

I'm a quarter mile short of the exit for Headquarters when my cell phone vibrates again.

Text message?

Who in the hell would send me a text message?

Oh shit! He has Haleigh's phone!

I jerk the wheel to the right and the Jeep instantly shoots into the grass on the side of the highway, skidding to a stop within feet of the exit sign. I quickly dig the phone out of my pocket, open it, and when I see Haleigh's name as the sender, damn near faint. My heart is once again racing. I punch the buttons to download the message.

Sports Bar
Istanbul Hilton
24 hours
You come alone and unarmed
I will do the same
Tarasov

I quickly type a response, and hit send.

And my children?

It takes only seconds for the answer to arrive.

Do as I ask, and the moment
your presence is verified, your
children will be sent home.

I'm typing the response, even before I finish reading.

And I should trust you because?

I sit staring blankly at the phone, waiting for his response. Again, it takes only seconds.

You should not trust me Director.
I would not trust you if the situation
were reversed.

I let myself smile – the silly bastard hasn't forgotten how to play the game. I quickly type my final response, and hit the send button.

I am on my way.

SOLUTION SQUARED

The Final Equation

Order this book online at www.mikefontenot.com
or by email at info@mikefontenot.com

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This is the third installment in the lives of the twins, and hopefully, you're reading them in order. If you just happened to pick this one up, and started reading it, I have a suggestion...

STOP AND GO READ THE FIRST TWO 😊

It would be a shame to miss the many one-liners, and of course, the back-story references!

Enjoy!

Mike

The trouble with lying and deceiving is that their efficiency depends entirely upon a clear notion of the truth that the liar and deceiver wish to hide. In this sense, truth, even if it does not prevail in public, possesses an ineradicable primacy over all falsehoods.

Hannah Arendt

American Political Philosopher

1906-1975

four years later



1

●──────────────────●

"I have done all that you have asked of me. I am here, you are not. Why?"

"It is necessary to the operation. Soon enough, those who need to know of this, will. Then we will proceed."

"*What 'operation'?* You gave your word you would not..."

"It is necessary, Daria. There are things you do not know, and I can only hope you will eventually understand."

"*Do not do this, Leonid!* If you do, you know what path I will choose. They saved you, gave you a new chance. Now, you do this?"

"I am prepared, Daria. I know your response, and know it is the only one you can offer."

"*Why?*"

"I am a spy. I was 'designed' to be a spy. It is the sole reason for my existence. Without it, I am nothing. I cannot live like this..."

"We do not have to succumb to the desires of those who created us. We still have free will..."

"That is what you do not understand. I have no free will. I am driven... to do this. To be what *they* created."

"Leonid..."

"When the time comes, be certain your aim is true, sister."

The moment the connection is broken, I know I have lost my 'brother' forever. He is not strong enough to overcome the things that have been done to us.

I now have only one path to travel. My brother's demise is left only to me.

So, here I sit, on a bench in front of my office building, staring at the Church of Aghios Demetrios, across the square from me, knowing that very soon, I will be forced to kill Leonid Tarasov.

For the first time in as long as I can remember, I cry...



2



Although perhaps quite unfair, it is time for me to once again become a 'spy' – and I must do so, invisibly and silently.

Since that fateful day, on a Swiss runway, Leonid became *my* problem, and I intend to ensure he does no harm.

The sisters went beyond all reasonable behaviors in allowing me to not only keep him alive, but to give him a new life as well. Although I think it a 'good' life – one that most would jump at the chance to live – Leonid apparently disagrees.

Since Switzerland, they – the 'Agency' – have seen fit to leave me alone, and allow me to live a normal life as a business manager. Although they could have called on me on any number of occasions, they have not. Of course, it goes without saying, that had they called, I would have responded immediately. I know in my heart I owe them... especially Whitney.

Now, they are apparently being threatened – although I have no idea in what manner.

I, of course, fully intend to aggressively eliminate that threat.

I stand up, and walk a short distance down the street to a small electronics store and purchase a 'pay as you go' phone – or as spies like to call them – 'burners'.

