

Chapter 1

“This is nice.” Sofia said sarcastically, sitting back on the bed frame welded to the wall. It was a small square cell, thick black bars blocking them on one side. And on the three others, gray stone. “What do you think?”

Nate grimaced, surveying the situation. “Metal bed’s a mistake.”

“But the weld is pretty strong.” Sofia countered. She lifted up the yellowed mattress. “Wire meshes, could snap them off.”

“Not a bad shank.” Nate agreed. He kicked the stone walls, seeing how much rockdust covered his feet. “Bricks are old.”

“That’ll take some time, even with a wire digger.”

“Got anything hidden?”

“Both my thigh-knives got taken. And my stocking blade.” Sofia paused. “And the little blade I tape to my back. You?”

“Nothing. Got Isabelle up here though.” He tapped his forehead.

“What does she think?”

I cannot see any resolution as it stands.

“She’s working on it.” Nate gave a double thumbs up.

“I think that’s why you attract the girls, Nate.” Sofia snorted. “You’re a terrible liar. What about the bars?”

“Electrified.” Nate listened to the hiss of the bars, studied the shade of blue. “Fairly high voltage, too.”

Sofia sighed, perching primly on the side of the bed. “That was an elaborate trap.”

“Was that what it was? My head is still spinning. Or maybe I’m just dumb as bricks.” Nate chuckled bitterly.

“Delfael was in on it?”

Nate shook his head. “I think he was a pawn who was telling the truth as he saw it, or as he was told it.”

“An arms dealer?”

“Mayko, maybe. Or whoever is behind her.” Nate really needed to shoot that bitch.

“They give out arms to the Lops royal family, to get them on board, to ensure that when you fly in, they know about it. Along with a healthy stack of credits.”

“The King retires from view to allow Delfael to take the lead, because he doesn’t want to take the risk of it.” Nate continued.

“And Delfael reports your movements back to the King.”

“The King tells his supplier.” Nate pinched the bridge of his nose. “And the crate gets

rigged to blow as soon as I open it up.”

Sofia whistled. “Pretty clean. Would have worked too, if you weren’t so spooked from Talia’s trap.”

Nate groaned. “I’m an idiot, aren’t I?”

“You’re determined to see where the string leads to. It’s why I knew you’d be a great Judge.” Sofia said softly. “Sometimes that string leads to a cat with sharp claws.”

“Ana says I have a hero complex.”

“I’m glad you do. Nobody else could have saved the day back with Jarek.” The white-haired Voor smiled, ruby red lips twitching. It was unsettling, sometimes, not to be able to see her eyes, but he always felt he could feel her meaning. “I was so proud of you.”

“Didn’t know you could feel pride.” Nate snorted. “You were so hard on me in training.”

“Only because I saw what you could be, but you went even further.” She nodded to herself. “So let’s do the impossible. How do we get out of here? This can’t be how it ends. You of all people are gonna go out with a bang, not a whimper. Can we wait for Ana and everyone to get back?”

“By the time they can get here, even if they bring the Federation or another Judge, it’ll be too late.” Nate tapped the wall in frustration, trying to think it through. “They want me dead but I’m not dead. If I’m in this cell, it’s because they want me here. But who?”

“The better question is why.” A voice said from outside the cell. Nate froze. It was a voice he recognized. Sofia flinched, because she knew it too.

He walked into view. Olive skin, wild brown hair, those mocking eyes.

Xavier — the Judge candidate Sofia had kicked out of the program for trying to kill Lunar. A psychopath released into the world.

The man laughed at their faces. “What, didn’t think I’d be back? You gave me a specific set of skills, didn’t you think I’d use them?”

Sofia snarled — she looked furious. “You became a black market bitch, Xavi?”

“Don’t be mean, Gunny.” Xavier tutted. “Alright, Nate? Two for the price of one. This is my lucky date.”

“What are you doing here, Nate?” He said, feeling his blood chill. Xavi had tried to kill Lunar — had shot down her medevac drone so she’d drown in the water. He was inhumane.

Xavi stuck his hands in his pockets — his armored vest at odds with casual cargo pants. “Doing a lil freelancer work, y’know? They pay you so much better than the Fed, or even the Council. Really, guys, you should both go private.”

