

Monday, December 12th, 2016

Chicago, Safehouse K

Fusion had departed Atlanta long before daylight.

The flight had been long enough to get some sleep, but not a long sleep. ON landing, they were met by Paige and Jennifer before being driven into the heart of Chicago and to Safehouse K where their new guests were able to get their heads down for some much-needed sleep. Jennifer had checked over both of the younger kids and apart from many cuts and bruises, plus some malnutrition, they were fine. Jennifer ensured that Mackenzie and Isaac were tucked up in bed before leaving them so sleep.

"They okay?" Mindy asked.

"Yes - Isaac insisted on sleeping with his sister," Jennifer replied. "They'll both be fine after a few days rest and some proper food."

"Glad to hear it," Mindy replied. "How's Lily?"

"Lily's worn out and feeling very morose. Again, rest and good food will have her back to rights. She's a *Predator*, so I'm certain that she will bounce back. I'm off to check on Stephanie, then I'll see to Lara."

"Thanks, Jennifer."

..._...

Stephanie was used to being prodded and poked by doctors, so Jennifer's fingers on her side were nothing new.

"You've not broken anything, Steph, which is always good."

"Most of it has only just finished healing," Stephanie responded, sardonically.

"You're doing well, Stephanie - and I'm pleased to see you still wearing a bra."

Stephanie coloured slightly.

"I'm trying to change my image and put who I was behind me. This is Stephanie Lizewski, not Stephanie Walker."

"I am very pleased to hear it, Steph - keep it up!"

"Thanks. I will."

..._...

After forty minutes with Lara, Jennifer smiled at the girl as she redressed.

"You're in reasonably good health, Lara. But, you need to build up your body with some food, plus I want to start you on a regime of pills which will ensure that you receive no infections from what you endured."

"Thank you," Lara whispered.

"I hate to ask this, but, were you a virgin before this?"

"No - I lost my virginity when I was fourteen. I was going through a phase of upsetting my daddy - I figured that having sex underage would upset him; I was not wrong!"

"I cannot even begin to understand what you went through, Lara."

"The first few days were horrible. I was never one to put my body out there. I rarely wore anything that showed off my tummy and I preferred one-piece swimsuits. The first time that they stripped me naked - I struggled. Then they tied me up, spread-eagled so that everything was exposed, and they touched me for the first time. The boss - he brought me to orgasm right there in front of his men. I had never felt so humiliated in all my life. The humiliation wore off after a few days of being felt up and ogled by male hands and eyes. The first time that a man put his dick inside me. . ."

The girl broke down into loud sobs.

..._...

Mindy could hear the sobbing and she was horrified by what the girl had endured.

"So, what happens to Lara?" Mindy asked Patrick Haig.

"She can stay here for a few weeks while I arrange for her homecoming. It won't be easy for her. However, she inherits the family estate and considerable financial reserves. When she turns eighteen in February, she inherits the title and she becomes Lady Cockburn."

"I suppose we'll need to give *Vengeance* the heads up," Mindy mused.

"I'll cover that when I get back to blighty. I suppose I won't be taking the boy back with me."

"Is that the end of it?" Abigail asked.

"Yes, it is," Patrick said. "Lucas will go down as a hero, and not as a rapist. He gave us crucial information which may help catch those who were truly behind what happened to you, Abigail."

"Thanks," Abigail responded.

***The following morning
Tuesday, December 13th***

***Washington Navy Yard
Washington D.C.***

Naval Criminal Investigative Service

"Welcome back, guys!"

"Thank you, Jimmy; it's good to be back," Special Agent Timothy McGee commented.

"Were you successful?" Doctor Jimmy Palmer asked.

"Partially - girl rescued," Special Agent Eleanor Bishop replied. "But, we lost a boy."

"Sorry to hear that," Palmer said. "Any of you get hurt?"

"No - we're all fine," Abby Sciuto commented as she strolled through the bullpen.

"How's our big boss - did he enjoy himself?"

"He enjoyed himself, Palmer," Special Agent Jethro Gibbs commented from behind Palmer as he sat down at his desk.

