

Seven-year-old Faith Carney was again in the hands of monsters... but this time she had a secret. Her bestest friend? The Raven!

Came a Tapping: "...I am the Raven"

By Kat Lewis and R.L. Pool

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Came a Tapping

The background of the cover features a computer monitor with a cracked screen, a keyboard, and a mouse on a desk. The scene is dimly lit, with a dark, ominous atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the image.

“... I am the Raven”

A DAHL HAUS CYBER SYSTEMS NOVEL

Part 3

Kat L. Lewis and R.L. Pool

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Dedicated to the men and women of Bikers Against Child
Abuse... B.A.C.A.... and their motto...
“No child deserves to live in fear...”

<https://bacaworld.org/>

And:

To the people working night and day to stop human
trafficking and slavery worldwide.

See: “TheSilentChildren.com”

Look up “Traffick Jam” and, yes, it is spelled correctly.

Musicians against child trafficking.

Chapter 1

“It begins at the end...”

She woke to pain in her chest. She moaned.

“Stay still, Raven.” came a young girl’s voice to her ears. “I’ve got you. Just lay still.”

“Keep the pressure on the wound, kid.” another voice chimed in... one filled with... pain? She heard the man cough and then, “You’ll need to find a way to get some help here pretty quick.”

“I already did.” the little girl voice responded a bit sternly. “Are you...”

“I’m just hanging on to see that she’s gonna make it, kiddo.” the man’s voice replied with a chuckle that brought another round of coughing. “I’m not gonna be around much longer. Just see that she is.”

“That’s the plan.” the small voice responded firmly as the pressure to Raven’s chest increased.

She began to fade again and tried to wake up to look around.

“Stay still, Raven.” the little voice reiterated in a whisper. “Stay with me. *Shadowling* is on the job.”

Then, Victoria Dahl passed out...

Chapter 2

“Two months earlier...”

“Mister President, what about the rash of vigilantes that have been terrorizing the country over the last two years?”

President McClondin smiled at the question and tilted his head at the reporter on the South Lawn of the White House.

“Where have you been?” he asked while other reporters laughed. “If you read or watch news other than your own, you would know that these vigilantes have been wreaking their vengeance for over twenty years... maybe longer. Past Presidents have appointed many to see that they are brought to justice and many have been.”

He sighed and then continued.

“Look. I know that there are many among you who are secretly rooting for those people... and I can’t really blame you. However, what they’re doing is against the law... illegal to the point of warranting the death penalty in many cases. I don’t want to see that. I want them to stop and let the proper authorities do their jobs.”

“But that’s the thing though.” another reporter chimed in. “With the regulations not allowing law enforcement to remove those thugs with impunity...”

“And run a police state where all of the rights you are guaranteed under the Constitution are forfeit?” the President asked with a frown. “Not on my watch.

“I’d like to think that the people of this great country were better than this... and most are.” McClondin continued sadly. “As long as there are those who profit from criminal enterprise, there will be vigilantes. It is my sincere hope that those who stand in the shadows to protect the innocent do not fall into thugdom, nor is it my intention to let them run rampant.

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“The former President, and three before her, provided me and those who come after me with a group of dedicated individuals who look to track down, arrest and incarcerate those who take the law into their own hands. I want them to stop, let the folks who work day and night to protect the citizens of this country do their jobs and not have to pursue them possibly to their deaths.”

He sighed again and, after a glance at his AG, added, “I do not condone, admire or encourage those vigilantes. I want them to stop, but also allow for the American people to step up and learn to protect themselves. I want the criminal organizations to stop as well and turn their talents to helping the weaker among us.

“I, however, do not live in a dream world where unicorns flit from flower to flower on little silver wings. Until we take the criminal element from the throats of our people, vigilantism will continue to be a problem.”

With AG Joe Bolles and the Director of DOJ at his side, President McClondin turned to end his press conference. As is normal, one reporter took a last shot.

