

The Joy of Revenge #Chapter 141 - Read The Joy of Revenge Chapter 141

Chapter 141

CHAPTER 141 Riot

Liam

“And Henry... | need you to place a tracker on the black Jaguar parked up front. | want to know where Thomas Martin lives, so | can go visit him when the need arises.”

“Yes, Mayor.”

After giving instructions to Henry, | walked out of the Sheriff's station to find a sizeable crowd gathered around. | noticed the people at the very front were part of the media.

If all

goes

well, I'll announce my invitation to my father's wake at Cohen Mansion.

As | positioned myself behind the Martins and their lawyer, the Sheriff gave a brief statement, informing the public that Ford Martin was being released pending an investigation.

“Sheriff, is it true Lindsay Hartman killed Theodore Cohen?” A tall man asked after the Sheriff gave the public an update. He was a reporter under Greyson Hunter of The New Salem Star, one of New Salem's reputable news outlets.

“That's still under investigation. Right now, we only have what was written on her suicide note,” Sheriff Combs answered.

“So it's true Nurse Administrator Lindsay Hartman committed suicide?” A woman asked. She was a journalist for the North Dakota Herald Press which had a small branch here in New

Salem.

“Upon our initial findings, yes,” the Sheriff answered. “However, as I said, her death is still under investigation.”

“Sheriff, is it true Ford Martin has had several complaints regarding sexual harassment? The tall man asked loudly. “Why haven't these women stepped forward? Have the Martins paid them off to keep quiet?”

Hunter's field reporter was working his magic.

The crowd suddenly turned quiet and began to whisper among themselves. They were caught unaware of this small detail about Ford.

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buzzing sound like I was near a hive with a swarm of irate bees.

I wanted to smile; it was evident that my plan was working. But after noticing Lincoln Murphy's repeated glances, I fought the urge, donning my poker face instead.

I knew the good attorney was trying to catch my reaction, however, there was no way he

could outwit me.

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“Yes, it is true. Ford Martin has had several complaints regarding sexual misconduct, however the women withdrew their complaints without any interference from the Martins. As to why they never stepped forward, the women signed non-disclosure agreements aimed at keeping a peaceful work environment,” the Sheriff replied without batting an eyelash.

“Ford Martin,” the tall man called out even louder this time, “what do you do with the sex videos you record? Do you sell them or do you use them for blackmail? What about consent? Do these women willingly perform sexual favors or are they forced to do your bidding? If so,

can't that be considered as rape, Sheriff?”

Numerous audible gasps came from the women in the crowd. The people appeared shocked by the revelation. "Rapist!" A woman suddenly yelled. "Ford Martin is a rapist!"

Angry howls erupted all around us...

Some people even raised their fists in the air in protest.

"We are still investigating the matter," the Sheriff yelled, hoping to pacify the people. "Th all for now. | need all of you to head on home because tonight the good mayor of this tow is opening the mansion-"

All of a sudden, a stone flew in the air, hitting Ford on his arm. That stone was followed immediately by another which luckily missed Ford's head by several inches. Jack, with his arm shielding his face, quickly opened the station's front door and yelled for the other deputies to come out and help subdue the crowd.

In the midst of the ensuing riot, | was left standing in front of the station while the Martins

fled.

"Liam, you need to get inside, son, before you get hurt, Sheriff Combs instructed. He roughly pushed me inside the station and closed the door before addressing his men. "Deputies,

arrest these people."

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Through the station's windows, | watched, amused. Everything that was happening was one

big mess.

All the deputies had their batons out, chasing after the townsfolk. While the bigger deputies. had people faced down on the ground, the other much

smaller deputies were in the middle of a cat and mouse chase, dodging stones and other items the people could get their hands

on.

| noticed Ford entering his father's brand new Jaguar. A stone flew right past him and hit the windshield instead. | let out a low whistle. That was going to cost a lot of money to get fixed.

"Your handiwork, | assume," a familiar male voice said beside me. | was so engrossed in all

the madness, | didn't notice Lincoln Murphy standing right beside me. "Isn't it the job of the mayor to keep the peace?"

"| don't know what you're talking about, attorney," | answered slyly. The corner of his lips.

curved into a wicked smile.

