

# Chapter One

"I'm done! I've had it up to here with that spoiled little rich girl. Find yourself another crew chief!"

Brock Williams looked up from the engine he was tinkering with at the sound of Ray's voice. Ray was the current crew chief for the hottest young NASCAR driver on the circuit this year, Rikki Renard.

Rikki was the oldest daughter of well-known oil man, Richard Renard, and already had built quite a reputation for herself, in more ways than one. She was fast becoming one of the big names on the track, with several wins under her belt and a good chance at a championship. But, in the pits, her name caused many a man to shudder. Rikki wanted things done her way and her way only. She had gone through more crew chiefs in the past couple of years than most drivers do during an entire career. Her wealthy daddy was her sponsor and the team owner, and growing up, Rikki had been indulged by both Richard and his wife, Joyce. Richard was an avid racing fan. Having no sons, he'd been thrilled when his oldest daughter began to share his interest in the sport. Rikki's younger sisters, Alissa and Maris, couldn't have cared less about engines, cars and tracks.

Richard had groomed his namesake from an early age, and when she was old enough and experienced enough, he sponsored her endeavors. It had paid off, because she was wowing everyone with her skill behind the wheel.

Everyone but her crew chiefs, that is. Ray was not the first to walk out on the job. Now, it seemed there was a position to fill again. Brock knew he wanted to apply for the job, but had he been at this line of work long enough to even be considered a viable candidate? There was no time like the present to find out. He marched right up to Richard, who was in the garage today, shaking his head.

"Sir, may I speak to you for a minute?" Brock asked bravely.

"Can it wait, son? I have to get on the horn and find a replacement for Ray, ASAP. Never thought he'd walk out on us."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I'd like to throw my hat in the ring for the job."

Richard looked at him in surprise before finally answering with, "Are you sure about that, boy?"

"Very sure, sir. I've worked closely with the last two crew chiefs and I paid close attention. It's something I've had in the back of my mind ever since I took this job."

"Come into the office," Richard said as he ushered him away from prying ears.

Once inside the large office, Richard offered him a drink.

"No, thanks, sir."

Richard helped himself to a beer and sat down behind his massive desk. "Now, what makes you think you can handle this job? Sell me."

Brock cleared his throat, determination in his voice when he spoke, "This has been a longtime dream of mine. I've eaten, breathed and slept engines and cars for as long as I can remember. I've followed NASCAR since I was a boy. It was a dream come true when I landed this job and I made up my mind the first day, I would one day become the chief of a good crew."

"That's all well and good, son. I do know your work is excellent. However, there is another part of the job that concerns me."

"Sir?" Brock asked.

"Oh, come now, boy. You've been around long enough to know my daughter isn't the easiest person to work with. I'm sure you've seen the tantrums, heard the screaming; hell, I'm certain you've heard the guys talking. Why do you think Ray just stormed out of here? Not to mention the five crew chiefs before him. I will admit, all three of my daughters are spoiled rotten. Do I like Rikki's attitude? No, I don't, but it's a little late in the game for me to change it. She needs a man in her life to do that. So far, she's not found one that fits the bill. In the meantime, we continue to go through crew chiefs like water. Now, tell me why you think you are any different from the rest?"

Brock straightened up in his chair and leaned forward. "I have three sisters. I've dealt with tantrums; I've survived screaming matches. I've had things thrown at me, doors slammed in my face and been given the silent treatment. Through it all, I knew one sure fire way to settle 'em down."

"Oh?" Richard asked with interest. "Care to share that wisdom?"

"When things got out of hand, over my knee they went. Worked like a charm."

Richard chuckled. "Now, that's exactly what my darling Rikki needs but I'm not so sure you'd survive if you tried it with her. As far as the job itself, I have no qualms about your ability to do it and do it well. Getting along with Rikki is my biggest concern."

"Why don't we give it a trial run? Say, six months?" Brock suggested.

Richard studied him for several minutes while he finished his beer. Finally, he said, "Okay, boy. Six months, it is. Why don't you take the rest of the day off, while I break the news to Rikki? Be back here at seven sharp, tomorrow morning, for training." He scribbled something on a piece of paper and slid it across the desk. "I'm assuming this will suffice for salary."

