

Falkirk, United Kingdom

Eighteen months previously, their only living parent was dead and they were stranded in a foreign country without any prospects.

Then, after a stupid decision led to a run-in with Shadow, aka Chloe Bennett, they almost died. It was only thanks to the very timely intervention of the Queen Bitch, Hit Girl, that they both survived a meeting with mob boss, Ralph D'Amico. Despite being rescued, Natasha King had seriously expected Hit Girl to kill them both, to maintain the integrity of their *Fusion* identities. That was the fault of her dumb-arse brother, Cameron King; he had unmasked Shadow and, therefore, they would have recognised her on the streets. Somehow, Hit Girl, aka Mindy Macready, had arranged for the siblings to return to their former lives in the United Kingdom.

Natasha had expected that to be that, but then Mitchell had appeared on the scene. That rollercoaster had finally stopped with the creation of *Vengeance*. She and her brother had become vigilantes and not only that, they were official employees of The Security Service – more commonly known as MI5 to most. They were part of an organisation which protected the Realm from the inside. The Kings were not short of cash; their father had left them financially secure for life. Needless to say, they had needed a cover for their activities, and they could not admit to working for Her Majesty's Government. As such, they were employed by a company called Universal Imports. From there came a monthly stipend which provided a legal source of income which could be monitored by HMRC for tax purposes.

Officially, they were both 'interns' – which was deemed sufficiently vague to prevent any form of digging.

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There had been no 'five' work since their return from Europe.

Their paymasters had decided to give them some time off. Not that either of them minded – the bruises and the trauma were still healing. Natasha had returned from Europe with bruises all over her unmentionables as well as in other places, while her brother would not think twice about showing his sister *his* unmentionables, Natasha saw herself as a little more private. Despite their closeness, Natasha would *not* ask her brother to check the bruises on her unmentionables. Since neither of them had had a mother in years, Natasha had nobody to see about some of my more feminine issues. However, since January, she had acquired a pseudo-mother.

Soon after New Year, Natasha had been stunned to hear about Mindy's trip into the Caribbean. Then Natasha had been even more stunned when Mindy had suggested an additional member for *Vengeance* who, it had turned out, lived just a dozen or so miles north of Falkirk and who had a father in the Royal Navy. Both Cameron and Natasha saw Cassie as a big sister. Her mother, Alexandra, was like a mother to them both. She would turn up out of the blue with a casserole or a chocolate cake. The pair loved it. She would also bring Cassie around and together, they would have a lot of fun, both in and out of *Vengeance*. Natasha would spend hours talking with Alexandra on their return from Europe. There were things that she could only speak about with somebody like Alexandra and the older woman had come through for Natasha.

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Then things had changed yet again.

Two of the cutest little girls Natasha had ever seen had moved in with Cassie and her parents. Unknown to the two girls, Natasha had seen them both in the wild, so to speak, in France. It was hard to look at the two cousins and know what they used to be. It was the same conundrum that Natasha had experienced with Mindy's own eldest daughter, Stephanie. On the outside, she was cute as a button, but then she had seen the young girl fighting in France. Stephanie was, to put it bluntly, pure evil, and Natasha was under no illusions about the skills which Kaitlin and Naomi would have learnt while part of that hell which they had endured since they had been taken. She knew that both of them had killed.

Mindy had suggested that they all keep their alter-egos a secret from the girls. Her explanation was that the two girls should enjoy life as children before they entered the world of the vigilante - even if that were years away. Mindy had promised that when the time was right, she would be there to help the two girls adjust, along with Stephanie and Saoirse. However, Natasha knew that Mindy had made a go at keeping *Fusion* a secret from her twins, to no avail.

Fate?

May 28th, 2016

Blairhoyle

Kaitlin had never slept in a bed like it.

