

**Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2016**

**Early morning**

**Two miles east of Blairhoyle**

"You are going to get us into trouble, Kaitlin," Naomi hissed.

"Just stick with the plan and we'll be fine," Kaitlin hissed back.

Naomi trusted her cousin . . . to a point . . . but it had been Kaitlin's idea to hide in the classroom, back in France and not to fight as they had been ordered to. It was an idea that had been the best idea ever as far as the two cousins were concerned. Right at that moment, though – two o'clock in the morning – Naomi felt that Kaitlin was pushing it a bit.

"You really are certifiable."

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Police Sergeant Roger Barlow, along with his shift partner, Police Constable Clive Forbes, were seated in their BMW 3-series police car.

It had been a slow night – so, after finishing off their beat checking for inebriated drivers, they parked up and clocked off for forty minutes. Sergeant Barlow was over the moon at being able to just rest with no problems and just peace and quiet. He closed his eyes and he visualised himself lying on a warm beach in the Caribbean. The sand was warm, the sea soothed him into a gentle slumber as the sun warmed his . . . The Sergeant came awake with a start.

"Err, Sarge . . ."

"What the hell are you doing, Forbes? I was enjoying . . ."

Forbes was pointing out the windscreen of the car to where two smiling faces looked back at them. Sergeant Barlow groaned as he recognised the shorter of the two girls.

"Wasn't she the girl who wrecked your last BMW, Sarge?" Constable Forbes enquired.

"Bloody hell!" Sergeant Barlow groaned as he pushed open his door and stepped out of his BMW.

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"You two stay away from my car – it's new!"

Kaitlin feigned looking upset but the Sergeant was not buying it.

"No sale – Kaitlin, wasn't it?"

"That's me! This is my cousin, Naomi."

"Hello, Naomi – I hope you are more restrained than your cousin."

"Much more restrained – your tyres and windows are perfectly safe," Naomi replied.

"I wanted to apologise, Sergeant – I was going through a bad time. I'm really sorry about your car," Kaitlin said with as much sincerity as she could muster.

"Thank you, young lady. Apology accepted. We all make mistakes and I am very pleased to see that you understand your mistake and are showing remorse."

"I bought you these – sorry it isn't something better; most of my pocket money ends up in a swear jar," Kaitlin said as she passed the police officer a large box of chocolates.

Sergeant Barlow laughed out loud.

"Somehow, I can believe that, Kaitlin."

"Now – can we give you two young ladies a lift home, so you can both go back to bed?"

Kaitlin smiled.

"Yes, please – my feet hurt."

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### ***A few hours later***

#### ***Blairhoyle***

Cassie smiled as the two girls sat down at the table for breakfast.

"Long walk, was it?" Cassie asked casually.

"Yeah – it hurt. . ." a very tired Kaitlin replied without thinking. "Oh, crap!"

"Busted!" Cassie chuckled.

"We went to apologise to Sergeant Barlow," Naomi admitted – both girls had learnt never to lie to Cassie.

"He liked the chocolates," Cassie commented. "That was very thoughtful, Kaitlin."

"You knew?" Kaitlin demanded.

"I've been keeping a very sharp eye on you two little girls," Cassie explained.

She received a pair of angry glares.

"You don't trust us?" Naomi demanded angrily, her eyes spitting fire.

Cassie just raised an eyebrow. Naomi quickly calmed down and she looked very guilty.

"Point taken. I'm sorry for sneaking out last night," Naomi said quietly.

"Me too," Kaitlin admitted. "It was my idea – don't blame Naomi."

"Finish your breakfast, and then I'll see you both in the yard."

"Yes, Cassie," both girls replied.

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The two girls were a little worried as they set foot in the yard outside.

They were both dismayed to see Cassie appear wearing a T-shirt and shorts, plus her trainers. She threw each of them the same items of clothing.

"Get changed – no . . . right there."

Kaitlin and Naomi grimaced as they toed off their trainers and very quickly pulled off their jeans and blouses. They pulled on the T-shirts and shorts, and then their trainers.

"I hope you two are feeling fit after your little stroll, this morning," Cassie chuckled as she began to run off. "Follow me, kiddies!"

The two girls followed, easily keeping up with the older girl. After a hundred yards, they stopped at the top of what was called 'The Avenue' which ran down beside the large paddock where they had ridden their motorcycles. Cassie stopped and she turned to the two young girls. She was smiling – the girls were not.

