

**Wednesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

***The home of Chloe and Joshua***

The first few days had been difficult and the adjustments required, hard.

However, the young Rebecca Wren, know to all as Becky, loved her new home. She loved the fact that she had a dog - not exactly a cute, fluffy one but Hercules loved the new girl who patted him and hugged him relentlessly. His usual owners tended to pet *each other* a lot more than they petted *him*. For Rebecca, the whole feeling of being wanted was from a lifetime ago. She struggled to sit down and just do nothing - for months she had been unable to get more than a few minutes alone. Some bastard would hit her, throw something at her, yell at her. The young girl had been unable to switch off and properly rest.

She was exhausted from everything and she amazed herself how quickly she had taken to her new life. She felt silly falling asleep at strange times of the day, usually cuddled up with Hercules. It usually took some gentle coaxing from Chloe or Joshua to wake her up for mealtimes and school. School; how normal. From fighting for her life one week, she had changed to a world where the only fighting she did was over who got the ball, her or Hercules. Her body was still bruised to hell, but for once, the bruises were healing without others replacing them.

She loved Chloe and she loved Joshua. At times, they sometimes went over the top watching over her . . . but she knew that she was cared for and that was enough for her to overlook the obsessive protection - yes, she had seen Joshua attempt to intervene during her fight with Anne-Marie. Each night, she snuggled down into a soft bed in her room. For a few nights in a row, she had awoken from a nightmare and found herself squirming into bed with Chloe and Joshua. Sometimes, she just could not sleep. She had been used to sleeping on a blanket on the floor like a dog.

Going to bed - actually being told to go to bed - was a different experience to the previous months. She was able to take her time using the toilet and then changing into clean pyjamas - Chloe had bought a set of pyjamas with My Little Pony characters all over them. Having the bed to sleep in was a welcome change and so soft. Her body still hurt where she had been punched and strapped but it felt better every day. Enjoying a shower and pulling on clean clothes each morning was an unbelievably good feeling. Seeing people smile at you because they cared about you each morning was different, rather than people who smiled at you because they saw an easy target. Chloe and Joshua ate big - well Chloe was an American - and Becky sometimes felt bad about not being able to finish her meals. A tearful conversation with Joshua had eased her worries and Chloe had promised to serve Becky smaller portions.

Then Becky had made a big mistake and she had found herself in big trouble.

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It had just been a bit of fun - at the time. Anne-Marie had first suggested that they have a bath together - then a water fight had begun. Then Sophia had wandered in and things had kind of got out of hand very quickly.

Upsetting Mindy had made Becky feel really bad. Knowing that Chloe would find out had made her feel even worse. She felt like she had betrayed the very people who had put everything on the line to rescue her and then find her a nice home with people that loved her. Becky's greatest fear was to be rejected and sent away - maybe put into an orphanage. She worried that if she caused enough trouble, Chloe and Joshua may not want her anymore.

When she had got home after school on Monday, Chloe had been very angry but she had calmly explained to Becky what she had done wrong and why it was unacceptable. Chloe was also calling her 'Rebecca', instead of 'Peanut' - that had hurt. For the past two days, she had been sent to bed the moment that she had finished her tea and completed her homework and *Fusion* activities - no TV, no playing with Hercules (Hercules was sulking).

Chloe had still appeared to give Becky a hug before turning the light off, though, despite the punishment.

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### ***That morning***

Becky groaned and the little girl rubbed her eyes as the light came on and her curtains were pulled open.

"Morning, Peanut!"

Becky smiled as she heard Chloe's words and she sat up in the bed - her punishment was over!

"Hi, Chloe."

"Up you get, honey!"

Chloe began to throw clean clothes onto the bed as Becky scrambled out from under the duvet and she ran for the bathroom.

"Hi, Josh!" Becky called out as he flattened himself against the wall so he didn't get mown down by the speeding eight-year-old as she vanished into the bathroom. "Such a relief!"

Joshua laughed as he continued on towards the kitchen for his morning mug of tea.

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### ***Later that morning***

## ***Safehouse F***

Mindy was brooding.

Their enemies were planning something, only Mindy had no idea what. Her snouts and informers had not produced much in the way of useful information and she was loathe to risk her one ace in the hole - her double agent. However, a meeting was due that evening with the young girl who was embedded in FEAR's organisation.

