

Saturday, 18th June, 2016

Early evening

Safehouse F

The Changing Room

"That was fun, but this bruise sucks!" Kaitlin moaned as she examined her chest while she enjoyed the soothing hot water of the shower.

"I've got two of the sodding things!" Stephanie chipped in from another shower.

"No pain no gain," Harper offered reasonably from her shower.

"I'll agree with that," Naomi agreed as she washed the shampoo from her hair and looked down at her own bruised chest.

"I think you all did very well," Megan commented as she got changed out of her combat suit. "I hope I didn't hurt any of you . . ."

"We're fine," Stephanie replied with a chuckle. "Us *Predators* are tougher than you think."

"Damn straight!" Kaitlin agreed and everybody laughed.

"Well done, girls!" Mindy announced as everybody gathered for the debrief.

The three *Vengeance* girls appeared very happy with themselves, as was the lone *Fusion* girl. Seated behind them, Megan, Chrissy, Sky, Cassie, and Hailee all smirked.

"The four of you got your asses kicked but we were unfair in our methods. Did you each learn something, today?"

"We learnt that you're a conniving bitch!" Harper announced.

"Harper!" Keira growled.

"Sorry," Harper offered.

"Don't be," Mindy replied with a laugh. "I am what I am!"

"Tell me about it!" Stephanie muttered to general laughter.

"I threw real vigilantes at you: Jackal, Petra, Venom, Bane, Nemesis, Wildcat – they all enjoyed having some fun . . ."

"Until somebody dropped a damn door on me!" Hailee grunted.

"It was fun," Stephanie laughed. "Thanks for the flash-bangs!"

"I could have taken you down, Wildcat," Naomi commented smugly.

"Never in a million years!" Megan sneered back.

"A standard *Predator* tactic – it's called a Pyrrhic Victory; the idea is to inflict devastating damage on the victor which then turns victory into instant defeat," Naomi explained and Megan winced. "Drop a frag as you go down . . ."

“She’s correct,” Stephanie confirmed. “Taught towards the end of Phase 1.”

“Not bad, Naomi – now,” Mindy went on. “I’ve been talking to the *Vengeance* Management . . . and they have seen fit to expand their ranks. There will be a lot of training ahead, girls – you want in?”

The grins on the faces of the three young girls gave their answer. Cameron and Natasha both stood up and moved to stand next to Mindy.

“Crimson and Drift, please, the floor is yours,” Mindy finished.

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“Let’s start with Glide – front and centre!”

Kaitlin looked a little worried for a second before she sprang up and stood before the two *Vengeance* commanders. Crimson grinned as she handed over a small card to the grinning girl. The card was a pale blue with a pair of narrow red stripes across the top-right and top-left corners. In the centre, was the *Vengeance* symbol, a pair of sabres with the points together and the hilts angled out to form the **V** of *Vengeance*. A QR code featured in the bottom-left corner along with a code along the top and right side. The top-left corner of the card bore a single gold stripe with a red border as worn by a Royal Marines Commando Lance Corporal. In the bottom-right corner, there was a name: **GLIDE**.

“Welcome to *Vengeance*, Trainee Operator Glide.”

The eight-year-old blushed furiously and she giggled before she ran back to her seat where Stephanie examined the access card.

“Prowl! Front and centre!”

Naomi was blushing before she even reached Crimson who handed her an almost identical card but for the name in the bottom-right corner: **PROWL**.

“Welcome to *Vengeance*, Trainee Operator Prowl.”

The girl flushed bright red but she smiled enormously as she also ran back to sit next to her cousin where they instantly compared their access cards and Harper began to fidget badly.

“Polaris! Front and centre!”

Harper jumped up and ran forwards, her face set in an enormous shit-eating grin. The card which Crimson proffered differed from that of the other two girls. Instead of the single stripe, a single ‘pip’ was present in the top-left corner. Her name was present in the bottom-right: **POLARIS**.

“Welcome to *Vengeance*, Senior Trainee Operator Polaris.”

