick; you can't savour all the . . . little emotions. In . . . you see . . . in their last moments, people show you who they really are."

The man was shaking – obviously a bully who enjoyed dishing it out . . . but when the same came calling, he quite literally pissed his pants.

"Hit Girl!" Kick-Ass called out. "Stop playing with your food!"

"Okay," Hit Girl replied as she slashed the bastard's throat open. "Boring conversation anyway."

..._...

Hit Girl sprinted down the corridor which ran the full width of the building, past Kick-Ass' badly parked SUV in the lobby and onto a small open plan area.

Hit Girl paused as she registered muttering from behind a five-foot partition. She grinned as she drew her twin Wakizashi swords and rammed both through the partition and on into the two guards taking shelter on the other side. After a measured period of pain, Hit Girl withdrew her swords and she moved on.

"I think they got the point," she grinned to Kick-Ass who just shook his head in disgust at the bad humour.

Together, they raced up the fire stairs to the second floor having cleared the first. A man ambushed them at the exit from the stairs with a large machete which Kick-Ass easily defeated and turned on the dead man fighting. Kick-Ass rammed the blade through the man's stomach, pinning him to the drywall behind.

"Stick around!" the veteran vigilante growled as he moved on.

Piranha, Stormtide, and Fury

Fury was on point, her bō-staff separated into two halves and Fury wielded it with expert and deadly precision.

Piranha and Stormtide hung back, well out of blade range and the pair were more than a little concerned for their younger friend. She was getting a little wild and her fury was best not experienced. The youngster matched her real and code names without even trying. Stormtide cringed behind her mask as a man lost his head, quite literally, and Fury was sprayed with blood which she studiously ignored as she pushed forwards, for her next target. Piranha shook her head – she was worried.

"She blames herself," Piranha commented.

"Yep!" Stormtide confirmed.

"She's going to come off the rails with a bang," Piranha added.

"Oh, yeah," Stormtide agreed.

"Are you two bitches just going to stand there?" Fury demanded from several yards ahead of them.

Piranha and Stormtide ran to join their friend.

Kick-Ass and Hit Girl with Piranha, Stormtide, and Fury

They met up on the second floor, at the south end of the building.

"Well?" Hit Girl demanded.

"Fury's gutted everything we've come across," Stormtide explained. "Left a bit of a mess and that blood will *never* come out of the carpet."

"No sign of Psyche, the kid, or the boss man . . . err Boss," Piranha reported.

"Thank you, Piranha," Hit Girl replied. "Good to have a professional on board."

"Teacher's pet!" Stormtide growled as she stalked off.

Fury chuckled as she ran after Stormtide.

..._...

"The fucking bastard has to be here somewhere!"

Hit Girl fumed as she found herself standing on a mezzanine floor overlooking the larger of the two warehouses. She stalked along the mezzanine, looking down each row of shelves.

"I've got the fucking bastard!" she yelled as she saw a movement and she dived over the railing down to the concrete floor below.

The man panicked, running hard for his life. He bolted out of the side door which the *Predators* had earlier destroyed, and he quickly came under fire.

"Federal Agents!"

"Special Branch!"

Bedivere dived behind a car as some of his men came around the building and they opened fire on NCIS . . . and Special Branch. Bedivere was not hanging around and he ran south towards the railway, throwing himself over a three-foot fence. Hit Girl ignored the flying bullets as she calmly walked between the opposing sides.

"Get out the bloody way!" Commander Haig bellowed. "Bloody vigilantes!"

Hit Girl ignored him as she easily leapt over the same fence and ran after her quarry.

..._...

They ran through the darkness along the railroad tracks.

Hit Girl was in a deviously devious mood and she allowed her quarry to remain a dozen yards ahead of her – never closer. She could take him down whenever she wanted, but instead, she wanted to extend the chase. Did she get off chasing bad guys down? Hell, yeah! She loved the feeling of adrenaline in her veins. Ever since that first day when her Daddy had almost scared the shit out of her with a pistol and she had experienced her first ever burst of pure adrenaline in her veins. It was a feeling that intoxicated her even if it meant cruel and inhumane treatment for the person she was chasing – well, they fucking deserved it, right?

A little over three hundred yards later, Bedivere led them to the left, away from the railroad tracks, and behind a nondescript building.

..._...

Bedivere was not as fit as he used to be, and he struggled to stand as he found himself cornered by the most feared women in the United States of America – if not the world.

"I'm every nightmare you've ever had. I'm your worst dream come true. I'm everything you ever were afraid of."

Hank 'Magic' Bedivere felt genuine fear and he knew that the end was nigh – but his brain still struggled to find some way out of his current predicament. Hit Girl moved slightly to his left, so he began to move away, to his right. He hadn't realised where he had been standing, but Hit Girl had. Hank Bedivere fell backwards, about ten feet and landing at the bottom of a steel box. The sides were vertical with an odd angle at the top. As Hit Girl vanished from sight, he tried to find a way out, but the sides were bare metal with no handholds in sight.

"Oh, this brings back good memories," Hit Girl mused as she ran her hands over the control panel before her, then she shouted down to Bedivere. "I'm crushed that we're never going to see each other again . . . just not as much as you will be."

"No!" the man yelled as a large diesel engine started up and he realised with increasing horror where he was.

The car crusher moved speedily, and Bedivere shrank into a ball as the sides closed in on him. Then he screamed, and he screamed . . . very quickly, though, there was a crunching sound, and the screaming stopped. The diesel engine died soon after as the crushing sequence ended. There was silence from within the crusher.

"What a douche!" Hit Girl muttered as she turned and walked away.

Back at Martin Street

"You found him?" Kick-Ass enquired.

"Yeah," Hit Girl replied nonchalantly.

"What happened to him?" Kick-Ass persisted.

"We couldn't get along – he was crushed."

"What the hell does that mean?" Kick-Ass asked his wife.

"A girl needs to keep her secrets," Hit Girl grinned as Kick-Ass simply shook his head.

It appeared to Hit Girl that the fight was over – only, there was still no sign of Stephanie or Mackenzie.

"I think I might have something," Commander Haig commented.

