

Chapter 5 An Unexpected Visitor

It was a call from his assistant, Rylee Beatty.

Glancing at Erin, who was peacefully resting with her eyes closed, Lucian stepped out of the room to take the call.

"What's the matter?" His tone was clipped, a subtle indication of his impatience.

"Mr. Clifford, you are expected to attend a business lunch today with the CEO of Stark Group."

"Alright, noted." Lucian's response was perfunctory. Just when he was about to end the call, Rylee's tone took a grave turn. "There is one more thing."

"Go on."

"I got a piece of news." Rylee hesitated, the pause on the line prickling the silence before finally saying, "I heard that Miss Murphy of Murphy Group has returned."

"The same Miss Murphy who vanished without a trace three years ago?" Lucian asked, his eyes narrowing at the news.

Rylee nodded, confirming. "Yes. During her absence, the shareholders of the Murphy Group stirred up quite a storm, impacting our business to a certain extent. However, we managed to capitalize on the situation, snagging several projects from them. I wonder what her return will mean for us."

The Murphy Group was a formidable force in the industry, its inception predating the Clifford Group. Despite the seemingly superior growth of the Clifford Group in recent years, the Murphy Group had a profound foundation that was impossible to disregard.

Similarly, Miss Murphy, at the helm of this force, was not someone Lucian could afford to underestimate. Their past encounters had been testaments to her ferocious tenacity.

Coincidentally, Giselle, an individual of no significance in Lucian's life except for her excellent housekeeping skills, shared the same surname as Miss Murphy.

The contrast between the two women was as stark as between the clouds and the mire.

The mere thought of Giselle ignited a surge of irritation within Lucian. He quickly massaged his forehead, suppressing his impatience, and ordered sternly, "Let's see how things unfold. If an opportunity presents itself, arrange a dinner with her."

The Murphy Group's CEO's disappearance undoubtedly shook the company's standing.

Now that she was back, the dynamics would inevitably shift.

Miss Murphy was renowned for her discerning eye and ruthless strategies. Anyone who dared cross her was certain to face dire consequences. She would certainly not stand idly by while her enemies prospered.

While not fearing her, Lucian didn't want to lock horns with such a potent adversary either. He preferred to tread cautiously for now.

Under the high noontide sun, Lucian found himself sitting across from Collin Stark, the CEO of Stark Group, in a private box of an opulent upscale restaurant.

Each was accompanied by their respective assistants, forming a mirror image of one another across the polished mahogany table as they engaged in preliminary pleasantries.

Collin was well into his forties, and he clearly needed to put more stock into maintaining his physical fitness. His black suit strained to contain his rotund belly.

His appearance was further marred by the dark circles under his eyes, which, coupled with his pale and haggard look, spoke of a man who indulged in a life of excess.

Raising his crystal wine glass, Collin made a respectful toast to Lucian. "Mr. Clifford, you are an embodiment of youth and promise. The way you helm your company is truly commendable. Please allow me to raise a toast in your honor."

While Lucian held no favorable impression of the man before him, he valued the importance of their prospective cooperation. So, he took his glass and engaged in the customary clink with Collin. "Mr. Stark, you flatter me. Let's focus on the project at hand."

"Absolutely," Collin agreed readily. "When you approached me about this project, I didn't hesitate in the slightest. I firmly believe that collaborating with the Clifford Group is the only way I can have full confidence in this venture. To be completely upfront, the Murphy Group had also previously reached out to me."

"The Murphy Group?" Lucian asked, a hint of a frown creasing his brow.

Beaming, Collin nodded. "Yes, but I hold a preference for teaming up with you. Now, about this project..."

Bang——

Before Collin could complete his sentence, the door was thrown open with a thud.

They all swiveled their heads towards the entrance, just in time to see a woman elegantly clad in a black power suit and stilettos saunter in with an air of unapologetic confidence.

As Lucian's gaze met hers, he froze in place.