

Sunday, September 25th, 2016

Malton, Yorkshire

Cassie slammed the door and Jasper floored the accelerator.

"Talk about a close shave!" Kaitlin said as she winced.

"You in pain?" Naomi asked, showing uncharacteristic concern for her younger cousin.

"Whatya think, wise arse? I just got fucking shot! Tell her, Cassie."

Cassie did not respond as her head lolled forwards and she lay against the doorframe. Blood was visible running down the side of her neck.

"Cassie!"

Safehouse VY

The Safehouse was peaceful as everybody enjoyed the downtime.

Suddenly, the happiness of the afternoon was immolated by three simple words shouted by Lynn as all hell broke loose.

"Cassie's been shot!"

There followed furious activity as the library was rapidly converted into its secondary role as a medical facility. The furniture was shoved over to one side and plastic sheeting was spread across the floor. A long table with a wooden top was setup and covered with a clean white sheet while medical supplies were produced and arranged on two more wooden topped tables, each of which had a clean white sheet spread over them.

"ETA four minutes!" Cameron announced.

It had been a simple meet to get a grasp on what was happening but somehow it had gone very wrong.

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The two girls were almost hysterical by the time the Audi slid to a halt outside the Safehouse. As for Cassie, she was slipping in and out of consciousness.

Jasper and Lynn helped Cassie out of the car and all but carried her into the Safehouse. Marinette and Alya grabbed the two girls and took them inside. Olivia was shocked by the sight of a barely conscious Cassie being carried by Jasper and Lynn into the library. She was also shocked by Naomi and Kaitlin. She knew what they were and Jessica and witnessed them in action at close hand. Both were scary to look at, despite their tears, and Olivia knew that something *really* bad had occurred.

Cassie was laid on the central table and Lynn examined the wound on her neck. After some prodding and poking, Lynn cleaned the wound before dressing it and wrapping a bandage around Cassie's neck to hold the dressing in place. The bullet had missed her carotid artery by about an inch but the strike had been enough to send her body into shock. After checking over the rest of Cassie's body to ensure there were no other wounds, Lynn pronounced her safe before she turned to Kaitlin.

"Jasper says you were struck by a bullet, Kaitlin," Lynn said. "Were you hurt?"

"I'm fine," Kaitlin replied.

"Yvette, Harper - get Kaitlin out of that combat suit so I can check her over."

"Leave me alone!" Kaitlin growled as she was grabbed by her friends.

"We do this the easy way . . . or the hard way," Harper declared and Kaitlin gave in, allowing her friends to help her strip off her clothing and then the combat suit underneath.

"What about you, Naomi?"

"Nothing hit me, but I slotted one of the bastards," Naomi stated for the record.

"Go get out of your combat suit and have a bath - it'll relax you. Don't worry about Cassie or Kaitlin - they're going to be fine."

"Thank you," Naomi said as Keira took her off upstairs.

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After the barely conscious Cassie was removed from the table and taken upstairs to bed by Jasper and Amy, it was Kaitlin's turn.

Lynn helped the eight-year-old onto the table and got to work checking out the injury. Kaitlin's right side was a mass of purple and blue where the heavy bullet had struck her combat suit. The suit had prevented the bullet's penetration but the impact force had been transferred through the suit and into her skin. After a few minutes of very painful prodding and poking during which Kaitlin screamed out in pain on several occasions, Lynn was pleased to find no broken ribs.

"You will be very sore for several days but it will ease," Lynn explained to the young girl as she sat up, grimacing in pain.

"I've been shot in armour before - but *that* was painful!" Kaitlin exclaimed.

"I think they were using .40-calibre rounds which would explain why you hurt so much," Jasper said as he came back into the room.

Kaitlin was in a lot of pain, so was given a painkiller before she was laid alongside the sleeping Cassie and she quickly fell into a troubled sleep of her own.

The following morning

Monday, September 26th

It was still early morning when Kaitlin awoke.

She felt very sore up her right side where the bullet had struck her body. For a moment, she couldn't remember where she was but then she saw a pair of dark brown eyes looking at her.

"You okay, sweetie," Cassie asked weakly as she ran her fingers through her youngest daughter's hair.

