



MY REALITY APP

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CHAPTER 10: NEPOBABY SMOKE SCREEN



****Chapter 10: NePO-bAbY smoKE sCReeN****

For Scarlett, today was the day. The culmination of weeks of effort, endless planning, and, in her mind, sacrifices. In just a few minutes, all eyes would be on her. Cameras would flash, the city's elite would sip champagne, and the world—or at least the carefully curated sliver of it that mattered—would witness the unveiling of her revolutionary fashion designs.

She stood in the lavish green room of the city council's main hall, surrounded by racks of opulent garments and a team of assistants who moved with quiet efficiency. Outside, the main room buzzed with anticipation. The city's most powerful figures, including her father, the mayor, had gathered to celebrate the young designer's debut.

For Scarlett, this was destiny. The beginning of her transformation from a talented heiress into a visionary who would change the world.

The presentation would indeed leave its mark on the city. But not in the way Scarlett imagined.

Scarlett thought back to the grueling months that had led her here. Nobody understood how much she had sacrificed for this moment.



When she first conceived of the idea, she had thrown herself into assembling a team to bring her vision to life. It hadn't been easy—nothing worth doing ever was, after all. People lacked her drive, her passion. It baffled her that they couldn't match her energy. Time and again, she'd had to make “difficult” decisions, replacing assistants and team members who didn't rise to her expectations.

Scarlett had worked tirelessly—well, almost tirelessly. She had spent a full day preparing the initial presentation to the city council, seeking funds for her grand project. Her father, as always, had been a pillar of support. She knew he would see how hard she had worked and approve her proposal. He was a fair man, and she was his daughter. How could he not?

Once the funding was secured, Scarlett turned her attention to finding the perfect location for her design studio. The process had been excruciating. Over the course of two stressful weeks, she had toured countless properties, each one failing to meet her exacting standards. But finally, she had found it—a luxurious space in the city's most exclusive district. Nothing less would suffice. Her designs were destined to revolutionize fashion, and her workspace needed to reflect that ambition.

With the studio secured, Scarlett faced the daunting task of assembling a team of master tailors to bring her designs to life. Her schedule was far too demanding to personally vet candidates, so she leaned on her father's extensive network to hire the best. After all, someone with her vision couldn't be bogged down by mundane tasks like recruitment.



Scarlett needed time to find inspiration.

And so, with six weeks remaining until the big presentation, she retreated to the most expensive resort in Honolulu. The lush, sun-soaked paradise was precisely what she needed to recharge and allow her genius to flourish. For two weeks, she immersed herself in luxury, sipping cocktails by the pool and sketching her ideas against the backdrop of pristine ocean views. She deserved this. She had earned it.

When Scarlett returned from her luxurious retreat, she expected nothing less than perfection—and, naturally, that's what she found. The team was already assembled and waiting when she arrived, precisely at 12:00 o'clock. Without acknowledging their presence, Scarlett strode through the studio's pristine entrance, the click of her designer heels echoing in the silence.

Not a word passed her lips as she headed straight for her private office. After all, what needed to be said? These people should feel privileged to serve her vision, to play even the smallest role in her inevitable rise to greatness.

Inside the glass-walled sanctum of her office, Scarlett spent the next six hours isolated from the team. The designers, tailors, and assistants exchanged uneasy glances, unsure of what was expected of them. The silence was deafening. Without direction, they lingered at their workstations, their uncertainty growing with every passing minute.



At precisely 6:00 PM, Scarlett emerged, holding a stack of hastily drawn sketches in her manicured hands. She summoned the lead tailor, her tone imperious and impatient.

"These are the designs," she announced, shoving the papers into his hands.

The tailor blinked as he glanced at the pages, his stomach sinking. The "designs" were an incomprehensible mess—chaotic, disproportionate scribbles that could have been drawn by a child. None of the forms made sense. Proportions were wildly inaccurate, and the details seemed more like random doodles than actual fashion concepts.

Scarlett's voice cut through his mounting dread. "I expect these completed by tomorrow. No excuses. Make it happen."

The team was stunned, but their hands were tied. In a society that offered workers no rights, they had no choice but to comply. Throughout the night, they worked feverishly, trying to interpret the nonsense Scarlett had handed them. As professionals, they did their best to fill in the gaps, making educated guesses about what she might have intended. They left the pieces unfinished and unsewn, knowing flexibility would be crucial for adjustments—a normal part of the process when working from raw sketches.



