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Lilly: Enchantment and the Computer

by

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Monday evening

All Dane knew about the girl was that she didn't come into the FastMart very often. When she did, she didn't pay with cash, she always used the FastMart Bucks which you earned by purchasing gas or food. What was unusual was that she used a different account ID and phone number every time.

She looked terrible, especially for this part of the city. She wore a baggy old sweatshirt and an over-large pair of worn-out, not stone-washed, jeans. She had a ragged backpack on her back. Her hair was matted and her clothing filthy. Her face and hands always looked clean, but Dane couldn't vouch for the rest of her. He never got close enough to smell her—he figured that would be much too close. He only knew her from his side of the cash register. She carried an inexpensive tablet computer in one hand and her shopping in the crook of her arm. The tablet had a broken screen and was taped across one corner. Dane was surprised it worked.

She shuffled, literally shuffled, to his isle, the only one open at this time of night and lifted a half gallon of milk and a cheap loaf of bread to the counter. At that moment, a group of four high school boys rushed up impatiently behind her. They had tried to beat her to the counter and were just a second too late. They carried power drinks and snacks. They pressed right up behind her, but she didn't budge an inch.

Before Dane could ring up her stuff, she said in a very soft lilting voice, "It's four dollars and sixty-three cents with tax."

Dane gave her a strange look and ran the items through the scanner. The total came back, four dollars and sixty-three cents. Dane glanced at her, "You're right. Four dollars and sixty-three cents. How are you going to pay tonight?"

She smiled and lifted her tablet, "Use my FastMart Bucks."

"What's your phone number?"

She glanced at her tablet, "253-280-7061."

"The name on your account?"

"Billy Martin..."

Dane was about to ask her to put her password into the keypad when a voice raised behind her, "Hey Billy, this girl is using your account. She has your name and password and everything."

A tall older teen pushed up to the front, "No way." He eyed the girl, "You're stealing my credits..." It was a statement.

The girl's face froze. She moved pretty quickly, but not quickly enough. Billy Martin grabbed her by the arm and pulled her back toward himself, "How did you get my name and account information." He grabbed her other arm and moved the tablet computer into his line of

view. He cursed, "She has everything listed right here." He shook her, "How did you get my information?"

The girl flinched and ducked but said nothing.

Billy twisted her arm, "You're going to tell me, or I'm going to beat it out of you."

Dane spoke up, "Don't hurt her. I'll call the cops if you like."

Billy scowled at him, "Keep out of this. This is between me and her."

Dane shrugged, "Then take it outside, but I'll call the cops on her and on you if necessary."

"Shut up, wimp. I'll do what I want. Right now, I want to know how she stole my account information."

Dane wasn't a wimp. He was tall and muscular, but still pretty thin. Billy had at least fifty pounds on him. In the past, Dane ran cross country and skied cross country. He eyed Billy up and down, "I'll warn you one more time. Take it outside."

Billy eyed Dane back. He slowly and deliberately wrenched the girl's tablet from her hand and threw it to the concrete floor.

She gave an anguished cry and tried to pick it up.

Billy still held tightly to her wrist. He lifted his boot and ground his heel into the tablet. It gave a crackle and a pop. He sneered, "Now you don't have my information anymore."

The girl cried out again and tugged ineffectually to be free.

Billy raised his fist and aimed a blow for the girl's face.

That's when Dane vaulted himself over the counter and struck Billy's arm with his feet. It was the arm Billy held the girl's wrist. Billy's blow only partially connected with the side of the girl's face. When Dane hit Billy's arm, she staggered back against counter and then hit the floor.

Billy went down for a moment but was back up almost immediately. By then, Jeff, the manager of the FastMart was running quickly from the back. He took one look at what was happening and pulled out his cell phone. While Jeff rang 911, Dane tugged the girl off the floor by her sweatshirt, grabbed her arm, and ran for the doors. She followed behind him.

