

Espionage, hacking, covert ops, and twisted truths. In the world of social engineering, that's part of the job. Traipsing the line between guarding the righteous and breaking the rules puts her in the line of fire. Can she escape unscathed?

Girl Alt Delete

By Jill Marie Denton

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GIRL ALT DELETE

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DENTON

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Not a soul, not even my wealthy boss, knew where I was hidden. I was untraceable. Mine was a life of secrecy, seclusion, and isolation. Everyone was safer that way.

The incoming text message cast my bomb shelter of a bedroom in an explosive flash of pure white. The air raid siren notification tone pierced through sweet dreams of endless zeroes and ones.

Five people on the planet had the ability to interrupt what little sleep I managed to steal. They paid me handsomely for the courtesy. As the display came into view, though, I groaned. It was just after two in the morning, forty-five minutes after I'd set the damn thing down.

Good Lord, what now?

I sat up with a wince, the phone gripped tight as I adjusted to the infiltration of retina-shattering light. My boss's name sat at the top left of the screen. As staunchly professional as ever, she'd typed:

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A press release is in your email box. Post it and
disable comments. Take down the homepage modal
for twelve hours. Remove any SameSite cookie
embeds. Activate notifications to A-tier
subscribers and give them four hours to view.
Release to B- and C-tiers for four subsequent
hours, then release to all levels after that.
Reply when the release is live.
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I was glad for the lack of pleasantries so early in the morning. With a sigh, I rose to my feet, stretched to the sound of popping joints, and rolled my head over my shoulders. I'd just walked away from my computer. I was returning to it for some press release?

I should double my rates. These girls run me ragged.

Convinced I wouldn't see more sleep any time soon, I made a pit stop to my coffee pot. Two scoops of shade-grown Chiapas plus sixteen ounces of glacial water formed the black satin elixir I craved on mornings like this. They came more frequently than ever.

I'd been overworked ever since she sued that ex of hers. That's when my contract was modified to include the "twenty-four, three-sixty-five" clause, and that's what allowed me to move across the globe and into this clandestine hideout.

I followed my morning ritual, stirring the coffee in precise swirls before carrying the broad mug of inky tonic to my floor-to-ceiling office window. Tugging back the heavy curtains revealed a magenta and black sky swirled with emerald and azure. These magnificent views were one of the many perks I now enjoyed. Quiet was another, as was crisp air that never turned oppressive. The winters were tough, companionship was nonexistent, and the landscape was rugged, but I'd had enough social interaction over the years to sustain me.

Besides, my phone never stopped chiming, and between video calls, online meetings, and YouTube video editing, I saw plenty of the outside world. I wanted precious little of it. It was a mess of betrayal, disappointment, and litigation.

Aren't I a ray of fucking sunshine this morning?

Settling into my desk chair, I slid my readers on and opened my email. Sure enough, the press release was there and waiting. The boss's newest pet project was headed out on tour and ticket sale info was included in the fine print. They were nine hours ahead of me and already hard at work planning. My job was much simpler. I did exactly as she asked before safeguarding the website, as always.

For the five whose lives were more important than my own, flawless online presence was everything. This work was my sole reason for existing. No one outfoxed me.

I shot out a reply email to the boss and set my phone down, scrubbing my face with chafed palms. I'd had to shovel out the morning before to get to my drop spot. Once the delivery copter pilot tossed my payload onto the powdery snow a mile west of my hideout, I had less than an hour to get to it before the deep freeze outside turned my glass bottles into grenades. I paid way too much for Californian kombucha to have it explode all over the organic produce and grass-fed proteins I had on reorder.

I began the daily task of delving into the internet's deepest recesses as my phone chimed again.

Much obliged. Add a case of the Yards seasonal ale to your next drop and bill me for the whole order. Consider it a holiday gift.

Damn, Moneybags. That's quite a boon.

With an impressed brow lift, I sipped from the mug again before typing a reply.

I'd say thanks but it's not my style. It'll be two weeks before the charge hits. Just snagged a drop yesterday.

Her response was speedy.

Don't I know it, and was that a literal or figurative 'snag?'

I couldn't help snickering. It was a legitimate question.

It took a criminal to sniff out others. My boss understood that better than anyone. Instead of occupying some jail cell, I was holed up in an appointed sanctuary, working around the clock to keep her and her second family from being victimized the same way I'd been. I did it proudly, vehemently, and immaculately, by whatever means necessary. She'd saved me. I'd earned this.

It was mine to snag. I'm reformed. Hadn't you heard?

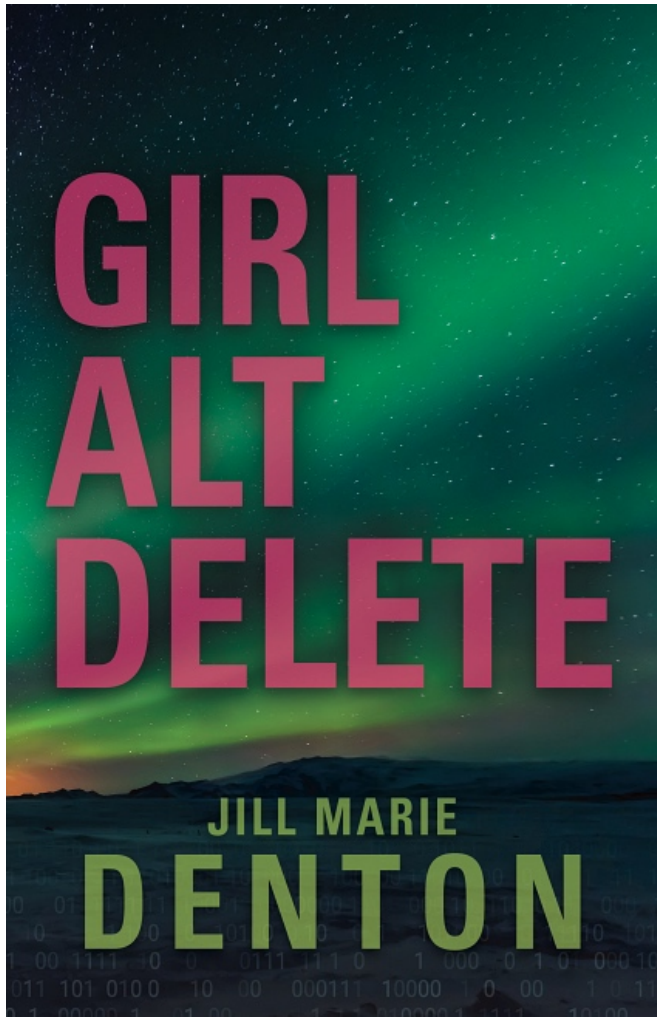
The air horn echoed around my expansive office again.

As your legal representation, I'm relieved to be reminded. Two interviews today, a photo shoot and appearances over the weekend. Ears to the ground.

I responded in seconds.

Aye, aye, captain. Over and out.

I'd be busy indeed. Hell, the boss always was. I was just following suit.



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