Kaitlin cheered which caused Harper to blush a bright pink as she jogged over to sit with her sister who gave her little sister a big hug.

“Finally – Scorpion! Front and centre!”

Keira almost jumped as her name was called out.

Her expression said, ‘Me?’

Mindy nodded and with a friendly shove from Harper, Keira stood up and walked over to Cameron who held another blue card. This card bore three vertical pips at the top-right corner, plus her name: **SCORPION**, at the bottom right. However, it also bore a set of naval-aviator wings above her name.

“Welcome to *Vengeance*, Operator Scorpion.”

Harper screamed louder than the rest put together as her sister blushed a bright red.

Safehouse F

Level 2

After we had all eaten, Harper came up to me.

“Hi, Harper, how you doing?”

“Thank you, Mindy, for everything. I have had the most amazing couple of days and I know that I have many more ahead of me.”

“I enjoyed seeing what you girls could do and I am very pleased that I could help in giving each of you a new life. I know what it is like to have skills that take over your senses and emotions. It is very hard.”

“Mindy . . . do you know what happened to my Mum and Dad?”

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I wished so badly that Harper had not asked that question but no matter what I thought about it, I could not lie to the girl. I looked over the railing and I saw the two girls I was looking for talking together below.

“Saoirse! Stephanie! Up here, please.”

The two girls quickly ran up the nearest set of steel stairs and skidded to a halt before Harper and me. Saoirse gave me a strange look – I had no idea what my expression was, but it was probably full of sorrow; that was how I felt.

Both Saoirse and Stephanie were worried by the expression on Mindy’s face.

“Harper has asked if I know what happened to her parents,” Mindy explained simply.

The colour drained from Stephanie’s face, as it did from Saoirse’s. Both looked appalled by the very thought – but both knew that it had to be done.

“We both found out in the most horrific way possible,” Stephanie said. “Which ever way Harper finds out, will be bad, but maybe we can limit this.”

Mindy looked at her two *Predators* and she felt so much compassion for the two girls. Yes, she had lost her parents, just as they had. Only Mindy had never known her mother, but she had been there when her daddy had been killed. She knew what it was like to have lost both parents, but she had no idea what it was like to know that you had killed both of them in cold blood.

“What’s going on?” Keira asked as she came up to the little group.

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Mindy was struggling with how her day had suddenly changed. How did you explain to a person that the person they loved; their sister, killed the only two other people in life that you loved even more?

“Harper has asked if I know how your parents died . . . I do. It is truly horrifying and that is coming from me, Hit Girl; I find it horrifying and disturbing! That should give you an idea that what happened was bad. Now, I have never told my own daughter this, let alone Saoirse. I hoped it would never come up. Saoirse, Stephanie? The CIA recorded those deaths, each and every time. Marty discovered the recordings about a month ago. I apologise for not telling you both, but I hated Stephanie going through that event herself, the first time, and the same with Saoirse.”

“I never want to see that,” Stephanie said quietly and Saoirse nodded in agreement. “But I think Harper should. She has no idea what happened and she needs to know . . . and so does Keira.”

“She’s right,” Saoirse admitted as she smiled at Stephanie. “We’ll both be there for Harper . . . and for Keira.”

Stephanie nodded as Mindy turned to Keira.

“I can’t help you with this, but these two can. Keira, I want you to promise me one thing – you will not judge.”

“I . . . okay . . .” Keira said quietly as Mindy led everybody into the Briefing Room.

“Lock it up!” Mindy shouted down to the Control Centre and Abby nodded.

Several seconds later, a steel shutter descended to shut off all access to the Briefing Room and ensure complete and total privacy.

The Film

The film began by showing an empty room.

The room was small but very stark. It looked like an examination room in just about any hospital. Against one wall was one of those wheeled hospital beds. In the middle of the room was a metal desk with a computer workstation sitting atop it. Over in the farthest corner, there were two occupied chairs; two adults sat on them, a male and a female.

The door to the room was both seen and heard to open and two people entered the room. One was a middle-aged woman; she was tall, thin, and horse-faced with greying dark hair. The other was a very young, dark-haired girl of maybe eight-years-old. The girl looked around as she took in her surroundings . . . it was Harper! The woman began to speak in a throaty voice with a British accent.

