

New Eden 481

Chapter 481 Biding His Time

Leon only grinned in response to Astaroth's bold words, already having an inkling of an idea of what he wanted to do.

Meanwhile, Commander Alena only shook her head dejectedly.

"I'll be going around the primary way, then. The new military councilman wanted all higher officers to be present for this meeting, so we all learn of the face of this buffoon—I mean, King of ours."

Coral threw a glare at her mother-in-law, reprimanding her cutting words, which Alena ignored with an enormous smile.

Astaroth chuckled at her comment, finally getting a grasp of how the woman was. She might have a rough demeanour and attitude, but she seemed incredibly loyal, and viciously protective of her loved ones.

These were all good qualities, in his eyes. He would only have to earn her loyalty through actions.

Leon smiled at her as she left, his respect for the woman apparent.

"You know, she questioned my intentions. I think she was scared I would go rampaging and warring every nation nearby. She is ferociously loyal to you, more than to me," Astaroth commented, looking at Leon from the corner of his eye.

Leon chuckled.

"I'm sure she would have tried taking you down if you had confirmed her worries as well. She is a feisty one, that Elf. But a strong Commander, and a loyal friend. I'll try putting in a good word your way, so she becomes less aggravating towards you."

Astaroth waved a hand dismissively.

"Don't bother. I'll win her over with my actions. I'll show that I only have one enemy, and it's everyone's common enemy. Till then, I'll deal with her like I would deal with any aggressive woman. I'll just smile and say yes."

"Grahahaha!" Leon laughed out loud.

"Now I see why Phoenix feels so much more royal than you. The lioness is always scarier than the lions. But keep in mind you also have to project strength, if you want to earn the other's respect."

Leon's words were strangely filled with wisdom, for someone who used to relish in combat just as much as he did. But he could only guess what ten years in power over a growing kingdom did to a man.

Peeking out of the side of the tunnel that led into the throne room, Astaroth saw that it was gradually filling up. He wasn't able to see the center of the room, as it was hidden behind the dais and thrones, but he could guess the usual table that resided there was not there at the moment.

So many men and women were entering the room, that the hubbub of speech was like a low rumbling or vibration, shaking the wooden walls a bit, transferring some of this vibration to the tree itself.

Astaroth was starting to feel a bit nervous, as he wasn't used to talking in front of sizeable crowds. But Leon slapped his shoulder, grinning at him jokingly.

"Don't get cold feet, your highness. You need to inspire awe and power toward all these fools if you want them to follow you later. If not, they'll think I should stay on that throne."

Astaroth chuckled.

"They wouldn't be wrong, in a sense. You know as well as I that I will be gone most of the time, and you will be acting as leader in my stead when Phoenix is also away."

Leon's face dropped a bit. He sighed heavily.

"And here I thought I would catch a break, and finally be able to rest and lounge. Why are you doing this to me all the time? Did I wrong you in a previous life?"

Coral giggled in the back, seeing Leon's dejected face for the first time, and unable to contain it.

Leon looked at her wide-eyed, then turned his head back to Astaroth.

"See?! Now even maids make fun of me. I just want to rest," he whined, his shoulders slumping.

Coral walked over to Leon, bowing a bit.

"I'm sorry, lord Leon. I didn't want to make fun of you. Your downtrodden face was just so adorable, and it was the first time I saw it."

Leon clicked his tongue.

"Stop being so cute, girl. I'll fight your betrothed for that hand if you do."

Coral giggled again softly, taking a step back.

"I believe Castien would take on that challenge if it meant getting to fight you and proving his worth," she replied, her smile bright.

Astaroth wondered what the context was to this, but decided to let it unfold and learn.

"Tch! That Elf has asked me so many times to spar I had to order the construction of the sixth floor! Persistent fellow. If his mother wasn't still healthy and strong, he would have long since replaced her as Commander."

Coral faked an astonished expression.

"Please, lord Leon. Don't let either of them hear that, or they will raze this city to the ground in their fight to prove who should be Commander."

"Gahaha! I know. That's why I would never utter those words before either of them. I just know they will be the first ones to try out the training floor when it's done."

Astaroth was taken aback. Hadn't Alena just called him a battle maniac minutes ago?

And now he was hearing that she liked fighting to this point, too. It felt a bit hypocritical in his mind.

But he could also imagine neither she nor her son would fight without a good reason. They at least gave off that much of a sense of discipline.

But now he was curious about their power level. By the sound of it, they were strong enough to hold a candle to Leon, at least.

He hadn't scanned anyone since he arrived in the city, minding his manners around the people. But he guessed it wouldn't be a bad time during the meeting to do so.

As a king, he had at least that right, right?

He kept the idea in the back of his mind, as he heard some clapping resound from the tunnel that led to the throne room. The thunderous clapping died down, and with it, the vibration of voices did as well.

'Seems like it's starting. Guess it's almost show-time!'

Chapter 482 Presentation

Inside the throne room, Phoenix was seated on the left throne, watching the representative of every branch of the structure of the kingdom, many of which were newly appointed after she looked into it, and she sighed silently to herself.

'So many people at the same time. I hope it doesn't get too rowdy. I know how Astaroth reacts when confronted...'

She awaited the signal from the guards at the doors, who were tasked with notifying her when the last ones were in. When the last person, Commander Alena, walked in, the guards closed the doors before giving a nod to the queen.

Phoenix took a moment to focus on her presentation before rising from her throne. She used a minor trick she had picked up from Leon in the last few days, and propped up her voice with mana, so she didn't need to shout.

"Greetings, everyone. Your attention, please. I would like to thank all of you for assembling on such short notice.

"I know many of you are busy, and it must have been troublesome to find time to attend. I apologize on behalf of the king for his lack of forewarning."

She paused, letting all the people present digest the apology. Murmurs spread across the small crowd, as many of them seemed slightly discontent with being pulled from their duties at such notice.

But many nods of approval for her apology also came her way, which prompted her to note the more polite ones.

It was good to know who was more likely to work with her than against her in the coming times.

Declan, from the side, was also taking screenshots of the unhappy representatives, making sure to compile all the dissidents. He took his job very seriously, and Phoenix was grateful for it.

"Now, for the reason you were all summoned here on such notice. The King has finally come back from his business across the lands, and he wanted to make sure everyone learned of him at the same time. He does not like dilly-dallying, and meeting all of you at once was the best for him."

Another wave of unhappy murmur spread about, quickly quelled by the guards at the sides, when they slammed the butt of their spears on the ground, commanding silence.