Palmer cringed but then his attention was seized when he caught sight of a stunning young woman who had just stepped off the left-hand elevator. The young woman was dressed correctly for the cold weather and she wore a dark jacket over blue jeans and ankle boots. Her blonde hair was tied back into a single ponytail. In her right hand, she held a cardboard carrier bearing two large coffee cups from the diner down the road. Jimmy watched the young woman look around the open space before she zeroed in on the bullpen. Jimmy's eyes followed the young woman as she walked up the bullpen and then stopped at Gibbs' desk.

"Morning, Gibbs!"

Gibbs accepted the proffered coffee and he took a gulp.

"Perfect!" Gibbs said with a grin. "How did you know?"

"I do my research," Mindy Lizewski replied.

"What are you doing here, err Mrs Lizewski?" Special Agent McGee enquired as he rose to offer his hand in greeting.

"I wanted to thank Gibbs and his team for their help in rescuing Lily and the rest."

"The coffee pretty much covers it," Gibbs commented as he took a long draw of the hot liquid.

"How're the girls and the little boy," Bishop asked.

"Very well - to be honest," Mindy replied.

"Very glad to hear that."

"Do we have a visitor, Gibbs?" a voice called out from above.

Mindy watched as a black man jogged down the stairs and walked over to the bullpen.

"A very beautiful visitor," the man continued. "Introductions, Gibbs."

"Director Vance, please meet Mrs Mindy Lizewski. Mindy, please meet NCIS Director Leon Vance."

"I have heard many things about you, Mrs Lizewski," Vance said as he shook hands with Mindy.

"Good things, I hope," Mindy responded with a shy grin, her cheeks turning pink.

"Not many women receive the approval of Leroy Jethro Gibbs, and never an accolade as high as the one he gave you. However, I sense that Gibbs is holding something back - but that's like getting blood out of a stone, so I've not pursued it. Anyway, it is very good to meet you, Mrs Lizewski."

"Thank you, Director Vance," Mindy replied.

..._...

Mindy was escorted by Gibbs down in the elevator, about forty minutes later.

"Gibbs, Mrs Lizewski," Jimmy announced as the doors slid open onto autopsy.

Mindy hesitated for a moment and, naturally, Jimmy had some words of support.

"Seeing dead bodies is not okay for everybody, Mrs Lizewski. If at any time it gets too much, please say."

"I think Mrs Lizewski will be fine," Gibbs chuckled.

"I've seen a dead body or two," Mindy commented.

Despite that, seeing the body which lay on the cold metal table made her want to leave. Instead, she forced herself to walk over to that cold metal table with the body. It was obviously the body of a young male. He was naked, apart from a towel to protect his modesty. Mindy told herself that it was no longer a person - it was simply skin, muscle, and bone. It was no longer Lucas. Mindy looked down at the cold body and for a moment, she remembered the boy alive. On his torso, she could see the untreated trauma from the two bullets which had taken his life but been prevented from taking the life of Lily.

"He died saving another," Mindy muttered.

"I didn't know," Jimmy responded.

"His half-sister is alive today because he gave her life for her. He was just fourteen. I have seen so many people die that I've become blasé about it. I remember all the innocent ones who have died, and I wish that I could have saved this one - he really deserved it," Mindy stated. "Why do the innocent always have to die, Gibbs?"

"That's a question I have been asking myself for probably thirty years," Gibbs replied. "It is the world we live in - innocent people are always around to be hurt or killed by those who don't even deserve to breathe."

"I promised that I'd look after them - each and every one of them, yet one died on my watch."

"As I understand it, the boy ran from your protection - you are not to blame. You went after him and while you could not save his life, you saved the lives of four others," Gibbs said slowly.

"I've taken so many lives and I've seen so many die - why should his life mean so much to me?"

"You're obviously very good at what you do, and you feel responsible for Lucas. Were you there at the end?" Jimmy asked.

"Yes - I held his hand as he died."

"Have you decided what you want to be done with his body?" Jimmy asked.

"I want him in Chicago, so he can be buried there - where he was born," Mindy replied.

"We'll take care of it," Gibbs said.

"Of course," Jimmy added.

..._...

The flight back was lonely.

