

Nobody Guns For My Family

Bermuda

6:32 p.m. - September 24, 2003

The three geared up quickly. Word had spread on the island that there was a group moving to shake things up, rattle the status quo. As much as Walker hated the thought of Don Thadius Maximus ruling the so called law of the islands, he hated the thought of an all out gang war even more. Just what they needed, bloodied Armani suits all over the place. As Walker would say in a rather flip way, what was wrong with a good pair of denims these days. Guns were loaded, ammo stocked, Kevlar double checked. Even though they seemed to be wearing no armour, the Kevlar hiding nicely under the rustic looking dusters and jeans.

"Monty," Walker said in a flat, even tone. "Make sure the horses 're ready. We're gonna be ridin' out in ten minutes."

"On it, mate," Monty said quickly, making no flip remark. Things were serious, and his time with the Red Hand taught him never to joke during a serious situation. The Aussie finished his check and moved quickly, with purpose to the stable. Walker looked over to the third of the trio, Marianne Wollcott. The former blade sister had been more quiet than she usually was, going over the last details carefully, almost automatically. "You ready,

Annie?"

"Of course, sir," she replied without hesitation. There was no emotion in her voice, just as Monty, no flip remarks, nor anything else. Which is what worried Walker.

"Annie," he said with an outstretched hand, gently clasping her shoulder. Normally, a Sister would have cut a man down for touching her. But Marianne knew this man, knew his demeanor. And knew that it could change just as a prairie wind would. She looked up directly into his eyes. "If there's somethin' wrong, you tell me. We ain't headin' out without clear heads, understand darlin'?"

Marianne nodded. And then she took a deep breath. "I'm a tad worried, sir."

"Bout?"

"Our contact mentioned this organization had assistance..." she began, her voice never wavering.

"We know that," Walker nodded with assurance. "The Sisterhood. We been through it a dozen times. Always knew that the Sisters 'r the Red Hand'd come gunnin' fer us at some point." Walker took out his Colt .45 and checked it one last time before holstering it again. "An' we know that one o' 'em's been gunnin' fer you. They sent word on the wire, put a bounty on yer head. The time's come. Either ya can keep runnin', 'r stand an' fight." Marianne nodded firmly to Walker's statement as she took another deep breath. "An' I will tell you right now, we been t'gether long 'nough," he continued in a low voice with just a touch of anger. "You an' Monty're like family ta me. An' I'll be damned if anyone's gonna try an' gun fer my family." Walker gave her a reassuring slap on the shoulder and they walked to the stables together.

Quietly, Marianne reached into a pocket of her duster, feeling the lockette in her hand. And her eyes narrowed as she remembered.

Vancouver, British Columbia
5:55 p.m. - August 26, 2002

"I do not have to remind you," The Mistress announced to the gathering of assassin's that met in the darkened underground bunker that served well for the purposes of the Sisterhood.. "How dangerous this will be. We cannot have this organization uncovered. We are being paid well for this. And there will not be any room for error." The Mistress surveyed her soldiers, women, all hand picked, all trained with only one thing in mind. Completion of the mission without giving clue as to point back to the Sisterhood. On this day, the CEO of Mandrake Biogenetic had grown very tired with her failed attempts at a takeover of Stewart Industries. And so, it was time to strike out and ensure that a sale would take place. Thus, Derrik Stewart had to die.

"You have prepared and studied the target. We know his routine and his schedule for the next several weeks. We need to strike now, while there is a lull in his activity," she repeated to the gathering, her lips seeming to form a sneering smile. Possibly a cocky pride, perhaps overconfidence. Most likely superiority. "This is our time. Go. And be successful."

"Sisterhood to the end!" the gathering announced in unison before hurrying to their selected duties. One assassin hung back in the shadows. She watched and listened. She didn't like this contract. Not in the slightest. Her code name was Sister White. Her real name,

unknown to the world at large, was Marianne Wollcott. And she decided here and now to make certain that this mission would not see success.

Marianne followed a small group of soldiers, matching their stride. A lieutenant stopped Marianne, her eyes narrowed slightly. "You are not scheduled for this detail, Sister White."

"I know, ma'am," Marianne replied quickly.

