

**Saturday, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Vengeance Command Centre  
Edinburgh, Scotland**

"You know, Cam, it is so peaceful without any of those pesky *Predators*," Eric commented.

"You miss them, Eric."

"I do?"

"You never have a bad word to say about them," Natasha laughed.

"They break all my stuff and complain about everything I make for them," Eric grouched.

"You have a point," Cameron admitted.

"We going out, tonight?" Natasha wanted to know.

"Damn right, we are!" Cameron responded.

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***That night***

***Glasgow***

It had been quite a while since it had last been just the two of them.

The brother and sister vigilante team cruised along the M80 motorway and they took the slip road onto the westbound M8 motorway. As was usual, most of the drivers were more intent on getting to their destination (and to hell with the mandated speed limit) rather than ogling vigilantes on motorcycles. For Drift and Crimson, that was just fine. They liked their anonymity and the darkness which assisted in keeping that anonymity. They also enjoyed the freedom of being out on their motorcycles: A Triumph Tiger Sport in dark blue for Drift, and a Triumph Speed 94 in crimson for Crimson. Though they enjoyed the time alone, they were also very conscious of the fact that they were alone with very little in the way of backup to call upon should things go wrong.

They were both seasoned vigilantes and they did not fear things going wrong. They concentrated on the night's mission and headed deeper into the city where alcohol flowed along with recreational drugs - at best. They had a reputation and when they cruised the streets, most tended to behave with just a drunken wave. Glasgow had a reputation for being a bad city at night, but that was mostly in the past. As a general rule, it was safe to wander about the city at night and many thousands did, on most nights. Apart from a few random fights which were expertly handled by the Police, Crimson and Drift had very little to do - at least until they spotted an unwelcome face nearby some student accommodation.

"Weasel!"

"My queen!"

"Can it, you sycophantic, brown-nosing little twat!" Crimson growled.

"Sorry, I meant no disrespect . . . I . . ."

"Why are you here?" Drift growled. "You peddling drugs to the students again?"

"No way - not a damn chance; and not after what you did to me the last time."

The ginger-haired man cringed slightly at the memory. He looked up at the two vigilantes, neither of whom appeared very amused by his antics. He decided that he needed to say something useful before he got his arse kicked.

"Something is building."

"What is it, that is building, Weasel?" Crimson demanded.

"There are some people in Scotland who do not belong," Weasel explained. "They are not immigrants, nor tourists, neither. Frenchies and some Yanks - they are here to cause trouble and despite them trying to stay apart, I've seen them working together."

"Is that it?" Drift asked.

"I'm doing my best!"

"We need more, assuming you want to stay out of prison," Crimson pointed out.

"There's muscle in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirling - also Carlisle. After events in London a few weeks back, I've been getting worried."

"*I hate to cut in, guys, but there's a storm a-brewing a few streets over,*" Q cut in over the radio.

"On our way!" Drift responded.

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### ***Blythswood Square,***

Drift entered the square and he grimaced as he saw a fight underway.

It was no ordinary fight between drunks, instead, it was a group of men, at least a dozen, and they had all their attentions on a single foe. As Drift sought out the foe, he caught sight of her - it was a storm, just as Q had advised.

"Crimson - Storm's in trouble!" Drift radioed.

Storm was in way over her head and she was struggling. She had already put three down onto the pavement, but it was obvious that she was struggling to keep from being overwhelmed. Drift jumped off his motorcycle and he waded in, giving Storm a way out. After three more men joined the pile on the pavement, Drift was able to grab Storm by the arm and propel her out on to the road. There the vigilante looked around as she heard a motorcycle engine coming closer. Crimson held out her left hand as she pressed her horn, attracting Storm's attention.

As Crimson sped past, Storm grasped the outstretched hand with her own left hand and she swung up onto the motorcycle.

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Crimson did not stop until they reached Kelvinside Park.

They waited for a few minutes before Drift pulled up alongside and they all dismounted from the motorcycles.

"Thanks," Storm said.

"You okay?" Crimson asked.

"I'm fine - nothing more than a few bruises," Storm replied.