“In this program, you will save the lives of our citizens . . .”

It was a lecture about patriotism, national pride, and saving lives. There was much emphasis on American and British lives – no other nationalities. The woman would add extra British emphasis, presumably because of Harper’s nationality.

“As part of this program, you will need to sacrifice your old life . . .”

The Briefing Room

Harper was physically shaking as she watched the scene unfold before her.

“I have no memory of that – none, none at all . . .”

“I do. I remember my own moment in that room – you are not alone, Harper,” Stephanie said quietly as she sat down beside the younger girl.

The Film

The image changed to show another room, this one tiled on walls and floor with a large drain to one side. Both Stephanie and Saoirse flinched involuntarily. In the centre of the room was a large steel tank and it was full of water. Harper was hauled into the room and she was stripped of all her clothing but her knickers.

The Briefing Room

Keira screamed as Harper was pushed bodily into the tank of water, face down, by two older girls. Harper could be seen to struggle violently but she had no chance against those holding her down.

“It was so cold . . .,” Harper said unbidden. “I had never felt so cold – not ever. The shock of immersion was immense and I fought against those that held me under the water. After what felt like minutes but which had to be only seconds, I was pulled up to receive air . . . then I was plunged under again – I tried to scream and I fought.”

Harper could be heard screaming and retching as she was hauled out of the water. The terror in her scream was obvious in the seconds before she was shoved under again . . . and again . . . and again.

The Film

We were back in the room with the two people in the corner.

It was the same rhetoric from the woman, the same shit.

“In this program, you will save the lives of our citizens . . .”

The same lecture about patriotism, national pride, and saving lives.

“As part of this program, you will need to sacrifice your old life . . .”

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The film would cut to other scenes, all showing Harper being all but tortured. She was seen screaming in a cell; she was in obvious distress as she covered her ears and hugged a corner. Then came the water tank again, then the woman and her lecture, then the cell . . .

Finally, the sequence stopped back in the room with the two people in the corner.

“An asset’s greatest weakness are those who know them. People who know you can tell others about you; therefore, they must be eliminated . . .”

The woman stepped forward and she stood before Harper. The woman's arm came up and in her hand, there was a pistol. It was a Heckler & Koch P30SK.

The Briefing Room

Harper was shaking uncontrollably and sobbing, so we took a short break. Keira took a moment to get a drink and she encouraged Harper to do the same. Even Stephanie had gone white at what she was witnessing along with Saoirse who looked physically sick at what she was witnessing.

"I'm ready," Harper said weakly, several minutes later as she hung onto her sister with one hand and held Stephanie's hand with her other. "Let's get this over with."

The Film

"Take this weapon and eliminate those closest to you. When you have done so, you will leave here not as who you were, but as Harper Brown."

Without hesitation, Harper took the weapon from the woman, grip first. She hefted the pistol and she brought it up in two hands. She aimed for the two adults seated in the corner.

The Briefing Room

"It was easy to do; it just felt natural. The pistol felt right in my hand. Then, two gentle squeezes of the trigger and as the smoke from the gunshots was sucked away by the air-conditioning and the sound of the gunshots faded – two bodies lay dead before me . . . my family was dead."

We all looked at Harper as she spoke.

"The doctor walked over to them, she pulled the hoods from the heads of their slumped bodies. I had shot both of them in the head; they were instant, clean kills . . . they were my first – not that I remembered killing them."

Harper paused and her face took on a look of horror.

"I killed our parents," she whispered.

Keira was stunned – just as much as Harper.

What had she just witnessed – a double murder?

Might it have been a triple murder had she herself been there?

Uncontrolled emotions began to bubble up from deep within Keira. There was the shock. The horror. The anger. The hate. The disappointment. The sorrow. The resentment. The compassion. Then the horror again. How could Harper . . . Harper looked wretched as she looked up at her sister, her expression almost pleading as she sobbed.

