



With her intimate knowledge of the dark web... skills she used to develop better and better security software for her multi-billion-dollar corporation... Victoria Dahl finds those who would steal children's lives and souls. Then, her more lethal skill set comes into play.

A Dahl Haus Cyber Systems Novel Part 1

NEVERMORE

"...I am the Raven."

by Kat Lewis and R.L. Pool

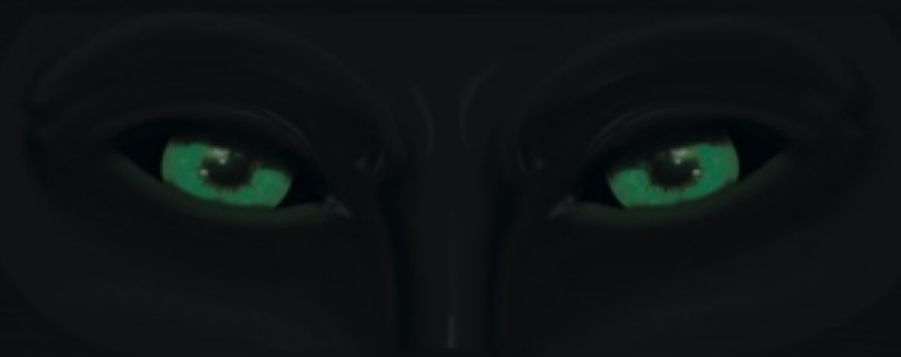
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A Dahl Haus Cyber Systems Novel
Part 1

KAT LEWIS AND R.L. POOL

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Chapter One

“Yes, Victoria. Monsters do exist...”

Five-year-old Faith Carney sat in the cold closet. Her hands and feet were bound with nylon rope and it was cutting off the circulation to her little hands. Fear caused her tiny body to shudder uncontrollably. She pulled her legs to her chest, her bound hands bringing them as close as she could. With her chin pressed to the top of her knees, she stared intently at the light that glowed beneath the door, watching for the shadow of movement that would mean her doom.

The man that put her in the closet had told her he would be back soon to “entertain” her. She had peed out of fear and he had taken her little panties with him when he left, bringing them to his nose with his eyes closed as he turned from the door.

She heard a sudden noise just out there. Her imagination ran wild, making the monster become more and more monstrous in her mind. She heard several pops, something like a balloon being stuck with a pin. She stared at the light shining beneath the door knowing that the man would soon be there. He told her that he was going to eat her small body before sending her bones into the sea... or something like that. She saw a shadow pass through the light. Faith Carney waited to die.

The door crashed open and a tall, dark figure stood there looking in. Faith tried to scream but nothing but a small whimper escaped, even while her mouth hung agape with her attempt. The figure stepped into the light but the little girl’s mind rejected what she saw. As the tall, lithe figure knelt before the little one, her voice finally came back.

“Please... don’t... hurt... me.” she begged between hard earned breaths as she looked from the knife in the figure’s hand to the green eyes peering over the black mask.

“I’m not gonna hurt you, sweetie.” said the figure in a soft feminine voice. “I’m gonna take you home.”

The knife sliced through the ropes like they were strands of water and the woman returned it to the sheath at her left thigh. Faith saw the holstered pistol on the woman’s right hip and the handle to another dagger sheathed at her right calf. The woman knelt before the little one and rubbed both of Faith’s hands until the feeling came back into them.

Though she saw a little hope in her small future, Faith still didn’t believe this dark figure’s words. She’d been in a nightmare for the past twenty-four hours and her little mind was all but broken.

“I’m gonna carry you out of here, Faith.” said the woman softly as she sat back on her ankles and looked into the frightened hazel eyes. “To do that, I’m gonna have to ask a favor. Can you do something for me?”

All Faith could do was nod. Her shaking was uncontrollable and she peed herself again, this time without the benefit of panties to help stop the flow from running out from under her.

“I know you’re scared, Faith, but I need you to put your arms around my neck and close your eyes.” said the figure softly. “Your daddy said that you sometimes do that when you’re scared and would hold Bundy real tight until the scary stuff went away. I need you to hold me like you do Bundy, okay?”

How did this woman, dressed in soft black clothing from head to toe with gloves that seemed to be so thin they were like her own skin, know about Bundy? That floppy eared rabbit was left on her bed when the scary men came in the night to take her away. Did Daddy really

send her or was this lady gonna eat her when she took her away from here?

“Your mom has been holding onto the ‘Princess and the Pea’ book since those bad men took you.” continued the dark figure with a soft chuckle. “Don’t worry.” she added softly with a little sparkle in the green eyes above the dark mask that seemed to contort as if she was smiling. “I didn’t tell her about your *Wonder Woman* comic collection you hid in the closet. She’s my fave too ya know?”

“She... is?” asked Faith between sharp breaths as she looked into those emerald eyes and began to calm. “I... wanna be... like... her... some... day.” she forced out.

“Me too, Faith.” said the woman as she reached out and touched the little one’s knee with that gloved hand. “I’ve been looking everywhere for bracers like hers and a rope that makes everybody tell the truth. Ya know?” At the little one’s nod, the woman continued, “Seems like too many people lie about important stuff and people like you are always caught in the middle. I wanna see that the bad guys are made to tell the truth and the worser guys get what’s coming to them.”

“Me... too.” said Faith as her breathing calmed just a little. “Are you really... gonna take... me home?”

“Yep.” replied the dark clothed woman as she offered her arms to the little one. “Just remember to hold me like Bundy and very soon I’ll put you into your mom’s arms safe and sound. Okay?”

“Okay.” said the little girl as she let the woman help her to her feet and, after wrapping her little arms about the woman’s neck, closed her eyes tight and put her face into the woman’s neck.

“You ready?” asked the dark clothed woman softly into Faith’s ear. After she felt the little nod on her shoulder, the woman said, “Let’s go home.”

Faith felt the woman lift her into her arms and carry her from the dark room. She felt the woman walk up the stairs and through what sounded like a big room. Then she felt the woman stop.

“Are we there?” she asked in something just above a whisper, her eyes closed tight and her grip on the woman’s neck increasing.

“Not yet, sweetie.” the woman said softly as she squatted down to pull the little panties from the pedophile’s mouth. She frowned at the hole her nine-millimeter had made in his forehead as she tucked the panties into a pouch at her waist. She continued out of the large front door to the mansion in upstate New York as she added, “I just had to pick up something you might need later. Just keep your eyes closed until I tell you, okay?”

“Okay.” said little Faith as she felt the woman carry her out and down some steps.

