

**Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016**

As the British Airways Boeing 747 accelerated down the runway at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, the occupants of seats 13E and 13F were glad that they were finally out of public view.

They were flying in business class, which had had its benefits, but not enough for them to both suffer intense humiliation. They had both been delivered to the airport by Lucy, but before they had been able to leave the car, their ankle monitors were swapped for examples which did not carry any explosives. They both felt like criminals as the new monitors were attached to their left ankles. Lucy did not judge, neither did she comment. They had still felt the guilt of their actions which had brought them to the situation they were in. Only, they were being given a second chance. During their time at Safehouse Q, they had both been fitted out with a complete wardrobe of clothing - some if it very expensive. Then, after barely a week, they had both been provided with a British Passport each, and a full set of papers which had included original British birth certificates, amongst other things. They were each given \$250 and £500 in cash - low denomination notes - to cover incidental expenses while they travelled.

Very little information was provided, other than that they would be met at their destination and that there would be a code challenge.

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They had been met by a pair of uniformed Transport Security Administration (TSA) officers who took over custody from Lucy.

Their humiliations went even further as they were guided through to security where their passports were checked, re-checked, and checked again. In the case of the TSA officers, they were judging; their eyes made the two girls want to run to hide from the humiliation. Then their accessories set off the security devices and they both endured a humiliating 'enhanced' pat-down. Other members of the public were able to see them being escorted and more than once, their ankle monitors had been on public display. By the time the TSA officers had escorted them into the British Airways lounge, Charlotte was in tears and Dakota was not far behind. They could feel the glances of the businessmen and businesswomen as they slunk down into their seats to await boarding.

The call for boarding could not have come too soon and they almost bolted for the gate.

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"Hello."

Soon after take-off, Charlotte looked up to find a blonde-haired young woman looking down at them from seat 13D. Their seats were side-by-side and facing aft on the centre-line of the aircraft so that they could be together, and presumably kept away from normal people.

"Hello?" Charlotte replied.

"I hate these long flights, don't you? My name's Brooke by the way."

"Charlotte."

"You heading home? You're a Brit, right?"

"Yes, I am. I'm heading back to Scotland with my friend."

"Hi, friend!" the girl, Brooke, called out to Dakota.

"Dakota," Dakota offered.

"I'll leave you two to enjoy the flight - see ya!"

Charlotte looked over at Dakota and they both simply shrugged.

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The flight was good, and the two girls had wanted for nothing.

They were provided with meals and drinks by a dedicated stewardess - her name was Melissa - who had raised an eyebrow at the sight of the girls' ankle accessories and as a result, both girls had felt really small and full of shame at the publicly visible sight of their incarceration. Melissa had simply smiled.

"I am not judging either one of you, okay?"

Both girls had just nodded meekly as they were served their meals. The girl, Brooke, would periodically check on them for some reason or other - maybe she just wanted to chat. Ultimately, both had been very surprised at the trust which had been put in them to travel such a distance all alone. Neither girl would ever contemplate absconding - not at the risk of having a vengeful Girl coming after them.

Finally, after many hours, they landed at London Heathrow and deplaned at Terminal 5 from where a private jet would carry them north, to Edinburgh.

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***Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>***

***Edinburgh, Scotland***

As the Gulfstream jet taxied to a halt on the parking apron, a dark blue Jaguar XJL pulled up a dozen yards away from the left wingtip.

A rather grave-looking man stepped out and he waited patiently for the forward hatch on the port side of the jet to motor open before he quickly mounted the steps and entered the cabin. He looked down at the two girls and he smiled before he then looked at them with an expectant expression. Both girls began to speak.

"We are *Marauders* and we are looking for a new life," they intoned.

"Are you sorry for what you have done?" came the expected response.

"We are."

"Then a new life, you shall have," the man said cheerfully, completing the challenge. "My name is Jasper - welcome to Scotland, girls."

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***Blairhoyle***

Forty minutes later, Jasper had to shake the two girls awake.

"Where are we?" Charlotte asked, somewhat tiredly.

"At the start of your new lives," Jasper chuckled.

It was dark and just a few minutes before 5 A.M., but despite that, Cassie Perrin was awaiting their arrival.

"This way, girls."