But Scarlett didn't care about normal.

She arrived the next morning, fashionably late as always, and immediately demanded to see the progress. What awaited her was a room full of exhausted workers and a collection of half-finished garments.

Her reaction was immediate and explosive.

"What is this?! Are you all completely incompetent?!" she shrieked, her voice echoing off the studio's high ceilings. Her face twisted in fury as she pointed at the incomplete garments. "Do you call this work? Do you call this effort? It's garbage! Absolute garbage!"

The team stood frozen, their heads bowed as she continued her tirade. Scarlett didn't understand—or care—that the unfinished state of the pieces was intentional. To her, it was proof of their laziness, their utter failure to grasp her genius.

"I give you a simple task," she ranted, "and you can't even do that! You're all useless! Useless!"

Her insults grew sharper, more personal, cutting through the air like daggers. When her fury reached its peak, she turned to the lead tailor with an icy glare.



"You want an example of what happens when you fail me? Fine. A third of you are gone. Pack your things. Now."

The workers exchanged desperate, silent glances, but no one dared to protest. In this society, they had no protections, no recourse. They were disposable, and Scarlett knew it.

With a final, dismissive wave, Scarlett stormed out of the room. "I expect everything to be perfect tomorrow. No excuses. If you can't deliver, you're all gone."

The remaining team members stared at the unfinished garments, their shoulders heavy with defeat. For them, there was no choice but to keep working—no matter how impossible her demands.

That night, despite their exhaustion, the team worked tirelessly to sew the models from Scarlett's chaotic sketches. The designs were riddled with flaws, each one more impractical than the last, but the team pushed forward. Knowing Scarlett's volatile temperament, they also prepared alternative versions—pieces that incorporated their own expertise and creativity, hoping to salvage the presentation. It was their second sleepless night in a row, but their dedication resulted in extraordinary craftsmanship, even if their spirits were all but crushed.



By the time Scarlett arrived the next afternoon, the atmosphere in the studio was tense. Her entrance was as dramatic as ever, her heels clicking sharply against the polished floors. The team braced themselves as she began inspecting their work.

Her face betrayed a range of emotions as she moved between the finished garments. A concentrated frown twisted her features, occasionally giving way to slight gestures of disgust. Despite her self-absorption, even Scarlett wasn't foolish enough to overlook the effort it had taken to produce the pieces in front of her. She offered faint, begrudging approval for several of the dresses, pointing at them with a dismissive wave of her hand.

"These will do," she muttered, barely audible, before turning her attention to the rest.

Her expression darkened as she gestured at the alternatives the team had created. "Burn these," she ordered flatly. Although Scarlett didn't care for them, she believed that someone out there could make millions from something that originated from her, even without her approval.

Over the next month, the workflow settled into a brutal rhythm. The team toiled late into the nights and over weekends, stitching Scarlett's outlandish concepts into reality. While they were spared complete collapse by finally being allowed adequate sleep, the relentless schedule pushed them to their limits. Their lives revolved entirely around Scarlett's demands, leaving no room for respite or personal time.



By the end of the month, the team had completed 40 dresses—an impressive feat considering the abysmal starting point they had been given. Each design had been painstakingly refined from Scarlett's initial sketches, most of which bore the haphazard marks of someone who had spent less than an hour scribbling on paper.

Scarlett, however, saw no problem with this imbalance. To her, that hour of work was worth more than millions of hours spent by others. Her talent, in her mind, was a priceless gift to the world—a gift that deserved to be carried by the sweat and labor of those beneath her.

For the team, it was a bitter truth they had no choice but to endure.

Scarlett stood backstage, her perfectly manicured fingers clutching a copy of the speech she was about to deliver. The teleprompter would guide her through every word, but she couldn't help glancing over the script one last time. Her father, ever the pragmatist, had hired one of Hollywood's finest screenwriters to craft the speech—a concise, five-minute masterpiece of accessible, catchy phrases. Short sentences, simple words, nothing that would trip her up.



He had made it clear to the screenwriter: "Make it easy for her to understand." Scarlett never took offense at such comments. Why should she? The details didn't matter. She was a visionary, not a technician.

The main hall of the city council was packed to capacity, the air buzzing with anticipation. This wasn't just any audience; it was the elite of the country, the movers and shakers of business, politics, and culture. Each one of them had come to witness the unveiling of Scarlett's so-called "revolution in fashion."