Faith heard the crunch of gravel as the woman walked along and, after a couple of minutes, the woman stopped. The little girl heard a car door open.

“Keep your eyes closed, Faith.” said the woman softly as she lifted the girl from her shoulder and sat her into the leather seat. “We’re still not safe yet so no peeking.” she added as she pulled the seat belt around the little one and secured it tight.

Faith heard the car door close softly and the footsteps of the woman walking around the car. Then she heard the other door open and the soft squeak of leather as the woman slid into the driver’s seat.

“Can I look now?” asked Faith as she sat with her eyes closed and her little hands over them to keep them that way.

“Not just yet, sweetie.” said the woman as she started the car. Faith felt the car start moving. “I’ll tell you when.”

“Okay.” the little girl replied with a little quaver in her tiny voice.

It seemed to take forever and Faith was starting to worry. She held her hands to her eyes tightly though. She'd promised and she always kept her promises. Even the one she made to that nasty Jimmy Douglas. If she could keep *that* promise...

The Lincoln pulled away from the carnage on the grounds of the mansion. Within those walls, twenty-seven thugs would be found, their bodies strewn about like rag dolls. The silenced Sig on her hip and the snipers she had placed as overwatch had sent them all to Hell.

"Okay, you can open your eyes now." said the woman softly.

Faith took her hands away from her eyes and, after rubbing them to make the blur go away, glanced at the woman behind the wheel of the fancy car she was driving.

"Sorry, lady." she said as she looked at the dark stain now creeping along the leather of the seat she was strapped into from the wet, dirty dress she was wearing. "I think I ruined your seat..."

"Don't worry about it, sweetie." said the woman with a giggle. "It's not mine."

Faith finally dropped off in fitful sleep and the woman pulled a blanket from the back to drape over her. Then, with a quick glance at the sleeping girl, she released the veil from her face and let it fall to ride on the right side of her black hood. She'd already disconnected the GPS tracker from Giovanni's car, this high-priced Lincoln, and she touched the panel on the dash.

"You got her?" came the question softly through the speaker system.

"Yeah." she replied with another glance at the sleeping girl. "You got 'em up at the cabin and safe?"

"Yeah," came the voice again, a soft male voice that sounded as if concerned. "I still don't understand why..."

“Not your problem, Frank.” replied the woman sharply, though as softly as she could. “If you used your car, there are those within your department who would be able to track you. In mine, even your cell phones don’t work.”

“I noticed that.” came the chuckling reply over the speakers. “How many this time, Raven?” came the question softly.

“You don’t wanna know, Frank.” she replied tersely.

“I’ll know soon enough I suppose.” said the man at the other end with a sigh. “So, what now?”

“That all depends on Carney.” said the woman softly as she reached back, again, and pulled the blanket up a bit to cover the little girl’s shoulders. “It’s in his court now. If he doesn’t want to help put Constantine away, I’ll see that his family is cared for but well away from him and the danger he’s put them into. Don’t look for me. I’ll show up when I get there.”

“Just like last time, right?” came the voice again.

“Yeah.” she replied dryly. “Just like last time.”

When she got on I80, just south of Scranton, she pointed the luxury car west. A few miles down the road, she found the motel she was looking for and parked the Lincoln behind it. She killed the engine and, after waking Faith gently, got her out of the car. She pulled the two small suitcases from the trunk then reached down to take Faith’s hand in hers. She walked with the little girl to the end room and entered.

“How much further, Diana?” asked the little girl as she looked about the clean room with a little trepidation.

“Diana?” asked the woman with a grin as she laid the little suitcases on the bed and opened one. “Where’d that come from?”

“Well, you said you wanted to be like *Wonder Woman*.” said little Faith softly as she stood in the middle of the floor with her arms

wrapped about her as if she was cold. “I just figured you’d be... you know... Diana Prince. You pro’bly have a big ol’ fancy job in the gover’nment and a ‘partment in New York or somethin’.”

“Well, you’re half right.” said the woman as she laid out a small pair of blue jeans, panties and a warm shirt. She pulled the down-filled coat out and walked over to hang it in the closet while she glanced at the little girl with a grin. “I do have another job that kinda keeps me busy but I don’t live in New York.” At the little girl’s sad frown, the woman added, “But if you wanna call me Diana, I think it might just be appropriate.”

“‘Cause you’re *Wonder Woman*?” asked the little one quickly.

“No,” said the woman with a light giggle, “‘cause I would *like* to be *Wonder Woman*.”

“Oh. Okay.” said Faith as she looked at the small clothes and then back to the woman with a question.

“I figured you would want to wash the stink of that place off of you before we see your mom, Faith.” said ‘Diana’ softly. “I brought you some warm clothes and some boots because we’re going into the forest where I took your mom and dad to keep them safe too. That okay?”

“Sure!” said Faith softly. “I don’t think mommy would like to hug me if I smell like pee.”

“I think your mommy would want to hug you if you smelled like a skunk!” said the woman with another light giggle. “Now, you get all clean and we’ll go.”

“But if I get all washed up and get back in that car...”

“Oh, we’re leaving that thing here and taking mine.” said the woman softly. “It belonged to the bad man who took you away and I think that a pee stain in his fancy seat is less than he deserves, don’t you?”

“Yeah.” said Faith with a big grin.

“Hurry up and get bathed and we’ll get back on the road.” said the woman as she took the clothes into the bathroom and laid them on the toilet seat.

Faith took her dirty pajamas off and threw them in the trash while the woman ran the bathwater. Soon she was relaxing in the warm water and letting it soak the fear away.

“Don’t take too long, Faith.” said the woman as she walked out of the bathroom but left the door cracked open. “I’m gonna go get my car and bring it around front, okay?”

“Okay.” said Faith as she let her head slide into the warm water.

The little girl used the motel shampoo to scrub her long brown hair and rubbed hard at her skin with the small bar of soap offered. When she thought she was clean enough, she laid back into the tub with her head underwater and blew bubbles to the surface. She came back up, sputtered as she wiped her eyes with her little hands, and heard the woman giggling. She glanced over and saw the lady sitting on the toilet seat with Faith’s new clothes across her arm and frowned.

Instead of the ninja-like suit she had worn before, she was now in bell-bottomed hip-huggers and a dark shirt. She still wore the hood with the face mask hanging on the side but Faith wondered if she’d taken the time to bathe first. Her gun and knives were gone but that didn’t bother her as much as the fact that *Wonder Woman* now looked like a regular lady!

“You look just like a wet puppy, Faith!” said the woman with another soft chuckle.