"There are forty-eight saplings, down The Avenue beside the paddock – twenty-four per side. You will both run the ninety yards from here to the bottom, and then back again."

"Sounds easy," Naomi muttered.

"You will slalom, from tree to tree, in both directions. You miss a tree, you do the whole thing again."

"Is that all?" Kaitlin asked sweetly. "We do that and then we're done?"

"Not even close, sweetie," Cassie told the eight-year-old. "Now get those little legs moving – both of you!"

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### ***Gulfstream G-550 G-CWWC***

The flight had been long.

In all, it had been a nine thousand nautical mile return flight – eight and a half hours in each direction. Not normally a major issue in a luxury jet, but a constant pain in the ears when you had a hyperactive nine-year-old on board as your only companion! Keira had looked at the handle on the main hatch, so many times . . . but Harper was her sister, as such, she was stuck with the noisy, petulant, over-inquisitive little bitch – at least she was until the co-pilot produced a roll of Duct Tape, two thousand nautical miles or so into the trip south.

Apparently, the pilot, himself, was getting more than a little annoyed by the constant interruptions from the half-pint. Needless to say, the half-pint was not amused to find herself taped to a seat with a warning that her mouth would also be sealed if she dared to say a single word. That warning lasted about twenty nautical miles before a piece of tape found its way across her mouth. Keira was then able to get in two hours, seated in the cockpit with the pilot, while the co-pilot caught some 'zzzz' in the main cabin.

The man, his name was Hank, was an ex-USAF pilot who currently worked for Wayne Industries as their Chief Pilot. He took Keira through the basic controls of the Gulfstream jet and he allowed her to take control for a while, on manual. The aircraft was very light – it had been quite a while since Keira had flown any fixed-wing aircraft and it felt good to be in control of one again. It was also good to be flying, full stop; she really missed it.

Keira had released the furious Harper, about an hour out from Ascension Island. She had used all of her powers of persuasion to calm the nine-year-old down before landing. It took a while – plus some very creative swear words – but she eventually saw the funny side to her experience; she also swore

all aboard to absolute secrecy. Hank made a deal with Harper: if she behaved for the rest of the trip, he'd let her fly the jet and he would not tell Naomi or Kaitlin about the Duct Tape.

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The flight back was very different.

Harper sat with the other girl, with a table between them. Electra appeared older than Harper, but not by much. She never said much, which might have been due to Harper's verbal diarrhoea. I intervened sometime during the first hour to give Electra's ears a rest.

"Harper, honey – please give Electra time to reply. That's how a conversation works; you say something, then you shut the hell up and allow the other person to get a few words in."

Harper and Electra both laughed at that.

"Sorry, Electra," Harper apologised.

"I didn't mind. I've not heard much talking – not in English. How do you cope, Harper?"

"What do you mean?"

"We're both killers. How do you get past that? How can you be so happy?"

"I get a lot of support, is the simple answer, Electra. I get support from my sister, her friends, my friends. I have two friends, Naomi and Kaitlin. They are cousins and they are both *Predators*. Me and Naomi were bitter rivals when we were being trained. Now, we're the best of friends. We support each other and we talk about our anxieties and our problems. We can all relate to each other which helps in a big way."

"What is going to happen to me? Will I have friends?"

"I am your friend. Naomi and Kaitlin will be your friends. There are many others, too. You will never be alone again – if that is what you want."

"Thanks, Harper," Electra replied before she turned to Keira. "I'm feeling tired, can I lie down, please?"

"Of course, honey."

Keira produced a blanket and she laid it over the girl as she closed her eyes and fell asleep. Keira looked over at her sister.

"Well done; I'm proud of you."

Harper grinned enormously.

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### ***Blairhoyle***

Both girls were tired but pleased that the first bit of their punishment was over.

"You ever heard of child abuse?" Kaitlin puffed at Cassie who grinned.

"Remind me, Kaitlin; you know how many ways to kill a man?"

“Okay – we’re not normal children,” Kaitlin groaned but then she smiled as Alexandra appeared with some ice-cold cans of Pepsi Max.

Kaitlin rolled her can across her forehead, savouring the coolness.

“That is so relaxing. . .”

Naomi did not respond as the girl took a long pull of the cold fizzy drink.