Brock's eyes nearly popped out of his head as he opened the slip of paper and read the figures. "Y-yes, sir."

Brock went back out into the garage and began putting away his tools.

"What's up, man? You walking out, too, cuz Ray did?" one of the crew members, Randy, asked.

"No, just taking the rest of the day off to take care of some things."

"I saw you talking to Renard. You didn't apply for the job, did you? Any man who takes that job is crazy. Rikki Renard is a first-class bitch to work for."

"So what if I did? You all know that's my dream. Hell, any one of you should have done the same."

"No way!" Dave, another crew member said.

"Me, neither," Randy agreed. "You sure you want to tackle that?"

"I want the job. If Rikki Renard's attitude comes with it, then so be it. I'll deal with it."

"How? No one else could, apparently."

Brock grinned. "I have my ways. Ms. Renard may have just met her match. Wait and see."

"Well, more power to you, man. I'm happy for you, and I'll be proud to have you as the chief but I don't envy you one bit," Dave said.

"You ain't sweet on our little wildcat, are you?" Randy asked.

Brock chuckled. "She is a looker, but that isn't why I want the job."

"Wonder how she'll take the news?" Dave asked with a laugh.

"Daddy will break it to her. That's why you're out of here for the day, huh, Brock?"

"Got things to take care of, bro. I'll see you in the morning." Brock waved and walked out to his truck, leaving the others shaking their heads.

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"You're joking, right? Ray will be back. He just needs to cool off."

Richard looked at his daughter and frowned. "No, Rikki, he will not be back. I've already replaced him. As of tomorrow morning, Brock Williams is your new crew chief."

"Brock Williams? That tall guy on the crew?"

"Tall, sandy-haired, yes, that's him. He's good at what he does, Rikki. You need to give him a chance. You can't keep running good chiefs off. Sooner or later, the word is going to get around and *no one* is going to want to work with you."

Rikki rolled her eyes. "These guys need to grow some balls. I'm not that bad."

"I would appreciate it, if you didn't talk like one of the guys, Rikki. You may be a driver but you are still a lady."

"Oh, Dad, really?"

Richard raised an eyebrow and Rikki relented, "Okay, okay, I'm sorry. So, tell me about this Williams kid."

"He is hardly a kid. He is older than you, my dear, by two years. I've been looking over his file. He has a lot of experience, even before he joined our crew. I think he can handle the job quite well. The question is whether or not he can handle *you*."

"I hardly need handling. If he listens to me, we'll get along just fine."

"Rikki, I know you are well versed in mechanics and cars, but do me a favor and let Brock do his job."

"I'm calling it a day since my crew chief isn't here. I'll see you tomorrow, Dad." With that, Rikki turned, flinging her long brown hair over her shoulder.

"Get some rest. No partying, young lady. You have a lot to do tomorrow. I want to have a meeting first thing in the morning to announce Brock's promotion. After that, you will need to spend some time with him, discussing things."

"Whatever. Same old thing. I wish these damn crew chiefs would stop being such divas and just do their job. Male divas are the worst."

"Language! And I wouldn't be throwing that word 'diva' around too much. Many could describe you that way. Have a good night, Rikki. I love you."

She sighed. "Love you. Later."

Rikki walked out of the garage and unlocked her fancy red sports car. She spun the tires as she left the lot and headed down the road to the local eatery the racing gang liked to frequent.

*Might as well grab some dinner before I go home, since I am under orders not to party tonight,*" she thought as she wheeled her vehicle into the parking lot. *Honestly, you'd think I was a teenager.*

She got out of the car, careful to lock the door, and walked into the tiny sports bar. As her eyes adjusted to the dimly lit room, she spotted a few people she knew and made her way to their table.

"Mind if I join you?" she asked.

"Pull up a chair, Renard," one of the guys said. He was the other driver on the team her dad owned.

"Thanks, Johnny," Rikki said as she joined the group.

"Heard Ray walked out today," Johnny said as he watched her face.

Rikki shrugged. "Seems that way."