Mindy could not get Lucas out of her mind. She hoped that no more kids would be lost - none of them deserved to die. She knew that Gibbs had been right - it was not her fault, but she was still beating herself up over it. As she sat in her seat on the Gulfstream, faces flashed through her mind: every person she had seen die, either at her own hand or that of another - there were so many faces and Mindy could remember each and every circumstance. It was her punishment for doing the unthinkable and taking a human life. Ever since that first kill, fourteen years ago, she had killed more and more people, relishing the adrenalin rush associated with each and every kill. She enjoyed the sight of the blood. She could taste the iron on the air from the blood once it

reached a certain intensity. No kill or death had ever bothered her before - so why should the death of Lucas Charlton be any different? She'd taken lives with less thought than that given to stepping on an insect. She could remember the dead whom she should have been able to prevent from dying but she had been too late for one reason or another and that was totally unacceptable in her organised mind - only, another part of her mind told her that she could not save everyone. That was true - she had been unable to save her own Daddy, instead she had saved Dave.

Basically, life sucked!

That night

Glenview, Chicago

Mindy was still struggling with her emotions and she found herself alone in the living room.

The kids were all in bed and Dave was down at Safehouse K. She grabbed herself a comforting hot chocolate and sat down on the couch with the lights off, staring into the darkness. After ten minutes of thinking and worrying she found her cheeks wet from tears which startled her. The tears kept flowing as she lay down and she had no idea why - she did not understand. She barely heard the footsteps padding barefoot into the living room and she completely missed the soft paws which followed. She found a body squirming in front of her and she knew that it was Stephanie. Mindy glanced at the other end of the couch and she saw two yellow eyes staring back at her and she could hear the loud purring as Horatio offered his own support. Stephanie never said a word as she snuggled into Mindy. For Mindy, Stephanie being there meant everything, and it comforted her enormously. Mindy wrapped her arms tightly around the youngster and she felt a small hand squeezing her own.

The faces of the dead seemed to fade away as sleep finally came to her.

..._...

Dave finally arrived home in the early hours.

He checked on the kids as he normally did. Anne-Marie was fast asleep, hanging off the side of her bed, so Dave gently eased the eight-year-old back under her duvet. A few steps further on, Dave found Danny curled up in a ball, barely visible as he slept. Next stop was Jamie up the spiral staircase. The boy was randomly struggling to sleep right the way through the night as he tried to put his recent past behind him. Not surprisingly, the boy's bed was empty. Dave knew exactly where to find him, so after a brief trip back to the floor below, he gingerly opened the door into his eldest daughter's bedroom. He smiled as he made out the slim shape of Jamie asleep on top of his sister's duvet. Strangely, there was no sign of Stephanie in the bedroom and she was not in the bathroom either.

Stephanie was known for her nocturnal wanderings, so Dave headed down the stairs and he stepped into the living room. He smiled again as he found Mindy and Stephanie asleep on the couch. Horatio looked up and meowed as Dave spread a blanket over the two girls. Dave had spoken with Mindy earlier that evening and he had sensed that something was wrong, but he also knew why she had flown to Washington D.C. early that morning. He had just left an increasingly morose Lily at Safehouse F where she was struggling to come to terms with what had occurred. Dave had known Mindy for eight years. He knew a lot about the young woman - probably more than she knew about herself. Dave had deemed it important to glean everything that he could from the likes of Marcus and Jack Bay. Some

of the stories of the younger Mindy before Damon had returned from prison were sweet and angelic - a far cry from the girl who had sliced and diced her way into Dave's life at Rasul's on that fateful evening in New York.

That single event had changed both their lives. For the better? Definitely. There had been a few ups and downs along the way for both Dave and Mindy, but throughout it all, they had learnt that they both needed one another and they had both risen to the occasion when required. Since they had become 'involved' on a deeper level after Mindy's descent into the darker side of her alter ego, the young woman, who Dave loved more than life itself, had changed into a different person as she had learnt new skills and she had learnt to process her emotions and not to just bury them deep down. Even Marcus had seen a significant change in her character, as had others who had known Mindy for years. Jack Bay had commented on the mothering instinct which had emerged when Danny and Anne-Marie had come onto the scene. Both he and Marcus had been more than a little concerned that Mindy might struggle, but like everything which Mindy did, she put everything she had into it and she had shown that she could be a loving parent - even with some rather unorthodox parenting skills. Both Jack and Marcus had seen some of Mindy's mother, Kathleen, emerge for the very first time in Mindy.