Billy gave a cry of surprise then shouted, “After them.” He was a little slow and inadvertently blocked the aisle to the counter. By the time, he and the other three boys were in pursuit, Dane and the girl already had a good half block on them.

Dane didn’t let go of the girl’s arm. He kept a tight grasp on her and was amazed that she could keep up with him. At some point, the hold on her arm transitioned to her hand. She still kept up. They turned at the corner and then back through an alley. Dane was familiar with this part of the block—it’s where the garbage went out and was picked up. The girl seemed to know it well too. The night was cool and the alley very dark. The Puget Sound skies were somber and cloud laden although little rain had fallen that day.

Dane exited on the other side of the block and stopped. They both bent over to catch their breath and see if anyone was still following. Dane heard nothing, at first, and then police sirens.

Dane stood straight. He stared at the girl up and down and wasn’t sure what to say.

She glanced at him and smiled, “Thanks, no one’s helped me before.” Then she scowled, “He busted my tablet.”

Dane took a deep lungful of fresh air, “You’re lucky he didn’t bust your face.” He paused only a moment, then more gently asked, “Are you alright? He did hit you.”

She shrugged, “I’ve had worse.”

He couldn’t see her face very well in the light from the streetlamps, “What were you doing, and how did you get his account?”

She shrugged again, “I was getting dinner. I don’t have any money.”

Dane put out his hand, but he didn’t touch her, “I notice, you use a different account each time. Did you steal those too?”

She shrugged, “How else am I supposed to eat?”

“Most people earn money.”

She didn’t look at him, “I am not most people.”

“Who are you?”

She gave a slight smile, “No one has ever asked me that around here. I’m Lilly.”

“No one ever asked you...?” Dane started, he finished with, “I’m Dane, Dane Vale.” He paused a moment for her to respond.

“It’s Lilly—just Lilly.”

Dane asked, “Are you hungry?”

“Yes. Very. I didn’t get anything for FastMart.” She stared oddly at him, “What about your work?”

“It was almost quitting time for me anyway. I’d rather not meet up with Billy and his friends again tonight.”

“Me either.” She glanced at him again, “Are you trying to pick me up?”

It was Dane’s turn to shrug, “Not really. I’m just a little curious...”

“Curious?”

“I’ve never really met a real hacker before.”

She tugged at her lip, “Do you think I’m a hacker?”

“Isn’t that what you are?”

“I guess.”

Dane gave a wave, "Come on. The campus coffee shop is still open."

She shuffled behind him, and they headed to 208 Garfield. Dane was cautious. He didn't think they would meet Billy again in this direction, but you couldn't tell.

The coffee shop wasn't very busy this time of night. They walked in and found a table at the back.

When they sat, Lilly stated, "I told you--I don't have any money."

"That's okay. My treat."

"Are you sure? I don't want to be obligated..."

"I figure you already owe me an explanation..."

"An explanation?"

Dane looked over the menu at her, "An explanation about the FastMart Bucks and everything."

"Oh."

"Have whatever you want."

"Thanks."

When the server came over and placed a basket of breadsticks on the table. Dane ordered a cappuccino to drink and a turkey and lingonberry sandwich. Lilly ordered a turkey and lingonberry sandwich too. She eyed the wine menu, but chose a coke to drink.

Dane asked, "Would you like a glass of wine?"

"I never had one before."

Under the lights of the restaurant, Dane got a better look at her. She was really petit for her height, and she wasn't all that tall. She looked undernourished. Her face was thin and kind of plain. Her eyes were very large and blue. They looked like an almost transparent blue. Her

cheek was turning a dark shade of purple already. Dane guessed that was where Billy hit her. He didn't think it was that hard. Her hair was long and kept falling into her eyes. It was blond, but how blond was hard to tell—the dirt and, he guessed, grease discolored it. Her eyebrows were so light they were almost invisible, so her hair must be really dirty. Dane looked at her hands again. They were clean and the nails were clean. That was odd. When he was close to her, he did note she had a scent. It wasn't that bad a scent, but it was like a mix of dirty clothing and unwashed body. He asked quietly, "How old are you?"