Charlotte and Dakota followed Cassie up some stairs to where Cassie pointed out a room to each girl.

"Charlotte, you take that room which will be yours for the time being. Dakota, this room is just for now until you meet your new family tomorrow. Please get some rest and sleep as long as you need. When you awake, please feel free to make use of the bathrooms; fresh towels are there as you need them. Have a good sleep - good night."

The girls found themselves alone and after a brief goodnight, they headed into their bedrooms and they quickly stripped off before diving under the soft quilts. Both girls were pleased to be somewhere new, far away from their previous life of hell in the USA. The girls were fast asleep within seconds of their heads touching the goose feather pillows and they descended into their usual combination of dreams and nightmares. Three hours later, neither girl noticed two heads peeping in on them as Kaitlin and Naomi checked in on them; their curiosity aroused.

Cassie, however, chased both girls away and sent them downstairs for breakfast.

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It was another two hours, around 10 A.M., before Charlotte and Dakota stirred.

Charlotte was awake first and she quickly dived into the attached bathroom, both for a wee and a shower. Her skin felt clammy from the long flight and the much-needed sleep. As she climbed out of the shower, she noticed a little girl staring at her.

"Hello," Charlotte said.

"Hello - I'm Kaitlin."

"Charlotte - but I prefer Charlie."

Kaitlin studied the girl standing naked before her, focussing only on the scar which featured prominently on her stomach and then the ankle monitor - there was not much else to see, to be honest.

"I'm a criminal," Charlotte admitted, her face turning red with embarrassment and humiliation.

"No, you're not," Kaitlin replied. "You're just a girl forced to do bad things and you lost your way."

"You are a *Predator*?" Charlotte asked as she dried herself off and walked back through to the bedroom.

"Yes."

"Sorry."

"I'm used to it."

Once Charlotte was dressed, they both crossed over the hallway to find Dakota getting dressed after her own shower.

"Hi, 'kota - this is Kaitlin."

"Morning, Charlie - hello, Kaitlin."

"Hello, Dakota."

Dakota frowned before reaching out and grabbing Kaitlin by the head and twisting it.

"Hey - my head's attached, you know!" Kaitlin hissed as Dakota checked behind her right ear.

Satisfied, Dakota released the younger girl.

"Sorry, Kaitlin - I just had to check."

"You could have asked!" Kaitlin growled, but then she smiled. "You must both be very hungry - come on."

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The two girls felt timid for some reason as they followed the little girl down the stairs and into the capacious kitchen.

They could smell the food cooking and the kitchen was warm and cosy. A woman stood over by the stove, cooking while another girl, this one older than Kaitlin sat over at a table with a large dog lying on the floor beside her.

"Charlotte, Dakota, please meet my cousin/sister (long story), Naomi - and before Dakota rips off her head, yes, she's a *Predator*, too. This is our Gran, Alexandra and the furball is Sasha."

"Morning, girls!" Cassie announced as she breezed in from outside. "Had a good sleep? I see you've met my Mum and the girls."

The two girls sat down at the table, ignoring Naomi's inquisitive expression as she studied the two newcomers. Sasha, too, gazed up at the two girls checking them both out.

"Oh, wow!" Dakota exclaimed as a massive plate with a mound of food was placed before her.

Charlotte just bit her lip as her eyes went wide as a similar plate graced her side of the table too. Cassie and the younger girls each received a plate, similarly loaded with bacon, eggs, thick pork sausages, fried bread, mushrooms, fried half tomatoes, whole plum tomatoes, black pudding, and lashings of baked beans. The plates were quickly joined by steaming mugs of hot, sweet, milky tea and triangular slices of thick white toast, running with real butter. The entire meal was a heart-attack on a plate, but it was also the very best way to start a day and both girls had missed a proper fry up and neither had even seen one in many years.

The food vanished very quickly as everybody ate without really talking much. Alexandra chuckled as she saw the happy faces on the two new arrivals. She knew that there was darkness behind the eyes, just like with Naomi, Kaitlin, and all the other kids. She intended on giving the youngsters every help she could to put them on the right road so that they could have a life and have a childhood.

"Thank you," Charlotte said with a grin as she sat back and pushed the empty plate away from her.