“You both know why I am punishing you, right?” Cassie asked.

“We snuck out,” Kaitlin replied.

“Worse than that – you broke the trust between us. Anything could have happened to the both of you. I know what you are and a little of what you are capable of. Either way, you could easily find yourself in shit that you can’t handle. Not to mention that little girls your age should not be running around at two in the morning.”

“I know,” Kaitlin admitted. “I just wanted to say sorry on my own. I took Naomi as backup, so I wasn’t out there alone. I fucked up – I should have thought it through and asked you.”

“As long as you both understand. We all care about you both – a lot. We don’t want anything to happen to either of you. Not to mention that *Vengeance* is under constant scrutiny and we would not want you two taken away from us.”

Kaitlin looked fearful for a moment.

“They’d do that?” she asked, her face a maze of worry.

“Yes. Okay – I’ll give you both thirty minutes to rest and then it’s onto stage 2!”

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Keira was both surprised and not surprised when she pulled up behind the house to see two very sweaty little girls sitting on the ground.

She climbed out of her Audi Q5 and grinned at Cassie.

“What did they do *this* time?”

“They snuck out to apologise to Sergeant Barlow,” Cassie explained. “So, you got the new girl?”

“Yes.”

Keira turned to see a very shy looking Electra being pulled towards them by Harper.

“Girls – please meet Electra Haig. Electra, this is Cassie and the two sweaty things are Naomi and Kaitlin.”

“Hi – we’re in trouble again,” Naomi admitted.

“Hello,” Kaitlin added. “We get in trouble a lot.”

“Harper told me that trouble finds you guys,” Electra said with a grin.

“Okay, you two,” Cassie said. “Go get yourselves showered and cleaned up . . . and no water fight!”

“No promises!” Naomi called back as the two cousins scampered back towards the house.

“Let me go and shower, then I’ll show you around, Electra,” Cassie offered.

“You do stink,” Keira laughed.

“Thanks for pointing that out, Keira.”

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Cassie reappeared out on the back lawn, twenty minutes later, to find Electra gazing out over the fields while Harper and Keira talked quietly.

“Where are the dubious duo?” Cassie asked.

“They’ve not come back,” Harper pointed out.

“Oh, dear,” Cassie groaned. “Come, Electra – time for a tour.”

Cassie led Electra into the drawing room via an outside door from the veranda. Harper and Keira followed on out of pure curiosity.

“Nice place, Cassie,” Electra commented as she took in the cream walls, large bay windows and the ornate, marble fireplace.

“Thank you, Electra. Through here we have the entrance hall, and a vestibule to the left which leads to the front door – we don’t use that entrance much. Straight ahead, is the library. . .”

“Woah!” Electra exclaimed. “Love the tartan carpet.”

“Never been overly keen on that, myself,” Cassie commented as they walked through a wide archway and then moved on down the reception hall. That door on the left leads to the yard and the garages. On the right, we have the dining room.”

“Massive table!” Electra exclaimed as she looked at the enormous, fourteen-seat, polished-wood dining table.

“Next, through here . . . we have the kitchen, breakfast room, and the morning room.”

“Cool!”

“And who is this?” Alexandra Perrin asked as she peered over her spectacles at the new girl from the chair where she was reading her morning newspaper.

“Mum, this is Electra . . . and yes, she’s another one!” Cassie explained. “Electra, this is my Mum.”

“Call me, Alexandra, Electra. Welcome to Blairhoyle.”

“Thank you.”

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Cassie led the small troop up the winding stairs.

“Naomi and Kaitlin have the bedroom . . .”

Cassie stopped talking as a soaking wet and very naked Naomi ran out of the bedroom before turning as an equally wet and naked Kaitlin appeared and threw a jug of water over her cousin. Naomi screamed, indicating that the water was very cold.

“Girls!” Cassie called out and the two naked girls froze before they turned to see their grinning audience.

“Can’t leave you two alone for a second!” Harper laughed.

Keira gave her sister a withering look.

“If you’d been here, you’d have been just as naked – and wet – as those two.”

Harper grinned.

“What is it with you *Predators*?” Cassie asked the four girls, rhetorically. “Have you two at least showered?”

“Yes,” Naomi replied – Kaitlin just nodded.

