

*Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

*Oak Pass Road*

*That night*

Maddie and James were sitting on Maddie's bed talking.

"You've been with the twins the longest - what were they like when they were younger?" Maddie asked.

"Err - I don't think that is for me to say, Maddie," James replied in a very diplomatic response, typical of his origins.

"Sky and I have no secrets from Maddie - not anymore," Chrissy said as she sat down on the bed beside James. "Continue."

"Are you sure - it might get kind of graphic," James pointed out.

"We can take it," Sky said as she sat down next to Maddie. "I know the story will be full of humiliation, but that's life. Get started, James."

James was still a little unsure, but he continued.

"The girls had already been there for six months by the time I came along. I was a tiny, very scared, nine-year-old boy, thrust into a manic, oppressive environment. To be honest, the twins were more of a curiosity than anything else. They were teased, but then we all were. When they were ten, they were okay, to be honest, but then things started to go wrong soon after they both turned eleven. By then, some had turned against the twins. I suppose they were jealous. They had one another while the rest of us had only ourselves. It was obvious why the instructors wanted the twins, and both were adept at pretending to be the other. Most of us thought that identical-looking twins were identical in every way, but no, that was not true.

"Sky was the weaker twin. That began to emerge around their eleventh birthday when Sky started to struggle with her tasks and training. That just made her a target for further abuse. Then came the kicker. Chrissy began to grow taller than her twin, almost two inches at one stage, then puberty set in and Chrissy got hair on her vulva and the beginnings of breasts on her chest, not to mention some nice thighs. Chrissy got teased, but for Sky, it was a lot worse as she had nothing to show for herself and her body was not much different from that of a boy - no hips, nothing. It got so bad for Sky that I remember her being called into the chief instructor's office - the rumours were that they almost put a bullet in her head."

Maddie noticed that Sky was shaking.

"I was dragged out of class and taken into that office," Sky said with tears running down her cheeks. "The floor was covered in plastic. I was shaking really badly. I was lectured on my behaviour and told that I was a waste of space and that my training was terminated. The bastard ordered me to strip naked - apparently, my clothes would be good for somebody else. Then he pulled a pistol from a drawer . . . I peed myself, right then and there. I was just eleven-years-old, and I was about to die. I wanted so many things; I wanted to see the sky, once more . . . I wanted to see my sister. He raised the pistol to my head . . . and he pulled the trigger. I collapsed into my still-warm pee . . . but, I was alive. The bastard laughed out loud and told me to get the fuck out of his office . . . he told me to leave the clothes and I was forced to run naked back to my dormitory. I showered and dressed before returning to class."

"Sky changed after that episode and she turned into a bitch. Chrissy changed too, to protect her sister. As you can tell, Sky caught up with her sister . . . about eight months later, Sky had small breasts and some pubic hair. But, by then, nobody dared to approach the bitch twins. They became a legend in their own time and the favourites of the instructors. Anytime a kid stepped out of line, they found themselves facing Sky and Chrissy. It was not a good place to be, I can tell you," James finished.

"Sky - I'm so sorry for bringing that back up," Maddie said.

"Don't be, honey. Neither of us is proud of what we did, back then. But, we did what we could to survive, and we survived to regain some of our childhood and now we have the best life we could ever have dreamed of," Sky replied, wiping her tears.

"We are what we are, and we cannot change that - same for James," Chrissy said as she wiped away her own tears. "I think it best that you know everything, honey."

"Thanks for trusting me."

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**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Christmas Day**

Maddie awoke feeling happy, but also sad.

It was the very first Christmas where she had woken up without her parents and brother nearby. She was in two minds as to whether she should give her brother a call to wish him a Happy Christmas - she couldn't give a flying fuck for her parents. Otherwise, she decided to go have some fun at everybody else's expense.

The new boy would be first. She slowly slipped out of her bedroom, grabbing a sack as she did so, listening for any noise - there was none. She crept slowly down the corridor to James' bedroom. Maddie found the door was slightly ajar, so she dumped the sack and nudged it open before she slipped inside the room. James was fast asleep in bed, lying on his back. Maddie stepped over towards the right side of the bed and she reached out to touch the boy's hand. Then Maddie's world turned upside down as she was thrown onto the bed, landing on her back. She gasped with shock and she tried to react, but she quickly found a face glaring down at her as she found herself pinned in place.