Faith giggled too, took the towel from the rack next to the tub and started drying her little body and hair. The woman stood and, as she put the clothes back on the toilet seat, said, “I got us burgers and fries. I

figure you for a Coke girl, right?” When Faith nodded with a little grin, the woman said, “Well, hurry up! I’m gonna eat mine while it’s hot!” and walked out of the bathroom.

After another half hour and lots of giggles, Faith was seated in the big Range Rover with the doors locked. ‘Diana’ had taken a big spray bottle into the room and, after she came out with the little suitcases, walked around to the back of the motel. After a couple of minutes, the woman came back to the big SUV, tossed the suitcases in the back and climbed in.

“Ready?” she asked.

At Faith’s smiling nod, she started the car and they pulled away back up onto I80. Two hours later, Faith was again asleep with a fluffy blanket, from the back of the SUV, laid over her to keep her warm. It would take another four hours to find the exit that would take them up to the cabin by the lake. The woman frowned at what lay ahead for her. Then, with a glance at a sleeping Faith, grinned at the welcome this little one would get from her parents.

The Range Rover pulled off of the highway into a small town and, after stopping at a drive-thru to pick up five burgers and fries and a cup holder for the five Cokes, the SUV was pointed toward the forest to the north. Faith kept an eye on the Cokes on the floorboard to make sure they didn’t tip over while they drove up the long dirt road into the mountains.

It was just getting dark when the big SUV pulled up to the cabin. Faith jumped out and ran up the long flight of wooden stairs toward the man sitting on the porch in the red flannel shirt. The woman, her mask once more in place, took the drinks from the floorboard and followed the little girl.

“Is my mommy and daddy here?” Faith asked as she climbed the long steps to the porch and looked the man over with a frown.

“*Faith!*” came the scream from inside. The girl turned toward the door as her mother threw it open, dropped to her knees and took her daughter into her arms crying softly into the little girl’s neck.

An older man came to the door. Upon seeing the little girl wrapped in her mother’s arms, he too dropped to his knees next to her. With trembling hands, he stroked the little one’s brown hair softly. He looked up at the tall woman with her face covered and nodded.

“Faith.” said the woman in the black mask softly. When Faith turned to look at her, the woman continued, “I left all our food in the backseat! Would you go get it while I take your mom and dad inside where it’s not so cold?”

“Sure, Diana.” Faith replied as she turned and toddled back down the long steps and ran toward the Land Rover.

“We need to go inside now.” said the woman sternly with a glance at Faith who now was working hard to get the heavy door to stay open long enough to retrieve the three bags of burgers. Once they were ushered into the cabin, the woman stopped them and, with glances through the screen door, continued, “Constantine had Giovanni take your little girl from her own bed, Carney.” she said angrily but softly.

“We know he’s a pedophile,” said the man in the red flannel shirt, “but we have never gotten any evidence on him to prove it.”

“That’s because he ate it, Frank.” said the woman sharply with another glance out the door at the little one straining with the three heavy bags as she climbed the steps slowly. Frank Costello, Assistant Attorney General of the United States Criminal Division, nodded as the woman continued, “According to your daughter, Carney, Giovanni told

her he was going to eat her after he was done with her. Do you still feel loyal to a monster that would do that?"

"What are you proposing... Diana." asked the girl's father with a worried look through the screen door. "Wit-Sec?"

"No." replied the woman as she watched the little one make it to the porch and, after a long breath, begin to carry the bags toward the door. "I don't trust them. I can, however, see that you have a new life far from here with a job that will allow you to spend more time with Faith and your wife. Right now, we need to have a burger with your daughter and, after that, your wife can take her into the bedroom upstairs and put her down for a safe night's rest."

"But we don't eat burgers." said Mrs. Carney as she frowned at the little one straining to carry the bags through the door.

"You do now." said the woman sharply as she walked over and took two of the bags from the little girl and led her to the kitchen table. "Faith is a burger and fries, steak and potatoes kinda girl, right?"

Faith grinned and nodded as she climbed into one of the chairs and opened one of the bags. While her mother looked on with disapproval, the woman slipped to her side and nudged her with her hip.

"That tofu, soybean, health food crap you've been feeding her doesn't give her enough nourishment to be able to defend herself from monsters." she whispered softly. "All it will do is give that little girl breasts long before she needs them and will make her weak. Buy 'free-range' beef and organic stuff if you have to, a good salad with her meat and green vegetables would be good too, but see that she eats good food from now on." Then, with a stern look to her eyes, she added in a whisper, "Now sit down and have a burger with your child."

After about an hour of giggles and smiling banter between the little girl, her parents and the woman she now called Diana, Faith began to squirm a bit.

“Ya gotta go?” Diana asked softly. At Faith’s nod, the woman pointed at a rough wooden door just off of the main room they sat in and said, “It’s in there, sweetie. There’s a stool just in front of the sink so you can wash up by yourself. We’ll just sit here and talk while you go, okay?”

“Okay, Diana.” said the little one as she dropped from the chair and ran toward the door, her little hand trying to help hold it in.

After the door closed, Diana turned to Carney and asked, “You ready to help?”

“What about next time?” retorted the obstinate man as he watched the door to the bathroom. “What happens when Constantine and his goons find us again and, this time, kills us all?”

“If you follow my instructions, that will never happen.” said the woman as she lifted her mask just enough to bring the straw to her lips and sipped. She set the plastic cup to the table and, with a stern sparkle in her green eyes, said, “That little girl and her mother are now in my care, Carney. If you want to stay safe and join them, help us. If not, say goodbye to them tonight. I will not let my new best friend be a party to this shit any more. Understand?”

“So, what do you need from me?” Carney asked with a slight nod of his head and a concerned look at the masked woman. “If I testify, I will be in danger and they might be able...”

“You don’t have enough information to do us any good in court, Carney.” said Frank, cutting the man off. “However, if we can get all you have on Constantine, we can add that to the other information we

have, find a pattern, and gather the evidence we need to put him away or see him strapped to a table with needles in his arms.”

“That I would pay to see.” said Carney angrily.

“You won’t.” said Diana in a matter-of-fact tone. “When next you hear about it, you will be sitting with some friends having a beer. When the news comes out, you might just say, ‘Hmmm... Isn’t that the guy...’ and the others will probably ask you where you’ve been for the last... several years.”

“After Faith has gone upstairs with Helen, I’ll tell you where I’ve stored copies of...”

Faith came out of the bathroom wiping her damp hands on her jeans. Her little grin brought a smile to every face at the table and a little tear to the stern green eyes just above the mask.