Outside the hall, reporters jostled for position, their cameras poised to broadcast the event live to millions. Inside, trays of delicacies crafted by the nation's finest chefs floated through the crowd, carried by a small army of waiters. The scent of truffle oil, aged wines, and decadent desserts lingered in the air. Everything was perfect.

Scarlett's gaze wandered briefly to the two waiters standing near the podium. They were holding large, empty trays and seemed oddly stationary compared to their bustling peers. But Scarlett dismissed them without a second thought. It wasn't her job to worry about the details. This event was under the watchful eye of the world's best security forces. What could possibly go wrong?



Her moment had arrived.

Scarlett stepped up to the podium, the dazzling lights of the cameras illuminating her flawless makeup and meticulously styled hair. The live streams began rolling, and the room fell silent, save for the faint hum of anticipation. This was it. The moment she would change the world.

She smiled radiantly, adjusted the microphone, and began.

"Welcome, everyone, to the fashion revolution the world has been waiting for."

And then, it happened.

The two waiters flanking the podium suddenly moved in unison, their trays tilting upward. For a brief moment, the room was filled with an unexpected explosion of color as a cloud of confetti rained down over Scarlett.

The crowd gasped, but Scarlett was unfazed. Instead, she began jumping in place, clapping her hands and smiling as tears streamed down her face. To the viewers at home, it seemed as though this was all part of an elaborate performance.

For a solid minute, she reveled in the unexpected "celebration," her joy infectious enough to elicit some hesitant applause from the audience. But as time dragged on, a murmur began to ripple through the room. Something was off.



Concerned whispers filled the hall. A few attendees moved closer to Scarlett, their faces etched with confusion. "Are you alright?" one of them asked, but she didn't respond. She continued jumping and smiling, her movements robotic, her expression frozen.

Then, abruptly, the scene shifted.

The vibrant confetti clinging to Scarlett's designer gown seemed to darken, transforming into something foul. The glimmering spectacle turned into streaks of gray and brown sludge.

Gasps of horror erupted as the realization hit. Scarlett wasn't covered in confetti—she was drenched in sewage.

The stench hit next, unmistakable and revolting. Scarlett's face, once radiant with joy, contorted into sheer terror. Tears of happiness were replaced with tears of horror as she stared down at her hands, her gown, her entire body, now slick with filth. Streams of sludge dripped from her hair, slithering down her face in nauseating trails.

Screams erupted in the crowd.

Security forces sprang into action, alarms blaring as the automated doors of the city council slammed shut. Attendees scrambled for safety, shielding their noses and mouths from the overwhelming stench.



But it was too late.

The two waiters who had orchestrated the spectacle were already gone, having slipped away unnoticed during the initial chaos. They had left no trace but the overwhelming evidence dripping from Scarlett's ruined dress.

William's phone buzzed with an urgent call just as he was preparing to resume his surveillance. He sat near the window of his rented apartment, his eyes fixed on Sofia's building, waiting for her to begin her usual walk through the park. She was minutes away from stepping outside when the call came through.

The voice on the other end left no room for negotiation: the mayor himself demanded William's presence immediately.

The weight of the summons sank into William's chest. Ignoring the mayor wasn't an option. The man wasn't just the city's political leader; he was a powerful figure on Reality Labs' executive board. Defying such authority wasn't just career suicide—it was dangerous.

William pulled up the system feed on his terminal, quickly reviewing the incident at the city council hall. The footage was chaotic and damning. He watched as the waiters threw what appeared to be confetti over Scarlett. At first, it seemed like an innocuous—if absurd—stunt. But then the illusion shattered, replaced by the grim, undeniable truth. The confetti wasn't confetti at all.



By the time the sewage began dripping from Scarlett's ruined gown, William's instincts were screaming. This wasn't just a prank—it was a calculated, humiliating attack. And whoever was behind it wasn't sloppy. They had timed the reveal perfectly to capture the attention of the entire world.

As William continued watching, unease settled deep in his gut. This was the type of hacking attack he had been investigating over the last months, but something about this act didn't fit the pattern he had been tracking.

So far, the culprits—whoever they were—had flown under the radar. Even the murder of Allison, while tragic, had been handled as an isolated incident, barely making headlines. Reality Labs had seen to that. Such murders weren't unheard of; overworked employees snapping under corporate pressure was an unpleasant but accepted reality.

