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+5 Points

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They say an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind, but I do not seek vision; I seek vengeance. For every wound inflicted, I will carve a deeper scar. For every tear shed, I will unleash a storm of sorrow. He dealt in shadows, but I would drown him in darkness. Evil for evil, a relentless dance of ruin. His sins will find no sanctuary, no place to hide. Justice may falter, but my wrath will never waver. The world may call it madness, but to me, it's balance. For when a heart is broken, it burns until it consumes everything.

Flashback

The room was dimly lit, illuminated only by the faint orange glow of the side lamp. A young Dave lay curled beside his father on the narrow bed. His father's labored breaths, mixed with the heavy scent of menthol ointment, filled the small space. Each breath was raspier than the last, hot enough to warm Dave's cheek as he pressed close to him.

Outside, the wind howled, muffled only by the sturdy stone walls of the Gray's estate. However, despite the solid walls and even with the heater humming softly, his father was still shivering

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under the thick blanket.

Dave adjusted the thin blanket over his father's trembling body, his small hands tugging at the edges to ensure it covered him entirely. He and his father only had each other. He didn't know his mother; he was told she had died during his birth. His father had taken on the roles of both mother and father, and Dave could never ask for more. Now, it was his turn to care for his sick father.

"Dad," he whispered, his voice soft but worried, "is it better now? Do you feel warmer?"

His father's response was a faint nod, but the persistent trembling of his body betrayed him. "Don't... worry about me, Davey," his father rasped, his voice like sandpaper. "Just sleep. The morning will come soon enough."

But Dave couldn't sleep - not with the soft wheezing that seemed to worsen with every passing minute. His father's breath was as hot as a furnace on his skin, and so was his temperature, which confused Dave, as his father was still shivering despite the heater and the blanket draped over him. *Was there something he was missing?*

The low murmur of voices outside distracted him,

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a sound growing louder as it neared. He didn't need anyone to tell him who it was; he recognized the voices. No one among the workers had the right to raise their voices, especially at such a late hour.

It was them again.

Paul Gray and his son, Hunter, were arguing, again. They always seemed to be at odds, their sharp words carrying even through the thick estate walls. Dave could imagine what they were fighting about; there was no secret left in the house for the servants. He'd heard that Hunter had been arranged to marry a beautiful girl who often came to visit. What Dave didn't understand was why Hunter was angry about it. The girl was pretty, and why would his parents want him to marry so young? That confusion had once led Dave to ask his father why he hadn't arranged a marriage for him too. The question had earned him a scolding.

Dave strained his ears, curiosity gnawing at him as usual. He envied Hunter sometimes, the confidence with which the older boy stood up to his father. At just fifteen, Hunter's defiance felt both reckless and admirable.

Rich kids, Dave thought bitterly. They can do whatever they like. The poor... we can't even speak

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without permission.

The argument outside grew louder, but Dave's attention snapped back to the present as his father began coughing violently, his face twisted in pain. Panic surged through him. He grabbed the water bottle from the nightstand, but it was empty.

"I'll get you water," he said hastily, rushing out of the room, his father's violent coughs echoing behind him.

The cold floor bit into his bare feet as he sped down the servant's hallway, his heart hammering in his chest. As he neared the main house, the sound of footsteps made him halt abruptly. Peering around the corner, he saw Hunter storming out of the front door, his jaw set in anger, his fists clenched at his sides. Dave froze, unsure whether to move forward or retreat.

Before he could decide, he caught a glimpse of a figure upstairs. Paul stood at the top of the grand staircase, his sharp eyes sweeping the hall like a hawk searching for prey. Dave ducked instinctively, pressing himself against the wall. Paul terrified him ever since the day he'd seen him berate Mrs. Henry, the kind woman who worked as the estate's head housekeeper while his father worked under her. But to Dave, she was more like

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a mother. He couldn't shake the memory of her tear-streaked face, it still haunted him, leaving him with fear.

Dave's heart pounded as he waited for Paul to disappear. When the hallway was clear, he darted

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into the kitchen, filled the bottle, and hurried back to his father's room.

