

Dangerous Haven

Maria E. Schneider

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Chapter 1

Dr. Alexia Zimmerman wondered, not for the first time, why people believed that burglars always wore black. Efficiently, she donned white gloves to match her outfit and slid through the doorway into the first chamber. That particular stereotype was about to cost the City of Haven its livelihood. Again.

Of course, she didn't really intend to *steal* the crystals that powered the experimental city; this was just her way of secretly proving that they could be stolen. No one really knew how much the crystals were worth, but because of the raw power they produced, there was no doubt that the crystals would sell if someone other than she were to take them.

Haven was a city chartered to create and apply vast technical improvements that would benefit not just Haven, but the world. Locked away in the mountains of the Cibola National Forest in New Mexico, various experiments utilized abundant sunshine and wind to provide much of the electrical needs for the city. The crystals, a serendipitous discovery, provided the rest.

Of course, none of this had anything to do with her penchant for breaking-in; a hobby that under normal circumstances, she would have given up now that she had joined Haven. However, when the crystals had nearly been stolen by a group of terrorists with plans to use the crystal's power for blowing things up, she stepped in with the hope of forcing Corporate to develop better security. Carefully, she launched an electric current to confuse the listening devices that recorded noises as quiet as breathing. The steady hiss would cover any minute sounds she might make, and it was constant so would trigger no alarms. A white reflective shadow, she crossed the room to the second door and organized her tools for final penetration into the chamber that actually housed the crystals. She drew a white hood over her head. It did not sport eye or breathing slits, but if all went well, she wouldn't need it long. Like a phantom, she dodged through the invisible light beams that crisscrossed the room, her stark white suit reflecting the beams back. The illusion was complete. No sirens sounded, and Alexia allowed herself a small smile of triumph.

As lead psychiatrist on the case of the thefts, she was supposed to help profile the mind behind the thefts. As part of the team of experts, she had access to the specifications for the security system--a fact that wasn't supposed to help said thief. It helped her.

Above the room, she knew that a real person was watching a camera feed. His pulse was monitored so that if he began to snooze, a jolt of electricity would awaken him. Five minutes ago, Alexia had blocked the camera feed with a computer-simulated picture of this very room.

Using lasers of her own, she bypassed the more complex light beams surrounding the package. The computer she carried could produce up to forty beams, and she had memorized the pattern that had to be formed before she entered the chamber. She set the device, feeding light into the receptors just long enough for her to grab the small package. She swapped the crystals with an empty bundle, removed her computer and scooted through the doorway.

Hurrying now, she placed the crystals in the first room where they would still have minimal protection. She removed her gloves and hood, shook her blonde hair free and tucked her tools away.

The outer door opened onto a hallway. Her watch indicated that she had just over a minute before one of the "random" electronic sweeps would detect her presence. Listening to the tiny microphone she had planted just outside the door, she heard nothing. Good. Knowing the clock was running down, she quickly inserted a metal strip that would keep the door contact sensors happy.

The door was opened a few millimeters when she heard voices.

With superhuman effort, she held perfectly still and listened. The voices weren't coming closer, nor were they fading. Her hand, turned to keep the doorknob in position, cramped.

Her heart beat faster and she licked sudden beads of sweat off her upper lip. She didn't dare look down at her watch. Doing so would twist her hand and she couldn't chance the knob moving. As long as no one glanced directly at the door...

She counted without moving her lips. Thirty seconds...forty. Shit. She had perhaps fifteen seconds, maybe ten.

Voices fading slowly or not, she had to get out or she would be caught and that would be the end of her legitimate career as well as her extra-curricular activities.

Edging through so that she could watch the hallway, she eased the contact strip out as the locks re-engaged.

The hallway cameras registered her presence as if she had just turned the corner. She held her breath as the two people who had passed continued talking. They were not facing her and took no notice.

Alexia put her shaking legs to use by walking steadily away from the scene of the crime. People might see her now, but would think nothing of it. This hallway was quite populated in the daytime, and it was only just after lunch.

Another myth: burglars always work in the darkness of night.