"| know you know I've made my money representing people who don't have any other interests other than themselves," he quipped, glancing sideways at me. It was an obvious insult, but | didn't care. "I'm good at it, | always keep my mouth shut and | look the other way. That being said, is there something particular you're after? | heard you made a deal with Norma Martin... something about a pharmacy. Is there something | can do to help facilitate this deal? So no one else gets hurt."

"Again, | don't know what you're talking about, Lincoln," | mumbled, instead of answering his questions. | wasn't sure if | could trust him. He was smooth, too smooth. Men like him always had some ulterior motive.

|

mean,

how could he come to me when he just represented someone who was against me?

He chuckled as if | had told him a joke. "You can call me Link, Mayor. | represented the Martins because they came to me for help. Actually, it was the Undersheriff who called me, asking me to help them. | rarely say no,

especially when I may be their last ticket out. As of the moment, I've gained Tomas Martin's favor. I did what he asked me to do. I got his son out. And favors are usually repaid, Mayor Cohen. It could be an option you're looking for... unless this," he gestured outside, "is what you want. Elections are just around the corner and your rival will use this against you. If you ever need my help, just give me a call or better yet, pay me a visit. As you said earlier, it's your duty to know New Salem's residents." He glanced outside and picked up his briefcase. "I'll be staying a bit. Someone might need my help. By the way, my heartfelt condolences, Mayor. I know how hard it is to lose someone you love.

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Good day."

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I watched him walk to the waiting area and sit down. Maybe he was going to take some cases. pro bono.

But fuck! He was right. Sarah Hughes is going to love this. But I couldn't have known the people would call Ford a rapist and start throwing rocks. That wasn't my intention. Maybe call the Martin names and boycott the diner and the pharmacy, but to cause a riot? No.

Yet, it did work in my favor. The Martins were now scared and soon they will think of leaving.

I didn't need Link's help. I had a few tricks up my sleeve. All I needed to do was visit Thomas Martin in his sleep.

As I walked to the door, I bumped into the Sheriff who had a nasty gash on his forehead. One of the stones must have hit him in the head.

"Liam, in my office, now," he said calmly, but his rage was apparent in his eyes. I followed him to his office sheepishly, knowing I was going to get a mouthful.

Once the door closed, he glared at me and asked in a low voice, "What in God's name did you

do?"

"I leaked the list of women to the press," I answered. "I got the idea from the district attorney and that bitch, Sarah Hughes." "The district attorney?! He isn't the type-" He stopped, realizing what I meant. "Of course. You wanted to make people angry. Well, you got your wish. But you should have asked.

Hunter to wait until the Martins had left the station."

"Then, it would be too obvious I leaked the information," I countered. "This way, it appears someone else did it. I want that pharmacy, Sheriff, and if I can't get the Martins to cut a deal, then I'll have them chased out of New Salem with their tails between their legs."

The Sheriff sighed, knowing there wasn't much he could do. The damage was done. He quietly walked to his desk and grabbed a mirror to check on his forehead. "Well, we now have an angry mob on our hands, thanks to you. The townsfolk are all riled up. I have a hunch they'll be headed over to Highland Oaks next. I'll have some of my men secure the residents in that neighborhood." He took a wet tissue and began cleaning up his wound.

"When the homeowners association notices the angry mob camped out front, they'll ask Norma and Ford to leave. Those rich people hate scandals. Main reason why Pete left in such a hurry. Hé

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didn't want to deal with those righteous bastards."

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"He's another problem I need to deal with. I'll pass by Lisa's office after I'm done at Town Hall. I need to secure my marriage license and make sure I have a contract ready for Thomas Martin to sign. I'll see you later at the mansion. I was about to make my exit when the

Sheriff called out my name.

"I'll have Jack take care of security for you later tonight. I'm going to have this wound checked out, then head home to get some rest. I'll see you at the Ol' Barn at midnight."

I nodded my head before walking out of his office. The station was packed with people from the riot earlier. I felt a tinge of guilt, but it was a means to an end.

As I walked out, I felt someone staring at me. I turned my head and sure enough, I found Link at Jack's desk, watching me leave. If I was a woman, he would've definitely creeped me out.

Outside, I took a moment to breathe in the fresh air. That's when I saw the tall man behind the bushes, recording everything on his smartphone. It was Hunter's field reporter.

"Fred, right?" I asked as I walked up to him.

"Yes, Mayor," he answered eagerly.

"I need you to release an announcement inviting everyone to Cohen Mansion for the wake of my father," I said. "I was going to announce it myself, but all hell broke loose."