"I think so."

Kaitlin moved closer to Cassie and she snuggled into her mum.

"My side hurts," Kaitlin complained as tears began to spill down her face.

"Just lie still, sweetie."

"I love you, Mummy."

"I Love you, too, sweetie."

Cassie grinned to herself. It was the first time that either of the girls had called her 'Mummy'.

Two days later

Wednesday, September 28th

Kaitlin was getting annoyed with her status.

"You're still bruised - live with it," Harper suggested.

"Stop treating me like an invalid - especially you," Kaitlin growled at Naomi. "It's unnatural for you to be caring, so stop it!"

"Just looking after my cousin slash sister," Naomi replied feigning a hurt expression.

"Girls - stop bickering!"

"Yes, Mum," the two girls said together before bursting into giggles.

Cassie was enjoying being a 'mum' but her two daughters could be really strange at times.

"Girls!" Craig growled as he finished off his mug of tea and headed back to training the newbies.

"I'm off ops, too, honey - so don't feel bad," Cassie explained to her daughter as Naomi vanished with Harper.

"At least I got one of the bastards," Kaitlin growled coldly.

"And we got the data we needed - good idea hiding an SD card in a pistol magazine," Jasper pointed out.

"This is only going to get worse, right?" Kaitlin said.

"Yes, honey," Cassie replied darkly as she hugged her daughter. "It will get a lot worse before it, hopefully, gets better."

Two days later

Friday, September 30th

Mid-morning

Monks Cross, York

"Is this meet going to be safe, Jasper?"

"Yes, Natasha, it will be safe; he's an old friend of mine."

"If we're going to keep up this 'family' charade, we're running low on little girls," Natasha pointed out, sourly.

"Yeah - not many of our kind left in one piece," Harper commented with a look over at her friend.

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more," Naomi chuckled.

"Oh, brother!" Harper complained as she rolled her eyes.

The shopping centre was enormous and the four of them spent the first forty minutes wandering around John Lewis. Then, at around ten, they headed for the restaurant at M&S. There, they took a seat and Jasper went for some drinks. He returned five minutes later with three coffees and two cans of Coke - plus a man.

"Ladies, this is Doug O'Reilly," Jasper introduced. "We worked together."

"Hi," Harper offered lazily as she helped herself to a can of Coke.

"Hello," Naomi said as she grabbed the other can.

"What's going on?" Natasha asked.

"Somebody is pulling strings in Whitehall and people are running scared. What happened to William Fraser of Scorpio Enterprises scared a lot of people. Some believe that *Vengeance* went too far. There are others who are not happy with the link which *Vengeance* has to that woman in Chicago - Hit Girl. As I understand it, people want to talk to you, Jasper, and all the members of *Vengeance*. This will all get sorted out, in time, and everything will go back to normal."

Jasper did not appear convinced.

"Who gave the order?" he asked.

"It came from the Home Office, originally, via the Home Secretary. . Problem, Jasper?"

Jasper was looking at his mobile phone. He pressed something on the screen before placing the phone back in his pocket. He looked at his 'old friend'.

"You're a turncoat, Doug - thirteen pieces of silver too much for to resist?" Jasper growled. "So much for an old friend!"

"Fuck you, Jasper - you sold your soul to the devil. There's something going down and you picked the losing side."

Doug stopped talking as he felt a hand on his right shoulder. He looked up to see Harper standing there - a forced smile on her face.

"Move a fuckin' inch and I cut your fuckin' rat throat," she hissed into his ear, a small blade visible in her left hand, just half an inch from his carotid artery.

Two hours later

VAS Thetis

"I vote that we cut his balls off," Prowl suggested.

"I vote that we cut his dick off," Glide countered.

"That's because you are a dick!" Prowl retorted.

"Am not!"

"Can we at least *pretend* that we are professionals?" Crimson growled.

The man in question was secured to a steel chair which, in turn, was secured to the concrete floor. He was blindfolded and gagged. Polaris was gazing at the man - she wanted blood - and she kept playing with several sharp blades.

"If you can't be useful, you two, then FUCK OFF!" the senior vigilante suggested.

