

## Twenty

Nothing is ever easy. As we turned to walk back to the car, Saskia put her arm out to stop me. "I can hear the MI5 phone," she said.

We faced each other to shield the sudden appearance of the phone as Saskia changed to be holding it. She answered it.

"Hello. This is Katya. Can we help you?"

I listened in to the other end with my super hearing. "This is the Operations Centre at Five. We have a problem we'd like your help with if you can."

"What's the problem?" asked Saskia.

"Hostage situation. It's at a girl's school here in London. Some of the girls are daughters of people who work at the Foreign Office. The gunmen want the release of some people we're holding on terrorist charges. We can't do that, of course. We have one hour before they begin shooting hostages."

Saskia looked at me and lifted one eyebrow in query. I nodded. She told the other end, "We'll be with you in less than half an hour."

"Come on," I said. "Leave the mini here, we'll collect it later. Into the car park and fly out of one of the levels. We need to be away from the runway as soon as we can."

We ran, at 'normal' speed until we got to the car park, then we accelerated into the air. By the time we left the car park we were moving so fast people probably didn't even notice us.

We'd been to London so often that even Saskia knew the way. At a couple of miles up, we increased our speed to a couple of times the speed of sound. We were landing on the roof of the MI5 building well within the half an hour. Changing to our black shirts and pants, we hurried to the Operations Room.

"Hello, girls. Glad you could come."

"Details please," I said. "We don't have long."

"The gunmen are holding the whole school hostage. It's a private school as you've probably worked out so there are only about three hundred girls and teachers - but that's three hundred too many. There's been some shooting already, to keep our people out I suppose, at least it's only been outside so far. Without your help the only way we could resolve the situation would be to storm the building. Heaven knows how many children would be killed or injured."

"We could break in and pose as pupils," said Saskia. "Wait until we're accepted as schoolgirls then disarm the men. That should do, shouldn't it?"

"Without guns they're pretty harmless," I said. "You needn't be too gentle after we're done with them. I don't like people who target children. How old are the girls?"

"They range from seven to sixteen."

"So there are very young children in there? Where is it please? Come on Katya. Job to do."

Saskia took time to whisper to me while men fetched maps and stuff, "*Maternal instinct, Twin? You're all fired up again.*"

"Do you blame me?"

"No. I'm right up there with you. Ah, here're directions."

"Tell your men we're on our way," I said. "Katya, roof."

"I'm right with you."

We left at a run, back up to the roof and into the air. It took only a couple of minutes to get to the school. We could see the armed police and people surrounding the building.

We landed next to the largest group of people. A uniformed policeman approached us. "I'm Silver for this incident. I'm told you're going to go in and disarm the gunmen."

"Silver, Twin?" whispered Saskia.

"Silver Commander. Next up is Gold, he'll be back at their base."

"Ah. Clever. Gold Silver Bronze?"

"That's it."

Silver was still speaking, "Five have told us to leave you to get on with it, just to be ready when you shout."

"Ok. We'll have a look round then go in."

True to his word, Silver withdrew and left us alone. Both of us used super vision to check the school.

"In through that loo window at the back. Change to be wearing the school uniform, then two very frightened girls let themselves be rounded up."

"Good plan," I said. "Come on, round the back."

We needed to be as quiet as possible. The loo window in question didn't stand up to heat vision, we soon had a hole - not large, but enough to fly through horizontally. Standing inside, we checked again with x-ray vision.

"Hm, pretty horrible uniform," said Saskia. "Mostly brown."

"This is no time for discussions about fashion. Let's change."

The uniform was a long-ish skirt in a brown and beige diagonal check, a white blouse with a tie like the skirt and a brown blazer. I arranged my hair to be tied back in a pony tail, Saskia did the same. We now looked like a couple of schoolgirls.

Leaving the loo, we wandered out into the school corridors. A gunman soon spotted us - he should have - we'd gone to find him.

He waved a gun at us. "What are you two doing out of the hall?"

"Oh please don't hurt us," wailed Saskia. "We were in the loo when you came. We've been hiding but we're scared."

"Ok, ok. Come on. In with the others."

"So far so good, Twin," I whispered. "Good acting."

"Think he suspects anything?"

"Nah. You're pretty convincing."

Our friend with the gun herded us into a large hall full of girls all dressed like us. We let ourselves be bullied into sitting with the girls while we took further stock of the situation. There were girls of all ages sitting on the hall floor, many of them very young - and very frightened.

"I count nine - no - ten of them," whispered Saskia. "Six in here and four watching out of the windows."

"Yeah, that's what I get. If we disarm this lot, the others'll come to see what's going on and we'll deal with them as well."

We were interrupted by the girl next to us whispering - a 'normal' whisper obviously.

"Who the hell are you two? You don't go to this school, I'd have seen a pair of twins. What's going on?"

"Shh," I said. "We're the cavalry. MI5. Pass the word around. When we move, the big girls look after the younger ones. Got it?"