Phoenix grinned. She glanced over at Declan, who winked his gassy eye at her through the slits in his helmet.

She nodded, almost unperceivable, thanking his preparation. The man had drilled all the newly appointed royal guards a few hours in advance, making sure they knew how to react to any situation that might happen during the meeting.

Silencing the discontent was part of those drills.

As the room became quiet once again, Phoenix resumed her speech.

"I know many of you are unhappy about the way things are and do not know how to feel about the king, as he takes back his rightful position. But, know this; King Astaroth is the true ruler of this nation, and you all owe him the respect that comes with bearing that title.

"We can address any discontent in private, with the king or myself. But we will meet any talks of dissidence outside those meetings with the appropriate measures."

The threat loomed over everyone, reminding them who the rulers were, and how they ought to act around the royalty of this kingdom. No whispers came this time.

Nodding her head in approval, Phoenix kept talking.

"Now that this is out of the way, I would like to reassure all of you that King Astaroth is no tyrant. He will gladly address any worries or issues you might have with himself, promptly. If he is not available, I will also speak on his behalf, to ensure everyone in the kingdom is heard and satisfied."

Nods of approval suffused in the crowd, which was a good sign. This meant more work for her and Astaroth, but at least, it offered them the chance to make everyone happy.

She could already tell that most of these disgruntled people were only angered at being under the management of Abnormals, strangers from another world. Even if they had most likely known it was a possibility, ten years under Leon had most likely made them forget it could happen at any moment.

She knew her work to make everyone acknowledge them wasn't an easy one, and would take a lot of time. But she was prepared for it.

She also assumed that whatever means Astaroth had thought of to introduce himself might nudge them in the right direction already. She only wondered what he had in mind.

Phoenix had asked him in a private message earlier that day, between two meetings, but he had kept mum. She silently hoped he wasn't going to do anything stupid or reckless that might ruin her one week of effort to gain favour amongst the many councilmen and top representatives.

Over the course of the week, she had to reassure many of the kingdom's echelons that the kingdom wouldn't suddenly turn into a warring faction, since that was the primary fear. She also had to tell so many people that Astaroth might not be there often, but he would still always keep the good of the kingdom as the priority.

The many Abnormals causing chaos around the world in a single week, as well as before they disappeared for a decade, had given them quite the reputation as troublemakers. Of course, this was only a minority of them, but it was already enough.

She only hoped that their work here would reflect well across the world of New Eden, and help mend a bit of the poor reputation. Crossing her hands before herself, Phoenix continued talking.

She was waiting for Astaroth to message her that he was ready.

"As for the future of the kingdom, King Astaroth and I fully intend to keep it growing and gain many allies along the way. Our goal isn't to make ourselves recluse or sheltered. We want this kingdom to be a large part of the world, in the future, and pray that everyone can work towards that goal with us."

As she finished saying that, a message notification popped in the corner of her eye.

She smiled when she saw it and unclasped her hands, opening her arms wide.

"Now, without further ado, I would like you to welcome our king back to his rightful place. A warm welcome to King Astaroth!"

As she said that, heavy pressure descended upon the entire crowd. It was like someone had dropped a building on everyone's shoulders, and many people had already started sweating.

'Seriously? What an idiot. A show of power right off the bat isn't going to make a good impression!'

Chapter 483 Dominance

Astaroth had been waiting in the tunnel that led from the back room to the throne room, preparing something he had been working on for some time. He could faintly hear Phoenix's speech from the opening before him at the end of the tunnel.

And regardless of all her tries to depict him as merciful and likeable, he still wanted to make sure he would assert some form of dominance over them. In his mind, a king ought to be the strongest person in a kingdom, or at least a close second.

So, as she prattled on, Astaroth prepared himself.

He was trying to reproduce a feeling, more precisely one he had felt when Gäap had taken full control. His goal was to reverse that feeling, into controlling the powers of his soul companions, without going through the transformations.

He had been trying to gain their strength simultaneously, previously, but it had always failed. But he was doing it differently this time.

He was trying to sap their power without taking over or merging into their souls. It took him a while to grasp how to do it, but Phoenix was taking her time, anyway, so he might as well.

Leon watched him with a curious look, as he could feel what Astaroth was attempting, from the movements of mana and Aether within his body. On the other hand, Coral just stood there motionless, only observing passively.

After a few minutes of fumbling around inside his own soul space, he finally managed to reach a point where he felt confident he had succeeded. And to confirm his thoughts, a notification pulled him back to reality.

Spell learned

Your inquisitiveness has allowed you to gain mastery over a spell very few before you have. Spirit Melding mastery level 1 gained. Spell learned; Soul Sap. Congratulations, player Astaroth.

He immediately opened his interface, curious as to what Soul Sap did exactly.

Soul Sap

For 3 minutes, you gain all the power of the souls under your command, sapping their strength for your own, but at a cost. For the next six hours, your soul companions must recuperate their power and cannot be summoned.

**

Astaroth was a bit disappointed about the massive cost of using the skill, but he felt like it could still be an enormous boon, in combat, if he ever needed it.

But right now, he was just trying to use it to make a point. It wouldn't matter if, for the next six hours, he couldn't use his soul companions, as he wasn't in a hurry to go fight just yet.

He felt the power coursing through him, like being injected with a massive dose of adrenaline, and he stepped near the tunnel exit. Astaroth messaged Phoenix, telling her he was ready.

As soon as he heard her present him, he unleashed all his magical aura, letting it rumble loose, as it exploded out of him, affecting everyone in the palace, from the bottom floor, all the way to the branches where the sentinels were on vigil.

It expanded out of the tree palace, washing over the guards and merchants that were near the tree, making some of the weaker citizens almost faint immediately. Even Leon felt pressured right now.

He looked at Astaroth, his mind barely registering how strong the young king had become. This wasn't just a simple step up.

Astaroth was currently rivalling him in power, all the while being under half his.

'Even if this is a temporary state, this man will someday rival gods, at this pace,' he thought.

Coral was feeling the pressure the most, as her proximity made it impossible to resist, and her finite amount of mana barely shielded her from the effect. Leon had to spare some of his magic to form a protective bubble around her, lest she fall unconscious.

After letting his magic run rampant for a few seconds, Astaroth grinned and stepped toward the front of the dais. His current speed made this one step travel the full distance in a mere moment, making him seemingly appear before everyone present.