The lieutenant nodded and looked to the small group that Marianne was following. "They could use your expertise in this matter, however. You have proven yourself most useful in details such as this." Marianne only replied with a nod as the lieutenant signaled to those in the group. Due to her fast rise in the ranks, Marianne was afforded some freedom with what details she could take. And if she seemed interested in one, she was assigned to it.

Marianne joined the group, saluting to each. The soldiers returned the greeting in kind, and together they moved off to the staging area to prepare departure. The soldiers had their orders, they knew what needed to be done.

Marianne had other ideas. She planned on stopping them.

The four office towers that made the Stewart Towers seemed dark. Only a few lights glowed in the many offices of one of the largest research and development companies in North America. Not many were in the Towers, only a few of the scientists and office workers put in long hours. It was the doctrine of CEO Derrik Stewart that his employees enjoyed free time away

from the office. Family, friends and a social life were important to those who worked for him, because it ensured they would remain healthy and loyal. But that, of course, did not always conform to the view of the CEO for himself.

Derrick brushed back his blond hair as he read through the final reports of the evening. A few studies were taking longer than expected, but better to be safe than sorry. He had shareholders to worry about, and they wanted to see the bottom line, which often went hand in hand with results of testing materials. He looked up and removed his reading glasses as his office door opened. "Evening, Maxine," he said as he picked up his coffee cup. "I thought you'd have gone home by now."

"No such luck, sir," Maxine Wollcott replied with a smile. "My job doesn't end until you go home." She approached the desk and set down one more small stack of reports. "And it would appear that you may be here a little longer than expected."

"Tell me again why I decided to be responsible?" he chuckled lightly as he rose from his chair and grabbed his suit jacket. Maxine stood by, waiting for Derrick's next statement, knowing what he would say. "Have you had supper yet?"

"I had a light dinner, but that was three hours ago," she replied in her crisp, British accent. Maxine was, if anything, always dutiful, always polite. She looked more like a librarian than the personal secretary for the CEO of a multinational company.

"Let's head to the cafeteria."

"Sir?" she said slightly confused.

Derrick held up a set of keys in his hand as he

picked up the phone. "I have the run of the building, remember." He chuckled as Maxine rolled her eyes and smiled. "William," he said into the receiver. "Maxine and I are taking a half hour break. Heading to the cafeteria, just so you don't send a SWAT team down for swiping biscuits." He rang off and offered his arm to Maxine, who graciously took it. They needed the break. Both of them had arrived at the Stewart Towers at nearly 5:30 in the morning. It had been a long day, and it appeared that it might be an even longer night.

The office door closed and the room, as lavish as it was with it's matching furniture and expensive oak desk, grew quiet and still. No sound emitted from the room at all. Not even when the glass to the window was cut. Not even when five very lithe and darkly clad women enter, their feet not making a sound on the carpet. Two of them scanned the room for a moment, and then gave hand signals giving the all clear. They all drew weapons, long, serrated blades that soldiers of the Sisterhood carried. One gripped a semi automatic hand gun, complete with a silencer. Their faces covered, not even their eyes revealed as they hid behind the infra-red visors they wore. The slick, form fitting armour allowing them to move quickly, and quietly.

They knew their target. They just had to follow, and make certain they could strike quickly.

"Yes, I'll make sure about that," Derrik said into the cell phone as he finished his small supper. He rang off and motioned to Maxine, her only reaction being a look of concern. She knew what this company attracted at times. Mandrake had already attempted several very hostile take

overs in the last few years. It was more than the power that would come from having one research and development company under one roof, it was the brain trust that Stewart had assembled. Some of the most brilliant minds of science, housed in the Stewart Towers in Vancouver. And often times, attacks would come.

But this time, he knew this would be something much more dangerous than a board room meeting. Over the years, he had grown to anticipate this. And he had prepared. Whenever his company would begin a high security, top secret project, he would always ensure that he was the one who became the first human guinea pig. More often than not, the developments never saw the light of day. Lesser developed projects would take the place of the major ones.

Because the scientist knew, that Derrick's alter ego needed the weaponry to deal with the things in the world that would attempt such as this.

