



Valkyrie



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To Laura and Gary Neal, Keith and Cheryl Partney, as well
as Kim and Gerald Svetlik.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S



Thank you, Nicole Andani, for your wisdom and support in making this book and its series a reality.

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P R O G R E S S



Vickie sits in her office staring out the window thinking, *My life has been a recipe for disaster, but yet I hunger for it.* She sits at her desk and picks up the Lazarus Game paper, staring at the Valkyrie symbol on it. She thinks, *Why would people play games with other people? Seems my whole life people have tried to play games with me. It seems that games are the nature of people. Maybe not the nature but boredom that rules their sense of being decent. Look at how much we sell because of boredom. An entire industry of marketing exists to keep people occupied. Like boredom was some kind of mental disease to be fought. Our industry spends more on advertising and marketing than we do fighting cancer. It is the way of the world, so be it.* She drops the game paper and begins to thumb through statistics on the computer. After a while Vickie rubs her eyes and stands to look out the window some more.

John Taylor, the marketing director, walks in. “Has anything moved out there.”

Vickie turns around and smiles. “I am keeping an eye on it.”

“Here are the results of the Spinner campaign.”

“Great, more things to read.”

John frowns with a half smile. “My mom asked about you the other day.”

“She feeling like berating someone?”

John laughs. “No, she wanted to know how you were.”

“And how am I?”

“You are doing just fine.”

“I am glad to hear that about me.”

“Can I ask you question?”

“You just did, sure.”

“You don’t date much, do you?”

“Why, John, delving into my love life?”

John’s face turns red as he begins to stutter. Vickie replies, “There was another John in college. My God, I make it sound like I am a prostitute. Anyway, that was the only one.” Vickie looks down at her desk. “He destroyed himself.” John has a concerned look on his face. “I am sorry I brought it up.” Vickie looks up. “No, it is all right. He was an alcoholic.” John looks down. “Wow.” He then notices the Lazarus Game paper and picks it up. “You are playing this too.”

“No, Dan brought that.”

“Yeah, he is a legend at this game. I heard about him at King’s Way.”

“You play it?”

“No, too rich for my blood. I don’t have time for it either. Honestly, it seems cruel.”

“Yeah, but these people get to experience a part of life they most likely never would.” “Yeah, I get it, just not for me.” John leaves as Vickie begins to look over the latest campaign results.

That evening Vickie is at her martial art school, and after her lessons she sits in front of her sensei Sato. “Sensei, have you ever heard of a game called the Lazarus Game?”

“No, what kind of game is it?”

“It is a game executives play by taking very poor people and trying to make successful people out of them. The first one to achieve it wins.” Sato stares without comment. “It may seem cruel, but it allows these people to see a part of life they never would.” Sato continues to be motionless as Vickie stares around and says, “It might even change their life for good.” Vickie sits and quietly waits for Sato to reply, and eventually he says, “Are you trying to convince me of the game’s merit or yourself?”

“I am not sure.”

“How can this make anyone successful if they were not gifted to be what this game wants them to be? Success is not a matter of money or position but whether you achieved what you want to do. Making another achieve another’s

definition of success for the amusement of that group is a form of slavery.”

“You don’t think these people would benefit from having their horizons expanded?”

“You can see all horizons but must live in one.”

“I understand, but how is it slavery? These people choose to play the game and take a chance on being so called successful.”

“It is not the poor that are the slaves but the executives. They are the ones being played.”

Vickie looks confused. “I do not understand.”

“Things are never simple in the designs of men, but in nature the complexity is hidden in its simplicity.” Sato stands as Vickie follows, and they bow. He leaves Vickie to ponder about what he said.



The next morning Dan walks in with Trevor Ortiz, who is his candidate for the Lazarus Game. Dan introduces them.

“Trevor, this is Vickie, and vice versa.”

Vickie shakes Trevor’s hand. “Nice to meet you, Trevor.”

“Nice to meet you, ma’am,” replies Trevor.

“Please, Vickie.”

Trevor smiles as Dan says, “Sure you don’t want to partner up with me?”

Vickie says, “You afraid I might join the game to compete.”

“Has crossed my mind,” Dan said.

“I heard you do just fine by your lonesome,” said Vickie.

“Okay, let me know if you change your mind.” Dan escorts Trevor, out telling him, “You are going to have an office someday like this.”