There is only one person on the planet that can help me now, and my heart hopes she will understand.

Once outside, I dial her number, which is forever burned into my memory. The call is connected in a matter of seconds.

"I know you have a damn good reason for what you've done, *right?*" Melinda immediately blurts out.

"I have missed you too, dear," I reply, trying not to laugh. "And how did you know it was me, if I might ask?"

“Who else would be calling me at this number, from a cell tower in Salonica, using a generic disposable phone, hours after *you* disappeared off the face of the earth?”

I laugh. Even the passage of time cannot change her. Four years later, she is still the Melinda I remember.

“Anyhow, I’m sorry about the greeting but, what the hell is going on, Daria?”

“Apparently, you *have* been keeping track of me,” I reply, her tension apparent, even over the phone.

“Of course I have, and you damn well know why. So, are you going to share?”

“A ‘situation’ has presented itself – something that I alone must deal with. If necessary, I can seek other resources, Melinda. I will understand and will not compromise you.”

“Damn it, Daria! You gotta tell me what we’re into here.”

“Leonid has lost it – I think he has snapped. He has apparently compiled some ex-assets, for some kind of ‘operation’. He has access to money – large sums if necessary – so in truth, I have not even a remote idea of what he is up to.”

“Well damn...”

“What, Melinda – you must tell me, *what has he done?*”

“We aren’t sure yet – but he too, has gone missing. Just as you have, he went completely off the grid two days ago. No trace. Why are *you* off the grid, Daria? I need to know.”

“He called me early this morning, and told me to meet him in a specific place, here in Salonica, at a specific time. He was quite insistent that I be unarmed, unidentifiable, and untraceable. I secured the transponder, and left everything in my office – I had to, Melinda. I was afraid he would escape me if I did otherwise.”

“He set you up, Daria – quite nicely actually. Although they haven’t called me yet, the powers that be, are of the opinion that you’re a team. Brother and sister, reunited.”

“That bastard! He knew my heart would rule me. I am a fool...”

I’m fairly sure I hear a small laugh come from the phone.

“That’s what keeps us human, Daria – our hearts. Amidst all the stupidity, don’t ever let go of it.”

“So, what is the verdict? Am I on my own? I will understand and accept your decision, Melinda – without question.”

“Oh please, so much drama,” she says with a laugh. “If you’re conning me – which I doubt – it will be the last time. Twenty years is a long time, Daria – especially doing what it was we did.”

“Yes, it is. And now, it is time to finish this once and for all.”

“Okay, so you’re marked. When they ask, we’ll have to tell them you’re missing. Your transponder has been off long enough, that we have to assume they know about it. For now, we don’t want you leaving any trails – so don’t go home. We need time to locate Leo, and figure out what’s going on. You’ll have to remain ‘missing’ for now.”

“You do realize what the inevitable outcome of helping me will be, do you not? The Director will have no choice but to...”

Melinda interrupts me midsentence.

“Not *this* Director. She is, and always has been, her own woman. She will do *what is right*, Daria – just as she always has. But you let me worry about that.”

“As you wish. Just as we have always done, you direct, I act.”

“What ID do you still have?”

“At this moment, I have none. The emergency one you gave me last year is however, placed where I can retrieve it in perhaps an hour or so.”

“Good. Do so. Can you travel?”

“Yes, I have a car – which of course, no one knows about.”

“Good. Kilkis – ever heard of it?”

“A small town north of here – sixty kilometers perhaps. Why?”

“That’s where you’re going dear. And once there, you need to find a private airstrip at the end of a road named ‘Perikleous’. The person you are looking for is Aeton Mestas – he flies the plane.”

“The plane? I am taking a trip, am I?”

“Yes, you are. I need you here – so I can do this right. If my ass is going to be flapping in the breeze, it will be on my terms.”

“Well, it has been a while since I was in Libya. I will have to make sure I am dressed appropriately.”

I hear her laugh again – rather loudly.

“I forgot – you’ve been out of the spy business for a while. I’m not in Libya dear. Get to Kilkis, and Aeton will get you *here*. Okay?”