Glide scowled. She had only been allowed to come along if she did not overexert herself. Nemesis gave her daughter a stern look which did the trick.

"You need some thick plastic, Polaris?" she asked, knowing that while the man could not see, nor speak, he could hear perfectly.

Polaris grinned, understanding the tactic.

"Definitely - they can detect blood so easily nowadays," she replied, loudly.

The man stiffened, understanding the relevance of the thick plastic. Sleuth was angry - kidnapping had not been on the agenda; however, Drift had been parked in the carpark outside, watching for activity. He had seen the MI5 vehicles closing in and the armed men covertly entering the shopping centre. He had sent a coded alert to Jasper's phone, as well as an emergency egress verbal warning. The alert to Jasper's phone had included a few photos of the teams assembling outside. They had casually walked out of the restaurant and made their way out of a back entrance while Eric had wiped the CCTV system to remove any evidence of their presence.

Jasper and Lynn were working on what to do with the man - there were many within Vengeance who wanted to kill him, but that was not allowed.

That evening

Safehouse VY

"Kaitlin, please ease up, honey."

"I need to get back into shape."

"You are in shape, honey - you just have a few bruises," Cassie pointed out.

"I want to get back out there."

Cassie groaned. She had found Kaitlin with the other kids all undergoing an intensive workout before dinner. Cassie was impressed with the new kids; they were joining in like they had been doing it for months. Even Olivia, who was very vocal on what she sometimes perceived as 'child abuse', was actively joining in, voluntarily, as was her younger sister. The boys, Christopher and Jeremy were keener on the physical exercise and they liked to compete against the new girls.

Cassie had also noticed Olivia spending time with Craig - and not just constructive time, either. During downtime, they could both be found on a couch together, watching TV. Jasper did *not* want to know, while Lynn just thought it was cute. As for Craig's parents, they had warned Craig to be careful. . .

The following morning

Saturday, October 1st

Safehouse VY

The day started bad and ended decidedly worse.

Naomi and Kaitlin had woken up that morning despising one another. Whatever had caused the bickering - nobody knew what that was - it had awoken just about everybody in the house. Cassie had grudgingly hauled herself out of bed to find out what the noise was and she had

found her two daughters in the kitchen engaged in a verbal fight with the odd slap thrown in.

"Why do you two do it?" she asked, not expecting much of an answer.

"She kept me awake, last night," Naomi growled.

"My side hurt," Kaitlin countered.

"Did you *have* to cry about it?"

"Fuck you, bitch!"

"Easy, now!" Cassie cautioned.

"They still at it?" Harper asked as she walked past her two friends.

"Apparently," Cassie replied as she grabbed a loaf of bread and fed the toaster.

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Things did not improve as the morning wore on.

The training session for all broke down into a free for all between the two girls. Cassie figured out the probable cause quite quickly - the girls were under stress, simple as that. Everybody was, only the adults could process and handle stress a lot better than little girls whose ages were not even into double digits.

By lunchtime, Cassie had had enough and the extra stress on her part was giving her migraines - a recurring problem since she was shot. Cassie and Keira checked out the girl's bruises - many were on their faces which was bad for when they were out in public. Natasha decided that a break was needed. She ordered the two girls to go put on their slimline combat suits and some outdoor clothing.

"I'll take the two bitches from hell out for something to eat," Natasha suggested.

"Can I come?"

Keira looked over at Naomi and Kaitlin - they both nodded - before looking over at Olivia.

"Let's go, Ajax."

At the Audi S8, Naomi made for the front passenger seat but she was cut off by the older girl. Olivia looked down at the two girls.

"Me teenager, you squabbling little girls - me go in front."

Natasha laughed as Naomi and Kaitlin reluctantly slunk into the back seat and pulled on their seatbelts while the smirking Olivia slipped into the front passenger seat and fastened up her own seatbelt.

They headed towards York at a sedate speed - at first.

That afternoon

Romeo Two Seven

*North Yorkshire Police
Roads Policing Group*

On the A1237, north of York

The marked Police BMW 3-Series Estate was being driven by Sergeant Janet Hargreaves. Beside her, sat PC Lois Green.