But this? This attack had thrust the system's failures into the global spotlight. Every media outlet was broadcasting the footage, dissecting it frame by frame. This wasn't staying under the radar. This was a message.

William's instincts whispered another possibility: a distraction.

His jaw tightened. If this was meant to divert his attention, it was working. He couldn't ignore the mayor's summons, but leaving Sofia unmonitored for even a moment felt like playing into someone's hands.



He didn't have a choice. He needed someone he could trust—not for their integrity, but for their willingness to operate outside the system's watchful eye. Someone who wouldn't hesitate to handle the task off-the-books.

He dialed a number and waited.

"Cole," he began as the line connected. "We've got a task that needs handling. Surveillance on a subject named Sofia Carter—basic procedure, nothing complicated."

Cole's irritation was immediate. "Surveillance? What for? I've got enough on my plate, William. Can't you find someone else?"

William exhaled slowly, carefully calibrating his response. The system monitored everything. Conversations had to be precise. He shifted the tone subtly, invoking a code the police forces had quietly developed to evade surveillance.

"This falls under standard procedure B5," he said, emphasizing the code.

There was a pause. Cole's tone shifted, the irritation giving way to curiosity. "B5, huh? And how are the reports being filed?"



William replied evenly, "Administrative system type C."

The silence on the other end lingered just long enough to confirm Cole understood. A "B5" operation meant this was unofficial, a covert task outside the system's purview. "Type C" meant there would be no formal documentation—only discreet payment for a job done in the shadows.

"Alright," Cole said at last, his tone now devoid of protest. "I'll take care of it. You'll get what you need."

William ended the call, his hand lingering on the phone as he stared back out the window. Sofia's silhouette appeared briefly, pausing by the curtains before disappearing again. His instincts gnawed at him.

He couldn't shake the feeling that he was being watched—that they knew he was onto them.

Thomas Cole was a man of blunt precision. Rough around the edges, with a temperament that leaned toward aggression, he wasn't the kind of officer you'd describe as diplomatic. But when he accepted an order, he followed it to the letter, no deviations, no questions. That's why people like William trusted him for the dirty jobs.



Twenty minutes after William's call, Cole met him near Sofia's apartment. He didn't need much of an explanation to know why William was under pressure. Cole had caught the tail end of the now-infamous live stream, thanks to his wife calling him over to see the spectacle. Watching one of the most entitled public figures in the city drenched in filth was the highlight of his week. The brief glimpse of Scarlett's humiliation had been worth every second.

William laid out the task: simple surveillance. Keep a watch on Sofia, record her actions, and pay close attention to anyone she contacted or interacted with.

It wasn't complicated, but Cole knew better than to underestimate a job. If William was pulling strings to assign this off-the-books, there was something deeper going on. Still, Cole didn't ask questions. Extra money was extra money.

Sofia left her apartment just as William finished briefing him. Without wasting a moment, Cole began tailing her. He kept his distance, slipping into the role of an unnoticed observer with the ease of someone who had been doing it for nearly three decades.



Surveillance was Cole's specialty. Over the years, he had honed the art of blending into his surroundings, maintaining just the right amount of distance to avoid detection. As Sofia moved through the city's late-afternoon streets, he adjusted his pace, staying close enough to see her but far enough to avoid suspicion.

The streets were beginning to empty, most people retreating to their homes to lose themselves in soap operas, sports games, or their preferred digital addictions. By the time Sofia entered the park, the crowds had thinned considerably.

The park was well-lit, its artificial ambiance casting soft glows across the pathways and the surface of a small, serene lake. It was the kind of place people came to escape the monotony of their lives—quiet, picturesque, and safe. With My Reality always active, the odds of any crime going unnoticed were slim to none. Criminals had long learned to avoid such areas.

Sofia strolled leisurely, her movements unhurried. After a few minutes, she stopped by a bench near the lake. Sitting down, she drew out a large book and began to read.

Cole settled into a comfortable rhythm, keeping his distance while keeping her in view. For the next hour, Sofia barely moved, her attention fixed on the book. She turned the pages at a steady pace, seemingly absorbed in its contents. At first glance, it was an easy assignment—a little too easy.



But something gnawed at Cole.

He couldn't pinpoint it, but something about the scene felt... off. His sharp instincts, honed through years of fieldwork, began to nag at him. Sofia was turning pages normally, one after the other, but the book seemed enormous—far larger than anything a casual reader would bring for a leisurely stroll. Despite her consistent pace, it didn't look like she was making any progress through the volume.