One click of an invisible button on his cuff link, and his expensive looking Armani began to shift. Nanite technology had allowed his clothing to reconfigure their shape and look. And the look they took on now was very dark. The suit was completely black, almost looking like leather, but much stronger. His face was completely concealed, a cloak and hood completed the suit. His gauntlets held wrist consoles, allowing him to tap into security networks and see the visual display on his HUD.

He looked to Maxine, who knew of this other life all too well, and spoke in a voice that seemed dark and sinister, the opposite of what his appearance as Derrick Stewart was. "Get to safety. Make certain that you and the security officers are out of the building."

"I can take care of myself, sir..." she began in protest, but Derrik held up a dismissive hand.

"I trust you completely, Maxine. But this is the Sisterhood. Camera details have confirmed this. They have managed to circumvent every security detail except what I can see." He studied the room for a moment, confirming his own suspicions that they were most definitely alone, before pointing to Maxine. "Leave as quickly as you can. These assassins have come for me."

Maxine never said a word. She knew when Derrik was like this he was very stubborn, any arguing was futile. She reached into her jacket and removed a small pistol from a shoulder holster, nodded to Derrik and began to move slowly out of the cafeteria and down the hallway. Derrik didn't move until he was certain that she was gone. And then he looked around the room again before speaking.

"You can come out now."

A lithe figure descended from the ceiling, landing noiselessly on the tiles only a few feet from the black clad figure. "I could have killed you at any moment, you realize."

"Doubtful," Derrik hissed his reply as he moved to the double doors of the room and scanned the area with all spectrum's. "But needless to say, I did receive your warning. And I have complied. Maxine should be moving out of the building now." He turned back to the blade sister. "So tell me, Sister White," his low voice grumbled to the Sister. "What is your interest in Maxine?"

"She is my sister." Her reply came quickly and evenly. Derrik had to study her for a moment to see if she spoke the truth. He only acknowledged with a nod.

"I should consider myself lucky, I would think," he stated as he moved back toward Sister White. "Miss Wollcott. Otherwise, I might be dead now."

"Doubtful," Marianne replied with a slight smirk. "You are, as I have seen and heard, very resourceful. You have kept your bargain. Now I must leave."

"Leave the sisters." It wasn't really a question, so much as a statement. And his eyes were like steel as they bore right into Marianne's very soul.

"You know that's impossible," she replied in a voice that betrayed how much she believed that idea was ludicrous. "If I were to do that, they'd hunt me down to the ends of the earth and kill me. I would never have a moment's peace. I could never have a normal life."

Derrick Stewart, also known as the Mannequin, turned toward the double doors that lead into the cafeteria. His cloak billowed out as he moved. And his voice called out, low and a hiss. "You'll die, if you go back."

Maxine Wollcott walked quickly down the hallway. She knew the dangers that came with her job. Stewart Industries was one of the most targeted corporations in the world. Not from accusations of those claiming the company did not follow proper guidelines for employment, waste management or anything like that. No, there were those that coveted the brain trust the company had gathered, and wanted it for their own.

But this was probably the first time a physical attack had been made on the company.

It was appalling that assassins would actually attempt to break in with the intent of killing Derrick Stewart. Maxine huffed at the thought as she moved

faster down the hallway. She furrowed her brow as she realized, there was a touch of fear in her bones as she moved. Her hand automatically reached for the revolver and she drew it out as she moved. No stopping, she'd get out safely.

The cut on her arm appeared so quickly, she didn't have time to register it. But it did one thing. She stopped. And she grew much more worried.

"There is that smell," a cocky voice called out from the shadows. "Fear." Maxine whipped the pistol around toward the direction she believed the voice was coming from. But softly, eerie laughter told her that had changed. "You will tell me where your employer is." It wasn't a request, it was a demand. Dripping with sinister intent. "You will do so now!"

"Really," Maxine replied in an even tone, attempting to cover any hint of fear in her voice. "So you may do what, exactly? Kill him? You honestly believe that I'll simply hand him over so that you..." Her comment was cut off and she let out a choke from her throat as a hand grasped her neck tightly. The Sister had appeared from nowhere, putting her in a rather comprised position. The pistol she held was easily smacked from her hand, leaving any defense she had now gone.

"Enough of your blathering," the Sister snorted. "Tell me now. Or you die."