"Sure, Mayor. I'll do it for you. Sorry about that. It wasn't my intention to instigate," Fred apologized.

"I know, Fred, but we have no control over other people's reactions," I said, patting him on the shoulder. "Make sure you indicate that the mansion will be open from seven to ten-thirty tonight. That will give the townsfolk enough time to bid my father goodbye." He nodded his head. "Thanks, Fred, and take care." I gave him one last pat on the arm and headed to my car

where Henry was waiting.

"Mayor, I've done what you instructed," he said, opening the door and ushering me inside. "There's a tracker on the Jaguar." "Good job, Henry," I replied, entering the backseat of the car. "I need to go to town hall. There are some things I need to prepare."

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| needed to prepare a deed of sale before | met with the Martins again.

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Chapter 142

CHAPTER 142 Terry's Snack and Gas

Joy

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It was almost five in the afternoon when Ki ki and | finally made it home. So now, we were in a rush to get ready for dinner. While | was away, Dina was in charge. She hired three new employees to help out at Virtue's. After giving each new hire a crash course in sales and merchandising, she took a long nap in my office knowing Xavier would need her to assist him later tonight. After we picked K iki up from the airport, we made a pit stop at the small furniture warehouse which was Cristos' base of operations before Mandan HQ became operational. There, we changed into camping outfits, making sure our faces were covered by hats and sunglasses. Then, we h ooked a camper trailer onto a Chevrolet Silverado and drove off

towards Red River.

Since Red River was known for its camping grounds, we decided it was best if we blend in. Driving a luxury car would definitely alert Pete and his posse, so we needed a disguise.

K iki was happy though. She preferred shorts to skirts.

While we were driving along the road that led to Red River and its popular camping sites, we called Xavier to inform him K iki was with us, snacking while surveying our location through her computer in the backseat. One thing about K iki, she always had to have food with her.

I honestly thought our conversation with Xavier would be short, but while we were away,

there was a dramatic turn of events.

“Ford's out of jail, but he is now the target of some very angry people,” he informed us, “They're actually calling him a rapist.” “Well, he did harass those women at the hospital,” Cristos reasoned. “How did that happen

anyway?

“Some reporter asked if the sexual favors he received from the women who filed sexual harassment complaints against him were consensual or forced. The mob at the Sheriff's station didn't need much convincing after they heard the word forced. They began throwing rocks at Ford, causing a riot. The Sheriff and his deputies arrested most of the rioters, so Link is sti

at the station trying to help the lot of them. When he's done, he'll be headed to see Tomas Martin.”

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“How did the reporter find out about that? From what I know, the women signed non-disclosure agreements after they withdrew their complaints,” Cristos said, confused.

“Someone leaked a document of all the women who filed complaints against Ford. My guess? Liam,” Xavier scoffed. “Anyway, I had Jake put a tracker on Tomas Martin’s car. He said right. after he placed a tracker underneath the car, Liam’s driver comes along and does the same. I suspect after Liam’s done at the Ol’ Barn, he’s going to pay Tomas a visit. Currently, Tomas is at Norma’s house in Highland Oaks waiting for Link to show up. Link did a great job getting Ford out of jail, but he opened a can of worms. I believe the Sheriff has Link on his s hit list.”

I glanced at Cristos wondering what Link had dug up. Cristos appeared to be thinking the

same.

the Sheriff knows that it’s part of

“So Link dug up some dirt on the Sheriff, big deal. Link is a defense attorney. For one thing,

Link’s job to keep his mouth shut,” Kiki said, popping her head in between us. “You know what I think? I think Link has earned the Sheriff’s respect, especially now that he’s helping all those people. The Sheriff’s probably already thinking of hiring him if s hit hits the fan.”

“That’s an interesting theory, but Kiki, you don’t know these people. They don’t operate with a code like we do. For them, it’s all about personal interests and their top priority is saving their own skin. If Link gets in their way, there is no doubt in my mind they won’t hesitate to kill him,” Xavier explained.

“Anyway, Link is trying to worm his way into Liam’s good graces, but Liam is one tough nut to crack. It’s safe to assume he’s going to take the pharmacy by

force. If the riot isn’t proof enough, I don’t know what is.”

“You sound worried. Wasn’t that a part of the plan?” I asked. “Liam kills Tomas and takes the pharmacy, then I kill him, and everyone thinks it’s Ortiz. Right?”