“Do you think it best that I leave without a word to anyone – perhaps perpetuating what they already believe?”

"Yes. Go get your car, your passport, and then go directly to the plane. I'll take care of the rest. I still have my ace in the hole, so..."

"Keith is still with you, no doubt," I reply, laughing myself.

"Sorta. But anyhow, get going. I figure the Director will be calling at any moment, and I need to have some viable answers for her."

"I am going now, Melinda. And... well... thanks!"

"Daria..."

"Yes?"

"Do not try to access anything from your life. Understood?"

"Yes ma'am."

"That means *absolutely nothing*. You are trying to hide from the only two people on earth, who could find you with even the tiniest shred of information."

"Although I have not *been* a spy for some time, Melinda, I have not forgotten *how to be one*. This will be a test for those two people you mentioned – we will see just how good they are. I will see you soon!"

I flip the phone closed, stick it into the back pocket of the jeans I am wearing, and head for the nearest bus stop. Although I could hail a cab, that means possibly being recognized.

Everyone is anonymous on a city bus.

It takes about five minutes for the bus I need to arrive. Once I board, I find a seat, and quietly stare out the window, watching the city I have called home for close to fifteen years, glide past me.

Then, totally lost in thought, I have a revelation – about one of Melinda's comments.

'I'm not in Libya.'

I find myself wondering where – *and how* – they moved that *entire* compound.

In spite of the stresses of the moment, the thought makes me smile.



It is a calming drive to Kilkis, and knowing what I am facing, I make the most of it. Once there, finding the small unpaved landing strip proves easy – I simply ask someone where it is.

Outside the only building in the area – a small hangar – is a fairly new Piper Seneca, which appears to have been prepped to fly. I am getting out of the car, when I see the older guy in dungarees come out of the building.

“Доброе утро, госпожа Ладенко. Как доехали?” (Good morning, Miss Ladenko. Did you enjoy your drive?) he says with a smile, as he tosses a small bag into the open cabin of the plane.

He catches me totally off guard. I’ve been a civilian too long. When he see my surprise, he speaks again.

“I am sorry. It was not my intention to alarm you.”

“More like scare the shit out of me. I *hope* you are Mr. Mestas.”

“Please, you must call me Aeton. Melinda briefed me – thus I was able to speak to you in your own language.”

“Я не разговаривал на своем родном языке долгие годы, но, безусловно, для меня это большая честь. А как так вышло, что «старик» из маленького греческого городка так хорошо говорит по-русски?” (I have not spoken my native language in many years, but you honor me. And, why does an ‘old man’ in a small town in Greece, speak such fluent Russian?) I reply, with a devious little smirk on my face.

“This ‘old man’ was once in the same business you are.”

“*Was* – same business I *was* in. I have been retired for quite some time actually.”

This time *he* looks surprised, and I laugh.

“Old spies never go away Aeton – we become more covert.”

“Of course, you are correct – I am a perfect example,” he says, laughing himself.

“I am told you know where I am going.”

“I do. Come, get aboard. We have a long flight. Perhaps we can share old ‘spy’ stories!”

“Only if I can ride up front with you.”

“As you wish,” he replies, pulling the cabin door fully open and allowing me to climb in.

It takes us about fifteen minutes to get airborne, and I notice immediately, that we are headed in a southwesterly direction. I watch quietly as Aeton climbs to ten thousand feet, and then sets a course and speed into his autopilot. When he has the plane flying itself, he turns to face me.

“So, Miss Ladenko, let us have a chat...”

It will turn out to be a very interesting four hours.



4



I find myself amazed, partially because of what is happening to us, but more by how my little brother is handling it. You see, when your mother is the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, shit happens. And sometimes, that same shit can get all over you – even if you are just kids.

And yes, even at seventeen, I’m still very much a ‘kid’.

But, as I sit here watching him, I now wonder how much of a ‘kid’ my brother really is. It appears he has a pretty good handle on being ‘kidnapped’ – which is apparently, what is happening.

Forcing back a smile, I watch as, with his hands behind his back, Lyle again keys his phone to send Mom our secret ‘trouble’ code. When the guy in the passenger’s seat looks back at us – or at me actually – my little brother has some choice words for him.

