

Saturday, December 24th, 2016

**Regina International Airport
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada**

17:28

The jet touched down with the usual chirp of rubber on tarmac.

Onboard, three vigilantes prepared for the unknown. For the youngest, it was the first time she had worn such clothing since she had been rescued, over a year previously. Though the clothing was new, the black jeans and the black leather jacket were almost identical to those items which she had worn that fateful day when Kick-Ass had scooped her up off the pavement. Under the leather jacket, a harness supported a ten-inch bladed knife, mounted vertically with the hilt above the small of her back. The harness also provided stowage under the left armpit for a compact SIG Sauer P225-A1 Nitron Compact 9-mm pistol with two spare magazines under the right armpit. On the belt which held up her jeans, she carried two more spare magazines (for a total of five) and an SR09-K suppressor. Stephanie finished securing her lightweight leather boots and she stood up so that Mindy could check her over.

"A flash from the past!" Mindy chuckled. "You look perfect."

"So, do you, Mum," Stephanie said as she checked out Mindy.

Mindy was dressed almost identically in every way, except for there being a Tanto adjacent to her backbone, and a Glock 23 in her shoulder holster. Chloe made her own appearance from the back of the plane and she grimaced at Mindy and Stephanie.

"Bad dudes!" she commented.

"Without sounding like a lesbian on heat," Mindy stated. "You look like you're ready to fuck."

Chloe wore a black skin-tight jumpsuit with a lightweight jacket over the top. On her feet, she wore ankle boots. No weapons were readily visible, but they were there. The suit accentuated the young teen's thighs and long legs, not to mention her chest. Chloe's hair was braided up, out of the way. Mindy's hair was in her patented single ponytail. Stephanie had no hair to put up, so hers simply remained as it was. The clothing worn by the three vigilantes may have looked ordinary, but it was anything but and was lined with various layers of Fox's own lightweight body armour.

"You guys ready?" Amy asked as she placed three small packs down on the couch.

"As ready as we'll ever be," Mindy replied. "Keep the engines warm, the pilots sober, and the aircraft safe."

"Yes, ma'am!" Amy said as she pulled out a Sig Sauer MPX-SD suppressed submachine gun.

Tuxedo Park

"Okay, guys - you need to be very professional about this."

Stephanie shrugged from the back seat of the GMC SUV. She was annoyed because she had wanted to ride up front, but Chloe had grabbed Stephanie and pushed her into the backseat.

"I'm always professional," Chloe responded from the front seat.

"Just checking," Mindy chuckled as she pulled up in a dark alley, behind a dubious-looking bar, in the very dubious part of the city.

The city of Regina had one of the worst crime levels in all of Canada which might have been why Mindy found the place so appealing. Snow was falling and adding to that which had been there for several days.

"Remind me why we're in this Canadian hellhole?" Stephanie asked.

"We are here to track down and rescue a young *Predator* who cropped up on the radar, as you well know, Stephanie," Mindy replied.

"You expecting any trouble?" Stephanie persisted.

"Steph - Mindy's here; there will *always* be trouble," Chloe chuckled.

"You sound like Marcus!" Mindy growled as she pushed open her door.

..._...

The bar was fairly typical of that part of the country and not for the fainthearted.

Mindy pushed through to a vacant circular table and she sat down. Chloe and Stephanie followed her example. A waitress saw their arrival, and she made for their table. She studied the trio before she spoke.

"She can't be in here," the waitress said as she pointed her pen at Stephanie.

"I'm sure that you could overlook it, just this once," Mindy responded, sliding a fifty-dollar bill across the table.

"What'll it be?" the waitress asked as she deftly pocketed the dollar bill.

"Three Cokes, please, no ice," Chloe said.

The waitress smiled and made a brief note on her pad before she vanished.

..._...

Over their drinks, the three girls chatted while keeping a constant eye on the bar's clientele.

The general noise level made it easy to chat without anybody being able to overhear what the three girls were saying. It was Chloe who first cast a wary eye on their target. She casually nudged Mindy's boot with her own and nonchalantly tipped her glass of Coke in the relevant direction. Mindy downed her own drink and she headed towards the lady's room. What exactly happened to prevent her from reaching it and how things went a little bit wrong, she had no idea. Stephanie, however, saw it coming from a mile away. Mindy had made it barely six paces when a man in his early twenties stumbled back from the bar, turning as he went, and as he did so, he bumped into Mindy, splashing most of his glass of beer onto the floor.

"What the fuck are you doing, you stupid girl!" the man growled as he shoved Mindy - the man appeared to be a few sheets to the wind.

Mindy fell back against another, larger, man who then spilt his own beer all over the table where he was sitting with another man. He did not seem happy and Mindy narrowly missed a large arm coming around to strike her. The large man jumped up and he glared over at the younger man who quickly tipped his head at Mindy.

"You owe me a drink, bitch!" the large man yelled.

"Not my doing," Mindy stated defensively.

..._...

"Any chance she's going to behave?" Chloe asked over at the table.

"Not a damn chance," Stephanie responded sourly.

"You will buy me a new sodding drink, you little whelp, or as God is my witness, I will. . ."

"Sod off!" Mindy responded to the first man.

