

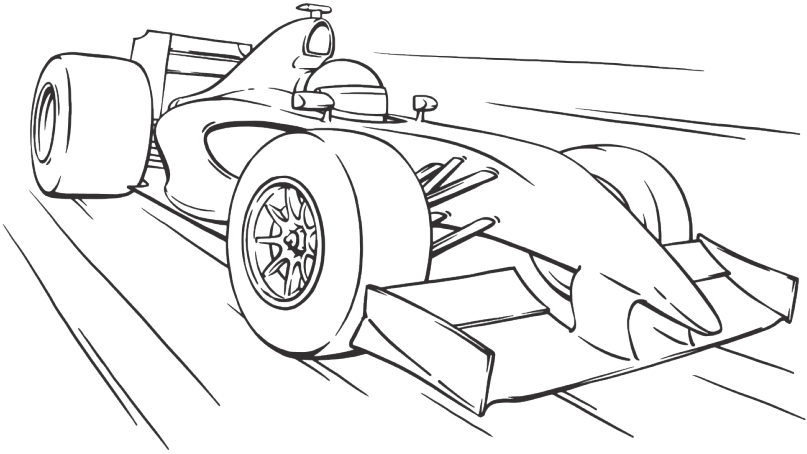
LAUREN ASHER

# Throttled

DIRTY AIR BOOK 1



Amsterdam · Antwerpen



## PROLOGUE

*Noah*

### TWO YEARS EARLIER

**I**nhale deeply, welcoming the smell of rubber and engine exhaust before I pull down the visor on my helmet. Gloved hands grip the steering wheel of my Bandini Formula 1 race car, my fingers trembling from the engine's vibrations while the metal hood rattles. The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix crowd bursts with excitement as the crew pulls off my tire warmers. Yesterday's successful qualifier sets me up in a first-place grid spot, and as long as I don't fuck it up, the World Championship title will be mine for the taking.

One by one, red lights illuminate above me, shining off the hood's glossy red paint. Fans silently wait. Lights shut off to signal the start of the Grand Prix. I press against the throttle,

and my car rushes down the straight road before I pull up to the first turn. Tires skid across the pavement, squeals sounding off behind me from other drivers. But I suffer from tunnel vision on the track. It's just me and the road.

"Noah, I want to let you know Liam Zander's behind you, followed by Jax Kingston and Santiago Alatorre. Keep up the pace and mind your turns." The team principal's voice carries over the radio in my helmet.

I stay defensive of my position, making it difficult for anyone to overtake my car at the turns. The hum of the engine fills me with exhilaration as I speed down another straight at over two hundred miles per hour. Fans scream as I pass them. My foot presses on the brake seconds before I make another turn, soft tires screeching against the asphalt. Music to my ears.

The first few laps of the race go without a hitch. Adrenaline flows through my body as Liam's car comes up next to mine at one of the curves, the recognizable steel-gray paint glistening under the desert sun. His engine roars. I pull a risky move, pushing on the brake a few seconds later than recommended for a curb. Metal trembles as the right tires lift off the ground before slamming back down. Liam pulls back, unable to pass me, as my car surges forward.

A mechanic talks into the radio. "That was a dangerous turn. Relax out there, you still have fifty-two more laps to go. No reason to drive cocky."

I chuckle at the advice. After a grueling season fighting off Liam, Santiago, and Jax, I have one last Grand Prix between me and the World Championship win.

"Santiago cut in front of Liam at the last turn. Don't underestimate him, he wants the win." More chatter echoes through the radio.