Mindy's thoughts caused her to miss the warning but she felt the kick as she suddenly became weightless for a second before gravity intervened and she crashed onto the mat.

"You are a pitiful sparring partner, today, honey," Dave pointed out with a chuckle.

"Fuck you, green asshole!" Mindy growled as she leapt to her feet and went on the offensive.

Dave grinned.

"You are weak, little girl!" he mocked as he kicked and spun around, landing some heavy punches on his annoyed wife before she was kicked to the mat.

"Fucking, cunt!" Mindy growled as she regained her feet and she scowled at her husband.

"Oh, take your tampon out, Mindy!"

It was like a red rag to a bull - literally!

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Mindy *hated* it when *anybody* turned her own words against her and those words were from a distant time and they had been aimed squarely at a, then useless, Kick-Ass. She loved her husband very much but there were times when she had to remind him *who* was the world's number one vigilante and *who* was number two. It did not help that Dave was grinning, fully aware of what he was saying and what his words were doing to his wife's sanity.

Mindy focussed on Dave and she let him have it. The show was epic and attracted many watchers who rarely saw Dave and Mindy sparring together.

"This is rare - normally they only spar in the sack," Joshua commented.

"That's disgusting," Stephanie commented dryly.

"Get with it, little girl, join the sexual revolution!" Chloe chuckled as she watched her mentors spar.

Stephanie ignored Chloe and Joshua and she focussed on her parents who were going full tilt - Dave was good, surprisingly good.

Everybody knew that he could hold his own in a fight but everybody

also knew that Hit Girl was the best. Whereas Dave had strength, Mindy had speed and manoeuvrability on her side. She used it too as she darted in for a strike and then backed off to avoid Dave's large fists. Dave grinned as he made a surprisingly swift dive to the right and Mindy's punch missed his stomach by two inches. Mindy growled angrily as she adjusted and kicked Dave in the thigh eliciting a small grunt of pain.

Mindy was not worried about hurting her husband - he could take just about anything which she could dish out with her hands and feet.

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Dave took advantage of his wife's manoeuvrability, catching her as she flipped past him - or tried to. With a hand on either hip, he twisted the struggling purple queen around and threw her to the mat where the catlike vigilante landed comfortably and sprang back at her aggressor. Dave was ready, but so was Mindy as she feinted to her right before diving to her left while Dave dodged right, straight into the angry young woman's fists. In turn, Dave reached out and he grabbed Mindy by her sports bra, throwing her behind him onto the mat - giving the world a fleeting glance of two very nice-looking breasts.

"Fuck you, Dave, fuck you!"

Mindy reattacked as soon as she had readjusted her clothing. Her face was contorted in anger and more than a little pink. Dave was smirking which only guaranteed his suffering as he was punched and kicked in very quick succession like he as a punchbag dangling from the ceiling. Dave took the abuse for almost a full minute before his reduced nerve function was exceeded and he began to feel some real pain. He waited for his wife to calm down, just slightly - he wanted her het up and angry.

With his strength, he seized Mindy's lower arms and gripped them tightly, forcing her to spot moving. She was angry - more than just play angry, too. He loved her when she was angry; her eyes positively sparkled. The sweat running down her subtle curves attracted Dave's attention and he struggled to contain the love which he felt for the eighteen-year-old young woman which he held in his iron grip.

"Dave. . ."

Mindy was unable to finish whatever crude insult was on her lips as Dave pushed his own lips to hers and pulled her body into his. He wrapped both arms around her, lifting Mindy off the mat. As the kiss continued, Mindy's body fell limp and she absorbed her husband's kiss, returning the pressure. Dave sank to the mat, laying Mindy down and they both wrapped their arms around one another and continued to kiss.

"Oh, wow!" Anne-Marie commented as she watched the sparring match degenerate into a sexually-charged kissing fest.

"I feel sick!" Stephanie exclaimed as she placed a hand over Anne-Marie's young eyes.

"More than you should be seeing, little one," Joshua said as he covered up Becky's slightly younger eyes.

"Hey!" the eight-year-old growled as she tried to pull his hands away, eager not to miss a thing.

"Somehow, I feel very inadequate," Joshua commented as he could not help but stare at his mentors as they rolled around the mat, kissing like there was no tomorrow.

It was another few minutes before they both broke apart and lay on the mat breathing heavily.