"You need to be taught some fuckin' manners, gorby!"

Then the large man tried to intervene. A punch was thrown. Mindy ducked, but another punch caught her on the right shoulder. Mindy simply reacted as her deeply ingrained training dictated, and she grabbed the offending fist, throwing the man attached to the wrist over onto his back, a wooden chair breaking his fall as it shattered into pieces.

Then all hell broke loose.

..._...

Stephanie wisely chose to stay out of the ensuing bar brawl and she casually slipped under the table.

Chloe was too big to join Stephanie, so she went to assist her wayward partner. Mindy was apparently enjoying herself as she deftly dodged flying fists, bottles, chairs, and bodies. Chloe could tell that Mindy was restraining herself and preventing a lethal Hit Girl rampage.

"Hi!" Chloe shouted as she found herself back-to-back with her best best-friend.

"It's amazing how these things just kick-off," Mindy responded as she kicked a man in the chest, sending him sprawling.

"Isn't it!" Chloe responded dryly as she glared at a man only about three years older than her who then had second thoughts about attacking her and he turned away.

Mindy floored a man who tried to grab hold of her before Chloe pulled Mindy out of the way of a flying beer glass.

"Look!" Chloe yelled, and she pointed towards the rear of the bar.

Mindy followed Chloe's finger and she saw their target attempting to fight his way out of the bar - it was time to leave. Mindy looked around for a moment and Chloe clocked the look of panic in her friend's eyes.

"Where's my daughter?" Mindy demanded.

"She's perfectly safe," Chloe replied as she disengaged from the fight.

Chloe dodged her way back to their table, with Mindy close behind. Underneath, they found Stephanie sitting cross-legged on the floor and grinning.

"Time to go, munchkin," Chloe said, and Stephanie grabbed the outstretched hand.

..._...

They reached the alleyway at the back of the bar just in time to see their target climbing into a black Escalade.

"I cannot believe that I just endured my first bar brawl - at ten-years-old!" Stephanie growled.

"Good practice for when you're older," Chloe responded.

There was no chance that they had been seen as many people were running out of the bar, and the police were just arriving. The three girls climbed into their SUV and they headed off in the same direction as the Escalade. The Escalade ahead of them made a few swift turns before jumping onto Highway One and heading north and then jumping off the highway towards Lakeridge. Mindy, who was driving, kept a safe distance between them and the Escalade, and as far as they could tell, the driver was unaware of his tail as he drove deeper into a residential neighbourhood. The SUV pulled up outside a property. Mindy pulled over a short distance back. She and Chloe pulled out night glasses to watch the SUV as the driver climbed out.

"You are late, Bobby," a voice called out.

"Got held up - a fucking fight at the bar - some fucking whore started it."

Mindy bristled at that comment as Chloe chuckled.

"Go get the boy and take him so we can get our sodding money."

"Okay, okay - asshole!"

In the SUV, Chloe looked over at Mindy.

"Do we make our move?" Chloe asked.

"No - something isn't right about all this," Mindy replied. "Steph?"

"They're trafficking the boy," she stated simply.

"We follow them and ensure that there are no more like him," Mindy said, and Chloe nodded.

As they watched, a boy of around maybe nine-years-old was brought out of the property and shoved forwards before being pushed into the back of the SUV. It was too dark to get a good look at the boy, so positive identification was

impossible. The driver clambered back behind the wheel and he sped off out of the neighbourhood before turning west for a few miles. Mindy followed a safe distance behind with Chloe and Stephanie watching for a tail or any other interference.

Twenty minutes later, the SUV pulled off the well-lit street and turned behind a not so well-lit building and parked in the shadows.

..._...

There was obvious activity at the building, despite the late hour of the night.

Other vehicles were parked in the shadows, indicating over a dozen people present inside at best.

"Marty - what have you got at our location?"

"Well, hello, my queen - I was expecting a call a while ago. You been brawling in bars?"

"Chloe upset the regulars," Mindy replied.

Chloe scowled at Mindy and Stephanie's mouth dropped open at the blatant lie.

"She does that," Marty chuckled. "Okay - property is owned by a Hank Ruthers . . . he has a rap sheet longer than the list of people who want to kill Stephanie."

"That's long," Chloe commented.

"I'm travelling with two fucking clowns!" Stephanie groaned.

"You have three entry points - front, back, and side. Alarm system is a piece of shit - and is now deactivated. Doo dee dum . . . oops, their phone lines have just been disabled, too."

"Thanks, Marty - we're going in," Mindy said.

"Lock and load, girls!" Stephanie growled as she pushed open the rear door of the SUV and dropped out of sight.

"Follow the *Predator*, I suppose," Mindy suggested as she and Chloe followed the youngster who had vanished into the cold, dark night.

..._...

Stephanie closed the building and she checked the small screen attached to her left wrist.

It was a greyscale image with three dull dots pulsing on the screen. One dot, a red one, had a small circle around it, indicating Stephanie's position on the map. The other dots were purple and blue, indicating Mindy and Chloe respectively. They were moving towards the front and back entrances while Stephanie took the side entrance. As promised, the side door released without setting off an alarm and Stephanie slipped inside. After closing the door behind her, she moved towards where the sound of voices was coming from. Down the end of a corridor, the sound of many voices came - male voices by the sounds of it. Stephanie moved closer, but she froze as she heard the sound of

sobbing coming from a room to the right. She was about to peer inside, when she heard footsteps, and she slunk into the shadows.