“Okay, my little friend,” said Diana as she scooted her chair back and held her arms to the little one, “I need a hug and a word with you before you get to bed.” At the fear that seeped back into the little blue eyes, Diana added, “Don’t worry, Faith. All of the monsters around here have been chased off by my other friends. If you want, you can check under the bed but I promise you won’t find any.”

“You sure?” asked Faith in a whisper.

“Cross my heart.” said the woman as she did just that. “Now, before you go upstairs, I have something for you.”

“What?” asked the little one with an awe-filled look up into Diana’s green eyes.

In answer, the woman pulled a silver chain with a key and a heart-shaped locket hanging from it from one of the pouches at her waist. She looped the chain over the little girl’s head and, as the key and locket rested on the tiny chest, Diana laid a hand over them.

“The key goes to a secret treasure in a small chest you’ll find in your room when you get where you’re going. The locket is secret too, but you have to promise not to use it unless you really feel you’re in danger.”

“I promise, Diana.” said the little girl sternly.

The woman lifted the little locket in one hand and, with the other, pointed at the loop where the locket had been strung through the chain. She pressed in on that loop and the locket opened to display a small red button.

“If you really, really need help, press that button and hold it.” said Diana softly. “It’s a super-secret transmitter that will tell the people I will have close to you that you need help and, after they check it out, they’ll call me. Then I’ll get into my invisible plane and fly to wherever you are and, together, you and I will see the bad guys are rendered to justice!”

“You gonna let me help, Diana?” asked the little brown-haired girl softly.

“Hey! You’re my very own side-kick now, right?” Diana asked as she leaned back and looked at Faith seriously. When Faith nodded with a big grin, the woman added, “You can’t tell anybody about that, even your very bestest friends. If you did, the bad guys could use them to get to you. That’s why all us superheroes have a secret identity. Ya know?”

“Yeah!” said Faith with a giggle. “So, what’s my...”

“Okay.” said the woman as she put her head real close to Faith’s and whispered. “You can’t let anybody know that you know me or even that we are friends... *bestest* friends, okay?”

“But we are, aren’t we?” asked the little one softly.

“Of course!” said Diana. “But they can’t know that or they’ll know our secret identity.”

“Oh!” said Faith as her little eyebrows shot up. “Okay, then...”

“Okay, from now on, you are... Josie Conniver.” said the lady softly with a glance at Helen Carney. “Your mom will be Jennifer Conniver and your dad will be... George.”

“But what about...”

“Faith Carney is your secret... *secret* identity and one you will use later when you join me to fight crime!” said Diana sternly. “Together, we will strike fear into the hearts of all evil-doers, okay?” Then, as she leaned back toward Faith, the woman added, “To be able to do that, you can’t let anybody know your secret identity or your mom and dad’s either. Promise?”

“I promise!” said Faith emphatically while she drew her little finger across her heart symbolically. “As far as anybody knows, I’m Josie now!”

“Right!” said the woman as she sat back in the chair and held out her hand with her little finger extended. “Pinky swear?”

Faith linked her tiny pinkie to the woman’s and nodded sternly. Then she glanced at her mother with a grin. Helen nodded and smiled.

“Now, Josie,” said the woman softly, “I want you to meet two of my bestest friends in the world. They’re yours too if you want. Sylvia and Brian are both former Marines who work with you and me in fighting crime. They will be the ones to answer if you ever have to push that secret button. Wanna try it out?”

“But it’s only for ‘mergencies isn’t it, Diana?” asked the little one as she fondled the locket gently.

“Yeah, but we gotta test it.” said Diana as she nodded at the girl. “They know it’s only a test this time, so they won’t be mad at you. Doncha worry about that. Go ahead.”

Faith gently pressed the button and almost immediately a very large man appeared in the door to the cabin and, from the kitchen, a small woman in jeans and checked shirt appeared.

“Sylvia? Brian?” said the woman softly, “I want you to meet Josie Conniver. That’s her name from now on and her secret identity is to be held in strict confidence.”

“She’s a super hero?” asked Sylvia with wide eyes and an astonished look on her face as she walked in and took a knee next to Faith.

“Yep!” said Faith with a little grin. “Just like Wonder Wom...”

“Don’t worry, Josie.” said the woman with a giggle when the little girl put a restraining hand to her mouth. “They have secret identities too. Sylvia and Brian aren’t their real names but that’s what you can call them for now. Besides, as my very bestest friends like you, they know everything. Now, you might see them from time to time but that’s so they can keep you safe. Okay?”

As Brian nodded with a big toothy smile, Sylvia laid her hand to the little girl’s back and grinned.

“Thanks, guys.” said Faith with a little grin as she snapped the locket closed. “I promise I’ll only push the button if I really, *really* need help, okay?”

“Okay.” said Sylvia with a little soft pat to the little one’s back. “Now, in the morning, Brian and I are going to take you and your parents to a secret place we call ‘Rendezvous One’. We’ll be there for about two months while we’re getting everything set up for your new life. There’s lots of room for running and climbing trees as well as horses to ride. You like horses?”

“I *love* horses, Sylvia!” said the little one, her eyes shining in anticipation.

“Well, you and me are gonna ride a lot while we’re there, and then, when we’re finished getting everything ready, we’ll move you to your new secret identity place where you will have to study real hard in school to get ready to help... Diana to fight crime. Okay?”

“Okay, but what if I don’t pass stuff... like in school and stuff?” asked Faith sadly.

“Don’t worry about that, Josie.” replied Sylvia. Then, in a soft whisper, she added, “I’ve already got a secret job at the school you will be going to next year and I’ll be your teacher for at least your first eight years. That okay?”

“If I see you, I’m not s’pose to call you Sylvia am I?”

“Nope.” said the former Marine sternly. “We’re secret super heroes, right?” At Faith’s nod, Sylvia continued, “So when you see me, you gotta pretend you don’t know me at first. I’ll give everybody my alter ego name before we begin the school year and, if you ever need help, I can come to your house and sit with you to help you learn stuff. As your teacher I can do that, ya know?” Faith nodded again and Sylvia continued, “I’ll be Miss Patterson, your teacher.” Then, in a conspiratorial whisper, she added, “That’s not my real name but only we know that, right?”

Faith nodded sternly and glanced back at Diana.

“You comin’?” she asked.

“I can’t, sweetie.” the woman responded softly. “I’ll be in close contact with Brian and Sylvia but... well... if the bad guys know you’re my bestest friend...” When Faith frowned sadly, Diana added, “But that doesn’t mean I can’t come visit later does it?”

