

Her Own Devices

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Chapter Eight, Scene Two

Sitting on the bus going to pick up Ramadi, Anna fretted over the pizza chef's awkward revelation and fingered a message to Ottovio asking to get together over at her place to examine his pilfered police database. As an inducement, she texted again, promising a take-out dinner of his choice, to which he tersely replied *souvlaki*.

That evening was not the first time that Ramadi had encountered Ottovio, but for the boy it was all new, as was his impressive black laptop that dwarfed his mom's brushed silver one. He watched as she and the Greek geek huddled in front of it on the kitchen table after supper, unable to decipher the glyphs its screen displayed, seeming to sense they meant something worth knowing. He hovered nearby, entranced.

I can almost smell the food she got from the taverna. It's good to see Ottovio. He really hasn't changed but for flecks of grey in that big curly beard. If I get right behind them I can read the computer screen. I know what they are doing. I was with her first time they met at the taverna. He looked her up in his police file to check if she was reliable. Now she shows him card for someone named Vassilios Laskaris on her phone. Seems to be policeman. Why would policeman be in that database of criminals?

"Can you tell if this guy is known to the police?" Anna asked.

Ottovio shoved a thumb drive into his infernal machine. "This copy of police suspect database is a little old," he apologized, "but let's assume he is old news to them." Ramadi announced he felt cold and snuggled into Anna's lap. Saying she felt chilled too, she hugged him and regarded the windows, but all were shut.

Ottovio opened an application, then a file, and started typing commands. Ramadi followed his actions with interest, understandably unaware of the extreme efforts he'd undertaken to liberate a three-gigabyte relational database from a Hellenic Police file server.

“Okay, we search by name,” Ottovio muttered, entering a query. After a moment of study, he informed her that Vassilios Laskaris came to the attention of Hellenic Police after an incident in 2013 involving excessive force during an altercation with a shopkeeper for which he was held partly responsible and fined but not sentenced. No mention of being deputized as a warden. That was pretty much it, he said, disclaiming that things may have changed since he last pilfered the database.

Laskaris’s record included a home address, somewhere down by the docks in the adjacent Perama district, a known Golden Dawn Party stronghold. Anna typed it into her phone’s address book along with the phone number and job description on his calling card.

“What exactly is a warden?” she inquired.

Kind of a junior detective, he mansplained, a supernumerary not sworn into the force, sometimes called stooge. Basically a paid informant doing piecework for law enforcement. Wardens come and go. Maybe he still is, maybe not.

“We can check,” she said. “Call police. What’s the closest station to here?”

“Would be the one over in Nikaia, just north of here” he replied, activating his wi-fi and searching anonymously. “This,” he said, pointing to the bottom of the screen. She took down its address and phone number, saying she would call from a pay station tomorrow. Ramadi intently eyed the web page until Ottovio closed the laptop. Noticing the boy’s interest, he told him “Can do a lot with this machine. Maybe you be hacker someday, have even better one.”

“Hacker,” the boy cheerily responded, seizing upon a new word.

Ottovio had brought a tub of pistachio ice cream, a new flavor for the boy. Anna divvied it up and handed bowls around. Ramadi sniffed and prodded it like a cat dubious about a new kitty concoction, tasted it, and proceeded to tuck it in, leaving the nuts behind. Another good reason for not baking him a birthday *Haselnusstorte*, Anna observed.

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