"[... worried... think..." We heard static in the background, then a beeping sound from the phone, indicating the call had ended. "No cell service," I said, looking up ahead. "Check it out. There's the gasoline station. How is it possible that a gasoline station is in a dead zone?"

"That is puzzling, but camp sites usually have bad reception. That's how it provides serenity and tranquility to their campers. No bothersome calls and no angry emails. However, there is a solution to all this," Kiki said. "Chip, why don't you gas up while Virtue here buys something at the convenience store. Remember... use different names, don't look up, and keep your sunglasses on.

"And what are you going to do?" Cristos asked.

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"I'm going to set up my portable satellite VSAT system," Kiki answered. I nodded my head, impressed she had one with her. "I brought it with me from California. Dina kind of mentioned there are dead spots all over this area. I'll get the satellite dish running while you guys distract whoever's maintaining that dump."

Dump was an understatement. It didn't quite completely describe the gasoline station. It was a shit hole.

According to the tall worn-out signage, the gasoline station was named Terry's Snack and Gas. There were two old dirty pumps underneath a teal colored canopy that looked like it was going to tip over. Beside the pumping station was a small convenience store whose doors and windows were covered with so much dirt and grime, it was difficult to see inside.

There was a car shed off to the side, locked, its paint chipping off like the rest of the gas station. Junk cars were scattered around the vicinity along with barrels of garbage.

The land the gasoline station was sitting on had no vegetation around it. It was just dry

earth. There was a single tree several feet away, but it looked dead.

Dust was swirling all around the area as the wind picked up, making the lone establishment appear as if it was a scene from a horror movie.

Good thing we had the camper. | didn't want to know what the restrooms looked or smelled

like.

"No wonder your luggages are heavy. Where are you going to set it up?" Cristos asked.

"In the truck bed," K iki answered. "I'll tie it up so it doesn't fall over. Don't worry you g ay head, Chip. | got some military training under my belt."

Before we entered the gas station, | put on some false teeth, drew a mole on m

my cheek tucked a gun with a silencer in the rear waistband of my shorts, covering it with my

windbreaker.

Instead of names, let's just use our initials," | said. "I'm V. Chip, you're C and K iki, you're K.

"Fine," K iki replied. "If possible, refrain from calling out to each other. Just f ucking shoot if anything goes south."

Cristos stopped the pickup truck at a pump.

"| see a man." K iki said, squinting through the car windows. "I think it's a man, but it could3/6.

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be a woman. | think there's no one else inside. Hold on, | thought | saw Some

movement.”

She took out a pair of binoculars from her backpack for a closer look. “Dammit. The view inside is obstructed by all that dirt. Anyway, V, just scope the place out while you shop. Look for CCTV cameras, check the walls and if you’re brave enough, take a peek inside the

restroom.”

As if on cue, we all jumped out of the truck. Cristos went to pump gas, Kiki went to the camper to get her VSAT system from her luggages while I went to the convenience store, not

knowing what to expect.

“Good noon, young lady,” an elderly man greeted me as I opened the door, reminding me of the horror movie *The Hills Have Eyes*.

As I raised my eyes to greet the old man, I stopped at the doorway, shocked to see the place was clean and cozy and set up like an old mom and pop grocery store.

“How can I help you, Miss?” The old man asked with a smile, showing me his false teeth. He was a small fellow, with silver hair, wrinkly leathery skin, black rimmed eyeglasses, a white shirt and denim overalls. “We got some hotdogs over there and my wife’s gourmet sandwiches. It’s lunch time, so I’m guessing you and your friends are hungry.”

“Yes, sir. We are hungry,” I smiled, showing him my buck teeth. It was hard to talk with my teeth protruding out from my mouth, but it made me sound like a whole other person.

“Well, go ahead and grab whatever you want,” the old man said. “There’s soda, juice, water and chocolate milk in the fridge. Help yourself.”

I took three hotdogs, three bags of chips, three sandwiches, water, juice and some soda, all the while keeping a close eye on the old man.

He glanced at my direction, every now and then with this weird smile on his lips. Something about him and this place gave me the creeps.

After placing the food in a basket, | roamed around, checking all the other merchandise. | tried opening the bathroom door, but it was locked, so | proceeded down the aisle which was stacked with toiletries.