"I heard Williams wants the job," another man, Damon, who was Johnny's crew chief, said. "So I heard. What do you guys think about that?" The server came over to the table and Rikki ordered a light beer.

"Brock knows his shit," Damon said. "He's a good guy, too, from what I've seen."

Johnny nodded. "Rikki, you gonna go easy on him?"

Rikki snorted. "I don't know why I get the blame for all these pantywaists who can't handle the job."

The group around the table laughed in unison.

"What?" she asked innocently.

Johnny wiped his eyes as he tried to control his chuckling. "Oh, my dear Rikki, you have no idea, do you?"

The server returned with her beer and Rikki ordered a burger and a salad before turning back to her comrades.

"I expect a certain degree of respect for my knowledge. Is that too much to ask? It would seem that, because I happen to be a woman, I'm not supposed to know anything about engines and tires. I probably know more than most of the guys on my crew."

"True, you do have a vast amount of knowledge and experience. No one is disputing that. But you have to learn to trust your crew chief, hon," Damon said solemnly. "You can't have them walking out on you all the time. Word gets around. You're lucky Williams wants the job. I'm sure he has seen you in action, as well as heard about some of your tirades."

Rikki rolled her eyes. "If he doesn't know what to expect, that's his problem. He'll find out soon enough that I run a tight ship. My dad may provide the money and he may know his business, but he's too easy on his employees. I've always thought that."

The others shook their heads and exchanged glances. It was no use trying to reason with this particular female. Woe to the man who finally tried to tame her. Rikki didn't date much, even though she was one hot female. Her attitude took care of that. She was a petite little thing, with long, brown hair and big brown eyes. Most men couldn't handle more than two or three dates. Once they got a glimpse of her smart mouth and stubborn ways, they were done. Rikki didn't seem to care, either.

"Speak of the devil, look who just walked in," Johnny said.

Rikki turned to look at the door. "Is that him? Brock?" she asked. *Damn, he was one fine specimen of male.* All man, tall, built, with sandy colored hair and golden tan skin. Rikki normally wasn't impressed by looks, but this man—she wouldn't mind getting up close and personal with him.

"Yup, that's the man, your new crew chief," Damon said. "Draw in the claws, kitty cat."

"Play nice," Johnny added.

She shot both of them a look before smiling at the man walking toward their table.

"Ms. Renard, care to join me? I think we have some things to discuss before tomorrow," the hunk said when he reached their table. He nodded to the group. "You guys don't mind if I steal her, do you?"

"I suppose I can do that," she said. She looked at Johnny and added, "Please tell the waitress where I am when she brings my food."

"Will do," he replied with a grin. He whispered to Damon, "This could get interesting."

Rikki gave them both a dirty look before standing up and walking with Brock to an empty table in the corner.

To her surprise, Brock pulled out her chair for her before taking the seat across from her.

"So, you've already ordered?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered curtly.

A server came to take his drink order and he ordered a beer, along with a burger and fries. "The lady was sitting over there. When her order is ready, please bring it here and put it on my tab," he said.

The server nodded.

"My, my, buttering up the boss already, I see," she said when the server left to put in Brock's order.

He grinned. It was a lopsided grin and Rikki's tummy did a little flip flop. She admonished herself sternly in her thoughts.

"I see you've heard. As for buttering you up, no. I asked you to join me for dinner. That generally means I intend to pay."

"And to what do I owe this invitation to dinner?" she asked sarcastically.

He grinned again. Damn, that was a delightful sight.

"I thought it would be nice if we could chat a bit, get to know each other before we meet with the others in the morning," he explained patiently, ignoring her attitude.

"Really," she commented drily.

"Yes, really."

"Okay, what do you want to know? I'm sure you've heard all the stories. I run a tight ship. You do your job and respect my opinions and we'll get along just fine."

"I have no doubt that we will," he said in a low tone. "Just seems to me when we meet with the crew tomorrow to make the announcement, we should put forth a unified front. Any dissention between a driver and her chief can cause the troops to lose respect for authority."

"The troops? Tell me, Mr. Brock Williams, were you, by chance, in the military at one time?"