"Yes, thank you," Dakota added.

"You are both very welcome," Alexandra smiled.

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***Early that afternoon***

"Dakota, this is Sinead McFadden," Cassie explained. "You will be going to live with her and her family, not too far away. "Sinead is a Captain in the Royal Marines."

Dakota's face brightened up at that news.

"Really - a Commando?"

"You better believe it, honey," Sinead replied with a grin.

"Are you hurt?" Dakota asked, seeing the limp.

"Just a few bullet holes - nothing I can't handle," Sinead smiled.

"Cool!"

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### ***Later that same afternoon***

#### ***Auchenross***

Dakota's eyes flew everywhere as she took in all that she saw.

Part of it was her deeply embedded training, the rest just pure curiosity. As the Land Rover Defender came to a halt on the gravel drive, Dakota saw her new home. The house was amazing and had to be over a hundred years old. Sinead waved the fourteen-year-old into the house and they passed through a studded oak doorway of considerable thickness - almost six-inches.

"Let's go find your bedroom, first, shall we?" Sinead suggested.

"Okay."

At the top of the pale oak staircase, they stopped.

"My parents live in there," Sinead announced, pointing to the right. "My bedroom is straight ahead, there, and I also have the room next door to it for all my uniforms and crap."

Sinead turned left and followed a long hallway.

"Bathroom is in there - there's a shower room by the back stairs. Your bedroom is in here - you get a lovely bay window looking west."

The bedroom was a good size and painted a pale blue above, with pale oak panelling below. The bed was a double and sat against the wall with the window to its right. The bedding was pink - very pink.

"Sorry about the bedding - my Dad gets a little carried away and he misses 'his little princess'," Sinead commented dryly.

Dakota giggled. As far as she was concerned, it was perfect.

"It's great - it really is."

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After leaving Dakota's bags on the bed, they returned to the ground floor.

"Sitting room is in there. Drawing room in there. Dining room in there. Kitchen is through there. Mum and Dad should be in the drawing room."

Dakota was very apprehensive as she entered the large drawing room. There were two couches either side of a large glass-topped coffee table arranged before an open fireplace which had a fire roaring in the grate.

"Mum, Dad - this is Dakota," Sinead declared.

"Hello, Dakota. Welcome to Auchenross."

The man who had spoken was tall and balding, probably in his fifties. He appeared very fit, though.

"Gerome McFadden, Dakota. Please call me Jerry for the duration of your stay with us."

He spoke with a clipped tone and Dakota figured that he was ex-military.

"Daddy was in the Royal Artillery, a Colonel, but he retired just last year," Sinead explained. "This is my mum: Beatrice."

"Hello, Dakota. Call me Bea. Welcome to our home."

"Thank you - it's an amazing house," Dakota replied.

"For you, it is a home," Jerry McFadden confirmed with a friendly smile.

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### ***That night***

#### ***Blairhoyle***

"Does it hurt?"

"No, Kaitlin," Charlotte laughed.

The three girls and Sasha sat on Charlotte's bed in their pyjamas (Note: the girls were in pyjamas, not the dog!). Kaitlin's eyes had focussed on the small black box strapped to Charlotte's left ankle.

"How long have you been wearing it?" Kaitlin persisted.

"This one? Since yesterday. I wore one for about a month, but it held explosives, so it was swapped before we flew over."

"Explosives!" Naomi exclaimed.

"Hit Girl's idea of keeping us from escaping," Charlotte growled.

"Yes - that sounds about right, I think," Naomi confirmed. "She has a flair for the dramatic, that Hit Girl!"

"It makes me feel bad, wearing it, but I suppose that's what I deserve."

"I'm sure they'll remove it soon," Kaitlin said. "Look, let's not talk about it again, right?"

Naomi nodded, and the conversation brightened up considerably.

"How old are you?" Kaitlin asked.

"I'm twelve and my birthday is on the first day of February. I'm a Phase 2 *Predator* and I was in the Fourth Intake."

"What caused that scar?" Kaitlin asked.

"This?" Charlotte asked as she pulled up her pyjama to reveal the scar across her stomach. "Fury."

"Fury did that?" Naomi asked.

