



*A young girl finds that she has inherited a fortune, as well as an ancient responsibility. She must choose to become an agent for maintaining life on this planet, or ignore the call and just live a life of ease.*

## **Eye of the Hawk**

By R.L. Pool

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EYE  
OF THE  
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R.L. POOL

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## Chapter 1

### *“In the beginning...”*

Was I just cold? Why wasn't I crying my eyes out... like Belinda and Amy? I mean, Auntie Pella was just buried! I just got back from the funeral and I'm walking around like it's just another day!

Great Aunt Pella raised me after my mother, father, and little brother were killed in that awful plane crash. I was only two at the time and they still have no idea how I survived. After the rescuers found me... in the baby carrier under burning bits of metal and crap... there wasn't a scratch on me! No damage whatsoever. Not only that, but I was smiling. At least that's what Auntie Pella told me a few years later.

I opened the large double doors and walked into the main hall of the old Victorian mansion. I expected Holgren to step out and tell me where Pella was, but all was silence.

Why was I so emotionless? Auntie Pella was good to me. Taught me many things in the large library just to the left there, or walking in the garden. She had tutors come in to school me on subjects that I at first thought were boring, but became rather interested in after a few sessions.

Pella insisted I play in the garden in the back of the big house... that large playground with all the bars, climbing walls, and mazes. She brought in a ballet instructor for me when I was ten and a martial arts master at twelve. Of course, I was reluctant at first, but it became fun for me to see what my little body could really do after a while.

Now, at 20, I wondered why Pella pushed me so hard instead of demanding I get some kinda diploma for finances or *something*. She never pushed that crap on me, but insisted I learn everything in that big

library! Maybe she thought I would find something there to devote my life to. I don't know.

I walked down the massive hallway, my shoes clicking on the marble floor, to the doors to the library. The library with books shelved from floor to ceiling containing all the knowledge of the world, or so I thought when younger.

I stood there for a moment waiting for it to hit me. This is where I would sit with Aunt Pella, read, and discuss some of what I'd read. She was always patient with me, answered my stupid questions, and let me draw my own conclusions. So where was the sadness? The loss? Why couldn't I at least force a tear?

The closed massive doors to her study drew me. I glanced at the doors leading to the hallway, listened for footsteps on the marble hallway outside, and moved slowly to those huge sliding doors.

I slid them open, glanced again at the hallway doors to the library, and took a deep breath.

I tiptoed into the study... that room that had been locked away from me forever... and looked at the many sculptures sitting at different locations throughout. Why were they of huntresses, warrior women, scantily clad fighters? And why did each have a mask on their sculpted faces?

A hawk? Why?

I sighed as I sat in the big chair behind the desk. I'd never been allowed in here and felt out of place.

Then again, it was all mine now.

The lawyers came just after the funeral, read the will, and declared the mansion, Pella's portfolio and everything else mine.

So what?

What was I supposed to do with the fortune Pella left me? Party? I didn't even know how to party! I couldn't even get drunk no matter how hard I tried!

Maybe Belinda could teach me, but that would have to wait until my prissy third cousin stopped being angry at me for my inheritance.

I sighed again and tried to open the top right-hand drawer. It was locked.

"Of course it's locked." I whispered.

I picked up the single paperclip sitting on the desk and, looking about guiltily, manipulated the lock until I heard the click.

"Why do I feel like I'm intruding?" I asked myself for the fourth or fifth time. "It's mine, right?"

I slowly opened the drawer and found an envelope sealed with a wax dot. Nothing else. Just the envelope with the red wax dot with a tiny seal that I ignored.

I turned it over and saw, "For Marissa" written in Auntie Pella's fine handwriting.

"Okay, Aunt Pella." I, Marissa Sanlier, whispered into the silence of the study. "More secrets?"

I glanced again at the big double sliding doors to the study, and listened for the tell-tale sound of footsteps on the marble tiles of the hallway beyond the library.

Nothing. It was strange not to hear someone... *anyone*... moving around out there. I mean, it's a big house with gardeners, maids, cooks... just a lot of people. I guess the funeral took the wind out of a lot of people's sails, hunh.