“Wow, never been in an office,” says Trevor.

Vickie stares with a concerning look on her face but then gets back to work.

She brings some reports to her boss, Tom Patterson. “Here you go, Tom.”

“Thank you, Vickie.” She stands looking at Tom as he asks, “What is wrong?” Vickie sits down in front of Tom’s desk and asks, “Do you think it is necessary for Dan to be playing this silly game here at the office?”

“Personally, I never understood it, but I guess it gives people a taste of something new and part of the pool goes to charity.”

“Yeah, but the charity part is just to seem like it is for a good cause. I am not so sure this is a good thing.”

“It is a waste of company time, but the advantage of it is that a lot of executives play it, and it helps a company build relationships. Used to be golf was the social business outlet, now this. What bothers you about it?”

“Like you said, it just seems like a complete waste of time.”

“Now if you have problem with it, I will tell Dan not play it on company time.”

Vickie looks around. “No, no, that is not necessary. I know the relations to other possible clients is important. Never mind, sorry I brought it up.”

“Not to worry, always let me know your concerns.” Vickie grins and leaves.

The following week Trevor delivers some reports from Dan to Vickie.

“Reports from Mr. Childers, ma’am—I mean, Vickie.”

“That’s better. Dan has you doing intern work?”

“He says I need to learn the work flow around here.”

“Uh-huh. Is he going to have you shine his shoes next?” Trevor looks at her with a confused look. “Never mind, good luck on your venture.” Trevor leaves to do more of Dan’s tasks. Vickie is going on a two-week vacation—her first since she has worked there. She just needs to tidy up things while she embarks on cruise.

C R U I S E C O N T R O L



Vickie makes her way onto the cruise ship to start her vacation. She has flown to Florida to leave for a weeklong trip to various touristy stops in Mexico and then back to Florida to spend the rest of her time at a beach house. At least that is the plan. She arrives on deck awaiting departure and grabs a deck chair before they are all taken. A waiter asks if she would like a beer, and she replies, “No thank you, but I will take a virgin pina colada.” She watches the land move and thinks about how far she has come in life to now be able to be here, grateful and at the same time concerned about if it will last and what else can life throw before her. But for the moment, the drink and the sun are bleaching the issues away. Vickie gets dressed up for a nice dinner, which is shared with few other people at her table. One at her table mentions he is a CFO of a large company and that his name is Zach as they introduce each other.

“Zach, can I ask you a personal question?”

“Sure, Vickie.”

“Have you heard of a game called the Lazarus Game?”

Zach slows down on his eating and looks up at Vickie.

“Yes, of course I have.”

“Your thoughts on it?”

“I played it one year about five years ago. It seemed fun, but it really does not help people. It is just for the amusement of bullies that like to taunt and flaunt what they have in front of those who have less. If you are thinking of playing it, don’t.”

“I did not realize that there were people that set against it.”

“Well, if I catch anyone playing it in my company, they are gone.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Obviously you are passionate about it.”

“The worse hell is not just going to hell, it is experiencing heaven and then being taken to hell. It is enough for some to not want to live anymore.” Zach stares at his food as if to play with it. Vickie continues with her dinner saying, “It is good.”

“Nothing beats these dinners.”

The dinner is pleasant and quiet till she is done. Vickie says, “Well, guys, it was nice meeting you, and I hope have a good cruise.” Zach says, “Same to you.”

Vickie changes to more comfortable clothing and sits out on deck to watch the stars. She thinks to herself, *There are so many of them. Wonder if there are other planets with people looking at our stars? Mom, I miss you. I hope that I am doing okay in your opinion. I wonder if my daughter looks up and sees these stars. She would be eight by now. Seems like a long time ago and another life. How did I make it through that time?* Vickie stares at the stars and drifts off from time to time. She thinks it is time to head back to her stateroom. The next day she enjoys some burgers a cruise employee is grilling. “These are very good.”

“Later we will have barbecue,” the employee replies.

“Not made from goat, is it?”

The employee chuckles. “No, pork ribs.”

“Good.” Vickie walks around the pool, and toy lands at her feet. She picks it up as a little girl runs up to her.

“Here you go, sweetie.”

The little girl responds, “Thank you, lady.” Her parents walk up, and her mom says, “That is very good, Veronica.” Vickie smiles at the parents and asks Veronica, “So how old are you?” Veronica holds up eight fingers and says, “Eight.” Vickie stares for a bit and says, “You know, I have a little girl your age.”