As | wandered through the store, | saw a bulletin board that had so many pictures of numerous young women of all shapes and sizes shopping inside this very store. All of them were wearing camping attire, and from what | noticed, all of them were unaware they were being photographed.

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At the edge of each photograph there was a date indicating when the picture was taken. The most recent was about a week ago while the oldest was about six years ago.

As | looked closely, one of the women caught my eye.

| grabbed the picture and rushed to the counter where the old man was waiting. | noticed his demeanor had changed... from the friendly store owner to a sneering dirty old man.

| lifted the basket onto the counter to put some space in between us while | placed a hand behind my back.

"We've been traveling since this morning trying to get here, so we're really hungry," | quickly

explained, justifying the amount of food in the basket. "My friend said the camping sites here are awesome this time of year." "They are," the old man said, tallying the food items while placing them in a paper bag. "You

have beautiful blonde hair. Your hair color is hard to find. Even your friend over there. She

has pretty blonde hair too." His lips curved into a leering smile. "That'll be twenty-five dollars and eleven cents." | reached into my pocket and gave him a fifty dollar bill.

“We have a great hair colourist. Expensive actually,” | replied, grabbing the paper bag. | wanted to get the fuck out of here. “Thank you for all your help. You have a good day, sir.”

“Wait, your change,” he called out to me.

“No, you keep it. As a tip,” | said, my hand reaching for the door handle. | tried to pull it open, but it was locked.novelbin

| slowly turned around to see the old man chuckling gleefully behind the counter.

“I need to give you your change, young lady,” the old man insisted.

| walked back to the counter, wide-eyed, pretending to be scared.

“Your teeth may be a problem though, but we can tape your mouth shut. Don’t worry about your friends. After they notice you’re missing, they’ll come in looking for you.” His smile was gone, replaced by a grim, forbidding, threatening look.

This old man definitely worked for Pete which meant this was Angels of Darkness territory.

| shuddered at the thought. Of course.

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up a CB radio from under the counter. “Carmichael... Douglas... | have another one for you.”

The bathroom door suddenly opened and out came two men, carrying chains in their hands.

This is why | hated camping out in the middle of nowhere.

Chapter Comments.

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Chapter 143

CHAPTER 143 Heart Shatter

Joy

| stared at myself in the mirror. | was wearing a black and white floral spaghetti strap midi dress under a three quarter sleeve black blazer. | decided to straighten my hair, allowing it to cascade down my back..

| gazed at me reflection, the person staring back at me had a little evil grin playing on her lips, yet there was a sadness in the depth of her eyes.

| was proud of myself. Earlier, | was stuck in a horrible situation where if | had been the same old Joy Taylor who left ten years ago, | would probably be at the mercy of the Angels of Darkness as of the moment.

Today, | gained K iki's respect which made me proud.

However, there was now a rift between me and Cristos which made me feel miserable.

From the other end of Terry's Snack and Gas convenience store emerged two men with chains in their hands. They were dripping sweat and smelled like they needed to take a bath. The suffocating stench from their armpits was so overwhelming, | had to cover my nose.

One of the men had dark hair, the color of midnight, while the other had bright auburn hair and looked like the younger of the two.

| decided I'd keep the redhead alive.

| dropped the bag of food items on the floor, appearing to be a damsel in distress.

| surreptitiously glanced through the windows and noticed Cristos was getting antsy. | saw him say something to Ki ki before walking towards the store.

“Stay away,” | told the two men in a panicky voice. “Or I'll... I'll scream.”

The three men laughed, amused at my apparent despair.

“Go right ahead and scream, Missy, but you're friends won't hear you,” the old man smirked. “I got loud music playing on the outside. And forget about calling 911 because we own the police. So | suggest you be a good girl. If you don't put up a fight, | promise to put you in the clean cages.”

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“What are you going to do with me?” | asked in a quivering voice as | slowly positioned my hand at the rear of my shorts.

| couldn't see the old man's hands. | had to make sure he wasn't holding a gun. | figured if | continued acting scared, he wouldn't see me as a threat and lower his guard.

“Lately, my boss has been asking for blondes. Last week, we thought we hit the jackpot since. we got us some young ladies who got holed up in here because of a storm. It was a pity when he only took the blondes and those with blue eyes,” he disclosed, disappointed things didn't go his way. “But I'm sure he'll pay a pretty penny for you.” | gasped in aghast at his statement. “Yep, this here gas station's a trap. The women we sell to our boss, the men we grind and sell as hotdogs while the cars we chop up into parts. Now, let's take a look at those. eyes of yours. If they're blue, you just earned me a hundred grand.”