"I'm here," he whispered, kneeling by his father's side and tilting the bottle to his lips. The water soothed his father's cough temporarily, and Dave allowed himself a small sigh of relief.

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But the relief was short-lived when a thunderous knock rattled the door not even an hour later.

"Open up!" a voice barked.

Dave jolted awake, his heart racing as he scrambled to his feet. He glanced at his father, who stirred weakly but didn't wake. Fearing the noise would wake him, Dave rushed to the door and cracked it open.

Two men he recognized so well stood outside, their faces cold but sleepy.

"Where is your father?" one of them asked, his words slurred by a yawn.

"He's sleeping," Dave responded, rubbing his eyes.

"Go get him," the other said, slightly irritated. "Mr Gray has ordered all the workers to search for his son. He hasn't returned home."

Dave blinked in confusion. "But my father is sick."

"Orders are orders," the man interrupted harshly.

"Dave..." His father's weak voice came from behind him. Dave turned to see his father struggling to sit up, his face pale but determined.

"Dad..."

"I'll go," his father rasped. "Stay here, Dave."

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"But, Dad__"

"No arguments," his father said firmly, though his voice lacked its usual strength.

Dave watched helplessly as his father bundled himself up and left with the men. The night dragged on, each minute feeling like hours. Soon, the workers trickled back one by one, drenched from the rain that had started to pour. Dave's heart leapt with hope and worry every time someone entered, but it was never his father.

Hunter had returned by then, equally soaked but unharmed. He had been found wandering near the woods, his expression defiant even as Paul scolded him in front of everyone. Paul even struck him, but Hunter simply walked away.

Dave sat outside the entrance, shivering in the cold. He refused to go back inside, his eyes scanning the estate for any sign of his father. A figure appeared in the dark, and his heart leapt with hope.

"Dad?" he called out, running into the rain to meet him. But his hope sank when he realized it was Mrs. Henry, the head housekeeper.

The older woman assessed Dave with a quizzical expression, her hand reaching out to steady him. "

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What are you doing out here? Is your father not back yet?" she asked, her brows furrowing with concern.

Dave shook his head, his throat too tight to speak.

Mrs. Henry sighed heavily. "Go inside. I'll go get your father. He probably doesn't know the brat is back." She glared at the gigantic house ahead before her gaze returned to Dave, who was completely drenched, his clothes and hair clinging to his skin as he visibly shivered from the cold. She sighed again. "You'll catch a chill out here, Dave. Go back inside. Your father will come soon."

His father did return, just as Mrs. Henry had said, but he was in worse condition than before. His face was pale, and he was trembling so badly that he could hardly walk. This was obviously why he hadn't come back earlier like everyone else. Mrs. Henry helped keep him warm but left to sleep later, leaving Dave with his sick father, who slept peacefully while Dave cried silently by his side.

Morning came with a shocking revelation. Dave realized he must have fallen asleep while crying. He reached out to his father but found him pale and cold. Confused and scared, thinking his father was still sick, he ran to Mrs. Henry and told her. Soon, his father was pronounced dead.

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Dave refused to believe it. He curled around his father's body just as he had the night before, crying. However, the difference was palpable - where his father's body had been as hot as a furnace the night before, it was now cold as ice, his face pale and peaceful as if he'd fallen asleep.

The news spread quickly among the staff, but the Grays showed no reaction. Paul didn't even acknowledge the death, merely instructing the staff to get back to work and clean up his father's body as if he were a piece of trash. Then, Paul announced that he would take Dave into his custody to repay his father's service to their family. As if that was enough to wipe away their sins. As if his father was nothing because he wasn't rich.

From that day forward, something shifted in Dave. The quiet boy, who once feared Paul Gray and envied Hunter, grew into a man fueled by resentment. The pain of losing his father, the cruelty of his father's death being treated as if he were nothing, and the cold indifference of the Grays planted a seed of bitterness that grew with time.

He would never forget. He would never forgive. Never. He would pay evil with more evil.