Briggs said he would join me after helping his grandfather place Auntie Pella's body into the mausoleum "properly". Holgren was Auntie Pella's... uh... bodyguard? Manservant? Butler?

I didn't think I needed anyone to help me dress, eat or anything else! But Briggs, Holgren's thirty-year-old grandson, said it was his "duty" to see after me. I guess that fortune might come in handy after all. At least Briggs would still be able to make a living, *if* I didn't learn to party with Belinda.

I slid a slim finger under the wax dot and the envelope popped open. The note was written, again in Auntie Pella's fine script, on an expensive looking piece of vellum.

It read:

*"Dearest Marissa. If you are reading this, Holgren and Briggs are carrying my lifeless body to the family plot to inter me for all time... or at least until the next cataclysm befalls this planet. There is so much I should have told you, but there was never enough time. I'll leave it to those I trust to inform you of our family history and why you were chosen. Trust no one, Marissa, except Briggs. I cannot stress this enough, child.*

*Now, have you ever wondered why the raven chose that particular bust?"*

And that was that. Well, almost.

*"P.S. Good job picking the lock, dear. The key is around my neck."*

Very tricky, Auntie!

So, I thought as I laid the note to the large mahogany desk, a scavenger hunt. Okay, Pella. Let's do this.

So, what in the note was out of place, besides the snide comment about picking the lock? Pella was one of those puzzle nuts who gave her great-niece all kinds of puzzles to solve. This was just another one of those, I guess.

I'd had many of those growing up in this big house. Pella would drop a note at breakfast and expect me to find the answer by lunch. This was no different, except there wouldn't be a cupcake at the end if I succeeded, right?

"Why did the raven pick..."

What bust? I grinned at that question. That's the one Belinda would have asked. She never read anything!

*"Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door..."*

Edgar would be pleased. Now to find the next hint. I walked to the big window to gaze out on the western garden, the one Auntie Pella loved so much. There were little statuettes in a lot of strange places and throughout the low-cut maze of hedges. Pella loved her statues.

Of course, there was a fountain dead center. And what do you suppose was the centerpiece for the fountain?

Athena of course.

Then, you might ask, what does that have to do with a "bust of Pallas?"

Everything.

See, Pallas was a nymph... and the BFF of Athena when they were young. They used to spar and train together as well.

One day, Pallas and Athena were sparring and it got serious. Athena accidentally killed the nymph, and her dad, Zeus, was pissed! Athena would have gladly taken it all back... Pallas *was* her BFF after all... but couldn't. So, she put Pallas' name before hers from that day forward. "Pallas Athena" was her penance for killing her best friend.

That meant the raven wasn't sitting on Pallas' shoulder. He was sitting on Athena's!

"This is going to get old fast." I muttered as I walked out of the study.

I'd just made it halfway through the library headed toward the doors to the sunroom, when I heard the car drive up.

"What now?" I sighed as I trotted into the hallway and to the front doors. I opened them and...

Shit! Belinda! And she dragged Amy along with her! This is the *last* thing I need today!



## Chapter 2

### *“Poor me and puzzles...”*

“*Oh, Mari!*” Belinda exclaimed in that high pitched, pitiful tone. “Whatever are we to do now?!”

I didn’t have to look at Amy to know she was rolling her eyes.

Where I was dressed in a conservative dark blue pants-suit, and Amy was wearing a dark brown tweed skirt with a lighter brown blouse, Belinda was all in black.

When I say all, I mean *all!*

The wide-brimmed black hat with the delicate black veil, the high-necked dress, frumpy to dramatize the mourning posture she displayed that went all the way to the ground, and the black gloves. She still held the one white tulip she’d taken from Pella’s casket amid the bullshit of her wailings.

“We’ll muddle through, Bel.” I replied, trying hard to keep my frustration under control. “It’s not the end of the world, ya know.”

“Easy for you to say!”

Here it comes.

“You have *everything*, Mari!” Belinda wailed. “The rest of us will be left paupers while you sit on the throne and parcel out *trinkets!*”

“Com’on, Bel!” Amy interjected. “That’s a lie and you know it!”

