

Chapter 37

The black and white checkered flag waved violently in the air.

Forrest's red and white stock car tore across the finish line, a full four seconds ahead of the second-place driver. He hadn't just won; he had absolutely annihilated the track record.

The Thunder Speedway erupted. The roar of the crowd was deafening, but it was nothing compared to the absolute chaos inside the Apex team's pit garage. Mechanics were screaming, hugging and spraying cheap beer into the air.

Up in the soundproof VIP box, the atmosphere was a stark contrast.

Brendan sat frozen on the sofa, his face a mask of bitter humiliation. The racing team he had personally sponsored and heavily invested in hadn't even cracked the top ten. He had come here to gloat, and instead, he was watching the brother he had discarded become a legend.

Down on the track, Forrest didn't drive into the winner's circle immediately. He slammed on the brakes right below the VIP skyboxes.

He ripped the steering wheel off the column, threw himself out of the window, and scrambled up the heavy chain-link catch fence like a madman. Hanging ten feet in the air, he ripped off his helmet and balaclava.

He looked straight up at the glass of Anissa's box and threw up a massive, two-fingered 'V' for victory.

Anissa stood at the glass, pressing her hand against the pane, a massive, genuine smile breaking across her face.

Fifteen minutes later, the official trophy presentation began on the podium.

Forrest stood on the top step, completely soaked in expensive champagne. The league president handed him a massive, gleaming silver cup.

Instead of holding it up for the cameras, Forrest tucked the heavy silver trophy under his arm. He ignored the screaming reporters and the podium girls. He jumped down from the stage and marched straight toward the

VIP barricades.

His massive security team had to physically shove the paparazzi out of the way to clear a path.

Anissa had just come down from the skybox, flanked by Caleb.

Forrest stopped right in front of her. The cameras swarmed them like locusts, flashes exploding like strobe lights.

To the absolute shock of everyone present, Forrest, the newly crowned champion of the speedway, dropped to one knee on the wet asphalt. He held the massive silver trophy up with both hands, offering it to Anissa like a knight presenting a sword to his queen.

"This trophy," Forrest bellowed, his voice carrying over the screaming crowd, "belongs to my beautiful sister! My lucky charm! Anissa!"

The media lost their minds. The flashes became a solid wall of white light. Anissa was instantly the center of the racing world's universe.

Anissa let out a bright, ringing laugh. She reached out and took the heavy silver cup, hoisting it into the air to indulge him.

Standing at the back of the crowd, pushed behind the barricades by Forrest's security, were Brendan and Ashlee. They looked like drowned rats. The jealousy radiating from them was almost visible. Brendan's jaw was clenched so tight his teeth were grinding.

Forrest stood up and threw his arm around Anissa's shoulders. He grabbed a microphone from a nearby reporter.

"Tonight!" Forrest screamed into the mic. "The whole team is coming with me! We are partying until the sun comes up! Drinks are on me!"

The crowd cheered, but the team manager pushed his way through the reporters, looking panicked. He grabbed Forrest's shoulder and whispered frantically into his ear.

"Boss, you can't," the manager hissed. "We blew the entire hospitality budget on that transmission rebuild last week. Your personal accounts are maxed out. We can't afford a massive party in the city."

Forrest froze. The triumphant smile slid off his face, replaced by a deep, painful flush of embarrassment. He rubbed the back of his neck, looking incredibly awkward in front of the cameras. He was a driving god, but he was notoriously terrible with money.

Anissa saw the panic in his eyes.

She let out a soft sigh. She reached into the pocket of her leather jacket.

Her fingers closed around the heavy, cold metal of the Black Centurion card Harding had given her.

Anissa pulled the card out. She held it up, pinching it between her index and middle fingers. The matte black titanium caught the flash of the cameras, absorbing the light.

"Don't worry about the budget," Anissa said. Her voice wasn't loud, but it carried a weight that silenced the immediate area. "Tonight, the entire celebration is on Mrs. Snow."

The mechanics surrounding them stared at the black card. They knew exactly what it was. It was a myth. A blank check to the universe.

The crew erupted into a cheer so loud it shook the ground. "Long live the Queen!" someone screamed.

Forrest's eyes went wide. He grabbed Anissa and spun her around in a circle, laughing hysterically. "My sister is the richest woman in New York!"

Anissa patted his back, signaling him to put her down. She turned to Caleb, her expression shifting back to cold business.

"Call the Elysian Club in Manhattan," Anissa ordered. "Tell them to clear the main floor and the VIP tiers. We are taking over the building."

The name Elysian dropped like a bomb. It was the most exclusive, impossibly expensive private club in the western hemisphere.

Standing behind the barricade, Brendan heard the name. His eyes widened in absolute disbelief. He had spent two years and hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to bribe his way off the Elysian waitlist, and he had been rejected.

Now, the sister he had called a whore was casually renting out the entire building for a Tuesday night party.

The crushing weight of his own insignificance finally broke Brendan. He couldn't watch anymore. He turned around and practically dragged Ashlee away from the crowd, fleeing the racetrack in utter disgrace.

Anissa watched them run. She slipped the black card back into her pocket. The night was just getting started.