"Yes. She looked after me, and she treated my wound, keeping me alive until help came. I count her as a friend, now."

"Okay, girls!" Cassie announced. "It's time for bed. You two have school in the morning."

"What about Charlotte?" Kaitlin demanded.

"Let the poor girl settle in, please, Kaitlin. Now, bed!"

Kaitlin and Naomi said goodnight to Charlotte and they ran through to their own beds. Sasha jumped down and sauntered off to join Naomi for the night.

"You okay?" Cassie asked Charlotte as the girl slipped under the duvet.

"Yes - thanks for taking me in, Cassie."

"No problem, Charlotte. Sleep tight."

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***The following morning***

***Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>***

***Marchmont Crescent, Edinburgh***

Amber Dawson was not happy.

Her minder had ordered her to pack and then told her to obey those who came for her. Nothing else. She was worried that her life of comfort was about to come crashing down. The twelve-year-old had been enjoying her house arrest, but that was ending, and she was about to embark on the unknown. She followed instructions and she packed all that she possessed, including her collective detective work on *Vengeance*. She found the safehouse empty and her minders gone. It was eerie and a little disconcerting as she had had somebody with her all the time for weeks.

Her new minder arrived half an hour later.

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It was a young woman: in her early twenties, Amber thought.

"Hello, Amber. I am Natasha King, and I am offering you a home."

"I thought that I was under arrest?"

"You were, but we are offering you a new start - should you want it."

"Okay."

Amber picked up her holdall and she followed the woman out of the house which had been her prison for over two months. They walked down the road and her holdall was taken from her and shoved into the boot of a Jaguar saloon.

"Get in," Natasha suggested.

Very soon, they were headed out of Edinburgh and making for Falkirk or Stirling, Amber figured by the road signs. They drove for a while before they pulled through a set of electronically-activated wrought iron gates. The house beyond was large and spread over two floors. After climbing out of the Jaguar, somewhat shakily, Amber was handed her holdall and she followed Natasha into the house.

"Hello, Amber," a jovial voice offered. The voice belonged to a young man. "Did my sister scare you with her driving? I'm Cameron."

"Hi. Maybe a little - she drives a bit fast and I'm sure we went through several red lights," Amber replied.

"The lights were amber - just like you," Natasha laughed.

"Very droll!" Amber growled.

"While we're on the subject of colours," Cameron commented as he waved forward a girl who was a little older than Amber. "This is Scarlett. Scarlett, this is Amber."

"Hi," Amber said.

"Scarlett, would you show Amber to her bedroom, please?" Natasha asked.

"This way," Scarlett muttered.

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### ***The same morning***

#### ***Blairhoyle***

The house was blissfully quiet.

"It's very quiet," Charlotte commented as she ate her breakfast.

"You noticed!" Alexandra chuckled. "The girls make a lot of noise, I can tell you."

"I noticed - even Sasha looks relieved," Charlotte replied.

"Now, is there anything you need from the shops? Do you need any feminine items?"

"Huh?"

"Tampons, panty liners - those sorts of things," Alexandra clarified for the mortified youngster.

"No - nothing like that. I've not started my periods."

Alexandra simply smiled.

"No problem. I've had two daughters who are now grown up, so I like to be prepared."

"Thanks for asking," Charlotte grinned. "Are you going shopping?"

"Yes. I'm off to Tesco in Stirling."

"Can I come?"

"Of course."

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### ***That afternoon***

#### ***Blairhoyle***

"What's that smell?" Naomi asked as they rushed into the house after school.

"Has somebody been baking?" Kaitlin enquired, her nose sniffing wildly.

"No idea - I've been out all day," Cassie replied, just as intrigued by the smells coming from the kitchen.

"Hello, girls!" Alexandra called out as she heard the door slamming. "Tea will be ready in a few minutes, with a surprise afterwards."

"What's the surprise?" Kaitlin demanded.



"It wouldn't be a surprise, then, would it, doofus!" Naomi retorted.

Kaitlin scowled.

"Go get out of your uniforms, please," Cassie directed.

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By the time the two girls entered the kitchen, they were ravenous.

They found Cassie, Alexandra, and Charlotte waiting for them. The kitchen table was laid ready for a meal. That was different. Normally, they just grabbed a plate of food and sat down randomly to eat, even taking their food through to the living room to watch TV.