“Nothing has changed, Bel.” I added, hoping Belinda would just *shut up!* “The lawyers were here a bit ago and all trust funds will be kept intact, properties will be maintained as before, and all tuitions will be left in force. Nothing has changed.”

“Nothing?” Belinda asked, and then screamed, “*NOTHING?!*”

Amy grabbed Belinda’s arm, but the spoiled rotten bitch just kept on.

“*Everything* has changed! You own it *all!* She always loved you more, Mari! *Always!*”

“Maybe if you weren’t such a bitch, she might have liked you, Bel.” I retorted calmly. “If you didn’t waste everything she gave you, you might just make something of yourself. I doubt it, but there is a chance.”

“*Fuck you, Marissa!*” Belinda screamed as Amy dragged her back to the car. “I hope you get... *warts!!!*”

Amy forced Belinda into the passenger seat and, just before she got in to drive the still screaming Belinda away, put her thumb to her ear with her little finger to her mouth. Then she raised an eyebrow.

I nodded and watched as Amy took my third cousin around the drive and out of the big wrought-iron gates. Amy was one of the good ones, and was always there to keep Belinda from getting too far gone. Not so much today, but that wasn’t her fault.

Amy is Belinda’s little sister. There’s a little more than three years difference between them, but miles of difference in their... attitudes.

Belinda is one of those who use their privilege to hammer those around her. She parties with anyone who will grovel at her feet, and lords it over anyone close enough to care.

Amy, on the other hand, graduated high school at fifteen and already had credits for university. She wants to get her MBA and get a job in the corporation Auntie Pella inherited from *her* aunt years ago. I’m hoping she does and if I have any influence at all, and I think I just *might*, there will be a job waiting for her.

Now, where was I?

Oh, yeah! Athena!

I watched the automatic gates close, sighed again, and went back up the wide steps to the doors to the mansion.

To get to Auntie Pella’s private garden, you had to go through the library, the sunroom, and out through the tall glass doors. Beyond that, pillars of natural stone, with wrought iron fencing in between, enclosed over an acre of garden. Short hedges lined the many cobblestone

walkways throughout, and the flower gardens with stone benches were everywhere!

I locked the front doors and took my time walking through the silence of the big mansion, only my footsteps to break the stillness. I stepped out of the sunroom and just had to take in a deep breath.

Not only did that bring my anger under control, but the smells here were delicious!

How many times had I come out here with Auntie Pella to tend the garden with the gardeners? How many times had she laughed at the dirt I seemed to gather on my small body by magnetism? Why then did I not feel more loss? More sadness? More Auntie Pella-less?

I shook my head at myself, pulled the long ponytail of dark brown hair over my right shoulder... mostly so I could play with it as I looked around. I sighed, again, and walked through the softness of the garden toward the fountain in the center.

I half expected Auntie Pella to stand up, smile at me, and wave me over to help with the weeding. That would never happen again.

“Keep your mind on the puzzle, Mari.” I told myself. “It’ll hit you when you least expect it.”

Yeah. And then I could have a good cry, right?

I let myself meander along the curving pathway to the center of the garden. There she was. Athena, Goddess of the outdoors, good counsel, prudent restraint and practical insight, as well as of war.

There were many myths surrounding the origin of the goddess. In one, Zeus ate her mother while pregnant with Athena, and wound-up giving birth to her. Another spoke of Athena coming forth from Zeus’ split head! Gross! Both of them. *Gross!*

Anyway, “Pallas Athena” stood in the middle of the circular fountain gazing at the mansion, while the waters at her feet bubbled happily. I suppose she probably should have been facing the other way to maybe guard the place or something.

I walked around the fountain looking for any errant piece of paper, note scratched in the white marble, or hidden under the water. Nothing.

Then I scoured the hedges surrounding the fountain, the mulch beneath them, and under and around the four stone benches set equally around it. Still nothing.

I sat on one of the benches and pulled my legs up under me. There had to be something. I mean, all the time I played in the playground out back, fell from the bars, the climbing wall, or from the balance beams set up like some kinda narrow trail, Auntie Pella would smile at me.