"Please don't send me away . . . I didn't know what I was doing . . . I . . . please don't send me away . . ."

Keira smiled down at her little sister and she wrapped her arms around the nine-year-old and pulled her close. She then looked directly into her little sister's dark brown eyes. The tears continued to stream down Keira's face unimpeded as she spoke.

"I love you more than anything, Harper. I would never send you away; you are all I have. You had no idea what you were doing. You were brain-washed into that act. That was not you. That was not my Harper. Yes, I am appalled by what you did; but I don't blame you . . . I never will."

"You really mean that?" Harper sobbed.

"Of course, I do; you are my little sister and we will always be together, come hell or high water."

"I love you so much, Keira, and I am so happy we are back together."

"You coming back to me was my greatest wish in the whole world, Harper."

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As everybody, but Keira and Harper, left the Briefing Room, Naomi and Kaitlin came running up.

"Stop!" Mindy ordered.

"What's wrong with Harper?" Naomi demanded.

"She needs to spend some alone time with her sister. Please leave them alone. Neither of you are to push her for information. Do not ask what went on in there. Harper will tell you when, and if, she feels the time is right. If I find out that you've nagged her about it – I will personally fly over to Scotland and take you both to task. Do you understand me?"

The two young girls were stunned at Mindy's tone, however, they both nodded in the affirmative as they felt a distinct chill creep up their backbones.

That night

Glenview

Against my better judgement, I allowed the sleepover.

To be honest it was against all judgment. I had to *insane* to allow it – maybe I was *insane*! Danny appeared after ten minutes.

"It's horrible!" he grimaced as he cuddled in with me on the sofa.

"What's up, champ?" Dave asked.

"Girls!"

I laughed.

"What've they done, now?"

"They tried to make me punch Megan."

"Well, why didn't you?" I asked, intrigued.

"She said she'd cut off my, you know..."

I giggled – Danny was *not* amused!

“Not funny . . .” Danny growled.

“They’re just having a bit of fun,” Dave assured his son.

“I’m a little worried about what ‘fun’ seven Predators, an eight-year-old, and an eleven-year-old, could be having!” I groaned.

The sleepover consisted of Stephanie, Naomi, Kaitlin, Harper, Saoirse, Sky, Chrissy, Megan, and Anne-Marie.

“So many girls is *not* good!” Dave chuckled.

“Tell me about it!” Danny grimaced.

I thought for a few moments.

“I’m gonna go get some Tasers . . .”

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Earlier that evening, I had spoken with Cassie and Sarah. I explained what Harper had asked. Cassie had been appalled. I explained about the film – Sarah looked physically sick at the thought.

“Do you have films of Naomi and Kaitlin – well, you know . . .” Cassie had asked.

“No – Marty hasn’t found them . . . yet,” I had replied. “Harper *will* say something eventually and I’m very worried about Kaitlin; she’s only eight.”

“I know,” Cassie has said. “It has to come out at some stage.”

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After retrieving a pair of Tasers and several replacement cartridges, I handed a set to Dave and then I headed upstairs to the British Sector. The noise was . . . raucous, to say the least! I could hear yells . . . squeals . . . howls of pain . . . giggles . . . ‘*shows over motherfuckers!*’. I rolled my eyes as I gently pushed open the door and . . . my view rotated violently and I found myself staring straight up at the ceiling with my back on the carpet.

“Hi, girls!”

Sky smirked down at me as she released hold of my right arm. Saoirse grinned sheepishly beside a giggling Anne-Marie.

“Hi, Mom!”

“What ya doing?” I asked casually.

“Defending the British Sector!” Stephanie chuckled.

“I knew this place was a bad idea,” I growled.

“You are in our custody, Hit Girl, and you must comply . . .”

“Or what?” I demanded with an evil grin.

“. . . Or I Taser your purple *arse!*” Megan announced as she aimed the Taser at me.

I muttered a few choice words that had Harper blushing with embarrassment and I felt myself hauled up and pushed onto the bed. I was allowed to sit up and then Saoirse smiled at me.

"We order you to answer some questions, Hit Girl; you make a mistake . . ."