"Please sit down," Charlotte suggested.

Both girls followed instructions and they took their seats.

"We have real spaghetti bolognaise with garlic baguettes," Alexandra advised Cassie, Naomi, and Kaitlin. "All the cooking has been undertaken by Charlotte, here. She is an amazing cook."

Charlotte blushed a little as all eyes rested on her for several moments while she placed a plate stacked high with garlic baguette slices.

"It smells wonderful, Charlotte," Cassie had her admitted before she turned to Kaitlin. "Kaitlin, would you tuck your napkin into your collar, please."

Kaitlin growled as Naomi giggled. However, Kaitlin followed instructions, dutifully tucking her napkin into the collar of her blouse as a large plate, piled high with perfect spaghetti and topped off with a steaming pile of bolognaise which itself was topped off by a small sprig of parsley. Naomi received an identical plate, as did Cassie and Alexandra. Charlotte placed down a final plate for herself before sitting down with a broad grin on her face.

"Dig in!" Charlotte announced.

Everybody did exactly that, and there was silence for almost ten minutes as everybody ate.

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Charlotte was among the first to finish her plate of food and she looked around apprehensively as others finished their own plates.

She was very pleased to see that everybody's plate was almost empty as the final morsels were mopped up with the final pieces of garlic bread. She also saw smiles all around.

"That was really good," Kaitlin commented as she wiped her mouth with the mucky napkin draped over her front.

"Oh, yeah - that hit the spot," Naomi added.

"Well done, Charlotte," Cassie congratulated the grinning youngster.

"What's for pudding?" Kaitlin demanded.

"You still have room left after putting all that away?" Cassie asked.

"Of course; I'm a growing girl!" Kaitlin retorted.

Charlotte looked over at Alexandra who nodded and the girl jumped up. Alexandra swept up the dirty plates, clearing the decks for pudding.

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"O-M-G!" Naomi squealed.

The most enormous slice of chocolate pudding had just been placed before her in a bowl, surrounded by lashings of steaming chocolate custard. Kaitlin was grinning enormously, and her eyes were almost popping out with anticipation.

"Charlotte made the chocolate sponge while I did the custard," Alexandra explained.

Naomi took one mouthful of the chocolate sponge and custard before groaning. She looked over at Charlotte.

"This is gorgeous, Charlotte!" the nine-year-old exclaimed. "I want to have your babies."

"A biological impossibility," Cassie pointed out between spoonfuls.

"Thank God!" Charlotte laughed.

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After the successful dinner, Charlotte was allowed to relax in the living room while Naomi and Kaitlin loaded the dishwasher - a task both hated, but they let it slide after the amazing meal.

Charlotte looked up from a couch as Cassie entered the living room wrapped around a man.

"Who might this be?" Andrew asked pleasantly.

"This is Charlotte - she's twelve," Cassie explained.

"Charlotte," Naomi chipped in as she followed Cassie. "This is Andrew, Cassie's fuck buddy . . . I know: 'pound in the jar'!"

"Andrew is my fiancé," Cassie clarified.

"Hello, Charlotte," Andrew said.

"Does he. . .?" Charlotte ventured.

"Yes, he knows that you are a *Predator*, and yes, he also knows what a *Predator* is," Cassie replied.

"Oh."

"Have no fear, Charlotte; I don't judge," Andrew said.

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***The following morning***  
***Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>***

***Blairhoyle***

It was the first time that Charlotte and Dakota had seen each other since the weekend.

They both hugged each other before sitting down side-by-side on a couch together. Sinead and Cassie just grinned. Both were very happy with their new charges. Sinead spoke first.

"Okay, girls! The honeymoon is over!"

The expressions on the girls' faces were priceless, but that quickly changed as Cassie spoke a single word.

"School!"

The expressions changed as the girls exchanged a look and they both looked scared. Both pulled up the left leg of their jeans.

"Please don't send us to school - not with these," Dakota bleated as she indicated her ankle monitor.

"It's going to be hard enough without everybody judging us from day one," Charlotte added.

"Do you really think that we are that cold?" Sinead demanded.

Cassie brought over a small step-stool and she placed it down before Dakota.

