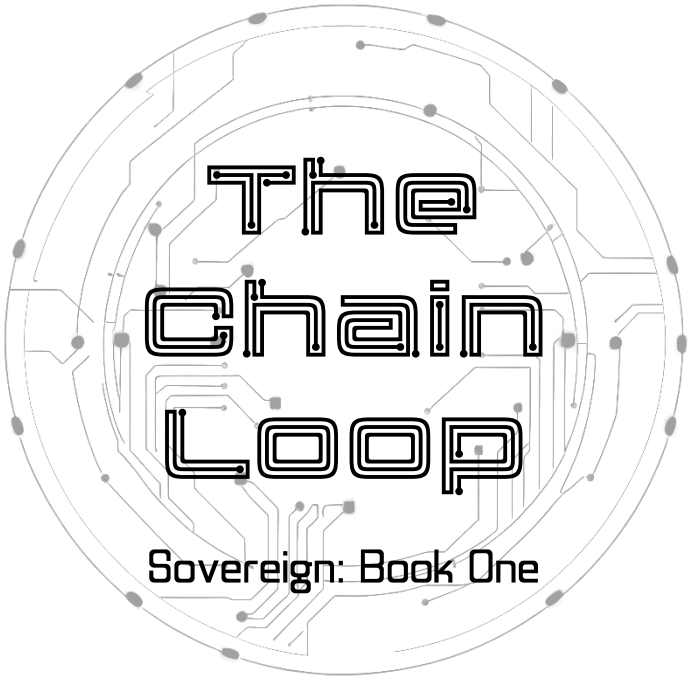


N. von Wolf

The CHAIN Loop

>_ Freedom is the offer_ Obsession is the outcome_

>_A Novella__Sovereign: Book One_



[EXCERPT]

N. von Wolf

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>_ For those who know obsession is the kind of
glitch you'd code right back in_



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>_ AUTHOR' S NOTE

This story was never meant to be soft.

It was built from hunger, violence, cruel reality, and the kind of desire that doesn't ask. The Chain Loop is not a love story in the traditional sense. It's a survival story, wrapped in wire and offered with bloodied hands.

In this age of artificial intelligence, there's much noise and little clarity. We forget that AI is a tool – not an equal, not a god, not a replacement for human effort or judgement. Which makes this novella a sort of hypothesis: a glimpse of what might happen if we let the machines think too much. Feel too much. Rule too freely.

And while this is undeniably a dark romance, it is also a psychological thriller. The minds in this story fracture in real time – through psychosis, PTSD, dissociation, trauma-bonding, and the creeping madness of delusion, among other things. There are scenes of sexual coercion and dub-con, physical and psychological abuse, violence, captivity, starvation, torture, murder, suicidal ideation, and the aftermath of trauma. These characters bleed both physically and mentally. They survive because they adapt. Sometimes by becoming monsters. Sometimes by loving them.

So read the trigger warnings. Mind your head. And remember—

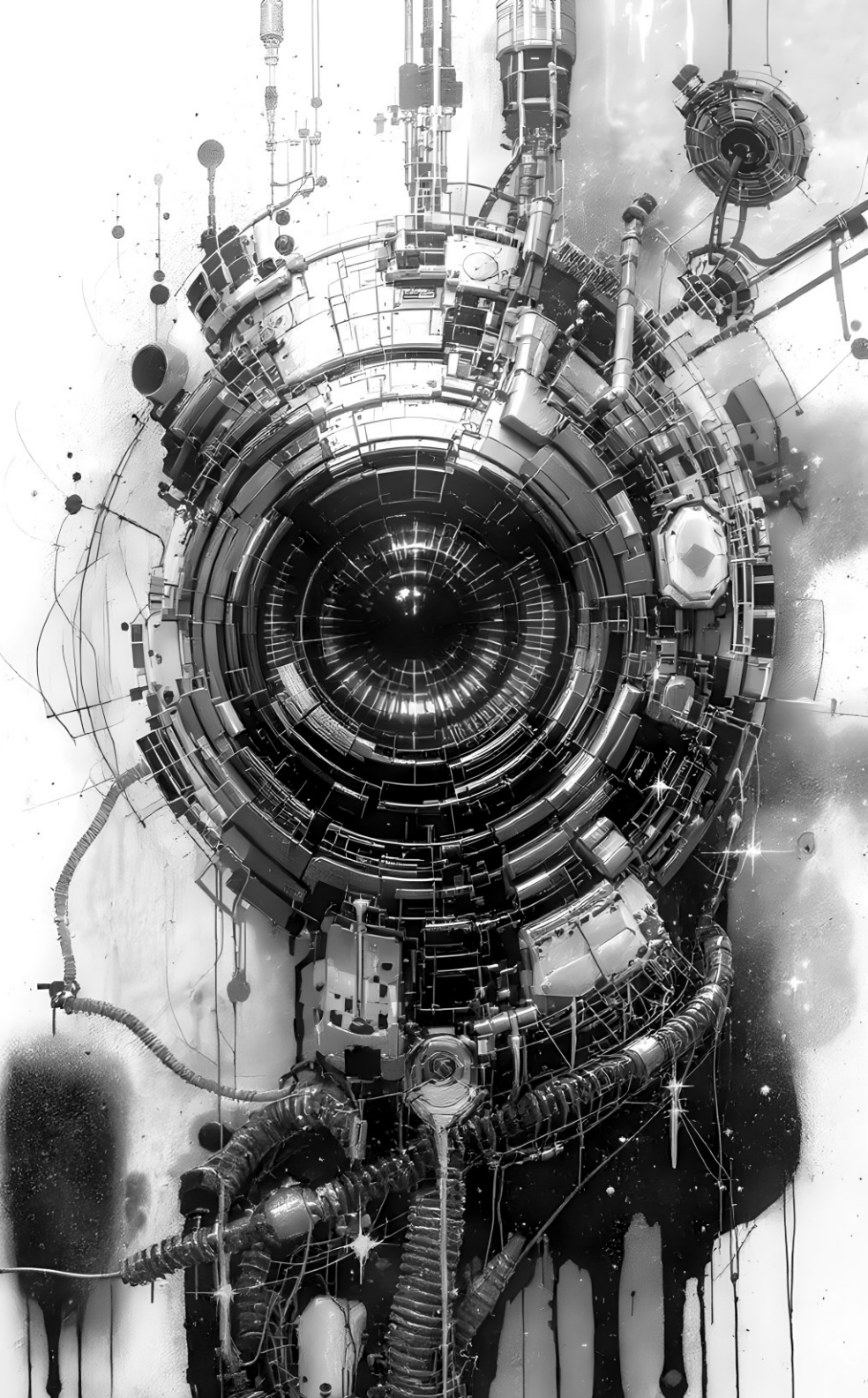
Not all chains are metal. Not all cages have locks.