"Who were your friends?" Drift asked.

"I don't know. They just appeared, and they surrounded me - nobody said a word. I've never seen anything like them before - where the hell did they come from?"

"Storm. There are forces at work across the globe. We call them the Axis of Evil. The UK branch is badly hurt, and the US branch is causing trouble. There are also other branches: French, Russian, and Sicilian."

"You saying this is just going to get worse?" Storm wanted to know.

"To be honest - yes," Drift advised the new vigilante.

"This puts a new slant on things," Storm commented.

"Just a bit," Crimson responded. "You may want to sit this thing out, Storm."

"Can I help?"

"I thought you were a lone wolf, Storm," Crimson pointed out.

"Looks like that may have to change."

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***The following morning***  
***Sunday, November 27<sup>th</sup>***

***Marchmont Crescent, Edinburgh***

For Amber Dawson, it was the start of a new day, just like each and every day of the over two months which she had already endured in the safehouse - maybe prison might have been a better description.

The script was the same: Wake up. Get out of bed. Walk across to the bathroom. Turn on the shower. Dump her pyjama bottoms. Pee. Pull off her top. Climb into the shower. Wash. Dry. Dress. Then head for breakfast. As a rule, she was left alone. Her minders appeared at random intervals to check that she was still alive and to stock up the food cupboards in the kitchen. They had also provided clothing to supplement the limited items in which she had arrived. The rest of each day was spent thinking and reading - mainly newspapers and magazines which her minders brought - and she tried to piece together what had happened and what was happening. She had been seized by *Vengeance*, but then they had suddenly vanished - until a few weeks before when they had reappeared in an explosive emergence which had resulted in armour-clad vigilantes appearing live in Downing Street.

Amber had been able to backtrack seemingly innocuous reports in various tabloids and magazines, including the shitty ones which still thought that Elvis was alive and well, living in Bradford with Marilyn Monroe! Those shitty rags tended to report stories which the mainstream tabloids would not touch. Amber had kept clippings of mysterious attacks and explosions. There had been the reported sighting of black helicopters over the mysterious and top secret Boscombe Down including the firing of surface-to-air missiles. There had been explosions in various parts of the southwest, then explosions off the east coast. Submarines had been reported surfacing and firing torpedoes. There had been a supposed attack on the Prime Minister's country residence and Chequers and then a massive amphibious assault which had been identified as a military exercise which had got out of hand.

Amber was not buying any of it - *Vengeance* had been caught with its hand in the cookie jar and they had been disavowed; at least that was her reading of the situation.

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**Over the Atlantic Ocean  
South of Greenland**

**Aboard Alpha Foxtrot**

Most aboard were dozing as the Gulfstream 650ER executive jet streaked above the ocean at 48,000-feet.

Harper was with Keira in the aft cabin, just the pair of them. Harper lay on the sofa while Keira sat across the cabin in a seat. Both sipped at a cup of tea each and they talked. Harper was telling her sister about everything which she had experienced in the Battle Bunker. Keira smiled at how excited her little sister was and she dutifully listened to everything that Harper had to say. Finally, after quite a while, the conversation thinned, and Harper laid back to rest.

"You get some sleep now, sweetie," Keira suggested.

"Okay," Harper conceded as she smiled and closed her eyes.

Keira smiled back as she got up to head forward for a new cup of tea. She passed by Naomi and Mary who were talking tiredly between themselves. Olivia was giggling with Electra over something both thought very funny, and Jordan was talking with Craig. The rest were fast asleep for the flight which made for a quiet cabin. Amy already had a cup ready for Keira, who nodded her thanks and headed back aft. As she strapped back into her seat, she looked over at the sleeping Harper - only she was not asleep.

"How's Diana doing?" Harper asked as her eyelids opened and her piercing brown eyes bored into those of her sister.

"She's doing good. Blake says that she's had a couple of days learning to use her new legs."

"How's Blake?" Harper grinned.

"Blake is fine," Keira replied, her cheeks going visibly pink. "He misses you."

"Strange as it sounds, I miss Diana."