Our suspicious girl was one of the older ones, about sixteen or so. She understood immediately. I saw her turn and whisper to the girl next to her. Girl number two passed the message on. They'd be better with something to occupy them.

Unfortunately one of the men noticed the whisper campaign. "Stop that. No talking."

He raised his hand to strike the girl he'd seen whispering. I couldn't have that. I stood up.

"Don't do that," I said sweetly. That certainly distracted him. He turned to me instead. "Sit back down or I'll knock you down."

"Hm. Perhaps we should discuss your obvious problems of inadequacy. Threatening schoolgirls indeed. But that's for afterwards," I raised my voice slightly, "Girls? All of you lie flat on the floor. Now please."

I burst into motion, out of the corner of my eye I saw Saskia doing so as well. Six gunmen was three each. They didn't get a chance to use their guns, Saskia and I had trashed them before they even knew we'd started moving. Now we needed to do something with the men.

"Right, six big girls to each man," I called out. "Sit on them, if they wriggle, bounce up and down."

We pushed the men face down on the floor. The girls gleefully sat on them. I noticed the teachers joined in as well - those men weren't going anywhere. We waited for the other four to notice something had happened. It didn't take long.

Three of the men appeared at the main door, guns held ready. The guns were only ready for a second or so, then they weren't guns anymore, just blobs of squashed metal. Saskia was holding all three men by their collars when number four entered the room. *Now* we had a problem.

He wasn't carrying a gun, he had a button-thing in his hand with a wire to something under his coat. 'Damn,' I thought. 'A bloody suicide bomber!'

"Please don't anybody move," he said. "There's enough explosive to take out the whole school." With his empty hand he opened his coat. He had quite a lot of stuff strapped round him. I wasn't an expert in explosives so I had to take him at his word. "If I release the button, the explosives will detonate, so I advise you all to keep still."

Saskia was holding three gunmen but I wasn't holding anything. At super speed I moved up to the bomber and closed my hand around his hand holding the little trigger closed. Now he couldn't release the switch and I wasn't about to let him. I thought quickly. Neither Saskia or I could move but we had a room full of people who could. I spotted the girl who'd first spoken to us. I got her attention.

"Come over here, Don't be afraid. What's your name?"

"Angharad."

"Right, Angharad. A job for you. Take off your blazer. I want you to go out of the front door, but you need to do exactly as I tell you. Ok?"

"O-ok."

"Walk to the front door, shout 'I'm coming out'. Put your arms above your head, then walk forwards until somebody shouts 'stop' or 'halt' or whatever. Do as he says but then turn yourself in a complete circle, that's so they can see you don't have a gun stuck down the back of your skirt. Got that?"

"Y-yes."

"Don't be afraid. Look at me, put your hand on my arm, Angharad you *can* do this."

"Yes - yes I can."

"That's the girl. Shout to them that the place is secured, use that word particularly. Tell them we're in a stand-off situation and we need a bomb disposal team."

Angharad took a deep breath and walked to the door of the hall. I could see Saskia following her with x-ray vision.

"It will do you no good," my bomber said.

I turned to him and said in my sweetest voice, "I could just lift you up and fly with you out of here, take you up a mile or so then make you release your hand. Your bomb will go off. *You* will be killed but *I* won't even be scratched. You'll be dead and it will

have been for *nothing*. Still think you're going to win?" I saw him go pale as I spoke the words.

At that point I heard Angharad calling out the words I'd got her to memorise.

"Don't worry girls," I said. "Any minute now there's going to be some more men with guns coming in. These are the good guys, ok? What is it with men and guns?" That got a quiet laugh, from the older girls at least.

Right on cue some men dressed in black with bulletproof armour and helmets and other stuff came in waving little stubby machine guns. They fanned out round the room looking for somebody to intimidate.

"Right, you lot," said Saskia. "First job, get the girls outside. The ones they're sitting on are harmless. You can take them as well."

"Take your three out as well," I said to Saskia. "I'm ok here, make sure everybody else is all right." I raised my voice, "Where's that bloody bomb disposal expert?"

"Here, here." He seemed to be wearing even more protective stuff than the others, I supposed he needed to.

"I'm holding his switch-thing. Can you make it safe?"

Investigations proceeded, our bomber said nothing. It seemed he'd rather die than help us. I wasn't having any of that.

"Can't make it safe."

"Can't?"

"Booby-trapped. Anything I do to it will make it go off - including trying to get it off him."

"That's inconvenient," I said. "Can you ask my sister to come in here please."

Saskia appeared quickly. "Can you tell her where to cut so the thing won't go off pop?" I asked. "When we know how to do that, I want you to go outside just in case."

"But you ..."

"We won't be hurt if anything happens. He might not survive," I said, nodding my head at our bomber. "But there's no point you being involved as well."

The bomb disposal chap gave Saskia information then withdrew.

"Last chance to tell us how to do it before we do it our way," I said.

"There is no way. It was designed like that. Once I'd primed it, I never expected to have to take it off."