Speak of the devil, Santiago's royal blue car shows up in my side

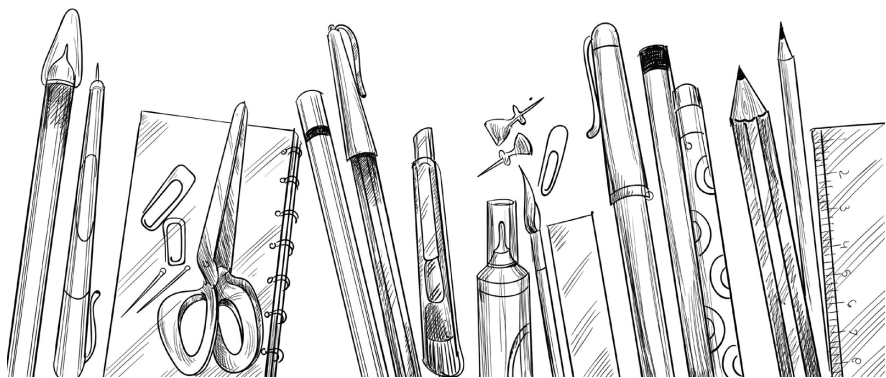
LAUREN ASHER

*Collided*

DIRTY AIR BOOK 2



Amsterdam · Antwerpen



## PROLOGUE

*Sophie*

### THREE YEARS AGO

Do you know what happens when people turn eighteen? They have nights filled with freedom, exploration, and boxed wine. For me, eighteen doesn't look the same—at least not yet.

James Mitchell smells trouble a mile away with his exposure to Formula 1's bad-boy racers teaching him a thing or two about handling a daughter. Ever since we moved from California to Italy when I was five years old, I get the same treatment as the Bandini drivers he manages. In his house, I adhere to his three Rs: respect, rules, and responsibilities.

My dad let me join him for one Grand Prix this summer before starting my university classes. A rare occasion, seeing how he has kept me away from the race scene ever since I grew boobs and learned what clothes flatter my body shape.

This morning, I trudged my feet through our hotel room, arms crossed over my chest, and bottom lip fully displayed in a pout.

My dad kept his face neutral with not a single gray hair out of place, unblinking and unwavering as I protested his plan.

Guess who won that battle? Not me, in case you were wondering, but thanks for the moral support.

Instead of hanging out in Bandini's pit garage, my dad volunteered me to dress like a princess for a kid's birthday party while I paint kids' faces. Don't let looks deceive you, I may be the same height as the eight-year-olds running around, but my brains, wit, and sass make up for my small stature.

I'm kind of like a lemon Starburst—sweet but packs a punch.

I run my hands down my ridiculous Rapunzel costume my dad bought. Joke's on him this time because he didn't realize he grabbed me a kid's size. Velvet material barely contains my breasts, suggesting I want to offer way more than candy and face painting to unsuspecting partygoers. The skirt rests above my mid-thigh, revealing tan legs and white Converse because this princess wears comfortable shoes. Screw heels and being a royal pain in the ass who needs to be protected by a pretty prince.

No thank you. I'd rather save the day in sneakers.

I ditch the sour attitude once I arrive at the party. Face painting can be a cool gig, letting me show off artistic talents I tamper down into nothing nowadays.

See, I've loved art ever since I picked up a paintbrush at two years old and decided to paint all over the canvas stools in our kitchen while under the influence of too many *Bob Ross* episodes. My dad wasn't amused when he sat on wet paint and rocked an imprint of a sunflower on his ass. I'd love to say an artist was born that day, but my dad didn't support my creativity as anything more than a hobby.

So now, instead of pursuing a degree in anything art related, I'm forced to attend a college tailored toward business degrees.

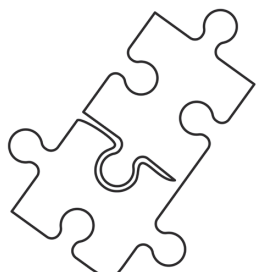
LAUREN ASHER

# Wrecked

DIRTY AIR BOOK 3



Amsterdam · Antwerpen



## PROLOGUE

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO

*Elena*

“*I*f you’re not ready in five minutes then you don’t get a story. You may be twelve years old now, but your bedtime is still at eight.” My dad’s voice booms through the halls of our second-story house.

I rush toward my bathroom. I’m a girl on a mission, hurrying through my bedtime routine since my homework took extra long today. After brushing my teeth, I rapidly pull my wavy hair into a braid and swap out my contacts for glasses.

I make it to my bed with thirty seconds to spare, jumping onto the soft mattress with a loud thud. *Papi’s* footsteps echo through the hall as he pops his head in to check on me. I shoot him a large grin as I cross my legs and clasp my hands.

He opens the door wider, his brown eyes staring me down. “Should I check if you flossed?”

I shake my head from side to side while fighting a giggle.



“The payment for your next dentist visit should come out of your piggy bank.”

“I promise to do it tomorrow. I’m dying to read with you, and homework took forever. Why can’t I go to school with all my friends? They’re done with their work in an hour.”

