



CORRUPTED CHAOS

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SHAIN ROSE

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Also By Shain Rose

About Shain Rose

CORRUPTED CHAOS DESCRIPTION

My enemy doesn't make the rules behind closed doors... Even if he's my boss.

Cade Armanelli might be an infamous hacker with billionaire status who operates better alone, but I earned my spot working alongside him...
Whether he likes it or not.

It's precisely why I'm on the first plane to an undisclosed location for our cybersecurity team retreat. I'm ready to prove to our company that **I can handle anything...**

Except sharing a cabin and a bed with my meticulous, elusive boss.

He's antisocial. Ruthless. Enemy number one.

Unfortunately, he's also number one in tatted, dark, and dangerous. I quickly come to find that not only are his hacking skills perfection, but so is his performance in the bedroom.

Not that it matters. I have a job to keep, a heart to protect, and our nation's data to secure.

Cade can't help me with any of that.

He's a distraction. One I have to avoid...

Even if it means I'm spray painting a red line down our bed and keeping my boss on his side.

A NOTE ON CONTENT WARNINGS

As a reader who loves surprises, I enjoy going in blind with each book. Yet, I also want to give my readers the opportunity to know what sensitive content may be in my books. You will find the list of them here for

Corrupted Chaos:

<https://www.shainrose.com/content-warnings>

PREQUEL

IZZY



“**Y**ou kissed him?” A low voice full of gravel hissed from the side of my parents’ house.

Shit. My stomach dropped, my heart leapt, and my thoughts scattered a million different ways at the sound.

Wincing, I shut my eyes and breathed in the smell of wood burning on that cool autumn night as the fire crackled in the center of our Adirondack chair circle. Maybe if I stayed frozen like that I could wish away the man that owned that voice.

Had he just heard our whole conversation?

A moment ago, I’d been teasing my butthurt brother because he couldn’t stop complaining about his best friend and my old boss, Dante, marrying our sister. So, I’d told him to get over it because, if anything, I should have been the one crying. I’d actually kissed Dante—but that had been before he professed his love to my twin, Delilah, and proposed.

Welcome to my shit show, right?

As I stared at them curled up together in front of that fire, though, my heart didn’t hurt much anymore. I knew he looked at her in a way he’d never look at me. While we were identical in just about every way possible—same wavy brunette hair, facial features, and even curves—I could never hold a candle to the love Dante had for Delilah. Even after I professed my decades-old love for him, I knew it would never be reciprocated because there was no one else for either of them.

I accepted that now after a year of quiet heartbreak. Quiet because I was happy for my sister, quiet because I knew my love for him wasn't that barreling, chaotic love. Quiet because I wanted to keep the peace and didn't want my family to worry.

It took a year of burying myself in work and exposing myself to their relationship to really be over it.

And I *was* over it. But Cade Armanelli, the most judgmental prick I'd ever met, was never supposed to hear about it. This was only supposed to be for family and close friends.

Cade wouldn't bring that. Dante, him, and I all worked undercover together for the government years ago, and he'd always approached me with an undercurrent of disrespect and disdain. The man didn't believe in anyone but himself and thought we all hindered his ability to get the job done.

As he stepped out of the shadows, I swiveled around to stare at him as I ignored his question about who I'd kissed. "Jesus, where did you come from?"

The sharp angles of his face wreaked havoc on my insides. No hacker for the United States of America should look the way he did. Tattoos painted his neck and hands, peeking from beneath the collar and cuffs of his suit. His strong jaw rivaled chiseled Greek gods, and his dark hair was so wavy it looked professionally styled, even though I'd bet it wasn't.

None of it really mattered, though, except for his penetrating dark stare that always held me captive. In the past, he looked right through me, like I was crystal-clear water with no depth at all. Yet, tonight, he studied me like I was a deep ocean, like I was a mystery at the darkest depths of it. His attention, the way he gripped me with that gaze, could haunt even an angel.

"Were you watching us?" I whispered.

I wouldn't put it past him. Dante and Cade were distant cousins, and Cade always seemed to be watching everything going on with his family. And he had the intelligence to do it, considering he was arguably the best hacker in the world. One that I respected, was in awe of, and loathed all at

the same time. When we used to work undercover together, he snickered when someone tried to inform him of something, like he already knew, like he had an omniscient power about him.

Then, I moved into the data security department, away from undercover work, and figured I wouldn't have to deal with him. Even if he technically was the head of the cybersecurity workforce within the Department of Homeland Security, Cade worked alone. He didn't need anyone's help, nor did he show up to the office to ask for it.