She glanced at him and her eyes flashed, then she looked down again, "I'm a student here."

"Really?"

"I have an ID."

"Why were you stealing food?"

She bit her lip and didn't look at him, "I don't like to think of it as stealing."

"It is, you know."

Her eyes flashed at him again.

"Then, why were you borrowing the food?"

"Isn't that obvious, because I was hungry."

"Yeah, but a half gallon of milk and a loaf of white bread—that's barely enough to sustain life..."

"What do you know about it? It would keep me going for a few days. I don't take more because I don't like taking it that way, and I don't want to draw attention to myself. People don't keep track of that kind of stuff much and many people don't use their credits at all. I just got unlucky that the account I was using belonged to someone in the store at the time."

"I'll say. What are you going to do now?"

She stared at him.

“Your tablet was broken...”

“I’ll go hungry for a while, but the garbage cans are pretty full around here...”

Their food came so Dane didn’t continue with his next question immediately. The moment the food was in front of her, she closed her eyes for a few seconds made the sign of the cross and picked up her sandwich. She ate the first half before Dane had a good grip on his. The second half was gone when he looked up again. She began on the salad.

Dane asked between bites, “What else did you eat today?”

“Nothing.”

“I thought not.”

“How are you going to get another tablet? Maybe I should ask, how did you get your last tablet?”

She blushed and looked into her coke, “I used my laptop to credit an account at Best Buy. They have credits too, and they limit the amount...I only could afford a repaired one.”

Dane leaned back, “Let me get this straight, you can just hack any account you want? How do you do it?”

“I dunno. I can just do it.”

“Do you guess passwords or what?”

“I look at the coding and then use mathematical algorithms to find the passwords and the usernames.”

Dane raised his chin, “Just like that...how do you prevent detection?”

“I can see the lines in the code for the services. If the programs are compiled, I look at the machine code.”

Dane's mouth was suddenly dry, "You can read the machine code?"

"Can't you? Can't everyone?"

Dane shook his head, "I don't know of anyone who can directly read machine code...how do you do it?"

"I see the patterns in the code. The sequences are obvious to me."

"Do you write in machine code too?"

"Of course."

Dane rubbed his chin, "How did you learn to do all this? How is it even possible?"

"When I was small, our family had nothing—we still have nothing. Everyone made fun of me because my clothes were dirty or strange. I started with the school's computers. I found I could make them show me their codes. At that time, I saw the sequences, but I didn't know what they meant. I read all the books in the library on coding and programming. Pretty soon, I could make a computer do almost anything I wanted. I programmed the kids' game systems and computers to get them through the game levels. They didn't make fun of me much after that."

"When did you start hacking accounts?"

"About the same time. It isn't hard if you can discover where the data is stored and then how to unscramble it..."

"And you can unscramble the data?"

"You don't believe me?"

Dane held up his hands, "It isn't a question of disbelief, it is a question of understanding. I'm not sure anyone else in the world can do what you can do."

"People hack accounts all the time..."

"Not on the fly and not to buy bread. I would have said it was impossible."

She glared at him, “How would you know?”

“I’m a student in the computer engineering department.”

“Oh.”

“What’s your major?”

She smiled, “Mathematics.”

A look of recognition came on in Dane’s eyes, “You’re Lilly Lin aren’t you. Lilly Lin Grant. You’re the little math wiz kid who entered last year. You maxed out the SAT and the ACT and won a whole bunch of math contests. Why’d you come here? Why didn’t you go somewhere more important? Somewhere they would feed you?”

“I didn’t want any recognition...”

“That’s silly. Why not?”

“Listen to me. My mother is a crack head. She takes everything I have and sells it for dope. She’d take my scholarship and sell it if she could.”

“Dump her.”

“Don’t you think I would if I could?”

“Lilly, you can hack accounts to buy bread, why don’t you hack your way out of your mother’s control...”

Her mouth opened wide, “Wha...”