“So, you’re saying there is nothing you can do?” the snide reporter asked. “While your... law enforcement buddies run around harassing innocent citizens with their bigotry and hatred for the common person, you can’t seem to stop the killing on the streets of this country. Maybe if you spend a little more time outside of your ivory tower...”

“You, sir, are, as usual, ignorant of the facts!” McClondin responded with venom as he turned a glare on the reporter. He walked slowly back to the podium and, taking the edges of the stand in a death grip, continued, “Law Enforcement Officers must, by law, stop citizens when they are breaking the law passed by local, state and nationally elected officials. They should not be responsible for your actions, yet must because of those laws.”

He sighed, tried to return to calm and then...

“They shouldn’t have to care whether you’re belted into your vehicle, you’re texting while driving, or that, in some districts, you’re talking on the phone while driving. They shouldn’t have to tell you to secure your children in the vehicle as you drive to the market, drive reasonably through neighborhoods or register your vehicle properly... but they must. They have other things to worry about rather than be responsible for your actions when you aren’t. But cannot because of the laws passed by their separate governments. Each time they have to stop a citizen for infractions, they take their lives in their hands.

“You, and people like you, scream about racial profiling but that is a necessary part of law enforcement.” he continued sharply. “If a five-foot-tall oriental robs a liquor store, they need to know that an oriental, about so tall, dressed in whatever, has broken the law. They don’t want to stop a black man or Italian-American to question them about a robbery that just doesn’t fit the description. They want to be able to find the robber... an oriental.

“A Law Enforcement Officer stops a car and, as they carefully come to the window to ask for ID, they are harassed by a citizen until that LEO has no choice but to arrest that citizen. They don’t want to. It makes more paperwork for them and a court case that could have been avoided.” President McClondin sighed again and added, “Are there some who are inept, who use the power of their badges to harass others? Yes. Is it acceptable? Not in the least.

“Yet there are far more frustrated when they actually capture a certifiable criminal, file the report, gather the evidence and that known criminal walks out of the courtroom a free man. Then they have to wait until that criminal commits another crime... and they will, being emboldened to do so by the very justice system that has broken down around them... and our LEOs must risk their lives to capture them yet again.

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“Law Enforcement, by law, cannot stop crime unless they are there to witness it themselves.” he continued. “Until crimes have been committed, they are powerless. To do otherwise is to remove your rights, those guaranteed under the Constitution, and will reduce this country to a police state.

“We are doing everything we can do... by Law... to prevent crime and stop the vigilantes from thinking they have to take the law into their own hands.” He sighed once again and glanced at Bolles before, “We are gathering evidence... *legal* evidence accepted in a court of Law... to put a dent in the criminal enterprises within the boundaries of this country. It’s an uphill battle because, while you make your snarky little comments about what we are still unable to correct, you and your friends get together to laugh at our efforts while snorting your illegal drugs, watching your child pornography and taking your prostitute to your bedroom for a romp. You belittle the LEO’s efforts every time you sit at your desk... which is not often I think... and think you are doing the world a great service.”

He glared at the reporter for a moment choosing his words carefully. Then, as he threw civility to the wind...

“Just shut up if you have nothing to add to the conversation but stupid little remarks intended to alarm and foment misery. If the demand for drugs, prostitution and sex slavery were to dry up tomorrow, the supply would soon follow. Then there would be no need for anyone to think they must take the law into their hands. Case closed!

“Now, go and misrepresent everything I’ve just said. At least you’re good at that!”

With that, President McClondin walked off with Joe Bolles and his DOJ Director without a backward glance.

“You know, Jack,” Bolles commented as they walked toward the Oval Office, “by the end of the day, you’ll be a xenophobe who thinks all orientals are short.”

“Frankly,” the President responded, “I couldn’t care less. It reminds me of Julius Caesar.”

“Careful, Jack.” Bolles responded with a chuckle. “If they heard you...”

“It’s just that ‘*The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones.*’ As long as they can tear down what we are trying to do, they will have inquiring minds who think they should know.”

President Jack McClondin sighed as they entered the Oval Office and he walked slowly toward his desk.