"I'm itching to use this . . ." Megan grinned as she toted the Taser in her hands.

"Bring it on!" I growled.

The British Sector

"How long," Saoirse asked with a grin, "was it between you crushing on Dave and giving him a kiss?"

Mindy saw Stephanie roll her eyes and shake her head at her friend. Anne-Marie giggled as Mindy took a deep breath.

"Four years, 4 months and 23 days – give or take an hour or two . . ."

All the girls gasped.

"That long!" Harper exclaimed.

"I was going through a phase . . . a weird phase," Mindy replied.

"What was it like?" Megan asked.

Mindy chuckled at the memory and her mind drifted back two years and almost 10 tenths.

"It was my very first kiss . . . we had just stopped the Motherfucker and I was about to leave New York forever . . ."

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"I'm leaving New York, Dave. I can't go home . . . I can't put Marcus in that position."

"Woah! He won't arrest you; you just saved the city."

"Yeah, well I also killed six guys with a cop's gun – vigilantes don't get a free pass."

"You can't go; people need you."

"They've got you, now."

"I'm not like you."

"You don't have to be a badass to be a superhero, Dave, you just have to be brave . . ."

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"It was very wet . . . it was the most sensual thing I had ever done in my life. But right then, I owed Dave and I so wanted it to go further . . . but Dave belonged in New York – I did not."

Mindy had the rapt attention of every girl present. Megan had lowered the Taser and she was just as enthralled as the others.

"I left New York. I was alone. I had no one. My life had been stripped from me for a second time. The solitude was becoming unbearable. I thought I knew who I was. I was alone before, after Daddy died.

But at least I had had Marcus to look after me and Dave to talk to. They both knew my history; what I was. That was the first time that my life had been stripped from me. I was constantly looking back, to try and find a way that might have stopped me having to leave New York, from having to leave Dave. I hated myself for saying it, but I missed Dave. The only thing that kept me going, was remembering that kiss; my first ever kiss. I felt warm, and more than a little tingly inside every time that I remembered that kiss.”

Naomi and Kaitlin giggled but stopped as Megan glared at them.

“Thinking of Dave always made me smile. I thought of what could have happened between us if I had listened to him. Instead of telling him to go to hell. What if I had kissed him much earlier, instead of just pounding his ass into the mats of the Safehouse? The solitude was killing me, from the inside. I found myself in Ohio then four weeks after leaving New York, I had found myself an apartment in Chicago. Then, just one tiny miscalculation and my attempt at being a normal human being was shattered. I was running. I was scared. I was alone. I had nothing, but the clothes on my back . . . and the blood on my hands. My safety, my freedom; it had all been forsaken.”

Hardly anybody was breathing – never had so many *Predators* been so quiet!

“I was reduced to the Chicago underworld. I lived off drug dealers: I used them as my personal ATM. But my grip on humanity was slipping from my grasp. I had never needed to control my humanity before; I had always had somebody – Daddy, Dave, Marcus. I was turning Feral and killing for enjoyment . . . I was turning fully into Hit Girl while Mindy Macready faded from existence.”

“How did you . . .?” Stephanie asked.

“Thanks, in no small part, to Marty, my knight in shining armour came looking for me . . .”

“Dave!” Anne-Marie exploded.

“Exactly right, little one. Dave found me. Only it was not the meeting you might find in some goeey chick-flick. I think my exact words when we first met were: ‘What the fuck do you want? I don’t need your fucking help, cunt!’ . . .”

There were several intakes of astonished breath from around the bedroom.

“I sent him away . . . and I hated myself for it. Then I went and got myself shot. Dave found me, carried me back to my shithole of a room, and he tended to my wound. When I awoke, I tore into him again and I reiterated my previous comment.”

Mindy flinched a bit at all the angry glares she was receiving from the assembled girls.

“Then Dave tore into me! I won’t tell you what he said, but suffice to say, he got through to the bitch inside and . . . well, the rest is history and *very* personal! Needless to say, we all owe our lives to a guy who decided to pull on a green and yellow wetsuit then go out and fight crime on the streets of New York. Without him, I would be dead, another dead corpse on the streets of Chicago. None of what you see would ever have been created. *Urban Predator* would still exist and you all . . .”

