

Saturday, October 29th, 2016

**St Thomas' Hospital
The Fifth Floor, Children's Wing**

The nine-year-old girl was in a lot of pain.

"Okay - let's dial up the sedative a bit," Dr Schneider suggested and a nurse made the relevant adjustments to the computer running the various drips.

It did not take long for Harper's tears to stop and her face to acquire a semi-vacant expression as she hovered between reality and the netherworld of drug-induced sleep. The doctor then walked up to the bed and he pulled back the quilt.

"Hey!" Harper exclaimed. "A little dignity for the naked girl, please!"

"Harper, shut up, there's a good girl," Keira suggested to her little sister.

Harper opened her mouth to respond but she then gave up and clamped her mouth shut, just glaring up at the doctor and her big sister. Yes, Harper was naked, and Keira was stunned by what she saw. If Harper's not-so-angelic face had been bad, her body was worse - much worse. The doctor began to point out injuries, beginning from Harper's head in a very clinical but humorous, manner.

"She has a thick skull - no damage as far as we can tell."

"Did you find a brain in there?" Keira asked in an attempt at some dark humour.

The doctor chuckled as he continued, "No brain damage as far as we can see, so she should be just as before."

"Oh, dear," Keira said sarcastically with a forced laugh ignoring Harper's annoyed expression which was bordering on indignation.

"We have several marks on her neck, front, and on both sides, where a knife has been used to slice her skin. There'll be more of that; as I said, Harper has been viciously tortured. There is limited scarring and the marks are not readily visible. These," the doctor pointed at Harper's chest area, "are cigarette burns and burns from what appears to be exposure to a naked flame."

"Oh, my God!" Keira exclaimed as she counted eleven separate circular marks which extended from Harper's collar bone down towards her stomach.

There were also three extended burn scars around the breast area. Keira looked into her sister's dark eyes. Harper looked very unhappy, but also very tired as the drugs began to take effect in her system.

"We have some more knife slices on her stomach and several on her thighs."

"Was she interfered with?" Keira asked, dreading the answer.

"I wasn't raped, sis," Harper pointed out, weakly.

"No sign of internal sexual trauma," the doctor confirmed, much to Keira's relief. "When we inserted the catheter, we did find evidence of a urinary infection and some redness but nothing to worry about. Her lower legs have received a lot of significant impacts causing intensive bruising, lacerations, and torn skin, but the bones are intact. As for the feet, all but one toe on her left foot are intact - we can fix the toe easily. The feet are quite heavily bruised, so walking will be painful at first but not impossible. Her right foot - well, it has a knife wound in it, however, the double-edged blade missed all the major parts and simply chipped two metatarsals. The wound will

heal fully and she will regain full use of her feet in a few days. That brings me to her left arm."

Keira grimaced as she looked over at the one part of her sister's body which she had been avoiding. The young girl's left arm was bandaged from above the elbow, to just short of her wrist. Her wrist was in a fresh, white cast while her fingers were each splinted and the tips of each finger were wrapped in white gauze.

"Her wrist was broken - a clean fracture. Each finger was broken in at least two places. They were not splinted, and we had to rebreak them to correct the alignment - not to mention that three of her fingers have had the nail ripped off. It will be five to six months before her hand is fully back to rights, maybe two for her feet. Her lower arm and elbow were exposed to boiling water and then salt was rubbed into the burn. The salt assisted in the healing . . . but the pain would have been unbelievable. Honestly, I have never seen anything like it - the torture that this girl has been through. . ."

Harper had fallen asleep several minutes before so was unable to hear most of the diagnosis.

"I cannot even begin to contemplate what she went through."

"What information could a nine-year-old girl have had that somebody would do this to her? How could she even have lasted as long as she did? I've known grown soldiers suffer less trauma before they gave in."

The doctor was unnerved by Harper's condition and her obvious signs of torture.

"Harper is special, doctor. You have had your confidential briefing on who we are - she was protecting the livelihoods of her friends and me. Harper was willing to die before giving up any secrets. We have no idea if she broke, but from what we can tell, she did not break, despite what you see before you."

The doctor carefully covered up the sleeping girl to restore her dignity. His heart went out to the two sisters. They had both endured hell.

"The person who did this to Harper?"

"He burned," Keira responded coldly. "He had my Hellfire up his arse."

"Good to know."

Mid-2015

The scene faded into another.

"You're going the fuck down, Ward!"

