

Five days later

Wednesday, June 15th, 2016

Scotland

A *lot* had happened over the preceding five days.

Harper was a different girl. Just being with other kids 'like her' seemed to have brought out the little girl that I remembered. Yes, their 'games' tended to be more like those a group of young boys might play – more play fighting and rough-and-tumble than playing with dolls, but it was still good to see such troubled youngsters smiling and laughing. It was also a relief, to be honest.

I was also pleasantly surprised – almost shocked – to see all three girls *sitting down* – a miracle in itself – and watching a My Little Pony movie together. It was something incredibly simple, but it linked each of them back to their former lives as innocent little girls. It was also good to see all three girls with tears running down their cheeks by the end of the movie. Harper, not surprisingly, had fitted in as the natural leader of the threesome. As I understood it, Harper had been a 'Phase 2', therefore she was technically senior to the other two girls. Not that they seemed to mind in the slightest.

However, under her leadership, Harper tended to get all three of them into varying degrees of trouble on a worryingly regular basis!

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On the other side of the coin, it was great to spend time with Sarah and Cassie. They were both wonderful people, as were their parents. However, if we were to stay in Scotland, we would need our own personal space, therefore, Harper and I had found a house in Edinburgh that we liked and we were going back to see it that afternoon. I was then intending on going back home for a few days, to pack the essentials while everything else would be moved by the MoD. I was slightly in awe about how much pull Commander Perrin had with the MoD – there was something else about the Perrins that nobody was telling me.

I had also met their friends; Cameron, Natasha, and Eric. They were all a laugh but while they were obvious friends, I saw something else connecting them.

That afternoon

Edinburgh

Cassie had brought us into Edinburgh in her Audi.

My car was still down south so the lift had been much appreciated.

"Come on, kid – the lady is there to show us around."

Harper quickly climbed out of the car and she looked up at the small house. Would it be a fresh start for us both? Only time would tell.

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The house was compact and I thought it looked quite quaint. Harper just thought it looked 'okay'. It was an older property and it had a secure garden to one side – not that I needed to worry much

about Harper's personal safety! We had a lounge and a separate dining room which had a large bay window. Beyond that, there was a well-equipped kitchen and a utility room that led outside. There was a downstairs bedroom which I thought would make a good study for me.

Upstairs, there were three further bedrooms, the one on the left at the top of the stairs would be mine. Harper lay down on the carpet in the next largest bedroom which looked out over the street to the front of the property.

"This room is mine!" she declared happily.

I turned to the estate agent.

"We'll take it!"

Blairhoyle

Harper was *not* happy that it might be weeks before we could move into our new home, but she consoled herself that she could spend more time causing trouble with her new friends.

I received a nasty shock that evening when the girls had been given the supposedly simple and benign task of emptying the dishwasher. From the next room, I could hear Kaitlin cheering for some reason or other and instinct suggested that I should check on the three wayward youngsters. On entering the kitchen, I was stunned to find Harper and Naomi engaged in a knife fight with two very large kitchen knives! Not surprisingly, Kaitlin was cheering them both on and generally encouraging the fight to get more dangerous.

"Stop!" I yelled and the two older girls froze.

"Just a bit of fun, sis," Harper tried as she placed the knife down on the kitchen side.

"I know you've been trained in this type of fighting but that is no excuse for you to fight each other like animals. What if one of you had been hurt? Did anybody think of that?"

The expressions added up to a unanimous 'no'.

"Keep this up and you will all be banned from touching a knife – even to eat."

"We can still kill without a knife," Harper muttered.

"Not helping, Harper!"

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I was also learning much about my not-so-dependent sister.

All three girls had remarkable figures due to them all being very fit – I had always thought that I was very fit but I had nothing on them! There was barely an ounce of fat between them; their biceps, abs, and thighs were almost all muscle. I had also discovered, during some not-to-be-recommended 'play fighting' with Harper, that she was *strong*! That was also the moment when I discovered that *Predators* did *not* 'play fight' . . . they would just fight. More than once, Harper would burst into tears and apologise to me profusely as I called out in pain when she got a little carried away in her attacks.

The girls had a lot of energy and ‘normal’ activities tended to bore them – hence the knife fight. Therefore, the three of them often went out into the gardens to spar together. I would cringe as I heard the muted screams and yells of pain from a distance; I could not bear to watch. At least one of them would return with a new bruise, cut, or scrape on their bodies but they would otherwise be in good spirits.