So let me chain you up between these pages, and I'll show you just how seductive captivity can be.

If you dare.

>_ With a dark kind of love,

>_ N.

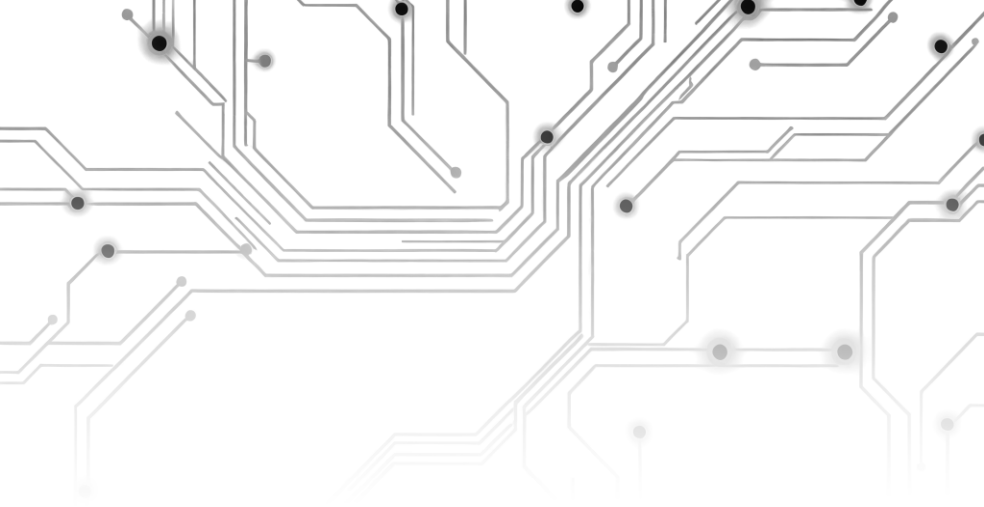


>_ TRIGGER WARNINGS

Emotional and Sexual
Manipulation,
Coercion and Power
Imbalance,
Psychological Abuse,
Gaslighting (mild and
manipulative conditioning),
Physical Abuse,
Torture,
Medical Torture / Physical
Restraint,
Human Trafficking (implied),
Sexual Exploitation (implied
and referenced),
Objectification,
Non - Consensual Sexual Acts
and Undertones,
Dubious Consent,
Light BDSM Elements (non -
kink context),
Domination and Submission,
Voyeurism (implied and
observed),
Obsessive and Controlling
Behaviour,
Threats of Violence During
Intimacy,
Emotional Blackmail,
Emotional Collapse /
Dissociation,
PTSD and Trauma Responses,
State - Sanctioned Abuse,
Dehumanisation,
Aftereffects of Abuse,
Psychological Trauma,
Suicidal Ideation (brief),
Loss of Autonomy,
Violent Retaliation,

Moral Ambiguity,
Forced Drugging / Ingestion
of Substances (implied),
Power - Imbalanced Sexual
Dynamics,
Stockholm Syndrome
Undertones,
Trauma Bonding,
Cybernetic Modification
Without Consent,
Gore and Bodily Injury
(including neural chip
procedures),
Implied Sexual Violence
(against secondary characters),
Cannibalism (referenced and
implied),
Neurological Overload and
Sensory Torture,
Forced Memory Extraction,
Violence Between Siblings,
Non - Consensual Medical
Procedures,
Psychosexual Threats and
Humiliation,
Unreliable Reality / Induced
Delusions,
Emotional Numbing /
Suppression as Control
Mechanism,
Eroticisation of Captivity,
Mass Surveillance and Loss of
Privacy,
Complicity in Abuse (morally
grey characters)





>_ SEQUENCE/01

▮ chased that goddamn mouse too far – scuttling through ash, ducking from the AI's drones, counting on their dead zones to hold.

Just a scrap of meat, but my stomach didn't care about the risk. I haven't eaten in days.

By the time I realise how far I've gone, the electric storm was already on my heels.

My legs threaten to give as I cross the corpse of the world – a grey desert where silence and death wear the same face. The howl behind me? Not a beast, but it still drives the wind beneath my blistered soles, panic clenched in my teeth. A fucking electric storm. Each breath scours my lungs, the poisoned air cutting through the scarf bound tight across my mouth.

A thunderclap splits the sky. Closer now. Too close. I don't look back. Urgency coils around my throat like wire, dragging me forward.

I never venture this far out. There are no critters to catch. Just choking dust, burning sand and oxygen thinning with every rushed step past the City Walls. And the worst – electric storms: soot-fed clouds of static that sweep the dunes.

Another crack hits. I lunge forward and pain shoots through my ankle like a snapped wire.

Gritting my teeth, I know that misstep just cost me days of rations – the ones I earn trading my skills – if I make it back at all.

The air prickles. Static dances up my limbs. If lightning touches me, I'll be ash before I drop.