Nate shook his head. “Xavi, we’ve had our differences but this is trouble you don’t want. Killing a Judge? That’s a stain you can’t wash off.”

Sofia snarled. “I’ll rip your head off and drink your blood, you fucking three-brain cell fleshbag. Don’t you remember anything I taught you? The Judge’s power is absolute.”

Xavi shrugged, grinning. “You kicked me out, remember? For following the morals you taught me — power is absolute. Titles are nothing. Besides, I hear the Judges aren’t so hot these days. Ol’ Bastian the backstabber, eh?”

“Then what is it?” Nate scowled. “Money? I can pay you.”

Xavi saluted him. “I have payment enough. Besides, a little payback makes me feel all warm inside.” He blew a kiss to Sofia. “Sit tight, sweetheart, old man. Someone’s paid good money to watch you die.”

With that, he was gone, whistling cheerily until a door shut behind him.

“I should have killed him when I had the chance.” Sofia sighed.

“I was thinking the same thing.”

“What do you think?” She tapped her foot.

“He got paid to be the facilitator, to slam the glass down on the fly. Now we’re waiting for the spider.”

Sofia let out a long exhale. “We need to be patient. If they want to watch you suffer before you die, then they’ll set up something nasty, something elaborate, something public. That’s when we’ll get our chance.”

Nate sat down next to her. “I hope the girls are—”

“Sssh, someone’s coming.” She hushed him.

Footsteps. A Lops soldier pushed a food tray through the bars and walked away.

Nate swiped it up from the floor. “Plastic fork, plastic knife. Plastic tray, plastic cover.”

“And the food?”

“Brown blended gruel, probably a mix of six different meats. Suddenly, I’m not so hungry.”

“I am.” Sofia said casually.

“Uh,” Nate coughed. “Y-you want?” He was hard immediately at the thought of his Voor instructor sucking him off — she’d formed the shape of many of his dreams at Judge camp, mostly hatefucking her after a particularly rough day.

Sofia slowly unwrapped her eyemask. Her eyes flashed. “Regardless of my health, I cannot concede any part of myself to a lesser.” She bared her fangs at him. “Can you defeat me? If not, I shall feed my hunger from the blood of your unconscious body.”

“Whoa, Sofia, hold up now—” Nate said hurriedly, backing up the edge of the cell.

“This is the Voor way. Did you not see it when you visited my people? The victor takes all they wish from the loser.” She grinned, eyes darkening with blood-lust.

“I...maybe we can talk about this?” Nate said hopefully.

But she approached him, slightly crouched, and he had a flashback to Judge camp and getting his ass kicked by her. He’d come a long way from then.

“Why are you such a pussy?” She taunted, the same way she’d taunted him all those months ago.

This time, he smiled. She exhaled, blowing away a few strands of her shockingly white hair. And through her long tresses, her glowing red eyes shone through.

She was so fast he barely caught it. A right hook into his chin, but it only caught his

ear. Nate answered back with a jab into her abdomen, but caught his hand and twisted it. Nate let himself twist, let himself fall, back flat on the ground.

“Never let your opponent get on top of you, Nate.” Sofia said in disappointment. But as she tackled him to find the submission chokehold, his hands darted out to find the plastic food tray. He went for the knife but found the fork — with a stab, it stuck out from her hand, barely penetrated.

They both looked at it for a brief moment, before she just laughed, yanking it out. With giddy excitement, a warrior’s bloodlust, she licked the little pinpricks of red from her hand.

Nate scampered back, snatching the plastic tray itself and snapping it in two to create a makeshift shank, a plastic dagger. But Sofia gave him no chance to use it, thick thighs crashing down on his arms to pin him down. She rained punches down on him, knocking him left and right, making him woozy, blood spurting from his nostrils.

But not woozy enough to forget what she’d taught him. She leaned down to lick the blood from his face and got a hard headbutt for her troubles, rearing back.

Nate grinned. He might be dim-witted but he had a thick skull.

Her eyewrap lay discarded on the bed and he snatched to wipe his bleeding nose.

“You’ll stain it.” She scowled.

“Give a fuck.” He said. And when she advanced with a growl, he used it like a wet towel, snapping it forth to whip against her face.

She hooked it and used it to pull him closer, cracking an elbow into his ribs as she spun. A backhand into his face. But using elbows meant he could get behind her, kick at the back of her knees to send her kneeling to the ground. And then wrap his thick arms around her neck, strangling her.