He let his aura seep out for another few seconds, before retracting it inside him, easing the pressure. But it had already been enough for everyone to understand who it had come from.

Declan looked at him with squinted eyes, already knowing what effect Astaroth had been going for. But the Undead had come to know some of his Commanders well, in the last week, and he knew some of them would take this as a challenge.

Turning his head, he could already feel the re-mounting pressure inside the room, as three of his Commanders unleashed their own magic aura. He shook his head disapprovingly.

But Astaroth washed away the mounting pressure in an instant, closing his hand in front of him.

Astaroth was doing something he had seen Solomon use on the demons inside the ring. By sapping all the mana in an area, he could limit the exertion of power for people who weren't strong enough to keep their mana from being leached away.

And in the current state of Astaroth, few could resist his pull on mana. In an instant, the three Commanders who had wanted to prove their mettle were sent to their knees, gasping for air as he took their strength away from them.

In these three, one familiar woman, whose position at the head of the sentinels made her the forefront of their defences, finally understood why Leon had bowed to this young Ash Elf.

'He's capable of exerting such power, at such a low level! No wonder Leon respects him...'

The two other Commander, a Human man dressed in mage robes, and an Orc woman with a greataxe strapped to her back, looked at Astaroth with fear.

To be robbed of your power instantly was not something so lightly done, and the ease with which he did so was enough to temper their outgoing attitudes instantly.

Astaroth could tell he had attained the goal he had set his mind on. Now the powerhouses in the kingdom knew who stood at the top of the totem pole.

He could now show them a more calm and tame side of himself, without fear that they would turn against him.

Retracting his control of mana, and taming his energy entirely, to the point his presence erased itself, Astaroth positioned himself at the center of the dais.

"Greeting to all of you. My name is Astaroth, and as you have guessed it, I am the king of this nation. I hope we get to know each other well and work to become the greatest nation of all."

Sitting down on his throne, next to Phoenix, some clapping started echoing amongst the representatives, before intensifying into a thunderous cheer.

Astaroth only grinned in response.

Chapter 484 Private Talk

Astaroth indulged in the clapping for a few moments, before raising a hand, motioning to simmer down. The clapping came to a slow stop, the representatives all sitting back down in their seats and murmuring to each other.

Meanwhile, Phoenix gave a discreet punch to Astaroth's arm, giving him a death glare.

She sent him a private message, so no one could hear her complain.

'Was that truly necessary? I just told them moments ago you wouldn't install a reign of terror, and you barge in here, trying to crush everyone with that stupid strength of yours.'

Astaroth chuckled in silence, before responding to her through the messaging function as well.

'It was mainly to make sure all the hard-headed fools understood who was boss. The rest of this meeting will be more civilized.'

Phoenix still looked at him disapprovingly, as the chatter finally died down. Now came the time to talk to everyone.

The meeting lasted many hours and only ended as nightfall settled in. Everyone left there somewhat satisfied with the answers they got, or content with the king and queen.

The results were excellent for them, and the pair also felt glad they could lay things out correctly with everyone. If they had done nothing or waited too long, the unease might have spread further into the populace, or become more than just unrest in the long term.

Now they could at least rest easy.

And rest they would, as Astaroth and Phoenix headed to their private room inside the palace. Reaching the room, Astaroth spoke to the guards.

"Please do not try waking us up tonight, as we will most likely not be present or available."

The guards nodded in understanding, closing the doors behind the royals, and setting up before them, making sure no one disturbed the monarchs.

Once the doors had closed behind them, Phoenix sighed loudly.

"This week has been so busy. Even outside here, during our normal days, I spend more time thinking about this darned kingdom than anything else.

"I had to cancel a thing I had with my mother just because I was busy here. And you had it easy all along, at the other end of the continent, fighting to your heart's content.

"If only you hadn't disconnected over there before the patching started..."

Astaroth listened to her plight, fully aware that he had left her with an incredible burden. But he also knew that without his help, the shelter would have fallen, and everyone would be dead or gone missing.

He hugged Phoenix from behind, taking in her sweet perfume, and kissed her nape.

"It's not like I wanted to be away from you this much. But if I had gone from there, my family would all be dead. Surely you can understand that."

Sighed loudly again, Phoenix pivoted in Astaroth's arms.

"Of course, I understand. I'm just ranting because I'm tired. Now that you are back, we can share the burden for a while. And then, we can dump it all on Leon again for a while, and go wreak havoc inside a dungeon or something."

She grinned as she said those last words, already thinking in glee of enemies burning to cinders before her. She was just as much of a maniac as Astaroth, but she hid it better.

He chuckled at her face, knowing full well what was happening behind those eyes of hers.

"I promise I'll help you for at least the next week. Plus, there is something that I can't do alone, and can't let you do alone either, that needs to be done."

Her curiosity took her out of her burning reverie, and she tilted her head cutely, peering into Astaroth's eyes.

"Hmm? And what is that?"

Astaroth pulled out the Property Deed from his inventory, reminded that the meeting had extended too late for him to ask Nalafein the question that was vagabonding his mind.

Phoenix took the scroll, unrolling it before reading its contents. Her jaw quickly loosed, as she understood the value of this parchment.

She spun around, freeing herself from Astaroth's grasp, sitting on the bed.

When she lifted her eyes from the scroll again, she locked them on Astaroth's gaze.

"You got another one?! What kind of golden finger luck do you have?! How high is your luck stat?"

"Believe it or not, it's at zero," Astaroth replied, scratching the back of his head.

"But I don't intend to keep this. The tower itself cannot be called the beginning of a kingdom, or a stronghold, but I still intend to give it to Nalafein for him to start taking back what is rightfully his. Do you oppose this?"

Phoenix frowned, her face scrunching up thoughtfully. This was a golden opportunity to expand their kingdom elsewhere on the continent.

But it also came with many problems that they couldn't possibly manage right now. His idea of relinquishing it to someone else wasn't so bad at all.

Her mind was already calculating the possibilities of this transaction. But Astaroth cut her train of thought.

"I don't want to trade it. I want to give it to him, free of attachments. I believe he deserves the right to a chance at taking back his throne."

Phoenix looked at Astaroth, dumbfoundedly.

Then she thought of the future implications of gifting this instead of tying strings to it. The idea wasn't bad and would garner a lot of good faith with the Ash Elf prince.

But her mind halted at a major problem.

"Even if you give this to him, how is he going to march on his father's kingdom without an army? I'm sure you noticed he only has the mage with him."

Astaroth grinned.

