

A Life of My Own - 8

by J. Mykell Collinz

I ride the bus downtown by myself for the first time without Patrick. He's my private tutor's teaching assistant. My father can afford it so I'm doing home schooling. Patrick told me it wasn't safe for a young woman of sixteen to mingle in the protest crowd without an escort but I'm finding it exciting. As I watch a suspicious looking character talking with two young men sitting next to me by the fountain in the crowded park, and I listen to their conversation, the slogan, beware of feds with dreads, comes to mind, especially white boys wearing wigs:

"All I need to gain control of an aging nuclear power plant is one lazy worker logged in on a company machine using simple passwords while downloading videos and social networking on the Internet."

"That can't be true," one young man replies.

"Right, it's gotta be more complicated than that," the other chimes in.

"I can invade any computer system that allows access through the Internet or relies on any form of wireless technology."

"So what are you talking about? Blowing up a nuclear power plant? Get outta here. We don't need that."

"Yeah, this is a nonviolent movement."

"Did I say anything about blowing it up? No, just shut it down."

"And then what?"

"You can't just turn it off and walk away. It don't work like that."

"Let the power companies deal with it, they created the mess. They'll get the message when all their nuclear plants start going down one by one."

"What message?"

"One by one? It would take years to dismantle every nuclear power plant in this country."

"So? It took years to get to the moon. We invented new technologies along the way. Why can't we invent new technologies to produce electricity without generating nuclear waste or creating potential meltdowns? Why can't we decentralize the power grid, replace it with local, safe, and renewable sources? The big companies won't allow it? It's not profitable enough for them? Well then, we'll need to force them into it."

He notices me watching, makes eye contact. I turn away yet his eyes and the expression on his face linger in my consciousness. I'm overwhelmed with apprehension: he wants to rape me, I'm instinctively sure of it.

"Hey, young lady, you've been listening to this conversation, what's your opinion?"

I turn back to face him. He's very attractive, with short blond dreads and brilliant blue eyes. Along with the wig, I think he's wearing circle contact lenses, which come in a variety of colors. He's like a professor's age in comparison to the other two, who look to be college student age.

"I don't know what to think," I say, feeling I should stop there yet, I add: "Local, safe, and renewable sounds good to me. How do we

get there? Hacking into computer systems? I doubt it. That goes too far. It threatens homeland security."

With his eyes locked on mine, he laughs, and says: "Homeland security is a joke. They've spent billions of dollars and what have they done? Have they improved our physical infrastructure? No. Have they upgraded our intelligence operations? No. Keeping a terrorist watch list is not a sufficient activity to justify their existence. Plus, they're not even good at doing that."

I'm not sure if he's right or not but he has a gorgeous smile, he's charmingly self confident, and he's very persuasive. I'm stimulated by his focused attention. The two college students are also watching me with desire in their eyes. I shouldn't have dressed so vampish. I probably look like I'm asking for it. But, even if I am, doesn't mean I want to be forced. Responding to my instinct, I abruptly turn and walk away.

During the bus ride home, I fantasize the scene for my novel, explicitly visualizing what might happen if I stay to gather more hands on research in the future.