You should be victorious from here, Nate. Isabelle said, and Nate tightened further as the Voor woman choked. Only the back of her heel thumped into his crotch, making him bend forward in pain, giving her just a few inches to escape his neck grasp.

Her arms behind her to hook onto his neck for leverage and she used him to flip over. Nate blinked and had a single glimpse of her panties before she was behind him. How the fuck was she so fast?

A fist to the back of his head — and yes! She tried to follow it up with kicking the back of his knees, just like he’d done, just like she’d taught him. He anticipated it and bowlegged his stance, like Ana the day after he’d hard-fucked her ass, so her kick went between his legs.

He clamped them shut, her ankle caught, and spun hard to throw her over his shoulder. She bounced to her feet, grinning widely, glowing with exhilaration.

But, he realized, she was closed to the bars.

To the electrified bars.

It was a dirty trick.

But that was how she’d taught him.

He tackled her forward, slamming her into the bars that fried her. Her body shook as she was stunned, her limbs locking up for a second.

And a second was all it took for Nate to take control of her, locking her arms behind her, twisting them behind her shoulders.

While she squirmed and trembled, her muscles vibrating with aftershocks, Nate ensured he held her up from falling. Sofia's mouth was open and dribbling, and he absently realized that his hard cock was pressing into her peachy asscheeks as she trembled senselessly.

"Do you tap out?" Nate asked gently.

Sofia looked over her shoulder and spat in his face. "I never—"

"Well, you asked for it." He turned her a little, holding her wrists with one hand and using his other hand to punch her stomach, hard. She bent over in a sharp cry, her short Voor robe spilling over the pale creamy cheeks of her ass.

Nate grinned as he shoved his cock between her buttocks, hot-dogging her soft cheeks.

"I will not submit unless I am defeated." She mumbled mindlessly.

"You seem pretty defeated to me." He rose an eyebrow as her head lay limply back against him. Was she really out of it? There was only one way to test it. He reached out and groped one of her sizable breasts, pawing at her milky tits over the intricate black lace of her robe.

He enjoyed himself for a long moment, until her head lolled forward and then suddenly slammed back into his face. "Ah, fuck!" Nate yelled, his battered nose broken, dripping blood once more.

She tried to snap her heel back into his crotch, but Nate shifted just in time. He kicked her in the rear and accidentally sent her careering back into the electrified bars.

The sizzle made him wince. Sofia moaned, drooling saliva down her chest, a string dipping between into her cleavage. "Okay, that was an accident." Nate winced. "Are you okay?"

She swayed left and right, white hair frazzled. She looked at him. "Y-you—"

"I really think you should sit down."

Sofia charged.

Nate sidestepped and tried to take hold of her, so she didn't hurt herself — only his hand caught her robe, tearing it with a loud ripping sound as she charged back.

Sofia looked at him in disbelief, stunned, dribbling, her bare breasts revealed, her torn robe sitting around her waist. Nate looked at the cloth in his hand.

"I didn't mean to!"

The Voor woman made an incoherent noise of rage. Nate scratched the back of his head — he needed to end this before she hurt herself.

He swept her leg and tossed her onto the bed. To make sure she didn't rain any more hits on his poor nose, he used the torn fabric from her robe to tie her hands to the bed frame.

There she lay, breathing heavily, her full teardrop tits heaving, pink-tipped and pale. Her white hair was at odd ends, framing her breasts. She'd bitten her lip, so it bled. She looked a mess.

“I...I have lost.” Sofia said, almost disbelievingly.

“I used some dirty tricks.” Nate said sheepishly.

“As you should have, as I trained you.” Sofia licked her bleeding lips in satisfaction.

“I am a Voor to the end. You are the victor, name your price.”

“I...Sofia, I don't want—”

She eyed his hard cock. “I see what you want. Would you like to...feed me?”

She tossed her white hair behind her and lay on the bed, her mouth open. “You may take use of my mouth.”

Nate thought about it for a long minute and decided he wasn't going to argue.

He *was* horny. He missed having the girls pleasure him every time the thought crossed his mind.

He stripped, knelt on the bed, straddling her chest. He took her full breasts in his hands, just because he could, sinking his fingers deep into her titflesh, groping them roughly. He thwapped his cock against her face, against her lips.