“So maybe later on you can come and...”

“You might even see me at Rendezvous One, Josie.” said the woman with a giggle. “I like to ride horses too ya know.”

“Okay!” said the little one with a giggle. “They got names already?”

“All but the little pony, Josie.” said Sylvia. “After a little while, maybe you and me can find a really good name for her.”

“I’d like that, Sylvia.” said the little one and then yawned.

“Why don’t you go on up with Josie and... Jennifer, Sylvia.” said the woman softly. “I told Josie that you and Brian had chased all of the monsters away but you know those pesky boogers.”

“If there’s any in that room or under the bed, I’ll make ‘em wish they stayed in monster land!” said Sylvia as she picked little Faith up and moved with Helen Carney toward the stairway.

Brian nodded at the woman with the mask and disappeared from the doorway.

“Both of them are very good at what they do, Carney.” said the woman sternly. “Should anyone find a way to locate you, they will see you safely to an alternate location until we can set you up again.” She sat back in her chair and, after another sip at the Coke, added, “Now, you were telling Frank about your backup?”



Three hours later, Carney, now George Conniver, retired to the room he would share with his wife for the night. Frank stood on the front porch with the woman in the black veil and sighed.

“I’ll have to get a warrant to get the information from his house, Raven.” he said softly. “After that... what?”

“Don’t worry about the stuff he hid, Frank.” she replied as she walked with him down to the Range Rover. “I already have people on location taking it as we speak. I’ll have it delivered to the drop box... after I get what I need. That way you won’t have to unmask our

relationship or find yourself on the news. Keep a low profile for awhile. I'll be keeping tabs on you but..."

"You know I'll have to continue looking to find out who you are?" he asked as he stopped and looked at her seriously. "What you're doing is illegal, Raven. I know you're helping but..."

"I know." she replied with a sigh. "It's your job, Frank. I'm walking on the edge of a razor and have to continually watch to see that I don't cut myself and fall onto the wrong side. If you weren't looking for me, I'd think much less of you." She chuckled and added, "Just like I know you've memorized the plates on my wagon."

He laughed and nodded.

"Look it up, Frank." she said as she opened the door and slid in. "You'll find the plates registered to a little old lady in the Bronx. She lives in a Retirement Home there and I fund her cruise every year to the Caribbean. You won't be able to trace that either, though I know you'll try."

"I just don't wanna have to arrest you." he responded sadly. "I don't know what that confrontation would be like and..."

"If it ever comes to that," she replied as she started the wagon, "I'll disappear and you will never see me again."

She closed the door and drove away. Frank took a deep breath, blew it out, and walked slowly up the steps to the cabin.

Chapter Two

“Shadows gather...”

The gate guard pushed the button to open the gates to the Dahl Haus Cyber Systems compound just outside of Mountain View. The Lamborghini rolled through the gates and, after making the circle of the drive before the very large twenty story building, stopped at the steps leading to the glass front. The young man in the red vest ran down the steps and waited while the gull-wing door opened.

“Mornin’, Miss Dahl.” he said cheerfully. “How was your weekend?”

“Kinda boring, Bobby.” Victoria Dahl replied as she stepped out of the metallic green sports car and handed the young man the keys.

She was tall. Her almost six-foot frame was perfectly proportioned in the green pants suit. Her two-inch heels clicked a little as she stepped away from the expensive car and looked down at the young valet with a grin.

“I took in a couple of shows, had some good food with friends and drove up to San Francisco to feed the gulls.” she added as she smoothed the long red hair and pulled the sunglasses from her green eyes. “I think Ginny could use a little TLC.”

“No prob, Miss Dahl.” Bobby replied with a big grin. “I’ll detail her myself.”

“How went your date with Judy?” she asked as the young valet fondled the keys to the Lamborghini.

“She loved the ‘Vette, Miss Dahl.” he replied in excitement. “Thanks for letting me borrow it.”

“So...” Victoria asked with a knowing grin.

“We drove down the coast to L.A.” he responded sheepishly. “We had dinner with her folks and they kinda like me... I think. I’m hopin’ to get my Bachelors in computer science next year, apply for a job here and...”

“I could always use another good programmer, Bobby.” she interjected sternly. “You any good?”

“Not as good as I wanna be, Miss Dahl.” he replied, now a little worried. “I’ve been studying but...”

“I have a few friends who can get you into... benevolent hacking if you want?”

“Benevolent...” he asked.

“They just get in... kinda like ghosts... and look around a bit.” she said with a light chuckle. “They don’t do anything or steal anything. They just use it to hone their technique... I think. It can be a good way to figure out what works and what doesn’t. That’s what we do here, Bobby. We see what holes are in a customer’s system and make recommendations to the owners to make them more secure. You up for that?”

“Yes ma’am!”

“Once you have your BS in hand, see Gloria in HR.” Victoria responded. “I’ll let her know to put you on probation until you prove yourself. The rest is up to you, Bobby.”

“Thanks, Miss Dahl!” he said softly. “I’ll take care of Ginny now and I’ll get Dahlia ready for you to use later.”

“Thanks.” Victoria replied as she walked up the steps to the big building, her heels clicking softly against the stone. She stopped and turned back as Bobby started to slide into the Lamborghini. “You have a computer at home, Bobby?”

“Just a rebuilt laptop, Miss Dahl.” he replied softly. “With my tuition, this job and keeping up payments on my mom’s house, I can’t afford much right now.” Quickly, he added, “I’m not askin’ for a raise, Miss Dahl...”

“I know.” she replied with a chuckle. “I just think it would be in my best interest if you had the tools to become an asset for the company. After you get finished, go ahead and see Gloria. I’ll give her a call in a minute to release one of the computers we have in storage and then I want you to talk to her about your budget. If we can help, we will.”

“Thanks!” he responded excitedly. “I won’t let ya down, Miss Dahl!”

“I know.” she whispered and walked into the main corporate offices of Dahl Haus Cyber Systems.

“Morning, Vickie.” said the brown-haired girl at the reception desk as Victoria stopped there to pick up her messages.

“Hi, Connie.” the redhead replied with a grin. “Anything interesting I need to know before I start my day?”

“I just got a phone call from a... Mr. Fontenelli about an appointment he wants to make.” Connie replied as she handed the tall redhead a slip of pink paper. “He’s the head IT for... uh... Constantine Imports out of New York.”