"That's where we come in. A few of my trusted friends and family are over there already, ready to give a hand. But I think we can gather him an army faster, or at least the start to one, if we play our hand right."

Phoenix looked at Astaroth with curiosity apparent on her face.

"And how do you intend to do that?"

"Pretty easily, actually. We have a resource that he lacks. Manpower."

Phoenix giggled lightly.

"I'm sorry, love. But we barely have enough players in our guild to manage here. I doubt we can send players over there, much less an army, to help the prince."

Astaroth grinned wider.

"Who said anything about our guild members?"

That's when his intentions became clear to her. He was proposing something that would indeed require both their efforts, but that could yield returns so high that their guild would raise even higher than now.

"See, this is why I like you. You are much smarter than you let on."

Phoenix brought herself up into Astaroth's arms, and kissed him fervently on the lips.

"Thank you. Hey, wait a second. Did you just say I look stupid?"

"See? Smarter than you let on," she replied, winking at him, before disconnecting, and leaving him alone in the room, his face a sour grimace.

Chapter 485 Finally, Some Rest

Logging out a few seconds after Phoenix, Alexander opened his eyes to the familiar pod inside. He had opened his eyes so many times to this view that it was almost like his new ceiling.

Pushing open the top of the pod, Alex stood and stretched, feeling his body aching from being so often lied down.

"I need to go to the gym... Clark is going to murder me for not going at all this week..."

He turned his head to the bed and noticed Kary was already up. He looked toward the bedroom door, and saw her silhouette at the end of the corridor, going down the stairs.

Yawning as he stretched, Alex was reminded of the many things that had been put on hold these days.

He had to get back to training his body out of New Eden. He also had to make some calls to David, make sure he didn't need help with anything of the monster sort.

Then he still had to take care of some email he received from EG about the chairwoman wanting to meet him. When he had told this to Jack, the old man had frowned and insisted he accompany him to the meeting.

Alex smelled himself as he stretched, noticing he reeked of sweat.

'A quick shower before breakfast won't do any harm.'

He jumped out of his pod, headed to the bathroom, undressing on the way there and shooting his night clothes into the hamper on the way. As he turned the water on, he heard the hamper's lid open and close again as he got into the shower.

Not even a moment later, the shower door opened again, and Kary looked at him hungrily.

"Did you think I would let you take a shower alone? We haven't spent much... quality time together lately. At least let me have this."

Alexander chuckled, beckoning her in with his hand.

"Of course not. I would never deprive you of your fun willingly. I'm sorry my time was so restricted this past week. But I'll make up for it, I assure you."

They took much longer in the shower than necessary, making tender love, before heading downstairs for breakfast. Alex did a simple omelette with cheese, ham and mushrooms, serving it with butter-toasts and coffee.

As they enjoyed breakfast on the balcony, Kary broached a subject in their conversation that Alex had completely forgotten.

"I was talking with Violette in New Eden last night, and she said something about her father being mad at you. Do you have any idea why?"

Alex looked confused for a moment.

"Mad? At me? Whatever reason could he have this time? It's not like I've been to see him, or anything."

Phoenix giggled lightly.

"I think that might be it, then."

Frowning, Alex asked, "What might be it? Did I—"

That's when it struck him.

"Fuck! I completely forgot! I had promised her and her dad to pass by their house to talk with him. It slipped my mind, with the goblin incident and all, then this baffling week inside New Eden. God dammit, he must be furious..."

Kary laughed at his distress before putting her hand on his.

"If you want, we can go together later today, after we go to the gym together. Clark has been asking when you are coming back. That's another angry man aimed at you, too."

Alexander slapped his face with his hands, dragging his skin down in exasperation at himself.

"I've been so busy in there, I set aside a few things that are just as important... Urgh... If Clark doesn't murder me in training, it'll be Richard later."

Sighing loudly, Astaroth let his head hit the table with a dull thunk as he grumbled to himself.

Kary laughed heartedly.

"Hey, imagine how bad it would be if you had also neglected your girlfriend during that entire week, depriving her of any bigger form of attention than sleeping cuddled a few hours a night. Wouldn't that make you a horrible person? Oh...wait. Hi hi hi."

Growling with his face on the table's surface, Alexander apologized to her. She was only teasing him, of course, and laughed the matter off.

"Now that things have calmed down a bit, just make sure you catch up to life on this side as well. We wouldn't want to make everything about New Eden."

"I know," he grumbled, raising his head.

Alex drank the rest of his cup of coffee and looked at his phone.

The date showed the twenty-fifth of July, and that reminded him of another matter.

His birthday was coming soon, and not too long after that, the anniversary of his parents' death. His mood soured, thinking about going to the cemetery alone.

Kary noticed the change in his mood and slid herself closer to him.

"Is something wrong?"

Taking a moment to get back to normal, Alex smiled forcefully at her.

"It's nothing. I was just reminded of something unpleasant I have to do soon, and it brought me down. But it's nothing to worry about."

Kary smiled warmly at him.

"What is it? Maybe I can help."

He looked at her; her gaze was warm and encouraging.

'It's not like she won't find out, eventually. Might as well tell her now.'

"I have my birthday soon, which isn't too bad by itself if it wasn't for what comes two weeks after..."

Kary looked surprised about his birthday coming around so quickly. They hadn't really told each other their days of birth, so she hadn't known until then.

"What comes after that can hinder the excitement of your birthday so much?"

He sighed sadly, his heart gripping slightly.

"The anniversary of my parents' death. Two weeks after my birthday, eleven years ago, my parents died in a motorcycle accident. They left for a joyride and never came back."

'Every year on the twelfth of August, I go to their grave, to put flowers, and have a small talk with them, giving them a resume of how my year went.'

Alex paused, taking a deep breath to steady his emotions. It had been eleven years, and he still resented fate for what it did to his parents and how it affected his life from that point on.

After taking a deep breath, he resumed talking.

"I know it sounds silly, talking to a grave. But it eases my mind, if ever so slightly, that maybe they hear me and can follow through my life with me, regardless of how prematurely theirs ended."

Finishing his phrase, he felt Kary's arms wrap around him as she grabbed his head and rested against her chest.

"Of course, it's not silly. It's so thoughtful of you to keep going every year like this, even though it hurts you. If there is anything I can do for you, maybe go with you this time, I will gladly do so."

Alexander rested his head there, his eyes foggy with tears, glad Kary understood his process and didn't ridicule him. He thought about inviting her, too, and her offering to come made his mind ease up.