Her worst fears were confirmed as a man strode down the corridor and he stopped at the doorway - the man was a gangster hardman, and he was armed.

"They ready?" he called into the room. "Yeah - I thought there was a third, but she's not turned up - Dirk's late. Take the brat and the bitch."

There was a scream and first one and then another kid was shoved out into the corridor. One was a boy, the other a girl. Both were wearing one garment of clothing only - their underwear - and their hands were bound behind them with rope. The boy was about the right size for the kid they had been following.

"Let's see what we can get for you fucking brats," the man chuckled as she

Stephanie's heart sank as she triggered her radio. She had to think quickly - very quickly.

"It's a fucking auction and I have eyes on two kids - boy and girl - about to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. I've got a plan."

"This a plan like Hit Girl's which often go sideways?" Chloe asked.

"More like Psyche's Predator plans which always go sideways," Stephanie responded.

"I trust you, Steph - stay safe, right?" Mindy said.

"Always," Stephanie replied. "I will be on comms, but I won't be armed."

"What!!!" Mindy exclaimed.

"You'll see in a moment - I would suggest you get to where all the people are."

"We're there, now," Chloe confirmed. "Stay safe, honey."

Stephanie finished her preparations, stripping off her clothing and weapons until she stood in just her black boy-shorts and black sports bra. The floor was cold beneath her bare feet as she stepped into the room on the right.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" the man demanded as she ran his eyes over Stephanie.

"A man - Dirk, I think - he sent me in ahead - he's doing something outside," Stephanie said, her head down.

"You look like you could be worth a few notes," the man said as he ran a hand over Stephanie's head and then looked into her face, grabbing her by the jaw. "I don't like you."

The man slapped Stephanie hard across the face and Stephanie screamed out, despite it not hurting all that much as she had twisted her face away at the last moment - it still stung, though.

"Move, you little slut!" the man growled as she slapped Stephanie hard on her left buttock, eliciting another fake scream from Stephanie.

Mindy was not happy with Stephanie's plan.

It sounded like a total disaster, to be honest, but she trusted her daughter, explicitly. Her brain was focussed on the dozen or so men and women in the open hall, most sitting as they looked up at a low stage ahead of them. Mindy and Chloe were in the shadows to the left and right, behind the men and women. As soon as Mindy had heard what the men and women were there for, she had mentally signed their death warrants. Each man and woman had a target assigned to them, and Mindy's ordered mind - yes, it was ordered, despite what some might think - was mentally ordering the men and women into a list of whom would die first, and how. There were also four armed guards at strategic points around the room - they went straight to the top of the list.

Mindy's mind refocussed as there was movement on the stage, and young kids, a boy and a girl, were brought into sight. Both were very miserable, very dirty, and both were crying. They were both rubbing their wrists, an obvious sign that they had been bound. The man with them held a suppressed pistol in his right hand, and a knife in his left. With the knife, he prodded each kid in the back and whispered into an ear. Mindy could see the result of the knife prodding and the whisper when both youngsters began to tremble as they slowly pushed their underwear down to the floor, leaving them both completely naked before the large audience. Both children stared at anywhere but the audience, their faces red with humiliation. At another prod and a whispered command, both youngsters slowly turned around to face the rear of the stage and Mindy could see blood on their backs from where the knife had dug in, before turning back to face the audience again. The girl tried to cover her groin, but she received the point of the knife in her back again and she trembled with fear as her hands went to her sides. There were several crude comments from the watching audience, including some laughter, and Mindy struggled to control her temper. Before the man could do anymore, there was a commotion from behind the stage and another man came into sight. He was dragging something which was struggling, and then there was a bang as another child was thrown onto the stage, crashing down on her front with a scream. Mindy froze, as she recognised Stephanie being dragged to her feet.

"I'm fine," Stephanie whispered over the radio, but Mindy could see blood on one of her knees and scratches on her stomach.

"*You survive this, young lady, and I am going to tan your backside before I fucking kill you!*" Mindy growled.

"Easy," Chloe cautioned.

"Something special!" the first man stated as his colleague vanished. "This specimen is superb - a little feisty, but you take what you can get."

There was laughter from the audience.

"Okay - how about we undress this little lady and you can see what you are bidding for?"

There was general agreement from the audience and Mindy was struggling to keep to the shadows and not intervene.

"First, let's hear some bids for the little girl here."

All eyes turned to the girl standing naked before the audience. Nobody made a move. Chloe figured that they were saving their cash for Stephanie's auction.

"Come on, ladies and gentlemen, five hundred dollars?"

There were no takers.

"Two hundred bucks?"

Nobody moved.

"Okay - your loss; say bye, bye to the little girl - then we can undress beautiful, here."