“Trust the goddess in you, Marissa.” she would say. “She’ll guide you through.”

Yeah, right. Just because I never got a scraped knee, cut, or broken bone from that accident-waiting-to-happen out back, didn’t mean it didn’t hurt! Trust the goddess? Yeah, right.

Wait a minute...

I looked up at Athena, her gaze on the big house and her spear...

For those of you who don’t know, Athena was the Goddess of War, though I think she was probably a reluctant warrior. She was probably expected to be some kinda fighter given her patronage.

Anyway, “Pallas” wasn’t only the name of the nymph Athena accidentally killed. It was also... kinda... a title of sorts. It meant, in some cases, “one who brandishes a spear”. Athena’s spear was...

“That’s not a spear.”

I stood up and walked closer to the fountain.

Not only was Athena looking back at the mansion, her *spear* was tilted that way too. Problem is, though Athena was normally pictured with a spear with a long sharp head, this one was...

“A trident?”

Why the Hell was Athena wielding a weapon normally ascribed to her uncle Poseidon? And why the Hell hadn’t I noticed this before?

I walked around behind her and, looking in the direction she seemed to be looking, saw the window high up above the windows of the huge mansion.

I spent most of my life running around inside that edifice and never even knew there was an attic. I knew every square inch of the place and there was no door, staircase, or dumb-waiter that went beyond the third floor! What was up there? And how would anybody get up there in the first place? And why?

And the biggest shocker of all? The window displayed a trident where the two sides of the frosted glass came together! Geez, Pella!

My room was up there on the third floor and, if I didn't miss my guess, it was just below that window. I could maybe...

Nope. Those window sills were deceiving. Although it may look like you could just step out on them and stand, they had this tilt. If you put a ball up there on the inside, left the windows open a bit, and let the ball go, it would roll slowly toward the window until it hit the outside sill. Then, it was all downhill from there. Literally!

I used to, when I was younger, put my ball up there, let it go, and see if I could race down the stairs to the garden and catch it before it hit the ground and bounced. I did manage to get there twice to catch it, but that entailed sliding down a lot of bannisters!

Standing up there trying to reach that window wasn't the greatest idea I ever came up with. I mean, the window was a lot farther up from my windows than the others to mine! But then...

The whole mansion was built out of large, square-cut, natural stone, perfectly matched to make up the walls. Then again, some of those I could see from here didn't look like they'd been set just perfectly. They looked like, here and there, the stones kinda jutted out just a tiny bit.

"Really, Pella?" I whispered. "You want me to climb that? I mean, really?!"

Really.

“*Trust the goddess, Marissa.*”

That marble statue isn't gonna catch me if I slip, and there would be no Briggs to haul on the safety harness to keep me from hitting bottom!

I thought about going up to my room and seeing if there was any way to get to those jutting stone blocks from there. Nope. They started just to the left there and, without getting close to the windows, seemed to make a path up, over and just below that weird window.

Okay. So how about going inside and looking around for a secret door or something? Now that I know there's an attic, that should be easy, right?

Not so much. You could search for hours... days... *years*, and never find anything worthwhile to get you up into an attic you were never meant to find.

So, what if I actually get up there and can't open the damned window, hunh? Going up would be a lot easier than climbing back down!

Why do you think climbers take so many days plotting their climb before even traveling to their base camp? The “retreat” is *always* more dangerous than the climb itself! I know! I've done a few of those!

When I was growing up, Pella would have Briggs move the handholds on the climbing wall out back as I got older. She made each climb more “challenging” than the last.

And we made lot of trips to Arizona to do some hiking, dirt bike riding, and rock climbing too! Briggs would always belay me, but it was on me to make it to the top and then drop a rope to Briggs. This then would no doubt be my final test. Accent on “final” if I missed a grip!

“You don't make this shit easy, do you?” I asked anybody who would listen as I sat down and slipped out of my pumps.

Luckily, I don't like pantyhose. Never did. They always felt confining. I took off the jacket and set it on the bench, rubbed at the chill bumps on my bare arms, and walked over to the wall to find a path up.

