**Chapter One**

Danielle could hack into her neighbor’s home stereo system in less than a minute.

She leaned forward, clammy fingers dancing over the keyboard. As her left-hand monitor continued to display the code she’d injected into her neighbor’s smart TV’s built-in webcam, the right exhibited data from the indoor camera and robotic vacuum cleaner.

In the next room, Danielle's baby brother, David, wailed.

“Shh, they’re going to turn off the music soon,” her mother’s voice pleaded over the screaming toddler. Even after Danielle had mustered enough courage to knock on Flavia’s door, complaining that the loud music kept her brother awake, the bass continued to shake the walls.

Danielle’s classmate, Flavia, rolled her eyes when she opened her apartment door, and before Danielle could voice her complaints, Flavia pouted at her.

“Mom said I could only invite fifteen friends over,” she said, before slamming the door in her face. Danielle heard their muffled voices and snarky laughter as Flavia no-doubt told the story to their classmates of how Danielle tried to invite herself over. Seeing her classmates shimmying to the electrifying music in Flavia’s living room made her feel like a total loser. Even the most unpopular kids had been invited.

Back in her room, Danielle hit Enter. The walls stopped vibrating. The living room camera captured five kids scratching their heads, shrugging, and raising questioning eyebrows at their hostess. Their surprised expressions became terrified yelps when the vacuum cleaner left its docking station and glided across the living room, joining the TV which flickered on its own accord.

Danielle slouched in her swivel chair and punched the air. *Yes*.

But then Flavia’s father strode into the frame. He said something to the guests, his words accompanied with reassuring hand gestures, and marched toward the exit. Someone knocked on Danielle’s door and her mother’s footfalls raced across the apartment.

Trying to eavesdrop on their conversation, she only heard, “Oh, hello, how are—”

Her mother’s voice was cut short as a muffled angry man interrupted her.

“...yes, I know it's your daughter’s birthday, but Danielle wouldn’t—what do you mean the vacuum moved on its own accord? Of course that’s not—I see. I’ll speak with her now. This won't happen again, we’re all very sorry.”

The door slammed and Danielle’s mother sighed before quick footsteps shuffled across the apartment towards Danielle’s bedroom. The door opened and there, wearing a merlot sweatsuit matching the color of her pixie-cut hair, stood her mother holding David in her arms.

“Why is Rossi’s internet not working? Why did the vacuum cleaner start working without anyone turning it on?”

“I don’t know,” Danielle drawled, swiveling side to side in her office chair.

Her mother waved a finger at her. “Stop lying to me. Flavia's father just told me you came by twenty minutes ago and asked them to be quiet. Now their internet’s not working. They're not stupid, you know. What’s going on in here?”

“I have no idea.” What Danielle really wanted to say was: *remember that time Flavia dumped a bucket of paint on my head, and I came home with blue hair? Remember a week later she came over asking for help because she accidentally downloaded some bug that trashed her phone? She allowed me to install a program on her phone to remotely control it in case she traveled somewhere and her phone got broken again. Which is why I left that backdoor into her phone wide open.*

For a while, her mother stood there, blinking. Her thick lips parted, and she said, “You hacked into their electrical devices.”

“Davy couldn’t sleep,” Danielle said. There was no point in lying anymore. “How can you be on their side?”

Her mother took off her red-rimmed glasses and wiped them on the edge of her sweatshirt—a gesture indicating she was beyond irritated. “I’m not on their side. Hacking into someone’s electrical devices is criminal.”