Fighting and the pain which went with it had obviously been a key part of their past lives.

Harper put Naomi down for the fourth time that afternoon – Kaitlin was nursing a sore elbow over by the trees; another victim of Harper.

“You really enjoy this, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes, that’s me: a lean, mean, killing machine!” Harper grinned.

“I am *never* going to get used to this,” I grimaced as Cassie walked up.

“It’s a real strange world we live in,” Cassie replied.

“Young kids, made to fight each other and learn to kill a dozen different ways . . .”

“A dozen?” Harper scoffed as she walked past me on her way towards Kaitlin. “Try over fifty!”

“See!” I complained. “No remorse; she’s cold as a block of dry ice.”

“Give them a chance. They’re still learning how to be little girls again and how to behave in civilised society,” Cassie pointed out.

“Tell me about it! That trip to McDonald’s earlier was a disaster; I thought the manager was about to call the Police!”

“Kids letting off steam.”

“I could have let off a hand grenade in there and it would have been nothing to those three girls!”

Cassie laughed. “Point taken.”

Two days later

Friday, June 17th

Evening

“You getting rid of us?”

I laughed. The three girls had come back from messing about in the garden to find three packed holdalls on the living room floor. They genuinely looked very worried.

“Whatever it was, we’re sorry . . . and we didn’t do it,” Kaitlin tried.

“We’re going on a trip.”

“Where?”

“That’s for you girls to figure out.”

"Cassie!"

"You'll need these, though," she said as she handed out three identical burgundy booklets.
"Passports!"

Later that evening

Edinburgh Airport

"Wow!" Harper exclaimed in awe as she saw the aircraft that would take us stateside.

The Gulfstream G650 was large and way beyond luxurious.

"Wayne Enterprises?" I queried.

"A good friend," Natasha replied somewhat cryptically.

516 nautical miles to the east and one, infuriating, hour later

"Are we there yet?"

"No, Kaitlin; for the fourteenth time – NO!"

"How long?"

"Too fucking long!"

"Moody!" Kaitlin muttered as she retreated from Cassie.

774 nautical miles and ninety minutes later

41,000 feet over the North Atlantic

There was about to be a murder.

Well, three to be precise.

"Did you three bring your parachutes?" Keira asked with a smile.

The three girls shook their heads and looked worried.

"Shame – who wants to step out for a moment?"

"Now?" Naomi asked?

"Yes," Keira confirmed. "If any of you learn to fly then fine."

"We're fine," Harper confirmed as she looked from Cassie and Sarah, to Keira, and then to Cameron and Natasha.

"Well, sit the fuck down, then!" Natasha growled angrily and all three girls bolted for their seats and fastened their lap belts. "And shut the fuck up!"

Cameron smirked at his sister who just shrugged.

Friday, 17th June

Late evening

3,229 nautical miles east of Edinburgh and after a total of six, very tedious, hours

Chicago Midway International Airport

United States of America

The landing was smooth and routine.

After a brief check of everybody's passports, all eight climbed into an enormous eight-seater 4x4 that had awaited their arrival at the airport. Cameron drove, turning the vehicle onto the I-90 East and beginning the twenty-two-mile journey to their destination.

"Cool!" Harper breathed as she stared out of the window.

Kaitlin was wide-eyed and uncharacteristically speechless as she took everything in. Naomi was silent as well as she took in everything that she saw. Sarah and Keira had both been to Chicago before, as had Cassie, Cameron, and Natasha.

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"Cassie?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Where are you taking us?"

"To a place that will blow your mind, Naomi."

The nine-year-old looked dubious, but she simply pulled a face and sat quietly. Kaitlin, however, she was having none of it.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were about to surprise us with something."

"A wise girl," Natasha acknowledged with a smile.

"All will be revealed in time, little ladies," Cameron added as he threw a reassuring smile at Harper.

"Talk about cloak and dagger!" Keira muttered with a glance at Sarah. Both were as much in the dark about their destination as the three girls.

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"You've heard of *Vengeance*, right?"

"You know we have," Naomi replied. "They're on the news almost every other week."

"Get with it!" Harper suggested as she rolled her eyes.

"So, you've heard of *Fusion*?"