"Leg!" Cassie announced.

Dakota placed her foot onto the stool and Cassie removed the ankle monitor, passing it to Sinead. Dakota rubbed her ankle and she smiled happily.

"Leg!" Cassie repeated as she moved the step-stool in front of Charlotte.

Charlotte grinned as her own ankle monitor was removed, however, the happiness was short lived.

"We are trusting you both. Remember, you fuck up, those monitors go straight back on," Cassie commented and the smiles vanished.

"Do you both understand?" Sinead asked in her command voice.

"Yes, ma'am," both girls responded.

"I don't think you do," Sinead went on. "You will follow all instructions given to you. You will do as you are told at all times. There will be a curfew which will be inviolable. There will be limits to your freedom. You will keep your mobile phones on your person at all times - except for things like PE, swimming, and showering. You will both think BEFORE you do ANYTHING. Now, DO YOU BOTH UNDERSTAND?"

The final words were a bellow which made both girls jump and Cassie could see that Sinead's comments had hit home - just as intended.

"Yes, ma'am," both girls responded, clearly and loudly.

Cassie reached behind the couch and she retrieved two suit carriers.

"Charlotte, this one's yours . . . and that makes the other one, yours, Dakota. Both of you, upstairs, and get changed, please."

The two girls grinned as they ran off.

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Sinead and Cassie were talking between themselves while they waited for the two girls to return.

Their speech had been planned and the result had been just as expected. Both trusted the girls, but they knew that temptation would always be there, and it would be easy for them to go astray. The girls were back in about fifteen minutes, both dressed in their new school uniforms which matched those worn by Naomi and Kaitlin. Dakota grinned as she twirled for Sinead and Cassie.

"I've not worn a skirt in years - it feels strange," she commented.

"Feels good," Charlotte added.

"You both look perfect," Cassie commented, and Sinead nodded.

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### ***That evening***

Charlotte froze as she entered the kitchen to find a tall man hugging Alexandra and Cassie.

"Hello, young lady . . . and who might you be?" the man asked as he turned to the new arrival.

The man wore the uniform of a Royal Navy Captain with four gold stripes on his sleeves topped off by a gold curl. On his left breast, the man sported six medal ribbons arranged in two horizontal rows. Visible on the adjacent countertop was a white-topped officer's cap with gold braid on the peak.

"I am Charlotte Grey, sir."

"Is that so. Welcome to the Perrin home."

"Thank you, sir."

"I think we can dispense with the 'sir', Charlotte. It is obvious that you are very polite, however, you are not a member of my crew and I am here for some peace. . ."

There was a roar of sound as a screaming Kaitlin bolted through the kitchen, closely followed by Naomi who was raging and yelling obscenities at Kaitlin.

"Welcome home, Captain!" Kaitlin yelled as she vanished from sight.

"And quiet. . ."

Captain Richard Perrin finished. "Please call me Richard."

Charlotte giggled quietly.

"I assume you've met the delightful Kaitlin and Naomi?"

"I have," Charlotte confirmed.

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### ***The following morning*** ***Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>***

#### ***Beaconhurst School***

The two girls stayed together as far as they could in the strange environment.

However, both received a nasty shock as they rounded a corner and Charlotte laid eyes on a girl who looked very familiar. Dakota had seen the girl as well.

"You!" Dakota exploded.

"Ah!" Olivia commented as the penny dropped - she knew that the two girls were starting school that morning, but she had forgotten about Chicago. "Don't make a scene, 'kay?"

"We saw you raped!" Charlotte hissed.

"You were all but naked," Dakota pointed out, but then she focussed on a boy just behind Olivia. "You bastard!"

"No - you've got it all wrong," Craig tried.

"Sorry, girls - it was a put up," Olivia said quickly.

"You allowed yourself to be raped!?" Dakota demanded quietly.

"Craig's my boyfriend," Olivia admitted. "I'm Olivia, by the way. As for Chicago - well, HG has a sense of humour!"

"You know who we are?" Charlotte ventured.

"Yes. You are Charlotte and Dakota. Yes, Craig and I know about what you are - we know Naomi and Kaitlin."

"Okay."

"Anything you need - you let one of us know, right?" Olivia finished.