"Maddie!" James exclaimed.

"Happy Christmas, James," Maddie grinned foolishly.

James released Maddie's wrists and Maddie found herself grinning.

"What?" James asked.

"I enjoyed that," Maddie muttered and then she giggled.

James' eyes went wide at the comment and he smiled.

"Merry Christmas, Maddie," James said as he sat on the bed and covered his groin with a pillow.

"I just wanted to surprise you," Maddie explained as she sat up.

"You surprised me, alright. Surprising a *Predator* is not a good idea."

"That's kind of why I woke you first," Maddie said. "It'll take two of his to wake the bitches."

"You got plans for them, have you?"

"I think so."

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James followed Maddie out of the room and down the corridor towards the two rooms occupied by Sky and Chrissy.

"Grab that sack," Maddie directed, and James did so.

The boy could not see waking the bitch twins having a happy ending, but he could see what Maddie was trying to do. Maddie had a heart, but sometimes, thinking with your heart could get you into a lot of trouble.

"You sure about this, Maddie?"

"Yes - stop being a wimp."

"Yes, ma'am!" James chuckled as they stopped outside Chrissy's bedroom.

They both hesitated, knowing the danger of violating the sixteen-year-old's much-coveted sleep. They could both visualise the bodily pain and misery that waking Christina Abbott might cause. Maddie took a deep breath and she plunged a hand into the sack which James was holding.

"Whatya doing?" James asked as Maddie pulled out what looked like a small video player.

"I don't want to walk into an ambush," Maddie stated as she turned on the device and she began to feed a fibre-optic cable beneath Chrissy's bedroom door.

"Cool!" James muttered as he studied the full-colour display.

The image showed the bedroom to be empty, but dimly lit by the daylight which streamed in from around the partially closed curtains. As Maddie moved the camera around, they found the bed and then peered over the end of the bed. Not surprisingly, Chrissy was not alone. Chrissy's enormous bed was also occupied by her twin sister, Sky. That was nothing outwardly surprising as they often shared a bed, especially after a difficult night out. Maddie pulled the camera back and she flicked off the display.

"Looks safe," she commented as she reached for the door handle before pausing. "You open it."

"Fuck that!" James growled. "She might have copied you and wired it."

Their indecisive bickering was interrupted as the door opened and Sky peered down at the boy and girl as they crouched outside in the corridor.

"You two lovebirds arguing?" Sky grinned.

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Maddie grinned sweetly.

"Merry Christmas?" she offered tentatively.

"I saw the spy camera, honey, but it was a nice try. Merry Christmas, guys."

"You're not mad?"

"No, Maddie - this is my first real Christmas for a very long time . . . I want to enjoy this day and remember it," Sky explained.

"Remember what?" Chrissy asked as she yawned loudly.

Maddie gave each of the twins a hug.

"Merry Christmas, girls."

Chrissy looked over at her sister and they both grinned.

"Merry Christmas, Maddie," Chrissy replied. "And to you, James."

"Here," Maddie said as she dug into the sack which James was dutifully holding. "I have some presents for you guys."

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Erika awoke to sounds of squealing, screaming, and laughing.

She grimaced then grinned as she heard the four happy voices not too far away. Then, her bedroom door burst open and three girls dived onto her bed with a boy remaining at the end of the bed, grinning.

"Hello, girls!" Erika said. "Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas!" chorused the three girls and James.

"Who woke who up?" Erika asked.

"Maddie woke me up, and then we went to wake up the twins, but Sky caught us," James admitted.

"I see. What was all the squealing and screaming?"

"We had presents to open on Christmas morning," Sky replied.

"For the first time, ever," Chrissy added. "Maddie gave them to us."

Erika looked over at the wildly blushing Maddie and she smiled.

"Well done, Maddie."

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### **WHITTIER DRIVE**

The nine-year-old boy awoke full of excitement.

As he had always done, since he was about four, he ran through to the bedroom two doors down and he threw open the door. Then he stopped dead. The bed was empty and had not been occupied in months. The room was dusty as if the person who lived there had suddenly vanished. Connor's excitement vanished, and he felt very, very sad as he stepped into his sister's bedroom. Connor Tyler climbed onto his sister's bed and he lay down and he felt tears of sadness running down his cheeks. Despite his behaviour towards his big sister, he truly loved her . . . and he missed her enormously.

