

Friday, November 25th, 2016

Los Angeles

The next few days were decidedly hectic.

Time was spent on training. That training was both vigilante focussed, down at the safehouse, but also publicly focussed, down at D-JAK. Maddie found that she enjoyed working by the pool - wearing shorter than normal shorts and a T-shirt. She would lie on the grass and hammer away at her laptop, ignoring the two bitches who enjoyed teasing her about her pale legs and arms. Erika had work to do, but she tried to spend time in the sun with Maddie as much as she could. There was plenty of work to be done, but there was also downtime after their work throughout that previous week.

There was also the running of their new Dojang to consider.

That night

Santa Monica: D-JAK

There were three classes underway.

The twins, each wearing an identical dark-blue Gi with a blue belt and red tab were supervising the two junior classes while Erika, who wore a black Gi with a black belt, supervised the older, more experienced class. Each class was made up of eight pupils - there were over forty-eight on the books already, with a waiting list of over fifty more. Mollie Hendricks had been swept off her feet, but she enjoyed hard work and signing everybody onto the books and taking the fees had been hectic but rewarding. Indeed, her pay packet was amazing, not to mention the nice bonus for getting everything set up and for the amazingly successful opening night. Her two children, Kristen and Ben were in the current classes. Ben was in the younger class with Chrissy while Kristen was with the older kids in the class being led by Sky.

Sky was enjoying herself. While she had never really instructed much, she found it personally rewarding. She had eight kids in her class who varied in age from eleven to fourteen - five boys and three girls. The girls were all twelve. One of them was a tall girl with jet-black hair and a nervous expression. Sky checked her printed class list - Cara Müller. She was a nice enough youngster who paid attention, as did Kristen Hendricks and the other girl, Kara Henderson. The boys were a mixture, but all generally kept their eyes locked on Sky as she demonstrated the movements.

Chrissy had the younger kids - she and her sister had tossed a coin to see who got the 'baby class' and she had lost - but they were not all that bad, to be honest. She knew Ben Hendricks out of the three boys - most of the class was made up of girls - however, one of the names was familiar: nine-year-old Connor Tyler. Maddie was in the back office, but she was supposed to be joining a class, however, Erika had postponed that at the last minute - because of Connor's arrival. Maddie was only too happy to return to her laptop and the digital environment where she felt comfortable.

Erika's class was mainly made up of fifteen-year-olds, with just a single sixteen-year-old. They were well skilled, for the most part, with a few rough edges. One, a boy called Marvin Kyle was a little too sure of himself and Erika had quickly shown him who was boss with a few decisive moves which had put the boy down on the mat and sent him scurrying back to his classmates. The entire class quickly agreed that Erika was the boss and should not be trifled with -

no matter how hot she was. The five boys thought she was hot while the three girls just groaned at the Neanderthal behaviour of the lesser sex.

The first half of the evening went well.

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"Erika?"

"Yes, Maddie."

Erika was taking a few moments to enjoy a coffee during a twenty-minute break in the evening's classes. The kids were all enjoying soft drinks.

"I am not going to let him dictate my life - I want to go out there, and it's not like I'm in his class."

"Okay," Erika replied. "Any issues, you're back in here. I do not want a scene between you and your brother, nor you and your mother when she returns to collect Connor."

"I'll behave."

Therefore, Maddie joined Sky's class after the break. She wore a plain white Gi with a white belt as a novice. She did not look over at the junior class a few yards away, keeping her focus on Sky who had just received a whispered briefing from Erika. Sky grinned at Maddie and moved her into the centre of the massed kids forming two ranks: one of five at the back and one of four in the front. Maddie found herself standing between a black-haired girl and Kristen.

"Hi, I'm Cara."

"Maddie."

"Girls! Concentrate, please!" Sky called out and Maddie grinned.