Sofia blinked at him, red eyes sultry, even though he could see the anger inside.

Nate let himself enjoy the moment. He was going to facefuck his Gunnery Sergeant, his tormentor, the unknowable untouchable Voor who ran the Judge camp like a dictator.

And she lay before him, compliantly shivering as he groped her tits like a teenager, as he rubbed his sweaty unwashed cock all over her pale face.

He ran his cockhead from cheek to cheek, letting his balls drag over her lips, over her nose. He anointed her with his precum across her perfect skin, and then used his cock to paint his cream over her lips. Her eyebrows drew in, scowling, red eyes rageful.

But as she made to say something, he dipped his cock inside her mouth. Sofia's eyes softened and she moaned happily at getting a taste of the cum she'd become accustomed to.

Her throat gulped and Sofia used her legs to kick apart Nate's steadying feet, sending him collapsing down — and his cock balls-deep down her throat.

Nate frowned as she choked. But he understood her meaning. She was Voor.

And the loser had to be dominated. He'd seen as such when he visited them. Still, he let himself enjoy the wet tightness of her throat, the massage of her milking throat as she struggled to deal with his size.

She was breathing heavily, her cheeks inflated, but Nate had to do as he asked.

He knee-crawled so he was pinning her neck down. He grabbed a thick bunch of her wavy white hair. Nate angled her head perfectly and then he began fucking her face. Sliding his cock back and forth through her dark red lips, not gently, delighting in every choke she made, in her bulging eyes, in her coughs and whimpers.

“GLURK!” She coughed as he stabbed his cock down, lancing precum down her throat, enjoying her swirling tongue. But with every shot of precum, she moaned contentedly, wriggling her whole head as her tongue wriggled as well to get every drop of his seed. Her moans made his cock vibrate, like she was speaking a language of pleasure directly through the medium of his meaty cock.

And soon enough, she was enjoying it too much for him to fuck her face — it was

more like her throat was fucking his dick, her head bobbing forward to throat his cock back and forth, leaving his rod spit-shiny and glistening. The cell resounded with the heavy claps of his balls on her chin.

“You’re such a good cocksucker.” Nate taunted, enjoying the angry flash of her eyes. But she never stopped swallowing his monstrous shaft.

“I wish I could let all the other guys back at camp know what a good little cocks slut you are.” Nate gathered her hair and held it as he rocked back and forth, feeling his balls begin to tighten.

She tried to growl but it came out only as a wet gurgle, glowing eyes welling up with choked tears, even as her tongue worked happily.

“I knew back then, of course.” Nate lied. “Could see how desperate you were for a fat cock to taste. All that bravado and all you really want is to be filled with cum, right, Gunny?”

Sofia snarled — but she hadn’t stopped throating. She snapped free of her wrist-bindings, the cloth robe tearing, and for a moment Nate was worried. But her free hands only went straight to massage his heavy balls, kneading the hot load inside, encouraging it to spew down her tight throat.

She’d take him all the way to his base and hold him there, contracting her throat tightly and open again.

“Ready for your daily meal, sweetheart?” Nate groaned.

A little flick of her tongue out of her mouth and against his balls — that was all it took.

He came with a cry, swollen balls unloading their package; rope after rope of thick cum rocketing down Sofia’s eager throat. She could barely swallow fast enough, gulping and glurking as he filled her. His hands tied in her hair, holding her tight, relentlessly cumming.

She was drowned by his never-ending streams of goo, lost in his scent and taste. When she couldn’t swallow fast enough, she reluctantly pushed him back so he could fill her mouth, and when her mouth was overflowing, she could only push him back completely — of course he painted her face with his final ropes.

“Good work, Gunnery Sergeant.” Nate gasped out, almost falling over. Sofia was pasted with his cum, glaring at him under a glaze of cream, but she was still spooning it into her mouth. “Whoa,” He felt dizzy. “That’s some throat. That’s why you’re the instructor.” Nate muttered.

“It was a good fight.” Sofia said stubbornly. “I look forward to next time.”

“You and me both.” Nate rolled off her, shaking his head. He’d known it then and he knew it now. Rivero was crazy.

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They were left alone for over a day. The panic dissipated and became solely boredom. Trays were pushed through the bars, which Nate ate if only to have something to pass the

time.