"You two enjoy yourselves?" Hailee asked with a grin as Mindy finally opened her eyes.

"Hell, yeah; I'm soaked!"

"Not from sweat, neither," Dave chuckled as he stood up.

"Dave!" Mindy exclaimed, her face getting redder.

"You two gonna do that again?" Curtis asked.

"It was hot!" Megan admitted.

"One show only," Dave replied while Mindy struggled to produce words.

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### ***That evening***

#### ***Central Chicago***

"We doing this *again*?" Kelly Wright moaned as Nightmare held out jogging pants and a sweatshirt.

"You know the drill, Fortune," Shadow growled from the shadows.

Kelly pulled off her clothing as quickly as she could, then she held out her arms and the seventeen-year-old girl turned a full three-sixty.

"You guys get off staring at my snatch, or what?"

"Just get dressed!" Nightmare suggested after performing a quick cavity search and an electronic scan of Kelly's body.

Once Kelly was dressed, Nightmare pointed to the backseat of the SUV and she handed the girl a black bag.

Kelly groaned but she climbed into the SUV and pulled the black bag over her head.

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### ***A few miles away***

It had been an exhausting 1,100-mile ride and her backside was sore as she checked into a small hotel a short distance from McKinley Park.

They were trained to operate alone, but that did not stop her missing her partner. Where was he? Was he still alive? He had to be still alive - she was certain that she would have felt it if he had died. She felt a yearning for him, despite it only having been a couple of weeks. She had expected something on their birthday, but she had heard nothing, nor had she dared contact him, just in case she compromised his safety.

She was currently the hunted one, not Leo. Her mind was in turmoil - she had fucked up, allowed everything to go wrong. Her first two operations and gone down like clockwork, but the third had gone haywire. It had been really simple - her comms had gone down after one final comment from her handler.

"*Urban Predator* is gone - you're on your own, kid."

With that comment, she had aborted her mission. Only for the target to catch sight of her as she had made her escape. Leo had escaped clean, at least she hoped he had. They both had an escape plan, unknown to the other - for security reasons - but they also had an ultimate escape plan for when they both had the chance to escape *Urban Predator*.

The sixteen-year-old eased herself into a hot bath and she allowed her muscles to relax - she was exhausted.

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### ***Safehouse Alpha***

"Hello, Fortune."

"Hello, Hit Girl."

"I'm sorry about the hoops that you've been made to jump through but it is essential as I am sure you can understand."

"I can. Having seen what, she is capable of and having seen first-hand how she operates - she makes my skin crawl; I am struggling."

"You can do this, Kelly. I am sure you're intelligent enough to have figured out what might happen to you, should you be found out."

"I watched her slit the throat of one of her own, just two nights ago - I threw up, minutes later."

"I assume that she will want you to kill at some stage, Fortune. You will have to do it, too, if you are to maintain your cover."

"She's planning an operation - well, her part of a larger one. I don't know the details but it is for Saturday night and she's putting ninety-two men forward for it. The Russian's are putting forward seventy-two while the Sicilian's have forty-eight. As for

that pink bitch - God, I hate her - she's off doing something else; I don't know what."

"Stardust."

"What?"

"Stardust. You use that in any communication, or you say that to any member of *Fusion*, and we will pull you out. Nobody knows who you are, but Shadow, Nightmare, myself, and select others. Other members of *Fusion* will be made aware of that codeword and will have orders not to harm you but to get you to safety. There will be no going back after we extract you - do you understand?"

"Yes, Hit Girl, I do. Thank you."

"This will all be over, very soon, Fortune."

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***Very early, the following morning  
Thursday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>***

***West Columbia***

Marty growled as a sound brought him out of his deep and pleasant sleep.

He opened his eyes to find himself staring at a nipple, just inches away from his eyes. His wife who was attached to the very same nipple was sleeping soundly. Without waking Kim, Marty sat up and he looked over towards his laptop - it was the source of the sound. He groaned as he stood up and walked over to the laptop and sat down before it. Once he was logged on, he checked the logs and then he felt a cold chill shoot up his backbone.

Thirty seconds later, his secure cell was putting a call through to another secure cell phone.

"This had fucking better be good, cunt!" Mindy Lizewski growled.

"Sorry, your purpleness!" Marty said briefly before he went on with his explanation for waking up his leader at 04:47. "Vengeance have just declared a *Code Alpha* - you know what that means?"