It appeared that the hidden influence of her mother, deep down, was surfacing and providing Mindy with the emotional skills to cope with her everchanging life. In turn, Dave was nurturing Mindy to assist her through a difficult part of her life as she herself emerged from being a child into being her own woman. The arrival of Stephanie in the mix had changed things yet again. A new side to Mindy had appeared - one which had surprised Marcus and Dave immensely. When Stephanie had been shot, Mindy's reaction to the youngster's predicament had shown a deep and caring side to Mindy which had previously been deeply buried. Jack Bay saw it as Kathleen coming to the fore and overshadowing the Mindy which Damon had created. Marcus had seen it first. He had seen the relationship between Mindy and Stephanie grow. Despite their completely different beginnings in different countries and cultures, the pair could have been mother and daughter. Many saw it, but Mindy sometimes struggled to see it herself. They had similar emotional issues and they both sported the very same temper and obstinate behaviour which many saw as beyond obnoxious. The pair needed one another to survive. Stephanie was steadily taking over from Chloe who had previously been Mindy's voice of reason. The same applied to Stephanie who would argue with Mindy to the point where they would both start to fight one another, but neither would ever hurt the other - beyond a few friendly bruises, of course.

As Dave looked down on two of the most important people in his life, he smiled happily.

The next morning

Wednesday, December 14th

Glenview

Stephanie was in the kitchen, talking to Horatio as he ate his breakfast.

". . . At least that's what Tommy says, maybe I need to . . ."

"Hey! Stephy!"

Stephy growled as she turned to the sound of the voice.

"What do you want, annoying brat?"

"Love you too, big sis," Anne-Marie grinned, ignoring the jibe. "Mom wants you in her study."

Stephanie grimaced.

"You're toast," Anne-Marie commented. "Assuming you've done something really bad, of course. Hope so!"

"Thanks, runt!"

Stephanie walked slowly up the stairs and then along the landing until she reached the partially open door to Mindy's study.

A certain poem from her past entered her mind, along with the first line:

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the Spider to the Fly.

The ten-year-old fly took a deep breath and she put on her most innocent looking smile before she pushed open the door and walked into the spider's parlour.

..._...

"Why do you always look like a cornered wild animal when I summon you here?" Mindy chuckled as Stephanie sat down across from Mindy who sat behind her desk.

"I might have done something wrong," Stephanie replied with a sheepish grin, before quickly adding a clarification to her statement. "I'm not saying I have, though."

"You need to learn to hide your emotions better, Steph," Mindy grinned. "Okay - I want you to fly to L.A. for two days. You will brief Madeline Tyler on what you are and how you came to be."

"You want me to brief her on *Urban Predator*?"

"Yes, please."

"Can I take Abigail?"

Mindy chuckled - those two were rarely apart.

"Take SD, too - she could probably do with the nicer weather I would have thought."

..._...

Abigail was very excited to be heading back to Los Angeles and Stephanie could hear her excitement as she checked in with the Murphy family.

Saoirse, too, was excited about the trip but annoyed that she was still having to rely on a crutch. Then she had a thought.

"Will I be your protection?" Saoirse grinned facetiously.

"A fifteen-year-old who can't even walk unaided?"

"Oh, you *do* need protection, Stephy - from me!" Saoirse growled as she threw a full can of Coke at her friend.

Stephanie easily dodged the inbound can without a problem, laughing as she did so.

"We depart at eighteen hundred," Stephanie advised her two friends.

That evening

Glenview

"You behave, now."

"Yes, Mummy," Stephanie grinned.

"SD - please feel free to slap her, if required," Mindy said.

"I won't hesitate," Saoirse acknowledged a bit too fast for Stephanie's taste.

"What about me?" Abigail chimed in. "Can I slap her?"

"You do, and you'll be borrowing Foxy's crutches," Stephanie promised.

"God, I hate her!" Saoirse exclaimed loudly.

Mindy knew otherwise, but she grinned all the same. Then she looked at the fourth member of the team.

"You sure about this, Morgan?" Mindy asked.

"Fucking crazy bird!" Saoirse growled.

"I need to look after my wayward younger sister," Morgan explained.