“Look at my sister again, asshole, and I *will* kick your ass...”

The guy laughs and says something in a foreign language – which, not only do I recognize, but understand as well – to the girl driving, as we again speed up. Based on the movement of the vehicle, I realize we’ve just changed highways, and based on the shadows being cast on the front windshield, as well as the sound of more cars around us, I figure we’re on the interstate, probably headed northeast, going towards DC.

So, are you wondering how two teenage kids ended up in the back of a cargo van, with our hands tied behind our backs, speeding off somewhere?

Let me catch you up.

It started thirty minutes ago, on our way to school...



5

●—————●

“No thanks, Sis, I’m gonna ride the bus with Curt and Kristin – I think she sorta likes me you know.”

“Ben says you are welcome to ride with us, Lyle,” I reply to my brother, as my boyfriend rolls up in his ‘birthday present’ – a bright blue BMW M3.

“You see, that’s the thing, Haleigh. If I’m always hanging out with you, how am I ever going to get a girlfriend of my own? Besides, I know I’m like a serious distraction to you guys,” he says, laughing as he does.

“And what the hell does that mean?”

“Oh please, I’m not stupid. I heard you guys Saturday night.”

For just a moment, I turn bright red – I can feel it. In this moment, things between my little brother and I, move to a new level. He knows – or at least suspects – that his big sister is sexually active. I thought he’d been asleep for hours when I let Ben into the house.

Now, it seems apparent, I was seriously wrong.

But the smirk on his face and the twinkle in his eyes allows me to relax a little, as does his next comment.

“No, Haleigh, I’m not going to say anything. It’s between you guys. If Mom and Dad find out, it won’t be from me – I swear.”

I lean over and kiss him on his cheek, which momentarily freaks him out. He quickly looks around – as if checking to see who might have seen me do it.

“Damn, Sis, would you *please not do that* in public?”

This time *he* blushes.

“My geeky little brother has turned into quite the awesome dude. I love you – I swear to God I do. I’ll see you at school, okay?”

“Yeah, Sis, at lunch as usual. Later!”

I open the door and climb into the BMW, leaning over and kissing Ben, as Lyle closes the door. Seconds later we’re rolling down Old Auburn Road toward Warrenton, where we go to school. We’ve gone about a half mile when, a dark colored, newer van passes us going the opposite direction. We’re all the way to the cemetery, when the look on Ben’s face catches my attention.

“What’s up?” I ask, as he looks from his side mirror, to the review mirror, and back a couple of times.

“That van – the blue one – is hauling ass up behind us. He must be going like eighty.”

I turn to look out the back window, just in time to see the van go flying past us, then suddenly cut in front of us, slam on its brakes, and skid to a stop sideways, blocking the entire road. Ben stomps on his brakes as well, the anti-lock system bringing the BMW to a stop, mere feet from the side of the van. Almost instantly, the sliding door opens and a guy with a rather sinister look on his face, and a gun in his hand, jumps out.

In the blink of an eye, my phone is in my hand, and I push the correct sequence of buttons to send Mom our secret code – ‘911’.

As the guy jerks open Ben’s door, a female runs up to my side, jerks open my door, snatches the phone from my hands and all but drags me out of the car. The guy does the same to Ben, who looks completely petrified. The girl then binds my hands behind my back with a thick black tie wrap as I watch the guy stuff poor Ben into his trunk – which on a BMW M3, isn’t really big enough for a person.

Before I can say anything, the girl grabs me by my hair and pulls me toward the van, forcefully shoving me in through the open sliding door, and then closing it. I land with a ‘thud’ on the bare metal floor, and as I roll over, I find myself looking at my little brother – and boy does he ever look pissed off.

Seconds later, I hear Ben’s car start, and the girl jumps into the van and starts it as well. We only go a short distance before we made a quick right turn and come to a stop. I know where we are – where we have to be, based on where they stopped us.

“Cedar Hill Lane,” I whisper to Lyle.

“NO TALKING!” the female yells, turning and glancing at us.