It was ginormous! Her cousin, Naomi, slept in an identical bed just a few feet away and you could not even see the nine-year-old girl who slept beneath the mounds of quilt. It was great to have a home and great to have people who cared about you . . . only, the horrors of the preceding few months still weighed heavily on the little girl's mind. She had seen and been made to do so many horrifying things.

She had seen people die - she had killed.

She had blood on her young hands, and she felt dirty. She felt disgusted with herself. Naomi appeared to be coping a lot better than Kaitlin was, but then Naomi had been in the programme much longer than she had. Kaitlin felt the disgust with herself building inside her, each and every day. She desperately needed a release, but she had no weapons to fire off - that used to help, back when she was a bad person - instead, she had only her dolls.

A plan began to form in her tortured mind; a plan which might just help the youngster ease her disgust with Kaitlin Ward.

Two days later

Monday, 30th May

Late afternoon

Blairhoyle

When Cassie returned from my classes at the university, her Mum did not appear very happy.

"Problems?" Cassie ventured.

"You could say that," her Mum replied. "The head called from the girls' school. The first day did *not* go all that well for Kaitlin. I called her on it, and found that the young lady has a very creative vocabulary."

"I'll talk to her," Cassie sighed. "Where is she?"

"Upstairs," Alexandra replied pointedly. "I sent her to her room."

Cassie could well remember being on the wrong end of her Mum's temper and it was not a very fun place to be. Cassie headed upstairs and knocked on the door to the girls' bedroom which was slightly ajar.

"Come in!" Naomi called and Cassie pushed the door open and walked into the bedroom. "Hi, Cassie."

Cassie smiled at Naomi who lay on her bed doing her homework. There was no sign of her younger cousin.

"Kaitlin?"

Naomi rolled her eyes and tipped her head.

"In the bathroom."

Cassie turned and pushed open the door to the adjoining bathroom which she had passed on the way in. The eight-year-old girl with her long dark brown hair sat on the tiled floor of the bathroom beside the sink. She just stared into nothing - the ubiquitous 'thousand-yard-stare'. Her facial expression was one of anger and she looked really pissed. Cassie sat down on the floor a couple of feet in front of her and crossed her legs. Kaitlin either had not noticed Cassie enter or she was just really annoyed with the world in general.

Either way, she never acknowledged Cassie.

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"So, how did your day go?" Cassie ventured.

"It sucked, big time. . ." came the annoyed response in a barely audible whisper.

"Care to explain?" Cassie pushed.

"Not really."

"Please?"

Kaitlin huffed and puffed for a few seconds before she deigned to respond.

"I don't like being told what to do; I've had enough of that."

"I can understand that. But being given instructions, well, that's just a normal part of life for a little girl of your age, Kaitlin."

"Only, I'm not a *normal* little girl."

"No, but you can be."

Finally, Kaitlin looked up from wherever she had been looking and her angry expression had dissolved into one of abject misery.

"I don't know how."

"We can help you."

"I'm a freak. The other kids laughed at me."

"No, you are not. You are just a little girl whose lost her way and needs help. However, you've got to let us in, if you want us to help you, Kaitlin."

A weak smile formed, and Cassie knew that she had made a chink in the former *Predator's* armour. A small chink - but still a chink.

"Shall we get up off this cold floor and go look at your homework?"

"Okay. Will you stay with me?"

"Yes. Then, once we are done, you need to apologise to Mum for what you said to her."

"I just reacted, and I never meant to hurt Alexandra. I'm in trouble, aren't I?"

"Yes, young lady, you are," Cassie replied as they headed over to Kaitlin's bed.

"What do you do for punishment?" the eight-year-old asked and I saw fear in her eyes.

"Ground you. Maybe send you to bed early. Restrict fun activities and TV."

"Is that all?" Kaitlin sounded doubtful and she still looked fearful.

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Cassie looked over at Naomi for help and the older girl looked grim as she spoke.

"When we were bad, we were punished very severely. They used bats and straps. Usually, they'd bend you over a table and yank down your trousers and knickers. Then you'd get six of the best - or more, depending on your age and crime."