“Look, I know computers. I can show you exactly what to do and where to do it. I can’t hack them, but I can show you where to hack them.”

A large smile grew across her features. She didn’t say anything after that, but the smile on her face told Dane she was thinking very intently.

They ordered desert and Dane had more coffee. Lilly drank another coke. Just before they left, Lilly looked to either side and slipped the remaining breadsticks from the basket in the center of the table into a napkin. She carefully folded the napkin over the bread and shoved it into her bag.

When they were done, Dane paid with Lute Bucks. He stood, "Let me take you home."

She pulled her baggy sweatshirt a little closer, "You don't need to."

"But I do—we have an agreement...of sorts."

"We have an agreement..." They exited the restaurant and Lilly shoved her hands in her pockets. She slumped, "Come on."

They walked slowly toward the campus and turned left on Park Avenue. The mist was rising and the air was heavy with moisture although, it didn't feel like it was going to rain. As they walked down the slight hill on Park Avenue, Dane could have sworn he spotted a strange architectural shape on the left between 124th and 125th Streets. It was like an oriental gate. It was copper colored with posts one foot in diameter on either side, a curved bar at the top, and a straight bar about a third down. Dane was certain he had seen something like that before. He just couldn't remember where. He didn't remember there being a structure like this anywhere on Park Avenue.

Lilly stopped at the gate. In the deep shadows of the night, Dane entirely missed a shape at the base of one of the posts of the gate. It looked like a bundle of rags. Lilly reached toward the bundle and shook it, "Hiko-kun. Hiko-kun, I have something for you tonight."

The rags moved. Dane swore he heard a tinkling sound just at the edge of perception. The rags sat up and a wrinkled oriental face smiled up at Lilly. The voice was oddly deep and didn't fit the face at all. It was rumbling and strong but didn't sound like it went that far beyond them,

“Lilly-chan, how many times must I tell you? My name is Kanayama-hiko. Hiko isn’t my first name.”

Lilly rummaged around in her backpack and brought out the breadsticks in the napkin. She held it out and wrinkled her nose, “Saying Kanayama-kun just sounds too pretentious. I brought you fresh bread tonight. It is a gift from Dane, Hiko-kun.”

The old oriental man smiled, “Dane, you say?”

Lilly stepped slightly to the side, “This is Dane. He helped me tonight and bought me dinner.”

Dane got a better look at the man. He saw, a scrawny and ancient looking Asian man with a thin white beard. On second appraisal, the old man’s clothing was very fine and looked oriental. He wore a black yukata that was embroidered with metallic looking thread. It only looked like rags because the man seemed shriveled and small. Dane realized Kanayama-hiko was not small at all, but the clothing engulfed him and was itself wrinkled. When Kanayama-hiko moved, Dane could hear the sound of tinkling bells—or perhaps it was the muted toll of clanking metal. The man moved deliberately but easily as though he was once ponderous, but now much smaller and lighter. When Kanayama-hiko reached out to take the bread from Lilly, the sleeves of his clothing fell back, and his hands and arms looked like those of a blacksmith. The hands that took the bread from Lilly were large and heavy, but the man moved lightly with a gentle touch.

Kanayama-hiko did not stand. He did not bow his head. For some reason, Dane felt like he should bow. He lowered his head, and Kanayama-hiko smiled, “Thank you, Lilly-chan for your gift, and you also Dane-kun.” A black cat moved from behind the post and sat next to Kanayama-hiko. Kanayama-hiko offered a piece of bread to the cat, and Dane was surprised it took it and began to eat.

Lilly stood straight, "I'm sorry Bakeneko-chan, I don't have milk for you tonight."

The black cat looked up at Lilly and meowed.

Kanayama-hiko glanced at Lilly, "Lilly-chan, how many times must I tell you. Her name is Kuro-chan and not Bakeneko-chan. She is a Bakeneko, but her name is Kuro-chan."

Lilly laughed, "I like to say, Bakeneko-chan. There are surely many cats named Kuro-chan, but how many can be called Bakeneko-chan."