Hit Girl allowed herself to be led over to where one of Bedivere's men lay on the ground – a pool of blood spreading around his head.

"This, err thing, informed me that there is another floor," Commander Haig said, stamping on the concrete. "Just over here."

Hit Girl stared down at the large rectangular hatchway set into the concrete at their feet.

..._...

Leaving NCIS and Special Branch up above, Hit Girl took her team below.

It was obviously the core of Bedivere's drug world and it had protection. Submachinegun fire erupted out as the team found themselves entering a kill zone. But they were prepared and as Fury and Stormtide threw smoke grenades, Kick-Ass engaged with a Kel-Tec KSG bullpup 12-gauge pump action shotgun. The shells were enhanced breaching rounds which tore apart the supposed ballistic protection that the defenders were relying on for their safety. After their protection was gone, Kick-Ass' rounds tore apart blood and bone, ultimately leaving none standing – at least not in one piece.

The smoke from the grenades slowly dissipated as the smashed overhead lighting flickered giving the subterranean facility a foreboding air as Hit Girl's armoured boots crunched through broken glass, blood, and fractured bone. They searched every inch of the floor until they came to a single door remaining. Beyond the door, they could hear the sounds of somebody having the living daylight beaten out of them – then a girl's scream.

Without hesitation, Kick-Ass flattened the door and all five burst into the room with weapons raised.

..._...

"It's about fucking time you lazy twats turned up!"

Stephanie sat fuming with Mackenzie beside her and a large cosh held in her hands. All around her, men and women lay scattered on the floor, mostly unconscious. One moved and tried to sit up. Whack! The cosh cracked the man on the side of his head.

"Stay the fuck down, pillock! I've been waiting so damn long, I thought I'd have to put these muppets down and breakout myself!"

Stephanie stood up and she pulled Mackenzie with her, barging past Hit Girl and Kick-Ass as she made for the hatch leading upwards. Kick-Ass simply shrugged as he looked at his wife who seemed genuinely lost for words.

"She is so like you, honey."

Hit Girl just stood there, gaping at her daughter as she vanished from sight.

The tunnel

McGee found a concealed doorway which led from the room Stephanie had been held in.

The doorway opened up onto a well-lit tunnel leading to the south. The tunnel was about seventy yards in length and wide enough for three people to walk abreast without bumping into one another. Piranha and Stormtide led the way with Fury acting as tail-end-Charlie and guarding their backs. At the end of the tunnel, they stopped at a set of concrete steps. Fury went up first, keeping low. If there had been guards, they were long gone.

"Clear!" Fury reported as she stood in the centre of the space and studied the seven stout wooden doors.

She was soon joined by Kick-Ass and Hit Girl, who were closely followed by Special Agent Gibbs, and Commander Haig.

"Well, well, well, the proverbial hen house," Gibbs commented. "The bastard was into the sex-trade, too."

"Anybody at home?" Haig asked.

"We've found a kitchen and two empty rooms with some weird leather shit," Stormtide commented.

"What," Hit Girl grinned. "You and Tempest aren't into bondage?"

"No," Stormtide growled, pulling at her mask as her face heated up.

"Disgusting thought!" Fury growled with a mock shudder.

Kick-Ass kicked in the next door – the room was empty. As was the next, and the next. The final room, however, was occupied.

"Holy shit!" Kick-Ass breathed. "In here!"

..._...

The girl was naked, and she lay on a musty old mattress which, in turn, lay on the bare concrete floor.

Kick-Ass gently eased off the dirty rag which was tied behind her head and then passed across her mouth and which was pulled tightly back into her jaw. The girl moaned as she began to wake from her sleep of the dead. Kick-Ass swiftly severed the ropes which bound her wrists and her ankles. The girl's skin was dirty, and she did not appear to have been properly washed in days, if not weeks, in Kick-Ass' opinion. Very gently, Kick-Ass eased the girl up into a sitting position. The young girl was probably very beautiful beneath all the dirt. Her long hair, a pleasant light brown where the dirt was not embedded, also hinted to her previous beauty. The girl was tall with a well-formed body which Kick-Ass decided placed the girl in her late teens.

Fury appeared with a small bottle of water from the kitchen fridge and she tore open the cap. Kick-Ass gently poured a little into the girl's open mouth and her eyelids opened to reveal large brown eyes which were full of fear and panic. She took in the various faces arrayed before her – most of them masked. She looked down at her wrists and her ankles – they were free . . . she forced a smile. Her mind was slow to properly appreciate what was going on – she took the proffered bottle of water and she began to gulp the wonderful liquid down her parched throat.

"Easy now," an electronically enhanced voice growled, pulling the bottle away. "You're safe – and there's plenty more water; too much and you'll be sick."

The girl's head turned to stare into the green and yellow mask. She no longer cared who saw her naked anymore and men leering at her body was just a day to day activity which she tolerated as she had no choice. Was she really safe? She knew who she was, and she knew what she had lost. Would anybody believe that she was who she was? Would the nightmare that had been her life for weeks – or more, she had no idea – ever end? The masked vigilante gently wiped her face with a damp towel – she cringed as she saw the towel get dirty very quickly.

"Bloody hell!" Commander Haig exclaimed as he looked closer at the face before him. "The Lady Lara Cockburn, as I

live and breathe!"

..._...

Hit Girl was struggling to comprehend how their trip to Atlanta had gone so badly wrong, but so right at the same time.

They had come to Atlanta to find a *Predator* in danger and recover a running *Marauder*. That had not gone too well. They'd found the *Predator* – a girl called Lily O'Brien – but in doing so, they had lost the *Marauder*. That had hit Hit Girl hard. The death of Lucas Charlton had not been expected – only he had died protecting the *Predator* who had turned out to be his half-sister. The boy had died a hero. Then, instead of heading back to Chicago with the *Predator* and the two young kids which she had somehow become responsible for, Hit Girl had gone on the rampage and taken down the person responsible for Lucas' death. Then, right at the very end, they had discovered a girl who had been used as a sex slave. The girl had turned out to be of English nobility, of all things.

They had found the girl some clothes and together with Mackenzie, she had been taken to a hotel to be checked over.