Cassie was stunned at the revelation.

"Did either of you...?"

"I received the strap four times - six the first time, then twelve each the remaining three times. They were all done in full view of the other kids. It was humiliating and very painful. Naomi received the strap once." Kaitlin paused. "The woman took the strap across her bare bottom sixteen times. Naomi couldn't sit down for a week. She screamed every time she went for a pee."

Cassie pulled Kaitlin into a hug and looked over at Naomi.

"Nobody will ever do that to either of you again. That is a firm promise. We would never hurt you. I am so sorry that you had to endure something so barbaric."

After a few minutes, Kaitlin wriggled free and she went over to where she had thrown her school bag. From it, she pulled out her homework and Cassie laid on the bed beside her.

The following night

Tuesday, 31st May

South Carbrain Road, Carbrain, Cumbernauld
(Approx. 30 miles west of Edinburgh)

SABRE

Crimson, Drift & Nemesis

The five-litre V8 engine of the Range Rover Sentinel known as *Sabre* hummed gently as the vehicle sat in the darkness beside the road, all lights extinguished.

Inside the vehicle, the three vigilantes sat in the darkness. None of them were visible from the outside due to the darkened armoured glazing. Most would have been very unhappy if they could have seen the vigilantes, all done up to the nines in their battle armour. They talked amongst themselves as they monitored the area for trouble. Cumbernauld was a favourite hunting ground for *Vengeance*. It was like the Glorious 12th, but for drug-dealers instead of grouse. Mind you, Drift cared for the grouse a fuck of a lot more than he cared for the fucking scrotes shottin to young kids - his sister, Crimson, and Nemesis thought the same. Police Scotland did what they could, but the druggies were always one step ahead, most of the time. The police did not skulk in the darkness like the vigilantes did and they did not strike like the vigilantes did. For some criminals, as far as *Vengeance* were concerned, they were guilty, until proved innocent.

The only catch was that the criminals had less than a second to persuade the vigilantes that they were, in fact, innocent.

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They did not kill when on an anti-drug night out.

They just roughed the fuckers up a bit and then left them for the police to scoop up. The police would always take the credit too, not that the vigilantes were bothered. Drug dealing was on the organised crime level and as such, anybody talking part was far game. It was also serious business and the dealers were, more often than not, tooled up with something lethal. The dealers also doubled up their business by loaning the money for people to buy drugs, with enormous mark ups. People were then trapped, and they were often beaten if they were late paying. It was not unknown for petrol to be poured through a letterbox and then followed up by a burning wad of newspaper.

The area was a nightmare for people like *Vengeance*, due to the many walkways and paths that zigzagged around the estates. To aid them in their night's work, Q was back at the *Vengeance Command Centre* on the outskirts of Edinburgh. He had one of their pair of drones airborne over the area, a kilometre overhead. EAGLE-1 would send real-time reconnaissance data for Q to examine and then use to guide the team when they were deployed on the ground.

EAGLE-1 could see as if it were daylight so it was next to impossible to hide.

Vengeance Command Centre
Edinburgh

Q

"Anything happening?"

"Nah, Abby, everybody up to no good seems to be in bed!" Eric groused.

"Let me cheer you up then...", Abigail Hunt hinted from across the Atlantic Ocean in northern Chicago.

Q, otherwise known as Eric Cunningham, was momentarily stunned as his girlfriend stood up and...

"Why would you be sitting at your laptop naked from the waist down?"

"You complaining?" Abby enquired as she pulled off her blouse and she dropped it carelessly onto the floor behind her. She was now very naked.

"No - definitely not...", Eric groaned as he gripped his groin.

SABRE

Crimson, Drift & Nemesis

"Q?"

"Q?"

"Huh?"

"You getting a virtual wank from Abby again?" Crimson demanded.

"No... Maybe..."

"Anything on the scope?"