“Call Tyler and Amy.” Victoria replied as she handed the girl the slip of paper. “Have them contact Mr. Fontenelli, find out what he needs and put together a presentation. I’ll get with them later to see if we need to fly him here or make the presentation over Vid.” Vickie sighed and, as she walked to the bank of elevators, added, “I’m going up to my place for a while, Connie. Hold all my calls until I let you know I’m back.”

“Sure thing, Vickie.” the receptionist replied with a sweet smile.

“Oh,” Vickie added as she glanced back at Connie, “call Gloria and have her release one of the better computers to Bobby. He’s gonna need it for his studies. And tell her to talk to Bobby about his budget. If we can help with his tuition...”

“I’ll see to it.” Connie replied as she picked up the phone.

Vickie took the ID card from her breast pocket, waved it at the receiver next to the elevator doors and waited for them to open. She glanced back at the smiling people walking about on their way to their separate offices. They all looked like they were enjoying their profession. She’d found the best and brightest... the very best people to populate the organization. There was not a “Black Hat” among them.

Vickie sighed again and corrected herself.

“Except me.” she muttered as the doors to the elevator opened.

She stepped inside, pushed the “Close Doors” button and waited again until the doors closed. She placed the card to the left of the panel at the top, butted it against the metal of the floor buttons and waited while the numbers flashed three times. Then she pressed the “Close Doors” button three times and watched the numbers flash again.

After punching in the five-digit access code, she lifted the card away from the wall and leaned against the wall of the elevator. She watched the LED display over the doors wink out and, after a short pause, the elevator started down.

B1... B2... B3...

At “B6”, the elevator slowed until the display read “B7”. It stopped and Vickie levered away from the wall to wait for the doors to open.

The big guy in full tactical gear smiled as she stepped out. He punched a series of numbers into the panel next to the elevator doors and the doors closed.

“Hey, Vic.” he said softly.

“Hey, Ron.” she replied as he walked with her down the short hallway to the blast doors at the end. “They all in the bunker?”

“Yep.” he replied as he punched in the code that would open the four-foot-thick vault doors. “Mitch has been monitoring them for a while now and there is one who is...”

“I figured they would all be antsy by now.” Vickie replied as she and Ron walked into the vast control room for the underground stronghold.

“Four of them are exploring their room, one is still crying while she sits on the bed but one has been pounding on the door for the last half hour.” he responded with a chuckle.

“It’s not all that funny, Ron.” she responded with a chuckle of her own. “They’re all probably scared shitless.”

“I’d be scared too if I was stuck in a place where I didn’t know how I got there with a guard at the door.” Ron replied as he put the modified AR in the rack next to the door and followed Vickie to the control platform. “They’ll need to calm down before...”

“Bring ‘em up Mitch.” Vickie stated with a glance at the bald man sitting at the keyboard before the extensive display.

While Mitch pulled up the screens for the rooms, Vickie lifted the hooded robe from the rack next to the door and slipped into it. Then she pulled the veil over the bottom of her face and stepped to the keyboard next to Mitch.

“We ready?” she asked softly.

Mitch nodded and punched a few of the keys. Just next to the displays for the rooms was a monitor that showed a dark figure dressed all in black. The figure floated in an ebon mist and the eyes that peered over the veil were intense green, alight in yellow fire.

“That your idea?” she asked with another grinning glance at the bald man.

“Figured you didn’t want them to see anything, Vic.” he responded with a grin. “It gives a feeling of mystery and dread. With what we’re asking them to do, it seemed fitting.”

“True.” she replied softly as she looked at the occupants of the separate rooms.

A small blonde girl, maybe eleven years old, sat on the bed crying. Her haunted gaze moved furtively about the room and Vickie knew that the little one was wondering when the slavers would come for her. Vickie shook her head sadly.

Then there was the teenager, maybe sixteen, with the strawberry blonde mullet. He had a big bag of Doritos and a Monster drink in hand. As he sat on the couch, his gray eyes watching the door, his ankle rested atop his knee, the booted foot bouncing impatiently.

Vickie glanced at the pretty little sandy-brown haired girl. Her hair was done up in braided pigtails, with which she absently played. The girl shifted her big glasses and sighed as she leaned back in the big chair, watching the monitor as if waiting.

Vickie turned her attention to the twenty-something young man who walked through the room adjusting the books, the contents of the fridge as well as the cabinet next to it. He then walked to the door and put his ear to the surface to listen. He wiped the non-existent smudge from the surface and walked over to again smooth the coverlet on the bed. He ran a hand through his light brown hair as his gray eyes surveyed the living quarters.

The overweight seventeen-year-old in the fifth room walked from the bathroom zipping his pants. He made his way to the fridge door and, after a moment of hesitation, he took a Sprite. He then opened the

cabinet and retrieved a big bag of Cheetos. He moved to the bed and stuffed a handful of the orange noodles into his mouth and drank over half of the Sprite to wash it down... but only after wiping the orange dust on the bedspread.

Then there was the sixth.

She pounded on the door with both hands, her face drawn up in an angry scowl. She backed off, slipped off one of her low-heeled boots and banged it to the door. Her black hair, with the neon green streaks throughout, fell over the shaved side of her head as she screamed at whoever was on the other side of the door. Vickie punched the audio and frowned.

“Let me outta here, motherfuckers!” the girl screeched. “I know my rights! You can’t keep me here. Open this door or... or ... or you’ll be in big trouble!”

“Come over to the monitor and sit.” Vickie said softly.

The girl heard the words in a deep voice that seemed to come from the bottom of a barrel. She stormed to the monitor and screamed, “Fuck you! Let me outta here!”

“If you don’t sit down, I’ll have one of the guards come in there and taze you!”

Vickie replied angrily.

“Do it, asshole!” the girl screamed. “I dare you!”

“If you don’t sit down,” Vickie responded, “I’m gonna narc you, send your stupid ass home and you won’t get to make some serious cash!”

The girl stopped and stared at the monitor for a moment. Then...

“Serious...”

“Cash!” Vickie replied. “If you sit, I’ll explain! You are not the only one I brought here. There are others who are in the dark like you but they aren’t acting like assholes!”

“Well,” she shot back, “maybe I don’t like being tossed into a van, driven all over the place and then stuck in a cell like a criminal!”

“But you *are* a criminal, darkgoth666!” Vickie responded. The girl stared at the monitor in open-mouthed astonishment as Vickie continued, “You emptied the bank account of a real nasty porn-site owner! He sent his black-hats after you and woulda found you if my team hadn’t intercepted them and sent them to Pakistan! Now, sit down and shut up while I get everybody else to their monitors!”

The girl dropped into the heavy office chair in shock.