He finally lifted his hands from underneath the counter... one hand holding a syringe.

“Please don’t hurt me, | cried out, backing away, my hand at the grip of my gun. “I’ll... I’ll... double whatever he’s promising you. Just let me go.” The old man laughed. “Sorry, Missy, but you don’t look like you have two hundred thousand on you and I... | have a business to

run,” he uttered, disdainfully. “Men, hold her down while. 1-”

| didn’t give him time to finish his sentence. | pulled out my gun and shot him in the eye.

| quickly turned around and shot the dark-haired man in the chest. He collapsed on top of the rack full of cookies, candies and other sweets.

| aimed my gun at the lone man standing in the convenience store, his auburn hair sweating... daring him to move.

He abruptly stopped, dropping the chain he was holding, and raised his hands above

head.

“No sudden movements,” | warned, “or you can kiss this world goodbye.”

A sudden banging sound coming from outside the door made him flinch. | aimed my gun at his companion lying on the floor and squeezed the trigger.

“Again... no sudden movements,” | said through clenched teeth, aiming my gun at his head. “The next bullet that comes out from this gun will be going through your skull.”

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BANE

| heard the unmistakable sound of a bullet hitting bulletproof glass as well as someone

ramming against the door. The man in front of me, closed his eyes, frightened by the loud sounds. His sweat was dripping down the tip of his nose while his already fetid stench became even more pungent as fear swept through his body.

“How the f uck do you open that door? And what’s your name?” | asked calmly.

“T-There’s a-a button underneath the counter which automatically unlocks the door and m- my name is Douglas,” he answered quickly. He had an accent. European. Irish? No. He was

Scottish.

“Thank you, Douglas,” | said before shooting him in the arm. He cried out and collapsed onto the floor in pain. “You’re lucky I’m going to keep you alive. | still need you to answer a few questions.”

| reached over the counter and felt for the button, unlocking the door. K iki and Cristos burst in, both with worried expressions on their faces.

“Oh my G od! | thought we lost you!” Cristos exclaimed in utter relief, giving me a kiss on the forehead. | saw the terror in his eyes which quickly turned into rage as soon as he saw Douglas writhing in pain. “What the f uck were they going to do to you?” Cristos asked, taking his gun out and aiming it at the poor b astard who was crying like a baby.

Ki ki rushed over to Douglas’ companion to check for a pulse. When she was satisfied he was dead, she went behind the counter.

“Douglas and his friends abduct women who happen to stop by the gas station on their way. to the camping sites,” | said, showing him the photo | took from the bulletin bo

she look familiar to you?”

Cristos took the picture, peering at it closely then shook his head in disbelief whe realized it was one of the women from Huff Hills Mansion. He suddenly kicked the the stomach. “F ucking sc umbag! | should kill you!” He kicked him again and again... again.

"C, sorry to rain on your parade, but this old coot has a small weapons cache under here. I don't see any CCTV cameras, but he does have a CB radio and a smartphone," Kiki said, stopping Cristos from kicking the shit out of Douglas. She took both items and placed them in her backpack. "What I want to know is where did those two come from?" Kiki asked.

From the restroom door," I told her. Kiki jumped over the counter and quickly barricaded

the door with one of the wooden racks.

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"Are there any more of you?" Cristos asked Douglas. He shook his head.

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"The old man said his wife made the sandwiches," I said. "I don't see a house in the area, so I suspect they live in the basement."

"I don't know about you guys, but personally I don't want to find out if there are any more of them. Good thing you used a silencer, V. But the rack falling over should've gotten the attention of anyone and everyone down below unless this kind of raucous is normal," Kiki rationalized. "I say we burn the place down. All we need to do is let the gas flow out of the pumps and into the store."

Kiki and Xavier were indeed siblings. They both loved arson.

"No, please, don't. Don't burn this place down," Douglas pleaded, alerting us.

Of course. There were more of them downstairs.

Kiki took out some duct tape from her backpack and taped his mouth. Cristos yanked him off of the floor and pushed him outside.

"V, you better head back to the truck. I got this," Kiki said, grabbing a bottle of whisky, a lighter and a dirty rag from behind the counter.

