

Ruins of Trust

Saanvi B. (author) Nitya K. (editor)

Summary

In a futuristic, dystopian city, Detective Jax investigates Nara Fontaine, an inventor whose hopeful work challenges the oppressive Agency. Torn between duty and justice, he finds his allegiances tested, setting up a conflict with Rurik that might cost him everything he just began to believe in

The city was dying long before I met her- I just didn't know I'd be holding the match when it caught fire. Neon signs flickered like dying fireflies. Buildings pulsed with sickly color: jaundiced yellow for starvation, bruised violet for fear, and harsh red when violence simmered. Lately, the skyline stayed red.

The Resource Wars carved the city hollow. Fuel bought loyalty. Water bought breath. Trust? Too expensive.

I quickly learned that softness didn't survive here. Which is why *she* caught my eye for the wrong reason. Most people kept their heads down; she didn't. And the city had a habit of flattening anything that refuses to bow.

But she carried herself like a weapon.
Managing to cut straight through me.

The Agency walls glowed pale blue-orders over guilt. Director Rurik didn't look up.

“You’re late, Jax,” he sighed.

“It’s Detective Jax,” I muttered.

A folder slid across the desk. A photo spilled out: Nara Fontaine, curls wild, goggles askew, determination bright enough to tint the office walls stubbornly gold.

“She’s spreading plans. Restoring infrastructure.”

“People dream,” I said. “Doesnt mean they can fix a water pump.”

“This one can. Find out what she’s building. Who’s backing her. Report back. No attachments.”

Perfect. Because falling for a girl who wants to save this city is my specialty.

Her workshop glowed warm amber-curiosity, defiance, hope. Haven’t seen those colors in years. Inside, drones buzzed like impatient wasps. She leaned over a half-built machine. I cleared my throat.

“Fontaine?”

Golden brown eyes met mine and she jolted, goggles slipping. “Who’s asking?”

“Someone with questions.” Not a lie, but not the truth entirely.

Her eyes narrowed. Calculating. “You with a gang? A buyer? A thief?”

“None of the above.”

“That leaves trouble,” she said flatly. “People who don't state their allegiances always bring trouble.”

“Maybe I'm just curious.”

She snorted. “Curiosity gets you shot in this district.”

But something in her gaze softened-barely. Enough.

She hesitated, then stepped aside from the machine. Not trusting-testing.

“If you're here to ruin my life,” she said, “you may as well know what you're ruining.”

In the center of the room, a glass core pulsed like a heartbeat.

“Energy converter,” she explained. “Takes power from movement-wind, footsteps, water flow. If it works, we get our freedom back.”

Bold enough for the Agency to shoot first.

“Optimistic,” I said.

“Optimism is rebellion here.”

Her eyes searched my face, attempting to read me. She didn't see the badge. She didn't see the mission. She just saw someone who could dream with her.

That was enough. And that was the problem.

Days blurred. Her theories lit the walls gold; her laughter softened corners the city had sharpened. She talked of a future she thought I belonged in. I hated how much I wanted to believe her.

Which is why the silence struck me the moment I reached her street.

The converter gone. *Nara* gone.

I made my way through the workshop when I spotted her. Blood. And Nara, strapped to a metal chair, curls tangled across her face, golden eyes frantic.

“Jax?” she rasped-not fear, relief.
I cut her restraints. “You’re ok.”

She flinched when my hand brushed her arm. That hurt more than the bruises on her skin.

“They knew everything,” she whispered.
My chest tightened. “Who?” There was no point in asking.
Her eyes dulled-melancholic. “I thought I could trust you.”

I opened my mouth. Shut it.
She saw the truth in the silence.

“I *needed* you! The city needed you! But I was going to realize it sooner or later.” Her voice cracked. “Hope makes you stupid.”

“That’s not fair-,” I objected.
“It’s honest.”

She stood shakily. I reached to steady her; she stepped back like my touch burned.

“Don’t touch me.”
My throat locked. “I’m trying to fix this.”

“Fix?” She laughed once-sharp, broken. “You can't fix what you helped start.”

“Nara-”

The workshop door exploded.

It wasn't a subtle entrance. The sound was deafening.

Director Rurik stepped through the splintered entrance, his face a mask of controlled, practiced authority that sent chills down my spine.

“You're off the case, Detective.” he said-voice flat.

Two agents grabbed Nara, pinning her arms behind her. She struggled, cursing things I couldn't hear over my ringing ears.

“Rurik, wait,” I said, stepping forward. My collar suddenly felt too tight.

“We can negotiate a deal, incorporate her work into the Agency mandate.”

He shot me a cold, dead look. “There is no mandate for hope, Jax. Hope is inefficient. It destabilizes our power structure.” He pressed an earpiece and signalled to the other guards to stand down.

A low thrum vibrated through the metal floor. The drones in the air dropped like stones. The air went dead silent, the smell of burnt copper and scorched circuits.

Nara gasped, not just in fear, but in utter devastation. The power grid, the machine she'd built with every ounce of her determination, turned to useless junk in a matter of seconds.

Rurik turned and walked toward the exit, ignoring the destruction he just caused. He stopped at the exit, glancing back at me—a bloodhound who had gone mad.

“Clean up the mess, Detective,” he ordered, his eyes promising a grey, and relentlessly cold future. “No attachments.”