"How would you feel if she came to live with us?"

"You want to adopt her?" Harper did not sound surprised.

"I can't just leave her to be swept into the system. She also knows about who we are - well, she guessed, and I know that she won't let it go," Keira replied. "She's a lovely young girl and you do get on with her."

"Yes, I like her, but she can be really bossy, and she thinks she knows everything . . . what does *that* look mean?"

"You and Diana have a lot in common, honey."

"I suppose. We have that bedroom downstairs, too. Yes, I could get used to having her living with us, I think."

"Assuming that she would be my daughter, she would be *your* aunt."

"Auntie Diana - just what I need," Harper grouched. "What about Blake?"

"What about him?"

"He going to be Diana's Dad and *my* brother-in-law?"

"Would you like him to be?"

"It would be nice for you to have somebody. I'm your sister, and I have my friends, but you need somebody. I find it unbelievably disgusting to even consider what you might be doing in bed with a man, but I'm mature enough to understand that adults need certain things. You need love and companionship, I understand that. I can give you love, but I know that you need something stronger than that."

"Thank you, Harper - that was all very mature of you. You're growing up fast."

"Sometimes events force you to grow up early. First *Urban Predator* and now Radford. I want you to be happy, Keira, and I want us both to be happy. You have my support, no matter what you decide where Diana and Blake are concerned."

"Okay. Thank you, for that."

Keira stood up and gave her sister a kiss.

"Get some sleep, little one."

"Night, Kei."

"Night, Harps."

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***The following afternoon***

***Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup>***

***London***

Everybody had gone their separate ways.

Back home. Back to School. Back to Work.

Keira had flown with Harper down to London. They had been met at London City Airport by Blake and Diana. There was something very different about the young girl and it took a moment for Harper to grasp it.

"You're taller than I thought you might be," Harper commented.

"I feel taller, I think," Diana replied. "They're taking a lot to get used to, but I'm just glad that I can get out and about without wheels - still need this damn stick, though."

"She's done very well," Blake commented as he and Keira exchanged hugs and kisses. "A few tears but we got past it."

"I am very pleased to see you like that, Diana," Keira commented, hugging the youngster. "Let's go get Harper her check-up, shall we?"

"Cool! Just what I always wanted!" Harper growled sarcastically.

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***Three days later***

***Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>***

***St Thomas' Hospital, London***

***The Fifth Floor, Children's Wing***

Some were happy, while another was apprehensively sad.

Harper was over the moon because she was finally leaving hospital for the very last time. The same applied to Diana who was pleased that Harper was done with the place. She had enjoyed showing off her new legs to the nurses at the

hospital. The two girls had also paid a visit to Scarlett Radford. The girl was morose, to put it mildly. It did not help that Diana flaunted her new legs which just had Scarlett sinking into a much sulkier state. Harper felt sorry for her former adversary, but there was nothing that she could do to help. For Scarlett, the final goodbyes were not fun and before long, she was alone again, and she knew that she would stay alone. Part of her wanted to be alone – she was embarrassed by what she had been part of. She had nightmares where she was tortured for hours in the same way that young Harper had been. The dreams had been so vivid and so real. Why could she not have stood up to her father and protected Harper? Why did she go along with it? How could she have been so callous? She had asked about her future, but nobody had told her anything. She figured that she would be dumped into some children's home – she was only thirteen and far too young to fend for herself. She was also penniless as her father's money had been tied up by the Government.

She had nothing: No money. No family. No friends. No hand. No future.

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### ***That Afternoon***

The drive north was entertaining for Keira.

In the back of the Audi Q5, the two girls laughed, giggled, and sang their way up the motorway from London. Anything which put a smile on Harper's face was good in Keira's book. The same also applied to Diana. The eleven-year-old was grinning at Harper's jokes – even the crude ones. More than once Keira had thoughts concerning what she was doing. Taking on a child was one thing, but a disabled child? Diana had yet to learn exactly why Harper was the way she was. Would that alter the way Diana thought about Harper, and by extension, Keira? So many questions, but so few answers.

It was always that way and Keira was used to it.