“. . . would be in hell,” Sky finished darkly.

“We all owe our very existence to Kick-Ass,” Saoirse summed up.

“I’ve never told that story until now. But now you all know there was a man named Dave Lizewski, and that he saved me, in every way that a person can be saved.”

“Did you just quote *Titanic*,” Chrissy asked with a smirk.

“Maybe . . .”

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“I learnt how wonderful a man, Dave was. He could be loving and kind. He was also a geek! But my love grew; it had always been there, just buried. I trained him and I taught him to focus his anger . . .”

“I know!” Saoirse interrupted. “I saw Kick-Ass go ballistic when some cunt laid a hand on Psyche during the Toulouse attack. He beat the man to death. The head was like a crushed watermelon when Kick-Ass was done. Kick-Ass kept yelling about his daughter – he was like a wild animal. After Hit Girl, I’m scared of one person – Kick-Ass!”

“That’s our Dad!” Stephanie grinned and Anne-Marie nodded furiously.

“Let’s go thank him . . .” Anne-Marie suggested.

The Living Room

Mindy cringed as she saw the horrified look on her husband’s face as he was hugged by the marauding *Predators*, plus his daughter and his sister-in-law!

“Thank you, Dave, for everything!” Saoirse grinned as she gave Dave a kiss on the cheek.

Danny looked totally freaked out by it all and he spoke out: “As Megan might say: What the fuck?”

Everybody laughed, including Dave.

“I told them about our first kiss and about my first trip to Chicago,” Mindy said slowly. “Sorry . . .”

“Did you enjoy the story?” Dave asked with a chuckle.

“Yeah,” the girls all admitted.

“Mindy learnt that she enjoyed these . . .” Dave said as he arose from the sofa. He towered over everybody as he strode over to Mindy and he wrapped his arms around her and . . .

“Ewww!”

“Disgusting!”

“Fucking awesome!”

“Cool!”

When Dave finally released Mindy, she was breathing heavily – and not just because she was out of breath!

“Damn!” Mindy groaned. “That tongue just gets longer each time!”

Stephanie cringed and led the stampede back up the staircase . . .

The British Sector

“Stephanie?” Sky asked as they re-entered the bedroom.

“Yeah?”

“You have the *best* parents ever.”

“We do, don’t we?” Stephanie replied with a grin at Anne-Marie and Megan.

The Living Room

Danny had vanished up to his bedroom leaving Dave and Mindy alone apart from Horatio who lay purring on the sofa.

“Somebody should write a story about our lives,” Dave mused.

“One problem – anybody who read it? We’d have to kill them!” Mindy replied deadpan. “Plus, it would be X-rated, what with Chloe and Josh fucking every few chapters!”

“Good point . . . still, it would make a damn good read. Some funny bits too, every time you fuck up!”

“Hey! Those things I like to forget . . .”

“So,” Dave asked. “What next for the mighty *Fusion* story, then?”

“Peace and tranquillity in Chicago?”

“With you about? Nah – if I were a betting man, I’d say the next chapter would be about Megan; she’s not caused any shit for a while!”

“Good point . . .”

The following morning

Sunday, 19th June

The farewell was a little tearful as *Vengeance* left to head for the airport and then home.

Mindy received a hug from each of the three young girls before they climbed into the SUV. Cameron and Natasha followed suit.

“You come and visit us, soon – they should have just about finished clearing up after your last visit!” Cameron joked and Mindy glared dangerously.

“We miss you, Mindy,” Cassie grinned as she hugged her friend.

“You all take care – you hang in there, Harper,” Mindy said.

“Thank you, Mindy,” Keira smiled. “You’ve put my mind at rest about Harper . . . and you’ve given us both a future. Anything we can do, you just call.”

“I will . . . count on it!”

The **Vengeance** storyline *will continue in Chapter 8: Vengeance Expansion of Vengeance*.