"I'm always watching, Izzy," Cade said in warning, his ominous stare was as abrasive as his tone. Always watching me? I didn't need him watching what I did or acting as though I couldn't handle myself. I was sure that's what he meant by it, too, because he'd said once or twice before I didn't belong in data security or working for the government in general for that matter.

Still, my body hummed at his confession, as though I was suddenly turned on and enraged all at the same time by the notion of him watching me.

It was ridiculous. Completely and utterly ridiculous. So, I scoffed at him and picked up a stick to roast a marshmallow. My mom had brought probably a thousand of them, knowing all six of her kids would be back in town to hang out.

As he stalked over to our fire, my four brothers sat up, their radars blaring. They'd finally accepted Dante into the family but trusting anyone else with the last name of Armanelli was difficult. Cade was the brother to one of the most powerful Italian mob bosses in the world, and his hacking skills made him potentially even more dangerous. Yet, no one, not even an Armanelli, could make them back down when it came to their baby sisters.

The fire crackled, and its light danced over him, illuminating his perfect bone structure as he said, "Dante, Delilah. Jet's ready to go."

Them? He'd come for them? Not me. I don't know why that was a surprise and why my ego deflated a bit from the thought.

"Tonight?" My sister's voice sounded shocked but hopeful. Dante must have planned a vacation for them with Cade's help. It made sense

considering Cade had the family private jet. For all I knew, it could have been the presidential jet considering the man was in the news for helping the country all the time with cybersecurity.

I stood so fast my knees popped when my sister got up to clear dishes on a tray table near our chairs. I moved to help, then followed her with my own handful to pad through the lush grass into our parents' ranch-style home.

I whisper-yelled over the classical music my mom always played in the kitchen to Delilah. "I can't believe Cade just shows up to our bonfire like this."

"I think Dante probably called him." Delilah shrugged, confused by my frustration. I myself wasn't sure what it was about either. Maybe it was the way he'd confidently told me he was watching, like I was a loose cannon, or maybe it was because every time I saw him, he stirred something in me that he shouldn't. I needed to keep my life like a calm lake, but when Cade came around, it turned into a tumultuous ocean, waves crashing violently on the shore.

I shook my head at my sister, placing a hand on the worn quartz countertop. "He's deliberately acting like my babysitter since I'm still working for the government." I didn't need anyone behind me looking over my shoulder like I was going to mess up. I'd proven myself time and time again over the course of years of undercover work. And now being in cybersecurity, I was determined to stay ahead of the curve. I even took classes to keep up my skills. "I can take care of myself."

"Well, he probably wants to make sure you're safe, considering you're friends." She shrugged and put another dish in the sink.

"Colleagues," I corrected, wrinkling my nose and brushing some of my hair that was frizzing away from my face. "Definitely not friends."

Lilah peered over at me like she was questioning my sanity. I'd probably announced that last part a little too loudly. "Noted," she grumbled, and I turned to the sink to wash the barbecue off a dish, hating that I'd let Cade get to me at all.

Still, I'd had enough people not believe in me over the years. And he

was the worst of them. He never gave me more than a glance when he walked into the room, and I knew he'd bad-mouthed me when I'd first started.

Suddenly, my sister stopped and pointed over her shoulder, yelling, "Gotta go to the bathroom, Izzy," as she beelined it out of there.

I spun around, knowing Delilah wouldn't speed off unless she was avoiding something. And sure enough, the reason was standing right in front of me. All six feet plus a good couple of inches of him loomed over me like he was trying to intimidate me.

He wouldn't. I didn't care if he was a whole head taller. The more I thought about it, the more irritated I became that he even attempted to come around me outside of work. I crossed my arms. "Don't sneak up on me in my parents' house, Cade."

He quirked a dark brow like I sounded ridiculous. "Hardly sneaking considering I'm stepping right in front of you."

"Whatever. This is a family party," I pointed out, trying to make one thing clear. "You shouldn't even be here."

There. Now he knew I didn't ever want to see him outside of work, that I didn't like him, that he wasn't wanted.

"Technically, I'm Dante's family." He glanced down at his phone like he didn't even have time to have this conversation. Then he peered back up at me, and his stare held a condescension I wasn't ready for. "Want to go so far as to say we're related too?"

Why did that feel like he was goading me? I turned around to scrub a dish way harder than necessary. "God, you're so annoying."

"If you think I'm annoying, quit your damn job."

Yep. *There* it was. Him being an absolute dick. Cade didn't want me on any team within the government. He'd had it out for me since day one because he thought I couldn't handle the pressure of our work. It didn't bode well for me. We all knew his ties to the president, to the Pentagon, to everyone. The man infiltrated everything because he had access to it all. A few clicks for him, a few hacks, and he'd be raking through my deepest darkest secrets.