“It doesn’t matter what I say or do...”

“It’ll never be enough.” Joe replied softly. “We’re doing everything we can possibly do to take the organized crime out of the picture, but they have powerful people and ranks of lawyers who keep them safe. I’m not saying we should, Jack,” Bolles continued seriously, “but if we could just shoot them on sight, it would reduce the paperwork.”

“Then what?” Jack McClondin asked angrily. “Purse snatchers? Jaywalkers? Shoplifters? Where would it end? That’s another reason we must... *must* find this Raven and end his career.

“I know.” he continued with an upraised hand. “He seems to be better at taking on the bad guys than we are but we are shackled to the Law... and rightly so. He must know that what he is doing is blatantly against the law.”

“Yet, Raven is responsible for removing several criminal organizations and providing legal evidence for the prosecution of many others.” Bolles responded as he poured a cup of coffee and sat on the sofa. “I’m not proposing to give him a pass but...”

“That would make the headlines now wouldn’t it.” Jack interrupted with a laugh. “How are we doing tracking him down, Joe?”

“I have a team with a leader you can trust, Mr. President.” Bolles replied. “It’ll take time but I have faith that he’ll find everything about

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this Raven and bring him down. I just wish Raven would stop on his own so we wouldn't have to do anything but wonder what became of him.”

Chapter 3

“Call Tony...”

“Genovese is finishing what Raven began, boss.” the thin man stated as he stood before the big desk and watched the sour look on Barron Venovich’s face. “He’s taking our resources from us and our profits are dwindling. Our own teams can’t keep up with the demand for young product.”

“Genovese is...”

“He has all of his people out looking for the capture teams, boss.” the thin man continued. “From what we found, he never did like Constantine’s taste in young girls and has been hunting down anybody who would take his three young daughters from him. Now that Raven took Polenski out, Genovese is spending a lot of time tracking down the independents and anybody else who would dare to threaten kids like his daughters. He even has Pretty Bobby running the show.”

Venovich looked at the older thin man with a frown.

“We need to find a way...” Barron stopped while his face became thoughtful. “What would happen if... if evidence came up that showed Genovese was turning into Constantine. If Raven found that Genovese was back in business doing what Constantine was doing...”

“It would take the heat off of us for awhile while taking Genovese out of the picture.” the thin man replied with a nod. “The question is, how do we send Raven after him while staying in the shadows?”

“And how do we set it up to remove Raven and Genovese at the same time?” Venovich added thoughtfully. “If we set it up right, the cops will catch Raven red-handed, take Hugo out with him and then...”

He thought for a moment trying to get his mind around the possibility...

“Whatever happened to Constantine’s kid?” he asked finally. “They found Constantine, his wife and a bunch of his soldiers in the rubble of

his place in upstate New York but they never found the kid's body... as far as we know. If we could somehow find her, take her while leaving evidence for Raven that Genovese was behind it..."

"I checked our sources in Wit-Sec and they haven't heard anything about her or any of the other people who disappeared before Constantine was taken out." the thin man replied. "If they're still alive, it's possible that Raven sent them into hiding. Suppose we found one or more of them, take them or their kids and leave a trail to Genovese?"

"That might work." Venovich replied as he stood and leaned on his desk. "Have our people begin to look for them... any of them. If they're out there, find them and figure out how to take them in a way that will lead our Raven to Genovese."

"Actually, we already have a line on one of them." the thin man responded with a grin. "We'll have to set it up but..."

"Who?" Venovich asked with a frown.

"One of Constantine's bookkeepers, boss." came the reply. "Fred Carney. He goes by George Conniver now and he's working in Casper, Wyoming for a CPA firm." The man chuckled and added, "He made the mistake of being in a company photo while at a picnic with his family... a wife and daughter. What do you want to do?"