"Happy Christmas, Mads," he whispered. "I love you."

After a few minutes, the boy left Maddie's bedroom, closing the door, and he went to find his parents. His Mom was in the kitchen putting on the coffee.

"Morning, Mom, Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas, Connor," Amber Tyler smiled.

"I miss Maddie."

Connor saw his mother's expression darken at the mention of his sister's name.

"That girl no longer lives here. That girl is no longer your sister, so let's have no more mention of her, understand?"

"But. . ."

"Understand!"

"Yes, Mom."

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### ***Bella Oceana***

For twelve-year-old Cara Müller, it was a day she could spend with her Mom without having to worry about anything else.

She had awoken that morning full of excitement and then run through to awaken her long-suffering mother. As for Rosa, she had hoped for a lie in - it was one of the few days which her boss allowed her to have without interruption of any kind.

"Cara!" she had bellowed.

"Happy Christmas, Mom!" her daughter had responded.

Rosa could never stay mad with her daughter, and not on Christmas morning. She had scrambled out of bed and vanished into the bathroom, shooing her daughter out of the bedroom. Cara was sitting on the couch in the living room, still in her pyjamas, when Rosa appeared. The young girl behaved as if she had red ants in her panties. Rosa knew why as she glanced at the mounds of presents and gifts beneath the eight-foot tree.

"Go on!" Rosa laughed.

Cara dived off the sofa and began exploring the gifts. There were always several from Uncle Dieter and Aunt Karri, who seemed to spend a lot of money on the young girl. Rosa tried to keep gifts respectable, opting for quantity over expensive. Cara, like most girls her age, wanted things - many things - and she was not overly bothered with expensive items. One thing Cara hated was to be referred to as a 'spoilt brat', especially by the other kids at the private school she attended. As such, gifts from Uncle Dieter tended to stay out of public view as they were *always* expensive and sometimes blingy which Cara also hated.

Rosa just sat on the couch and she watched her daughter as she enjoyed herself, ripping off the wrapping paper before she exploded into grins and smiles as the relevant gift came into view. Cara wanted for nothing. She had a mother who loved her and protected her. She had Dieter Mannheim who also cared very much for the young girl and had the resources to protect Cara from anything. Rosa knew that Cara was not exactly enamoured with Dieter, but she tolerated him, and she treated him like a favourite uncle. Cara knew nothing of what Dieter really was, nor for that matter what her own mother really was. For the moment, Rosa was content with allowing Cara to grow up as normally as possible. Rosa knew that it would not last, and at some stage, Cara would begin to see things and add things up, possibly coming to the right conclusion. How might the girl react?

Rosa had no idea, but she hoped that the day might never arrive.

"Kristen!"

"Yeah, Mom!"

"Leave your brother alone!"

"He won't leave *me* alone!" the twelve-year-old girl yelled back.

Mollie Hendricks was getting a headache from the constant sniping between her children. Eight-year-old Ben took great joy in annoying his big sister, and it was even better when he caused her to scream - or so he thought. He loved his big sister, but she was so easy to manipulate.

"Ben - go play with your new toys," Mollie suggested.

"Yes, Mommy."

Kristen slumped down on the couch beside her mother.

"He's really getting on my nerves," the girl complained.

"He's eight, honey."

"I know, and I love him, but. . ."

"He's a boy and he has a lot of energy - just like you did, back when you were eight."

Kristen grinned.

Mollie could not have been happier. It was the first Christmas for years that she had had the money to treat her children. The pay check she was receiving from Erika had enabled her to give the children a Christmas that they would remember.

Their lives were turning around, all for the better.

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### ***Oak Pass Road***

Erika had insisted that they all eat breakfast before anybody opened anymore presents.

Not unsurprisingly, breakfast was a speedy affair. Once they were done, the three girls, James, and Erika all went through to the living room where the Christmas tree sat with piles of neatly (in most cases) wrapped presents beneath. Erika had let them all off their respective leashes and all four kids and dived to the floor and begun to dish out the gifts. Even the sixteen-year-old twins were taking full advantage of things and behaving just like young kids. Erika was very happy for Sky and Chrissy and their smiles of happiness were lighting up the room. Maddie, too, was grinning happily as she joined in the fun. James was more reserved, but his expression showed happiness as he found presents and gifts with his name on them.