Sky did her best not to favour Maddie, but she struggled. Maddie was paired up with Cara who appeared to have a few skills, but nothing to worry about, so the girl made an ideal partner to Maddie even though they were a little over one year apart in age. Neither girl was very happy about striking the other, but Sky soon put a stop to that and she had them exchanging strikes and blocks in a slow and steady fashion. The two girls appeared to be enjoying themselves and Sky was pleased to see a smile on Maddie's face instead of the usual dour expression. There was also a lot of giggling going on between the girls at every opportunity which the boys were using as an excuse to tease the girls. Kirsten was paired off with a twelve-year-old boy who thought a little too much of himself and Sky taught Kristen how to topple the boy with ease and wipe the snide grin off his face.

"Respect for your opponent is crucial," Sky lectured. "It does not matter if they are male or female, big or small. They can still take you down should you give them the opportunity - always remember that. Just because you are a boy, does not mean that you are superior to the girls. That also applies to you girls: you are not superior to the boys. I do not want to see any teasing of classmates from now on - understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," they all responded.

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At the end of the evening, Maddie, Kristen, and Cara were happily talking when Maddie was interrupted by a hand on her sleeve.

"Hi," Maddie said to her brother.

"What are you doing here?" Connor Tyler asked.

"I live with the boss, Connor."

"Oh - free lessons; I see."

"Maddie."

"Hi, Mom."

"I was not expecting to see you here."

"Hello, Mrs Tyler."

"Erika - so nice to see you. I see Maddie is well and you are teaching her to fight."

"I am teaching her to defend herself," Erika corrected.

"Whatever!" Amber Tyler responded offhandedly. "Come on, Connor."

Maddie glowered after her mother as she left with Connor.

That night

BELLA OCEANA

"You seem happy," Rosa Müller pointed out.

"The class was amazing, and I made two new friends: Kristen and Maddie," Cara Müller replied from her bedroom as she pulled on her pyjamas.

"So, you want to go again, huh?"

"Yes, please!"

"Okay. Into bed and get some sleep."

"Night, Mom."

"Night, honey."

OAK PASS ROAD

Maddie was grinning as she pulled the duvet up over her.

"You seem happy," Erika pointed out.

"That class was fun. Sky's a good teacher - if a little nuts."

"I heard that, brat!"

Maddie laughed.

"I'm sorry about your mother and brother being there, but we can't kick them out, can we?"

"I suppose not," Maddie replied, thinking the complete opposite. "I just hate seeing them."

"I know. You behaved well."

"Thanks."

"Get some sleep, now."

"Night, Erika."

"Night, Maddie."

"Night, nutcases!" Maddie bellowed.

"Night, geek!" Sky bellowed back.

"Night, dweeb!" Chrissy yelled out.

Erika just shook her head as Maddie kept on grinning.

The following evening
Saturday, November 26th

Office of the CEO
The Tomahawk Group

Central Los Angeles

"Are our people ready?"

"Yes, sir," Anton Renke replied. "Including the err, extra that you requested."

"After all the money I've spent on her, she had better be!" Dieter Mannheim growled. "What about your layabouts, Günther?"

"My men are ready to support Mr Renke," Günther Schmidt responded, hiding his annoyance at how his men were seen by his ultimate boss. Yes, there had been a minor let-down the previous week, but that could happen to anybody, he reasoned.

"I want no foul-ups, this time. They die, and there will be nobody to rescue them, this time. Somehow, *Fusion* got wind of my scheme in San Diego and they put an end to it. Right now, they are busy in Chicago and an entire continent away. As for the tramps here in Los Angeles - I want them dealt with."

"A plan is in motion, as we speak," Ranke chuckled.

Rosa cringed - she hated that man. Her mind was in turmoil. She had her loyalties, but she also had a daughter and she could see the proverbial writing on the wall. But what could she do about it?

"Rosa?"

"Dieter."

"I want you to go down to San Diego and supervise the situation - your word is my word."

"I'll get packing," Rosa replied as she glowered at Renke and Schmidt who were now her subordinates - technically speaking.

Maybe there was something that she could do about it.