"Please, Mindy - she's doing my fucking head in!" Saoirse groaned. "I hate being mollycoddled."

Mindy grinned. "Far from me to get in between sisters, SD - have fun, Morgan."

"Bitch!"

"I am what I am," Mindy chuckled.

"Okay, a few days in L.A. with my big sister, and the Phase 2 *Predators* from hell!" Saoirse groaned. "I must have been a very bad girl in a previous life."

"Have fun!" Mindy chuckled.

"Okay, spawn of Satan - let's go," Saoirse growled as she glared at Stephanie and Abigail.

..._...

Just as the girls vanished out the gate with Mathilda, who was driving them to the airport, Jennifer pulled in with Lara.

Naturally, Lara appeared a little apprehensive as she stepped out of the car and she shook hands with Mindy. Despite her being semi-comatose during her rescue, she had figured out who she had fallen in with. She had remembered Kick-Ass as being the one who had rescued her, so it was not too much of a stretch to assume that the woman before her was somebody very special . . . and very dangerous.

"Hello, Lara - you look a lot better," Mindy said, putting on a friendly smile. "Come in."

Lara followed Mindy inside at the behest of Jennifer. Mindy waved them both into the living room.

"Coffee?"

"Please," Jennifer replied.

"Got any tea?" Lara asked in a very recognisable accent.

Mindy grinned.

"My daughter is a Brit who loves tea leaves, so I have various: Earl Grey, Breakfast, and some godawful Darjeeling."

"I don't know how anyone can drink Darjeeling." Lara grinned. "I'll take the Earl Grey."

..._...

Mindy returned with a tray of mugs and she sat down in her chair.

"So, what is this about, Jen?"

"This morning, I put Lara through a full medical, inside and out," Jen replied.

Mindy cringed as she crossed her long legs and Lara smirked slightly.

"For goodness sake!" Jennifer complained. "Anyway, during that examination, I found three items which attracted my attention."

"I've been branded," Lara offered in a low voice.

"Explain," Mindy suggested.

"Lara has three tattoos that were never there before, and she has no memory of how they got there," Jennifer commented. "Right buttock, right thigh in the groin, and on the left side of her left breast. A small dragonfly. We have no idea what it means."

Mindy looked down at the floor for a few moments.

"May I see?" she asked.

Lara looked at Jennifer who nodded.

Lara undid the button on her trousers and she eased them down her thighs, still sitting. She showed Mindy the inside of her right thigh, up near the groin. The dragonfly tattoo was very small and easily missed, however, it was colourful - a blue head, abdomen, and thorax with four pink wings.

"Thank you," Mindy said, and Jennifer quickly pulled up her trousers and button them.

"Still getting used to wearing clothes after two months naked," Lara commented as she took a large sip of her tea.

"The tattoo means that you are the property of a sex ring," Mindy stated. "If we had not rescued you, then you would have been sold - if you weren't already. You would have been used either as a common prostitute, or maybe a high-class call girl. Those tattoos, based on insects, are often used by the Russians to mark their property. I should be able to track down who that tattoo belongs to."

"You said that I may already have been sold - am I at risk?"

"A very good question. They would have taken photos of you - naked ones, to use for selling purposes. We'll see what we can find."

"Will my body be on the internet?"

"Not the internet as you know it - but deep down on the dark web, maybe. You are hot property, so the images would be guarded and most likely not stored electronically where somebody could access them, except for some discrete shots which they would use to sell you - photos of your breasts and other parts, for instance, but no facial details or anything which could identify you. If they want to buy you, they will be shown a printout of your face - never the Full Monty, so to speak."

Lara looked horrified.

..._...

"Have no fear, Lara - we will look after you. We have a team who will search the dark web for you and we will see if we can track down who you might have been intended for. As to whether you are at risk, we will have to assume yes - however, what intrigues me, is that if they knew who you really were, then they would have ransomed you for millions - a much bigger payday than merely selling you as jailbait," Mindy said.

"Merely?" Lara asked. "Jailbait?"

"Sorry - a bit melodramatic" Mindy apologised. "Go get some rest and leave things to us. I will keep you safe. Very soon, you'll be able to return to your home, in England, and I am certain that you will be safe there.