“Go, get dried off and get some clothes on,” Cassie directed as both girls ran back into their room – giggling their heads off.

Electra was grinning too.

“This place is awesome!”

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### ***Later that day***

Cassie was in the living room going through some *Vengeance* intelligence on her tablet when she sensed that she was being watched.

The person watching came closer before sitting down on a chair opposite – it was Electra, and she appeared apprehensive about something.

“What’s up, Electra?”

“Cassie – I lost my glasses on the ship and I’ve been wearing the same contact lenses for the past week. They’re making my eyes sore – can we. . .”

Cassie smiled at the nine-year-old.

“You want to go find an optician?”

Electra nodded.

“Let’s go!”

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“Are Naomi and Kaitlin always that goofy?” Electra asked in the Golf as Cassie drove them both into Falkirk.

Cassie laughed.

“Those two are nuttier than a fruitcake with extra nuts – Harper tries to be the mature leader but she’s just as nutty.”

“I like them – they’re funny. I hope I’ll fit in. . .”

“Electra, I think that you’re a perfect fit. Keira said that you and Harper got on well, on the flight back.”

“I hope so – I am different. I don’t like running around naked, for one . . .”

“They do that a lot – I thought it was just a *Predator* thing.”

“I suppose it is – but it was one part of being a *Predator* that I hated.”

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**Later . . .**

**Blairhoyle**

“She looks like a dork.”

“Kaitlin! Apologise!”

“Sorry, Electra.”

Electra smiled.

“I am a dork and I don’t mind the reference,” the nine-year-old replied.

“Still,” Cassie commented. “It wasn’t very nice to say that.”

“I apologised, okay!”

“Less of *that* attitude, young lady, or you’ll be spending the rest of the evening in your bedroom.”

“You just can’t keep your mouth shut, can you, Kaitlin” Naomi lectured.

“Fuck you!” came the response.

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As a rule, the two girls got on reasonably well together.

At first, on their arrival in Scotland, the two cousins had been inseparable. However, as time had moved on, the two girls had begun to drift apart and there were random moments when they almost attacked each other out of anger or frustration. I had called Naomi out on it and she had explained that before *Urban Predator*, the two girls had hated the very sight of one another. Apparently, Naomi had found her younger cousin incredibly annoying and fantastically spoilt.

During their time together in *Urban Predator*, the two girls had buried their hate and protected one another. However, with the end of *Urban Predator* and the chance to live a normal life, the two girls had re-developed their own personalities and habits. Those personalities and habits tended to clash in anything but a good way which usually resulted in shouting and a bit of screaming on the part of Kaitlin. Naomi would purposely bait her cousin, just to get a reaction. For example, Kaitlin had developed a soft spot for her toys – something which she had missed while being taught to kill and maim. Her favourite toy was Princess Twilight Sparkle and Kaitlin would take the soft twelve-inch version of the My Little Pony character around with her all over the house. Naomi saw the soft toy as an easy way to wind up her cousin.

After one particularly noisy session of screaming, Cassie had taken Naomi off to one side and asked her about their time as *Predators*.



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**Early March, 2016**

**Toulouse, France**

The days had drifted together and it had been several months since the girl had been brought to the French facility.

Memories of her past life had faded and her mind was focussed with just surviving the endless days of beatings and abuse. Her mind was filling up with nasty, deadly, and very scary new skills. That morning, her attention was on breakfast, but while eating her usual sausage sandwich, her eyes were drawn to several new kids who filtered in for breakfast. You could tell they were new by their defeated expressions and their new clothing.

One young girl in particular attracted Naomi's attention – there was something about her but Naomi couldn't figure it out. It nagged at her mind for the rest of the morning but she couldn't figure out why the girl was familiar. At lunchtime, Naomi saw the girl again – she was sitting alone at a table in the corner of the large dining room – so she took her tray of food and sat down across from her. The young girl was staring forlornly down at her plate which held a solitary sausage.

"You know, if you're going to survive in this place, you have got to eat a proper meal on a regular basis."

"I know – my life sucks."

"Join the club – you'd better get used to it, err. . ."

The young girl looked up at Naomi and her expression became one of confusion.

"I'm Kaitlin – Kaitlin Luton . . . You're Naomi – you're my cousin, Naomi Bedford."

"What – I don't have a cousin . . . at least I don't remember having one – this place does weird things to your brain. Anyway, my name *is* Naomi, but my surname: it's Ward, not Bedford."