"So what would you have done if we'd agreed to all your demands rather than get blown up? How would you have dealt with that? Gone into a field and blown yourself up anyway? I'd heard you lot were dedicated, but stupid as well?"

"I don't know. I suppose we'd not thought that far ahead. What will you do?"

"You are a very lucky man. We don't believe in hurting people, we take killing you to be an extreme form of hurting you. We'll do all we can."

Saskia had been examining the fastening arrangements. Now she slipped a hand behind a strap to protect the man as she used heat vision to cut it. She did this trick a couple more times.

"Right. He should be able to take it off over his head. Can you get his hand off the switch? You hold it on your own?"

"Mm. Should be able to." I pushed my thumb under his on the trigger. His thumb was lifted off while my thumb held the thing down. So far so good.

Our man seemed relieved when Saskia lifted the bomb off him and gave it to me in my spare hand.

"Take him outside and clear the front area just in case. I'll stay here until you've done that. Just shout when it's done, then I'll walk out and take it up a good way and let it go off."

“But you’ll be ...”

“No I won’t. I meant everything I said to you. I won’t even be scratched.”

Saskia dragged him outside. I watched with super vision as the immediate area in front of the school was cleared. Then I heard Saskia shout, “All clear. Come on out.” Carrying the device, I walked out of the front door and lifted into the air. At around a mile or so in the air, I let the little trigger switch go. The explosion was quite pretty from the inside as most such usually are. I’d seen quite a few in my time as a super girl. I did discover that although I was a super girl, I wasn’t infallible - I’d forgotten I was still wearing the school uniform. *I was indestructible but it wasn’t.* Oops.

Once the fireball had dissipated, I changed to be wearing our black shirt and pants, the little super costume is fine in its place but I was about to drop vertically into a large group of men, I wasn’t a *complete* exhibitionist!

Saskia was waiting for me with several men and Angharad, the girl I’d got to fetch the cops.

As I landed, I heard Saskia whisper, *“There’s something odd about this girl. It’s as if she shouldn’t be here somehow.”*

Now I had time to think about it, she was right. It was strange. The girl was here yet not here at the same time. Think about that in a minute.

“You did really well Angharad,” I said. “Not too afraid were you?”

“I was until you made me touch you then it all - went away, and I felt fine.”

“I’m sorry I had to do that to you. It’s just one of the things Katya and I can do. I’m Kyra, by the way.”

“I’m pleased to meet you. Kyra and Katya? That’s odd. Grandma Harriet tells a story about two girls, two twins, she met at a party who talked her out of getting drunk. She met Grandad the very next day. Says it was all down to the two of them. Must be a coincidence, you two are much too young to have been that Kyra and Katya.” Saskia and I laughed with her at the ‘coincidence’. “Now *I see why she’s both here and not here at the same time,*” I whispered to Saskia. *“She wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for us. We have both sets of memories, if you can call it that.”*

*“Wow. that’s spooky. Voice did say we’d have two sets of memories. This is the first time it’s happened. It’s weird!”*

Saskia decided to change the subject before Angharad could think about things further. She was still wearing the school uniform.

“Don’t think much of your school togs,” she laughed. “I’m going to change. Now I suppose telling you not to jump won’t do any good?” She changed. “Thought not. Not to worry. Just something else we can do.”

“Oh my,” said Angharad. “I wish I could do that.” She looked down at her mainly brown school uniform.

“Don’t think much of it either?” I laughed.

“We know why we wear it, well, the older girls do at least. Doesn’t make it any more appealing. It’s still pretty awful.”

“It’s been nice to meet you,” I said. “Wish the circumstances could have been better but never mind. Got to check in with the people at MI5.”

“Do you really work for MI5?”

“Now and then, see?” said Saskia, producing her MI5 badge while Angharad was looking at me.

“Just wait ‘til I tell everybody.” Then she had a thought. “I shouldn’t tell everybody should I? Some of the girls mums and dads work in the government, like mine. The less people who know about you and MI5 the better.”

“That’s a good thought. You’ll go far with thoughts like that. Ever thought of a career in politics?” I asked.

“How did you know? That’s what I want to do.”

“Stick at it,” said Saskia. “I have a feeling you’ll succeed. We need to go. Nice to meet you.”

Angharad waved as we lifted into the air to call at MI5 on our way home.

“Isn’t that weird about Angharad,” said Saskia as we flew.

“Mm. The family is already in politics. I wonder if Voice meant the third generation including Harriet? If so, that means Angharad will be Prime Minister. Even if it doesn’t include Harriet, one of Angharad’s daughters will become Prime Minister.”

“We move in exalted circles, you and me, we might have been talking to a future Prime Minister,” said Saskia. “Speaking of exalted circles, here we are at MI5.”

The people at MI5 were suitably grateful and after a couple of questions which we answered we were on our way again. Back to Manchester unfortunately but that’s where we’d left the mini. A quick calculation revealed we’d be back in plenty of time to get home before Rob. The people at the plant could wait until tomorrow for explanations. For now, they’d probably think that the naughty Saskias had bunked off all day.