"Leave that to me, Styles." Barron replied softly. "If we can get Carney... or better yet, his daughter... we can force Raven into the open. Once Genovese and Raven are both out of the picture, we can consolidate power and take over from the assholes now ruining our business." Venovich thought for a moment and then, "Get Welch and MacGruder in here... and Vickers if you can find him. I'll need a team to take that bastard Raven down once he shows."

"I'll see to it." Styles replied as he turned, walked to the door and left.

Barron Venovich stood and, with his glass of Crown Royal in hand, walked to the window. He sighed as he looked out over the LA skyline.

So far, he'd managed to keep a low profile. The FBI and the DOJ had not touched him and he liked it that way. His organization was profitable but still in the weeds... as long as Raven didn't target him. Now, with the new business he was starting up to increase his share of the human trafficking, that would change. He needed to take Raven out of the picture and spend some time gardening the bigwigs in Washington. Thanks to Styles, he has one of the men close to the President sitting in the wings if he needs him. At least that's something.

Genovese was cutting into the independent capture teams Barron needed and he too needed to be removed. This was risky but...

"What's up, Barron?"

"Hey, Tony." the boss of the organization responded as he turned to look at the young man in the neat suit as that one dropped into the leather chair before the desk. "I've got a delicate operation I need done. I need somebody I trust to head it up."

"Say the word and I'll see it done then." Anthony Vickers responded with a grin. "Give me the particulars."

"We've been dabbling in the child sex trade for a little while now and, with our new contacts in the middle east, need to step up our supply line." Barron replied as he sat and swirled the ice cube in his drink. "The problem with that is..."

"Raven." Tony finished for him. "As long as you work the regular lines... drugs, prostitution, gun-running... all you really have to worry about is the feds. Touch a kid and all Hell falls on your head. While the cops have to work the due-process route, Raven walks in, craps all over the operation and leaves dead bodies all over the place. You sure you want to get into that?"

"The money's there, Tony." Barron replied after a sip. "Since Polenski got hammered, the pedos have been screaming for a fix. The contacts we have in Saudi, Emirates and... the rest of that sand box, need their young wives. Little boys and girls are at a premium for the kiddie-

porn and adrenochrome industry and we can cash in big... if we're careful."

"What do you have in mind?" Tony asked as he sat forward.

"Not sure yet." Barron replied thoughtfully. "This is gonna take some time, Tony, and I'm gonna need you to see to it." He sipped at the liquor and sighed. "We need to find a way to send Raven after Genovese, take them both out and then wait awhile to restart our efforts. If we're careful, we can start slow, fill orders and become the top provider for the sickos who need it."

Barron stood up and walked to the window while Tony watched. When Venovich turned around, his face was all business.

"Styles has a line on Fred Carney, Tony, one of Constantine's CPAs." Barron stated sternly. "I want you to shadow him for awhile... his habits, hangouts... whatever. He has a kid. We think Raven put him and his family under her protection so, if the kid comes up missing and we can tie it around Hugo's neck..."

"It'll have to be done in such a way that the other organizations can't put the finger on us, Barron." Tony responded. "As long as the plan is fool-proof, Raven will go after Genovese, we'll be there to end Raven... as well as accidentally see Hugo dead. Then, while they think we're heroes, we can move in and take whatever we want. It all depends on if we can get Raven to go after Genovese. It would help if we can somehow get the government boys involved."

"I'm working on that." Barron replied with a grin. "If everything goes according to plan, the DOJ will see only what we want them to see." He sat back down and added, "I've got Styles putting together a team, Tony. If you'll..."

"We don't want anybody else in on this, Barron." Tony responded quickly. "We know the feds have people in your organization. If they get wind of this, it'll all come back on us. I'll use my own people and you need to get Styles back in here to shut him up."

“You’re right.” Barron replied. “Contact me after you’re all set.”

“I’ll send you a phone.” Tony said as he stood up and moved toward the door. “It’ll be clean and untraceable. Don’t call me at all. I’ll call you when I know you have that phone.”

Tony Vickers pulled his phone from a pocket and hit a couple of buttons. He nodded at a couple of the men walking around the sitting room beyond the office and grinned. Guards trying to look nonchalant. He shook his head.