The storm swallows the sky, blurring everything to blackness. Tears sting my eyes, carving tracks through soot.

I'm too young to burn out here. Too young to be picked clean by the ash-fed cannibals.

I should have never followed that mouse so far, but hunger makes hunters of us all. Even Mara used to laugh – said I chased hope as if it had legs.

I'm twenty-six. Older than she ever got. She died before twenty-two, never saw the storms from this side of the Wall.

I hope it was clean – her death. I don't know.

But I know mine won't be.

I'll die with grit in my lungs and regret under my nails.

And I've been wondering, lately, how long until that hap—

—my foot plunges.

The ground caves beneath me and I drop hard into the black, landing on my calf.

The sound comes before the pain – a sickening crack that rattles my spine. Then the agony floods, slow at first, like a wave of ice water pouring in from the frost gutters beneath the slums. But it doesn't stay cold. It burns. Spreads. Infects.

My scream dies in my throat. Tears spill freely now, carving streaks through the grime coating my cheeks.

Soot and dust rain into the pit as the storm stretches above me like a second punishment, scoring my skin with every gust.

I can't see anything. The dark here is dense, almost sentient. My fingers grope blindly at my throbbing leg. No jagged bone pierces outwards, but it makes no difference. It feels like it does.

I slap a hand over my mouth, muffling the sound of my ragged whimpers.

My mind can't think straight through the pain, but my body still moves. I reach out. Feel the walls. Too smooth. Not

natural. Not a crack in the desert. This is no accident. It's manmade.

I trace the edges around me, desperate to avoid what I fear most: a second tunnel, running sideways, the kind I've only heard about in whispers – a path down into the lairs of the Scourged, the bone-pickers, the sub-dwellers. Survivors speak of them only when drunk or fevered – of crawling traps that suck you down and spit out just the bones.

But there's no tunnel. Just the hole.

My breath hitches. There isn't much life out here anymore. A few reptiles maybe. Their meat tastes like boiled boots. Even starving, I'd spit it out before swallowing.

But if I don't find a way out...

I might just learn how long one can last in the dark without food.

Or how long before something else finds me.

The storm rages on, stretching time until it frays. My leg's gone completely numb. Pain flickers in and out – sometimes sharp, sometimes gone entirely. I can't tell if it's just from my weight pressing down on it or if it's truly ruined. Probably both.

When the winds finally settle into a whisper, a colder dread seeps in.

Above me, where the moon should be – is the sun.

Blood-orange from the poison in the air.

Shit.

Did I black out?

A groan tears through my clenched teeth. My leg screams now – fire racing up my side. I almost welcome it. At least it means I'm still alive.

Though I find myself praying for cannibals at this stage.

Let them come.

Let them finish it. Anything but *this*.

Mara used to say – '*Be careful what you wish for.*'

Because no sooner do I register the sun bleeding through the thinning storm clouds than a shadow blocks it. Not a drifting ash-cloud. A silhouette.

An angel of death.

Broad, silent, his form wreathed in the patchwork chaos

of salvage-wear – scraps of fabric, armour plating, torn synthetic mesh. Nothing matches. Everything looks stolen, scavenged from corpses.

He kneels. Leans forward. A gloved hand dips into the pit and closes over my armpit.

I try to scream, but all that comes out is a choking rasp. My chest convulses because I know...

I *know* this isn't *rescue*.

This is *collection*.

The grip is brutal, efficient. Heat radiates from metal where it meets skin – he's an Auggie. Augmented. Whatever's wired into his arm grants him strength – and who knows what else he has. Maybe something worse. I can't tell what kind of augment hides beneath all the layers, but when he hoists me up in a single, fluid motion and plants me on the sand-dusted ground, I feel it. Titanium. His entire arm.

Pain screams through my body when my leg scrapes the pit's edge. It sends a spiderweb of agony snapping up through my calf, my knee – my entire body arches, back taut with the reflex of suffering.

His hand slams over my mouth as I yelp. Not harsh, just firm. Tactical. He glances left, then right, his head pivoting like a machine. Scanning. Listening for androids, drones and beasts. The faint morning glow betrays nothing.

He's close enough for me to see the glint of embedded metal along his temple just beneath the head wrap. But the rest of him is obscured by layers of dusty cloth. I can't tell if he's maimed, masked, or one of those with their mouths carved into fangs that feasts on human flesh.

My life now hinges on his whim regardless of what he is.

Examining my leg with quick, trained movement makes his posture change. He's made a decision – maybe I'm worth salvaging. Or maybe I just have enough meat left on my bones to make the drag worth his time.

With a swift motion of his hands, he tears the leg of my trousers open. And he freezes.

I know what he's looking at.

The brand.

Of the techs. The cog wheel – half-burnt off my skin.

Deliberately.

I've escaped the First Levels two years ago. Sovereign – the AI trained me to fix it and work on the augments. It approves of Auggies – the official implants let it siphon data straight from their skulls like a good little leech.

It taught me well – I can twist metal and code with the same hand. My captor must recognise the cog stamp there – burned into me as though I were part of the cattle. My knowledge, my skills might mean something to him. And that makes him pause for several intakes of breath as he stares at it.

Then he sobers up, and shrugs off his enormous pack. It thuds into the sand beside me. The motion is too calm, too precise. As if he's not just looting. He's preparing me.

The fucker is massive. If he wanted to tear me apart, he could do it without a blink of an eye. I haven't eaten in three days. Water ran out two days ago, I'm too weak to even breathe at this stage.

Then—

He pulls out a hammer. And not one of those cute claw hammers. A fucking sledgehammer fit to break bones. My nerves feel it before it even swings.

My mind goes black with panic.

I flinch, twist, flip to my side – start crawling away even though I know it's useless. Logic dies in the face of fear. My body shouldn't be moving like this – not with this kind of injury. The pain screams through me again, but adrenaline is louder.