Safehouse C

As usual, Maddie was deeply immersed in the, sorry, *her* computer systems.

As Erika had chuckled on more than one occasion, the world could end around Maddie and she would still be tapping away happily on her keyboard. Indeed. Erika had ensured that the building was as secure as possible when Maddie was alone as anybody could break in and she would never know until she had a pistol

to her head. Actually, Erika wasn't certain that even *that* might stop Maddie from tapping away on her keyboard.

"You going to be okay while we're gone?" Erika asked as she pulled on her mask."

Maddie turned away from her screens with some reluctance and she gave Erika a 'WTF?' look.

"I'll be fine!" Maddie stated rather forcefully. "I'm not a kid!"

"Actually, Maddie, you are, but I know what you mean."

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The three vigilantes headed north on I-110 before leaving at the Convention Centre exit.

As was usual, the place was very busy with people, cars, more people, and more cars. Many were from out of town and that meant that there would be people who were determined to separate those tourists and visitors from their money. Some did it legally, selling the usual tourist tat that only tourists would buy. Others, well, they had alternative methods to relieve the tourists of their valuable assets. That varied from the simple pickpockets, to the car thieves, then the muggers, and finally onto those who simply saw tourists as having value from a sexual point of view. Some would steal without causing harm while others cared less about collateral damage. That was their operation that evening; to prevent people getting hurt and losing their hard-earned cash.

The three vigilantes separated to cruise the streets around the venue. They kept their eyes peeled for trouble. The presence of *Fusion* vigilantes in the city was now reasonably well known, however, where and when the vigilantes might appear was apparently random. They left the safehouse at different times and took different routes to and from the safehouse, compounding any attempts to track them. Most criminals played the odds that they would not come across a vigilante considering the sheer size of the sprawling metropolis which was the city of Los Angeles. However, the sheer randomness also scared many would-be criminals as they dreaded meeting Mist, Venom, or Bane unexpectedly. However, not all were scared to meet the vigilantes. The two girls - the twins - were not averse to meeting their fans. Yes, Venom and Bane had fans. There were numerous fan websites springing up where Venom and Bane were idolised - even Mist had her own site. It was nothing new; *Fusion* had numerous fan websites, too - Battle Guy actually ran one! Many enjoyed watching the females in their figure-hugging combat suits while some preferred the rippling muscles and strapping physique of the male vigilantes such as Jackal and Kick-Ass. There were even rankings for the females as to their body physique. Most weeks, Hit Girl topped the list, however, in L.A., Mist topped the list with the twins close behind.

The twins would often stop near crowds of teenagers and they would both lap up the looks of envy, spite, and downright leering. The girls loved to have boys quite literally drooling over their feminine curves. For some reason, which Maddie could not fathom, men and boys alike appeared to have a 'thing' about well-featured women in body armour who carried deadly weapons. Part of Battle Guy's fan site was the merchandising. Yes, *Fusion* made money from selling authentic posters and photos - actually, all the money from the website went to deserving victim's charities. Chloe for one thought it slightly creepy that random strangers were probably masturbating over her image in the semi-darkness of their bedrooms. Venom and Bane had no qualms over boys pleasuring themselves to their likenesses - they took it all as a compliment. Maddie was appalled by

what the twins usually called 'harmless fun'. The twins just teased the innocent teen which usually resulted in 'treasured porn' vanishing from the twins' laptops.

That night was no exception as Venom took a few moments to allow a few dozen sets of appreciative eyes to run themselves across the Bucine Grey paintwork of her Aprilia RSV4 RR motorcycle. The eyes did not stop there as they continued onto the grey combat suit and the exquisite curves of Venom's butt and the supple accents around her breasts. Venom knew exactly where the male eyes - and some of the female ones - were looking, and she lapped it up.

"*You had enough of having your bits ogled by half of Los Angeles?*" Crypto demanded.

"At least I *have* some curves!" Venom responded tartly.

"*Is that so!*" Crypto growled.