"In your dreams!" Naomi Ward responded as she kicked out at Harper.

Whatever it was, the two girls did not get along and they were constantly at each other's throats. The instructors actively encouraged the 'banter', turning a blind eye to the cuts and the bruises - they saw it as 'character building'. Therefore, the two evenly-matched girls would lay into one another whenever possible, often resulting in heavy bruising and numerous cuts on their bodies. Just to make things worse, the bastard instructors opted to relocate the girl's sleeping accommodation. So, after the two girls had finished their sparring session, they had both showered and cleaned themselves up. Then, they both received a nasty shock as they returned to their respective dormitories to find that they had both been shifted into a third dormitory.

"Well, well, you must be the new bitches," a tall girl of maybe eleven-years-old commented as she glared down at the two newcomers. "I am Charlie and you will obey me, or I will snap you both in half. Your beds are over there - back corner . . . and no lesbian shit."

Harper scowled. "Isn't Charlie a boy's name?" she asked cheekily.

Whack!

Harper crashed to the floor of the dormitory with blood pouring from her nose. She quickly jumped back to her feet and punched 'Charlie' in the chest, shoving the older girl backwards.

"No more fighting."

Charlie turned to see another girl - this one maybe a year older with jet black hair - and she backed down, skulking off to her own bed, three down from the two which were now the home for Naomi and Harper. Harper grinned; there were always bigger fish in the sea - or just a bigger *Predator*. Ward was not amused by her new bed - but there was nothing that she could do about it and she knew it. Harper scowled, flicking her bedmate the finger.

"Stay away from me, Brown, or I kill you in your sleep."

"You're all talk, Ward."

Saturday, October 29th, 2016

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"Did you honestly think I was dead?"

"We had no reason to doubt the bastard," Keira replied out of all honesty.

"Well, you should have done a better job of rescuing me, then," Harper growled angrily.

"That's unfair!" Keira retorted. "We did everything that we could."

"For fuck's sake, Keira, I was drugged - they injected me with some shit which made me pass out and it paralyzed my body as well as slowed my breathing. I was scared to death when I awoke as I could not move until it wore off. Did anybody even bother to check the bloody video?"

"Eric gave it a cursory look, but we were all in a bad place and we missed you so much - losing you . . . coming so close to you. . ."

"I know - it was hard . . . it really was," Harper relented.

"You've been through so much, Harps - I'm really proud of you. I love you so much."

"I love you, too, Keira."

August 2016

The crash was spectacular - at least that was the considered opinion of several of the witnesses.

It was not often that you saw a large five-door hatchback weighing almost two tons flying through the air. The 2008 Ford Mondeo had clipped the rear end of a

car transporter as the transporter had slammed on its brakes thanks to a small Hyundai which had cut up the six-axle, articulated lorry. The Mondeo's left front corner had lifted, rolling the car over and thrusting it upwards. The front end of the car had then crashed down, bending the entire engine compartment backwards towards the windscreen. Despite the deployment of the multiple airbags in an attempt to mitigate injury to the three occupants of the vehicle, the incredible damage to the vehicle was passed onto the three fragile human beings, crushing and tearing at the flesh and bone as the vehicle had crashed down onto its right side, barely recognisable as a vehicle. The wreckage was strewn all around and mercifully, of the three occupants, two had died on impact whilst the third, a ten-year-old girl in the front passenger seat of the Mondeo, had passed out.

To the police, paramedics, and firefighters who had attended the road traffic accident, it was one of the worst scenes they had attended.

Sunday, October 31st, 2016

***St Thomas' Hospital
The Fifth Floor, Children's Wing***

As Harper was no longer comatose and she was safe, Keira had opted to stay in a nearby hotel where she could face her own emotions while allowing Harper her space.

Harper was feeling drowsy from the medication and also more than a little tired from her sister's visit. At the sound of a gentle knocking, she saw a tall girl put her head around the door to her room.

"Hello."

"Hello," Harper replied.

"I'm Diana."

"Harper."

Diana came in and she stood beside the bed - the girl was on crutches, Harper noticed as she fell back onto her pillows and then began to cry. Diana looked a little unnerved.

"Sorry," Harper offered. "I try not to show pain in front of my sister - I've been holding it in."

"Was that your sister?"

"Yes - Keira."

"I can sit with you, if you'd like?"

Harper simply shrugged noncommittedly.