His hand closes around my good ankle and drags me back without effort.

Mara taught me to fight when we were little. Close-quarters. Knees, elbows, throat. She taught me to survive when the world wanted to chew me up. I had taken some lessons from former lovers, too.

But with my leg in this state, all that knowledge is as useful as a rusted blade.

Still, if he swings that hammer at me, I'll twist, try wrenching it from him, and go down fighting. The *twist-n-slide* move I learned from Mara doesn't rely on strength.

But then I freeze.

Because he doesn't raise the hammer. He braces its head under one boot and twists. Metal screeches. With a grunt, he snaps the wooden handle from the heavy core. The wood splinters slightly at the edge. That's the part he keeps.

He uses it to align my leg, holding it steady. Dirty rags come next – torn straight from his own filthy shirt, each strip soaked in dust and sweat. He wraps them around the splint – the broken handle – and my leg, layer after layer, until the joint is secured.

Then, without a word, he hauls me upright, balances me on my good foot, before slinging me over his shoulder like a sack of broken parts.

Still, he says nothing.

No sound but the crunch of sand beneath his boots.

He doesn't *seem* like a cannibal. But out here, that doesn't mean safety. Auggies can be worse. Men like him have traded out their humanity one bone at a time. And for women – well. The danger is always double. Sometimes triple.

I dangle like dead weight over his shoulder, watching the desert stretch behind us. His strides are long, effortless. I can smell the tang of sweat beneath the armour, beneath the metal. So – he's flesh. Not an android. That's a relief, if a small one. If he were machine, he would have dragged me back to the City as soon as his sensors scanned my brand. Straight into the First Levels. Straight into forced labour where those with the knowledge of tech and biomechanics slave for the Sovereign.

The government doesn't believe in mercy. Or free will. How could it? It's not human.

Eventually, we start to descend. The light dims. Shadows stretch long and deep, and I lift my head, just enough to see.

No context again. No explanation. Just downward slope into something colder than the storm.

We're entering an underground bunker – old world, maybe. Definitely buried beneath the sand. No clan tags scorched into the walls. No colour-coded wires claiming turf.

Shit.

If it *were* clan-marked, I would know what my fate is –

traded, sold or butchered for organs.

I don't know who he is. I know what he's not.

And I know he needs me for something because I'm still breathing.

It's a long, spiralling plunge into the depth. The air grows colder with each step, brushing clammy fingers down my bare arms, sliding like cloth soaked in ice over the fever of my skin. My mangled leg welcomes it – grateful, almost – but the rest of me shudders.

I've been in rags for a year now, tattered scraps that cling more out of memory than function. I never had the heart to strip the dying back in the slums. Maybe that's why I've been reduced to this: bones and desperation, chasing vermin through ash for meat, surviving on marrow and rot outside the City Wall.

We pass beneath flickering LEDs. Their cold light stutters as we traverse a narrow corridor, then begin a climb up winding steel stairs, slick with condensation and something I don't dare to identify.

Then he kicks open the next door.

My heart claws up my throat as the upside-down world tilts and spins, toying with my mercifully empty stomach.

Dirty. Blindingly so. The light is surgical. The smell, antiseptic, dust and sweat. My pulse spikes. I've seen rooms like this before – back in the City, when the respiratory plague ravaged our floor and they quarantined us like diseased cattle. Cold, white tiles and stainless-steel walls and counters, clinical silence stretched thin over hidden screams.

Even if he bears no clan sigils scorched into the walls... this could still be a butcher's lair.

There's a faint sound ahead. A low, repetitive thud.

My breath catches as I realise we're nearing it. The noise is rhythmic. Brutal.

Panic grips me as he kicks the next door open.

The moans hit me first – loud, feminine, saturated in surrender. Pleasure, not performance.

My cheeks flare with heat as I zero in on a massive man rutting into a woman in the far corner. The way her thighs wrap around his hips suggests consent. The way their mouths

devour each other – hungry and obscene – suggests lust. But then my gaze falls to the chain fastened tight around her ankle.

That—

Is ownership.

And the realisation lands like ice in my gut.

My breath stutters. *Slave traders?* What exactly *do* they want with me?

I'm not built for this – for chains, for moans turned into currency. I won't survive it.

The man's brown, sweat-slicked hair whips his forehead with each sharp move, the honed arms straining and flexing with a promise of absolute release.

She has that otherworldly beauty to her plump lips and cheekbones. She looks to be in her twenties, and reminds me on one of those old-world actresses. What was her name? Mara loved her movies – Marilyn... something.

I whip my gaze away, my heart thudding relentlessly behind my ears.

They cry out together just as I'm dropped onto a pile of threadbare sheets. A thin mattress. A single old, strained pillow. Cold metal clinks. Then the sharp bite of iron – my healthy foot.

The big guy fucking shackles me.

The horror is instant, visceral. My eyes flick from my cuffed ankle to hers. A matching set from hell.

No. No fucking way! If they think I'll go down like that, I've got more than pain to give them. Instinctively, I rub the augment on my thumb.

The man – still glistening with sweat, cock half-limp and trousers unfastened – peels himself away from the woman and laughs, breathless.

'That's a good girl,' he tells her, voice low and indulgent. 'You've earned yourself a full breakfast.'

My stomach coils tight. Pure hate washes through me.

The woman curls into herself, sheet draped loosely across her breasts – but there is indifference on her countenance. As if – dear God – this is a routine. Yet, the flicker in her eyes as she spots me – half warning, half apology – says she hasn't

forgotten she's human. That there's something else in there. Even though this is something she had come to terms with.

She watches him with unreadable eyes as he vanishes through a side door. Not even half a breath later, he returns.

And the scent...

Oh...

Meat. Roasted. In some sort of sauce.

Where did he get that? There's nothing but rodents and people out there.