The Ritz-Carlton Presidential Suite

They had taken over the suite with the assistance of Special Agent Gibbs with his Federal credentials which prevented too much attention from the hotel management who were told to forget that anybody had ever been there that evening.

They were not spending the night – they were just there to clean up the new acquisitions and prepare them for the flight to Chicago. Lara Cockburn had been the first to be shoved into the massive shower. She was still in a semi-comatose state as she had struggled to get used to being free. According to Commander Haig, the girl had been holidaying with her father, Lord Cockburn, in New York when she and her father had vanished. The body of her father had never been recovered, although, his daughter had been missing for a total of eight weeks by the time she was found. The girl was traumatised – naturally – and she needed to be seen by a doctor. That would be sorted out back in Chicago as Commander Haig wanted to keep her reappearance quiet for the time being. Once the girl had been cleaned up – with the help of Lucy and Shannon, she was dressed in new clothing provided by the hotel's remarkable concierge. The boy had not wanted to be separated from his sister, so Mackenzie and Isaac had both showered together, glad to be finally back together again. While they had been in the shower, Lily had been interrogated by Mindy.

"Who are they?"

Lily had cringed as she had brought back those memories.

"Their parents were killed by Bedivere – he burnt their house to the ground," Lily responded.

Mindy was certain that there was more to the story and she pushed Lily onwards with her explanation.

"I know you *Predators* get up to all sorts of shit, but taking in random homeless kids?"

"Okay," Lily admitted, coming clean as she looked over towards the bathroom. "I got their parents killed."

"How?" Mindy asked.

"I took the drugs their dad was supposed to be selling. Bedivere went crazy, not believing that he had been screwed over by a young girl. He killed them as a demonstration to the others."

Lily obviously felt immense guilt over her actions.

"Do they know?"

"No – please don't tell them."

"They're going to have to know, one day," Mindy said.

"I know."

Mindy ended the conversation as Mackenzie appeared with Isaac. Lily vanished into the bathroom to sort herself out. Again, the hotel concierge had come up trumps and the two kids received new clothing.

..._...

"You okay, champ?" Dave asked Stephanie.

Stephanie nodded.

"Some sore ribs and my bruised face – I've had worse," Stephanie admitted as she rubbed her left side.

Dave grimaced at the bruises on his daughter's face and Stephanie smiled. She had known that Dave and Mindy would come for her – no matter what. Stephanie could see Mindy looking at her and knew that she was well cared for as she grinned back.

"It's all my fault," Abigail stated from over on a couch.

Stephanie sighed.

"I've been so wanting to do this for ages," Stephanie said as she walked over, and she slapped Abigail hard across the cheek.

Abigail struggled to stifle the scream which almost escaped her lips, but a few tears fell down her cheeks.

"That make you feel any better?" Abigail asked a minute later.

"A little bit," Stephanie admitted. "Whine like a bitch, get slapped like a bitch!"

"You're so like Mindy," Dave commented with a chuckle as he walked past.

"What about it?" Mindy demanded.

"Yeah, Dad," Stephanie added with a grin.

Dave took a moment to look at both of them.

"Neither of you ever change," he said as he walked off.

"You picked the perfect man, mum, the perfect man," Stephanie muttered.

"Damn right!" Mindy replied. "Dave was one of my better decisions in life. Anyway, let's get you back to your bedroom and safety."

"Safety is overrated," Stephanie replied. "I have Hit Girl for my mum; I'm as safe as it's humanly possible to get. Plus, I've got a kick-ass Dad!"

***Chapter 366*: Marauder Fallout**

Monday, December 12th, 2016

Chicago, Safehouse K

Fusion had departed Atlanta long before daylight.

The flight had been long enough to get some sleep, but not a long sleep. ON landing, they were met by Paige and Jennifer before being driven into the heart of Chicago and to Safehouse K where their new guests were able to get their heads down for some much-needed sleep. Jennifer had checked over both of the younger kids and apart from many cuts and bruises, plus some malnutrition, they were fine. Jennifer ensured that Mackenzie and Isaac were tucked up in bed before leaving them so sleep.

"They okay?" Mindy asked.

"Yes – Isaac insisted on sleeping with his sister," Jennifer replied. "They'll both be fine after a few days rest and some proper food.

"Glad to hear it," Mindy replied. "How's Lily?"

"Lily's worn out and feeling very morose. Again, rest and good food will have her back to rights. She's a *Predator*, so I'm certain that she will bounce back. I'm off to check on Stephanie, then I'll see to Lara.

"Thanks, Jennifer."

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Stephanie was used to being prodded and poked by doctors, so Jennifer's fingers on her side were nothing new.

"You've not broken anything, Steph, which is always good."

"Most of it has only just finished healing," Stephanie responded, sardonically.

"You're doing well, Stephanie – and I'm pleased to see you still wearing a bra."

Stephanie coloured slightly.

"I'm trying to change my image and put who I was behind me. This is Stephanie Lizewski, not Stephanie Walker."

"I am very pleased to hear it, Steph – keep it up!"

"Thanks. I will."

..._...

After forty minutes with Lara, Jennifer smiled at the girl as she redressed.

"You're in reasonably good health, Lara. But, you need to build up your body with some food, plus I want to start you on a regime of pills which will ensure that you receive no infections from what you endured."

"Thank you," Lara whispered.

"I hate to ask this, but, were you a virgin before this?"

"No – I lost my virginity when I was fourteen. I was going through a phase of upsetting my daddy – I figured that having sex underage would upset him; I was *not* wrong!"

"I cannot even begin to understand what you went through, Lara."

"The first few days were horrible. I was never one to put my body out there. I rarely wore anything that showed off my tummy and I preferred one-piece swimsuits. The first time that they stripped me naked – I struggled. Then they tied me up, spread-eagled so that everything was exposed, and they touched me for the first time. The boss – he brought

me to orgasm right there in front of his men. I had never felt so humiliated in all my life. The humiliation wore off after a few days of being felt up and ogled by male hands and eyes. The first time that a man put his dick inside me. . ."

The girl broke down into loud sobs.

..._...

Mindy could hear the sobbing and she was horrified by what the girl had endured.

"So, what happens to Lara?" Mindy asked Patrick Haig.