The man raised his pistol and Chloe suddenly realised why the stage was sparkling in the bright lighting - it was covered in thick plastic. The little girl began to sob as she saw the gun turned on her, and she shook from head to toe, the tears flooding down her face. They had to act - and fast. Mindy saw her daughter tensing up on the stage - nobody else saw the subtle set of her muscles and her joints as Stephanie shifted her weight. The set of Stephanie's expression told all - she was about to kill without a moment's remorse.

"Stand by," Mindy hissed into the radio."

..._...

It took less than a second and the man never saw it coming; nobody did - except for Mindy.

Stephanie's hands flew forwards, and she ripped the gun from the man's hands, rotating it as she fell to the ground, her weight causing the man to lose grip on the pistol. The moment the man's greasy hair came into her sights, she squeezed the trigger twice on the suppressed pistol, blowing the man's head apart. His body was sagging to the floor before anybody in the audience had managed to realise what was going on. Chloe was amazed by how skilfully the unarmed Stephanie had taken down the man - in her fucking underwear - with his own fucking gun! She snapped into action, putting a suppressed bullet into the head of the nearest guard stationed a few feet from her. Mindy was doing the same, eradicating the opposition. All four guards were down before the audience began to realise that more was going on and panic ensued as weapons were drawn.

On the stage, Stephanie turned to the two startled youngsters.

"Pull your goddamn underwear up and let's fucking move!" she ordered as the room erupted into a killing zone.

The youngsters operated on autopilot as they followed the basic instruction and then Stephanie dragged them both off the stage and down the corridor to where Stephanie had hidden her clothing and weapons. Stephanie pushed the two kids ahead of her as she scanned forwards and backwards, her appropriated pistol following her every glance.

"Get in there and get your fucking clothes on, yesterday!" she ordered as she shoved the two kids into the room.

The sounds of gunfire were getting closer - it sounded like a major battle.

"They're turning on each other - nobody knows who the enemy is," Chloe reported.

"This is your friendly eye in the sky," Marty cut in. "Looks like some of the buyers called their security details - you have about eight SUVs maybe two minutes out."

"This has so gone sideways!" Mindy growled as she struck down another of the audience with her Tanto.

"I see nothing different than any other operation," Stephanie quipped.

"I am so going to tan your fucking backside, young lady!"

"Gotta catch me first!" Stephanie retorted.

..._...

Stephanie had pulled on her trousers and she was tying her boots when two men came barrelling along the corridor - one was the man who had slapped her.

"You!" the man exclaimed as he saw Stephanie.

"Fuck!" Stephanie growled as she finished tying her boots and she picked up her knife.

The man saw the glint in the lights, but he missed the blade scything through the air. Stephanie, though, did not miss and the man braced up as the knife entered his chest, cutting his heart in two. He lived for less than a minute as his brain was starved of blood and oxygen. The other man, he died from a bullet to the head. Stephanie nonchalantly pulled on her T-shirt and weapon harness, then her leather jacket.

"Damn!" the boy exclaimed as he pulled on his sweatshirt. "You can shoot!"

Without warning, Stephanie slammed the boy against the wall, her pistol at his throat. The girl screamed.

"Shut it!" Stephanie growled, and the girl went silent as she completed her dressing and Stephanie turned back to the boy. "You had better be William Martyn," Stephanie growled as she stared into the boy's hazel eyes.

"Yes, I'm Billy Martyn - I remember you; Stephanie, right?"

"Tell me more," Stephanie pushed as she continued to pin the boy to the wall with the pistol held to his neck.

"I last saw you with Electra, in the woods . . . you . . . you cared about us *Yellows*. You used Duct Tape on Electra's wound. Your hair - it's different. You've also got tits."

Stephanie actually chuckled at the boy's observations.

"That's good enough, Billy - it's him," Stephanie radioed to the team. "You want to get out of this place?"

"Yes, please."

"You sure he's a *Predator* - he's way too fucking polite," Chloe pointed out as she stuck her head around the door.

"Just because I'm not foul-mouthed like you uncouth Americans. Go fuck yourself, you skinny, sex-starved bitch!"

"It's that obvious?" Chloe demanded as Mindy appeared.

"All teenage girls are sex-starved," Billy explained.

"Okay, he passes!" Chloe growled as Mindy and Stephanie chuckled.

"You okay to move?" Mindy asked as she saw the bruises and cuts on the boy's legs.

"I'll run a damn marathon if it gets me out of this shithole."

"I like this kid," Mindy responded approvingly.

"What about the girl?" Stephanie asked.

"She's not our problem," Mindy replied. "Leave her to the local cops."

"No!" Billy exclaimed.

Stephanie figured differently, and she waved the young girl forward. The girl moved slowly, her face full of fear. Stephanie studied the girl's face, looking into her eyes, then Stephanie turned to Billy.

"What are you not telling me, Billy?" Stephanie asked forcefully.

"You know I'm a *Yellow*, well, so is Kendra."

"Is that true, Kendra?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Stephanie looked over at Mindy.

"Fuck!"

"*You have seconds to get to the SUV,*" Marty pointed out.

"We take her with us," Mindy growled.

Stephanie grabbed the boy and the girl, pushing them forwards as they heard vehicles pull up outside the building.

..._...

There was no time for a plan, no time for a diversion, no time for anything but escape.