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### ***East Mayfield***

It was late evening by the time they arrived at their home.

For Keira, it had been weeks since she had last been there, but she found Natasha waiting for her. Natasha had cleaned the house from top to bottom and restocked the fridge and freezer, as well as the kitchen cupboards in expectation of Keira's return.

"Hi, Harper – you look good," Natasha said as Harper hobbled slowly up the path towards the front door.

"I'm sure this path's gotten longer since I was last here," Harper grouched good-naturedly.

"Move it, short-arse!" Diana laughed.

"Natasha – this is Diana," Keira said. "Diana, this is Natasha."

"Hi, Natasha."

"Hello, Diana – please, call me Nats."

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"My sister's bedroom is up the stairs, turn left. My bedroom is up the stairs to the right. Bathroom straight ahead. Your bedroom, Diana, is to the left of

the stairs. The toilet is there on the right. Living room in there - dining room and kitchen are through there," Harper said happily.

Harper hobbled forward, pulling Diana with her. Diana pushed open the door to her new bedroom. The walls were painted pink, and there was a single window off to one side. A single bed with pink bedding lay alongside the wall opposite the door. Beside the bed was a desk and chair, adjacent to the window. To the right of the window, in the corner, there was a sink. Between the sink and the door, there was a wardrobe with three drawers at the bottom. Diana's grin was enormous as she took in the colour scheme and the little things, such as soft red pillows on the bed and a large pile of soft toys piled up beneath the window.

"I love it!" Diana squealed happily before hugging Harper tightly.

Diana quickly moved on from the startled Harper and she hugged Keira just as tightly. Keira looked down at the little girl who had started to cry. Diana felt extremely overwhelmed by her treatment, but she was also very happy. That evening, after Natasha had left, the three of them sat down in the cosy living room. Harper insisted that Diana share the couch with her while Keira sat in a comfy armchair. Between the three of them, they consumed two large pizzas, a few litres of Pepsi Max, and some chocolate ice-cream. By ten that night, both girls were very tired, and Keira encouraged them both to get to their beds. Harper insisted on struggling up the stairs on her own while Diana also insisted on doing it all herself.

When Keira went to check on Harper, she found her sister wearing an oversized T-shirt and hobbling out of the bathroom. Keira waited patiently for Harper to hobble into her bedroom and then flop into her bed. There was intense relief on Harper's face. She had never expected to ever see her home again, let alone sleep in her own bed. There were a few unbidden tears, but otherwise, Harper was smiling.

"Good night, Harps, sleep well."

"Night, Kei. Love you."

"Love you, too. Sleep Tight."

Keira turned off the light and she headed downstairs.

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Diana was sitting on her bed, pulling on her pyjamas.

Her 'legs' were arranged neatly at the end of the bed where she could easily get to them. Keira pulled back the duvet and Diana slid her stumps underneath so that Keira could then tuck the duvet in around her.

"You alright?" Keira asked.

"This is all amazing, Keira. I love it all, and I'm so happy to be out of London. Even better that I have me feet, so to speak."

"You get a good night's sleep, okay?"

"Yes, Keira. Night."

"Night, Diana. Sleep Tight."

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"So, you all made it okay?"

"We did, Blake. Thanks for everything. I'm going to miss you."

"I'll be with you in a little over two weeks - it'll pass quickly, I promise."

"You promise?"

"I do. Sleep Tight, Keira."

"Sleep Tight, Blake."

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***The following morning***

***Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>***

***St Thomas' Hospital, London***

***The Fifth Floor, Children's Wing***

Scarlett Radford received little more than forty minutes warning.

She had next to nothing to pack, so that task was completed in just two minutes. After receiving her patient notes from Dr Schneider, the youngster was led out of the hospital for the first time since her arrival, six weeks previously. Where she was headed, she had no idea. Outside, she was met by two young adults.

"Hello, Scarlett, my name is Cameron King, and this is my sister."

"Natasha King, Scarlett. You will be residing with us for the next few months."

"How's the new hand?" Cameron asked the girl.