"Yes, I do," a suddenly wide-awake Mindy replied, stiffly.

"Two minutes ago, Eric dumped his servers. *Vengeance* has gone dark. It can only be HMG."

"Activate Victor Yankee and Thetis . . . let me make a call and see if we can't get some friends out there to help."

"I'll do what I can from here without compromising them. I've blocked all their active comms devices in case anything falls into the wrong hands. If they make it to Thetis, they can collect virgin comms."

"Fucking, hell!" Mindy growled. "Keep me updated - thanks, Marty."

"I'm headed down to Foxtrot. I'm bringing Kim, Matty, and Hope - I'm worried that things are going to blow up here, too."

"We need hope," Mindy said as she dropped the call.

"What is it, Marty?" Kim demanded from the bed.

"Vengeance has gone dark."

"Chicago?"

"Going to hell and back."

Kim leapt out of the bed and she began to dress.

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It had been spreading throughout the city like a cancer for weeks.

The cancer was initially small and for a while, it had gone unnoticed but then it had begun to rear its barbs and dig into anybody who would listen. Every store that was robbed. Every citizen who was mugged. Every person who had their car jacked from under them. Every person who was scared out of their home and out of their neighbourhood. Every person who was extorted for protection. They were all told the same. They were being persecuted because of Hit Girl. They were being persecuted because of Kick-Ass. They were being persecuted because of *Fusion*.

At first, the words were shrugged off by a city who felt safe under the protective umbrella which their vigilantes provided but as more people suffered and the suffering became harsher, human nature began to look for somebody to blame beyond those hurting them. Human nature turned the citizens of Chicago against those who had protected them for almost three years. Instead of shouts of welcome and yells of praise, *Fusion* began to receive angry comments and more than once, an armoured vigilante was pelted with rotten vegetables and eggs. However, *Fusion* took it all on the chin as the heroic vigilantes that they were, shrugging it off and continuing to protect the city.

Those barbs dug deep within those heroic vigilantes and the words hurt, even if the rotten eggs did not. The younger vigilantes were unhappy at the sudden twist in how *Fusion* was respected out on the streets of Chicago. For weeks, they had struggled to contain the anger within them, knowing that to react would go against what they represented. Against what *Fusion* represented.

Then the Mayor had tried to come up with an answer. The people wanted blood. The people wanted peace. The people wanted to live and work without fear. The Tripartite Threat, as it was referred to, was paralysing the city. The Mayor was honest, unlike his corrupt predecessor. The Mayor had reluctantly summoned Superintendent Jack Bay to his office. The response from the Superintendent had been colourful, to say the least, but he could see where the Mayor was coming from. He cautioned the Mayor that his order would not go down

well with the rank and file of the Chicago Police Department. The Mayor backed down and a relieved Jack Bay went back to policing an increasingly dangerous city.

Before long, it was to be the Chicago Police Department who found themselves the hunted as they found themselves facing the Russian Solntsevskaya Brotherhood, the Sicilian Mafia, and the self-styled super-villain known as FEAR along with her cohort: Sunset Phoenix. On top of the unlikely display of united organised crime, the CPD found themselves needing protection from those they were sworn to protect. The Chicago Police Department was about to face a massive backlash after a devastating night.

It was a kidnap gone wrong that had ultimately ended with horrendous results and equally horrendous consequences for the city.

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***Later that morning***

***Lincolnwood***

"I did it, Libby!"

"What, dweeb?" Elizabeth Dade asked her annoying brother.

"I hacked into her network and I managed to grab some files before I was kicked out," the excited boy explained.

"Whose network?"

"FEAR's!"

Elizabeth's face went pale.

"Are you stupid?"

"What?"

"Did you hack her from *here*?"

"Yeah . . . oh, shit!" the thirteen-year-old boy exclaimed as the penny dropped.

"You, dumb fuck," his newly fourteen-year-old sister groaned. "We gotta get the hell outta here . . . now!"

"I'm sorry, Libby - I'm so sorry. . ."

"Tell it to Mom and Dad, wanker!"

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Mark and Sarah Dade were getting themselves ready for work and they were about to call their teenaged children downstairs when there was pounding on the stairs and their daughter appeared in a panic.

"We gotta go, Mom, Dad."