Moments later, the guy gets back in on the passengers’ side.

“You can’t just leave him in the damn trunk, you asshole!”

“I told you, NO TALKING!” the girl says again.

I feel the van make a u-turn, and then a quick right, and know we're still headed for Warrenton.

"I think we have a problem, Sis," Lyle says out loud, with a big smirk on his face. I know exactly what he's up to, and it works.

"I WILL NOT TELL YOU AGAIN! NO TALKING!" the girl yells, as the van makes a right turn and accelerates.

From the sound of the traffic around us, I figure we're most likely on the highway – US 29. And because of the right turn, know we must be going north. I'm trying to concentrate on the situation, when my brother does the last thing I would have ever expected from him.

"FUCK YOU, BITCH! If you were in a position to do anything to us, you would have. So quit making threats you can't back up. I'll fucking talk if I want to."

The guy in the passenger's seat laughs – loudly.

I know Lyle is right – we're in some serious trouble. I also know it has something to do with our parents – more specifically, with what they do for a living.

As we speed down the highway, going who the hell knows where, I have the most absurd thought. It's taken me over a year to get Ben to actually date me – guys tend to avoid you when they know your mother has a job that involves killing people. Now, I have a strange feeling that I'm once again, going to be a 'single' teenager – which will undoubtedly make my mother ecstatic.





I'm in the middle of a sentence when, the cell phone in my pocket vibrates, indicating an incoming text message, the door to my office opens unexpectedly, and the phone on my desk rings.

I never stop to consider that bad things come in threes...

"Sorry, Director, we have a situation."

"Do I need to leave?" Calvin Meeks, my Deputy Director, asks as Whitney closes the door behind her.

"Christ, Calvin, why in the hell would my Deputy need to leave the room? For all I know, this – whatever *this* is – could be your fault," I say, and then answer my phone.

"Whitman."

"It's Howard, Courtney. Do you guys have anything weird going on – that civilians shouldn't know about?"

"If we did, your wife would certainly know about it. Care to elaborate?"

"I dunno... probably not. Could just be my suspicious nature, Court. If anything else comes up, I'll get back to you."

"Okay. If you want to talk to your wife, she's right here."

"No, not necessary. I'm late for class. Talk to you later."

The connection is broken before I can reply, and as I lay the receiver back in its cradle, I glance at my sister, who has taken a seat next to Calvin.

"You got something going on with my husband, Sis?"

Poor Calvin almost bites his cheek trying not to laugh.

"I have my damn hands full with *my* husband – how the hell could I deal with yours too?"

We laugh, and then Whitney picks up where she left off.

"So, Cal, do you or those 'intelligence' weenies, have any idea where my other 'sister' may have disappeared to, and why?"

"What?" I blurt out.

"Daria is... well... she's 'missing'. Completely off the grid. I just got off the phone with Keith. They found all her stuff – cell phone, ID, even her aliases – in her office in Salonica. Keith also mentioned that she seemed excessively agitated for about the last week."

"Let's see what they know," Calvin replies, pulling a cell phone from his pocket and dialing. The call is answered quickly.

"Hey, Chuck – Calvin here. I need instant intel. Okay, I'll wait."

My husband – who Calvin is waiting on – is now Director of Intelligence at the Agency. And yes, my sister too, has been promoted, and is now Director of Clandestine Service.

"Where is our favorite Black Ops individual? While you're at it, check on her brother as well. Call me in the Boss's office. Later."

"And?" Whitney asks.

"Chuck will get back to me in five minutes."

Once again, I feel my phone vibrate – telling me I still have a text message waiting for me. As the only people who text me, are my children, I know I have to look at it.

As I pull the phone from my pocket, I see the little smirk on my sister's face. Shaking my head, I flip the phone open and press the keys necessary to download the message. The moment I see it, my heart stops...

'911'

It's our secret emergency code. I told both my kids years ago, that if they were ever *really* in trouble, to text it to me, and I'd be there in a heartbeat. The message was sent from my daughter's number. I hit the correct speed dial number, and when I'm immediately switched to her voice mail, I know her phone is off. I try a second time just in case. Same result. Whitney sees the look on my face, and knows there's a problem.