"She can stay here for a few weeks while I arrange for her homecoming. It won't be easy for her. However, she inherits the family estate and considerable financial reserves. When she turns eighteen in February, she inherits the title and she becomes Lady Cockburn."

"I suppose we'll need to give *Vengeance* the heads up," Mindy mused.

"I'll cover that when I get back to blighty. I suppose I won't be taking the boy back with me."

"Is that the end of it?" Abigail asked.

"Yes, it is," Patrick said. "Lucas will go down as a hero, and not as a rapist. He gave us crucial information which may help catch those who were truly behind what happened to you, Abigail."

"Thanks," Abigail responded.

***The following morning
Tuesday, December 13th***

***Washington Navy Yard
Washington D.C.***

Naval Criminal Investigative Service

"Welcome back, guys!"

"Thank you, Jimmy; it's good to be back," Special Agent Timothy McGee commented.

"Were you successful?" Doctor Jimmy Palmer asked.

"Partially – girl rescued," Special Agent Eleanor Bishop replied. "But, we lost a boy."

"Sorry to hear that," Palmer said. "Any of you get hurt?"

"No – we're all fine," Abby Sciuto commented as she strolled through the bullpen.

"How's our big boss – did he enjoy himself?"

"He enjoyed himself, Palmer," Special Agent Jethro Gibbs commented from behind Palmer as he sat down at his desk.

Palmer cringed but then his attention was seized when he caught sight of a stunning young woman who had just stepped off the left-hand elevator. The young woman was dressed correctly for the cold weather and she wore a dark jacket over blue jeans and ankle boots. Her blonde hair was tied back into a single ponytail. In her right hand, she held a cardboard carrier bearing two large coffee cups from the diner down the road. Jimmy watched the young woman look around the open space before she zeroed in on the bullpen. Jimmy's eyes followed the young woman as she walked up the bullpen and then stopped at Gibbs' desk.

"Morning, Gibbs!"

Gibbs accepted the proffered coffee and he took a gulp.

"Perfect!" Gibbs said with a grin. "How did you know?"

"I do my research," Mindy Lizewski replied.

"What are you doing here, err Mrs Lizewski?" Special Agent McGee enquired as he rose to offer his hand in greeting.

"I wanted to thank Gibbs and his team for their help in rescuing Lily and the rest."

"The coffee pretty much covers it," Gibbs commented as he took a long draw of the hot liquid.

"How're the girls and the little boy," Bishop asked.

"Very well – to be honest," Mindy replied.

"Very glad to hear that."

"Do we have a visitor, Gibbs?" a voice called out from above.

Mindy watched as a black man jogged down the stairs and walked over to the bullpen.

"A very beautiful visitor," the man continued. "Introductions, Gibbs."

"Director Vance, please meet Mrs Mindy Lizewski. Mindy, please meet NCIS Director Leon Vance."

"I have heard many things about you, Mrs Lizewski," Vance said as he shook hands with Mindy.

"Good things, I hope," Mindy responded with a shy grin, her cheeks turning pink.

"Not many women receive the approval of Leroy Jethro Gibbs, and never an accolade as high as the one he gave you. However, I sense that Gibbs is holding something back – but that's like getting blood out of a stone, so I've not pursued it. Anyway, it is very good to meet you, Mrs Lizewski."

"Thank you, Director Vance," Mindy replied.

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Mindy was escorted by Gibbs down in the elevator, about forty minutes later.

"Gibbs, Mrs Lizewski," Jimmy announced as the doors slid open onto autopsy.

Mindy hesitated for a moment and, naturally, Jimmy had some words of support.

"Seeing dead bodies is not okay for everybody, Mrs Lizewski. If at any time it gets too much, please say."

"I think Mrs Lizewski will be fine," Gibbs chuckled.

"I've seen a dead body or two," Mindy commented.

Despite that, seeing the body which lay on the cold metal table made her want to leave. Instead, she forced herself to walk over to that cold metal table with the body. It was obviously the body of a young male. He was naked, apart from a towel to protect his modesty. Mindy told herself that it was no longer a person – it was simply skin, muscle, and bone. It was no longer Lucas. Mindy looked down at the cold body and for a moment, she remembered the boy alive. On his torso, she could see the untreated trauma from the two bullets which had taken his life but been prevented from taking the life of Lily.

"He died saving another," Mindy muttered.

"I didn't know," Jimmy responded.

"His half-sister is alive today because he gave her life for her. He was just fourteen. I have seen so many people die that I've become blasé about it. I remember all the innocent ones who have died, and I wish that I could have saved this one – he really deserved it," Mindy stated. "Why do the innocent always have to die, Gibbs?"

"That's a question I have been asking myself for probably thirty years," Gibbs replied. "It is the world we live in – innocent people are always around to be hurt or killed by those who don't even deserve to breathe."

"I promised that I'd look after them – each and every one of them, yet one died on my watch."

"As I understand it, the boy ran from your protection – you are not to blame. You went after him and while you could not save his life, you saved the lives of four others," Gibbs said slowly.

"I've taken so many lives and I've seen so many die – why should his life mean so much to me?"

"You're obviously very good at what you do, and you feel responsible for Lucas. Were you there at the end?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes – I held his hand as he died."

"Have you decided what you want to be done with his body?" Jimmy asked.

"I want him in Chicago, so he can be buried there – where he was born," Mindy replied.

"We'll take care of it," Gibbs said.

"Of course," Jimmy added.

..._...

The flight back was lonely.

Mindy could not get Lucas out of her mind. She hoped that no more kids would be lost – none of them deserved to die. She knew that Gibbs had been right – it was not her fault, but she was still beating herself up over it. As she sat in her seat on the Gulfstream, faces flashed through her mind: every person she had seen die, either at her own hand or that of another – there were so many faces and Mindy could remember each and every circumstance. It was her punishment for doing the unthinkable and taking a human life. Ever since that first kill, fourteen years ago, she had killed more and more people, relishing the adrenaline rush associated with each and every kill. She enjoyed the sight of the blood. She could taste the iron on the air from the blood once it reached a certain intensity. No kill or death had ever bothered her before – so why should the death of Lucas Charlton be any different? She'd taken lives with less thought than that given to stepping on an insect. She could remember the dead whom she should have been able to prevent from dying but she had been too late for one reason or another and that was totally unacceptable in her organised mind – only, another part of her mind told her that she could not save everyone. That was true – she had been unable to save her own Daddy, instead she had saved Dave.