“Start working in corporate America.”

I stopped my assault on the poor dirty plate and winced at his recommendation. I liked to think I worked as hard as he did. And I had unfinished business with the government. I’d researched enough while undercover to learn that a large Albanian family was breaking laws within our country. We’d caught them once, and I wasn’t going to stop until I had them all behind bars. “The Albanians aren’t done. You and I both know it.” I waved between us like he should understand. He’d seen what they were capable of in the past, and it was our job to make sure it never happened again. As I got better at sifting through the data, I’d found more evidence. “The drugs are a fucking cover for nuclear warfare, and I’m gonna help bring them down.”

“You’re digging where you shouldn’t be. And you may be good, Izzy, but not that good. I’ve tracked every fucking hack you’ve done,” he said, an arrogant smirk on his face. Then he leaned in and whispered, “It’s not warfare, love. It’s the laundering of so much money they would control everything. We’ve built alliances, though. It’s fine. You need to back off.”

The way his breath felt on my skin, on my neck, so close to me that I could smell him . . . I loved it in a way I shouldn’t. My body instantly gravitated toward him as if I should lean in instead of away. “They won’t honor that alliance. So either let me do my job or fuck off,” I ground out, trying to ignore everything he was doing.

He hummed low, not moving back even an inch. “If you get kidnapped, I’m leaving your ass with them.”

“Great.” I peered up into his eyes and turned my face so our lips were just a touch away from each other. “They’ll probably be better company than you anyway.”

“Say that again, and try to mean it this time,” he growled.

Our stares held, his full of something I didn’t normally see. Cade was alive right there next to me, his gaze no longer dark and cavernous but wild and full of adrenaline and joy, like a kid ready to play his favorite game. That look mirrored mine when I found something to keep my mind off my own demons. We’d have worked well together in another life.

We heard the bathroom door opening and stepped away from each other. My brother-in-law came in, too, swooping Delilah under his arm, smiles a mile wide as they hurried through saying goodbye to me.

Cade ushered them out of the house without a backward glance.

Well, good riddance to him, too. Except I wasn't proud to say I did flip him off as he exited.

Still, I went to bed with deep-brown eyes threaded with gold in the back of my mind. I tried my best not to slide my hand between my legs, imagining what it would have been like to lean in an inch farther and taste that man's lips.

I hated myself for it the very next week.

THE FOLLOWING Monday started terribly with rain pelting down on me as I made my way into work, drenching my navy blouse and pinstripe pencil skirt. I didn't even have time to dry off, though, before HR called me in.

My stilettos squished with the rainwater as I made my way down the hall, hoping they had a simple update for me of some sort. I'd never been summoned like this, not even for a review of my work.

As I turned the corner and knocked on the already open door, though, understanding dawned. Cade in a black three-piece suit sat behind a small elderly woman at her desk with what looked like one outrageously expensive Berluti loafer propped on a bent knee to hold his laptop across his thighs. He was the epitome of a successful and very intimidating businessman.

To add to it, he didn't even look up or greet me as I entered. The woman with wiry white hair whom I had never met before chirped as soon as I shut the door, "Congratulations, Izzy! We have amazing news for you. Take a seat."

I readjusted my pinstripe wool pencil skirt and glanced between both of them with so many questions running through my mind. "I'm sorry. Is he a part of this—"

She cut me off by talking over me. “Oh, Mr. Armanelli sits in on some office procedures. He is a supervisor here. Have you met—”

“We have.” My tone gave away precisely how much I despised him.

“Right.” She shifted in her chair. “Well, please take a seat.”

Chewing on my cheek, my heart beat faster. Thinking over the last conversation I’d had with Cade, I replied, “I’m fine with standing.”

“Of course. Of course.” She chuckled. “Well, you’ve been reassigned to Stonewood Enterprises, and it was such a great contract that you’ll be starting in the next week. No long waiting period.”

“Reassigned?” I stuttered, the air whooshing out of my lungs. I felt like I’d been sucker punched.

“Yes, we’ve acquired a wonderful contract.” She slid it across her pristine white desk while he typed away like no one was in the room.

The fact that he was even there—after having never set foot in this office in all the time I’d been there—was him waving a red flag in my face. Like he wanted to fight.

I cleared my throat and straightened my blouse, not picking up the packet to even appear intrigued. “But what if I don’t want to be reassigned?”

“Well, this is within the state’s rights, Ms. Hardy. If you check section . . .” She droned on about distance between home and work and where I was needed and a bunch of other crap I knew wasn’t true. I just glared at him with his smug expression as he lifted his gaze to smirk at me.