"I would like that, yes. Thank you."

"Of course, my love."

They spent an hour out on the balcony, just embracing each other, uncaring of the things they had to do temporarily.

Chapter 486 Through The Wringer

After enjoying their morning, Alex and Kary prepared for their long day ahead. Leaving for the gym shortly after, Alex decided to go by the bank that had been robbed to see how things had re-established over there.

Reaching the front of the bank, he noticed additional guards were now standing on the outside of it, on the watch out for robbers, contrary to before. The window that the flying vault door had blown out the last time was already replaced, looking like nothing had ever happened.

Inside, where the guard had been splattered on a wall, everything was clean and like new, any sign of the robbery erased from existence. It was like nothing ever happened.

The people inside went about their business, uncaring that people, innocent people, had died barely a few weeks ago on the very floor they walked. Uncaring that a teenager, with reddened skin and horns sprouting out of his forehead, had tried ransacking the place before someone interjected.

'People really are quick to forget things that don't concern them. It's not a good habit, considering what is coming.'

He and Kary kept walking toward the gym, which wasn't far from there, and discussed in low voices what they could do to raise the awareness of people to the coming unnatural events.

Sadly, apart from being upfront with the truth, and maybe ending up in the loony bin, there wasn't much they could do yet. People would only listen when there was proof to back any quirky claim.

They would have to keep their eyes and ears peeled for any strange event happening near them, and try to resolve them before they became catastrophic. But they also knew David was on that task, as often as he could, keeping a hidden eye on the world.

They would have to go with what little information he gave them whenever he deigned to keep them in the loop. When they reached their destination, both of them silenced their conversation, not wanting to attract unneeded attention.

But not thirty seconds went by after entering the gym, and Alexander was already attracting plenty of attention.

"You! It's about time I see you again, you lazy dumbass! Where have you been for the past week?!"

Alexander took the scolding with his head down, realizing he could have called Clark at any moment, to tell him he would be too busy to come train, but didn't.

Kary watched from the sidelines, savouring the moment as Alex was being torn a new asshole. Once Clark had piped down, Alex apologized to him, and promised to give his two hundred percent today, and in the few days to come, as penance.

"Good! Then get changed! I have one hell of a workout plan for you today, you bum!"

The young man left with his head still hung low, already thinking about how he would get abused in the following hours. He would not be having fun, that much was certain.

And the training did indeed proceed the way he had envisioned, with Clark drilling him like a staff sergeant on a military base, and draining every ounce of energy and strength he had in him. In contrast, Kary's training was smooth and constant, making a few stragglers eye her lasciviously as they passed her.

Alex wanted to hover over her, so they didn't get any fancy ideas, but he couldn't get away a single second from Clark. Not that it mattered, as the only one that dared approach the curvaceous woman was sent packing faster than they got there, with one of her icy glares.

Alex didn't blame them, though. He was also having lapses of lost focus, looking at her curvy, sweaty form, getting many unholy thoughts.

'She's rubbing off on me. I don't remember being so horny...'

"Hey! Eyes on me, Ted Bundy! Keep your mind out of the gutter!"

The derogatory nickname took Alex aback, but focused his mind back on Clark. Losing focus for too long meant stretching this hell even more.

After three hours of excruciatingly painful and tiring workout session, Alex was drenched in sweat, breathing so heavily he was practically grunting, and his body felt like it weighed a ton and a half. He looked at the grinning trainer, his eyes supplicative.

"Alright, man. I get it. I won't miss workouts without telling you again. Please, just spare me."

Panting as he said this, Clark looked at him and scoffed.

"I'm not even close to being done with you. Next time will be just as worse. And if you miss, then I'll accumulate the punishment! Now go home, and rest well. I will see you again in two days."

Clark didn't let him plead any longer, and walked away, going into the staff locker room, his clothes also drenched. Clark was in much better shape than Alex and was still feeling alright, but he had followed Alex through the pain, to at least motivate him.

Dragging his feet to the men's locker room, Alex looked at Kary, who was already waiting by the door, an enormous smile on her face.

He went to change and dragged his sore body to the exit, where his girlfriend awaited him.

"So. How was training?" she asked, a teasing smile on her lips.

"Urgh... Let's just go home. I feel dead, inside and outside. I need to shower and eat before I possibly crash into bed and die."

Kary giggled at his response, but his day wasn't done.

"You can't sleep just yet. I contacted Alfred. You told me you would go speak with Violette's dad today. So I got him to come pick you up."

"Aww, man!" Alex whined, his shoulders slumping.

"Couldn't that have waited until tomorrow? I feel like my body was put in a cage with Mike Tyson. Now is not the time to go there, and most likely have my ass handed to me by Alfred..."

Tsk tsk tsk

Kary clicked her tongue at him, disapproving of his lack of commitment.

"You said you would go, and you will. I doubt Alfred will beat you to a pulp, given the state you are already in. He might take pity on you. But you need to get this done."

Alex sighed loudly as they kept walking home.

"Alright... I'll go. But at least tell me I'll have time to clean up and eat. I'm starving..."

Kary giggled at him.

She grabbed his slippery arm, uncaring of his smell, and replied, "Of course. I called him for the afternoon."

And so they reached home, and he settled down for the remainder of the morning, eating a hearty lunch, trying to regain some energy before he had to confront Richard.

'I just hope he's calmed down since the last time.'

Chapter 487 Getting Ready

After eating a budget lunch, consisting of a five-dollar ramen, pimped up with a few fresh veggies and two soft-boiled eggs, Alexander felt reinvigorated. This large intake of calories after his intense workout made him a bit sluggish, but at least his stomach stopped rumbling like a category-five earthquake.

Kary, in the meantime, made herself two grilled-cheese sandwiches, being less hungry than him. But that didn't stop her from stealing a few bites from his bowl, like the little food ninja she was.

Alexander almost forgot he had a displeasing appointment at the start of the afternoon, his mouth reaching palate-heaven during lunch. But not an hour after eating, while he was lounging on the sofa, watching the news, a text message grabbed his attention.

Unfolding his smartphone, he looked at the sender, and his face darkened.

Kary looked at his old phone from the side and snickered at him.

"You still hold on to that old model Z-flip? I'm surprised it hasn't been destroyed with how you get thrown around so often. Why don't you buy yourself a new phone?"

Alex pulled his tongue at her.

"I like this one. It works fine, and it is quite resilient. Not like the new mind-phones everyone has. I'll be damned if I change phones for those while this one still works."