"I remember you – my Mum told me that you went missing; it was about a year ago, I think – you look different, but I'm certain that it's you."

"If you say so. . ."

"You used to shout at me and call me names . . . you hated me."

Naomi looked pensive for a minute as she ate her toasted cheese sandwich.

"You were spoilt rotten – a daddy's girl; you always screamed when you couldn't get your own way and you always blamed others for your own failings. Yes, I hated you."

Kaitlin grinned.

"I was a nasty little girl – but I promise to be nice . . . if you'll help me."

"Just don't bring attention to us both."

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**Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2016**

**Stirling, Scotland**

## ***Drift and Crimson***

The two sibling vigilantes had spent the evening cruising around Stirling.

Drift was astride his dark blue Triumph Tiger Sport. He rode just two feet away from Crimson, who was astride her Triumph Speed 94. The night had been boring, to that point, with not much happening in the City of Stirling. Crimson decided to venture into some of the side streets – but in a stealthier fashion than on a high-powered motorcycle.

Sirens had been heard a few minutes earlier, so they had opted to head off in that direction. After a few minutes, as they came closer, they could hear yelling and arguing coming from the next street over, so after a brief exchange of glances, they went for a gander. On turning the corner, Drift frowned and he felt anger surge up within him as he took in the scene which was laid out before the two vigilantes.

A big red, Volvo fire engine was parked at the side of the road, blue lights flashing. The fire engine's crew were attempting to attack a blazing car with their hoses. But instead of the crew being supported in their actions by the local community, the younger members of that community were pelting the firefighters with anything that they could get their hands on – rocks, beer bottles, cans. A Ford Focus police car, blue lights flashing, was parked further down the street and I scowled as I took in a police officer who had obviously attempted to intervene but was now being treated by a firefighter who attempted to treat a vicious looking head wound while both he and the police officer were still being pelted with detritus.

Drift ran forwards, his sister following on his heels. As the *Vengeance* vigilantes approached, the cunts turned toward them both and they instantly became the targets. Both Drift and Crimson could see the grateful looks on the faces of the emergency services personnel as the two vigilantes absorbed the bottles and rocks. To be frank, neither were too bothered as their armour protected them from the impacts and the welcome distraction gave the firefighters time to put out the blaze.

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By the time the blaze was out, the youths were angry – their fun had been quite literally extinguished. An even dozen of the youths turned on the those who they held responsible for removing their evening fun. Drift and Crimson both dialled back their anger – they were dealing with immature youths, not hardened criminals. Nonetheless, the vigilantes defended themselves.

Not that it took much – most of the youths were fuelled with their usual Bucky, so they had no real idea what they were doing, let alone that they had no chance whatsoever of defeating two armour-clad, heavily-armed, vigilantes. The first youth came forward with a steel bar in his hand, he struck out at Crimson who ducked out of the way and buried her fist into his stomach. The youth went down hard before he was set upon and handcuffed by a female police officer who had just arrived on the scene.

Drift took no time in putting down the next pair as his sister faced off against a young woman armed with a large knife.

"Put it down, honey," Crimson growled.

"Fuck you, slag."

Crimson easily batted away the knife, unconcerned with the sharp blade. The young woman was angry and very drunk, so she continued with her attack – to no avail as Crimson slapped her across the face and the young woman span backwards into the waiting arms of a large police officer.

“Keep ‘em coming!” the police officer called out.

It was barely five more minutes before the last drunk youth collapsed onto the ground, only to be dragged back to their feet by a waiting police officer.

“Thank you, *Vengeance* – your help was much appreciated,” the senior fire officer said as his men mounted their engine.

“We enjoy a bit of fun,” Drift commented as he and Crimson headed back to their motorcycles.

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As they each swung their legs over their rides, they talked about the evening.

“You two gonna talk all day?” came a voice out of the darkness.

Crimson turned at the sound of a motorcycle as a dark grey KTM 1290 Super Duke GT emerged from the darkness. The rider, clad in dark grey armour, smiled.

“Let’s go kick some arse!” Nemesis persisted.

“Impatient bitch,” Crimson laughed as she started her three-cylinder, 1,050cc engine.

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!” Drift called out as he accelerated away.

The girls just shook their heads as they accelerated after their colleague.