"The choice... between dying... slowly... or dying... quickly," Maxine forced out as she gasped for air, struggling to remove the woman's hand from her throat. "Is not... a choice at all."

"Is that so?" the Sister replied with a smile that revealed all her intentions to the world. "A quick death, or

torture. Luckily for you, I do not have time for a perfect torture." Maxine tried to sneer, showing her defiance as she heard the sound of metal against metal, seeing the glint of a blade out of the corner of her eye.

Her hands still struggled. She wanted to live, but knowing that she might not. Her last few moments would not be pleasant, but she would also not bend to the Sisters. "I'll... see you... in hell."

Marianne quietly followed the black clad man as he traced his steps through the hallways of the office tower. Her only real concern was her sister's safety, and every now and then she would remind Mannequin about that. It was finally sinking in. He would stop, inspecting the area carefully as they would prepare to move. Wordlessly, he would motion for her to follow, his own movements quiet and careful. Marianne Wollcott knew this man could be a valuable ally, or an incredibly dangerous enemy. She began to consider his words from before about leaving the Sisterhood.

Mannequin stopped suddenly, his entire body tensed. His suit was connected to the central security grid, which allowed him to directly see any warnings immediately. Something came up on the comms. He turned his attention to Sister White, who followed him closely. Even through the tinted eye holes, Marianne could tell what was wrong. Her heart began to beat faster as she believed the worst. "Where is she?" was the only thing she asked.

"We have to be cautious."

"Fuck cautious," she spat back in a venomous rage. "This is my sister I'm talking about. You know something."

I don't care about any of the rumours I've heard about you, if you don't tell me, I will thrash you around this room until you tell me."

He watched her for a moment, contemplating his next action. She was a highly trained assassin, but he had his own fighting skills that have been honed over the years. "You will follow me. I know where she is. Lower level. Bay 3. Stay close to me." Marianne narrowed her eyes and finally nodded affirmation. Together they worked their way through the hallways of the office tower, avoiding meeting any of the other assassins that had come. Mannequin knew that if they were to meet any of the other Sisters they would have to be dealt with, and Sister White might deal with them with extreme prejudice. He'd hoped to avoid this. Slowly, they wound their way to the lower level.

Marianne gasped as she took in the scene. Maxine's body lay motionless on the floor. The woman known as Sister White cried in anguish. Her sister, her true sister, lay dead on the floor. Marianne rushed to her body, hoping that some life might be found, hoping that she could save her. Mannequin merely watched. His demeanor could have been taken as heartless, cold and emotionless. But behind the mask that hid his features, he was seething with rage. The only indication that such an emotion was present came from his fists as he clenched them hard.

"Well, well," a cool voice said from the shadows. "After the incident in Ohio, I had always wondered if in fact you were going to show your true colours, Sister White."

"You murderer," Marianne hissed as she rose to her feet. The serrated edge blade was drawn quickly, a sign of

what Marianne Wollcott planned on doing.

"Ha!" the woman replied as she stepped into the dim light. Her blade had already been drawn. "Murderer. Yes, I've seen the things you have done in your own past, Marianne," she stated, using Marianne's real name. A sign that she was suddenly no longer thought of as a Sister. "When you join the Sisterhood, you cut all ties you had to the outside world. That includes family. But you always had a weakness for family. You always had a weakness for morals. You were much like Operative Violet Rose, and Omega Six." She brandished the blade in front of her, glaring at Marianne.

"Anything I have ever done in my own past," Marianne said, her voice a low hiss. "I will re-enact upon you now." She jumped forward, anger and rage her guiding force as all her energy was focused on her former Sister. The other assassin was ready, and leapt toward Marianne. No need for the shadows, no need for deception. This would be glorious. To bad they both seemed to forget Mannequin was still there.

Marianne was reminded as a black clad open palm pushed her back. He raised his arm, the nanites hardening to that of steel as it blocked the blade from the other Sister. Mannequin quickly glanced to Marianne as he forcibly pushed back the attacker. "Stand down." He turned back to the Sister and began his own assault, as well guided punches pushed her further back toward the wall. Just when she thought she might lose consciousness, Mannequin grasped the neckline of her tunic roughly. "Crawl back to the Sisterhood and tell them you failed. Because I will not allow you to shed any more blood this night." He reached out to a door that they stood beside and

opened it. It lead to the stairwell. And while Mannequin thought for a moment of tossing her down the remaining flight of stairs with great force, he merely shoved her limp form through the door. She stumbled as her dazed eyes tried to guide flailing hands toward the railing, and failed. She fell down the few steps, landing in a crumpled heap at the bottom of the landing.