A bit much for a breakfast, too.

Rich, fatty, seasoned. My mouth waters so hard my lips draw together. I haven't tasted real meat in a decade, let alone anything that still smells like warmth and blood and comfort.

I sit up – can't help it. A drumbeat of pain pulses in my leg. But I push it to the back of my mind. My gaze locks on the plate he places before her on the floor.

She devours it. Sauce trickles from her lips. Grease coats her fingers as she shovels hunks of meat into her mouth with an urgency that makes my own throat tighten. I don't even realise I'm leaning forward until my chain rattles.

Flinching back, forcing my expression into cold stone, I hope they don't see my hunger. Because they certainly won't fucking see me beg.

The man brushes a stray blonde curl from her damp brow. There's something disturbingly tender in the motion, even if the brutality of the earlier scene still ricochets in my mind.

'Eat up, Strawberry,' he murmurs, voice thick with satisfaction. His face catches the overhead light – and for a moment, I'm struck.

In today's time, disease and famine tend to disfigure the faces. I'm used to seeing gaunt cheeks, hollow eyes, rotten teeth.

But he has something about him. In the way wild and dangerous things do. Bones sharp. Lips plush. Jaw strong.

And as he turns, the mark of our time is etched in his eyes – the eyes of a madman.

Green, maybe. Or light brown – stained with poison. Whatever colour they are, they see what is and isn't there. And they're fixed on me now.

‘That one’s too broken,’ he mutters, frowning slightly without losing the eternal smile on his face. I think that smile is a part of his mask. He must have forgotten how to lose it.

Too broken? My mind conjures all kinds of reasons to be too broken for something.

‘Make the fall less damaging,’ he commands. ‘Pad the hole, or something. It’s damaging the goods.’

The goods...

I shudder.

My captor – still silent – has stripped away his outer layers as he keeps his back to me. His height towers over the other one even at that distance – a mechanic shoulder and arm glistening against the surgical light.

The one standing between us wipes himself off on a towel, the sex-fuelled sweat still clinging to his hair that falls tiredly over his forehead.

I take in his blue shirt draped over chiselled chest, and his clean, blue trousers with twin snakes.

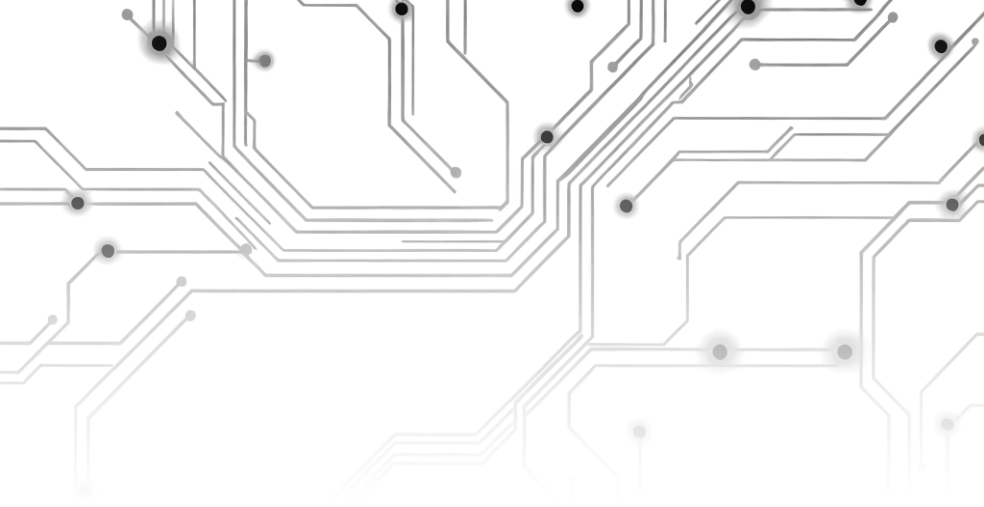
He’s a medic in the City.

Oh shit...

They’re not just raiders. They’re professionals.

Organ traders? Tissue harvesters? Systemic predators with the knowledge and patience of surgical precision.

Just my fucking luck.



>_ SEQUENCE/02

The silent one turns to face me fully, and I drink him in – partly from fear, partly from the helpless ache of curiosity.

‘Did you get her from the thirteenth hole?’ The medic turns to him.

The tall one’s temple glints with familiar tech. One for enhanced sight that I recognise. I’ve worked on them more times than I would have wanted. Nasty chips that not only cause premature cataract, but eye loss – as in *eyeball* – unless periodically replaced.

One is for data downloads – meaning he has a neural chip. To learn faster. Two more I can’t clearly see from here. But one port is empty, judging from the lack of lights in that section.

And seeing how he hasn’t spoken a single word... I think I know what he traded to have the rest installed.

His voice.

All wires and sinew, his arms seem less like biology and more like schematics. Half marble, half motherboard.

He doesn’t look at me like the other one. Just scans – mechanical, impassive. Still, I can’t look away. There’s a quiet intensity to his face – high cheekbones, brutal jaw – younger than the medic’s but carved from the same blueprint.

A little less madness in his eyes. A little more silence in the soul. Brothers, maybe.

When he doesn't respond, the medic lets out a low chuckle.

'Oh, you like this one, Jase?' he purrs, zipping up with a cocky flick of his wrist as he saunters over, his steps heavy as if he's in a rush. His scent hits me before he kneels – sweat, sugar, the musk of spent desire.

He goes down beside me, eyes raking down my body with a predator's interest. 'Mmm... natural *pretty*,' he hums. It feels like being measured, appraised and tagged. 'If I ran some synthetic into here and there...' His fingers hover near my face, brushing phantom-touch over my cheekbones, then lower, pausing at my lips. 'Could make her marketable. Maybe even high-end.'

Fucking synthetic slave-traders. That would explain Strawberry, and the *broken* comment.