“Where is she?” Veronica asks.

Vickie slowly and quietly says, “I don’t know.”

Veronica smiles. “You should find her then.”

“Yes, I should.”

"I'm going to be an as...as...astronomer someday."

Vickie lights up. "Astronomer. You know, that is what I wanted to be when I was your age."

"You are not one?"

"No, I went another way in life, but I loved astronomy. I am sure you will be one and be a very good one."

Veronica's parents tell her, "Come on now, let's leave the nice lady alone." The mom looks at Vickie. "Sorry, she is so enthusatic." Vickie says, "That is okay, she reminds me of me at that age." Veronica's dad says, "It was nice to meet you." He picks up Veronica and kisses her on the cheek. "All right, you, let's play in the pool." Vickie watches them leave and start playing in the pool. Veronica sees Vickie looking at her and waves. Vickie waves back and sits down to watch a nice family having fun. She reminices about her childhood and wishes it would have been like theirs. She thinks to herself, *I am not going to sabotage my present by regretting my past. My past will not dictate how I feel about myself now. I will only let it be my tool to learn from.* Vickie starts to leave, and Veronica asks her parents something as they nod yes. Veronica runs over to Vickie and hands her the little plastic starfish toy she had. "I want you to have this. It is a starfish. Nothing to do with stars, but it is named after them."

Vickie says, "Really, I did not know that. Thank you, Veronica. I will treasure this." Veronica has a big smile on her face and runs back to her parents. Vickie walks back to

her room carrying her starfish. She goes to her stateroom and sits on her bed looking at the starfish. She turns it over, and it has a red V on the back. She stares at it for a bit and puts it in her luggage.



Vickie enjoys an uneventful cruise and excursions to the ports. She manages to buy jewelry and some souvenirs for the ones at work. At the end of the cruise she gathers her luggage out of customs. She notices Veronica and her family gathering theirs. Vickie reaches in her purse and pulls out the starfish. Veronica smiles and waves as Vickie waves good-bye. She arrives at her beach house and just lays on the bed looking at her starfish. She spends the week reading her new books and relaxing.

OFFICE SUPPLIES



Returning to work Vickie sits at her desk holding her toy starfish from Veronica. She smiles and sits it on top of the Lazarus Game paper. Tom Patterson walks in. “Well, how was vacation?”

“It was good, I like the sea. I like looking at those stars at night. No light pollution if you go to certain parts of the ship.”

“Well it is nice to have you back with us.” Tom sees the starfish. “A memento of the trip?”

“A little girl gave it to me on the ship. She was so cute, I wanted to spend the whole day with her.”

“Well it sounds like you had a great time. We have a new client called Mazzaroth I wanted to discuss.”

“Okay, I will be right over.” Tom points his finger and smiles as he leaves. Trevor walks in to hand some papers to Vickie from Dan. Trevor is very quiet and disassociative.

“What is the matter, Trevor, you missed me?” asks Vickie. Trevor stands quiet turning back and forth between leaving and standing in front of Vickie. “Trevor, what is wrong? You can talk to me, I am here if you need me.” Trevor mumbles at first and then says; “I am okay, ma’am.”

“Look, I have to meet with the boss, but let’s talk when I am back.” Trevor nods and leaves as Vickie grabs her notepad and pen to meet with Tom. She enters Tom’s office, and he is already meeting with Dan at his office small conference table. Vickie sits down, and Dan says, “Hey, Vic, how was vacation?”

“It was good, I was away from you for a while,” replies Vickie.

“Not nice,” says Dan.

Tom says, “C’mon, guys, lets get to it. Vickie, to catch you up, we have a production company called Mazzaroth that uses a web domain of Mazzaroth.net. They specialize in books, TV shows. What they need for us is promote season four of their successful tv show *Destiny*. Now this is a reverse of what we usually do as you know. We usually sell advertising to TV shows for clients, but our recent work on campaigns has led them try the opposite.”

“Basically they want to buy our advertisers by letting us manage things,” concludes Vickie.

“Exact-a-mundo,” says Dan. “I have analyzed their show, and it is like a variety show where different characters experience a new situation each episode. There is no continuity to the show, each is different.”

“That presents a problem as we are not sure how each episode will be received.”