"Well, dur!" Kaitlin replied. "They're the ones that rescued us."

"They put an end to that hell," Harper added darkly.

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As they neared the end of the journey, the 4x4 turned off the road and they headed directly towards a rather bleak-looking warehouse.

"I think we're about to get car-jacked," Harper commented as she studied the dubious surroundings outside the vehicle.

"Welcome to *Fort Fusion*," Cameron said theatrically.

"Yeah, right!" Naomi responded, her tone dripping sarcasm.

"We may be young," Kaitlin added. "But we ain't stupid!"

"Woah..." Harper breathed as the warehouse swallowed the 4x4 and they rushed towards a concrete wall.

The three girls screamed, along with Sarah and Keira.

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The large 4x4 was soon descending the tight concrete ramp before it emerged into bright lights and came to a stop beside several other vehicles which were parked in front of a tall glass shield that blocked further progress into the immense cavern.

"O – M – G..." the three girls muttered together as they instantly recognised *Iron Hide* and *Beast*, not to mention the purple Panigale that belonged to Hit Girl – for some reason, it had a noticeable gouge in the right fairing below the 'HG' logo.

Cassie exited the 4x4 and she dragged two very stunned and uncharacteristically speechless girls with her. An equally stunned Keira and Sarah climbed out with the open-mouthed Harper. A young woman with blonde hair awaited them and she strode forwards through a gap in the glass shield.

"Morning, Nemesis. Good trip?"

"Perfect, thanks."

Naomi and Kaitlin looked up at Cassie with awe etched into their faces as they tried to make sense of everything.

"You . . . *you* are Nemesis?" Naomi exploded and Cassie nodded with a grin.

"Does that make you two, Crimson and Drift?" Harper asked as she studied Natasha and Cameron.

"Talk about sensory overload!" Kaitlin quipped.

"All of you, please meet Mindy Lizewski," Cassie said.

The three girls and then Sarah and Keira all shook hands politely with Mindy as Cassie introduced each of them to her friend.

"I also go by the name: Hit Girl," Mindy offered. The three girls and the two women just stood there, their lower jaw's hanging open. It was almost a full minute before any of them could speak.

"Speechless women, that's what I like!" another voice chuckled and both girls looked up at a large man who came and stood behind Mindy.

"Kick-Ass . . ." breathed Naomi.

"A bright girl," Dave replied with amusement. "Dave, Dave Lizewski."

Mindy rolled her eyes and held out her hands to the three girls.

“Let’s go meet the rest of the team.”

“My brain just exploded!” Kaitlin murmured.

Safehouse F

The place was amazing!

Cassie gave me a cheeky grin – she had obviously been to the place before, as had Cameron and Natasha. My sister the vigilante – I was still struggling with that.

“It’s wonderful, isn’t it, Sarah?” Cassie asked her sister.

“Amazing!”

Sarah turned on the spot, taking in everything around her. She paused as she saw a young girl, about ten-years-old and not all that much taller than Naomi or Harper. The young girl looked just like any other, but Sarah knew that she was just like Harper, Naomi, and Kaitlin – there was something in the eyes. Mind you, the fact that the young girl had a holstered pistol on her right thigh, also showed her to be more than just a normal young girl. She wore a dark grey uniform, just like that which Mindy wore, except she wore a single, vertical silver bar on the collar of her high-necked top as opposed to Mindy’s star.

The girls followed Mindy up a set of steel steps where they stopped before the uniformed girl.

At the top of the steel staircase, the three girls were met by a slim girl, not much older than themselves, with her blond hair tied back into a ponytail.

“Hi. I’m Stephanie Lizewski, but you can call me Steph. I was a *Predator*, just like the three of you. I was known as Psyche back then . . .”

“Oh, wow,” Harper interrupted. “You’re famous.”

“Please don’t,” a tall, brown haired girl with an Irish accent suggested as she stopped beside Stephanie – behind *her* was a tall blonde-haired girl. “We have enough trouble with her ego as it is. I’m Saoirse – please call me SD. I was a *Predator*, too . . . Foxtail.”

“Were you both there when . . .?” Naomi asked with a pained look on her face.

“Yes. We were in Toulouse to take down *Urban Predator*,” Saoirse replied.

“I was there too,” the blonde-haired girl said and she smiled as she approached. “I’m Morgan; although back then, you knew me as Raven.”