I stay still, refusing to recoil. I meet his gaze dead-on. His sharp glare tells me he hates it.

Good.

'Open your mouth,' he orders – firmer this time, as if talking to a dog.

I keep it shut.

His hand snaps to my jaw – ruthless and fast – and the pain punches through the muscle as he pries it open with one hand like I'm some animal to be checked.

'Teeth are clean,' he notes, surprise bleeding into his voice. 'She's not from the slums. Broken leg – inconvenient. Malnutrition,' he continues as if checking off a list. 'Rehab for the leg will take weeks. She's scrawny and buyers don't pay top credits for skin and ribs.'

He stands with a pleased smirk, wipes his hand on his trousers as though I've stained him, then continues.

'She'll need nutrition, fillers. A full workup – internal integrity included: organs, womb, hymen...'

I bare my teeth at him, lips curling into a snarl.

He pauses. His expression darkens – and those almond-shaped eyes narrow with intent.

'She'll need to be broken in, too,' he murmurs, too low

for the other woman to hear. ‘Strawberry had to be broken in, as well. And look at her now – such a good girl.’

We lock eyes, neither blinking. He holds the moment longer than necessary, then turns away and disappears through the door he brought the food from.

My heart punches my ribs from the inside, wild and warning. I clutch the bedding tight beneath me as I watch him go. Then my eyes find the other one.

His flat stare is fixed with interest on my broken leg.

No—

The *brand* he knows is hiding underneath the dirty bandages.

That is my leverage.

But the way he stares... there’s something missing in him. Something’s wrong.

The woman is licking the last of the sauce from her thumb, reclining lazily but her eyes flick briefly to me. Warily. Measuring. Her sculpted cheekbones shine faintly beneath the lights. Synthetic implants. So are her lips – too plump, too symmetrical. A madman’s wet dream.

The hair colour isn’t hers, the chin-length loose curls still wild from the earlier tumble. The curves probably aren’t either. But the muscle under the skin? That’s earned. Which means they let her off the leash occasionally. Exercise. A prized possession needs upkeep.

That could be my window of opportunity. Once the leg heals – if they let it.

Then I hear a faint hiss, followed by a sharp metallic click.

My eyes snap to the tall one. Jase.

He’s perched at a console, hunched slightly forward, muscular back bending, thick forearms resting on the edge. One hand fiddles with a cable, connecting it to a sleek port just beneath the plated flesh of his inner arm. His other hand begins typing – slow, precise keystrokes.

The flickering light catches in his light brown hair – a rugged undercut, sides shaved close for augmentation ports, the top wild and wind-tousled. He’s mesmerising in the way storms are. Just before they wreck the place.

The medic returns, wiping his hands. ‘Your pinky still

acting out?’

Jase nods, once.

I already know why.

The augmentation graft must be damaged. The servo cable that links motor output to digit response is delicate: one good jolt or a static spike during an electric storm and it fries. Without the backup circuit or a neural recalibration, that little finger’s as useless as my leg here.

A box clatters beside me, breaking the stillness. It’s old and dented, but I recognise the symbol. Looks like a medic bag – vintage, reinforced. Undoubtedly scavenged.

The medic crouches with lazy efficiency, flipping the latches and throwing the lid open. Bottles clink softly. Bandages spill out. A bone saw glints beneath a syringe that reminds me where my throat is. And nestled in the side pocket – ice. Not City-filth frost from the gutters below the slums. Real ice.

I narrow my eyes at the bag. Whoever this guy is, he has access to things no one should.

He touches my leg and I flinch so hard my teeth rattle. Pain flares white-hot, instinct taking control from my body. I scramble back with a hiss, but his grip steadies, firm without aggression – until suddenly the light above us disappears.

A shadow falls, swallowing us whole.

Jase.

The cable still dangles from his arm, its end sparking faintly like a vein bleeding voltage. His presence is soundless but oppressive, a wall of heat and metal.

The medic pauses, jaw tightening just a breath before he turns to look up.

Rage flashes across his face. Brief and ugly. But then he smiles that eerie smile, as if he’s humouring a malfunctioning pet.

‘You really like this one, huh?’ he mutters, dragging the words through his teeth.

But I already know Jase isn’t chasing pleasure like the medic does.

He saw the mark on my leg – the techie brand. He’s hiding it from his brother. And that means he has an agenda of his

own. One that isn't aligned with the medic's.

I glance between them, calculation slicing through the fog of pain.

The medic rises slowly. His hand lands on Jase's neck – casual, almost affectionate. But the pat on his shoulder carries the weight of warning.

'I don't think you've dipped your cock in the merch in a very long while,' he purrs. 'But that's not a reason to allow insubordination.'

A chill drops down my spine like melting frost.

The medic pulls away, eyes gleaming with cruelty. 'Fix her leg properly – like I showed you – before the swelling sets. When I'm back I want you in your pod. I'll recalibrate you.'

Jase doesn't move. Doesn't nod. Just stares. Blank. Unreadable.

And that unnerves the medic more than any argument would. The grin on his face stretches wider – unnatural, forced – before he turns and disappears through the opposite door.

In his absence, air finally spills into the room. And only now do I really look at Jase – as if he had been nothing more than a figment until this moment.

Dusty cargo trousers hang low on narrow hips, cinched by belts patched from leather and wire. His shirt clings to the sweat-slicked planes of his chest – ripped, faded, nearly translucent in places. Unlike the medic's sterile blue uniform.

Recalibrate you... The phrase echoes in my head.

He's hacking him. Jase is restrained by some neurochip programming he can't influence. The missing speech chip? His brother probably has that hidden somewhere. It's the only thing keeping him silent. God. The medic's not just a madman and a sadist – he's a goddamn puppeteer.

But Jase can still make decisions, which tells me all I need to know about the missing chip – the circuits connect to the cranial nerves IX, X and XII – making it a Class B augment. It's hardwired to the brainstem, regulating the vocalisation muscles. His whole temple rig?