It was a subtle thing, and Cole couldn't quite explain why it bothered him. Everything seemed normal, at least on the surface. The My Reality feed displayed the scene with the same clarity as always, its filters augmenting reality without gaps or anomalies. Yet, the unease remained.

Still, he stayed focused, doing what he did best: watching. No detail escaped him, his sharp eyes following every movement Sofia made. Whatever the odd feeling was, Cole dismissed it as just another quirk of the job. For now, it was easy money.

Once Luca confirmed that the police officer surveilling Sofia was seeing the carefully crafted loop of her reading on the bench, he knew it was time to act. Everything had unfolded according to plan so far, even with William's backup officer now in play.



Luca and Henry had anticipated this possibility. They knew William, even while operating unofficially, had the resources to escalate the situation. That's why they had prepared for contingencies.

Fortunately, Thomas Cole didn't have the security microchip that made hacking into William's systems impossible. With Cole's vulnerabilities, Luca was able to execute his plan. He had captured a convincing loop of Sofia sitting and reading, complete with an unchanging scene surrounding her. By hacking into Cole's contact lenses, Luca fed the officer the loop, effectively freezing Sofia's apparent actions in Cole's augmented reality feed. The illusion extended beyond Sofia herself, replacing the entire area around the bench to ensure Luca could approach undetected.

For six months, Luca had observed Sofia carefully. He knew her routines, her habits, and, more importantly, her temperament. She was no fool—an intelligent, calm individual who handled tense situations with grace. He had watched her resolve conflicts among students with a rare mix of empathy and authority, always seeking a solution that worked for everyone.

Luca also knew that deception wouldn't work. Someone as perceptive as Sofia would see through a lie immediately. He needed to approach her with the truth, but the situation's danger meant he couldn't afford to let her flee. Everything hinged on her staying put.



Steeling himself, Luca moved silently behind her, every step precise and deliberate. As he approached, he played his first card.

"Sofia," he said, his voice low but firm, "I know you can turn off your contact lenses completely. I know you're off the system right now. Please, stay still unless you want to lose that privilege."

The words hit Sofia like a lightning bolt. She froze, her mind racing, alarm coursing through her veins.

Luca pressed on, his tone softening slightly to reassure her. "Even if you don't believe me, I want to assure you that I mean no harm." He paused briefly, watching her. She remained frozen, her sharp mind likely weighing her options. He added, "Now, I'm going to sit next to you and explain myself. Please, understand that if you run, you could lose everything. I need you to confirm that you understand."

Sofia's voice trembled, but it carried a thread of confidence, her willpower keeping her fear at bay. "...I understand," she said, barely audible.

Luca circled the bench slowly and sat beside her, maintaining a careful distance. Sofia's body was tense, her eyes fixed on the lake as if searching for an escape.



"I'm really sorry we have to meet under these circumstances," Luca began, his tone genuinely apologetic.

Sofia said nothing, her fear tightly controlled but still visible in the way her hands gripped the book in her lap.

"My name is Luca," he continued. "And right now, I'm also off the system. The system cannot hear or see us, as long as we stay seated on this bench."

Her eyes widened slightly at his words. The ability to completely disable the system was reserved for the most powerful corporate executives, a privilege granted only to a select few. That she still had access to this feature was an anomaly—a remnant of some powerful intervention in her favor.

But Luca's claim that he, too, was off the system was harder to believe. How could someone outside the corporate elite achieve such a feat? She remained silent, her mind racing to reconcile this unexpected encounter with the reality she had always known.

Luca studied her carefully. She wasn't panicking; instead, she seemed to be calculating, weighing the truth of his words against the risk of her situation. That was good. It meant she was listening.



The silence stretched between them, heavy with unspoken tension. Luca knew the next words he spoke would determine whether Sofia stayed to hear him out—or if everything they had planned would fall apart.

"Yeah, it's a hard thing to accept," Luca said, his voice steady but tinged with gravity. "That's why I need to say this—to prove it to you. Something that, in fact, is the absolute truth."

He took a deep breath, his eyes locking with hers. The weight of his next words hung in the air like a storm about to break.

"I'm going to take down Reality Labs. I will destroy the My Reality app. Everyone will be free..." He paused, letting the enormity of his statement sink in before finishing. "And you're going to help me."