"United States Army, four years. I studied mechanics while I was there."

"I see."

The server brought Brock's beer and Rikki's meal.

"Could I please have a glass of ice water with lemon?" she asked as she picked up the small cup of dressing and drizzled it over her salad.

"Of course."

"So, the lady really does have ice water in her veins," Brock joked.

"You shouldn't listen to gossip, you know," she said with a laugh.

"You should laugh more often," he remarked. "I like the sound of it."

"Flirting with the new boss now?"

"Not at all, just making an observation. I take my job very seriously."

"Okay, truce. Look, Brock, you seem like a nice guy. As for your work, you came highly recommended by my dad. Time will tell if we can work well together and if you really 'know your stuff,' as everyone seems to think you do."

Brock nodded. "Truce it is, then. Now, how do you wish to conduct the meeting tomorrow?"

The server brought his meal and Rikki waited until they were alone again before answering his question. "I am sure Dad will make the announcement and give a little speech, welcoming you and all that. Next, I will talk. After that, you can say your piece. You and I will meet in my office, with Dad, most likely, when the meeting is over."

He saluted her. "Yes, ma'am. Guess you've done this a few times."

She looked up from her plate and said, "You know damn well I have. And, if you don't do your job, I'll be doing it again."

"So much for the truce. Simmer down, boss lady," he said, throwing his hands up in the air.

"Did you just tell me to simmer down?" she asked.

"Yes, and I'll do it again, if need be. Gonna fire me for that?"

She glared at him. "Not today."

"How about we start over? Only, this time, we table the work discussion and talk about other things. Tell me what you like to do when you aren't working."

"When would that be? I'm either on the track, practicing or racing, traveling or in the office or garage."

He shook his head. "You know what they say."

"What do 'they' say?"

"All work and no play makes Rikki a dull girl."

"Well, so what if I am dull? I have been eating, breathing and sleeping cars and racing for as long as I remember."

"Everyone needs a break, Rikki. At least once in a while. That may explain some of your stress."

"Stress? Who said I was stressed?"

"Mmm, the attitude maybe."

"I can't believe you think you can talk to me this way!" she exclaimed in disgust.

"Maybe someone should have, a long time ago. Think about it, Ms. Renard."

They finished their meal in silence. Rikki was fuming. And to make it worse, Brock was smiling and digging into his food as if no hostile words had been spoken between them. Just who in the hell did he think he was?

When she was finished eating, she picked up her purse, ready to leave.

"Leaving so soon?" he asked.

"I need to go home. I'll see you in the morning, bright and early. Thanks for dinner."

Brock stood to help her up. "If you wait a few minutes, I'll walk you out to your car."

"I guess I can do that. After all, you treated me to a burger." Her tone was slightly more friendly than before. She'd decided, during their silence, it did no good to remain miffed at him. Not if they were going to work together. She had plenty of time to train him to her ways.

Brock took one last swig of his beer, paid the tab and walked around to pull her chair out for her.

They walked out of the bar together, his hand on the small of her back. This gesture did not go unnoticed by Johnny and the others who winked at Brock as they passed their table. Rikki saw it, ignored them and noticed that Brock did the same. Score one for the new crew chief.

Outside, he waited for her to unlock her car door, helped her inside and made sure she was safely buckled in. "Drive safely and sleep well. Busy day tomorrow."

"I'll see you then, Mr. Williams. Be prepared to dive in on your first day."

Rikki backed up her car and pulled onto the road, leaving her new chief in the dust.

## Chapter Two

The next morning, at seven sharp, the crew assembled in the garage for the anticipated meeting. Richard announced that Brock was now the new crew chief and he said a few words, as Rikki had predicted. The crew congratulated Brock before Rikki stood up to speak.

"Good morning, crew. I wish to assure all of you that we are a team and we will all be working together. I feel that, under Mr. Williams' direction, we can take it to the top. I hope I can depend on all of you to give one hundred and ten percent."

Everyone nodded. Rikki saw Johnny grinning at her and she ignored him. They'd known each other for years, raced together and learned the business side by side.