Venom then saw a picture appear inside her visor. It was of a naked footballer with rippling muscles and a big . . . 'File Deleted!'

"You bitch!" Venom growled. "How the fuck, do you keep finding those?"

Venom had done her utmost to keep her 'private files', private, but no matter how careful she was, nor how much encryption she used, the little bitch always found her juiciest images.

"How do you always know which my favourites are?" Venom wanted to know.

"*Simple - some of the files are opened more often than others. They are really disgusting, Venom, you should be ashamed of yourself!*"

"*She told you!*" Bane threw in from half-a-mile away.

"Fuck you, Bane!"

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Mist ignored the good-natured bickering - she was used to it - however, she was very pleased that Crypto was standing up for herself and not allowing herself to be rundown by the two bitches.

"Okay, girls, let's get back to the mission, please."

"*You have business on West Pico Boulevard,*" Crypto advised as she went all business-like. "*Bane, take the next right. As for you, Venom, there's some guys - with clothes on, sorry - causing shit on West 12th Street.*"

Venom and Bane accelerated off to cheers from their 'fans'. Mist moved off to a position from where she could provide support as required. Bane reached her trouble first and she found a group of men gathered around the hood of a Jeep SUV. On closer inspection, they were counting cash which had been accumulated from a reasonable collection of purses and wallets. They were so intent on their ill-gotten gains that they were not keeping an eye on their surroundings.

"You need help counting that?" a voice growled.

"Nah - we're good . . . oh, fuck!"

The man who had responded had barely a second to comprehend who he was talking to before his head slammed into the steel hood and he lost consciousness. The remaining four men attempted to draw weapons, but Bane struck out at each of them, putting them all out cold within ten seconds.

"You do make a mess," a voice said from behind Bane.

Bane turned to find herself facing a pair of Los Angeles Police Department officers. For a moment, she considered bolting, but the officers were smiling and neither had reached for his service pistol.

"We can help tidy up, if you wish," the officer continued.

As far as the officer was concerned, it was five easy arrests and several victims would see their property and money again.

"Please," Bane growled in her electronically enhanced voice as she strode towards her motorcycle.

"Damn," the other officer chuckled. "So cold, yet those curves . . ."

Bane grinned beneath her mask.

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Back at the safehouse, Crypto was amazed by how fast Bane had put down five men.

Admittedly, they had not seen her coming, but that was their hard luck. Crypto was also happy that the police had not caused any trouble. Despite the official line about arresting *Fusion* vigilantes on sight, Crypto knew that many police officers backed the vigilantes and were happy just to pick up the pieces after Mist, Bane, and Venom had finished their work. In most cases, it meant easy arrests and often brought in wanted criminals who suddenly found their evenings getting much worse as they found a long list of charges awaiting them at the police station. For many criminals, the idea of being brought down by a girl was both humiliating and maybe a little hot - at least some thought so. Crypto spent time reading through police forums, keeping her finger on the pulse of L.A.'s law enforcement and looking for potential trouble for her team.

"Well done, Bane - very slick as usual," Crypto called over the comms. "I think Venom might need a hand - two blocks over if you're interested."

"On my way!" Bane responded as she left the scene.

Crypto switched her attention back to another monitor where a fight was playing out between Venom and three men.

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Venom had cursed Crypto for giving her sister a seemingly easy task while leaving her to fight hardened criminals as opposed to pickpockets.

Not that she wasn't up to the task. Anybody who wished her, or her team, harm would find themselves receiving a major hiding, escalating to death as required. Venom was an equal opportunity vigilante - she would offer a beating to anybody who caused trouble, no matter what level of criminal they were. The men she was fighting were mercenaries, that was certain. It was also very possible that they were *Panther* and she was part of another of Dieter's attacks, similar to that of the previous week. Her comms told her that Bane was heading her way and that Mist was closing in. Venom hated to receive help when she knew that she could handle things herself, only the threat of what *Panther* represented worried her and so she did not mind the backup from Mist and Bane, not to mention the overwatch protection from Crypto. Yes, she and her sister gave the young girl a hard time, but she needed toughening up and both saw her as a little sister, being very careful not to push things too far. Erika had warned both of them about the consequences of their fun towards Maddie turning into bullying - the twins respected Erika and to a point, they were a little scared of her.