“Fleming.” stated the woman’s voice at the other end of the phone call.

“Tanya, it’s Vickers.” Tony said as he moved to the elevator. “Get our team together. We have a job.”

“What?” Tanya asked.

“Barron wants to set Genovese and Raven on each other.” Vickers responded with a chuckle. “It’s not gonna work. Raven has too many assets. I want you and the guys to set up a watch over Barron’s system, but I want you to do it from outside. When they come for him, I want us to take them on from the outside. You know their patterns and the programs they’re comfortable with. Set up to repel them and then I want them destroyed... but I also want to know exactly where they are. You up for that?”

“Just did an update to the system, Tony.” the soft voice replied. “We did a ‘lessons learned’ for the hackers Raven is using and we’ve come up with some interesting counters. How much time do we have?”

“I’m thinking maybe a month or less.” Vickers responded.

“I’ll get everyone on board and shadow Venovich.” Tanya said thoughtfully. “I’ll have to hack him so no one knows we’re there. That will give us control if and when they come for him. I already bumped up our firewall and added a couple of alert codes to the programming. I’m thinking that it might be a good idea to leave a not so obvious hole in his defenses to draw them in.”

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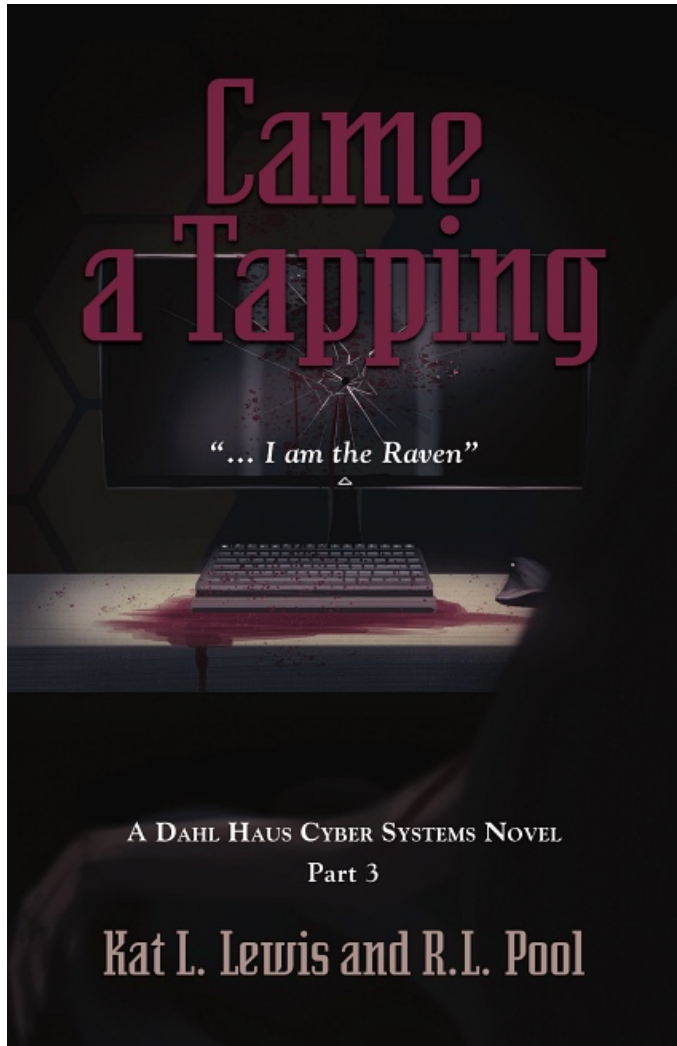
“Just do what you do, Tanya.” Vickers replied. “I don’t want us to be caught napping.”

“We’ll be set, Tony.” Tanya responded with a chuckle. “Bring donuts.”

“And popcorn?”

“And popcorn.” Tanya replied.

The line went dead and Tony grinned. Donuts? That computer genius couldn’t gain weight if she owned a donut shop.



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