Next, Brock stood before them and thanked Richard for his confidence in him. He told Rikki he would do the best job possible to keep her car running at top speed and he finished by thanking the crew for their support. After a few minutes of talking after the meeting, the rest of the crew returned to work and Brock followed the Renards into Rikki's office for a private meeting.

Once seated, with the door closed and a cup of coffee in his hand, Richard began by welcoming Brock again and going over some statistics with him. Rikki listened, saying nothing, watching her new crew chief, assessing him more thoroughly.

Yes, he was handsome, downright hot, but as she sat listening to him talking to her dad, she realized he really did know a lot about the business. She was slightly shocked at this revelation. She shouldn't have been. Enough people had told her. There was more to Brock Williams than a great body and a sexy grin, that was for sure.

"Rikki, what do you think?"

She looked from her dad to Brock. "I'm sorry, I missed that."

Her dad gave her an odd look and repeated his question. "We were discussing changing to a new compound. Goodyear has one I am interested in. What is your take on that? Johnny mentioned it the other day."

"I, uh, let me look into it. I wasn't told anything about this. Another thing Ray failed to include me in."

Brock spoke up. "I think that's a good idea. You look over the information and get with me with your thoughts, after lunch."

Richard sat back in his chair and watched the pair with interest.

Rikki replied in a surprised tone, "I will do that."

After discussing a few more items on Richard's list, he and Brock left her office. Rikki picked up the information they'd left her about the tires and began to read. Turning on her computer, she did more research online and wrote down some notes. It was nearly lunchtime by the time she looked up. She got up and walked over to the refrigerator in her office. Taking an apple and a container of yogurt out for her lunch, she went back to her desk to eat in the peace and quiet of her office.

At precisely one o'clock, she got up and went into the small lavatory in her office. She brushed her teeth, checked her makeup and fluffed her long hair. *What in the hell are you doing?* she thought to herself. *Brock Williams is no different than any other crew chief you've ever had.* So why had she taken great pains with her face, clothes and hair that morning?

Disgusted with her thoughts, she steeled herself for her meeting. Armed with her notes, she went in search of Brock. She found him talking to one of the crew members.

"Brock, I have some questions for you, can you come into my office?" she asked.

"Sure, give me five minutes to finish up here," he replied.

Rikki turned and went back to her office.

When he entered, a few minutes later, she told him to have a seat. Immediately, she began asking questions about the new compound, which he answered without hesitation.

"Okay, order a couple of sets. We'll give them a try," she said after a full half hour of discussing the pros and cons.

"I can't have them in time for Bristol but definitely for Charlotte," he told her.

"Sounds good. I need to get packed soon. We'll be leaving for Bristol in the morning, you know. I'll get with you to go over any last-minute things before I leave for the day."

He nodded and excused himself.

Rikki shut down her computer and cleaned off her desk before grabbing her bag and leaving her office. She stopped by her dad's office and checked on the time for their flight.

"Our private plane will leave the field at ten. I've asked Brock to fly with us this time, rather than with the others on the commercial flight. The rest of the crew pulls out at six. We should arrive just a short time before they do."

"Any particular reason for that?" she asked.

"His first race as the chief. We can discuss strategy on the plane," Richard said matter of factly.

"I suppose," she said absent-mindedly as she turned to go.

She stopped in the garage and spoke to Brock for a few minutes. "I guess we can go over everything on the plane tomorrow. Are the tires on order?"

"Yes, and yes," he replied as he looked down at the clipboard in his hand. "I need to take care of a few more things here. Get some rest."

Rikki started to say something but stopped herself. She was always in charge. This new guy seemed to think he was. Well, yes, the crew chief, in reality, was in charge but Rikki had never heeded that rule before. Why did she get the impression Brock Williams was going to take charge whether she liked it or not?

"Check that axle, Rodney," she heard him say as she slowly walked away.

She got into her car and drove to her condo. Kicking off her shoes, she went to the kitchen for a glass of iced tea before she began the chore of packing. One thing she'd always liked about the life was the traveling. If only she had a maid to pack and unpack for her. At home, they'd had a housekeeper and several other household employees. On her own, she didn't. She could well afford it; she just had never taken the initiative to hire anyone.