The old man smiled. Dane caught the sound of the tinkling of metal again. Kanayama-hiko wrapped up the bread and folded his legs. He sat up against the post of the gate, "You are very kind to bring a gift to me every night Lilly-chan."

Lilly leaned toward the man and whispered, but Dane heard her clearly, "It is a professional courtesy."

Kanayama-hiko didn't bow, but Dane could see his smile, "So it is Lilly-chan. Kuro-chan also thanks you." The cat seemed to bow.

Dane stood straighter.

Lilly smiled at the man, "Dane is taking me home."

The old man glanced from Lilly to Dane and back, "I'm glad someone other than me, is protecting you, Lilly-chan."

Lilly nodded, but she didn't bow, "Good night, Hiko-kun, Bakeneko-chan."

"Goodnight, Lilly-chan."

Lilly continued walking down Park Avenue, and Dane followed her. When they were out of range of the gate, Dane looked back. He couldn't see anything in the darkness or the mist. He asked Lilly, "Who was that?"

"Kanayama-hiko and his cat."

“Is he homeless?”

Lilly shrugged, “I guess...I bring him bread and share milk with him. He is a friend.”

“What did you mean the bread was a professional courtesy?”

Lilly didn't respond.

“You seem to know him well.”

“I know him very well. He was here the first day I came here. He was the only one who greeted me.” She laughed, “He was the only one I greeted.”

Dane asked, “How do you know all these Chinese words and stuff...?”

“Kanayama-hiko isn't Chinese. He is Japanese.” She raised her eyes to Dane's, “Why don't you know these things. I learned about Japan from manga and anime, plus the Internet.”

Dane frowned. He shrugged.”

They turned on the next street and came to an alley. Lilly led him down the alley to a fire escape. She stopped below it and kicked a wooden box from the wall. She stepped on the box.

Dane glanced dubiously at the fire escape, “You live up there?”

She cocked her head as though she were in thought for a moment, “This is just the back way in...that way I don't have to put up with the crowd in the lobby.”

“Crowd in the lobby...?”

Lilly jumped down from the box, “Thank you very much for dinner.” She gave him a crooked smile and stuck out her hand.

Dane shook it, “You're welcome.”

Lilly ran back, stepped onto the box, and jumped onto the fire escape.

Dane watched her disappear into the damp darkness. He couldn't tell if she stopped at a window or continued to the top. He whispered, "That couldn't be..." After a moment, he turned around and headed to his apartment.

Tuesday morning

The morning skies were dreary but no rain had fallen during the night or morning. Dane went to his first class. He rode his bike and took a short detour down Park Avenue to see if he could find the gate where Kanayama-hiko had sat the night before. He didn't see anything like it and gave up because it was getting late. Dane continued onto the campus and locked his bike in the rack in front of the math building. He entered the classroom and found a place near the front. He pulled a notebook from his backpack and some mechanical pencils. He sat the backpack at his feet. The professor entered the room at the front and at almost the same time, the last of the students came in the back door. That's when he saw her. He hadn't realized Lilly was in this class with him. It was a really advanced class on theoretical mathematics. He was taking it because it was an engineering requirement, and because he wanted it for his electrical engineering classes. It wasn't exactly pure theory, but it was close. It indirectly aided in the programming and development of electrical components and circuits. Wiz kid or not, there was no way Lilly Lin Grant should have been at a level for that this kind of class—it was a senior level one and had numerous prerequisites and requirements. But, there she was, plain as day. No one sat close to her.

Dane wondered why he hadn't noticed her before. He wished now he hadn't sat near the front of the class. She was at the back, and he couldn't keep an eye on her. With the few glances he could steal, he saw she pulled out an old laptop with a kludged battery attached to it.

