



CLOSE TO THE HEART

Sometimes the technology works, and sometimes it
doesn't

Ah, the games families play... or as King Lear once
said: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

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She took a flying leap at the ornately dressed man in the impressive uniform. The dagger struck perfectly between his ribs, seeking his beating heart. The shiny blade penetrated about a quarter-inch and then bent; the point blunted.

Andrea's forehead furrowed as she looked down at the now-useless weapon in her hand. She'd gotten it through detection, which wasn't easy to accomplish. Fortunately, they tended to look for guns. The dagger had been redesigned on a quantum level to pass through the dictator's personal shielding, but it had still failed spectacularly. But what Andrea found most disconcerting is that she was still alive. The elite guard had moved to block her exit, but none of them had even laid a hand on her. They didn't even attempt to disarm her.

"So," the dictator asked, "Which one of my children hired you?"

Andrea's face melted into a grown of frustration and confusion. The blade had passed through every armor they tested.

Then the dictator's expression glowed with satisfaction. "I'll bet it was my youngest son, he's always been the clever one in the family." The dictator read the expression on Andrea's face. "You have to make these things challenging, you know. I long ago announced to them none of them could inherit the empire until they kill me. They've been trying for some time now. So, who came up with the dagger, was it my youngest son?"

"Actually," Andrea choked slightly on the words, "it was all of them."

"All of them?" The dictator seemed excited. "Well, there's a new development... cooperation. I'm impressed. I didn't think they'd make it to this point so quickly."

"How?" Andrea stumbled over the words. Finally, she held up the blunted dagger.

"Oh, that," the dictator gave her a wry smile. "I'm an android. My oldest daughter managed to kill me some time ago. Poison... old-fashioned but still effective. I had my consciousness transferred before my body died." He leaned in close to Andrea, grinning madly. "I wouldn't want the game to end too soon, you understand."