Mannequin closed the door and locked it securely before he turned his attention back to Marianne. "Leave. Now!" he demanded. "There is nothing more you can do today. For now, this fight is over."

Marianne Wollcott rose to her feet, her breath haggard as she glared at Mannequin. "And now what? I still want my revenge."

"You will have it in time. But not now."

The words were simple. And Marianne knew now was not the time to argue. Mannequin had his wits about him, and he would be a difficult opponent should she attempt to ignore his warnings. She would have her revenge, but not today.

Derrick Stewart stood at the edge of the grave as the gathering began to leave. He didn't move an inch. Maxine had been with his family since he was 13. She'd been like an aunt to him, much more than just a secretarial assistant. All the memories began to come back to him as he stood in the lonely graveyard in Sussex. He didn't even look to the woman who also stood solemnly. When she spoke, it was one of the few times he nearly jumped. His guard was down. He wasn't wearing his other mask.

"I apologize if I startled you, Sir," she said in a pleasant voice. "But Maxine was rather dear to me."

Derrick studied her for a moment, and then he realized all too well. This red haired, bespectacled woman could very well have been a younger version of Maxine. "She was my older sister. We wrote back and forth a great deal. She told me about all of the things she encountered while working for your parents, and with you."

"Everything?" he asked quietly. Normally, he would have considered the next statement to be something of blackmail. But he already knew two of the Wollcott sisters. Both were honourable, even if one was an assassin. He smiled slightly at this thought. "Yes, well... Maxine was a very special woman."

"Indeed," she replied with a light chuckle and then coughed and excused herself. "My apologies, Mr. Stewart. My name is Eleanor Wollcott. It was because of Maxine, that I took a great interest in diplomatic relations."

"Really?" Derrick said with a charming smile. "What kind of work do you do, if I might ask?"

"I am in charge of diplomatic visits to the different consulates around the world," she replied in a matter of fact tone of voice. "Rather dull work. I have often wished to find something much more challenging." She looked to Derrick with a knowing smile. And the CEO of Stewart Industries smirked and shook his head. He knew that look all too well. Which ever mask he was wearing.

"I believe I can offer you a job, Miss Wollcott," he said with a soft, yet firm voice. "But there are some rigors. And some dangers to the job."

"I'll make certain that the dangers are minimal." The voice seemed to come from the newly erected tombstone. And Derrick narrowed his eyes, recognizing it

instantly. "My younger sister will not fail. Nor will I fail her, like I did my older sister." The cloaking field Marianne Wollcott wore was cut and her form shimmered into place. Derrik noted the tear marks on her shoulders, the patches marking her as an assassin with the Sisterhood now gone. Obviously she'd escaped with some gear.

"Marianne," Eleanor seemed to gasp as her older sister materialized. She began to step forward, halted by a calm hand from Derrik.

"How can we trust you?" Derrik stated more than asked.

"The Sisterhood struck out at you," she said almost glaring at Derrik. "And my sister paid the ultimate price. I won't let that happen again."

"We all take risks," Derrik said as it seemed a shadow passed over him. "Maxine knew the risks of the job she held. You don't expect any of us to stay hidden away in the dark, never to come out of our rooms in fear of death, do you? If we did that, then we aren't living." He could tell the words were starting to sink in, her face seemed drawn and tired. "Eleanor will work for me, in the same capacity that Maxine did. She'll be a part of my family. And she'll still be a part of yours." He offered his arm to Eleanor, who took it without question. The shadow that covered Derrik seemed to draw away from him. "I hope that you will learn from the choices you make, Miss Wollcott. I hope that the choices you face, will be similar to mine."

"You hope I make the same choices?" she shot back in a scoffing manner.

"No," Derrik replied as he lead Eleanor to his waiting car. "I hope your choices are better than mine."