"How old are you?" Diana asked, obviously eager to talk even if Harper was not.

"Nine."

"I just turned eleven. What happened to you? You look bad."

"Beyond my being abducted and tortured, I can't really say, sorry," Harper replied, tiring of the conversation very quickly.

"I'm in with my legs - they got hurt in a car crash . . . couple months back."

Harper looked downwards out of curiosity, and her eyes went wide as she noticed that the girl who rested on crutches had no feet and she was missing quite a bit more, too. Diana was an amputee - a double amputee.

"What legs?"

"I think I left them somewhere. . ."

Harper actually laughed, and she instantly hated herself for it.

"Sorry."

"Gallows humour *is* allowed around here, Harper - the fifth floor is for reprobates like us."

"Miss Price!"

"The prison warden is back," Diana quipped as the ward sister put her head around the door and the woman glared disapprovingly at the eleven-year-old.

"What have I told you about disturbing the other children?" the woman in her early forties demanded.

Sister Bartholomew was the senior nurse on the floor and her word was law - even the doctors did not trifle with her.

"I have to agree, Diana," Doctor Schneider commented as he followed the woman into the room. "Harper needs her rest. Out!"

"I'll be back when the old people are gone," Diana said loudly enough for the 'old people' to hear as she crutched herself out of the room with a big grin on her face.

Harper smiled as her new friend vanished.

The next day

Monday, November 1st

Scotland

"Where have you been?"

"What were you doing?"

"What's with the bruising?"

Olivia Kensington received a lot of attention from her friends who had not seen her in many weeks. For the thirteen-year-old girl, it was difficult. She could not tell anybody anything at all - a fact which Jasper had hammered home to her, Jessica, and Christopher. She had almost betrayed *Vengeance* once - never again. Instead, she just smiled sweetly and explained that she had been involved in a minor car accident while they had been away visiting a sick relative. It was a good enough story as any and she enjoyed the attention that she was receiving from her friends. Jessica, however, took great joy in pointing out one aspect of their time away.

"Did Olivia tell you about the semen in her pubes?" the eleven-year-old girl chuckled as she walked past her sister.

Olivia's mouth dropped open and her face turned bright red as her friends demanded to know more.

As for Naomi and Kaitlin, life was returning to boring normality.

Kaitlin had complained bitterly as Cassie had ensured that the youngster was dressed correctly and that her hair was perfect. Kaitlin hated to be called 'sweet' and 'cute', but she allowed Cassie to be 'Mum' and sort out her two girls. Naomi had no problems with the attention, she was enjoying being 'normal' again.

"Okay, Kaitlin," Cassie lectured. "Where are your fists going to be, today?"

Kaitlin rolled her eyes before responding.

"By my sides."

"Are you going to hit anybody?"

"No."

"Are you going to cause anybody pain?"

"If they . . . no."

"Are you going to be a normal-ish eight-year-old?"

"Never in a month of Sundays!" Naomi exclaimed.

"What did I say about your fists, Kaitlin?"

The fiery youngster returned her fists back to her sides and she just glared up at the smirking Naomi. Then Cassie turned towards the older girl.

"Now, Naomi, you are not going to annoy Kaitlin, are you?"

"No, Mum."

"Would you care to elaborate on that," Cassie pushed.

"I promise not to annoy Kaitlin," Naomi growled, annoyed that her favourite past time was banned.

Kaitlin just grinned in response to Naomi being put in her place.

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For Craig, things were a lot more difficult.

He had never felt for a person what he felt for Olivia. They were in different classes but that did not prevent them from meeting up at lunchtime for some idle gossip. It did not take very long for Olivia's friends to figure out whose semen had been involved and they giggled their way through lunch while Craig and Olivia did their utmost to ignore them. Their day passed peacefully until it was time to head home. David was standing with Lynn and both were chuckling as they two teenagers approached.

"What's so funny?" Olivia demanded.

"Dad," Craig warned. "If you are about to humiliate me in front of all my friends. . ."

"Ewww . . . are they together again?" Jessica grumbled as she stalked past.

"People keep asking me about Olivia and her pubes - ugh!" Christopher commented as he strode past making a beeline for the car.

"I'll text you," Craig offered as he gave Olivia a peck on the cheek.

Olivia blushed as Jessica called out, "Disgusting!"

The following morning

Tuesday, November 2nd

St Thomas' Hospital

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"Will you please stop treating me like a child!"