Stephanie seized Billy's right hand with her left while Chloe grabbed the girl. Stephanie ran for the side door. There was shouting outside, then men burst into the front door of the building and the rear door. Stephanie pulled open the side door and bullets pounded the doorframe. Stephanie reached into the small black pack which she carried, pulling out a SIG Sauer MPX-P and cocking the action. She sent a controlled burst of half-a-dozen rounds out the door before she bounded forwards, yanking Billy after her, out of cover and she sprinted directly towards the SUV with Chloe pulling the girl and running along behind while Mindy provided covering fire as she followed. The boy and the girl were all but dragged forwards, but both did everything that they could to keep up with their rescuers.

Stephanie let go of Billy's hand for a moment, forcing the MPX-P into his hands, as she ducked, and she rammed a gunman in the upper thighs with her

back, causing the man to lose his balance. Stephanie drew her pistol and she put a bullet into his head as he fell, before she came back up to her feet. She reached for Billy's outstretched hand and yanked him forwards towards safety, holstering her pistol and seizing hold of the MPX-P. Chloe fell to the ground as two bullets found her chest, but she scrambled to her feet, sheltering the girl. Mindy went down on one knee, drilling Chloe's shooter two new orifices in his forehead. Chloe was then unceremoniously dragged to her feet by Mindy and shoved towards the SUV. The youngsters were all but thrown aboard as Mindy jumped into the driver's seat.

"Better strap in kiddies," Chloe called out. "It's gonna be a rough ride!"

Mindy chuckled as she shifted the SUV into gear and stomped on the gas, racing for the roadway, knocking down two gunmen as she did so. With a controlled power-slide the SUV slid sideways onto Pasqua Street and Mindy increased speed as she headed south for the airport.

..._...

Six SUVs were in pursuit.

Mindy just had to hope that they could reach the airport before they were outgunned. It appeared that they were rapidly being out horse-powered as two of the SUVs came up, one on either side. With a wrenching clash of steel, the SUV beside Mindy smashed into her SUV, causing her to momentarily lose control as she smashed into the other SUV. Stephanie forced Billy and Kendra into a footwell as bullets flew into the SUV, shattering glass and peppering the metalwork. Chloe wound down what was left of her window and she fired off brief bursts into the SUV to her right. Stephanie was doing the same on the left side of the SUV. As well as having to contend with the pursuing SUVs, there was also the evening traffic to contend with and they had already drawn the attention of two police cruisers, just to add to the evening's excitement.

They raced south, passing onto Lewvan Drive, driving at speed, dodging other road users, not to mention police cruisers, stinger strips, and the pursuing SUVs. It was only a seven-kilometre drive, but it was turning into a total nightmare. Four of the SUVs had peeled off, presumably to make for the airport directly while Mindy and the team were being slowed and harassed by the remaining pair of SUVs and the cops. Marty had intercepted radio traffic indicating major roadblocks ahead at the airport, therefore, Plan C had been activated and the Gulfstream had launched from the airport with an abbreviated flight plan before dropping off radar and turning for a new landing zone - one which the pilots were not all that amused about using - but orders were orders

As they approached the turn for Dewdney Avenue, Stephanie waited for the SUV on her side to come in for another metal crunching ram. Just as the two vehicles came into contact, she threw a pair of high-explosive hand grenades through her smashed window and through their open rear window.

"Step on it!" Stephanie bellowed to Mindy who pushed the pedal through the floor without any further encouragement.

The SUV with the grenades appeared to wobble before it was blown apart by two explosions, closely followed by the shattered fuel tank. The remnants of what had once been a very expensive SUV flipped over and smashed into the kerb. Kendra screamed at the explosions and the wrenching of metal - the ten-year-old was so scared and she huddled in the footwell with Billy who was just as frightened. The right-hand turn was coming up and the remaining SUV would not be expecting a turn as the obvious route out of town was the airport. At the last moment, Mindy yanked the wheel over and passed in front of the other SUV

which slammed on the brakes, just missing Mindy's SUV and ploughing head-on into a truck.

Mindy did not hang around to exchange insurance details.

..._...

"You are serious about this, aren't you?" Stephanie demanded.

"Yes," Mindy responded as she drove.

"Plan C is about as good as my plan back there," Stephanie went on. "Plan C as in Plan Crap!"

"It'll work," Mindy reassured her dubious daughter.

Three miles (or so) to the southeast

It was dull duty, but it had to be done.

He was a rookie Mountie, learning his trade. He sat in his Royal Canadian Mounted Police cruiser, just off Pinkie Road at its junction with Route One. His job was to be ready for an incident on either road and also to keep an eye on the major construction at the site of the new Ring Road. Various stretches were now complete and local youths had a habit of using those completed, but not open, stretches for speed trials. The stretch of completed highway, just eighty yards away from where he sat was about 1.2-kilometres in length and perfectly smooth. Indeed, another RCMP officer had noted that it was perfect for landing an aircraft on - not that anybody would be so stupid . . . the deafening roar took him by surprise - he had ignored the sound of the jet engines as he was only a few miles from the airport - as a jet aircraft missed the top of his cruiser by about a dozen metres.