"Thank you, Mindy - I owe you my life," Lara said. "I have lost my father, leaving me alone on this earth. I hope that I can call on you as my friend, Mindy?"

"Of course."

Lara vanished to make use of the bathroom, leaving Mindy and Jennifer to talk.

"If she *has* been sold, and money *has* changed hands, then somebody will be looking for her. However, they have no idea who she is, as I mentioned. But somebody may come looking for her, and they would start in Atlanta. The trail should end there, but worst case, they find themselves at my door - worst case for them, that is."

Mindy chuckled darkly and Jennifer scowled. Jennifer was not a big fan of the dark humour which pervaded *Fusion* - quite frankly, it scared her. But, she understood why it was necessary for the vigilantes to be able to laugh about what they did at night - she had been amongst enough military personnel to hear similar dark humour and she had hated that, too.

Once Jennifer and Lara had gone, Mindy made a quick call to Abby, and she asked her to direct *Synthesis* onto a visit into the dark web.

The following morning
Thursday, December 15th

Safehouse E
Level 8 - Detention Level

There were not that many *Marauders* left in the accommodation.

Those that were, sat at the same table eating breakfast: Carrie Milligan, Kieran Brennan, Dylan Page, Joel Burnell, Jay Hilton, and Willow Hartman. The six youths chatted, although Willow tended not to join in the conversations much. The two remaining girls were outnumbered two-to-one, but they each considered themselves to be worth two of the boys any day of the week. Carrie was the first to look up as the door opened and she nodded at Shannon as she entered the room. Then Carrie performed a classic double-take as a girl walked in the door. The girl was very familiar with her jet-black hair.

"Lily!" Carrie exclaimed.

"Hi, guys!" the girl said with a brief wave of her hand. "I understand you lot are in a spot of bother."

"Just a bit," Carrie admitted. "Where. . .?"

Carrie stopped dead as Hit Girl strode through the door.

..._...

"Could I please have your attention," Hit Girl called out.

Everybody turned to face her - nobody ignored or disobeyed Hit Girl. Under normal circumstances, Hit Girl might have laughed at the kids snapping to her tune, but not that morning.

"Three days ago, Lucas Charlton died."

There was an exclamation from six kids.

"Did you kill him?" Willow demanded.

"No," Lily said, as tears fell down her cheeks and she sobbed loudly. "He died protecting me. He took two bullets instead of me."

Shannon hugged Lily tightly as she sobbed. There was a mixture of stunned and shocked expressions at the news.

"For those of you who did not know," Hit Girl said quietly. "Lucas and Lily were half-brother and sister."

"Wow!" Jay exclaimed. "You kept that quiet!"

"Do you blame me?" Lily asked.

"No."

"Lucas died a hero," Hit Girl said. "His body is on its way back from Washington D.C. to Chicago. He will be buried in this city after a funeral. I understand that he was born here, so I see it as fitting that he should be buried here."

"Who is going to pay for all that?" Dylan asked.

"I will. That boy made some mistakes, but that does not mean that he deserved to die. I made a deal with each one of you. You follow instructions and learn from your mistakes, then I will look after you, no matter what."

There were mixed expressions, some showing embarrassment at calling Hit Girl's bluff.

..._...

Hit Girl walked out of the room, leaving Shannon and Lily behind.

"I don't trust her," Willow stated.

Shannon marched straight up to the older girl and shoved her against a wall.

"Don't you ever say anything against Hit Girl, or I will fucking take you down, and I don't care what age you are or what Phase you were - I will fucking end you!"

"Calm down, Shannon!" Willow responded.

"Do you trust me?" Shannon said to the gathered *Marauders*.

"Yes, we do, Shannon," Carrie said, wincing at the angry teenager's fierce attitude.

"I happen to know that Hit Girl went to town for you fucking retards. A Chicago PD Captain wanted you all sent to a secure prison after three of his officers were hurt when Lucas broke out of their custody to go after Lily. He thinks that you are all too dangerous to be allowed into society. Guess fucking what?"

Hit Girl went defensive and guess what her response was? She said to that Captain, and I quote: 'Over my fucking dead body'! Fucking useless twats, the fucking lot of you!"