"Harps, you need help."

"I can feed myself."

"You rush it and then you make yourself sick - you've barely eaten for weeks and you need to take it slowly."

Before Harper could make a suitable retort, a familiar but very unexpected voice cut in.

"Just do what you are told, Harps - take it from me; you need all the help you can get."

Harper did a doubletake before her face exploded into an enormous fangirl grin.

"Stephanie!"

"Just thought we'd pop in to say hello," an American voice explained.

"Mindy!" Keira exclaimed as she jumped to her feet. "Dave, hello!"

"Abby's gone directly to Scotland to screw Eric - no surprise there. She's delivering some new tech for Eric to replace the destroyed stuff."

"What the fuck happened to your hair?" Harper exclaimed.

"A gift from a *Marauder*," Stephanie replied before she turned to Keira. "May I speak with Harper alone?" Stephanie asked Keira pointedly.

Keira hesitated, and Harper shook her head; a look of fear crossing her face.

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Once the room was empty and the door had been closed, Stephanie turned on Harper.

"Stop it!" Stephanie ordered.

"What?"

"The hard girl thing. Believe me, it doesn't make a difference. Don't hold it in. Don't be afraid to cry; you are only human and right now, you are not a *Predator*. Just be a young girl for a while - you'll enjoy it; I did. Let Keira look after you. You both need the time together. I felt angry when Mindy and Dave did everything for me, but they did it out of love. Right now, I look back and I am glad that I showed my true feelings of how I felt. It was embarrassing at times, but we're beyond that, right?"

"Right," Harper replied before she dissolved into tears.

Without hesitation Stephanie walked around the bed and she took hold of Harper's right hand. Stephanie felt the strong grip of Harper's uninjured hand.

"Let them know how you feel. Don't hold it in - it isn't worth it. Just being able to touch somebody who loves and cares about you. Feeling their hand on yours . . . being able to squeeze and feeling a squeeze back. Does it feel better?"

Harper nodded as she continued to squeeze Stephanie's hand.

"She does that a lot, you know."

Stephanie peered up at the door and she saw a tall girl of maybe eleven-years-old push her way in through the door - she was seated in a wheelchair. Harper wiped her eyes.

"That's Diana - she left her legs on a motorway along with quite a few of her brain cells," she grinned.

"Hi, Diana - I'm Stephanie, a friend of Harper."

"Hello," Diana said, offering her right hand to Stephanie who shook it. "You telling her to stop being an idiot?"

"Something like that," Stephanie conceded.

"I tried that - only she's stubborn."

"She is that," Stephanie laughed.

The three girls chatted for a short while before Keira, Dave, and Mindy returned.

"I'll be right back," Stephanie commented.

Across the corridor and two doors down

For the young teen, life had taken a nasty turn.

It had been four days since the violent death of her father. She knew he was dead and she was vaguely aware of the details, but she was struggling with so much. Not only had she lost her father, she had also been scarred for life by one of those *Predator* vigilantes. The past few days had been full of humiliation and pain. The Royal Marines had been very rough with her, despite her injury. She had been flown aboard a Royal Navy ship, barely conscious, her veins teaming with morphine-sulphate. The next day or so had passed in a blur before she vaguely remembered another helicopter ride and then a trip in an ambulance. She had finally awoken, just the day before, her drug-fogged brain thinking it had all been a dream - at least until a nurse had changed the bandage on her right wrist.

She had screamed as the realisation that she had lost her entire right hand and that it had not all just been some hideous dream. The thirteen-year-old girl had screamed and screamed, so much that she had had to be sedated. Then, just that morning, she had begun to tolerate the bandage-wrapped stump. She hated the very sight of it, but as she lay there in the hospital bed, wearing nothing but a hospital gown, she just cried and cried. However, she was interrupted by her door opening. With a start, she saw a large man peering in and then a skinny girl with short hair stepped in and the door was closed securely. Scarlett Radford may have been in an alien place, and all alone in the world, but she recognised death when it came.

The girl had the same dark eyes as Harper Sharp.

"Hello, Scarlett."

"You're like her," Scarlett replied carefully. "You're a *Predator* and you've come to kill me."

Stephanie took a deep breath as she approached the bed.

"Yes, Scarlett, you are correct. Yes, I am a *Predator*. I spend my time looking after those who survive. It appears that one of my kin has already wrought vengeance on you for what you did to Harper. Now, my first idea was to kill you."