The man looked up to see the orange glow of the hot engines as the twin-engine aircraft came lower and lower before he heard the distinctive chirps of the tyres striking the roadway. He heard the engines screaming as they increased power to slow the aircraft, however, the aircraft was over a kilometre away by the time it came to a stop. Strangely, no navigation lights were flashing, so apart from the sound of the engines, he had no idea where the aircraft was. He also could not know that the aircraft was taxiing as far it could before it turned around ready for a fast take-off.

"Damn!" the man exclaimed as he reached for his radio, unsure of whether to pursue the aircraft or not.

Pinkie Road

19:46

The SUV had taken a battering and it was beginning to wheeze a bit.

There were also SUVs back on their tail, having seen the roadblocks and they knew that Mindy had headed elsewhere. As such, they had caught up - easy, considering that Mindy's SUV was struggling to hit fifty. Finally, they left the road and drove over the unfinished median onto the roadway, slamming on the

brakes a dozen yards from the Gulfstream's port wingtip. The engines were screaming as the pilots held the aircraft on brakes alone. Amy was at the airstair, waving them aboard. They all abandoned the SUV, Stephanie yanking the two kids out and thrusting them towards the waiting aircraft. Stephanie leapt aboard, dragging the confused youngsters with her. Chloe hit the button for the airstair to retract and the door to close the moment she and Mindy had followed Stephanie aboard.

"Move it!" Mindy yelled at the pilots who immediately firewalled the engines sending the jet accelerating down the roadway.

The aircraft gathered speed as the twin Rolls Royce BR725 turbofans dug deep for every kilonewton of thrust that they could produce. The flashing lights of a police cruiser indicated where the strip of roadway ended. The lights grew closer and closer. The pilots were way past V1 and heading for V2 - they were committed, and they were getting off the roadway, no matter what. As the police cruiser came closer and closer, the two pilots exchanged a glance.

"Fuck this!" the captain growled as he pulled back on the yolk, willing the large aircraft to climb.

He ignored the warnings and the computers which were not overly amused by his piloting skills at that moment, but with two feet of clearance, the main undercarriage missed the police cruiser, rocking the vehicle violently with the jet wash as the aircraft clawed into the sky.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are airborne," the captain informed his passengers.

Behind them, the pursuing vehicles braked hard as they realised that their target was way out of reach.

Aboard Alpha Foxtrot

19:57

Amy had strapped in the two new passengers, regained her own seat, and strapped herself in, just as the aircraft took on a decidedly steep up angle.

It was not the first combat launch she had endured, and she knew that it would not be the last. Both pilots were highly skilled and ex-U.S. Airforce, so such manoeuvres were nothing new. Once the aircraft was at cruising altitude and rapidly approaching U.S. airspace which was just ten minutes flight time away, Stephanie came to life, releasing her seatbelt and digging into a pack for a small computer. She knelt down beside the two youngsters who sat facing one another on the starboard side of the aircraft.

"This won't hurt," Stephanie reassured the boy and the girl. "Kendra, please place your index figure on the pad . . . hold it still - thanks. Okay, Billy, your turn . . . hold still - thanks."

"Okay," Marty reported from Chicago. "*Running the prints against the Urban Predator files . . . got the first back . . . William Martyn - identity confirmed. Next one . . . Kendra Rhys - identity confirmed . . . oh, wow - Mindy, going private.*"

Stephanie looked up at Mindy with an annoyed expression as Mindy listened to the comms.

"Get it done," Mindy said after two minutes of listening to Marty.

"What's going on?" Stephanie asked.

"I'll let you know in a little while - for now, you and I are going to talk," Mindy said as she grabbed Stephanie by the arm and dragged her into the aft office.

Mindy closed the door behind her.

..._...

For a moment, Stephanie felt fear, which seemed fully justified as Mindy grabbed her daughter and pushed her down onto the couch.

"I promised myself that I would never hurt you, Stephanie, but right now, that strap would be very useful. If you ever, EVER, do anything like that again, I will take your pants down and you will get the hiding of your life, young lady. I don't want to, but if you push me, then to keep you safe, I will."

Stephanie could see the pain in Mindy's eyes and that pain cut deeper into Stephanie than any strap ever could.

"I saw Billy and Kendra . . . I had to act."

"I know, honey, but I can't lose . . . not ever." Mindy took a deep breath before continuing. "Now, we need to treat your wounds and their wounds."

Stephanie pulled off her clothing, down to her underwear, and she carried a first aid kit through to where Chloe was talking to the two kids. Mindy pointed Stephanie onto the couch and then waved Billy and Kendra to sit beside Stephanie.

"Take your clothes off and we'll get your wounds treated," Mindy directed.

Mindy's anger returned as she watched Chloe gently treating the various scratches, scrapes, and cuts on Billy, Kendra, and Stephanie. Kendra and Billy had been treated badly and they were both covered with bruises, not to mention the cuts on their backs from the knife. Chloe's brief examination of the youngsters had also provided unsubstantiated evidence that Kendra may have been sexually abused. Once the three kids had been cleaned up as much as possible, they redressed, and Amy provided some hot food and some drinks for all.

Sleep followed for the rest of the flight back to Chicago.

Safehouse E, Chicago
Level 8 - Detention Level

20:45

Shannon was tired, but it was her night for duty and the urgent request from Marty had sent her scrambling down into the dark depths of Safehouse E.