She typed on it throughout class. The class went on and on. Dane thought it would never end. Finally, the prof finished and assigned the homework. Dane stood and went to the back to intercept Lilly. He got a better look at her and her computer. The computer appeared like it came out of the trash. The batteries were more than kludged, they were taped and wired to the back of the computer. She was just closing the lid when Dane arrived in front of her. Dane was slightly breathless, "I didn't know you were in this class."

That's when he caught a whiff of her. She reeked. He wondered why he hadn't noticed it last night—maybe it was the damp. He took an involuntary step back.

Lilly turned him a sneering smile and stood, "It keeps away the unwanted and the unpleasant." She swept her oddly taped computer into her ragged bag and gently slipped it on her back. She gave him a look as she headed out the door.

Dane followed her, but not too close. He whispered, "Did you mean because you stink?"

She stopped suddenly and rolled her eyes then raised her lip in a very sardonic sneer, "That is exactly what I meant." She twirled around and continued down the walk.

Dane followed behind her. She headed to the Student Union and then went behind it. She stopped at the first dumpster and took a long sniff. She shook her head and went to the second. She sniffed at this one too, then she took off her ragged backpack and gently laid it on the ground. She threw open the dumpster lid and pulled herself up on the side. She stood on the metal arm welded to it.

Dane stuck his hands on his hips, "Just what are you doing?"

She didn't look at him, "I couldn't buy anything last night...and I gave the remaining bread to Hiko-kun."

"I'll get you something."

“I don’t like being dependent.”

“I’ll pay you...”

She stood up straight and half turned. Her look was suspicious, “Pay me for what?”

Dane thought quickly, “For your class notes...,” he stated lamely.

She sucked in a breath, “How do you know my notes are worth anything?”

“I’d rather pay you for your notes than have you eat garbage from the Student Union dumpster.”

She hopped down and stood directly before him, “Does it embarrass you?”

“Not really. It makes me sad that you have to eat here.”

She kept her eyes on him and reached down to pick up her backpack, “They throw out so much good food, it seems a waste not to eat it.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Dane turned around and waved for her to follow.

They walked back around the climbing drive to the front, and Dane led her to the small bistro inside.

He put his bag on a couch, and she set hers beside his.

Lilly raised her chin, “Give me money. I’m hungry right now, and I’ll send you my notes afterwards.”

Dane waved her to the counter, “I’ll pay with Lute Bucks. You can order whatever you want.”

She came with him but asked, “What are Lute Bucks?”

He turned sharply and stared at her, “I’m surprised you didn’t hack the school accounts for them. They are credit you can use to buy food at the cafeteria and other places around and on the campus.”

She squinted, “As a professional courtesy, I don’t foul my own nest.”

“I take that to mean, you don’t hack systems you have professional associations with.”

“You are astute—that is just what I meant.”

When they arrived at the counter, Dane ordered a cup of coffee and a bagel with cream cheese. Lilly ordered a breakfast sandwich with egg and bacon. She also ordered a coke. Dane paid for everything. They went back to the couch and sat down. Lilly sat on one end and Dane on the other. Their bags were in the center.

After a while, Dane asked, “Would you like a job at the FastMart?”

“Could I get one? Usually they take one look at me and shut the door in my face.”

“That’s because you stink and your clothes look like crap. I could give you a recommendation. I think Jeff would listen to me.”

“My tude too....Why would he listen to you? You buggered out yesterday, and you assaulted a customer.”

“I know, but I was protecting another customer.”

She didn’t smile, “One who was borrowing an account.”

“I’ll try. Will you take it if I can get it for you?”

She shrugged.

Dane glanced at his watch, “I have another class now.”

“Me too.”

They picked up their bags and Dane headed to the engineering department. Lilly walked beside him all the way. Dane tried to stay downwind. When they arrived, she entered the building with him. She followed him into the classroom. He turned, “You aren’t in this class too, are you?”

“I am now.”

“What do you mean?”

He didn't get an answer. The class was beginning to fill. She plopped down in a seat in the back and Dane took a seat one desk away. He was also at the back this time. He wanted to keep an eye on her. He usually sat at the front.