Erika saw Maddie freeze as the young girl held up a pair of items from one of the unwrapped presents.

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Maddie scowled as she stared at the skimpy lingerie in her hand.

Skimpy did not really do the garment justice and it would not have covered up the private parts of a hamster. Sky and Chrissy were giggling hysterically as Maddie scowled at them - it was obvious where the gift had come from.

"You going to try those on?" James asked with a look of hope.

"Do you want me to tell Chrissy that you hacked into her lesbian porn collection?" Maddie countered.

"He did what?" Chrissy demanded as she suddenly stopped giggling.

"You need to improve your cyber security, Chrissy," Maddie responded with a grin that said, 'Fuck you, bitch!'

"We were just having a bit of fun," Sky admitted. "Maybe you can keep them for when you have a boyfriend - hint, hint."

Maddie's cheeks went even redder. She threw the garments at James who quickly appropriated them, adding the items to his own presents. Maddie quickly turned to a larger present.

"It's heavy," Maddie commented as she weighed the present in her hands.

"Just open the damn thing!" Chrissy growled in eager anticipation.

"Okay, moody!" Maddie responded.

Carefully, Maddie pulled apart the wrapping paper to reveal a black plastic case with a carry handle.

"Oh, wow!" James exclaimed as he immediately recognised it for what it was.

Maddie also began to realise what she held in her hands as she dropped the last of the wrapping paper to the floor. Tentatively, Maddie turned the case to face her and she flipped open the two catches and she lifted the lid.

"Bloody hell!" the thirteen-year-old girl exclaimed.

Inside the case, amongst other items, there was a small black pistol. Maddie carefully picked up the weapon and she read off the description etched into the slide.

"Glock 26 Gen4."

The girl was speechless as she held the weapon, unsure of what to say or do. She hated guns, but she knew that in her line of work, she did not really have much of a choice.

"It's amazing," Maddie muttered as she remembered her training and she cleared the weapon before examining it further.

Sky nodded at how expertly Maddie had cleared the weapon - Maddie was a perfectionist, and she forgot very little. James helped Maddie, pointing out some of the features, including the ten-round magazines and take down points of the pistol. While that was going on, Erika began to open the package from Maddie, who paused James and followed Erika's every movement, her heart in her throat. Maddie noticed tears well up in Erika's eyes and she began to panic.

Inside, was a simple photo frame. The photo within the frame was one taken by Sky which had Maddie and Erika standing together, laughing about something. The photo was lovely, but it was not just the image which was causing Erika to cry, it was the simple words printed onto the bottom of the photo: *I'm yours*. Erika broke down into tears at that point and Maddie looked totally bewildered as she looked up at Sky.

"Did I do something wrong?"

"No, honey," Sky said as she looked at the photo and smiled. "You did perfect."

Lunch was a grand affair with everybody pitching in to create an assortment of stomach-filling dishes.

It was the very first time that Erika had ever cooked anything as grand as a turkey, but with the help of Sky it was cooked to perfection. James and Chrissy were preparing the various vegetables and stuffings with Maddie as referee to ensure that they behaved - a requirement as both were trying to outdo each other when it came to chopping up the potatoes with very sharp knives. Erika reminded the teenagers that she had no desire to visit the emergency room with one of them impaled in a blade. The meal itself was fun and full of banter and laughter. Everybody ate, chatted, drank, and laughed for almost three hours before nobody could even look at a plate of food. It was a first for the twins and James, for many years and all three had dug in with barely concealed gusto. Maddie had even noticed tears of happiness and pleasure as the three *Predators* had enjoyed their meal. Neither Erika nor Maddie commented, not wanting to embarrass any of them. When everybody had finished eating, Maddie stood up and glared at Sky until she stopped talking.