Basically, life sucked!

That night

Glenview, Chicago

Mindy was still struggling with her emotions and she found herself alone in the living room.

The kids were all in bed and Dave was down at Safehouse K. She grabbed herself a comforting hot chocolate and sat down on the couch with the lights off, staring into the darkness. After ten minutes of thinking and worrying she found her cheeks wet from tears which startled her. The tears kept flowing as she lay down and she had no idea why – she did not understand. She barely heard the footsteps padding barefoot into the living room and she completely missed the soft paws which followed. She found a body squirming in front of her and she knew that it was Stephanie. Mindy glanced at the other end of the couch and she saw two yellow eyes staring back at her and she could hear the loud purring as Horatio offered his own support. Stephanie never said a word as she snuggled into Mindy. For Mindy, Stephanie being there meant everything, and it comforted her enormously. Mindy wrapped her arms tightly around the youngster and she felt a small hand squeezing her own.

The faces of the dead seemed to fade away as sleep finally came to her.

..._...

Dave finally arrived home in the early hours.

He checked on the kids as he normally did. Anne-Marie was fast asleep, hanging off the side of her bed, so Dave gently eased the eight-year-old back under her duvet. A few steps further on, Dave found Danny curled up in a ball, barely visible as he slept. Next stop was Jamie up the spiral staircase. The boy was randomly struggling to sleep right the way through the night as he tried to put his recent past behind him. Not surprisingly, the boy's bed was empty.

Dave knew exactly where to find him, so after a brief trip back to the floor below, he gingerly opened the door into his eldest daughter's bedroom. He smiled as he made out the slim shape of Jamie asleep on top of his sister's duvet. Strangely, there was no sign of Stephanie in the bedroom and she was not in the bathroom either.

Stephanie was known for her nocturnal wanderings, so Dave headed down the stairs and he stepped into the living room. He smiled again as he found Mindy and Stephanie asleep on the couch. Horatio looked up and meowed as Dave spread a blanket over the two girls. Dave had spoken with Mindy earlier that evening and he had sensed that something was wrong, but he also knew why she had flown to Washington D.C. early that morning. He had just left an increasingly morose Lily at Safehouse F where she was struggling to come to terms with what had occurred. Dave had known Mindy for eight years. He knew a lot about the young woman – probably more than she knew about herself. Dave had deemed it important to glean everything that he could from the likes of Marcus and Jack Bay. Some of the stories of the younger Mindy before Damon had returned from prison were sweet and angelic – a far cry from the girl who had sliced and diced her way into Dave's life at Rasul's on that fateful evening in New York.

That single event had changed both their lives. For the better? Definitely. There had been a few ups and downs along the way for both Dave and Mindy, but throughout it all, they had learnt that they both needed one another and they had both risen to the occasion when required. Since they had become 'involved' on a deeper level after Mindy's descent into the darker side of her alter ego, the young woman, who Dave loved more than life itself, had changed into a different person as she had learnt new skills and she had learnt to process her emotions and not to just bury them deep down. Even Marcus had seen a significant change in her character, as had others who had known Mindy for years. Jack Bay had commented on the mothering instinct which had emerged when Danny and Anne-Marie had come onto the scene. Both he and Marcus had been more than a little concerned that Mindy might struggle, but like everything which Mindy did, she put everything she had into it and she had shown that she could be a loving parent – even with some rather unorthodox parenting skills. Both Jack and Marcus had seen some of Mindy's mother, Kathleen, emerge for the very first time in Mindy.

It appeared that the hidden influence of her mother, deep down, was surfacing and providing Mindy with the emotional skills to cope with her everchanging life. In turn, Dave was nurturing Mindy to assist her through a difficult part of her life as she herself emerged from being a child into being her own woman. The arrival of Stephanie in the mix had changed things yet again. A new side to Mindy had appeared – one which had surprised Marcus and Dave immensely. When Stephanie had been shot, Mindy's reaction to the youngster's predicament had shown a deep and caring side to Mindy which had previously been deeply buried. Jack Bay saw it as Kathleen coming to the fore and overshadowing the Mindy which Damon had created. Marcus had seen it first. He had seen the relationship between Mindy and Stephanie grow. Despite their completely different beginnings in different countries and cultures, the pair could have been mother and daughter. Many saw it, but Mindy sometimes struggled to see it herself. They had similar emotional issues and they both sported the very same temper and obstinate behaviour which many saw as beyond obnoxious. The pair needed one another to survive. Stephanie was steadily taking over from Chloe who had previously been Mindy's voice of reason. The same applied to Stephanie who would argue with Mindy to the point where they would both start to fight one another, but neither would ever hurt the other – beyond a few friendly bruises, of course.

As Dave looked down on two of the most important people in his life, he smiled happily.

The next morning
Wednesday, December 14th

Glennview

Stephanie was in the kitchen, talking to Horatio as he ate his breakfast.

". . . At least that's what Tommy says, maybe I need to . . ."

"Hey! Stephy!"

Stephy growled as she turned to the sound of the voice.

"What do you want, annoying brat?"

"Love you too, big sis," Anne-Marie grinned, ignoring the jibe. "Mom wants you in her study."

Stephanie grimaced.

"You're toast," Anne-Marie commented. "Assuming you've done something really bad, of course. Hope so!"

"Thanks, runt!"

Stephanie walked slowly up the stairs and then along the landing until she reached the partially open door to Mindy's study.

A certain poem from her past entered her mind, along with the first line:

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the Spider to the Fly.

The ten-year-old fly took a deep breath and she put on her most innocent looking smile before she pushed open the door and walked into the spider's parlour.

..._...

"Why do you always look like a cornered wild animal when I summon you here?" Mindy chuckled as Stephanie sat down across from Mindy who sat behind her desk.

"I might have done something wrong," Stephanie replied with a sheepish grin, before quickly adding a clarification to her statement. "I'm not saying I have, though."