It looked like I could start there, to the left, and, with the jugged stone blocks placed where they are, make it to just under my windows. Then, I'd have to traverse right to the other side of those windows to get above them. Then another traverse to the left, that looked like it would include a couple of scary looking "leaps of faith", to get to the narrow sill of that weird, trident looking window.

"If you're gonna do this stupid shit," I muttered, "you'd better get after it. Holgren and Briggs will be back in a bit and they would probably want to cart you off to the loony bin."

I retraced the path I'd chosen again, stretched a bit and shook my arms to get them all loosened up. Then, after another look at the path, I started up.

It wasn't all that hard, once you get going that is. I made it to the second floor, crab crawled to the right using the lintels of the second story windows for toeholds, and started up again. Once above my own windows, I had those two jumps to do, and no safety line to depend on.

I made the first jump, hung on for a minute to still my pounding heart, and to wipe the grime from my hands on my sleeveless shirt one at a time. When I got done, depending on being alive, I was gonna have to explain the dirty smudges on my new clothes to Miss Dot. For now...

I settled in, gaged the distance to the next handholds, and...

My left hand, or rather my fingertips, caught the block, but my right didn't find the other. Here I am, hanging by my fingertips at least forty feet off the ground!

I didn't panic however, even though I knew I should have. I got my right big toe onto a block below me and, with that small leverage, reached up with my right hand to grab the same block my left hand was

holding onto. Once my toes were steady enough, I closed my eyes and did that “poof, poof, poof...” thing you do just before diving into the pool for the first time.

I glanced over at the window just a couple of feet away, and *poofed* three times again. I reached out my left foot to feel for the block I knew was there and, after an eternity, felt it. Once my toes were holding me, I reached over for the last block I knew was there with my left hand and, with my right holding the block with my fingertips, got as much of a fingerhold as I could on the dirty, slick stone.

Now to see if I could get that window open.

I reached up with my right hand to the juncture of the two frames where they joined to make the staff and center prong of the trident. The one on the right overlapped the other one. I got a fingernail under that overlap and...

The window opened! I reached inside, got a firm handhold, and pulled my shaking ass up and through. I sat on the rough wooden floor for what seemed to be forever just panting!

What the Hell was I thinking! I just climbed a sheer wall with my toes and fingertips! And for what? Another one of Auntie Pella’s whimsical puzzles? To find some clever little bauble that I could exchange for a cupcake? Maybe you should let Briggs sign you into the nut-ward, Mari!

Well, I’m here now, so...

I wiped my hands on the now filthy shirt, closed the window, and stopped. The latch was open. Why would the latch be open when...

Okay. One thing at a time. I closed the latch and drew in a breath of musty air. Not musty as in attic musty. More like... library musty. The reason for that smell was the rows and rows of bookshelves with tons and tons of books on them.

They all looked old. Like tomes left after years of history passed them by, and an archeologist just happened to bust through a wall to



find them. I saw the light way down there at the other end and, not knowing what I would find, used the bookcases to hide my progress toward it.

It was slow going, and there was absolutely no noise from down there. When I dared to look...

Briggs sat in one of the four low-backed, overstuffed chairs, while his granddad sat in another close to him. They didn't make a sound, but seemed to be glancing my way every now and then. The low table between the chairs had a bottle of wine and two stem glasses. They were only half-full.

I stepped out and slowly made my way between the bookcases directly for them. Briggs grinned and then glanced at his grampa. Holgren slipped a green bill into his grandson's hand frowning.

"It took you long enough." Briggs commented as he motioned to the chair across the table from him. "I was beginning to wonder if you would *ever* get here."

## Chapter 3

### “WTF!”

“You’re a mess.” Briggs commented as I sat in the chair across from him and crossed my bare feet under the low table between us.

“Yeah,” I responded dryly, “I know. Did Pella put you and Popi up to this?”

“In a way.” Holgren... Popi... responded sternly.

Briggs sat there smiling in his blazer over the polo shirt he always wore. He never took off the blazer unless he was holding onto the safety line for the climbing wall. Then, afterward, it went right back over the polo shirt.