"What's up, Court?" she asks, as my desk phone rings again.

"In a sec," I say, standing up and walking around my desk. "Answer that for me, Calvin."

He does as I ask, quickly picking up the receiver.

"Director's office. Meeks."

Although I hear him, I've already turned my attention to my cell phone. Whitney is up and standing next to me, before I make it around the desk.

“Talk to me, Sis...”

“Haleigh sent me a 911. She’s never done that before. Now, her phone is off.”

Whitney flips open her cell, hits a speed dial number and is talking instantly.

“Riley, I have a hot one. I need to know where my niece’s cell phone is, at this exact moment. Uh-huh – 781-7731. I’ll wait.”

Then I hear Calvin's raised voice behind me.

“That’s unacceptable, Chuck. *Find her, now.* Understood?”

My eyes – and mind – are still locked onto the text message, the ‘911’ burning into my brain, when I hear Whitney again.

“Are you sure, Riley? How long ago? Shit. Hack the CID index, and if it transmits again, I want to know *as it’s happening* – understood?”

When I raise my head, Whitney is white as a ghost.

“The last time her cell transmitted – which I think was your text message – it was less than two miles from, and directly east of the tower in Warrenton. It was powered down the instant the transmission was complete. That location would put her very close to the cemetery, Sis.”

“She’s headed for school...”

I spin around and hit the intercom button on my desk phone.

“Yes, Mrs. Whitman?” I hear Angie say.

“Call the high school, and see if my kids are there.”

“Yes ma’am, immediately!”

“Calvin?” I ask, looking right at him.

“Her location transponder is off, Director. It hasn’t been off in over four years. Now suddenly, it is. And...”

“Oh shit,” I hear my sister say behind me.

“Tarasov is missing too,” I say, finishing his sentence for him.

“Courtney... she wouldn’t... *you know that.* Not after all the shit we went through.”

I hit the #6 speed dial button on my cell phone, and after only one ring the call is answered.

“Aston.”

“Freeze all the assets, Melinda. Do it right now – I’ll wait.”

“What?”

“*Just do it, damn it! Now!*”

"Yes ma'am, stand by."

"Courtney..." my sister starts to say.

"S-O-P, Whit, and you damn well know it. She has access to an incredible amount of this agency's info, as well as money."

She nods her understanding, and then turns her attention to her now ringing phone.

"Jensen. Yeah, Riley, what's up?"

The next two things happen simultaneously. First, Angie comes back on the intercom, and while I'm still holding it, waiting for Melinda, my phone vibrates again.

"Mrs. Whitman, the school says neither of the kids is there. They didn't call because they assumed they were sick – apparently there are a number of kids out."

"Thanks, Angie..." I reply to my secretary, just before my sister goes ballistic.

"*What?*" Whitney yells. "*When?*"

The answer to her question is in my hand.

"Right now, Whitney..." I say softly, feeling everything drain out of me. I turn and hold my phone up so she can read the small screen...

'911'

This time, the originating number belongs to my son's phone.

"It's done, Courtney," I hear from the speaker of my cell phone. "Only I have access now."

"Monitor *everything*, Melinda," I reply, placing the phone back to my ear. "And no, at this point I'm not sure why. I'll get back to you when I figure this out." I disconnect the call before I hear her reply, and turn my attention to Whitney.

"Where? Okay – CID on both numbers. I want current locations – *yesterday* damnit!"

Then, out of nowhere, a thought occurs to me. I lay my phone on the desk, keeping the circuit open, then reach over and dial Howard's number on my desk phone, and wait. He answers on the third ring.

"Jensen."

"Quickly, Howard – what, *exactly*, prompted that call earlier. And be specific."

"Uh, well... a car. It appeared to be headed for our house, and when I caught up with it, it turned around and left. Kinda fast,

actually. Figured it was someone who got lost – hell, Courtney, nothing indicates the road ends in your yard.”

“Why were you going back to the house?”