"You need to learn to hide your emotions better, Steph," Mindy grinned. "Okay – I want you to fly to L.A. for two days. You will brief Madeline Tyler on what you are and how you came to be."

"You want me to brief her on *Urban Predator*?"

"Yes, please."

"Can I take Abigail?"

Mindy chuckled – those two were rarely apart.

"Take SD, too – she could probably do with the nicer weather I would have thought."

..._...

Abigail was very excited to be heading back to Los Angeles and Stephanie could hear her excitement as she checked in with the Murphy family.

Saoirse, too, was excited about the trip but annoyed that she was still having to rely on a crutch. Then she had a thought.

"Will I be your protection?" Saoirse grinned facetiously.

"A fifteen-year-old who can't even walk unaided?"

"Oh, you *do* need protection, Stephy – from me!" Saoirse growled as she threw a full can of Coke at her friend.

Stephanie easily dodged the inbound can without a problem, laughing as she did so.

"We depart at eighteen hundred," Stephanie advised her two friends.

That evening

Glenview

"You behave, now."

"Yes, Mummy," Stephanie grinned.

"SD – please feel free to slap her, if required," Mindy said.

"I won't hesitate," Saoirse acknowledged a bit too fast for Stephanie's taste.

"What about me?" Abigail chimed in. "Can I slap her?"

"You do, and you'll be borrowing Foxy's crutches," Stephanie promised.

"God, I hate her!" Saoirse exclaimed loudly.

Mindy knew otherwise, but she grinned all the same. Then she looked at the fourth member of the team.

"You sure about this, Morgan?" Mindy asked.

"Fucking crazy bird!" Saoirse growled.

"I need to look after my wayward younger sister," Morgan explained.

"Please, Mindy – she's doing my fucking head in!" Saoirse groaned. "I hate being mollycoddled."

Mindy grinned. "Far from me to get in between sisters, SD – have fun, Morgan."

"Bitch!"

"I am what I am," Mindy chuckled.

"Okay, a few days in L.A. with my big sister, and the Phase 2 *Predators* from hell!" Saoirse groaned. "I must have been a very bad girl in a previous life."

"Have fun!" Mindy chuckled.

"Okay, spawn of Satan – let's go," Saoirse growled as she glared at Stephanie and Abigail.

..._...

Just as the girls vanished out the gate with Mathilda, who was driving them to the airport, Jennifer pulled in with Lara.

Naturally, Lara appeared a little apprehensive as she stepped out of the car and she shook hands with Mindy. Despite her being semi-comatose during her rescue, she had figured out who she had fallen in with. She had remembered Kick-Ass as being the one who had rescued her, so it was not too much of a stretch to assume that the woman before her was somebody very special . . . and very dangerous.

"Hello, Lara – you look a lot better," Mindy said, putting on a friendly smile. "Come in."

Lara followed Mindy inside at the behest of Jennifer. Mindy waved them both into the living room.

"Coffee?"

"Please," Jennifer replied.

"Got any tea?" Lara asked in a very recognisable accent.

Mindy grinned.

"My daughter is a Brit who loves tea leaves, so I have various: Earl Grey, Breakfast, and some godawful Darjeeling."

"I don't know how anyone can drink Darjeeling." Lara grinned. "I'll take the Earl Grey."

..._...

Mindy returned with a tray of mugs and she sat down in her chair.

"So, what is this about, Jen?"

"This morning, I put Lara through a full medical, inside and out," Jen replied.

Mindy cringed as she crossed her long legs and Lara smirked slightly.

"For goodness sake!" Jennifer complained. "Anyway, during that examination, I found three items which attracted my attention."

"I've been branded," Lara offered in a low voice.

"Explain," Mindy suggested.

"Lara has three tattoos that were never there before, and she has no memory of how they got there," Jennifer commented. "Right buttock, right thigh in the groin, and on the left side of her left breast. A small dragonfly. We have no idea what it means."

Mindy looked down at the floor for a few moments.

"May I see?" she asked.

Lara looked at Jennifer who nodded.

Lara undid the button on her trousers and she eased them down her thighs, still sitting. She showed Mindy the inside of her right thigh, up near the groin. The dragonfly tattoo was very small and easily missed, however, it was colourful – a blue head, abdomen, and thorax with four pink wings.

"Thank you," Mindy said, and Jennifer quickly pulled up her trousers and button them.

"Still getting used to wearing clothes after two months naked," Lara commented as she took a large sip of her tea.

"The tattoo means that you are the property of a sex ring," Mindy stated. "If we had not rescued you, then you would have been sold – if you weren't already. You would have been used either as a common prostitute, or maybe a high-class call girl. Those tattoos, based on insects, are often used by the Russians to mark their property. I should be able to track down who that tattoo belongs to."

"You said that I may already have been sold – am I at risk?"

"A very good question. They would have taken photos of you – naked ones, to use for selling purposes. We'll see what we can find."

"Will my body be on the internet?"

"Not the internet as you know it – but deep down on the dark web, maybe. You are hot property, so the images would be guarded and most likely not stored electronically where somebody could access them, except for some discrete shots which they would use to sell you – photos of your breasts and other parts, for instance, but no facial details or anything which could identify you. If they want to buy you, they will be shown a printout of your face – never the Full Monty, so to speak."

Lara looked horrified.

..._...

"Have no fear, Lara – we will look after you. We have a team who will search the dark web for you and we will see if we can track down who you might have been intended for. As to whether you are at risk, we will have to assume yes – however, what intrigues me, is that if they knew who you really were, then they would have ransomed you for millions – a much bigger payday than merely selling you as jailbait," Mindy said.

"Merely?" Lara asked. "Jailbait?"

"Sorry – a bit melodramatic" Mindy apologised. "Go get some rest and leave things to us. I will keep you safe. Very soon, you'll be able to return to your home, in England, and I am certain that you will be safe there."

"Thank you, Mindy – I owe you my life," Lara said. "I have lost my father, leaving me alone on this earth. I hope that I can call on you as my friend, Mindy?"

"Of course."

Lara vanished to make use of the bathroom, leaving Mindy and Jennifer to talk.

