

On Fractured Ground: Book 1 of the Shattered Lives Chronicles
Short Excerpt from Chapter 8: What He Can't Control

Chase stormed up to the limo, threw himself inside and slammed the door. "You're an asshole!"

Corbin blinked. "What did I do?"

"Don't pull that shit with me. You know exactly what I'm talking about!"

"I think you need to calm down. And why did you tell her I made another threat? Should we have held her back longer?"

It no longer mattered. He was done. "Why the hell was she asking if you were a skill trainer?"

Corbin's eyes went distant.

What Corbin should've said was *Gee, Chase, I don't know what she was talking about. Or maybe Golly, she must have me confused with someone else. Or how about Aw shucks, I look like my father, so she thinks she's seen me before.* But no. Corbin sat there looking like he needed to think on it for a bit. "What are you hiding?"

"Nothing. It's over, you can go back to your normal life."

"You have got to be kidding." Neither of them had the luxury of a normal life. They were condemned to digging out the rot this underground world had tainted them with. They would forever live with awful memories and depraved secrets. Alone, with no one but each other. Given how much he hated Corbin right now, maybe this was justice.

His lungs froze with an urge to punish both Corbin and Tylar for forgetting his existence back there. He wanted them to pay.

He rubbed his face. "Jesus, Corbin. What have you done to me?"

"What are you talking about?"

His hands slid down the sides of his face. "I wanted to teach her a lesson for the way she was acting."

Corbin's demeanor shifted toward a lurking madness. He spoke with loaded slowness. "You didn't, did you?"

"No. Don't look so goddamn worried."

"Why would I be worried?"

He could not possibly be that obtuse. "Oh, come on! After the way you were acting back there?"

Corbin looked out of the window. Same bullshit he always pulled when he didn't want to talk about something. He was shutting down the conversation, and it drove Chase insane.

"Admit it. You're attracted to Tylar, and it infuriates you. That's why you go out of your way to threaten and intimidate her. You know it doesn't work, right?" Chase sneered. "She's not scared of you."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Corbin said with forced evenness.

Oh, he had Corbin's number, all right. "Want to know why it pisses you off?"

"Stop."

Not a chance. "It pisses you off because Tylar is a student, and you can't control the arrogant hard-on she gives you. She played you like a puppet back there. Probably did the same thing the last time, too, didn't she? Pulled all your strings, only that time I'll bet she got you all hot and bothered—"

"Enough!"

"I'll just bet that's what pisses you off the most," he said. "Corbin Manning. The man who has to be in control of everything can't handle his own lust. You know she was raped four days ago, right? Maybe you will end up just like your father, after all—"

Stars of light burst in his vision. He leaned his head back and pinched the bridge of his nose as blood poured down the front of his shirt. After a few moments of crackling silence, Corbin smacked his knuckles against the black glass behind his head.

Jimmy lowered the privacy window, something Corbin should've been perfectly capable of doing himself with his own button. "Yeah, Boss?"

"Can you hand me a rag or a Kleenex?" Corbin's voice was filled with rage, probably at the comparison to his father. "Chase had a mishap and is bleeding from his nose."

"Hell of a mishap," Chase muttered.

Corbin thrust a handkerchief at him. Chase held it over his nose and sat back in the seat, applying pressure to stanch the flow. It didn't feel broken. Corbin either pulled the punch or the blow didn't land right. Still, it hurt like hell.

Neither of them spoke for the rest of the ride. Chase thought venting would alleviate the animosity. Now everything hurt worse.