Lilly didn't look at him, “Give me your email—for the notes.”

Dane wrote it on a piece of paper and handed it to her.

The prof entered and looked around the class. He glanced at the class roster with a puzzled look on his face, then started his lecture. Lilly had her junk computer open right away. She began typing the moment the professor started speaking.

Dane didn't have time to think about much of anything else. He was too busy trying to keep up with the equations and remarks from the professor.

At the end of the class, the professor came to the back while Dane and Lilly were putting away their stuff. He stopped a few feet from Lilly and then took a few steps back, “Are you Lilly Grant?”

Lilly put on a pasted smile, “I'm Lilly.”

“I find you are now on my class roster...?”

She continued to smile, “There was a slight error in the registrar's office.”

“I see. You're a freshman?”

“Yes.”

“The system says you have the prerequisites for this class—how can that be? This is a senior level class.”

She held her smile, “I'm a special student in the system.”

“Yes, I did note that, but...”

“The registrar said I could take any class I wished, I just have to be able to keep up.”

“I’m not so sure about that. I need to talk to the registrar.”

Lilly was nonplus, “You do that. I’ll keep up, plus Dane is helping me.”

“Really?” He glanced at Dane, “Are you helping her with the class, Mr. Vale?”

Dane wasn’t sure what to say. He stammered, “I guess.”

The professor shook his head, “As long as it’s alright with the registrar and your advisor... Who is your advisor, by the way?”

“Dr. Krise is my advisor.”

The professor’s eyes bulged, “The president of the university is your advisor?”

“Yeap.”

“That’s highly irregular...”

“It’s in my records.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

Lilly slung her bag over her shoulder and cocked her head, “You can check in the system.”

“Yes.”

Dane wanted to move quickly. Instead, he followed the slowly moving Lilly out of the classroom and back out of the building. They left the professor shaking his head. When they got outside, Dane stated, “I thought you didn’t foul your nest.”

“I don’t. Dr. Krise is my advisor, and I can take any class I wish. I wish to take my classes with you.”

“You mean you are in all my classes now?”

“Since yesterday.”

“What about your other classes?”

“I’m taking them too. I have one now in the Math department.”

“How many credits are you taking?”

She grinned at him, “That’s classified information, but I’ll tell you. I’m taking thirty-six right now.”

Dane stopped in his tracks, “How can you take thirty-six credits?”

She grumped, “Because I can. I took twenty-four last semester.”

“And you passed them?”

“I aced them.”

“What are you doing for lunch?”

She shrugged, “Dumpster diving. I find stuff other than food. It’s entertaining and sometimes profitable.”

“Like your computer?”

“Yeah. People don’t throw away tablets yet, but computers are pretty common garbage.”

“I can’t really believe that...”

She held up her backpack and gave it a gentle shake, “Backpacks, clothing, and other stuff too.”

“You don’t have anything, but you can take any classes you wish?”

“I can have anything I take from the garbage too.”

“How did you get it to work?”

She cocked her head at him, “What do you mean?”

“People don’t throw out good computers.”

She just smiled at him.

Dane's voice was low, "Can I look at your computer?"

"Sure, but not now. Like I said, I have a class." She headed toward the Math Department.

Dane followed her to retrieve his bike. At the Math building, Lilly continued inside. Before she was out of earshot, Dane called, "I'm going to the library to study. I'll be there until my class this afternoon."

She halted a moment, shrugged her bag more securely on her shoulder and pushed through the door. Dane went to the bike racks. Then he headed to the library.

Dane found a seat near the large windows at the back of the Mortvedt Library. The moment he opened his laptop, he received an email from Lilly with her notes from their previous two classes. The notes were perfect. They included all the equations and comments from the professors. It was as though she had produced the exact notes the professors had prepared. Dane didn't wonder that he had made a very good trade of less than five dollars for her notes. She could have sold them to anyone in the class for much more than that. He started on his homework and then realized that she had finished that in the class time too. Lilly Lin Grant was certainly not what he expected at all.