Alexander's older model phone was one of the last decade. Although it was still functional and did almost everything the new ones did, it lacked many aspects of the new technology.

The new mind-phones no longer came with screens, and were silent to everyone around, making having private conversations easier, even in crowded places.

The phones were now simply small earpieces you could slip over your ear, which hitched a ride on your brainwaves, making no sound at all, even when ringing.

Instead, it rang inside the mind, and it directly held the conversation in thoughts. It voiced text messages over, and texting was practically voice messaging, given how every message was delivered with voice on both ends.

Having to read messages was a thing of the past, and it saved everyone's time. But it also came with the much higher ease of access to certain content in public places, making for some uncomfortable situations in public transportation sometimes.

Alex much preferred the sanctity of his older model. He liked having to read his texts, and it almost gave him the feeling of old books, another thing that had practically disappeared.

But right now, the text he read wasn't making him happy. Alfred was waiting for him in the lobby.

Getting up from the sofa, Alex went to put on some more appropriate clothes, since he would have to meet Violette's posh father.

The last time he went there, he had been wearing casual attire. He could guess it hadn't helped the impression the man had made of him.

Picking out a nice pair of pants and a buttoned shirt, Alex thought of putting on a tie as well, but then decided against it, lest he give something for Alfred to grab on if Richard ever gave him the attack order.

Coming back downstairs, Kary whistled at his slick figure. His tapered-cut pants accentuated his ass, and his tight buttoned shirt left little place to the imagination regarding his muscle mass.

She got up and walked over to him, as he was leaning to put on his nice pair of shoes.

Alex felt a crisp slap to his rear end as he leaned forward and grinned.

"Don't make me want to force Alfred to wait, vixen. That'll only make my situation worse."

Kary giggled, covering her mouth with her left hand.

"Hey, it's not my fault you look like a snack. I might have a taste of this snack when you come back if you aren't too roughed up."

Alexander chuckled, putting on his second shoe, as Kary stared at his ass.

When he rose back, she grabbed him by the collar, careful not to crumple it, and smacked a teasing kiss on his lips before giving him a small push toward the elevator doors.

"Go. And make sure you don't let him beat you too hard. But stay respectful of her father. It would be best if we want her to keep on playing with us."

"I know. I know," Alex replied with a loud sigh.

"I just hope he has calmed down since. I don't want to have to deal with his drunken rage again. Let's just hope his week or so without Violette gave him time to recenter himself, and he's gone back to the father she worshipped."

Kary nodded her head, her smile becoming tainted with a tinge of sadness. But she shook away the negative thoughts.

"Have a pleasant conversation. And don't take too long. We still have much to do inside New Eden, and we can't get on too late."

Alex walked into the elevator, turning to face her as the doors closed.

"I'll do my best. See you later, love."

Kary responded with a wink, making a heart with her hands as the doors closed in between them. The smile it brought to Alex's lips lasted until he reached the lobby and saw Alfred's stern and serious face.

Walking over to him, the man looked at his watch.

"You made me wait. Mr. Bellemare won't be happy that we kept him waiting."

Alex scoffed.

"You're at least fifteen minutes early. I could have made you wait that entire time and still be on time. I respect you, Alfred, but don't kid yourself. You don't scare me much."

Alfred smirked.

"Ah. Not much. But I still scare you, so that's a plus. Now let us get going."

Tch

Alex clicked his tongue, realizing he admitted the butler scared him. It was the truth, even though it wasn't to a high degree.

Even if Alex was powerful beyond compare to his peers in New Eden, the amount of power he could transfer on this side wasn't nearly enough to make him unbeatable.

Alfred had already proven once that he could still inflict serious pain on him, even melded with White.

Alfred led the way back to the black sedan parked in the guest zone, in front of the building, before opening the door for Alex. After boarding the car, they made the trip in complete silence, Alfred keeping a sharkish grin all along, while Alex started growing nervous.

'He looks too happy for someone that is just driving me to a discussion. I feel like he expects to have some fun later. God dammit...'

Chapter 488 Flaunting Oppulence

The traffic in the city mid-day was bad enough that the fifteen-minute drive quickly turned into a one-hour drive, in which Alfred never said a word, leaving Alexander alone to his thoughts.

This caused him to grow restless, and by the time they made it to the rich part of town, Alex was already making up the worst scenarios in his mind.

Scenarios like having to fight Richard, and being forever banned from speaking to Violette. Or Violette being forbidden from playing New Eden.

As they pulled up into the long driveway to the small, rustic mansion, Alexander's nervousness peaked, and Alfred finally opened his mouth to speak.

"Calm down, boy. Mr. Bellemare isn't in any foul mood, and he is sober. Although he is angry at you for putting his precious daughter in danger, we also dug around and found out what happened. He also knows you were the one to pull her out of the water. That offsets his resentment, if only slightly."

Alexander breathed a sigh of relief. But it also peeved him that the butler hadn't said anything until now.

He let him stew in his angst for an entire hour, only smiling from his driver's seat.

"Couldn't you have told me this earlier?"

"I could have, yes. But it was much more enjoyable to hear your mind cogs spin like hell and watch you become a nervous wreck. Where's the fun of just telling you early and having a calm drive?"

"Fuckin' sadist," Alex muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Alfred asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Nothing!" Alex blurted out.

Alfred chuckled, having heard the words very clearly, but wanting to torment the kid, anyway.

The car parked shortly after entering the large iron gates, and Alfred walked over to open Alex's door.

"Follow me, boy."

Alex nodded his head, gulping down his dry saliva one last time, as he tried to get a grasp on his nervousness.

As soon as Alfred opened the front door, a small projectile dressed in white zoomed out, flashing next to the butler, and slamming into Alex's form, almost launching him down the stairs.

"Alex! I missed you!"

Violette hugged Alex tightly, the butler looking on with a smile, as the maid followed behind the little madame, grabbing her by the collar.

"Miss Violette! Such actions are unbecoming of a young lady! Have some manners, please!"

Alex chortled a bit before pushing back the little lady.

"I missed you too, Violette. How are you? Have you recovered nicely from our brief trip to the pond?"

Alex saw Violette shiver ever so slightly at the thought of her view of the sky through ten feet of murky water. But it quickly passed, as she shook her head slightly.

"I'm okay. But my mom doesn't want me anywhere near any body of water until I learn how to swim. I can barely drink a glass of water without her towering over me."