She threw a load of laundry in and went to the living room to sit down. Turning on the TV, she watched a movie until the laundry was ready for the dryer. Returning to her movie, she thought about her new crew chief again. He certainly was different. He was willing to get her opinion this morning, even patiently went over everything with her. On the other hand, he pretty much dismissed her earlier, when she had stopped to talk with him on her way out.

She wasn't sure how to take that. She would bide her time, as he was new to the job, but if this persisted, she would have to make sure he knew who was really in charge here.

The buzzer on the dryer began to sound, begging her to turn it off. She took the clothes out, folded them and carried them into her bedroom. Placing them on the bed, she walked to her large walk in closet and took her suitcase out. She opened it on the bed and began packing. Finally,



when everything was ready, several minutes later, she zipped it shut and went into the bathroom to begin gathering her toiletries.

She ordered a pizza, opened a bottle of wine and sat down in the kitchen to wait for the delivery.

The doorbell rang and she jumped up. "That was fast," she said as she grabbed some bills from her wallet and went to answer it.

"Oh, it's you. I thought you were the pizza delivery guy," she said when she opened the door and saw Brock on her doorstep.

"Sorry to disappoint you. I could have brought a pizza with me," he said with that grin of his.

"Come in. To what do I owe this impromptu visit?" she asked.

"I was busy when you left, so I thought I'd stop by and see if you need anything before we take off tomorrow."

"H-how did you know my address?" she asked.

He looked at her oddly before saying, "Your dad, of course. Is it a secret?"

"Well, no, not really, but I don't give out that information to just anybody."

"I sort of think your crew chief would be included on the list of those who know."

"Would you like a glass of wine?" she asked. "The pizza should be here soon. Join me? I guess I owe you a dinner, since you bought mine last night."

"Thank you, don't mind if I do. It's been a long day."

"So, tell me," she said as she walked to the kitchen for another wine glass, with him following. "How was your first day?"

She poured the wine and handed him the glass. "Sit down."

After they sat at her kitchen table, he answered her, "Not bad, very busy, a lot to take in. There's so much to check before a race."

"You didn't know that?"

He laughed. "Of course, I knew that. Starting the job the day before we leave for Bristol, after the former chief walked out the day before, isn't your normal, run of the mill first day on the job, you have to admit."

"True," she agreed as she took a sip of her wine and watched him over the rim of her glass.

The doorbell rang again and she jumped up. "Now, that had better be the pizza. I am starved."

She returned a few minutes later and set the pizza on the table. Going to the cupboard, she took two plates down and got forks out of the drawer before joining Brock at the table.

She put a slice on one of the plates and set it in front of him. "Eat up," she said.

After helping herself to a slice, she sat down. "Mmm, this is good," she said, after taking a bite and washing it down with wine. She started to refill her glass.

Brock looked at her, finished chewing his food, and said, "I don't think you should have any more wine the night before a trip. You'll be doing practice runs tomorrow afternoon, you know."

"Are you serious?" she asked.

"Yes, I am very serious."

"Since when is it part of your job description to tell me how much wine I can have?"

"Just looking out for your best interests. That *is* part of the job."

"Car wise, driving wise, yes. Personally, no."

"Suit yourself. Don't bitch to me on the plane in the morning when you have a wine hangover."

"Are you insinuating that I can't hold my liquor?" she asked.

"Not at all. I just want you sharp and focused out there on that track."

"I will be." She took another sip of wine for spite but set the glass down when he glared at her.

"And, yes, the pizza is good," he said as he helped himself to another slice.

She ignored him and continued eating her own food, getting up to grab a soda from the fridge. "Want one?" she asked.

"Sure, thanks," he said with *the* grin.

*Damn him and that grin!*

They discussed the upcoming race and the trip, after that. When dinner was finished, he took his leave, bidding her a good night. "I've got to get home and get my gear ready. See you at the field. Thanks for the pizza," he said when they reached her front door.

She closed the door and took a deep breath. Too much wine? Really? And why had she listened to him? Something about Brock Williams...