Holgren, however, was every bit the butler type. His three-piece suit, complete with the gold paisley vest with the pocket watch in the waistcoat pocket, was always perfect, clean, and the creases could cut you if you stood too close. His white hair was always short but his mustache was one of those long, handlebar types.

And, he frowned a lot... like now.

“She wanted to test you.” he added.

“For what?” I asked with a return frown.

Why was Briggs grinning, and Holgren not despondent? They’d just laid Auntie Pella into the family mausoleum and sealed it, for Christ’s sake! You’d think they’d be all sad, right?

“She wanted to see if you had what it takes to take her place, child.” Holgren continued. “I’m still doubtful to tell the truth.”

“Take her place?” I asked as I brought my feet back and leaned forward in the overstuffed chair. “Nobody will *ever* take her place, Popi! I don’t even want to try!”

“In that case,” Popi responded tightly, with a sideways glance at Briggs, “kill her.”

What?! Kill me?!

Briggs reached under his blazer quickly and I guess I was supposed to just sit here and...

I leaped headfirst over the table... and Briggs. On the way, I grabbed his right hand as it came out of his blazer with the revolver, twisted my body in midair, and landed behind him. My left hand had his wrist, with the thumb on the back of that hand, and the revolver came free and into my right hand.

I pulled his right hand and arm over his left shoulder... *hard*... put the barrel of the pistol to the back of his head, and squeezed the trigger.

It was instinct, I swear! I no more wanted to kill Briggs than see Aunt Pella buried! But he was gonna...

*Click*

I squeezed the trigger again, my mind recognizing the click as the hammer falling on an empty chamber. It's like my body was running on cruise control!

*Click*

I finally got control over the automatic responses my body was doing, let go of Briggs, and backed away with the empty pistol in hand. I started shaking and I know I had this shocked look on my face.

Holgren was smiling. *Smiling!*

I wanted to smack Briggs on the back of the head with his empty pistol, grab Popi, and pull the hairs of his mustache out one hair at a time!

"I told you this would be dangerous, Holgren." came a voice from behind me.

A voice I knew well. I spun, and...

"If you hadn't emptied that pistol," Pella continued as she stepped from behind one of those bookcases, "you would be dead, Briggs."

"Which is precisely why I unloaded it, Pella." he responded while rubbing at his shoulder. He winced and added, "I think she dislocated it."

“Aunt Pella?”

But... She was dead... Right?

“It’s me, dear.” the pretty woman responded with that smile I’d grown to love. “Sorry about the ruse. If you’ll sit, I’ll try to explain.”

I stumbled over to the chair I’d recently vacated, sat down heavily, and laid the pistol in my lap, my hand still around the handle. I gawked at Pella as she stood Briggs up, took his arm in hand and, with one hand on his shoulder, twisted and jerked the arm down. I heard the pop from here!

“You’ll need to get x-rays, Briggs.” Pella commented as she walked over to the other chair and draped herself into it. “It could have been much worse.”

Okay. I think I need to explain something right here. Pella is late eighties, early nineties? But she carried herself as if she were no more than... well... fifty! She was only a couple of inches taller than me... five foot nine? Her body was slender, poised and she never seemed to be sick a day in her life!

The only indicator of age that I could see, other than the fine lines that were starting to spread at the corners of her eyes, was the streaks of white in her dark brown hair. Either she has a great beautician, or she just didn’t age!

“Close your mouth, dear.” she said softly. “You look silly.”

My mouth slammed shut, but my eyes stayed on my dead aunt! How? Why?

“I think explanations are in order, my love.” Holgren commented with a soft look for my aunt.

“You’re damned right!” I blurted. “And it better come quickly before I lose my fucking mind!”

“Calm down, dear.” Pella responded with that offended look I’d seen many times before... mostly because of my language. “If you will sit calmly, we will try to bring you up to date on why you are here.”

I sat back, crossed my legs, and glared at each of them in turn.

“To begin,” Holgren said softly, “your parent’s death was no accident.”