Scarlett apprehensively raised her right limb.

"It's going to take some getting used to," she admitted as the four fingers moved one after another.

She had only had the hand a week - a gift, apparently, from some black guy. It was no direct replacement for the hand which she had had since birth, but it had allowed her some independence as she'd figured out how to use the state-of-the-art computerised device.

"Where am I going?"

"North of the wall, honey!" Natasha grinned.

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***East Mayfield***

***Edinburgh, Scotland***

"Hey, Harper!"

Harper groaned as she grabbed a spare pillow and she held it to her face with her right hand.

"Come on!"

Harper screamed into the same pillow for a few seconds before she threw the pillow towards the sound.

"Great - nice way to treat a friend!"

"Diana!" Harper growled as she forced her eyes open. "What time is it?"

"About six o'clock."

"DIANA!"



"What's up, grumpy?" Keira chuckled as Harper limped into the kitchen an hour later.

While Keira had no problems with early mornings - thanks to the navy - Harper had never been a morning girl, even when she was little, so 6 A.M. was really pushing it. Keira was struggling not to laugh at the youngster, but Harper's expression was so adorable. It was caught between anger at being woken up by Diana - yes, Keira had heard the scream - and affection towards Diana. If it had been anybody else, Harper would have simply punched their lights out - especially if had been Kaitlin or Naomi - but Diana was different as far as Harper was concerned. Keira gave in as she saw the smiling Diana swaggering in on her new legs, and she started to laugh. Harper pouted as she endured her big sister's laughter.

"Okay, I look like crap," Harper admitted.

"You got that right!" Diana grinned. "What you guys got for breakfast?"

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After breakfast, Harper and Diana dressed ready for the day.

Diana helped Harper with her trousers as her feet were still tender and difficult to manoeuvre trouser legs over. The left hand was something else and Harper closed her eyes as Diana took her time easing it through the sleeve of a blouse. Short sleeves would have been best, but it was December, so that was a no go. Harper felt humiliated at having to receive help, but Diana was gentle and did nothing to further embarrass the nine-year-old. Despite Harper finding the older girl distinctly annoying at times, she also liked the girl immensely. Harper missed having a companion and moving away from Naomi and Kaitlin had always been hard.

But Harper felt like she could trust Diana.

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"What do you want to do today?" Keira asked the two girls as they returned downstairs.

Diana shrugged.

"Keira, I want to explain to Diana what I am and why am what I am."

"Bit of a mouthful, but okay."

"Am I going to like this?" Diana asked somewhat apprehensively as she sat down on the couch.

"No, but I think that you need to know all about me before you make any decisions about where you want to live," Harper replied as she struggled to look Diana in the eye. "You have already figured out that I am a part of *Vengeance*, but there is more - so much more."

"Go ahead," Diana said.

"I am a *Predator*. I was taken when I was just seven and I endured hell while I was trained to become an assassin. . ."

Over two hours later, Diana was sobbing and so was Harper. Diana was filled with sorrow for Harper and while she had wanted to know all about the mysterious girl who had appeared in the hospital with major injuries, the revelations were mind-boggling. Government schemes. Children being forced to kill and to learn awful things. Diana had learnt about Polaris and everything

which had occurred since Harper had returned to Keira - right up to when she was taken and then rescued by Royal Marines in Wales of all places.

"Do you still want anything to do with me, now, Diana Price?"

Diana's eyes narrowed as she shakily got to her carbon-fibre feet and she turned to face Harper.

"Don't you dare, Harper Sharp," Diana said sharply. "You are what you are, and I like you for what you are. I knew weeks ago that you were dangerous - I could see that in your eyes - but I never flinched away from being your friend. I'm not going anywhere. None of that *Predator* stuff was your fault and now you're using what you were forced to learn for good. That just makes you a hero in my book, Harper Sharp."

Keira had never seen her little sister looking so meek and speechless as she absorbed what Diana said.

"Thanks," was all Harper could say.

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***Early that same afternoon***

***Southfield Letham, Falkirk***

The flight had been short - about an hour.

