



**JEFF
SOMERS**

**BLACK
HOUSE**

Black House

Chapter 11

by Jeff Somers

11. The Spare Room

He fell, the light vanished, and then he was sprawled on the floor in near-total darkness, the air muffled and insulated. He'd barely managed to sit up straight when Dee crashed down onto him, knocking the wind out of him.

"Mr. Marks! *Mr. Marks!*"

"It's ... okay ..." he managed to wheeze. "I'm ... here."

"Oh ... it's the closet again."

Marks sat up and felt the soft furs against his face. He stood up, breathing hard, and allowed himself a moment to get his breath back. Then he fumbled his way forward, emerging into the disappointing bedroom they'd been in before. Agnes was seated on the bed, leaning back slightly, looking, Marks thought, beautiful. Had she redone her makeup? He stared for a moment, uncertain, but she seemed ... more put together. Prettier, somehow.

"Took you long enough," she said. "I was *almost* about to start reading that book. Looks dreadful. *Then* I wondered if you maybe ditched me, which was kind of a depressing thought. That maybe you'd let me go through the window and then you'd taken the door."

Marks shook his head. "Like I just said to Dee: All for one, and one for all."

"That's *sweet*," Agnes said, looking down at her hands. "But *also* not at *all* what you said before."

Marks nodded. "Deandra's a better person than me."

Agnes raised one manicured eyebrow. "*Anyway*, here we are again. It *is* the same room, isn't it? Or is it maybe a different room that just *looks* the same?"

"Same room," Dee said promptly, pointing at the night table. "See where the dust is messed up? I picked up that book and put it down, just like that."

Agnes looked at the table for a moment, pursing her lips. Then she looked up at them and smiled. "Well then! Same room. Very simple." She looked over at the doors. "Mr. Marks, I believe you made a record of the doors last time—any differences?"

Marks dropped the backpack and knelt to rummage in it. "That's a great suggestion," he said. "We need to stay on top of things like that. Only way we'll figure a way out."

"Mr. Marks, you're far too relaxed about this, you know," Agnes said. "And you accepted this place *far* too quickly, you ask me. Almost as if you knew all about it. As if this place was familiar to you."

Marks nodded absently, studying his notes. "Maybe it is!"

Agnes looked at Dee. Dee looked from her to Marks and back.

He looked over at the doors. “Nothing’s changed. Ape, lizard, some sort of bird, and the snake.”

“Viper,” Agnes corrected.

“Viper. We know the Ape Door takes you to the foyer,” he said thoughtfully, pacing slowly in front of the doors.

“I can hear voices again,” Dee said quietly.

They all froze. Sure enough, they could hear the muffled voices through one of the doors. Marks gestured for quiet and crept from door to door, listening with his ear against each one. Finally he turned and shook his head. “I can’t tell. Look, in the foyer there are only three choices: The library, the dining room, and the Newt Door we haven’t tried yet.” He spread out his notebook on the bed and gestured at it. “The library offers up the Wolf Door—the others we’ve been to. The Dining Room offers the Viper, but we can go through that one here.”

“What’s your point?”

“No point yet. Just talking out loud. We can go back over old routes, or strike out in a new direction. Either might be profitable.”

“Anyone ever tell you you talk like a lawyer?”

“Maybe.”

Agnes sighed and rolled her eyes, dangling one shoe from her foot. Marks thought she looked adorable, as if she’d been carefully posed for maximum attractiveness. Something about her suddenly tugged at his soft, glassy memories, but he couldn’t put his finger on it. “Jeebs,” she said, waving at the doors. “Whatever you think, oh fearless leader.”

“Dee?”

The girl frowned, studying the doors. “I hate going back where we been, you know? I say the bird.”

“That’s right kid,” Agnes said with a laugh like musical notes. “Give ‘em the bird!”

Marks gathered up his backpack and notebook. “Let’s go.”

Agnes slid off the bed and they gathered in front of the door with the ominous bird carved on it. Marks leaned forward, turned the knob, and pushed it open. Again, a short hallway led to another doorway—but they could suddenly hear the voices much more clearly.

“Come on!” Agnes shouted, pushing forward. “Before they make a run for it!”

“Wait!”

Marks reached for her but she was already running down the hall. Dee took off after her, spinning around halfway down the hall. “It might be Dad!” she shouted with a shrug.

“Dammit,” Marks said, following.