Okay, Popi. You can’t just say that shit and pause! I felt my mouth start to open again and snapped it shut.

“Your family... your mother and you particularly... were targeted by those we monitor.”

Again, Popi paused and I sat forward in the chair glaring directly at him.

“Mom?” I asked in a whisper that sounded to me like a shout. “And me? Why?”

“Because of genetics, dear.” Pella replied offhandedly. “She was supposed to take my place here and carry on, with you as the possible next generation.”

“Her genetics weren’t as strong as we would have liked...” Holgren interjected, but I’d heard just enough to be dangerous!

“Her what?!” I exclaimed. “What are we? Genetic freaks or something? I’m some kinda product of a secret breeding program? You can jump in here with clarification anywhere you like, ya know!”

“She’s getting too worked up, Pella.” Briggs said softly. “Maybe we should...”

“Shut the fuck up, Briggs!” I shouted. “Now, without all the pauses, somebody give me the straight skinny!”

The pause lasted a bit longer than my patience and I was just about to voice my displeasure when Pella raised a stern hand to me.

“That will take quite a while, dear.” she said softly. “If you’ll let us collect our thoughts, we will begin.”

I sat back in the chair, crossed my legs again, and, with my bare foot twitching impatiently, I waited. Well. I *tried* to wait.

“You can start with who killed my parents... and my little brother.” I asked calmly... or at least as calmly as I could under the circumstances. “Were they caught?”

“Yes,” Pella responded softly, “and no. We know who tampered with the mechanics of the airplane, and I removed them. But those who ordered the deaths are still at large.”

“Wait.” I replied, my voice just barely a whisper. “You killed them?”

“Yes, dear.” she stated as if it was something one does just after tea. “I loved your mother like she was my own. Our talents are not passed down linearly, you see. The genetics, for some reason we have yet to determine, are passed down from mother to daughter, surely. But, as in my case, it is passed across sibling lines from sister to sister.”

“Hunh?”

“My sister and I were born to the same mother, but I was the one to gain the hereditary benefits. I, because of those selfsame genetics, was never to have children of my own. That was left for my sister.

“The traits are passed down every other generation or so, but through the sister not graced with the active gene. Your mother was my sister’s granddaughter and, though she was tested at birth and found to have certain of the required markers to carry the line further, she had a son.”

“My little brother, right?”

“Precisely, dear.” Auntie Pella replied sadly. “If she hadn’t been killed, she might have produced another girl that could carry on the line. As it is, we’re not certain what we should do to get back on track.”

“Wait a minute!” I blurted. “You’re not thinking of putting my ass into your breeding program are you?!”

“That is quite impossible, Mari.” Pella replied sadly. “You, like me, are not able to have children.”

Okay. Punch me in the gut one more time, why doncha!

“When you were born, we did the tests.” Holgren stated somberly. “You, though blessed with the genetics even stronger than Pella, are, in fact, sterile. Your sister, should one be born to your mother, would have had to carry the heredity within her for the next skipped generation. As it is, we’ve had to look elsewhere for the gene traits. With someone actively seeking us...”

I held a stern hand up to them all and tried to get my head around the complicated shit they were passing out.

“So, if my brother had lived...”

“That would not have solved the problem, dear.” Pella interrupted. “Though men are the ones to initially fertilize the eggs we carry throughout our lives, their only addition is the *Y* chromosome. The man determines the sex of the child, while the woman is the one who passes all there is of the bloodline to the offspring.

“Your brother would not have had any say as to the genetics, with a very few minor exceptions.”

Okay. I’ll buy that. I learned about that in some of the courses I took from biologists Pella had for me online. The guy only determines if the baby is named Bobby or Barbie. But still...

“So we’re... what?” I asked. “Assassins?”

“In a manner of speaking, dear.” Pella replied with a grin. “Though that might be a bit harsh.”

Harsh Hell! I almost killed Briggs! He was the one I played with most of my life. He was the one who picked me up when I fell, dusted me off, and made me laugh! And I could have killed him because of some gene I had that turned me into a fucking assassin!