Alex chuckled at the thought. But he understood the woman's thoughts, and it reassured him that she wasn't locking down too much on Violette.

"Wait. You said learn to swim? Did she get you into swimming lessons?"

Violette nodded her little head with a smile.

"She said she wasn't going to let this happen again, and that she refused to have her only remaining child die the same way as the first. So she went against my father's wishes and signed me up for swimming lessons at a nearby indoor pool. It's been fun after I passed over my fear of water."

Alex smiled warmly.

"I'm so proud of you, and happy, too. Seems like your life will finally start moving forward again. Good for you."

Ahem

Hearing Alfred clear his throat intently, Alex understood the unspoken message.

He patted Violette on the head, leaning in closer.

"We can talk later, little one. I first have to meet with your father. Wish me luck."

Violette tilted her head to one side, unsure why he needed luck for this.

But she closed into Alex's ear, whispering in it.

"He's been in a good mood lately. I'm not sure why. He's almost back to normal."

Then she pulled back and smiled mischievously.

"Anyway, good luck!"

Then she darted off, leaving the maid in the dust, looking at her fleeing back with a discouraged look.

"Please, young lady, stop running in the house. You're going to hurt yourself!"

But all the response she got as she walked after her was a wild little girl's giggle and stomping feet. Alexander almost burst into laughter, barely containing himself at the last second.

When he looked at Alfred, to signal he was ready to follow once more, the man was sporting a much softer smile than earlier.

Alex could guess the butler was glad the house was back in a more normal state by the smile alone.

But Alfred went back to being stoic almost instantly when he noticed Alex looking at him.

"Let us get on our way. Mr. Bellemare is waiting for us in his study. Follow me."

Alex nodded, following behind the man. The study was at the back of the house, on the right side, giving a view on the end of the garden Mrs. Bellemare had planted, and its rows upon rows of bookshelves, on almost all the walls, made for a very impressive sight.

The study looked like something pulled straight out of a movie; the bookshelves loaded with hardcover books, some in better shape than others.

On the back wall, an enormous set of windows gave a lovely view of the backyard, and on the end of the garden. On another wall, a gigantic stone fireplace was burning softly, the occasional crackling of wood giving an ambience to the room.

Richard Bellemare was sitting at his desk, a set of reading glasses sitting on his nose, as he read through a pile of documents, his eyes squinting. When he heard the door to the study close, he kept reading, only motioning for Alex to take a seat, not even opening his mouth.

Alex sat in one chair in front of the desk, only briefly enjoying the plush cushioning of it before the nervousness settled in again. He let the man finish reading, looking toward the windows behind him, trying to keep his mind focused on staying calm.

A ruffling of paper brought his attention back to Richard, and he knew the moment had come.

Richard stared at him for a while, his eyes stern and emotionless, before opening his mouth to talk.

"Let's get right to business, Mr. Leduc. I don't like you."

Chapter 489 Business Offer

The statement in itself was nothing surprising. But what did surprise Alexander was the lack of loathing or hatred contained in the words.

This was the first time someone told him they disliked him with such a straight face.

"I had assumed as much, Mr. Bellemare."

Richard raised a hand, silencing Alex.

"Let me finish. I don't like you. But many observing parties have brought to my attention that my daughter has taken a liking to you .

"It would be quite easy to get rid of you entirely and be rid of the sore sight you bring to me. But I would be a terrible father if I deprived my daughter of one of the few good friends she has finally made.

"I would also be a bad husband if I were to go against my wife's words to leave you alone.

"Now. As things go, I already have racked quite the roster of poor decisions and bad faith from my family in recent times, and I wish not to elongate that list. So you and I need to come to certain terms."

"I will gladly discuss this with you, sir."

Richard glared at Alexander, shutting the latter's mouth once more.

"You have a bad habit of interrupting adults when they speak. I'll tell you when you can speak. For now, you listen. Understood?"

Alex wanted to rebuke that he was also an adult. But Richard's glaring and Alfred's snicker from the side made him understand he was in no position to argue at the moment.

"I'm sorry, sir. Please, proceed."

Mr. Bellemare nodded his head, satisfied that the boy had finally grasped his role in the conversation.

"Good. Where was I? Ah, yes. We need to come to terms with our problem. I dislike you, and I will probably never like you. But since my wife has asked me to play nice, and my daughter almost idolizes you, I have to make concessions.

"But I don't just make concessions for anyone, and much less without a price, in this case. Do you understand where I am going with this, Mr. Leduc?"

Alexander frowned a bit.

'A price? What price? It's not like I'm the one asking him to play nice...' Alex thought.

But he kept those thoughts to himself.

"I'm not quite sure I do, sir. Could I ask you to get to the point?"

'So he does have a spine. Hmm. Good,' Mr. Bellemare thought.

But his face stayed still as a statue.

"Then so I will. You have a problem on your hands. A problem that has now spilled onto my family, as my daughter was affected. Now, I could ask you to compensate for the mental trauma you put my poor Violette through, but it seems that ship has sailed."

Richard leaned in on his desk, interlocking his hands together, and a small grin made its way to his face.

"So I have another proposition."

Alexander wasn't sure where this was going, but seeing the demeanour change in Mr. Bellemare was a good cue as to his change into business mode.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the mansion, the lady of the house was taking tea on her little terrasse, just outside of the view of Richard's study windows.

The older head servant was standing near the woman, ready to answer any of her queries. But Katherine enjoyed her tea in silence, with an open laptop on the table.

On the laptop's screen, a few different windows were open, showing different things. One window was a set of cameras, currently following her daughter around the house, making Katherine smile as she looked at her daughter having fun getting chased around by the younger of their maids.

In a second window was a single camera, with no sound, showing her husband's study. The angle of the camera was a downward view, with a narrow view, giving the impression it was not a camera in the open, but a dissimulated one.

Katherine kept tabs on the general feel of the room, making sure her husband respected her wishes for being lenient on Alexander.

And many other windows were open behind those, with data and messages defiling at a baffling speed, all of which were also being sent directly to Katherine's neuro-phone. The content of most of these messages would look like gibberish to anyone, but not to the woman.

And she finally received what she had been wanting for the last two weeks.

'I have you now, you slimy bastards,' she thought, her face distorting from a calm smile to a maniacal grin.

Alexander sat silently, waiting for Mr. Bellemare to state his proposition. He didn't want to make the older man snap at him again.

Richard didn't make him wait too long.

"Before I tell you what my proposition is, I would like to ask you what you know about the Bellemares, Mr. Leduc."