She didn't stare out the window of the small, twin engine Cessna. She didn't care about the water below them. Nor the clouds. Not even the sight of a beautiful pod of whales stirred her interest. Marianne Wollcott only cared about the last phrase that anyone had said to her in earnest. I hope your choices are better than mine. For as smug as he was, Derrik Stewart held some wisdom. Perhaps his tortured soul would be saved. But Marianne knew her own could not. Not ever.

The islands were a remote location in the Bermuda Triangle. It was difficult to get to, and most of the worst vermin on Earth hid in this small island chain. Ruled by the iron fist of Don Thadius Maximus, this Mafia controlled chain of islands was a lawless land indeed. She knew that she would have to hide in this place, because every single person on these islands would be gunning for her. Perhaps she would find allies in her fight for survival.

She sat back in her seat and closed her eyes, letting herself lightly sleep. It had been five days since she had last gotten any real sleep. Since the assault on the Stewart Towers, she'd been on the run, sleeping where and when she could. "Sleep. Perchance to dream," she muttered to herself.

"What was that, ma'am," the pilot asked as he looked back to her.

"Nothing," she replied as she forced a small smile. Probably the first smile since she'd joined the Sisterhood. "Just quoting Shakespeare."

"Hamlet, isn't it," the pilot commented. Again, Marianne smiled.

"You are quite well read."

"I'm a pilot, ma'am," he said with a chuckle. "When I'm not making trips, all I have to do is read. I get by with that just fine."

Marianne looked out the window of the small plane and smiled. Perhaps this would be a good start to a new life. She had always been associated with cutthroats and thieves, never once had she been involved in a conversation, even as short as this, that held any kind of meaning. "That's life. All of us just getting by."

Bermuda

3:40 a.m. - September 25, 2003

Walker and Monty held their hands up as the three black clad women trained their weapons directly at them. One of them, who's face was not covered, smiled a wicked smile as she studied the pair. The operation was anything but simple, and Walker knew that their best case scenario would more than likely be capture. But what this woman had been doing on these islands, had forced Walker to act, and quickly. Of the devils that lived on this island, at least Don Maximus had some kind honour.

"The infamous Operative Violet Rose," the Sister snickered as she studied each man carefully. "And his ever infamous sidekick, Omega Six. You two have a heavy price on your heads. The Red Hand is paying a great deal for your return to them." She chuckled lightly as her words seemed to be spoken with acid. "No information was given if that order meant dead or alive. I prefer the former."

Walker merely smiled lightly as the Sisters readied their weapons. "Well then," his voice was cool and calm as he drawled his words. "If this here's an execution, then

maybe ya gonna gimme the honour o' havin' a last cigarette." The Sister smirked again and nodded and Walker slowly reached into his jacket to produce a metal cigarette holder. "Much appreciated." He lit the cigarette and pocketed the holder again.

The Sister looked to Monty with sly eyes. "And you?"

"Shiela, I don't want a cigarette," he replied with a smirk. "That shit'll kill ya, mate." The irony of the situation coupled with the comment made Walker laugh slightly. The Sister, however, only glared in response.

"I hadn't expected such flip remarks from either of you," she snarled. "I anticipated some measure of heroics from you, an attempt to escape by now."

"Then you really don't know neither one o' us," Walker said as he took a pull on the cigarette. "An' as fer heroics, well darlin', ya underestimated my crew. B'cause I'd have ta say that we've got the drop on you." Walker just let the words sink in as the Sister continued to glare at him. Her eyes could have been daggers with the look she gave him. How could these two men be as calm as they were knowing that their death was imminent.

"You really don't fully grasp the situation, do you, gentlemen," she said in a low hiss. "I had thought that I would save the execution for your delivery to the Red Hand, but your nonchalant attitude has worn thin with me. Yes gentlemen, now is the time you shall..." She stopped suddenly as there was a definite click that came behind her. The hammer of a pistol being cocked.

"Blah, blah, blah," Marianne Wollcott said in an even tone as she held the Colt .45 to the back of the Sister's head. "You always were a windbag, do you know

that, Sister Eventide? And you never could fully grasp the situation of an assignment. It is more than obvious you didn't study this assignment well enough. If so, then maybe you'd have realized I was here."