Shaking her head, she went back to the kitchen and cleaned up the mess before going to her room. Filling the tub with warm water and lavender scented bath salts, she undressed and slowly lowered her body into the soothing bath. She relaxed and closed her eyes, letting the aromatherapy work its magic on her tired body. When the water started to cool, she got up and dried herself, rinsed the tub and padded into the bedroom. Slipping on a t shirt and a pair of panties, she climbed into bed and slid between the cool sheets, remembering to set her alarm before she dozed off. Dreams of a sandy haired crew chief barking orders at her invaded her sleep. She tossed and turned, telling him off in her sleep. Finally, she fell into a deeper slumber and slept until the alarm went off the next morning.

Grumbling as she threw off the covers and went into the kitchen to make a cup of coffee, she recalled her dream. *Yikes! Now, I'm even dreaming about Mr. Bossy Pants.*

She popped a couple of slices of bread in the toaster and sat down to enjoy her first cup of morning caffeine. When the toast popped up, she slathered it with peanut butter and grape jelly and took a bite. "Mmm," she said aloud.

She finished her breakfast and went to the Keurig to make another cup of caramel flavored coffee before getting ready to go. She carried her coffee to the bedroom with her and chose her clothes for the flight. When she was dressed and ready to go, she grabbed her suitcase, and making sure all was in order, she locked up and went through the kitchen door to the garage. Driving to the field, she wondered how the flight would go. It would be the pilot, co-pilot, her dad, Brock and herself. Her sister, Alissa, had expressed interest in going with them. Rikki knew her sister had a secret crush on Johnny and she sometimes accompanied them to races, when her schedule allowed. She hadn't checked with her to see if she was going to be able to make it this time. There just hadn't been time.

Alissa worked in their mother's law firm, as a paralegal. Their parents had encouraged her to go to law school, but she was content with her current position. Richard and Joyce didn't push their children. They encouraged them but never pushed. Between the oil business, the racing team and the law firm, both parents kept busy and the girls were all assured of a job. Maris worked in Richard's oil firm.

She was pleasantly surprised when she pulled up at the airfield and saw Alissa's car. Yes! She would have another female with her on this trip. She had the feeling she was going to need one, with Brock along.

*What the hell is wrong with me? I have never let a guy, a crew chief, get to me like this before. Since when do I listen to anything anyone has to say? Since when do I care what anyone thinks?*

Growling to herself as she got out of the car, she started to retrieve her bags when a strong arm took hold of hers. "Let me get that for you."

She looked up into the face of none other than Brock Williams. Damn!

"I am perfectly capable of getting my bags out of the car and onto the plane."

"I have no doubt, just trying to be gentlemanly," he retorted. "You shouldn't have to do it yourself when an able-bodied man is around to do it for you."

"Chauvinist," she hissed under her breath.

"What did you just call me?" he asked with a chuckle.

"Never mind. Just do your he-man thing. I'm going to join my sister."

"You do that. Maybe some of her sweetness will rub off on you," he said, just loud enough for her to hear.

"Hmph," she huffed as she walked off, leaving him to get her bags. She threw the keys at him. "Lock it when you're done."

She walked to where Alissa was standing. "Morning. Dad here yet?" she asked.

"He's talking to the pilot. That new crew chief is pretty hot, sis," Alissa said.

"He's pretty damn bossy, is what he is," she answered with a shrug.

Alissa shot her a look, which Rikki chose to ignore. No doubt she and Johnny had been discussing her and Mr. Bossy Pants privately. They talked often on the phone. Let them. She couldn't care less.

Before long, it was time to get onboard. She and Alissa sat in one of the comfortable couch like seats, while the men sat across from them.

Once they were in the air, Brock and Richard began to talk business. Alissa was bored and got out her Kindle, leaving Rikki to listen to the men. They didn't bother to include her, which was normal. She was taken aback when Brock addressed her, asking her a question about the trailing arm on her car.

"Uh... no problems that I've noticed," she replied.

Johnny had noticed something on his car, apparently, and Damon was going to get the crew on it as soon as they arrived at the track. Brock and Damon had spoken already that morning.

Richard nodded approvingly, obviously happy with his choice in Brock.