Ever since my dad became an ambassador for Mexico a few years ago, our lives have changed. I was enrolled in a private school, we moved to a better neighborhood, and now we have money to go on a few vacations. Mami stays home while *Papi* travels to and from the United States, working on important things with the government.

“Because one day you’ll thank me for forcing you to attend an American school. All those hours I spend putting away bad people and fixing Mexico are paying off.”

“But they make me speak English all day,” I whine.

He taps my scrunched nose. “And what a great accent you have now. I’m glad the tuition is worth it. I look forward to the day you’ll walk across the graduation stage at an American university.”

He sits next to me, my bed dipping under his weight as he presses against me. He opens my copy of *The Hunger Games* to the last chapter we left off on, ready to start our nightly tradition. With his position, comes a lot of responsibilities, including missing our reading nights.

“Are you ready to get started?” My dad flashes me the chapter page.

“Yes, yes, yes!”

“You know the deal.” He brushes aside a loose wave, which escaped my braid.

I fight the urge to roll my eyes into the back of my head. “Yup. You start, I finish. Woo. Let’s get this going.” I swirl my finger in a motion telling him *less talking, more reading*.

His rough voice picks up right where we left off two weeks ago.

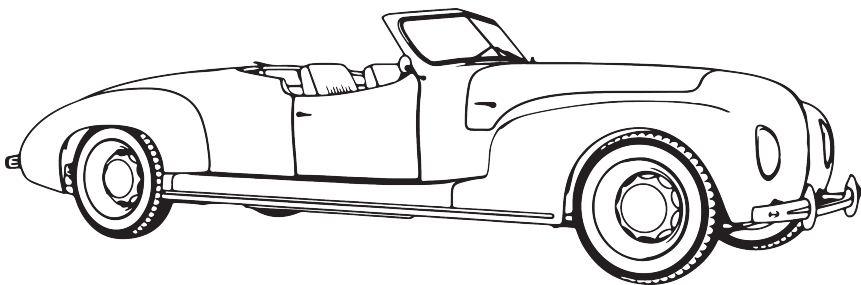
LAUREN ASHER

*Redeemed*

DIRTY AIR BOOK 4



Amsterdam · Antwerpen



## PROLOGUE

*Santiago*

### THREE YEARS AGO

Crowds of fans roar in the distance, fueling the adrenaline building up inside of me. The Silverstone Prix lights reflect off the hood of my red Bandini car. Sweat trickles down my back from the heat of the vibrating engine behind me.

I take a deep breath and hold it as each of the five Prix lights shuts off.

*Vamos.* I press down on the throttle. My car squeals as it rushes past the first straight. Noah, my brother-in-law and the best F1 racer, leads the group of drivers. His rear bumper stays within touching distance as I turn past the first corner behind him.

The post-rain humidity makes my helmet's shield foggy as we race lap after lap. Slick roads challenge my skills and my tires.

I lift the protective visor an inch, allowing the hot air from my mouth to escape through the gap in the helmet.

My lungs tighten with each heavy breath. I push through exhaustion and attempt to get around Noah's car. He keeps to the center of the track, making it impossible to take over his first-place spot.

"Get better control of your car on turn four. You're driving sloppy because it's wet out there," James Mitchell, Bandini's team principal, speaks into my earpiece.

"Got it." I grip my steering wheel tighter, focusing on the road.

Turn after turn, I match Noah's speed. Although he's family and my teammate, we both crave beating each other as often as we can. But together, we work as an unstoppable Bandini force competing against everyone else.

Noah enters the pit lane in need of new tires, leaving the track and his first-place spot open for me. It's my moment of opportunity.

Everything counts. Every breath, every wheel rotation, every damn second ticking away.

The pace of my heart increases as I pass another blurring Grandstand filled with cheering fans. My body hums with a rush of energy. It's a feeling unparalleled to anything else. I've never been high a day in my life, but I assume it feels like this—exhilarating and untouchable. I smile behind my helmet as I drive by the crowds.

Noah returns full force and speeds around me at the latest straight. His tires shriek as he presses on the brakes at a corner.

I jab the button to switch gears. "Bastard. Always trying to steal the spotlight."

"Our computers show that there's a light shower coming in. For fuck's sake, watch for the wet patches and don't crash into Noah." James's voice echoes through my ear.