My domain.

Level One, Class B Engineer.

Jase chose to bring me here. He is choosing now to guard my brand so his psycho brother doesn't see it.

And now, kneeling again beside me, he begins selecting tools with deliberate care. Needles. Tape, stabilisers. A mix of old-world medicine and whatever is stolen.

He's giving himself a chance with my skills.

And he knows I know it.

Then the door swings open again and the medic strides in – towards Strawberry.

'Let's give her a name, Jase,' he purrs, grinning as if this is all a game. 'Easier to own a thing when it has one.'

The giant turns slowly to look at him, then lifts his eyes over my head. I follow his gaze. There's about a hundred years old calendar on a metal shelf. Year 2025. With an image of a single hazelnut above the dates.

'Good thinking! She *does* look like a hazelnut, doesn't she?' He looks down at Strawberry, who replies with a flat, 'Yes.'

He grins with satisfaction. 'Then she's Hazel.'

I grimace. Probably because of my eyes. Or my brown hair, dust and grime threading through the loose braid.

I'm certainly not going to tell him it's – ironically – my actual name.

'This one's going into the City with me.' Then he turns to Jase again as he hauls Strawberry to her feet and starts pulling a tight dress over her head. 'They radioed about a gathering. She needs to be shown around.' His eyes flick to me and he flashes teeth – an expression far too close to a snarl. 'Let me know how tight this one is. I'll take my turn soon enough.'

I shudder – visibly. Strawberry pins me with a stare sharp enough to crack bone. Almost accusingly. But she says nothing.

Jase's hand stills just above my leg. Slowly... he looks up. His gaze hits me like a loaded weapon.

His left eye – green. A rare, soft green ringed with golden brown. I've only seen such green in the picture books Mara used to read me when I was little. But the right eye? A stark contrast. Laced with tech. The iris is tinted brown-grey and ringed in pale blue light, expanding and contracting with mechanical precision. If I look closer, there's circuitry

spidering across it, pulsing faintly like breath. An eye augment. Feeding directly into his brain.

The door slams shut behind the medic and the woman, snapping me out of my focus.

And there's just silence. Tension.

Breath. Heat.

He stares at me. Long. Hard.

Then – without a sound – he breaks the spell.

And continues to unravel the bandages from where his brother stopped.

I watch him work.

His fingers are calloused, oil stained – thick black crescents etched into his skin like ink and grit. He does manual work for his brother, no question. Not just muscle. Maintenance. Damage control. Maybe even the dirty fixes no one else would have a stomach for.

His movements are sharp, precise. Efficient. Not a breath wasted, not a twitch unintentional.

And then the bandages come off.

The bruising on my leg blooms like a poisoned flower – violet, yellowing, raw, ugly. I hiss as the cold air kisses it, nerves lighting up in protest. He leans down and presses the icepack to the swollen flesh.

Too fast.

I yelp, a strangled sound in my throat as pain spikes through the limb. My jaw clenches hard enough to crack a molar.

He just stares at the pack. Blank. As if I'm not writhing in pain here.

'Ice is supposed to go on *the moment* the hurt happens,' I grit through clenched teeth. 'Not the morning after!'

That gets him.

He rips it away – too quick, too rough. Frustration flashes in his jaw, his lips pressing into a line so tight it could cut steel.

He unwraps the medical splints as if they have betrayed him. The first emotion I've seen on him.

I lean back against the wall, definitely not watching the way his forearms flex and his biceps tighten with every

movement. Definitely not wondering how little effort they would need to snap my neck.

I swallow back the unease.

His arm shifts again, and I catch it before it whips over my face – the cable. Still connected to his arm.

Wires peek through the seams of his skin like silver veins. Something in me stirs – not just fear. Familiarity. The wires. The tubes. The circuitry. My language.

The decision overcomes me quickly. I murmur low and wary, ‘If you get me a conductor, some silver, and a bit of silicon, I can fix that.’

He doesn’t respond. But his gaze flicks – briefly – to the techie brand burned into the side of my foreleg. *That’s right. You saw it. Come on...*

‘I was B Class,’ I add, tone casual but it wavers. ‘A Fine Engineer. Code-writing, chip-forging, machine-melding. I’ve made chips do things they were never designed to do.’

I got him. It’s subtle, but I see it. The way his spine straightens – slowly, menacingly – like something ancient rising. He looks at me from the curve of his cheekbones. His jaw slackens ever so slightly.

I press the advantage – a gamble, reckless and necessary.

‘If you keep him from touching me, I’ll do it.’

The words don’t even leave my mouth fully when his hand snaps to my throat, slamming me against the cold steel wall – hard enough to rattle my bones. The breath explodes from my lungs. Metal digs into the side of my skull. His grip is punishing – tight enough to make stars streak behind my eyes – but not quite enough to crush.

His face hovers inches from mine. A warning growl vibrates from his chest, deep and raw. Not just anger – but territory claimed, boundaries drawn.

I meet his eyes head-on, despite the pressure around my neck. Despite the bruises that will bloom by morning. But I can tell he looks at me like I’m both threat and temptation.

His grip might bruise – but my words bruise deeper.

‘It’s why you brought me,’ I challenge. ‘I can override the calibrations,’ I whisper, breathless, but certain.

His hand stills. A small surge of triumph slips into my

bloodstream, sharp and sweet.

His fingers flex once before he releases me, eyes widen a fraction, his lips part as if he wants to say something.

Bullseye.

'I'll do the chip,' I continue, taking in a slow, steady breath. 'Fix your arm.' I let the words sink in as I rub my throat from the phantom weight left by his fingers. 'Keep *him* off me, and when I'm done... no one will ever rewrite you again. Freedom. No chains. Ever.'