"It's been almost two months," Maddie began. "My entire life has changed - for the better. I was a spoilt little bitch who thought that she was better than everybody else. I turned my own family against me - not that it had been all that hard, to be honest. I was alone, and I thought that I would be spending the rest of my life in children's homes and probably jail. Then along came Hit Girl and my life changed completely. At first, I was scared stiff - I still am - but I am glad that I persevered with what she wanted of me. If I had not, then I would never have met the three of you - sorry, James, but you're not involved in all this. I fought against you and persisted in keeping to myself; I was used to being a loner, and it took a while to realise that people actually cared about me. At first, I could not understand why any of you wanted to be nice and caring. I expected to be treated like a tool and used, then discarded - just as everybody always did. But no, Erika treated me like a human being. Even the two ice queens were nice at times, and I'm thankful for everything they did to force me out of my old persona. They encouraged me to enjoy who and what I was. They even had me skinny dipping, for fuck's sake!"

"Wish I could have seen that!" James exclaimed with a dirty grin.

"You didn't miss much," Chrissy grinned with a wink at Maddie.

"I've learnt to be part of a team. I've learnt to enjoy what I do, and I feel like I finally have a purpose in life. You all respect me, and you all put your lives in my hands. I feel like I have grown up a lot in the past two months, and I have you three to thank for it. Sky has been like a big sister to me, and Chrissy has been the same, although she has been a little harder on me - but I am glad for it. I have learnt to think about others and care for others, even the bitch twins. When I learnt how they became what they are, I was horrified, and I felt for them deeply. James expanded on things further and I felt so bad for what you both, and James, had endured when you were all so young. You have all treated me like family, and then Erika went even further, and she ensured that I had a home, and that I had somebody to protect me, and to guide me. What Erika did for me, I can never repay. I can only promise to be a good daughter to Erika and hopefully make her proud of me."

Maddie faltered, unable to go on as tears spilled down her cheeks. She sat back down.

"Sorry, I just had to say all that," she muttered.



Sky and Chrissy jumped up and they both hugged Maddie tightly. All three girls openly cried as they hugged. Even Erika had tears running down her cheeks.

"Do I need to go get a mop?" James asked.

There was a burst of giggling from the females present and James felt uncomfortable, but he understood where Maddie was coming from and it answered many of his own questions concerning his future in Los Angeles.

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**Old Sonoma Road, Napa  
San Francisco**

Dieter Mannheim was enjoying Christmas with his wife, Karri, and his three children: Otto, Wanda, and Hahn.

Despite the special day, at around six that evening, Anton Renke paid a visit. Very few people liked the man, but he had a nasty habit of accomplishing things which was why Dieter put up with his odious nature as the Chief Operations Officer for the Panther Organisation.

"So, Anton, what do you have to report?" Dieter asked as he sank into a sumptuously upholstered leather chair. "I think 2017 is to be a wonderful year.)

"For once, we appear to be doing very well, my master."

"Lake Yoa?" Dieter prompted.

"The solar facility is all but complete, and the first devices should be coming off the production line in late February, next year."

"Any problems in country?"

"No, master. The government have graciously accepted the grant for the facility and the employment which it provides. We have also been guaranteed no customs involvement during our shipments in and out of the country."

"Very good. When will the first special components arrive?"

"They will begin to arrive at various ports in the United States in late January 2017 for inspection before being forwarded onto the solar facility. The final special components will come through the Port of Los Angeles in late May 2017."

"The devices?"

"We should have over a dozen in position by the summer, master."

"What of the command centre?"

"We are having a few issues with the climate and acclimatization, but that is being overcome. The command centre will come online middle of March 2017."

"What of our friends in Scotland?"

"He has suffered a loss to his family, but I understand that he has something special planned for New Year's Eve when a member of Vengeance will die at his hands."

Dieter nodded thoughtfully.

"Not a bad idea," he mused. "I want a simultaneous strike on those bastards in Los Angeles - a single death, I think. Also, two deaths in Chicago, if you can."

I want the deaths to be very public - it will show that being a vigilante is not a safe proposition. I will take them down - you mark my words, Anton."

"Of course, master."

"On that note, I want a device allocated to Chicago.

"Oh, yes, 2017 is to be a wonderful year," Dieter Mannheim muttered as Anton Renke grinned fiendishly.

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### ***That night***

#### ***Palisades Park***

#### ***Santa Monica***

The creature moved with purpose, keeping to the shadows.