Anyway, back to the three men. They were skilled, and rippling with muscles. Venom was careful to keep them at arm's length as any one of them could easily snap her in half. She had to rely on her superior manoeuvrability and speed, not to mention her combat skills, as she battled single-handed against the large men. Venom could read the menace and malice on their faces - they wanted her dead and maybe her head mounted on a wall. Nonetheless, she had gained a few well-placed strikes which, it seemed, had only appeared to madden the raging animals with whom she was fighting. Then she found out just how hard their punches were as one ginormous fist made contact with her left shoulder and Venom yelled out in pain as she almost lost her footing.

Then, she did as her world suddenly turned upside down.

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Bane arrived just in time to see her sister being thrown through the air.

As she slammed on her brakes, Venom crashed down onto the hood of a truck before rolling off onto the sidewalk. Bane leapt off her machine, dropping her crash helmet and running for her sister's attackers. She might bicker with her sister, but they were very close as siblings and neither would ever allow anyone to hurt the other - that was the basic principle behind their reputation at *Urban Predator* and the trouble they had usually found themselves in. During training, they had both become acquainted with the strap well before their eleventh birthday, almost within weeks of being taken and inducted as apprentice *Predators*. Bane's anger exploded like a volcano blowing its cap and spewing forth molten lava as she pulled forth her seven-section four-foot-long chain whip. She lashed out at the nearest thug, ripping open his left bicep with the razor-sharp tip. The ape barely flinched at the wound as he turned towards Bane.

"Another little bitch come to play, huh?"

"Play, no," Bane growled back in her electronically enhanced voice. "Kill, yes."

"In your fucking dreams, G.I. Jane!"

"Huh!" Bane retorted as she lashed out again. "She *wishes* she was me!"

The man was good, Bane noticed, as the bastard ducked the flailing chain which skimmed the top of his shaven head.

"Not bad, kid!" muscles growled as he advanced on the decidedly shorter vigilante.

Bane jumped backwards, flipping herself in a backwards somersault as she went.

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Mist appeared on the scene at that moment and she was *not* happy.

Her team was at risk. Men were attacking *her* team. The men were large and obviously mercenaries - it had to be Dieter Mannheim. Venom was on the ground, struggling to regain her feet as two men advanced on her. Bane was going one-on-one with a man more than three times her size, her chain whip lashing out.

Mist pulled out her twin nineteen-inch Sai and she swiftly made for the pair of men who were about to attack Venom.

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Venom was not having a good night.

Her body ached, and she dreaded the bruises which would be scattered all over said body by the time she took the combat suit off. One of the men had been able to seize her from behind and throw her at the SUV - the hood had cushioned her landing . . . sort of. As she scrambled to her feet, she saw two of the men closing on her. She had heard her sister's voice a few yards away, so she knew that she had backup, but then she heard one of the men approaching her yell out and he turned away from Venom. The vigilante was a little surprised to see a Sai sticking out from the man's left shoulder, but she grinned as she saw Mist fly at the man and kick him in the head, putting him on the ground. Venom had no time to watch the fight as she found the remaining man about to drive his massive fist into her own head. A quick dodge and she was able to regain her feet and get herself back into a fighting position.

She kicked out at the man, landing multiple strikes, but then he caught her left foot and he twisted it savagely. Venom felt the pain in her ankle and allowed her body to twist with her foot, landing on her hands and pushing herself off into a somersault. She may have been bruised, but she was still able to use her skills to the fullest extent. As Venom regained her feet, she sent a pair of her throwing knives towards the man - both missed as the man dodged.

She had had enough, it was time to bring out her newest weapon.

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Bane's night was not going all that well, either.