They were on the eight-till-six shift and they had spent the morning patrolling the A64 around the south and east sections of York. They had handed out fourteen tickets, from not wearing a seatbelt to using a mobile phone while driving, and onto the bane of their lives: speeding. Two drivers had no insurance and one had a bald tyre which cost him three points on his licence and a visit to court for a prospective £2,500 fine.

Both women loved their jobs and they enjoyed the freedom of the open road. Neither were novices when it came to policing the roads of North Yorkshire and they had both witnessed horrendous road traffic collisions, or RTCs, during which they had seen life-threatening injuries, as well as death. Their vehicle was fully equipped with the latest in in-car police equipment which would assist them with catching and prosecuting motorists who chose to break the law.

They were cruising west along the road, just passing the Clifton Moor Industrial Estate to the left when the ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) system beeped to indicate that something had been found. A registration appeared on the display: **FY16 HGF**, followed by the vehicle specifics and then the reason for the alert: **PNC ACTION - Cloned VRM**. The identified vehicle had just passed them, heading east. Sergeant Hargreaves accelerated for the next roundabout, coming around and picking up the same road she had been on, but heading in the opposite direction.

The car in question was a dark blue, Audi S8 saloon.

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As far as they had been able to tell, there were four occupants in the vehicle: an adult female was driving, with four young kids in the car.

Three miles and four roundabouts later, PC Green pressed the buttons which triggered the blue strobe lights that adorned the roof and front of the BMW, as well as activating the siren. The Audi, a dozen yards ahead slowed as if the driver was expecting the police car to accelerate past but Sergeant Hargreaves flashed her headlights and used her hand to indicate that the Audi driver should pull over. Within another thirty seconds, it was obvious that the Audi driver was *not* taking the hint.

The Audi accelerated away at speed.

"Romeo Two seven. Failing to stop, failing to stop! Heading south on A1237, towards A64 junction," PC Green reported over the radio.
"Dark blue Audi S8, four occupants, passing eighty-five."

The Audi slammed on the brakes at the next roundabout, slowing down before taking the exit for the A64 junction. The Audi took the left-hand lane, roaring up the inside at speed and through a red light and then veered to the right around the roundabout, narrowly avoiding a collision with two other road users. Sergeant Hargreaves followed, passing through the traffic, siren screaming.

"Romeo Two Seven. Southbound on A64. Request TPAC."

The Audi

Natasha knew that she should have stopped.

Only, past events had made her very wary of the authorities - not to mention that she was wary of the traffic police in general. Thus, at the first sight of the blue lights, instinct had told her to put her foot down. Her desire for self-preservation then had her tearing up the Highway Code and ultimately driving like the hot-headed maniac which was when she was behind the wheel.

"At this rate, we're going to be on 'Traffic Cops'," Olivia pointed out a few minutes later as Natasha shot past other road users.

As they passed beneath a junction, Kaitlin made a brief comment.

"We're boned!" the girl commented. "Four more cars joining us, blues and twos."

Natasha scowled as she saw a total of *five* marked police cars in her rear-view mirror, all BMWs, and all with blue lights flashing.

It was time to make a phone call.

Romeo Two Seven

Tactical Pursuit And Containment, or TPAC, is used by the police to bring a potentially dangerous vehicle pursuit to a swift and safe end, protecting both police and the general public from harm.

In a short space of time, the other four police vehicles took up coordinated positions, two BMWs racing on ahead and taking up position ahead and just to the left of the Audi on the hard shoulder. Another BMW moved alongside the BMW while Romeo Two Seven took up position on the hard shoulder and the final BMW moved into position within a few inches of the Audi's rear bumper. Under the command of the front vehicle, each police vehicle slowly applied their brakes and the Audi driver was compelled to brake to avoid a collision until the group of six vehicles came to a halt in a mass of blue lights, just short of the A19 junction.

While the driver 'came quietly', as did the older of the passengers, the remaining two passengers, did not.

Fulford Road Police Station

"Fuck you!"

The police officer slammed the hatch in the cell door and she laughed.

"Spirited youngster," PC Green commented to the custody sergeant in the custody suite. "How old is she?"

"Let me check the notes: 'I'm fucking eight, you got that, you thick bastard', were her exact words," the custody sergeant chuckled.