“I forgot something I needed for the lecture this morning. I had to have it, so I turned around at the bridge and went back. I saw their brake lights when I was passing Squires Lane, and they were turning onto the dirt road when I passed your parent’s street. Like I said, I figured they were probably lost, but when I turned onto the dirt road, they immediately stopped, turned around in the Wallace’s driveway and went flying back toward Old Auburn.”

“Make? Model? Passengers?”

“What’s going on, Courtney?”

“In a minute, Howard – answer my question.”

“Dark blue Chrysler 300. It was a rental – had the sticker in the lower left corner of the plate. Virginia plate – last four digits were 0225. Sorry, wasn’t paying close enough attention to get the rest of it. At least two passengers – might have been someone in the back as well, not certain. I noticed they went the long way when they hit the pavement, they turned right headed towards Warrenton.”

“Jesus. Once a damn spy, forever a damn spy,” I mumble, scribbling as Howard is talking.

“Now, what the hell is going on, Courtney?”

“I’m not sure yet, Howard, but my kids aren’t where they should be. I want your ass in the car, *right now*, and headed home. No questions – just do it.”

My sister’s eyes get really big, and she sucks in a huge breath.

“I’m gone, Courtney. I’ll call you from the house.”

“Just in case, approach quietly, Howard. Understood?”

“Yes ma’am.”

Then the line goes silent. As I hang up my phone, Whitney’s rings again.

“Jensen. Talk to me Riley. Okay... where? How long? Damn! He’s doing exactly what I taught him! Thanks. Keep on it girl...”

“What, Sis? What the hell did you ‘teach’ my son?”

“Transmit – secure – transmit –secure. They must be in trouble Court. He just...”

Before the words leave her mouth, my cell phone – still lying on my desk – begins to vibrate again. I momentarily close my eyes as a feeling of dread sweeps over me. I shake the feeling off, and

knowing what needs to be done immediately, I grab the phone on my desk, and dial.

Time to call in a favor...

"State Police. How may I direct your call?"

"Deputy Superintendent Rodriguez."

"One moment..."

I hear the call being switch, then hear a new female voice.

"Superintendent's office, how may I help you?"

"This is Courtney Whitman, Patti. I need to talk to Veronica – now."

"Let me find her for you. One sec."

As I'm waiting, I realize that Calvin has been diligently typing away at a terminal for at least the last fifteen minutes. I'm about to look at what he's doing, when I hear the circuit complete once again.

"What the hell is up, Whitman?" Veronica asks.

"I need help lady. Do you have any birds in the air?"

"Yep, two actually. Where do you want them?"

"I need one with a bunch of gun-toting troopers on the ground at my sister's house, ASAP, if not faster. Her husband is headed that way now, but he may need some back up. I figured you could get there quickest."

"Hang on one second..." she says, leaving the line open so I hear her entire conversation with the dispatcher. After a few seconds she comes back on.

"Who's onsite now, Courtney?"

"The babysitter – Mary Winston – and my sister's kids. A three year old female and a one year old female."

"And?" she asks.

"And maybe some bad guys. We – Whitney and I – might be targets."

"And the husband?" she asks, talking to someone on another line at the same time.

"Red Jeep Patriot – and yes, he's armed."

"Copy that. My people will be on the ground, a half mile away in about eight minutes. You want to wait, or should I call you back?"

"Call me back. I'm working something else as well. And thanks Veronica – now I owe you."

“Not even, Courtney. We are, and always have been, on the same damn side. I’ll call you in five.” Then, the circuit goes silent.

My sister is lost – as if she can’t believe what’s happening. And for the first time, in as long as I can remember, she’s speechless. She just stands there, staring at me. Calvin brings us back to reality when he stands up, banging his chair against my desk.

“Special Operations is up, and manned ladies, let’s go down stairs, shall we?”

Not knowing what else to do, we followed Calvin out into the outer office, past Angie, and down the hall to the elevator.

Five minutes later I’m once again standing in a basement, in front of a bunch of giant plasma monitors, surrounded by five technicians, all typing away.

This time however, it’s me the bad guys are after.

Or so I think...