Then had come a drive of about forty minutes - due mainly to the traffic - before they had pulled through a set of electronically-activated wrought iron gates. The house was large and spread over two floors. Scarlett was led inside and shown around before being taken up the stairs to a bedroom which overlooked the grass which surrounded the property on all sides.

"Scarlett, this is your bedroom. The bathroom is next door," Natasha said. "My bedroom is down the far end of the house, while my brother is by the stairs. Make yourself at home and then you are free to do whatever you wish. Tomorrow, I will take you shopping and we can get you some clothes and personal things. You need anything, we'll be downstairs."

"Thank you."

Scarlett was overwhelmed by everything and once Natasha had gone back down the stairs, Scarlett lay down on the bed and she tried to make sense of everything which was happening to her. She held her new hand up in front of her face. It was black - she had a flesh-like 'glove', but she liked the skeletal-like fingers and the movements mesmerised her as she triggered the fingers to fold and then to form a fist. The hand was carbon-fibre, making it very light, much like her original hand. She knew that she had to make a choice of how to live out her life. Not that she had many choices to make. Her life was in the hands of Cameron and Natasha - they seemed nice enough, but how much did they know about her . . . and what she had participated in?

Only time would tell, she thought as her eyes closed and she drifted off into a troubled sleep.

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"Scarlett."

"Scarlett."

"Scarlett."

The thirteen-year-old opened her eyes - it was dark. For a moment, her brain struggled to comprehend where she was, then she remembered as a light came on beside her.

"Hey, honey - it's time for dinner."

"Natasha?"

"Yeah - call me, Nats. You hungry."

"Yes, I think I am."

"I'll leave you to sort yourself out and then come downstairs to the kitchen."

Scarlett sat up and swung her legs to around to rest her feet on the floor. She rubbed her eyes with her left hand as she woke up properly before heading for the bathroom and a wee. For a moment, as she left the bedroom, she was a little lost, but she found the stairs and she followed the smell of food. The kitchen was warm and cosy. Scarlett found Cameron and Natasha arranging several dishes of food onto the kitchen table.

"We didn't know what you liked, so we just cooked a range of stuff," Natasha explained.

"I cooked - Nats cannot cook to save herself," Cameron clarified. "Nats just took the chips out of the freezer - and she managed to screw that up."

Scarlett grinned.

"Take a seat. We have chips. We have fish fingers. We have some pork chops. We have some . . . well, they started off as chicken nuggets, but Nats managed to burn a few of them when she 'accidentally' nudged up the oven temperature," Cameron went on.

"I was just trying to help," Natasha tried.

"It looks so good!" Scarlett exclaimed.

"Dig in!" Cameron directed.

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Scarlett was amazed by the spread laid out before her.

She had not seen so much good food in weeks, if not months. Her father generally ate small and usually boring meals. After she had eaten her fill and drunk herself to the point where she had to go to wee, she sat back down and felt pensive. Her expression betrayed her turn of mind.

"What is wrong?" Natasha asked.

"What do you know about me?" Scarlett asked.

"We know everything about you, Scarlett Radford," Cameron replied evenly. "We know everything, right down to how you lost your right hand, and how you gained a replacement."

"So, you know what I've done?"

"Yes, we know all about what happened to Harper Sharp," Natasha replied. "That girl is our friend, but as far as we can tell, you helped her when you did not need to. It was your father who was the inhuman animal. You cared for our friend and for that, you are being given a second chance at life. Yes, you can look at yourself as being on probation. How long that is for, is up to you,

Scarlett. Take this new chance, use it well. It will be difficult, and your past will come back to haunt you, but I am certain that you can beat it."

"Will I see Harper again?"

"Oh, yes - most definitely."

"I'd like that."

Scarlett processed all that she had been told and she liked the sound of it all. At least she had nothing to hide from Cameron and Natasha, which was a weight off her mind. It would be a struggle, they were not wrong there.

"Every journey begins with the first step, Scarlett," Natasha said warmly. "You have taken that first step and every step moves you closer to getting back to a normal life. We will stay with you for as long as you want us there, okay?"

"Thank you."