While Cristos handcuffed and chained a wounded Douglas inside the camper trailer, |

watched Ki ki douse Terry's Snack and Gas with gasoline.

When she was done, Cristos and | climbed into the pickup truck, while K iki jumped he

truck bed.

Cristos turned the ignition and drove off back to Bismarck. In the rear view mirror, throw a molotov co cktail into the gasoline, setting everything on fire..

We were already a good distance away when we heard an explosion. K iki suddenly knock on the roof, signaling for us to stop. She jumped down and climbed into the backseat, laughing enthusiastically.

“G od da mn! Look at those fireworks!” She exclaimed, clapping her hands like a delighted little girl. “You know, when the Blood Disciples back home said you guys were having so much fun out here in the middle of nowhere, | thought they were joking. Man, was | f ucking

wrong.” She leaned back on her seat and sighed. “Virtue, | was bout you. | thought

you were just using my brother to get your revenge, but f uck, this is even bigger than | coutef

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54%2

CHAPTER 143 Heart Shatter

have ever imagined. She patted me on the shoulder. “You did good back there. And by the

way, |am

never leaving your side from now on... just as long as | get to do more sh it like

that!”

"K iki is right," Cristos said, finally breaking the awkward silence between us. "You did good, Virtue."

He was obviously blaming himself for what had happened.

I was about to console him and convince him none of us could have known the gasoline station was a trap when Cristos phone suddenly rang.

I grimaced. It was Xavier.

"What the hell happened?! I've been trying to contact you for the past hour, Xavier bellowed. "Well, is someone going to tell me what happened?!"

Calm down, will yah?" K iki said indignantly. "The gas station, according to the data I found,

was strategically placed in a dead zone, okay? I tried to put up my VSAT as fast as I could,

but we got tangled into a bit of a mess."

"What kind of mess?" I heard the strain in Xavier's voice. "Chip? Virtue? You guys okay?"

"Yes, we are Bo," I answered. "We're going to head back to Mandan HQ to deliver a package."

"What happened this time?!"

"The gas station was set up as a trap to lure in campers. The people who manne convenience store abduct women. Virtue found a picture of one of the women y saved at Huff Hills. She was abducted there. They almost abducted Virtue, but sh them except for one. He's in the camper trailer, tied up and bleeding. Unfortunate

to burn the place down. There were more of them in the basement," Cristos answer voice laced with guilt.

I see you at Mandan HQ," Xavier replied gruffly and hung up.

When we arrived, a very worried and angry Xavier greeted us. Apparently, he was about to send out a search party for us when we couldn't be contacted.

“Cristos, this was why | wanted satellite images and information before engaging. You guys were only supposed to survey the area. What were you thinking?!” Xavier yelled at him. We were in an office room inside the warehouse. Xavier was pacing angrily in front of us whileS/6

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CHAPTER 143 Heart Shatternovelbin

Cristos, K iki and | were seated on a sofa like children being scolded by their father.

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“I'm sorry..... | wasn't thinking,” Cristos said quietly, feeling small. He bowed his head low, placing his hands on the top of his head, like he just wanted everything to stop. When he raised his head, there were tears in his eyes. “While | was ramming myself against the door, | actually thought Joy was dead. It scared me so much | literally thought my heart was going to stop. He wiped the tears from his eyes. “S hit just got real, Xavier. | don't know if | can go through something like that again.”

“What do you mean you don't know if you can go through something like that again?” Xavier asked.

“| mean | can't do this anymore,” Cristos answered. “I'm heading back to California. You can use my men at your disposal, Xavier.” He took my hands in his. “I hope you get your revenge, Joy, | really do. | love you so much, but | can't do this anymore.” | felt my heart shatter as he uttered those words.

Chapter Comments

Elizabeth Johnson

that's a shock, how can he leave????

Liz Boten

3)

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Chapter 144

CHAPTER 144 No Excuse

Cristos

54%

| was in Sebastian's room, still in my hideous camping disguise, waiting for Sebastian to

wake up, so | could tell him | was going home. Xavier agreed to let me go under one condition... | had to tell Sebastian my decision.

Sebastian's room was a reflection of his personality. It was contemporary and efficient, but styled with boring minimalist pieces in monotonous tones of white, gray and black. Sure, everything looked clean and neat in all its simplicity, however it gave off a rather dull impression.