She hated the long concrete corridors which scared her a bit, despite the bright LED lighting, when she was alone. Finally, after several creepy corridors and staircases, she reached the lodgings of the remaining *Marauders*.

"Willow!" Shannon called out. "Get your sorry butt out here!"

Willow appeared out of the girl's dormitory. She grinned at Shannon as she made her way out into the corridor.

"What's up, Shannon - this is past curfew," Willow pointed out reasonably.

"I need you to answer me some questions - please answer truthfully to the best of your ability."

"Fire away."

"Do you remember your family?" Shannon asked.

Willow was caught out by the question.

"I . . . I don't know."

"Think - it's important."

Willow tried to think back, back past when she was taken. Her memories from back then were very murky and she had very little recollection of anything. The subject of their early years tended to be avoided by *Predators* - and the *Marauders* had not talked about their past.

"I . . . I don't remember my parents," Willow replied slowly, and a pained look crossed her face. "I don't remember them."

Shannon hated asking the question as she could see the pain in Willow's face.

"Did you have any other family members?"

"No . . . maybe . . . I think I might have had a sibling - a sister, I think."

Willow was getting very confused.

"That's all I need to know. Come with me."

"Like this?"

Willow was barefoot and wearing only a T-shirt and shorts.

"Sorry - go get dressed, please - and hurry."

Glenview

22:05

Willow had no idea where she was as Shannon's father, Patrick, pulled the car into the driveway of a large house.

"Here we are, Willow," Shannon announced.

"Where exactly is 'here'?" Willow asked, feeling a little out of her depth.

The past week had been a whirlwind of activity, what with being flown to the UK to fly a helicopter. That had been truly amazing, but Willow was struggling to see why she was being treated so well.

"You know that Hit Girl trusts you, don't you?" Shannon asked.

"She does?"

"Are you always this dense, Willow? Yes, she trusts you; she sent you to the UK to fly, and you returned as directed. This is Hit Girl's home. I am sure that you have figured out more than you should, but we are trusting you to keep quiet."

"You have my word, Shannon."

..._...

"What is *she* doing here?" Rachel asked as Willow stepped into the living room.

"She is a guest, Rachel," Dave pointed out.

"Sorry, Willow. Why *is* she here?"

"All will become clear, very soon," Dave said.

"I hope so because I have no idea what's going on," Willow stated.

Rachel guided Willow over to a couch.

"I think we need to be friends," Rachel said.

"You shot me in the head."

"Shame it didn't knock some sense into you . . . I had to, and I don't regret saving Stephanie's life for one moment."

"I suppose . . . I don't regret you shooting me - I deserved it, and I should be thankful that you only wounded me," Willow admitted. "Okay, I'm glad the little bitch is still alive, too."

"You two going to have make-up sex?" Jamie asked as he sat down beside the two girls.

"Do you want to slap him, Willow?" Rachel grinned.

"Ow!" Jamie exclaimed.

"Thank you, Willow," Rachel laughed.

Saturday, December 24th

**Chicago, Illinois
United States of America**

Glenview

23:40

Rachel and Willow were getting very bored by the time the front door opened and they heard several people enter.

"Where have you been?" Rachel asked as she saw Stephanie's bruised face.

"Rachel, when we spoke a few days back, what did you say your greatest Christmas wish was?" Stephanie asked as she entered the living room, waving off Rachel's concern.

Rachel stared at Stephanie for a moment before she responded, a sadness spreading across her face.

"All I want for Christmas . . . is . . . is my little brother."

"You must have been a good girl this year," Stephanie grinned as she stepped to one side. "Santa's come early."

Rachel simply froze as a young boy appeared from behind Stephanie. Jamie looked up at his sister in surprise; Stephanie just grinned. The fourteen-year-old girl was struggling to speak, to move, to do anything but just stand there. Tears began to pour down her cheeks as the boy took a few tentative steps towards her.

"Rach?" he asked in surprise.

That was all it took for Rachel to rush forwards and sweep her little brother off his feet. Both sobbed as they hugged each other for the first time in several years. Stephanie turned to look up at Willow who was looking very confused.

"I can't say that you've been a good girl, Willow, but everybody deserves a life - and they also deserve a family," Stephanie said as she held out a hand to the older girl.

"Stephanie, it's too late for word games - what the hell is going on?" Willow demanded.

"We believe that this girl belongs to you," Stephanie said. "Kendra?"

The ten-year-old girl stepped forwards and she looked up at Willow. In turn, Willow moved towards the younger girl. They both studied one another for almost a minute. Suddenly, the clouds blocking certain memories in Willow's mind parted. Memories of herself at nine-years-old. Memories of a little girl at maybe four-years-old. Memories of a little sister - a little sister called Kendra.

"Is it really you?" Willow asked as she took her sister's hand in her own.

"Hi, Willow - it's been ages."

Stephanie felt tears spilling down her cheeks, unbidden, as the two sisters hugged for the first time in over five years.

..._...

The siblings were allowed time together while Mindy brought Dave up to date with everything which had happened.