"Nothing yet..." Q began.

"There will be once Abby makes him climax!" Nemesis laughed.

"That's disgusting," Drift commented.

"You used to jerk off in front of that mirror on the back of your door - some of those stains never came off you know," Crimson advised her mortified brother.

"Ewww!" Nemesis growled.

"Stand to!" Q advised over the comms.

"We thought you were," Drift responded, and Crimson laughed.

"Something's going down - Greenrigg Road. Make a U-turn and left under a footbridge. First block of flats. You might want to cover the footbridge."

"On it!" Crimson called as she turned the gear selector to 'D' and executed a quick U-turn before she put her foot down.

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Just before the turn, Crimson slammed on the brakes and the three-tonne vehicle came to a rapid halt.

Drift dove out just as Crimson stomped on the go pedal and she took the next left followed by a sharp right. There was definitely something going on as they came to a halt again. Crimson and Nemesis jumped out while Q remotely locked the vehicle. The headlights blazed onto a scene that was typical of the organised drug scene. A man was on his knees and another held a pistol to the kneeling man's head. Arrayed around both men were three others, all armed with a pistol each.

"What the fuck?" The man with the pistol to the other man's head demanded at the sight of the two vigilantes clad in battle armour.

"You are filth," Crimson growled in her electronically distorted voice as she brought around her bō-staff. "You kill that man, you die."

"Go take your flashy blades and use 'em to fuck yourself."

Nemesis took exception to that comment and she showed it as she drew her Katana from her back and took up position a few feet from her partner.

"Okay, I'll fuck you both," The man laughed as he pulled the trigger.

The kneeling man's head exploded, and the corpse fell to the ground. Nemesis ran forwards and she rammed her armoured elbow into a man's face before the man could raise his pistol any further. Blood exploded from his destroyed nose as he dropped his firearm and screamed out in agony. Crimson, too, was quick on the draw as she made for the murdering bastard.

Only, his two henchmen had closed ranks on their master, and they had given him time to make his escape.

The drug dealer was the boss of that part of town and everybody knew it.

He had not, until that night, tussled with the vigilantes who had seemingly sprung out of thin air at the beginning of the year to wreak vengeance on anybody who was involved in organised crime. Craig Allan always managed to keep ahead of the thin blue line which attempted to maintain law and order in central Scotland. Whoever they were, he thought, they were very organised, almost to military precision. That was fine by him, he was ex-British Army and as far as he was concerned, he could look after himself. With his men slowing down the two bitches from hell, Allan ran towards the footbridge and an easy escape in a strategically placed vehicle.

He skidded to a halt as something emerged from the gloom ahead of him. Something was already on the walkway. Allan drew his pistol, a Browning Hi-Power in nine-millimetre. An older pistol, but cheap and reliable. A relic from his Army days and totally illegal anywhere in the United Kingdom. He pulled back the cocking lever and raised the large pistol to head height. He heard the rasp of steel being unsheathed and he felt a cold chill that was not just the cool night air. The form emerged out of the darkness. The battle armour was a dark blue and for the first time in quite a while, Craig Allan felt real fear. He squeezed the trigger of his pistol and he kept squeezing. Twelve rounds later the slide locked back. The thirteen-round magazine was empty. Allan peered into the darkness to where he had seen the vigilante fall.

"Fucking ouch!" came a growl out of the gloom.

Crimson heard the gunshots and she saw the muzzle flashes in the darkness.

Despite her brain telling her that her brother wore heavy battle armour, her mind still worried that he could be hurt. She ran after him the moment she and Nemesis had put down the final henchman. As usual, Crimson was getting ahead of herself as she skidded to a rapid halt about midway across the walkway. Crimson caught the scene just as Drift delivered a powerful punch into the side of the man's head. Without a sound, the man sank to the concrete walkway and he collapsed completely.

"Fucking took you long enough!" Drift growled as he stepped over the unconscious form.

Updated: May 2019