The question took Alex by surprise, as it was out of the blue. He also didn't have much of an answer, since he never really dug into Violette's family.

"From what I gather, sir, you are a prominent entrepreneur, with good money and solid connections. But aside from that, I'm afraid I don't know much."

Richard grinned a little wider.

"Good. If you had given a more detailed answer, I would have been worried. In this case, let me educate you a little. Let me give you a quick history lesson."

Alexander almost gulped. No good information ever came after those words.

"My family has been around for a long time, and we have spent a lot of this time forming connections to business branches around the world. The Bellemare's rich history has flourished, especially in the last three centuries, when my ancestor Jean Bellemare joined the fight in the American Revolution, on the side of the French.

"The connections he made during that war later translated to a business partnership with some major American factions, and the birth of the Bellemare's lasting company. Since then, the money

we made in those enterprises was enough to fund our expansion in many other domains, making us the company we are today."

Alexander was already getting confused and bored with the 'little history lesson', and wondered when it would get to the point. But he didn't dare say as much.

Alfred coughed lightly from the side, bringing Richard back to focus. The butler knew that his boss tended to become enraptured when he talked about his family's history, so he tried bringing the conversation back on track.

He had heard this story a million times and wished not to hear it again in all its length.

"Ahem. Excuse me. I got a little riled up. Let me shorten this for you. My company deals with personnel. Para-military personnel, to be precise. And I have an offer for you."

Chapter 490 Transactional Relationship

Alexander was almost worried that he had angered someone with access to para-military personnel. This was just a political way of saying mercenaries, after all.

But the offer intrigued him.

"What offer?"

Richard took a small pile of paper from his desk, passing it to Alexander. Small was putting it lightly, as at least thirty pages were stapled together in Alex's hands now.

A slight look of panic crossed his face, as he thought he would have to read this whole thing right here, right now. But Richard reassured him.

"This is just legal paperwork. Don't bother reading it for now. I will explain the gist of it."

Alex sighed in relief, lowering the pile of paper to his thighs.

"We rarely give out contracts to the private sector anymore. So this paperwork is our terms and conditions, if you will.

"The short version of it is that we accept a work order to clear out the threat to your immediate person, with the ones that have you marked. My men reserve the right to pull out of the job, should the task prove to be too dangerous for a single team to handle.

"It also englobe's all the conditions you have to respect, in terms of secrecy about our deal and its terms. Of course, I'm sure you wouldn't tell anyone you hired us for this, since it would incriminate you."

Alexander gulped. This was a masked threat if he'd ever heard one.

"Of course not. But why are you giving this to me?"

Richard burst out into laughter.

"Hahaha! Giving?! Oh no, boy. I am not giving you anything. You are paying the full premium for this, and I'm not asking. You put my daughter in a tough spot, and now you are taking responsibility, that's it. There is no friends and family discount for you."

Alexander frowned.

'So this was never an offer. Not really, at least.'

"What if I don't want your services?" he ventured.

Richard's laughing face turned to stone immediately.

"Then I collect the bounty on your head from the other side of this conflict to assure my daughter's safety."

To Alexander, Richard didn't feel like someone who would kill until that moment. A sudden sense of dread washed over him, and he immediately recognized the killing intent of the man.

This was a man that had shed blood before and was ready to do so again, to protect his family.

But Alex was no slouch in the pressure department, and his face also became serious.

"I don't take threats lightly, Sir. You may have lots of troops at your beck and call, but I can assure you the cost of going after me isn't going to be cheap."

Richard withstood the mounting pressure like it was nothing until Alfred broke the silence.

"Simmer down, kid. He wasn't threatening you. Only telling you what the only other option is. You made some very powerful people pissed, and blood has to be paid. Mr. Bellemare doesn't care whether it is yours, or theirs, but he is willing to pay the blood owed."

Alexander simmered down his intensity a bit, but the glare he was getting from the businessman wasn't relenting. He could feel Richard was only looking for an excuse to make this debt easier to settle.

"Fine. I'll accept your offer. But I have conditions."

Richard simmered down, hearing the young man fold, and leaned back into his chair.

"Conditions? I don't think you get to make conditions in this situation. But I will humour you. What conditions?"

Alexander smiled, with a smile not many had seen from him before. The smile of a man out for blood.

"I don't want your team to interfere. They can act as a backup if you insist on it, but I'm doing this on my own terms. Thrice they have crossed me and have involved more and more bystanders. This time, I come to them, and I settle this. In blood."

Alfred felt a cold chill go down his back. He could tell the young man was not kidding.

Something told the butler that Alexander was going to make this a bloody mess if he got his way. He only hoped his boss would decline.

A gunfight happening in a mob boss' house was something that could be easily cleared out in terms of legality. But Alfred had seen what Alexander had done to the two goons on the news.

He wasn't sure dismembered bodies and ripped out throats would be as easy to explain.

But Alfred's eyes widened as he heard his boss' answer.

"Fine. I'm curious how you alone are going to storm a house defended by almost a hundred armed gangsters. I will allow you to go in alone.

"This also gets me out of any responsibilities if you die. I'll just say you acted alone. But you still have to pay for the information."

Alexander nodded his head, understanding that much. He slid the bundle of paper back to Richard, over the desk, before asking, "How much?"

Alfred just sat to the side, unsure what to make of this turn of events. Mr. Bellemare brought his hand to his chin, looking pensive.

"I was originally going to charge you two million for the task. But seeing as you want to do it yourself, I would only be selling you the information. And I get to keep my hands clean. Hmm. Five hundred thousand. Take it or leave it."

Alexander almost lost his breath at the price. But he guessed there was no backing down any longer.

So he nodded his head, pulling out his phone.

Richard looked at him strangely.

"What are you doing?"

Alexander frowned at the question.

"Transferring the money? What else did you think I was doing?"

Mr. Bellemare looked at him like he was the biggest idiot ever.

"Do you think leaving an electronic trail is the best thing to do? Pay in cash, you numbskull."

Alexander almost smacked his forehead in realization.

'Of course. This way, we don't leave any proof of this ever happening. What was I thinking...' he thought.

He made an appointment with the bank, so he could withdraw the sum and put his phone back in his pocket as Richard stood up from his seat.

"Alright. Then we have a deal. Now, if you don't mind leaving my study, I have work to do and looking at you makes me want to punch you in the face."

Alfred took this as his cue to lead Alexander out of the room, as the young man grumbled to himself.