"Calm down, Libby - what's going on?" Sarah Dade asked.

"As usual, butt-breath has been thinking with his dick, again. . ."

"Libby . . . Language!" Mark Dade growled at his daughter.

"Sorry - he used his genius brain to hack into FEAR's network - but he previously used his dick to think and he did it from *here*."

"Libby!" Mark growled but his daughter stood her ground.

"What have we told you, Jesse?" Sarah demanded as her son appeared.

"I messed up, Mom."

"Yes, you did - get your kit, some clothes . . . but move!" Sarah ordered and both kids bolted for the stairs. "Libby? Did you call for help?"

"Err - doing it now, Mom!" Libby said as she pressed the pulsing orange button on her *Fusion* cell phone.

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As soon as the voice answered, Libby exploded into life. However, all Battle Guy heard were a few key words:

". . . brother . . . hacked . . . network . . . FEAR . . . at home . . . scared . . ."

"Calm down, Flare - listen! Did your brother get any data?"

"Yes - on his laptop."

"Take the laptop with you - it'll be taken and placed into a Faraday bag once we get to you. Until then, get out of the house. Drive southeast down North Lincoln Avenue until you reach West Petersen Avenue. Get out, abandon your car and head into Legion Park. Keep your Fusion phones on you - destroy the rest. I can track you and a friend will meet you in Legion Park - remember your training and stay safe. Codeword is 'banner'."

"Thank you."

Eight minutes later, the Dade family drove away from their home at speed. It did not take them long to travel the mile or so to the junction with West Petersen Avenue where they abandoned their vehicle at the entrance to Legion Park. Each carried a small pack and the family ran into the park, their eyes scanning around for trouble. All four were very scared, knowing that they were up against a ruthless organisation who would think nothing of killing them. The park was long and thin with a river down the middle. The path meandered in and out of the trees with grass either side. The fast walk was actually quite pleasant in the early morning sunshine. But then Libby screamed as she saw movement up ahead and three Corsairs came running out of the trees and levelled automatic weapons at them.

The family froze, not moving.

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Jessie's head came around as he heard the roar of an over-revving engine coming from West Ardmere Avenue which terminated at the park.

A Chevrolet SUV burst out of the trees and took all three Corsairs in the back, two being scooped up and thrust into the windshield, shattering it, before one of the, just as shattered bodies, was thrown off to one side to join his colleague who had been catapulted into a tree where his head had made a funny squelching sound on impact.

"Get in!" Sergeant Paul Murphy yelled. "Banner!"

Everybody clambered aboard with Libby riding up front with Murphy, who threw a large bag with embedded copper wiring at her brother.

"For the laptop!" he growled and Jessie shoved his laptop inside the Faraday bag, sealing it.

Gunfire erupted from deeper into the park as Murphy reversed at speed back out onto the road, shedding the third Corsair on the way as he spun the vehicle around and floored the accelerator, his blue light flashing and siren screaming.

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An hour and two vehicles later, the Dade family had no idea where they were - not least because they found themselves in the back of a high-powered SUV with hoods over their heads.

Another twenty minutes and the vehicle slid to a stop and the engine shutoff and they were finally still for the first time in almost two hours since they had started running for their lives.

"You can remove your hoods now," a voice told them and they all did so. "Step out of the vehicle."

The Dade family found themselves in a garage beside an armoured SUV. Before them stood a young girl of maybe sixteen-years-old and she smiled before waving them all through a door and into what appeared to be a normal home.

"My name is Discord and you are safe here," the girl explained as she rested a hand on the holstered automatic pistol at her right hip. "You will not leave this building. You will not open a door or window. You will not do anything to attract attention to this building. You will follow any command I give you. Any deviation from these rules and I cannot keep you alive. Yes, that is my job, to keep you four people, alive. I am a member of *Fusion*, and I run this Safehouse. I know that this will be difficult for you but please look at this place as your home. I live here too, but I will allow you all some privacy as a family. Mr and Mrs Dade - bedroom, top of the back stairs on the right. Jessie Dade, next on the right. Libby Dade, last on the right. Do not go into any other rooms and stay out of the basement, otherwise the first floor is open to all."

"You're British!" Jessie pointed out.

"Sorry," Sarah grinned.

"No - it's fine."

"Go get yourselves settled in, sleep, do what you want, but I would advise you to spend some time together," Sarah advised.