Stephanie scowled as she saw the angry look which Dave threw in her direction and she felt a surge of guilt, but then, when she looked into the living room, she saw the happy smiles and she decided that the risks had been worth it. Stephanie saw Willow look up in her direction and smile. Stephanie turned back to the kitchen where Dave was grinning, then Mindy laughed about something.

"Stephanie."

Stephanie turned to see Willow standing there with Kendra beside her. Without warning, Stephanie found herself being hugged by Willow and Kendra.

"Thank you, Stephanie. Thank you for my little sister."

"No problem," Stephanie replied with some embarrassment.

"How did you do this?" Rachel asked as she entered the kitchen with Billy in tow.

"I can answer that, I think," Mindy said. "Marty has some of his computers running algorithms which search the internet - light and dark - for traces of *Urban Predator*. Despite what Willow might think, I am determined to track down every victim of *Urban Predator*, dead or alive. Marty's program picked up traces of Billy in Canada, a week ago, so we quickly put together a mission."

"Could have done with a bit more planning, but time was against us," Chloe said. "As for Kendra - she wasn't part of the plan, but she was in the right place at the right time."

"Thank you, all of you, for risking your lives," Rachel said.

Willow studied Stephanie more closely. She took in the bruising on Stephanie's face, the cut on her cheek.

"I wronged you, Stephanie. You are one brave bitch. I owe you my sister's life - and I owe you my own. I am in your debt."

Stephanie did not know what to say. Mindy stepped forward and she wrapped her arms around her daughter. No matter what choices Stephanie had made, she had risked her own life to save the lives of two young children. In doing so, she had brought happiness and closure to others. Mindy knew that there would be lots to do after Christmas, and Willow was very high up on that list.

As far as Mindy was concerned, everything was working out perfectly.

..._...

"Stephanie, would you take Billy and Kendra upstairs, please, and introduce them to the shower in your bathroom?" Mindy asked.

Stephanie held out a hand to both children and she escorted them up the stairs.

"Are you taking me back to my . . . cell?" a worried Willow asked Mindy.

"I may have the reputation for being a nasty bitch - a reputation that is well deserved, I might add - but I do have a heart. You will stay here tonight, with you sister, Willow."

"And tomorrow?"

"One day at a time. Now," Mindy continued. "Rachel is sleeping in my youngest daughter's bedroom. Billy and Kendra will join her. Can I trust you two to sleep in the same bedroom without causing a bloodbath?"

Rachel and Willow exchanged looks.

"Yes, Mindy," Rachel replied.

"We've started to sort out our differences," Willow admitted. "I'll behave."

"Good. . ."

Mindy was interrupted by yelling from up the stairs.

"I would suggest that you two go and find out what your siblings are getting up to. My eldest son, and Stephanie's brother, was a *Yellow*, so, if they are as bad as him, then they are probably wreaking havoc."

"Stephanie has a brother?" Willow asked with genuine surprise.

"Yes, he was a *Yellow* before becoming a *Predator* - that was Jamie."

"Somebody call?" Jamie asked as he appeared beside Willow.

"You're Stephanie's brother?" Willow asked.

"Yep."

"You're a *Predator*?"

"Yep."

Willow pushed Jamie's head down so that she could see behind his right ear.

"You could have sodding asked!" the boy growled at the abuse.

"You have an amazing big sister, Jamie," Willow admitted to the boy.

"She is that," Jamie allowed.

..._...

Rachel showed Willow up the stairs and into Stephanie's bedroom - Willow laughed at the sign on the door.

They found Stephanie sitting in the doorway to her bathroom, laughing. There was a lot of screaming and laughing going on, with a good amount of giggling thrown in for good measure. As Willow and Rachel stepped around the bed, they came closer to the racket.

"I think they overdid the shampoo and shower gel," Stephanie exclaimed.

All was revealed as Willow and Rachel peered into the bathroom. Billy and Kendra were both well and truly covered in foam and bubbles - it was difficult to tell which the boy was, and which was the girl. Willow laughed, as did Rachel. Stephanie peered up at Willow, and she saw a tear of happiness run down the older girl's cheek. Maybe Willow's heart was thawing, Stephanie thought to herself.

It took quite a while to get the youngsters cleaned up, but they were finally in Anne-Marie's bedroom, each wearing a borrowed T-shirt from Stephanie. Dave had produced a large double blow up mattress for Willow and Kendra, plus a sheet, duvet, and some pillows. Mindy appeared, and she threw a T-shirt at Willow.

"For tonight," Mindy grinned. "I want it back in the morning. Merry Christmas, girls - and Billy."

"Merry Christmas, Mindy!" they all chorused.

After fifteen minutes of giggling from the youngsters, silence reigned in the darkness. Willow hugged Kendra tightly. The youngster insisted in cuddling into her big sister and Kendra was soon fast asleep. The same applied to Billy as he

cuddled into Rachel, both of whom were quick to fall asleep. Willow stayed awake a few minutes longer. Her life was turning around - four hours before, Willow had had nothing to live for; now she had her little sister. Kendra was a reason to live and make something of herself. Willow grinned as she realised how lucky she was to be alive and to have her little sister back.

For the first time in many years, Willow Hartman fell asleep with a broad grin on her face, and happiness in her thoughts.