Mr Muscles was a fast learner. He learnt quickly to dodge the lethal tip of the chain whip as it lashed out towards him. He had very quick reflexes and he caught Bane unawares as he caught her out by catching the end of her whip. He was also very strong as his massive biceps suggested. He literally reeled Bane in as he pulled at the whip, section by section.

"What are you going to do about this, then?" he chuckled.

"You want my whip?" Bane replied as she released her hold on the device. "Take it!"

The man frowned, not expecting his opponent to give up the weapon so readily. He grinned as he considered using it on the young girl, maybe whipping some manners into her before he killed her. But his grin faded at the sound of a sharp crack . . . and he dropped the whip. Both of his hands went to his stomach for a moment before he held them out and he stared at the bright red blood glistening on his palms and fingers.

"Playtimes over, dickhead. Next time remember this: Bane *never* plays!"

Bane then calmly shot Mr Muscles in the head three times.

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Venom reached over to her left shoulder with her right hand and she seized hold of a package which she had been carrying on her back.

The package was a little over three feet in length and a few inches wide. Very quickly, she pulled two items out of the black leather cover. The first was a carbon-fibre staff with a decidedly lethal-looking pointed end a blunt opposite end. The second item had a similar blunt end; however, the opposite end was just deadly . . . period. Together, the two sections formed a Chinese Guandao Halberd - a combined spear and axe. The broad curling blade was nasty, and it was capable of cleaving off a limb with ease. The entire weapon was seven feet in length while the blade, itself, was two feet long and almost six inches

across at its broadest point. The entire ensemble added greatly to Venom's fighting style. Not surprisingly, her adversary quickly registered the new weapon and his expression went very serious once he figured out that he could be rather badly hurt, or worse, killed to death - yes, that *is* a thing . . . at least Maddie thought so, but more of that later. Venom grinned beneath her mask as she saw the bastard's own grin wiped off his shit-eating face.

The bastard gauged the menacingly sharp item which the female vigilante was thrusting in his direction. It was obvious that it could inflict any number of lethal injuries to his frail human body. Somehow, he had to get close to the girl, only the seven feet of weapon was getting in the way. The bastard was a seasoned fighter, so having something sharp and shiny being waved in his face was nothing particularly new to him - he would just have to figure out a way to defeat the ancient-looking melee weapon. He lunged at the girl, past the fearsome blade, but he was stunned as the vigilante took a pace back from him, ramming the pointed base into the ground and using the fucking spear to vault over him. He suddenly found himself with his back to a serious vigilante and a very dangerous weapon, he also felt suddenly weak as his legs folded beneath him and his view of the world began to change as everything tilted before he found himself on his side staring resolutely ahead. He could not move his head. He could not move anything. He never felt Venom remove the Guandao blade from where it had severed his backbone. He did, however, see the girl as she rolled him onto his back. He also saw the pistol held in her hand.

"You are terminated!"

The bastard saw the flash . . . then nothing.

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"Really? 'You are terminated' . . . are you fucking kidding me?" Crypto demanded.

"She has a point!" Bane stated as she joined her sister.

"Fuck you, Bane!" Venom growled. "Fuck you, Crypto!"

They both turned towards where Mist was apparently playing with her food. The man she fought was covered in blood while the veteran vigilante remained well out of his reach, stabbing him with her Sai as she flew around him with casual abandon.

"I've had enough," Mist growled as she moved in and she drive the hilt of a Sai into the man's face.

With a grunt, the great brute of a man collapsed to the street. Mist then executed the coup de grâce as she slit his throat, allowing his life to flood down the drains.

Safehouse C

"That really sucked!" Chrissy groaned as she checked out her body in a mirror.

"Tell me about it," Sky moaned as she pulled off her body armour and examined the bruises to her side and stomach.

"Ouch!" Maddie cringed as she saw Chrissy peel off her combat suit.

"Is it that bad?" Chrissy asked as she saw Maddie's cringing expression.