Sofia's tummy processed his huge load of cum. They passed the time practicing combinations of jabs and elbows, Sofia trying to teach him how to merge from a missed punch into an elbow to the chin.

They didn't know what time it was - the fluorescent lights above never dimmed. But eventually, they heard footsteps again.

Only this time it was the clear clap of high heels.

Nate did not expect the face that appeared. It was the face he'd seen on the billboards, on the holoscreen interviews.

The President's wife. She smiled in satisfaction when she saw Nate, brushing down her long pencil skirt. Her brunette hair coiled elegantly behind her. A black blazer draped over a crisp white blouse.

She looked like she was heading to a gala, not a Lops prison.

"Good evening, Captain Clancy. Miss." The woman nodded at Sofia.

"It's you I have to thank for this, is it, lady?" Nate realized, a chill running down his spine as suddenly a lot of his questions were answered. She had all the connections and resources — she could have high-level networking and access to the Federation's highest levels.

She was rich beyond measure.

And she had reason to hate him. Nate had strangled her husband, watched the light leave his eyes.

"Charlotte, please." The woman said dismissively, taking her blazer off and hanging it out of sight. "I'm afraid you're right."

Nate sighed, smacking his head back against the wall. Of course — she hated him enough to create and fan the fumes of a months-long media campaign against him. Why wouldn't she hate him enough to want him dead?

Maybe he should have seen it.

"Didn't think you were more than a housewife." He admitted.

Charlotte's laugh was rich. "I was a representative of the Federation House board before my husband's rise to power, actually. But his star was brighter than mine, so I was happy to support him."

"Charlotte, this — this isn't necessary." Nate shook his head. "All of this? Madam Mayko? The nonsense with Talia? The house at Sapezza?"

"Don't flatter yourself, Clancy." Charlotte paused for a moment. "Well, I mean, yes, I suppose all of this *has* been for you, but there's not really much effort beyond funding the right minds. Or the wrong minds, as has been the case — quite unstable."

Nate clenched his fist. "But to kill me? You had a Federation ship taken, slain?"

"I would never." Charlotte frowned at him like he was a little boy. "Mayko found it floating, crew murdered, in the Dead Space. Pirates, no doubt. We simply made use of it."

Sofia snorted. "Is that we she told you? You're a fool, lady, playing at games you can't understand."

“Yes, yes.” The elegant woman examined her fingernails. “Divide the opponents, seek to sow doubt and conflict. The playbook of operatives like you is available for all to read, you know.”

“Charlotte, listen to me.” Nate begged. “I did not want to kill your husband. It was a high pressure hostage situation where letting him live meant letting the bugs have a hostage they could use to destroy the Federation.”

She scoffed. She came closer to the bars, her whole body shaking in barely contained rage. “You *tore* my life apart. My children will grow up with no father. You made me empty.” She laughed bitterly, holding her arms wide and turning. “You made me *this*.”

“I had no choice—”

“You had every choice!” Charlotte thundered. “You killed him only because you couldn’t stand losing. We could have ransomed, we could have bargained, we could have fought. But no — you took that option from us, from *him*.”

Nate swallowed, losing himself in the memories of that day, in the uncomfortable choice he’d made, the one he still wasn’t sure was right. “I was trained to find the third option between two no-win scenarios. And that...that is what took place. Your husband knew he couldn’t be delivered to the bugs, knew what—”

“And there it is.” Charlotte laughed, tears running down her cheeks, a lump in her throat. “You *chose* my husband’s death, because you didn’t know him, because he was just a faceless politician to you.” She wiped her cheeks. “Fuck the man, right? He’s not a person, he’s a politician!”

“It wasn’t like—”

“But you would have done the same thing if he was one of your whores, right?” She sniffed, wiping her puffy eyes. “You would have snapped the neck of your Lunari whore? Or was that third option not the right one?”

Nate could say nothing, his jaw flapping uselessly. Because, despite what she’d done to Talia, what she’d tried to do to them, she wasn’t wrong. He would never have made that choice if it was someone he knew.

But would he have found another? He could never know.