Sister Eventide's eyes grew wide, and in an involuntary action, she began to raise her hands as if to surrender. The pair of agents with her made the fatal mistake of looking back, giving Walker and Monty time to draw weapons and train them on the pair. How the tables turn. A calming signal from Walker urged the Sisters to drop their weapons. "Ya really don't understand the gravity o' the situation, do ya?" Walker drawled, any smile that he had before was gone now.

"Sir," Marianne called out as she pushed the barrel of the Colt into the back of Eventide's head. "Might I make a suggestion."

"I'm all ears, Annie."

"Don't kill them," Marianne said flatly. "Strip them of weapons and gear, leave them in their clothes and let them crawl back to the Sisterhood. Their failure will be their shame, and worse than any death."

Walker considered this for a moment, then slowly nodded. He motioned with his gun for the three to do as Marianne suggested, and watched as pistols, blades, and tech was dropped into a small pile on the floor. As Eventide dropped the last of her gear, Marianne took the pistol and slapped her, butt first, on the cheek. "This is for last year, you bitch. This is for what you did to my sister. My REAL sister."

"You were part of OUR family," Eventide spat back.

"No. I wasn't."

As Monty gathered the equipment, Walker held a pair of Desert Eagles trained on the remaining two Sisters. His words, however, were directed to Eventide. "She has a new family, now. An' if yer smart, yer gonna steer clear o' us an' this island. B'cause ya come gunnin' fer any o' us 'gain, I won't be as charitable as I am right now. Nobody, but nobody, guns fer my family." He gave a nod to Eventide, an indication to get moving. As the three shamed Sisters walked slowly away, Walker lowered his weapons. He looked to Marianne and let go of a breath he seemed to be holding for a while. Marianne's features softened as she looked Walker and Monty. In her eyes was all the thank you that needed to be said.

Epilogue

Marianne closed the locker carefully after putting away the recovered equipment. It had been an incredibly long day. And it brought back every memory from a year ago to her mind. She reached into her coat pocket, fingers searching for only a moment as they quickly found purchase on a small locket. She took it out and opened it gently. It held three photographs, her own, Maxine's and Eleanor's. All when they were children. As she brushed some dust away from the glass, a tear ran along her cheek. She tried holding it in, but felt she couldn't. And it grew even worse when she felt Walker's calm and easy hand on her shoulder. Marianne turned to look into his eyes, and she fell into the pools of comfort without thinking.

He had said she was part of his family now. Herself and Monty. And deep inside, she knew that there was no word of a lie that came from his lips. He had honour behind his words. And she trusted him

completely. Walker didn't have to say anything. His eyes spoke volumes. The place they had carved out for themselves was safety enough for them. They had faced the Heritage Front, the Sisterhood, and Don Maximus' thugs together. They could face anything.

She closed the locket and placed it on the necklace she wore. A fitting place to always remember who her family was. In time, she believed she may have to add two pictures to it.

Sister Eventide trudged behind her two agents. How would she explain their failure to the Mistress? How could they return, explaining how Sister White had thwarted their efforts? Eventide steeled herself. At least the punishment would be most for herself, not the two agents that she lead. They were promising, and she actually felt they should not receive such harsh punishment.

As they walked silently, Eventide would look back toward the Safe house every so often. She found Walker and his crew most interesting indeed. She thought of this as her two agents walked carefully ahead of her, turning corners before she did. And with Eventide's mind preoccupied, it was no wonder that she was oblivious to the next few moments. The last corner before they would have reached the transport they had left docked was quiet and unassuming. Eventide had stopped for a moment, but now continued on. But she had to stop again. Her agents had been rendered unconscious. As she turned the corner, both Sisters that accompanied her were laying on the floor in a crumpled heap. She quickly searched the area, her mind suddenly realizing just a little too late who might

have done this.

And then her cheek began to sting.

She reeled back as she felt another blow. Mannequin was keeping her off balance, but not doing enough damage to seriously hurt her. He landed another blow and grabbed her roughly by the collar. "Sister Eventide," he said in a voice that sounded more like a whispered scream. "Sister White might be finished with you," he said as he slammed Eventide against the wall. She winced noticeably at the pain. "But I'm not."