Sofia's reaction was immediate and visceral. She shot to her feet. Her hands trembled as she clutched the book to her chest, her face pale with terror.

"What—" she stammered, her voice barely above a whisper, as her gaze darted around the park. Any moment now, the security forces would descend upon them. The weight of Luca's words felt like a noose tightening around her neck.



Her breathing quickened, her chest heaving with panic. Running seemed futile, but her instincts screamed at her to move, to flee. Yet, somehow, she didn't. Some deeply buried sense of logic, or perhaps sheer survival instinct, forced her trembling body to sit back down.

Her mind spiraled with fear, her heart pounding uncontrollably as tears welled in her eyes. This is it, she thought. This is the end.

The seconds dragged on, each one feeling like an eternity.

One minute, two, three... Sofia sat frozen, every sound in the park amplified in her heightened state of terror.

Four minutes, five, six... Her eyes darted to the shadows, waiting for security forces to burst out, waiting for the inevitable.

Seven minutes, eight, nine... Luca sat silently beside her, his face etched with quiet sorrow, his presence both unnerving and oddly grounding.

Ten minutes, eleven, twelve... Slowly, doubt began to creep into Sofia's mind. The system's response to such a blatant threat should have been immediate—a helicopter roaring overhead, boots hitting the ground. But nothing happened.



Thirteen minutes. Fourteen. Fifteen... Sofia's breathing began to slow, her mind racing to reassess. Could Luca really be telling the truth? If the system hadn't responded, did that mean they truly were off the grid?

Her tears slowed, her terror ebbing into a strange, exhausted calm. She glanced at Luca, who sat quietly, his posture apologetic.

"I'm really sorry to have put you through that," he said, his voice soft but sincere. "Believe me, I didn't have a choice. Please... I beg you. Give me a chance to explain."

Sofia's voice was still trembling, but it carried a new edge of cold resolve. "Do I have a choice?"

Luca met her gaze. "Yes, you do. But that choice could mean losing the only opportunity we have to end this nightmare of a society. And I know," he added, his tone firm, "that you hate this society as much as I do."

Sofia looked away, her eyes drifting to the darkening sky. The first stars were beginning to emerge, faint against the fading glow of the horizon. Her body ached with residual tension, and her mind struggled to reconcile the events of the last few minutes.



She didn't accept Luca's extreme actions—not yet. But she understood them. In a world as broken as theirs, desperation could drive people to extraordinary lengths.

Finally, she spoke, her voice quieter but steady. "I'm listening."

After an hour of watching Sofia sit on the bench and read what seemed like an endless book, Thomas Cole observed her stand up and leave the park. The session had been uneventful—apart from that faint, nagging sensation that something was slightly off.

Still, Sofia's behavior had been outwardly normal. Cole had done his job, meticulously recording the feed for William to analyze later. If there was something hidden in the details, it wasn't Cole's problem to uncover it. His role was to watch and record, not to interpret. That was someone else's responsibility.

As he tailed Sofia on her way back to her apartment, Cole began to notice subtle changes in her demeanor. At the park, she had seemed relaxed, her body language loose and unguarded. But now, there was something different.



To an untrained eye, her movements might still appear calm, but Cole had spent decades reading people. He could tell when someone was faking composure. Sofia's pace was steady, her gaze forward, but there was tension in the set of her shoulders, a rigidity that hadn't been there before.

She was hiding something.

The thought sent a ripple of curiosity through Cole. He scanned the surroundings as they walked, his eyes darting over every alley, doorway, and passerby, looking for any sign of a clandestine exchange. A nod, a glance, even the smallest gesture could betray a meeting. But there was nothing.

Sofia entered her apartment building without incident, disappearing behind the door as it clicked shut.

Cole lingered outside for a moment, his instincts chewing at him. Something had happened in that park—he was pretty sure of it. But whatever it was, it had left no visible trace. No contacts, no signals, no tangible evidence. He'd tell William everything when he returned from his meeting with the mayor. It was William's job to dissect the footage and make sense of it. Cole's task was complete.



As he walked back toward his car, Cole allowed himself a small, satisfied grin. He had done the job with precision, exactly as instructed, and the extra cash from this off-the-books gig was already earmarked for a little indulgence. He thought about the whiskey he'd been eyeing at the corner shop and how it would taste tonight.

For Cole, this was just another job well done.