The sixteen-year-old's body was marred with bruises on her back and her front. Maddie had never seen such bruising on a single person before. Sky wasn't a lot

better and by the time both girls were naked, Maddie was feeling positively queasy.

"How can I go out on the beach looking like this?" demanded Chrissy as she checked out the bruises which were spread out across her abdomen.

"Part of the job, girls!" Erika proclaimed as she headed for the showers.

The following afternoon

Saturday, November 26th

Sky and Maddie had taken the opportunity to go shopping.

Neither wanted to be around the moping Chrissy who was constantly complaining about her aches, pains, and bruises. Erika had told them both that they had fought really well, and that they both knew what the consequences of fighting were. Chrissy was mainly unhappy about the bruising which made her body look horrendous in a bikini. Just as Maddie was on aisle 8, looking for some breakfast cereal, she groaned as she saw a boy coming towards her.

"What do you want?" Maddie growled.

"Hey, sis - same place same time; it's not like I was looking for ya."

"I hope not."

"Who's the half-pint?" Sky asked as she returned from the next aisle to find Maddie talking to a young boy.

"My asshole of a brother - the dick's name is Connor."

"Hi, err . . ."

"Nice to meet you, Connor. Let's move, Maddie."

Sky had quickly figured things out and she manoeuvred Maddie out of the aisle and only stopped when they were both a few aisles away.

"I did not know you had a brother," Sky commented.

"Yeah - Erika's been keeping my private life, private," Maddie admitted.

"Care to talk about it?" Sky asked.

"Not really. I have a little brother and I have parents who think I'm just a waste of space. I'm a criminal, Sky. I was recruited from an FBI holding cell."

"Don't feel bad, Maddie," Sky responded. "It's not what we've done that defines us; it's what we do with our lives in the present."

"Wow!" Maddie stated. "That was deep."

"Not really a Sky thing, huh?"

"Not really," Maddie admitted, surprised by Sky's comments.

Maddie had expected ridicule, but no, Sky had offered words of support which were totally out of character for the girl - maybe there was more to the bitch twins than Maddie gave them credit for.

Five days later

Thursday, December 1st

Safehouse C

Nobody had gone out - it was time to heal.

The three dead men were all mercenaries, hired via a maelstrom of holding companies, which had ultimately led back to a company which was part of The Tomahawk Group. That had confirmed that Dieter Mannheim was behind the attack. He was stepping things up - and that was bad for all involved. As was usual, Maddie spent her time on the computer systems. She would look for anything which might indicate an attack initiated by *Panther*. That very morning, she found something.

"Something is happening - we need to get to San Diego."

Erika looked over at Maddie.

"You sure?"

"*Panther* has been moving forces out of L.A., in a southerly direction. Radio chatter indicates something is building. Dieter is out for revenge after what we did to him, I'm certain."

"Can you get hold of Team San Diego?"

"No. Guinevere's phone keeps going to voicemail. I've tried to ping it, but it's not anywhere near a mast - same with Juno's."

"That's a little strange, unless they're out on their bikes, I suppose," Erika mused.

"I'll keep on it," Maddie replied as she turned back to her computer screens.

"Hey, girls!" Erika yelled.

"What?" Chrissy yelled back.

"Get packing!"

"Where we going?" Sky asked as she ran over to Erika.

"San Diego."

"Will I need my swimsuit," Chrissy enquired with a grin. "Or is this business?"

"Business," Erika confirmed, and Chrissy's grin faded.

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While the Operators gathered up their equipment and prepared to head south, Maddie continued her digging.

Things were not adding up. She had sought out some help from Marty, over in Chicago, and he had confirmed that her findings were correct. They had both agreed that something very bad was about to go down in San Diego - and it was going down in just a few hours. Erika was just about to leave, and she told Maddie to make a move as the twins were heading out as well.

"This isn't right - there are cell towers down in San Diego," Maddie said as she downloaded everything onto her laptop.

"Prelude to a major attack," Erika agreed. "Let's move - San Diego beckons."