“Okay, then.” I said, trying hard not to let my emotions get the better of me. “So why is it important to have another line of assassins bred into being?”

“To combat the dark forces arrayed against humanity.” Holgren replied simply.

Okay. That answered... nothing. I waited.

“While most of humanity is apt to offer a helping hand to any and all,” Pella continued for Popi, “there are others who offer a hand to take from those less capable of protecting themselves. Drugs, murder, human trafficking... all heinous to the safety and continuance of life around us.

“While those things are hideous, we seek the deeper layers of evil. We seek the puppet masters who manipulate the masses, rulers, and those appointed as heads of their individual governments.”

“We can’t let ourselves be drawn into the everyday occurrences of the underbelly of society, Mari.” Popi added somberly. “Though it would seem that we could maybe make a difference in their lives, we must stay hidden to effectively help them all.

“Should we be found out, the powers behind most of the strife in this world would be free to destroy all that has been built over thousands of years.”

“So, if I find some asshole trying to take a kid at the mall, I should let him go?”

“Not at all.” Pella replied casually. “Use your skills, modified of course, to allow those who are watching to see only what you want them to see to rescue said child. Then, with the data base and contacts we have, you can find the perpetrator, end him, and any who are complicit, and make it seem that they killed each other.

“I’ve had that pleasure several times in the past and it makes all of this worthwhile.”

*That* smile gives me the creeps! She just told me she was responsible for the deaths of some real rat-bastards, and liked it! Okay, I probably would be kinda proud of myself too if I could find those assholes and end them. But still!

“There is a world-wide network of groups like us, Marissa,” Popi said as he leaned forward to pick up one of the glasses of wine, “though



there are few with your genetic talents. We are not privy to who or where, or even how many groups there are. That knowledge dangerous as you can imagine.

“However, we do have a communication grid we can use to pass information one to another. Bits of intelligence that come across the lines that could be useful in keeping track of the puppeteers behind the powers that rule this world.”

“You mean like the Illuminati? The Templars? The Skull and Bones guys?”

“There are many names given to those, dear.” Pella responded softly. “Though none are entirely correct. Let us say that *they* are those we are tasked with monitoring.”

“Do you know who they are?” I asked, my mind in a real turmoil.

“Some we are aware of.” Popi replied with a nod. “Others are more of groups of powerful beings that stay deep in the shadows, unnamed and undetected by those they wish to rule.”

“So, if you know some of ‘em,” I asked naively, “why can’t you just turn them over to the authorities and...”

“They own the authorities, or most of them.” Briggs answered. “Besides, there’s a *Hydra Effect* we just can’t risk.”

*Hydra Effect?* Yeah.

Hydra was an ancient fantasy monster with three heads. If you cut off one, it grew back doubled. If you kept cutting off the heads, you’d soon have a creature that looked like it was *really* having a bad hair day!

The only way to kill it was to cut the heads off all at once! Difficult, but doable. However...

“Without knowing every player in the game, there is no way to remove them all with any permanence.” Briggs went on. “Besides, whatever was left would be disastrous!”

“Those we are aware of run all of the major corporations that feed, clothe, and shelter... well... the world, Marissa.” Popi interjected. “They also own most of the mass media outlets. To remove them, and stay out of the limelight, would put the vast majority of the people of this world in jeopardy.”

“Our mission,” Pella added, “is to blunt their efforts without ripping the fabric of humanity to shreds. That is why we work on the fringes, dear. We find a path they are pushing, divert it if possible, or remove the construction crew to cause them to divert.”

“It’s a delicate balance that we have to maintain that will leave the world whole,” Briggs said softly, “while seeing that those... *puppeteers* are left guessing. That’s also why we have to stay anonymous.”

“Anonymous?” I asked angrily. “So, if we’re so fucking *anonymous*, how come my family had to die?!”

“A leak, dear.” Auntie Pella replied softly. “At least that is the most common assumption. And that is why I had to die as well.”



*A young girl finds that she has inherited a fortune, as well as an ancient responsibility. She must choose to become an agent for maintaining life on this planet, or ignore the call and just live a life of ease.*

## **Eye of the Hawk**

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