"If she *has* been sold, and money *has* changed hands, then somebody will be looking for her. However, they have no idea who she is, as I mentioned. But somebody may come looking for her, and they would start in Atlanta. The trail should end there, but worst case, they find themselves at my door – worst case for them, that is."

Mindy chuckled darkly and Jennifer scowled. Jennifer was not a big fan of the dark humour which pervaded *Fusion* – quite frankly, it scared her. But, she understood why it was necessary for the vigilantes to be able to laugh about what they did at night – she had been amongst enough military personnel to hear similar dark humour and she had hated that, too.

Once Jennifer and Lara had gone, Mindy made a quick call to Abby, and she asked her to direct *Synthesis* onto a visit into the dark web.

The following morning
Thursday, December 15th

Safehouse E
Level 8 – Detention Level

There were not that many *Marauders* left in the accommodation.

Those that were, sat at the same table eating breakfast: Carrie Milligan, Kieran Brennan, Dylan Page, Joel Burnell, Jay Hilton, and Willow Hartman. The six youths chatted, although Willow tended not to join in the conversations much. The two remaining girls were outnumbered two-to-one, but they each considered themselves to be worth two of the boys any day of the week. Carrie was the first to look up as the door opened and she nodded at Shannon as she entered the room. Then Carrie performed a classic double-take as a girl walked in the door. The girl was very familiar with her jet-black hair.

"Lily!" Carrie exclaimed.

"Hi, guys!" the girl said with a brief wave of her hand. "I understand you lot are in a spot of bother."

"Just a bit," Carrie admitted. "Where. . .?"

Carrie stopped dead as Hit Girl strode through the door.

..._...

"Could I please have your attention," Hit Girl called out.

Everybody turned to face her – nobody ignored or disobeyed Hit Girl. Under normal circumstances, Hit Girl might have laughed at the kids snapping to her tune, but not that morning.

"Three days ago, Lucas Charlton died."

There was an exclamation from six kids.

"Did you kill him?" Willow demanded.

"No," Lily said, as tears fell down her cheeks and she sobbed loudly. "He died protecting me. He took two bullets instead of me."

Shannon hugged Lily tightly as she sobbed. There was a mixture of stunned and shocked expressions at the news.

"For those of you who did not know," Hit Girl said quietly. "Lucas and Lily were half-brother and sister."

"Wow!" Jay exclaimed. "You kept that quiet!"

"Do you blame me?" Lily asked.

"No."

"Lucas died a hero," Hit Girl said. "His body is on its way back from Washington D.C. to Chicago. He will be buried in this city after a funeral. I understand that he was born here, so I see it as fitting that he should be buried here."

"Who is going to pay for all that?" Dylan asked.

"I will. That boy made some mistakes, but that does not mean that he deserved to die. I made a deal with each one of

you. You follow instructions and learn from your mistakes, then I will look after you, no matter what."

There were mixed expressions, some showing embarrassment at calling Hit Girl's bluff.

..._...

Hit Girl walked out of the room, leaving Shannon and Lily behind.

"I don't trust her," Willow stated.

Shannon marched straight up to the older girl and shoved her against a wall.

"Don't you ever say anything against Hit Girl, or I will fucking take you down, and I don't care what age you are or what Phase you were – I will fucking end you!"

"Calm down, Shannon!" Willow responded.

"Do you trust me?" Shannon said to the gathered *Marauders*.

"Yes, we do, Shannon," Carrie said, wincing at the angry teenager's fierce attitude.

"I happen to know that Hit Girl went to town for you fucking retards. A Chicago PD Captain wanted you all sent to a secure prison after three of his officers were hurt when Lucas broke out of their custody to go after Lily. He thinks that you are all too dangerous to be allowed into society. Guess fucking what? Hit Girl went defensive and guess what her response was? She said to that Captain, and I quote: 'Over my fucking dead body!' Fucking useless twats, the fucking lot of you!"

With that, Shannon grabbed Lily and shoved her out of the door, before following closely behind, slamming and locking the door as she went.

Around that same time

Safehouse L

It had been a little over two weeks.

The bruises had all but gone, along with the tiredness, and the pain. Although, the guilt was still there, but slowly subsiding. So, what had they been doing for two weeks? There had been lots of time spent exercising and keeping their bodies trim and their muscles toned. In Juno's mind, her mentor and Nicholas had spent a lot of time exercising certain other muscles and her mind was struggling to comprehend how much sex it was possible for two people to have. Okay, she and Logan spent their night's naked and embraced, but only to play – Juno was not quite ready for the next step; she told Logan that she was waiting until they returned west before committing to that event.

Logan had no problems with that as he still had full access to Juno's body and she his. He was very happy that her bruises had faded – he hated seeing her suffer in any way. Other than sexually based activities, the four of them sparred, often two on one to increase Juno's abilities. It was harsh, but Juno understood the reasons why they had to push her – and, as a by-product, provide her with a whole new set of fresh bruises to mar her otherwise perfect body. For that morning's exercise, Juno held a pair of black Escrima sticks, each a little over two feet in length. She wore a pair of skin-tight shorts and an equally skin-tight sports bra, both of which she had pulled on straight after stepping out of the shower that morning. Logan loved his girl's ample thighs and the visible muscles on her calves, thighs, stomach, and biceps. He was the referee for that morning's exercises and Juno was facing off against both Guinevere and Nicholas.

It seemed so unfair.

..._...

Guinevere was just as scantily clad.

The limited clothing allowed the girls freedom of movement with nothing restricting the range of their joints as clothing would normally. Nicholas wore his usual baggy shorts and a baggy T-shirt. He preferred brawn over fast, snappy movements, and he had the muscles to back that up. To ensure that the training was beneficial to all, one of them was always a referee to ensure that things did not get out of hand and to ensure that Juno did not get hurt too badly.

A few bruises never hurt anybody, and Juno was young – the pain and the tears soon went away, as did the bruises. The sparring would also start slowly as Juno exchanged steady strikes with Guinevere, their Escrima sticks clashing slowly, then increasing in tempo as Nicholas joined in to split Juno's attention, two sticks verses four sticks.