Anger, swift and hot, flew through me faster than I could control. “You requested this, didn’t you? The almighty Caden Armanelli.” I wrinkled my nose at him in disgust.

Immediately, the woman stood, her blue eyes widened into orbs of concern. People didn’t just sneer Cade’s full name. Businessman, my ass. We all knew when they threw around the Armanelli mafia name they got what they wanted. “Ms. Hardy, we’ve talked with a few of your team members, and there is state work you’ll still be doing there. It’s a great opportunity for you all to be contracted there. Cassie and Braxton will be transferred too. You’ll get amazing corporate raises that the state can’t

compete with. You'll even get to travel for work, and it's good for the team."

"Let me guess." I popped a hip. "If I don't go, my team doesn't either."

The woman stepped between Cade and me, like she wanted to break our eye contact. "You've done fantastic work, and we'd like you all to stay together, yes."

"This can't be protocol."

"Honestly . . ." She sighed and rubbed her eyes like she'd had a long day. Her wrinkles, testaments to the stress she faced, moved with her hands. "I'm going to level with you. It may not be protocol, but if you don't comply, you all will most likely be out of a job."

I leaned to the side enough so that I could see him. "That true, Cade Armanelli?"

One side of his mouth hitched at me sneering his name. "Ms. Hardy, I promise corporate America will suit you."

The lady nodded. "Cade does run most of the data security teams here, Ms. Hardy. I do suggest you take the offer. Your salary—and the salaries of everyone on your team—has been doubled, and you probably have more opportunities there than you do here."

I sighed.

I would have thrown a tantrum, demanded they reconsider, and maybe even thrown a pen or two around. But that was the Izzy of years ago, before I lost myself to passivity. I was better now. I'd reformed. I'd packed my emotions up into a nice, neat box so no one could say I was being a diva or indulging in that personality of mine that got me into trouble.

Everyone said I was such a grown-up now, but most days, it felt like I was simply tired. Keeping a lid on so many emotions would do that to a person. Still, I accepted my lot and hoped I could go home soon for a nap and reset. "Thank you for the opportunity," I told her, the words as sour as limes in my mouth.

Cade's eyebrows raised. "That's it?"

I swear, he wanted a fight, but I wouldn't give him one. The woman hurried on with a nervous chuckle. "I promise, it's for the best. You'll

thank me once you're settled into your new position. You'll see. You'll probably have more time on your hands there."

What she didn't understand was that I *wanted* to do all I was doing for the government. I wanted—no, I *needed*—to work hard for them. My mind didn't do well without a goal or something to occupy it. It was how I kept the indulgent side of me, the side that was bottled up, from creeping out.

Cade was ruining everything, and he damn well knew it.

Three Months Later

Cade: Stop trying to hack into government property.

Me: OMG get a life and stop watching what I'm doing.

Cade: Technically, I'm doing my job. It's national security and you're breaching one of our firewalls.

Me: Still, you're watching what I'm doing

Cade: Me watching what you're doing is knowing you sold your condo to move to Greene Liberty Apartments where they have a shit security system.

Me: Seriously, stop.

Cade: Stop sifting through confidential data then.

Me: Get over it. It's only for information on the Albanians.

Cade: That's not your job.

Me: I'm quite aware of your reassigning my job duties.

Cade: Yeah, about that ...

Cade: I'm waiting for a "thank you so much, Cade."

Me: Fuck you very much.

Cade: You're welcome to come over.

Me: I wonder if you think that actually works on women.

Cade: I don't have to wonder.

Me: You do realize you're my boss. This wouldn't look very good to HR.

Cade: I'll take my chances if you're agreeing.

Me: I'm not. I have a boyfriend that's actually a good human.

Cade: You sure? Want me to hack his data and see?

Me: You better not.

Cade: Yeah, we'll let him have his fun while he's out of the country.

Me: How do you know he's gone?

Cade. I know everything ... Stop poking around

Me: Fine. Whatever.

Three Months Later

Cade: Don't you have anything better to do at 3 am?

Me: Maybe I would have more work to do if you let Stonewood Enterprises give me a promotion.

Cade: You're not ready obviously or you wouldn't be doing something reckless like hacking systems in the middle of the night.

Me: Leave me alone.

Cade: Then turn off your computer and do something else with your time.

Me: Nothing else to do right now.

Cade: Your boyfriend must be gone again, huh?

Me: So what if he is? Stop watching me.

Cade: Get over yourself. I built an alert for when you start digging for Albanian data. Leave it alone.

Me: You're seriously the most annoying person I've ever met.

Six Months Later

Cade: They must not give you enough work over at Stonewood