“It was *you*,” Kaitlin said quietly as she ran forwards and gave Morgan a hug. “You found us and you saved us.”

Naomi did the same and she smiled up at Morgan. Harper looked at Stephanie and then over at Mindy.

“Stephanie, Mindy – you were both there that night, in that dormitory. You helped us to rebel against *them*. Without you both . . . I . . . I . . . I might never have found my sister.”

“It’s okay, Harper,” Mindy said soothingly as the nine-year-old girl hugged her. Mindy appeared uncomfortable with the contact but she went with it.

They all sat down in the Briefing Room while Chloe and Joshua appeared with drinks for everybody.

“Why are you showing us all this?” Naomi asked.

“Are we going to become a part of *Vengeance*?” Harper ventured with a tinge of hope in her voice.

“You’re very smart, Harper,” Mindy commented and the younger girl blushed.

“Does that mean we can go out and kick people’s arses?” Naomi enquired and her younger cousin nodded vigorously.

“There’s a *bit* more to it than that,” Cassie suggested with a nod from Natasha.

“No there isn’t,” Joshua commented which drew a glare from Mindy.

Chloe just laughed at the three girls.

“So sweet and so adorable – bit like Megan was, before she started puberty.”

“You taking the piss?” Naomi bristled.

“No, honey. I just love the way you say ‘arse’ instead of ‘ass’ – so gorgeous.”

Naomi walked right up to Chloe who in turn stood up to meet the girl. Naomi looked directly up into Chloe’s smiling face.

“You and me, bitch. Right the fuck, now! Get your bloody arse on that mat, girl!”

Chloe grinned and she looked over at Cassie who just rolled her eyes and shrugged.

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Naomi walked down to the mat, kicking off her shoes as she went, followed closely by her cousin.

“Move it! Hate to think that you were *all* talk, Shadow!”

“What makes you think I’m Shadow?” Chloe asked as she kicked off her own trainers and followed the girls onto the mat.

“Stands to reason – Shadow looks hot and so do you,” Kaitlin replied as she toed off her own shoes and casually kicked them out of the way.

Chloe looked generally lost for words but Kaitlin’s comment had been intended as a distraction and Chloe soon yelled out in pain as the younger girl quickly kicked the older girl in the side. Naomi got in on the act and she planted a foot squarely in Chloe’s chest which sent the older girl flying backwards.

“I gotta get me some of this!” Harper called out as she ran down the mat and kicked off her own shoes.

Chloe had scrambled back to her feet and she rapidly sent Kaitlin flying backwards with a well-aimed kick and she brought Naomi high in the air and then back down hard onto the mat. Both girls screamed out but neither were hurt apart from maybe their egos. Harper span around and she kicked Chloe in the shoulder but Chloe had seen the attack coming and she moved with the blow but caught Harper in the chest with a fist. Chloe followed up by kicking out Harper's legs from under her and planting the girl firmly down onto the mat.

There was a brief round of applause from everyone present.

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Saoirse and Stephanie had been watching the three younger girls and their body moments intently. Stephanie went over and helped Naomi back to her feet. She then whispered a few words of advice into her ear before she moved over to Kaitlin. Saoirse was doing the same thing with Harper. Chloe scowled.

"What are you two bitches up to?"

"Nothing!" Saoirse and Stephanie replied together with feigned innocence.

Chloe took up a position at one end of the mat while the three girls spread out with Harper in the centre and Naomi to her left. Kaitlin took up the space to Harper's right. Chloe scowled at the girls for a few moments and then with a smirk, she ran forwards. The three girls did the same. Chloe took in her advancing opponents and gauged her attack. Then total pandemonium ensued.

At a command from Harper, Kaitlin dived to her left and cannoned into Chloe's legs taking them out from under the fifteen-year-old. Chloe struggled to recover but she was prevented from regaining her feet by Naomi who landed on Chloe's back and she seized hold of the bigger girl's legs and wrenched them back. Harper moved in and kicked out at Chloe's right wrist as the senior vigilante struggled for purchase to throw off Naomi. Then Harper sized that same wrist and twisted it backwards and upwards towards Chloe's neck.

Chloe yelled out in pain as Kaitlin looked deep into her eyes.

"You ready to yield, yank?"

*This storyline will continue in **Chapter 287: Vengeance of Forsaken.***