"Got the wild one safely contained," Sergeant Hargreaves grinned as she entered the suite.

"Yeah - got some attitude that one," PC Green admitted.

"The other two girls and the woman, contained?"

"Yes, though they haven't said much since they were stripped. What were those suits, anyway, some kind of body armour?"

"They were tooled up for something," the custody sergeant commented.

"Anything come up for them?"

"No - their prints aren't in the computer - none of them."

"The little one is off limits until she calms down - but she needs checked on every fifteen," PC Green advised. "Let's pull the woman and see what she has to say for herself, in about an hour."

Six hours later

Natasha was fuming.

She could not believe that it had been a simple traffic stop for a cloned number plate - that was bullshit in itself; their number plates were clean. Somebody was fucking with them to get them into custody. Her mind had been playing scenarios for hours. She had been able to come to one conclusion - they were trapped and somebody was coming hunting, she was certain of it. Moments before they had handed themselves over to the police, Natasha had made an urgent phone call to Eric to make him aware of their predicament. All four of their Vengeance mobile phones were disabled, permanently, by Eric at that point rendering them useless.

There had been a brief, but heated, discussion in the car in the final minutes, detailing what might happen next as it was not expected that they would be able to talk freely after they were arrested. Naturally, Olivia was very scared while the two young

girls had taken the unfolding events in their stride with Kaitlin being given a role to play with the assistance of Naomi. Natasha was concerned that if they were not in custody, then they might be at greater risk of something worse than incarceration at Her Majesty's Pleasure. She had toyed with the idea of outrunning the police cars - an easy task with the S8 but they would have nowhere to go and then there would be a manhunt.

There had been an interview with the traffic cops who had stopped them - a total waste of time as Natasha gave up nothing and due to Kaitlin's behaviour, she had not been interviewed and the other two girls had been put off limits as Natasha had understood it. The police were unsure what to make of the four of them. During a body search, their combat suits had been discovered along with a selection of slightly illegal, to extremely illegal weaponry. All four of them had been stripped - Kaitlin by *four* female police officers - and left in their underwear for an hour before receiving some very fetching disposable white suits which went well with the handcuffs they each wore.

"You can fuck right off!" Kaitlin had exclaimed. "You think I'm going to wear that bloody thing? It'll be like wearing a fucking tent!"

Kaitlin remained in her underwear.

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It was a little after nine in the evening and Natasha knew that they were on borrowed time. Right on schedule, she heard screaming and banging from another cell and then an alarm as Naomi hit the panic button in her cell. There was the sound of running feet and then the sound of a lock being turned and a heavy door being heaved open.

"What's going on?" a voice called out.

"Looks like the girl's having a seizure."

"Get the adult out - we need to know what's going on."

Natasha stood up as she heard the lock on her cell door being turned and then the door being heaved open.

"One of the girls appears ill - we need to know what might be wrong with her," the female custody sergeant explained as she waved Natasha out of the cell.

"What's wrong with her?" Natasha asked with feigned concern.

"She collapsed but managed to trigger her panic alarm. We can't get much sense out of her, although she has calmed down," the officer informed Natasha.

Natasha was led to another cell where she found Naomi being helped to her feet and then through into the custody suite where they both sat on plastic seating which was bolted to the floor. Naomi wiped away her forced tears and she smiled up at Natasha, putting on a

show of being a scared little girl. The police officers did not appear to be buying the show but they had to give the nine-year-old the benefit of the doubt. Naomi was given a warm mug of tea with plenty of sugar. The girl sipped at it, which wasn't all that easy in the rigid cuffs.

"I'll leave you two to sit there for a few minutes," the sergeant said as she returned to her place behind a tall counter with a colleague.

Suddenly, the lights went out and all the computers wound down. Natasha braced up. The two police officers in the space also sensed trouble.

"It's not just a power cut, is it?" Naomi asked, dropping the act of being a scared little girl, with concern in her voice.

"Hey!" a male voice called out in the darkness and then there was the unmistakeable staccato sound of suppressed gunfire closely followed by a scream and then the thud of a body hitting the ground.

"No - it is not," Natasha stated.