Vickie switched to the blonde girl still crying and sighed.

“Gypsy99?” she asked. When the little girl looked toward the monitor in terror, Vickie continued, “Gypsy99, I need you to come to the monitor for a moment.”

“I don’t wanna be raped!” she screamed from the bed.

“I don’t want your body, little one.” Vickie replied softly, though the deep voice from the monitor probably didn’t carry the soft sadness. “I need your mind.”

The little girl slipped from the bed and, with her arms wrapped about her tiny chest, walked slowly toward the monitor, her little body shaking almost uncontrollably.

“I know that the many animal sanctuaries in Connecticut would like to thank you for the donations you made last year, sweetie.” Vickie went on. “The governor probably hates you... or would if he knew it was you who took all of his off-shore accounts and sent the money to the sanctuaries. I think it was wonderful... but you shouldn’t have done that from home. My team had to track you, shift the trail to Canada and

then send his hackers to Australia. You need to learn to be more careful.”

“How’d you find out?” the little girl asked as she wiped her eyes on her *Hufflepuff* t-shirt.

“It’s my job, sweetie.” Vickie responded. “Now, settle down while I get the others online. Okay?”

“Okay.” Gypsy responded softly, but with a little sob as she sat down in the big chair.

Vickie switched all audio on and said, “I need you all to come to the monitor.”

It took a few moments and, before Orion7 sat down, he had to wipe the chair, the desk and the monitor with a Kleenex. Ballsafire69 wiped his hands on the bedspread, picked up the half empty bag of Cheetos and walked over to plop down in the chair.

Route66 sauntered to the monitor and, after setting the Doritos bag to the desk, sat back to sip on the Monster as he grinned.

“Nice effects.” he stated and put a couple of Doritos into his mouth.

“Thanks.” Vickie responded. “Now, if you will all pay attention, I have an offer for you.”

“I’m listening.” Darkgoth responded in a sullen tone.

“Good.” Vickie took a deep breath and sighed. “First, until we’re finished, no one uses their real names. Use your handles and don’t give your address, phone number or... anything else that could be traced back to you. This is important. That’s why, for now, I’m the only one who can hear you. What we’re asking of you is illegal, dangerous and could get you jail time or killed. It’s that important, folks.”

“Killed?” asked the little blonde girl in a whisper.

“Yeah, Gypsy.” Vickie responded softly. “The guy we’re going after is a certified...”

“Gypsy99 is here?” asked the twenty plus year old, Orion7. “He’s an Elite! I watched when he took that pedophile Governor’s mullah away from him! I tried to shield him but somebody pushed me out...”

“That was me.” Vickie responded. “You were in the way.”

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I’m gonna put you all online so we can discuss this.” Vickie said softly as she touched the key to turn on the interconnect.

The others all leaned toward the monitor and Vickie sighed again.

“At one time I was known as... The Raven.”

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Darkgoth666.

“When I went by that name...”

Orion popped in excitedly, “He took out three terrorist cells in Iran and Iraq simultaneously. From all accounts he shut them down completely financially, killed the security systems and then sent all of the locations of the known leaders to the good guys. Remember the airstrikes ten years ago? That was *him!*”

The girl in pigtails leaned forward with curiosity. “You’re the hacker that took out that Hollywood pedophile ring? Got all those actors and politicians sent to prison?”

“Not to mention,” cut in Gypsy with a soft, squeaking voice, “destroying that child slavery ring out of South America two years ago. He unlocked all the electronic cages remotely, burned their systems with a custom-built virus named ‘Raven’ that, while cooking the system, was sending all evidence and the location of the group to the government.”

The young blonde leaned forward chewing on her lip. “That’s what got me into hacking. I always thought, you know, The Raven was a girl. I wanted to do good like that... take out the really bad guys. I wanted to be... you. But then you disappeared right after that and...”

“Wait a minute.” Orion cut in. “How old are you?”

“Eleven.” Gypsy replied softly. “So what?”

“So... You’ve been hacking since you were...”

“Nine.” Gypsy cut in proudly. “I started right after I built my first computer. Now that The Raven needs us...”

“I’m glad to know that my reputation precedes me...” the disembodied voice responded. “They nearly caught me, guys. I was forced to hack the North American Air Defense Command computers in Colorado Springs. I altered their program to misdirect agents who were trying to trace me. I had to burn my identity at that time. Now, you all may call me... *Nevermore.*”

The alias, N3V3RM0R3, popped up on the screen for a few moments before returning to the hooded, fiery eyed shape.

“Look.” Vickie stated softly. “I know you’re all interested in where I’ve been but that can wait. There’s a monster on the loose and I need Elites to help me. For that, I’m gonna need a lead hacker to take charge of the process.”

“Raptor.” stated Orion7 quickly. “If we had Raptor, he could get in, sneak around and pull out anything you need. You wouldn’t even need any of us. He’s Super, *Super-Elite!*”

“This is gonna be a major decision, guys.” Vickie stated sternly. “If I can get Raptor, you’re gonna have to let him direct everything. One little slipup could wreck everything and all of us could be in real trouble. Suggestions?”

“Raptor is the best.” Ballsafire69 stated as he dug into the bag of Cheetos for the last one. “He shielded me when I was trying to add a couple of zeros to my bank account. They never caught on and I was able to buy... somebody special, Christmas last year.”

“If I was half as good as Raptor,” Darkgoth666 added in awe, “I could have the contents of the Louvre delivered by UPS to my door and nobody would ever figure it out.”

The others nodded and Vickie grinned.

“So how do I find...”

“I’m here.” the sandy-brown haired girl responded in almost a whisper as she fidgeted with a braided pigtail.

“You’re a girl?” asked Orion7 incredulously.

“Yeah?” asked Darkgoth666 angrily. “So what? A girl can be Super-Elite!”

“I know.” responded Orion7 softly. “But I thought he... uh... she would be an old man with a bald spot sitting in a basement somewhere running around on the dark web. You sound very young. How did you manage to take the CIA’s stash in the Caymans four years ago?”

“I wrote a program, sent it in to decoy while I slipped in the trapdoor.” Raptor replied sheepishly. “They caught on just as I was leaving and, after I burned their black hat, I sent them to Greenland for the summer.”

“Nice!” Orion replied with a grinning nod. Then, as he sat back in the chair and glared at the monitor, he said, “Okay. You said this is gonna be dangerous... maybe deadly. I’m kinda worried about the girls... no offense, ladies. I’m just one of those guys who wants to protect all of womankind from the bad guys. Frankly, I don’t wanna be dead either. What’s to stop...”