“Right metrics are out the window on this one.”

Tom says, “Vickie, here is the copy of the Mazz file. Give it a study, and work with Dan to figure out a plan, okay, guys?”

“You got it, Tommy boy,” says Dan.

“Okay,” Vickie replies. Dan leaves the office. As Vickie is about to leave, she turns and asks Tom, “What is a Mazzaroth anyway?”

“The client Melinda says it is an ancient word that basically has to do with the twelve signs of the zodiac.”

“Hmmm, okay.”

Vickie returns to her office, and as soon as she does Trevor walks in.

“You need any office supplies, ma’am?” Vickie leans her head to one side and stares at Trevor as he says, “Sorry, Vickie.”

“That’s better. I don’t think I need anything at the moment.” Trevor stands there as Vickie says, “I guess I could use some notepads and a few pens.”

“Yes, m—Vickie.” He leaves as Vickie starts to read the Mazzorth file. Very quickly Trevor returns with the supplies. “Thank you, Trevor. Can you put those on my shelf for me and tell me what is on your mind?” Trevor puts them away and says, “Vickie, I not happy here.”

“Not happy here or not happy with Dan?”

“With Mr. Childers.” Vickie sees Dan looking at her office. “Trevor, go ahead and get back to Dan. Let’s talk

after work, okay?” Trevor nods his head and leaves. Vickie watches as Dan is obviously saying something to Trevor that is upsetting him. Trevor’s head is slumped down and nodding. As soon as Dan finishes with Trevor, Dan walks into Vickie’s office and says, “Is Trevor bothering you?”

“Not at all, he got me some office supplies.”

“All right, I was just hoping he does not bother you. He has a tendency to get a puppy-dog depressive attitude once in a while. He likes to gain sympathy from people.”

“Well what do you think? He is in an environment he is not familiar with and doing things he has never done before. He wants to please everyone and do a good job. Does not help when you don’t lend a sympathetic ear or berate him constantly.”

“Look, you may not be used to working with interns, but I have, and they are usually young and need to learn how to work in a professional environment.”

“That is crap, Dan. You are just mean by nature, and the only thing you are interested in is winning that stupid game of yours.”

“Whatever, Vic, I will just do things my way.”

“Well you just do what you do best.” Dan leaves as he directs Trevor to do more busy work.



That evening as the business day closes Trevor walks to his bus stop as Vickie drives next to him and says, “Get in,

Trevor, I will take you home.” Trevor gets in her car and says, “Thank you, Vickie.”

“Where am I going?”

“I live in Hilltown.”

“I know where that area is.” Vickie makes her way to that area of town as she says, “Well, Trevor, spill the beans. What is wrong with Dan?”

Trevor looks down as he says, “I don’t think I can do this job anymore.”

“I know Dan can be kind of tough, but you are going to find the world is full of assholes like him.”

“Yeah, I know.” There is a few moments of silence as Vickie asks, “There is more to it, is there?” Trevor nods. “Tell me what it is. You can trust me.”

“I don’t mind the work at your company, and I don’t care about Mr. Childers getting onto me about things. It is the things after work that bother me.”

“What things after work?”

“Sometimes after work he takes me to his house to do house work. You know, mowing the lawn, fixing up things. One entire weekend my parents and I painted his house.”

“What?”

“He says it builds character and work ethic. He told me that is the reason he is successful and people like me are not. He said we are lazy and inefficient.”

“That is not true. I doubt Dan has worked a real job a day of his life. From what I know of him, his family is well-to-do. He is just using you for free labor.”

“I did not mind at first because I hope this takes me to a good job later.”

“It won’t. I am sorry to tell you this, but you are just part of their game, and when it is over, you will be left high and dry. It will be up to you to keep whatever level of success you achieved in the game. The problem is no one is going to keep you at the relationship level they can with someone like Dan.”

“But I still might have a chance.”

“Of course you have a chance, every lotto ticket buyer has a chance. The odds are against you though. If you want a real chance, go to college. Get an education and get a real job.”

“This is my turn off to my neighborhood.” Vickie follows his directions to his house in a very poor neighborhood. As they pull into his driveway, Vickie says, “Trevor, I will help you get started on an education. There are lots of things to help out there.” Trevor opens the door and says, “I will think about it.” He leaves, and his parents step out on the porch to greet him. Vickie thinks to herself, *He is so young.*