“Charlotte.” He said quietly. “Nothing good lies down this path. Even if you kill me, you’ve got to go back to your children and tuck them in at night. But we can still leave this here — go home, be with them—”

She laughed as she pulled a makeup mirror from her clutch. “It’s too late for that, Clancy. This started with you but it won’t end that way. I’m going to cement my husband’s legacy, to do what the Federation is too afraid to. There’s a lot of us who don’t want the Federation to be run by an unelected invisible Council, and its unaccountable Judges.”

Nate sighed, realizing just how far this went. Her anger and her public profile had made her useful — and blind. Blind to the figures smart enough to stay hidden in the cogs of the Federation, using her to work against the current election candidates, and against Nate too.

“That’s...that’s where the plasma-shielding batons are from. Our very own R and D.”

Nate grimaced.

“Just a little taste. I thought giving Mayko and my security a sprinkle of them would ensure they could manage the very simple task of keeping you where I want you, but apparently that’s too much to ask.” Charlotte shrugged. “That’s okay, I don’t mind. She delivered eventually. Lots of new allies to be found down here in Lops-land, where nobody looks or cares.”

Nate’s head felt heavy. He couldn’t reason with her, not when she was so clouded by grief and anger. But what would he do, even if he could escape? Would Kanu and co believe him? Could they do anything, even if they *did*? She was powerful, high profile. “What do you want, Charlotte?” He said tiredly.

The woman stepped closer to the bars, so he could see her dark eyes narrow. “Your whores, they love you, don’t they? The Lunari, the others? I’ve seen how they looked to you as my cage squeezed you, as death inched closer. So I’ll take from them what you took from me.”

She smiled dangerously, her eyes cold. “They’ll know what it feels like to lose the love of their life.”

Charlotte snapped her fingers and she was surrounded by mercenaries. Xavier at their front, carefully taking a syringe from his shoulder-satchel.

“Madam.” Xavier said respectfully.

“Please begin.” She said.

The bars opened. Nate couldn’t even begin to scramble up before he and Rivero were pinned down by a bunch of large soldiers. He struggled but his arms were held, as Xavier strode closer, syringe in hand.

“W-what is that?!” Nate spluttered, feet scrambling uselessly on the stone.

“This is a bit of local flavor, Nate.” Charlotte smiled. “A synthetic drug that the Lops use when someone’s been a very naughty boy. It inhibits the flow of adrenaline, you see? Greatly inhibits.”

Xavier laughed at Nate’s look of confusion.

“It slows the heart, Clancy.” Xavier explained. “Blocks your adrenal receptors.”

“What?” He said, bewildered.

“A slow death.” Charlotte said, with great satisfaction. “Just a fraction of the terror you gave my husband, from the time you shot him at the Jubilee to when you broke his neck. I want you feel the fear he did. But you’re much luckier — you get the certainty that as soon as your adrenaline drops, you’re dead.”

Xavier grabbed his arm and, with another, held it down. Nate kicked and screamed but could nothing as he was injected with the drug.

“Get off him!” Sofia snarled. “Fight him like a man, not this bullshit!”

“W-what are you going to do to me?” Nate shuddered.

“Nothing.” Charlotte clapped her hands in delight. “We’re going to let you loose now. Aren’t I merciful? You can do whatever you like with your last hours. Thank you, boys, Xavier.”

“Ma’am.” Xavier nodded as Charlotte walked away, the clip-clop of her heels

leaving.

His former Judge colleague yanked him to his feet. “Good luck, brother.” He grinned. “Few hours left on a planet of Lops — I know what I’d be doing.”

And then they were gone. Nate watched on, bile in his throat, as the men left, all of them. To his wonder, they left the bars open. The electrified cell deactivated.

He shared a wide panicked glance at Sofia, who was open-jawed.

“Nate? How do you feel?”

He looked at her, as the drug swarmed into his system. His heart begun to pound. His head swimming. The colors brightened and swam together. The white of her hair glowed, made her look like an angel.

She pulled him to his feet, took his chin in her hand, made him focus on her.

“Nate? You with me?”

“Y-yeah. I’m here. I’m with you.” He said, but the hairs on his arm was standing up. “Isabelle?”

I can’t do anything, Nate! The drug does as they said and it’s blocking me, too! It’s in your bloodstream, I can’t remove it.

He swallowed hard, looking deep into Sofia’s red eyes.

“I think this is how it ends.” He smiled bitterly. “Not with a bang but with a whimper.”