With that, Shannon grabbed Lily and shoved her out of the door, before following closely behind, slamming and locking the door as she went.

Around that same time

Safehouse L

It had been a little over two weeks.

The bruises had all but gone, along with the tiredness, and the pain. Although, the guilt was still there, but slowly subsiding. So, what had they been doing for two weeks? There had been lots of time spent exercising and keeping their bodies trim and their muscles toned. In Juno's mind, her mentor and Nicholas had spent a lot of time exercising certain other muscles and her mind was struggling to comprehend how much sex it was possible for two people to have. Okay, she and Logan spent their night's naked and embraced, but only to play - Juno was not quite ready for the next step; she told Logan that she was waiting until they returned west before committing to that event.

Logan had no problems with that as he still had full access to Juno's body and she his. He was very happy that her bruises had faded - he hated seeing her suffer in any way. Other than sexually based activities, the four of them sparred, often two on one to increase Juno's abilities. It was harsh, but Juno understood the reasons why they had to push her - and, as a by-product, provide her with a whole new set of fresh bruises to mar her otherwise perfect body. For that morning's exercise, Juno held a pair of black Escrima sticks, each a little over two feet in length. She wore a pair of skin-tight shorts and an equally skin-tight sports bra, both of which she had pulled on straight after stepping out of the shower that morning. Logan loved his girl's ample thighs and the visible muscles on her calves, thighs, stomach, and biceps. He was the referee for that morning's exercises and Juno was facing off against both Guinevere and Nicholas.

It seemed so unfair.

..._...

Guinevere was just as scantily clad.

The limited clothing allowed the girls freedom of movement with nothing restricting the range of their joints as clothing would normally. Nicholas wore his usual baggy shorts and a baggy T-shirt. He preferred brawn over fast, snappy movements, and he had the muscles to back that up. To ensure that the training was beneficial to all, one of them was always a referee to ensure that things did not get out of hand and to ensure that Juno did not get hurt too badly. A few bruises never hurt anybody, and Juno was young - the pain and the tears soon went away, as did the bruises. The sparring would also start slowly as Juno exchanged steady strikes with Guinevere, their Escrima sticks clashing slowly, then increasing in tempo as Nicholas joined in to split Juno's attention, two sticks verses four sticks.

Juno was getting good and her reflexes were spot on as the opposing sticks moved fast from her left and her right. She had to anticipate and gauge each and every strike so as not to leave herself open for a strike from the other side. But she was fighting two seasoned fighters who had been fighting for many years when she had only been fighting for a few months. However, Juno knew that

learning the skills would keep her alive. She had been exposed to the life of the vigilante and the associated burst of adrenalin-fuelled pleasure that it brought. She wanted to continue with that life which her mentor had offered her. She knew that she could say no, at any time and Guinevere had made that abundantly clear, but Juno was no quitter, so she was seeing it through to the very end.

The Escrima sticks clashed harder and faster, then Guinevere grinned nastily, and Juno knew what was coming as Guinevere made to sweep Juno's feet out from under her, but Juno was getting wise to her mentor's antics and Juno swiftly and skilfully blocked the strike. . . only to realise her error with no time to correct it as she felt real pain when one of Nicholas' Escrima sticks struck her right buttock and Juno screamed out just as Nicholas' other stick took her across the left breasts, sending a huge surge of pain across her chest. The pain was extreme and in two separate places at once. The girl dropped her weapons and she fell to the floor, her eyes screwed tightly shut in an attempt to fight the searing pain on her buttock and in her chest. Logan stepped in and he used his own set of Escrima sticks to block those of Nicholas and Guinevere.

"Stop!" he called out.

Nicholas and Guinevere both froze, and they lowered their weapons. Juno struggled to her knees, tears streaming down her face, one hand gripping her right buttock with another, her breast.

"You need to move faster and have eyes in the back of your head, Juno," Guinevere stated without any compassion. "Get up!"

Juno forced herself to her feet, picking up her Escrima sticks as she went. She did not want to give Guinevere any satisfaction by appearing weak. She ignored the pain and she braced herself for another attack from the two people who she was starting to dislike immensely.

"Just say the magic word, Juno," Nicholas reminded the girl.

"Fuck you!" Juno retorted angrily, and Nicholas smiled.