The men who were busy breaking into a house atop the bluff had all their attention focussed on the potential take from a property loaded with expensive Christmas presents. They never saw the shadow closing in on them. There were five of them - one remained in the SUV, ready to make a fast getaway should they be spotted, and the police head their way. The intruder made no sound as it approached the first of the men. He was large, about six feet tall and most of that in width. The professional thief suddenly braced up as a sharp pain struck his back, closely followed by a very similar pain in his chest. He began to feel weak and his legs folded underneath his body and he collapsed to the ground. His final sight was of something dark and what could only be claws . . . then nothing. The intruder moved closer to its next target, standing close enough for the intruder to smell the sweat as without warning, the same claws momentarily glinted in the moonlight. The criminal's throat turned red as the flesh was ripped away in a single moment. His vocal cords had been ripped out, so screaming was out, but the rush of air escaping from the severed wind pipe was perfectly audible as the next pair of men turned to see their colleague sag to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Maybe, they should have called out, only they were dumbfounded by what faced them.

The combat suit was dark green and black overall. The dark green created a mottled effect which allowed the suit to blend into dark surroundings where it would be all but invisible at night. The full-face mask featured a diagonal blood-red stripe running from above the left eye across the face. What had truly focused their attention were the claws. Four on each fist and they dripped blood from their razor-sharp tips. Almost simultaneously, both men went for their guns. It was the very last decision that they ever made as the intruder closed the distance in a second and the first man was slashed across his chest. He reached up with his left hand and he felt large parallel gashes, then with mounting horror, he felt something solid - he was touching his own ribcage. The claws came at him again striking him in the heart, cutting the organ into five neat sections.

The other man had pulled out his pistol, but in the time it took for his dead partner to collapse to the ground, he found himself staring at his stomach which appeared to have collapsed, spilling ream after ream of intestines out onto the manicured lawn. He was dead from a blow to the neck before he even considered hollering for help. That just left number five. He was the youngest and he was getting worried. They should have been on the road; time was up. He stared into the darkness, seeking out his colleagues in crime. There was something there - but what was it?

"Hank?" he hissed into the darkness.

"Hank is dead," came a deathly hiss which sent a cold chill down the young man's backbone.

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Lieutenant Frank Nielsen of the Robbery-Homicide Division had seen many things in his twenty years on the force.

He had seen many dead bodies, in many states of distress. Interestingly, four men had died violent deaths - all similar, but very different. A fifth had somehow survived but was a blubbering mess which paramedics were trying to make some sense out of. Some wise-guy had already christened the alleged murderer, the 'Bluffs Ripper'. Things like that only caused a frenzy of rousing journalism that scared citizens half to death. Between Los Angeles and San Diego, a lot of violent deaths and occurred over the preceding months, mostly related to the recent rise in vigilantism. Yes, he was fully aware of the Chicago vigilantes appearing in Los Angeles. His Division had been tasked with taking those same vigilantes down. That subject was a proverbial hot potato and there was a fairly even split amongst the Los Angeles Police Department concerning whether the vigilantes should be apprehended. For the moment, Frank was on the fence until he got a proper handle on the situation.

Back to the case in hand, Frank could see no reason why four career criminals should die, but a fifth should survive. Maybe, it was because the fifth thief was barely nineteen-years-old - did the vigilante in question have a conscious? It would probably be morning before he could interview the terrified thief and get something useful from the blubbering wreck. Until then, he would return to his home and his two young boys. As he climbed back into his ancient unmarked Crown Victoria, his mind went to work. Of the Chicago vigilantes who referred to themselves as *Fusion*, only two were known to use claws: Wildcat and Hellcat. Neither fitted the ferocity of the attack, his gut told him, but they were a start. Wildcat, herself, had also been seen in Los Angeles only the previous month, so that made her a suspect - a suspect with form. By the time he had come to that decision, he had pulled into the drive of his home and shut off the engine.

As he climbed out, the front door opened, and his eldest son stood there, a big smile on his face. T.J. was thirteen and the spitting image of his father. His younger son, ten-year-old Jon, was more the image of his mother, Stacy. Frank's wife had died - a victim of Los Angeles' endemic violence - seven years before. She had died when T.J. had been just six years old and the loss had hit the boy very hard - less so his younger brother who had been only three at the time. Bringing up two young boys had been difficult, but Frank had received the assistance of his wife's brother, Jonathan, and his family. It was not the best way to end Christmas Day, but that was life.

"Jon's asleep," T.J. advised his father.

"Thank you - off to bed now."

"Night, Dad - Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, son."