Alissa looked up from her reading long enough to smile at them. "Just make sure Johnny is safe," she said.

"We will. That's our job," Brock said. "Damon has it all under control."

Rikki rolled her eyes. Could her sister be any more obvious? She wondered how Johnny felt about her. They'd never gone out, as far as she knew.

They landed in Bristol at lunchtime. After picking up their luggage, they had lunch in the airport while waiting for the rest of the crew to arrive with the motor coach so they could settle in. They were expected around one.

Alissa made sure she was seated next to Johnny, who had arrived on the commercial flight shortly after they had landed. Damon was with him. Her dad sat on Johnny's other side, leaving Rikki no choice but to sit beside Brock. Great!

She made it through lunch—barely. She had to bite her tongue several times. Why did she do that? She had never watched what she said in front of any other crew chief. Somehow, she got the impression that Brock wouldn't take much of her guff. That had never stopped her before. Was it possible she didn't want him walking off the job? Nah! That couldn't be it.

They took cabs to the field. When they arrived, they saw that the crews and the motor coach were already there. The girls got settled while Johnny, Damon and Brock went to talk to the two crews. Richard had business calls to make so Rikki and her sister were on their own until it was time for Rikki's practice laps.

"What do you think of Brock?" Alissa asked. "Johnny says he's a really smart guy."

"Time will tell, I suppose," Rikki answered with indifference.

"Really, sister dear, one of these days you are going to meet your match. Do you ever wonder why you never have more than three dates with a guy and why you can't keep crew chiefs?"

Rikki looked up from her unpacking and gave her younger sister 'the look'.

"Don't you care?" Alissa asked.

"At least I don't hang all over someone, like you do. Have you ever actually gone out with Johnny?"

"For your information, yes, I have. I don't hang all over him, either."

"Does Dad know this?"

"I don't know and I don't care. Why should he object, anyway?"

Rikki shook her head. "He probably wouldn't. He likes Johnny. But have you ever thought about the fact that Johnny is a driver of one of Dad's team cars? What if the two of you have a falling out?"

"Seriously? You'd refrain from dating someone you really liked because of the possibility it wouldn't work out and it would be bad for business? That's part of life, big sister. You've been too busy with your nose stuck under the hood of cars all these years to know the basics. You think you're one of the guys."

"Whatever. Now, if you are finished lecturing me, I'm going to go find out what time I need to be in the car and on the track. Some of us are here to work. Enjoy yourself."

When she found Johnny, he told her that his crew was working on his car and Brock was checking hers out with her crew.

"Are you going to be able to qualify?" she asked.

"Hopefully. I think your car's about ready to go."

She walked over to where Brock and two other crew members were checking the trailing arm on her car.

She watched and listened for a few minutes and then said, "Tighten it some more."

The men turned to look at her and went back to what they were doing.

"Are you deaf?" she asked.

Brock turned to her. "I heard you, Rikki. We've got it under control. You need to go get ready."

"You will *not* ignore me. I know what I'm talking about." She was growing angrier by the minute.

Brock gave instructions to the other men and turned to her. Grabbing her by the arm, he took her to the corner, away from the others.

"Now, you listen to me, Ms. Renard, and you listen good. You will not speak to me like that in front of my crew. It is my job to guide them and to make sure these cars are in top shape. I

appreciate your knowledge and I will take your advice, when it is given in the correct manner. Are we clear on that?"

"Who do you think you are talking to?" she asked.

"Someone who needs to learn some manners, apparently. I heard your suggestion and we were working on it. You should have waited and watched instead of running your mouth. You know, a little more sugar and a lot less vinegar would go a long way. I am not Ray or any of those other chiefs who were afraid to stand up to you. I won't walk away."

Rikki was fuming by now. She was so angry; she couldn't find the words to reply. No one had ever spoken to her that way.

"Calm yourself down before you get in that car. I need to get back to your car and then see if Damon needs any help with Johnny's. We can finish this discussion later."

Rikki turned around and walked away from him, muttering to herself all the way back to the motor coach. "Damn arrogant ass. I'll show him. Nobody talks to Rikki Renard like that. I'm not a child."