Guinevere refused to show concern for Juno. The girl had chosen her path, so she would have to take the good with the bad. There was a safe word, of course, and Juno was free to use it at any time, but the youngster was stubborn, and Guinevere knew that her protégé would rather take a beating than surrender. Inside, Guinevere smirked as she noticed that they had an audience - Nicholas and Logan had noticed, too, but Juno had not. It was the same problem; Juno's situational awareness sucked and had almost got her killed on more than one occasion. The fighting continued in earnest, as the sweat-soaked Juno moved to avoid the inbound strikes. Despite her tiredness, the girl fought well, and she landed a swipe on Guinevere's rump, much to the older girl's annoyance. Nicholas was having none of it as he took a stick smartly across the youngster's right buttock, eliciting a yell of pain and indignation from the girl. That momentary distraction allowed Guinevere to sweep Juno's feet out from under her and deposit the girl on her back, eliciting another yell of pain.

"Stop!" Logan called out. "Time!"

Juno glared up at Guinevere and Nicholas before scrambling to her feet and storming off up the stairs to the bathroom for a shower.

..._...

Guinevere slipped into the bathroom while Juno was showering to check on her charge.

Juno was just finishing off washing her hair when Guinevere caught sight of the two wicked-looking red stripes on Juno's right buttock. Then Juno turned around and she grimaced at Guinevere as she saw her mentor's expression at the red welt marking her left breast.

"Sorry about those, Juno, but they should remind you to move quicker."

"They look horrendous!" Juno growled. "What will people say?"

Guinevere laughed.

"Who else is going to see your bottom and your boobs other than me and Logan?"

"I might want to go naked," Juno retorted without much thought.

"I'll believe that when I see it," Guinevere chuckled as she swapped places in the shower with Juno.

"Okay, I will!" Juno growled as she finished drying off and she threw the towel onto the bathroom floor before stalking off out the door and down the stairs.

Guinevere closed her eyes and held her breath for a few moments and then came the scream from downstairs followed by a loud yell.

"Guinevere, you are a fucking bitch!"

..._...

Juno stopped dead as she entered the living room.

Nicholas and Logan were talking to Lucy and a girl with jet-black hair. Juno screamed as she tried to cover up her breasts and her pubic hair with her arms and hands. Then she looked up at the ceiling and shouted at Guinevere.

"Guinevere, you are a fucking bitch!"

"Love the choice of clothes, Juno," Lucy chuckled.

"Sorry," Juno muttered as she felt her face go brilliantly red and she could see the blush extending down to the tops of her breasts.

Logan handed his girlfriend a large T-shirt from the laundry which Juno quickly pulled on.

"Juno, this is Lily," Logan said, introducing the black-haired girl.

"Lily, this is Juno - she doesn't normally go around naked," Logan explained.

"Hi, Juno," Lily said. "You fight well."

Juno stepped towards Lily and studied her.

"You have a dagger too?" Juno asked.

"Yes, I do," Lily replied as she swept her long hair back away from her right ear and showed Juno the mark. "I was the same intake as Logan - although he was Kai back then. I also knew Guinevere and mister 'I enjoy covering girls in piss and semen'."

Juno laughed as Nicholas' cheeks went slightly pink.

"Lily is right," Lucy said. "You fight really well, although you must be a little sore from those red welts on your butt."

"I don't move fast enough according to my bitch of a mentor."

"That would be me!" Guinevere chuckled as she walked into the living room.

"Hello, Lily - it's good to see you again."

"Likewise, Guinevere."

"I was just telling Juno how well she fights," Lucy commented.

"She is good, and she is improving every day," Guinevere said proudly. "There are a few gaps to be filled in, but we're getting there."

"Do you need any help?" Lucy offered.

"Please!" Guinevere exclaimed. "She's a difficult bitch to teach!"

"Reminds of a stubborn ten-year-old girl, I once knew and tried to train," Lucy replied.

"I was the perfect student," Guinevere complained.

"Perfectly difficult as I remember it."

"I kicked *your* arse, remember."

"Vividly!" Lucy scowled.

Author's Note: *You can follow Stephanie, Saoirse, Morgan, and Abigail in Chapter 10: The Predator File of my other story: Fusion: Los Angeles.*