Stephanie paused as she placed a very sharp, six-inch knife down on the bed beside Scarlett's right leg. Beside that, Stephanie placed three items: a pistol, a magazine, and a suppressor. Scarlett's eyes went wide, and she began to hyperventilate. Stephanie casually attached the stubby suppressor onto the muzzle of the Glock 26 Gen4 pistol. Then came the ten-round magazine which Stephanie inserted into the butt of the pistol.

"Don't even think of screaming, bitch. That man out there is a Royal Marine and he was there at what we like to call the Radford Incursion . . . must sound good to have an attack named after your father . . . anyway, where was I. Yes, that Royal Marine knows what you did to Harper - or what you allowed to be done to Harper."

Stephanie pressed the cold muzzle of the nine-millimetre pistol against the shaking girl's chest.

"Nobody would hear the report of the gun firing - you'd be very dead. Maybe I should return the favour; I saw Harper's wounds and I have a very sharp blade."

"I tried to help her. My father forced me . . . please believe me. I looked after her and fed her . . . I'm sorry . . . so very sorry."

Stephanie saw through the tears and her eyes bored into those of Scarlett Radford.

"I'm about second chances," Stephanie said as the gun and knife rapidly vanished from sight. "You slip up, just the once, and I will make sure that you suffer. My name is Walker, Stephanie Walker, and I destroyed *Urban Predator*. I continue to destroy anyone who intends to hurt a *Predator*. Do you want me as a friend or an enemy, Scarlett Radford?"

It was almost a full minute before Scarlett could respond.

"Friend?"

"I accept."

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Stephanie returned to Harper's room after giving the Royal a nod.

"What's up, Steph?" Keira asked as she noticed the ten-year-old looking worried.

"Could I come stay with you, tonight, Keira . . . please?"

"Don't you want to stay with Dave and Mindy?"

"God, no!"

"Am I missing something?" Keira asked as she looked up at the grinning Mindy.

"It's their fucking anniversary - and that is exactly what they will be doing from dusk till dawn: fucking!"

Keira laughed out loud.

"Okay - we can have a girl's night in."

Stephanie grinned enormously, relieved that she would not have to spend the night trying to ignore the goings on in the next room.

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Keira walked Dave and Mindy out, leaving Stephanie to chat with Harper, Diana having vanished back to her own room as Sister Bartholomew came on her rounds.

"She's strong, Keira," Mindy said. "She's been through a lot in her short life, but she has you, and you are strong. Give her some space - that's difficult, I know. I went a little over the top when Steph was in the hospital and I'm sure that she hated my attention at times. However, I think Steph and I are a lot closer now than before."

"She's so angry with me. She blames me for believing she was dead."

"That was very difficult," Mindy admitted. "Not knowing is horrible - I've been there with Anne-Marie and Stephanie. Just be there for Harper no matter her demands or threats. She doesn't know it, but she really needs you - her friends, too. Once the physical scars are healed, you need to get to work on the psychological scars deep inside. Stephanie had nightmares for weeks and she still does. We're all here to help, Keira, you are not alone."

"Vengeance has been through a lot," Dave said. "You all need time to come to terms with what you all went through. You were hunted and hounded across the country but you all survived - all of you. Harper went missing for a short while and you all did everything you could to get her back. Radford was ruthless, and he is only one member of the *Scorpio* organisation which has its tentacles all over the world. We are aware of the UK cell which still exists. We have seen the appearance of the French cell and the US cell. This is a major threat to security for both Europe and the United States. This is the beginning of a world-wide problem and between our three organisations: *Fusion*, *Vengeance*, and *Honneur*, we can prevail."

"We do have a rocky road ahead," Keira agreed. "Thank you, Mindy. I owe you a lot. Thanks to you and Stephanie, I got my Harper back the first time after I thought she was gone for good. I'm still struggling with losing her again. I felt like I had betrayed her by not keeping her safe. But then I remember what she is and that she is perfectly capable of looking after herself. We need each other, I know that."

"Stay firm, Keira - it will pass," Mindy said as she gave her friend a hug.

"You two have fun tonight," Keira grinned, and Mindy fought back the blush which spread across her cheeks.

"Oh, we will," Dave chuckled.

*This storyline continues in **Chapter 354: London Anniversary of Forsaken** as well as in **Chapter 47: The Vigilante of Vengeance**.*