Juno was getting good and her reflexes were spot on as the opposing sticks moved fast from her left and her right. She had to anticipate and gauge each and every strike so as not to leave herself open for a strike from the other side. But she was fighting two seasoned fighters who had been fighting for many years when she had only been fighting for a few months. However, Juno knew that learning the skills would keep her alive. She had been exposed to the life of the vigilante and the associated burst of adrenalin-fuelled pleasure that it brought. She wanted to continue with that life which her mentor had offered her. She knew that she could say no, at any time and Guinevere had made that abundantly clear, but Juno was no quitter, so she was seeing it through to the very end.

The Escrima sticks clashed harder and faster, then Guinevere grinned nastily, and Juno knew what was coming as Guinevere made to sweep Juno's feet out from under her, but Juno was getting wise to her mentor's antics and Juno swiftly and skilfully blocked the strike. . . only to realise her error with no time to correct it as she felt real pain when one of Nicholas' Escrima sticks struck her right buttock and Juno screamed out just as Nicholas' other stick took her across the left breasts, sending a huge surge of pain across her chest. The pain was extreme and in two separate places at once. The girl dropped her weapons and she fell to the floor, her eyes screwed tightly shut in an attempt to fight the searing pain on her buttock and in her chest. Logan stepped in and he used his own set of Escrima sticks to block those of Nicholas and Guinevere.

"Stop!" he called out.

Nicholas and Guinevere both froze, and they lowered their weapons. Juno struggled to her knees, tears streaming down her face, one hand gripping her right buttock with another, her breast.

"You need to move faster and have eyes in the back of your head, Juno," Guinevere stated without any compassion. "Get up!"

Juno forced herself to her feet, picking up her Escrima sticks as she went. She did not want to give Guinevere any satisfaction by appearing weak. She ignored the pain and she braced herself for another attack from the two people who she was starting to dislike immensely.

"Just say the magic word, Juno," Nicholas reminded the girl.

"Fuck you!" Juno retorted angrily, and Nicholas smiled.

Guinevere refused to show concern for Juno. The girl had chosen her path, so she would have to take the good with the bad. There was a safe word, of course, and Juno was free to use it at any time, but the youngster was stubborn, and Guinevere knew that her protégé would rather take a beating than surrender. Inside, Guinevere smirked as she noticed that they had an audience – Nicholas and Logan had noticed, too, but Juno had not. It was the same problem; Juno's situational awareness sucked and had almost got her killed on more than one occasion. The fighting continued in earnest, as the sweat-soaked Juno moved to avoid the inbound strikes. Despite her tiredness, the girl fought well, and she landed a swipe on Guinevere's rump, much to the older girl's annoyance. Nicholas was having none of it as he took a stick smartly across the youngster's right buttock, eliciting a yell of pain and indignation from the girl. That momentary distraction allowed Guinevere to sweep Juno's feet out from under her and deposit the girl on her back, eliciting another yell of pain.

"Stop!" Logan called out. "Time!"

Juno glared up at Guinevere and Nicholas before scrambling to her feet and storming off up the stairs to the bathroom for a shower.

..._...

Guinevere slipped into the bathroom while Juno was showering to check on her charge.

Juno was just finishing off washing her hair when Guinevere caught sight of the two wicked-looking red stripes on Juno's right buttock. Then Juno turned around and she grimaced at Guinevere as she saw her mentor's expression at the red welt marking her left breast.

"Sorry about those, Juno, but they should remind you to move quicker."

"They look horrendous!" Juno growled. "What will people say?"

Guinevere laughed.

"Who else is going to see your bottom and your boobs other than me and Logan?"

"I might want to go naked," Juno retorted without much thought.

"I'll believe that when I see it," Guinevere chuckled as she swapped places in the shower with Juno.

"Okay, I will!" Juno growled as she finished drying off and she threw the towel onto the bathroom floor before stalking off out the door and down the stairs.

Guinevere closed her eyes and held her breath for a few moments and then came the scream from downstairs followed by a loud yell.

"Guinevere, you are a fucking bitch!"

..._...

Juno stopped dead as she entered the living room.

Nicholas and Logan were talking to Lucy and a girl with jet-black hair. Juno screamed as she tried to cover up her breasts and her pubic hair with her arms and hands. Then she looked up at the ceiling and shouted at Guinevere.

"Guinevere, you are a fucking bitch!"

"Love the choice of clothes, Juno," Lucy chuckled.

"Sorry," Juno muttered as she felt her face go brilliantly red and she could see the blush extending down to the tops of her breasts.

Logan handed his girlfriend a large T-shirt from the laundry which Juno quickly pulled on.

"Juno, this is Lily," Logan said, introducing the black-haired girl.

"Lily, this is Juno – she doesn't normally go around naked," Logan explained.

"Hi, Juno," Lily said. "You fight well."

Juno stepped towards Lily and studied her.

"You have a dagger too?" Juno asked.

"Yes, I do," Lily replied as she swept her long hair back away from her right ear and showed Juno the mark. "I was the same intake as Logan – although he was Kai back then. I also knew Guinevere and mister 'I enjoy covering girls in piss and semen'."

Juno laughed as Nicholas' cheeks went slightly pink.

"Lily is right," Lucy said. "You fight really well, although you must be a little sore from those red welts on your butt."

"I don't move fast enough according to my bitch of a mentor."

"That would be me!" Guinevere chuckled as she walked into the living room. "Hello, Lily – it's good to see you again."

"Likewise, Guinevere."

"I was just telling Juno how well she fights," Lucy commented.

"She is good, and she is improving every day," Guinevere said proudly. "There are a few gaps to be filled in, but we're getting there."

"Do you need any help?" Lucy offered.

"Please!" Guinevere exclaimed. "She's a difficult bitch to teach!"

"Reminds of a stubborn ten-year-old girl, I once knew and tried to train," Lucy replied.

"I was the perfect student," Guinevere complained.

"Perfectly difficult as I remember it."

"I kicked *your* arse, remember."

"Vividly!" Lucy scowled.

Author's Note: *You can follow Stephanie, Saoirse, Morgan, and Abigail in Chapter 10: The Predator File of my other story: Fusion: Los Angeles.*