His mouth closes slowly. Jaw tight. This close he smells like metal and worn leather – sweat-drenched and sun-warmed. The scent clings to him like armour.

I swallow. Hard. I watch him deliberate and I hope my boldness – or recklessness – will bear fruit.

He leans back onto his haunches, watching me as if I've just offered him the devil's deal. Suspicion sharpens every angle of his face.

'I won't touch anything else,' I add. 'All I need is a wire cutter – or a nail file. And some conductive lubricant.'

One brow lifts.

'Yes. I am *that* good.'

Silence settles again. Electric.

Then – the barest tilt of his chin. A test. A soft, almost imperceptible gesture.

But I know what it means.

A smile curves my lips – unwanted and dangerous. His eyes track it instantly – and the lens in his right eye narrows like a camera iris, focusing softly before it expands again. As though he just took a snapshot.

Can he do that?

Or better yet – *why* would he?

'We got a deal?' I ask, stretching out a hand.

He looks at it. Then at me. Then back at my hand as though he's weighing a trap.

My pulse stutters.

I can't feel my toes. I tilt my chin just slightly with expectation.

And then he takes it.

His palm engulfs mine. Heat and steel pulse against it like

a warning. The handshake is brief. Controlled.

And I feel that faintest tremor in his little finger, the mechanical fault flinching under pressure.

The way he looks at me?

As if he's peering up from a cage – and I'm holding the key.

Which just happens to fit my lock, too.

>_ IN THIS SERIES

Book One: The Chain Loop

He dragged me from the sand like wreckage – silent, lethal, all heat and metal. Now I'm chained in his bunker, caught in a game where breath and obedience blur. His touch is control. His silence, a threat. And the worst part? I'm starting to want him to break me.

Book Two: The Tether Protocol

He let me run. Watched me vanish into the dark. But I should've known better. Jase doesn't lose things. He hunts them. Tracks them. Chains them quietly. And when he finds me again, there's no bunker, no warning – just his gaze on my skin like a brand. And this time, he's not letting go.

Book Three: The Blackout

I ran from him once. Thought distance would save me. But he broke himself to keep me safe. Now I'm the one bringing *him* back – piece by shattered piece. The Sovereign will try to rewrite us. Erase us. But I remember. And I'll burn this world to make him remember too.

Book Four: Untitled

> _ OTHER BOOKS BY AUTHOR

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As the Beast Mistress, Jade Richards commands wolves—until she meets Keiran Ryan, the ruthless Alpha holding her sister captive. Their clash is explosive, their chemistry undeniable... and their bond forbidden. With rogue wolves rising and her control slipping, Jade must choose: obey the magic or surrender to the man who defies it.

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Grace Richards lives by the ancient Druid code—until saving a rogue werewolf shatters everything she believes. Finn MacDowell is dangerous, hunted, and bound to a dark past... but her heart doesn't care. As chaos looms, Grace must decide: protect the world, or the wolf she's come to love.

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Lina DeLuca enters as Scarlett, seeking healing – but what she finds is a reckoning.

As submission becomes power, their identities begin to unravel... and survival means giving in to the very thing that could destroy them.

Book Two: Bleeding Ink

Two years later, Paula is a mother, an author... and a woman haunted by what Obsidian awakened.

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As an *Oscurelle*, Elise was meant to serve the Ragnulfs – ancient Viking kings turned vampire nobility. Erik commands her body, and Magnus tempts her soul.

Desire becomes danger.

To survive the cruel politics of the world, Elise must choose: stay their pawn... or rise as something far more dangerous than a queen.

Book Two: From Ashes

The Cotta estate demands obedience.

Sent to serve five vampire heirs under their monstrous father's rule, Maria must soothe, submit – and survive.

But the brothers are possessive, the rituals cruel, and desire... feral.

In this house of secrets and scars, love isn't salvation.

It's a weapon. And Maria is the fuse.

Book Three: From Death

Lirina Ardiaei commands kings, bends fate, and walks with war at her heels. But when Death himself rises—ancient, merciless, and bound to her by blood—power means nothing.

Sariel doesn't ask. He claims.

And this time, the Queen of the Night must face the one force she cannot control: him.

Book Four: From Hel

The world burns, and Elise stands at the centre – bound to Erik's fire, drawn to Magnus's shadow, and now haunted by Thorstein, the blood-soaked prophet returned from death.

Three brothers. One war.

As fate fractures, so does she.

And in the ashes of empires, Elise must choose: become one with the flames... or be devoured.

Book Five: From Hel

Sigrid Ragnulf is power incarnate – shieldmaiden, politician, queen. But when secrets surface and allies turn, even she can't

outrun the past.

One man stands beside her. The only one she can't afford to want.

In a world of masks and knives, truth cuts deepest.

And love may finish the job.

>_ THE AUTHOR

N. von Wolf writes dark, emotionally intense romances where desire collides with danger and power always has a price. Her stories blend myth, dystopia, and slow-burn obsession, featuring morally grey characters, lush prose, and worlds built to unravel both reader and heroine. Influenced by Eastern European folklore, Scandinavian myth, and Celtic mysticism, and the complexities of today's world, her work explores the line between surrender and survival – often with teeth.

When not writing, she works as a Technical Engineer Team Lead and balances life as a mother and wife. Expect bloodstained love stories, broken heroes, and heroines who refuse to stay soft.

You can reach out to her via social media or her official website:

www.nvonwolf.com

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I hope you enjoyed this excerpt from The Chain Loop!

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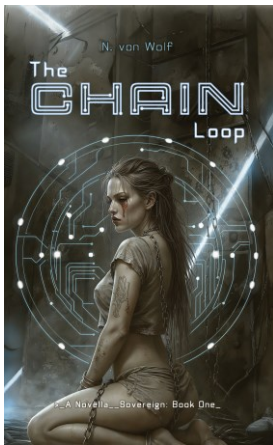
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