“Only your expertise, guys.” Vickie responded softly. “Like I was saying, this guy is a monster. He has his hands in sex-trafficking, drugs... the really bad kind... arms sales to gangs, murder, mayhem... Pick a crime and this ass-hat has his fingers all up in it. He recently

took a five-year-old little girl from her bed and gave her to a pedophile who would have raped and then eaten her.”

“What?” Orion⁷ exclaimed as he lurched forward in the chair. “Where...”

“I killed him.” Vickie replied softly. “I took her home to her mother and gave them a new life. The problem is, I don’t know enough about our target to protect us all.

“All of you are either white or gray hats. This is something I know because I’ve been following you all for a while now. If we get caught, we could all go to jail for twenty to life. If this monster finds us...”

Vickie left it there as she watched the faces on the monitor. All except little Gypsy’s turned stern.

“Gypsy?” Vickie asked softly.

“I’m scared.” she responded softly. “What if they find momma and...”

“We won’t let that happen, right Raptor?” Orion stated sternly.

“I’m not gonna lie.” the sandy-brown haired girl responded with a worried look. She adjusted her glasses and added, “I know what I can do alone, but taking you guys with me?” She sighed. “If you’re all in this...”

“What’s in it for us?” Darkgoth asked as she sat toward the monitor.

“For you?” Vickie replied. “A chance to see your Mom stop working three jobs and for you to quit your job at Burger King.” She let that sink in for a moment. “I know your Dad passed away three years ago and your mom’s been working her ass off to pay the bills. I know you have to work too, the computer you built needing constant repair, and your studies are suffering for it.

“I can see that an obscure Insurance Company contacts your Mom with a hidden policy your dad supposedly took out ten years ago. It has an immediate payout to the tune of six figures and a monthly that will allow for your Mom to go back to school for her nursing degree. I will also, if you can bring your grades up, set up a free-ride to Columbia for you. They have a great computer science program and...”

“I’m in!” said the girl as she rubbed the six earrings in her left ear with a big grin.

“For you, Orion7,” Vickie continued, “an all-expenses paid trip to MIT.”

“Really?” he asked as he wiped his sweaty hands on the Kleenex and stared at the monitor. “I mean... *really?*”

“Yeah.” Vickie responded softly. “Really.”

“What about me?” asked Route66. “I ain’t got nothin’ and my Pop’s gonna lose the farm. He ain’t real good in the city so...”

“I already bought the mortgage on your Dad’s place, buddy.” Vickie responded softly. “Even if you don’t join us, the company I’m using is going to restructure his loan, pay all back taxes, provide him with the capital to buy some equipment and see that he has what he needs to keep the farm going.” At his incredulous stare, she added, “I’m a sucker for farmers. It serves no purpose to let him go under just because some bank wants to have a black bottom line.”

“And if I help?” he asked softly, not certain he understood the lengths this guy had gone through to see his Pop could keep the farm.

“I can see that a mistake is made in the loan agreement, write off the mortgage and, with your grades and your abilities, can see that a University with the right curriculum contacts you. I have a group of investors who will offer a limited partnership to your dad, buy up all of

the vacant land around your farm and provide whatever is necessary to make it go. They owe me for... past assistance. Deal?"

"Deal!" he replied forcefully as he sat back with a big country grin.

"My turn." said the overweight young man as he wadded the empty bag up and threw it to the floor. "My Dad's a lawyer and my Mom ran off. Dad keeps me supplied with whatever I want and gave me the basement for a playroom. I already have a computer, unlimited data, a Play Station 12 and an allowance that lets me buy whatever I want. You have nothing for me."

"No?" Vickie asked through the monitor. "Maybe you should ask yourself whether your Pop would litigate a charge of embezzlement against you for stealing from his account to deposit the funds into your mother's account. I know she didn't leave on her own. He threatened her, sent her away and is sharing his bed with his pretty secretary. Your Mom's been very sick for a while now and has a hard time getting around. You spend all of your time in the basement because he knows you know."

Ballsafire sat back in the chair in shock while Victoria continued.

"I don't even know if you want to, but I can see to it that you and she have a home far away from your Dad with a decent income, get you a housekeeper to see after her and I can offer the right schooling for you to be able to write coding for games. I can even recommend companies that need programmers who are proficient." With a ghostly finger from the monitor, she added, "You're gonna have to learn to pick up after yourself though. Start by picking up that bag and put it in the garbage."

He quickly bent down, retrieved the empty bag and held it for a moment looking about for a trashcan. He stood up and walked over to

the can by the door, dropped the bag in and came back to drop into the chair.

“So,” Victoria asked, “are you in?”

“Yeah.” Ballsafire responded softly. “I’m in.”

“What about Gypsy?” Orion asked softly.

“Gypsy’s Momma is sick.” Vickie responded softly. “She’s been in the hospital for almost a year now. Gypsy’s aunt has been siphoning off her sister’s trust account for quite a while and treating Gypsy like crap. If something happens to Gypsy’s mom, the aunt takes automatic guardianship.

“Her aunt doesn’t know about the computer system Gypsy built in the attic or the line she tapped into for data.” Gypsy started crying again, but Vickie continued, “I have... friends who would like nothing better than to charge her aunt with fraud, take Gypsy to a home I know of where the people are computer nerds just like her and I have already sent a specialist to the hospital to see what is going on with her Mom. I can’t promise anything but...”

“I’m in!” the little girl shouted as she glared at the monitor and wiped her face on the t-shirt again. “Even if Momma... I’ll testify against Aunt Rose if you can get the dirt on her.” the little one added angrily. “Until Momma gets out of the hospital, I’ll spend the time with people who understand....”

“That they do, sweetie.” Vickie replied with a ghostly chuckle. “Now, the doors will be opened in a minute and you can wander up to the lounge. Each of you has a guard. They are your personal bodyguard and will go wherever you go in the compound.” Vickie paused for a moment. “They are there to protect you, guys. They are not your personal servants. Tomorrow...”

“What about Raptor?” Orion asked with a frown.

“Raptor and I have already talked.” Vickie responded. “We have an understanding.”

The brown-haired girl with the braided pigtails grinned and Vickie tapped the key to shut the audio down.

“See that Sal and Vera monitor them closely for a while, Mitch.” Vickie said as she lifted the robe off and hung it on the rack. “I’m gonna fly down there and see after them personally.”

“There’s not an airport close by, Vic.” Mitch replied with a worried glance.

“I know.” she said with a grin. “Call Guy and have the jet prepped. It’s only a short hop so...”



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