

Circles within Circles
Chapter One – Prologue
November 2021

Night had fallen. It lay now, dark and immeasurably heavy, over the city below. Stabs of light struggled bleakly upward: headlights and stoplights and warning lights. But the night was too deep, and the glimmers faded silently into the darkness, impotent against the brooding black of the starless void.

Through the night she came. Her step was quick, brisk as a dutiful servant. If any onlooker had been close enough to observe, in the sickly green light of a nearby traffic signal they might have caught a glimpse of her face. A pair of grey eyes, guarded and apprehensive. A wisp of dirty blonde hair that had slipped free from beneath her hood. Pale lips, tight-drawn as if in anxiety.

And then she was gone: disappearing down a deserted alley like a silent shadow.

No casual onlooker could have noticed the crevice she slipped into. No one would possibly have observed the silent swing of the door that received her, nor would anyone have heard the light click of the lock behind her. And assuredly no one else could have known where her hurried steps now took her: down the dimly lit hall, the rustle of her coat and the click of her heels echoing strangely through the concrete passage...

But she knew. She knew exactly where she was going. She'd been there before, after all... even if she recoiled from the memories.

The distant pulse of some subterranean bass came to her ears now, and as she strode forward, she found her own steps falling inevitably into time with the dull, primal beat. It was as if she'd found the heart of the vast city itself, thrumming steadily and unceasingly somewhere in the dim spaces beyond. And still she went forward, lips compressed to control their trembling, fingers clenching as if in readiness to defy the power below...

Only they too began to clench in time with the beat.

By the time the red-lit outline of the final doorway appeared before her, her chest was rising and falling in quick, fluttering breaths. She was here: at last. As commanded. She had that going for her. Of course there was nothing to be afraid of. Nothing to hide, nothing to worry about-

"PASSWORD!"

She nearly leapt out of her skin, her entire body jolting with the shot of adrenaline that the stentorian voice had bellowed at her. But, hiding her frightened eyes in the shadow of her hood, she gulped back her fear, forcing her unsteady knees to stand firm as she gazed up into the tattoo-covered face of the guard who now blocked her path. She knew it. She had to say it, to say it firmly and without a hint of fear-

"Garibaldi," she announced, her voice high and unnaturally loud in her ears. "I'm here on Queen B's request. She-"

"Yeh, yeh, shet it," the fellow growled, even as he stepped heavily aside. "Save it fah her, then." Thus encouraged, the woman stepped onward, resisting the urge to gaze any longer at the fellow's burly form and leather-clad muscles. No time to wonder where he'd come from – or how he'd come here in the first place. Time to go forward, to let everyone see how dutifully compliant she was with the Queen's demands...

The room through which she stepped now was no palace – in fact, quite the opposite. Steel beams and bare concrete formed the vast hall before her, with small alcoves rimmed in steel railings and metallic fixtures ringing three of the four sides. In each of these alcoves she could see people – or rather, bodies: naked, bound, panting, struggling each in their own grotesque frenzy of pain, or lust, or terror. Throughout the echoing chamber resounded not only the heavy thumping pulse of the ever-present bass, but the crack of leather on skin. Muffled cries of ecstasy. Hoarse voices issuing commands. Pathetic wails and pleas for mercy.

But none of that mattered – not now. For on the far end of the massive chamber, crimson and brilliant with light amid the otherwise dim chamber, rested a giant divan... and on it, lying in supreme indolence, lay the scantily-clad, bejeweled form of a woman.

Not just any woman. Queen B.

"At last," she muttered as the young woman halted before her and dropped to one knee in a quick courtesy. "I was about to sent Grunt to fetch you." She eyed the kneeling figure through mascara-rimmed eyes: coldly calculating eyes, eyes that seemed to pierce right through to one's soul. "But that won't be necessary – not this time, Number 27547."

The figure before her flinched as the five separate numbers rang out, cold as the iron links of a

chain. "Yes, Queen B. You- you wanted to see me-" "Indeed I did," Queen B cut in with an imperious wave of her ring-covered hand. "I'm sure you remember all about our little arrangement. That little affair last year that left you deep in my debt. At the time you said you'd serve me in any way I asked, as I recall..." She smiled at last – a grim, meditative smile that curled her thick, blood-red lips into a supercilious sneer.

"I'll collect that debt now, Number 27547."

The kneeling woman's face, already pale, blanched beneath her hood. But still she ducked her head in a dutiful nod. "Yes- yes, Queen B. What... may I do for you?" Her voice was low, with the barest hint of a quaver. This was no time to grovel, to show fear. She had to show composure, deference, total and unquestioning obedience to whatever this woman might ask...

"I've become tired of my latest subs," Queen B offered at last, by way of explanation. "They're just so... pathetic. No fight left in them anymore." She raised herself on one elbow and glanced meditatively down at her jewel-encrusted fingers. "And of course, it's always the same things. Cocks and asses and whips and chains. So incredibly cliché. So... boring."

She leaned forward now, dark eyes alight in her heavily made up face. "But you, Number 27547. You're new. Fresh. Different." She sniffed in sudden exasperation at her visitor's downcast posture. "Come, now. Look at me when I'm complimenting you!" Which the now-trembling young woman did: grey eyes locking with brown, the Queen reveling in the quailing obedience and trepidation she saw in them.

"You're going to train me a new sub," she breathed now, eyes still locked with those of her visitor. "You are going to go out there and find me a new toy. A young one, virgin if you can find him." "Him?" Number 27547 murmured uncertainly, and Queen B gave a curt nod. "Yes, *him*. Cock size doesn't matter. What does matter" – and here she flashed another dangerous leer – "is that he be trained as a B-class. I'm commanding you, Number 27547: train him and deliver him here to me. One B-class male sub by the end of May. Got that?"

The grey eyes blinked, a flicker of confusion showing that Number 27547 wasn't certain what this B-class involved. "Oh, away with you!" Queen B barked now with an impatient wave of her glittering hand. "I have neither time nor patience to explain it all to you *again*. Grunt. Grunt! Come here, will you?" She sank back onto her divan and waved one chubby, copper-colored arm imperiously toward her visitor. "Show out our visitor... and make sure to have her visit our old B-classes on the way out. Just to freshen her memory..."

The audience was clearly over – if not from Queen B's words, then certainly from the startling appearance of a short, thick-set fellow from the curtains behind the divan. He was undeniably repulsive: blessed with four chins, a pair of pig-like eyes, and not a hair left on his head. Clad as he was in little more than a harness of brown leather and tarnished chains, one could catch repeated glimpses of poorly executed tattoos adorning his corpulent body. As for his mouth, it was completely obstructed by the massive leather muzzle that set his entire face into the semblance of a muzzled beast. Indeed, it was the muzzle that had given him his role and his name: a surly, obsequious, voiceless Grunt whose only purpose in life was to please his Queen.

Grunt stepped forward now, motioning the kneeling girl to follow him back toward one of the alcoves. But as Number 27547 gave a last quick bow and turned away to follow obediently in the monstrous Grunt's heavy steps, the Queen's voice called once more, high and strong and mocking behind her.

"You know what will happen if you let me down, Number 27547. Remember *that*, if nothing else. Remember... and be afraid."