There was one small object though which contrasted with the simpleness of the room. On his smart nightstand was an old cigar box, its varnished wood gleaming under the soft glow of the yellow light coming from the matte black dimmable table lamp situated right beside it. That box, | knew, was from Joy. Just like our home in Los Angeles, Sebastian's room had the same subtle Joy touch. There was one piece of vintage furniture that stood out in his monochromatic bedroom, a restored vintage black leather chair located right beside hist

window... another gift from Joy.

Joy and I, we had the same tastes when it came to furniture. We loved antiques, spending hours and hours during the weekends flitting from one antique shop to another, purchasing unique items created during a certain period of time in history. We enjoyed incorporating each item into our spacious contemporary home and adored how each carefully crafted piece brought character to our surroundings.

Sebastian, of course, wasn't the only one who received gifts from Joy. I had a beautiful black leather antique cufflink box in my office at the pub which I brought with me from California while Xavier had an antique pistol case in his office at Bo's; small trinkets that reminded us

how well Joy knew us.

Our Joy...

I couldn't believe I almost lost her. I didn't even think that worn down, fly infested gas station was a hotspot. From outside, it looked completely harmless, yet on the inside, it served as a trap and operated as a prison.

How could I have been so naive? I've been berating myself for being so careless since we left that disgusting place.

115

CHAPTER 144 No Excuse

When we left New Salem to pick up Ki ki at the airport, I didn't expect that a somewhat uneventful morning would turn into a tragedy come noon.

Outside, as I waited by the gas pumps, I kind of suspected something was wrong when the ice cream truck music began to play through the loudspeakers hanging on the canopy. It was so loud, I couldn't even hear myself think.

Through the dirty windows of the convenience store, I managed to see Joy's silhouette

walking through the aisles as she casually looked around and shopped. After a couple more minutes, I noticed her rushing to the counter to pay. She moved so fast, I expected she would be coming out as soon as she was done paying.

“K, hurry up. V is at the counter paying. Once she’s out, we’ll head down further south a bit,

then make a u-turn back to Mandan. Knowing Bo, he’s probably freaking out,” | yelled to

K iki.

“We’ll contact him as soon as we hit the road again, so he won’t have to worry,” K iki yelled back. “I’m about done. Just give me another minute to tie this thing up and we can be on our

merry way.”

After several minutes had passed with no Joy, | began to fret. Ki ki was already done tying the VSAT system in place on the truck bed while Joy was still inside the store. She should have

been out by now.

“K, | think | should go and check on V,” | yelled, pointing at the convenience store.

“She isn’t out yet?!” K iki asked surprised. She quickly let go of the piece of tarp she was covering the satellite dish with and jumped off the truck. That’s when | saw the worrie

in her eyes.

The expression on her face was enough for me to walk on over to the convenience store. pushed on the wooden door with all my might, but the damn thing was locked.

| peered through the windows and saw two men pass by, walking towards the counter. Where in the hell did those two come from?!

The hairs behind my neck stood up and my heart began to beat rapidly in trouble.

in my chest. Joy was

“What's going on? And why are you still outside?” Ki ki asked loudly as she peered through

the glass windows.

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CHAPTER 144 No Excuse

54%

“V’s in trouble and the door’s locked,” | yelled, banging on the door and shaking it, hoping for some miracle.

“It's locked?!” K iki exclaimed, pulling out her gun. She aimed at the window furthest from

where we were and shot at it. | expected the glass to break, but to my utter shock and

dismay, it was bulletproof glass.

“This place looks like it’s falling apart, but their windows are made of bulletproof glass,” K iki

exclaimed. “This dump is a front. We need to get inside before it's too late. Is there a keyhole?” She looked down at the door. “There’s no keyhole, C. This thing is locked from the

inside.”

A cold sweat appeared on my forehead and my hands began to shake uncontrollably. | felt sudden pain in my chest at exactly where my heart was, as if someone was squeezing the life

out of me.

| gasped for air; the grip-like constriction in my chest made it difficult for me to breathe. For a split second, | actually thought | was going to keel over from a heart attack.

| closed my eyes and steadied my breathing. | needed to get a grip on myself. Joy needed me.

| opened my eyes... We were going to get inside that store... by any means necessary.

| took a step back and rammed my shoulder against the door, but it wouldn't budge. | took another step back, silently praying the lock would give when | rammed into it again.

Ki ki positioned herself beside me to help and both of us slammed our shoulders onto door. We felt it move, but it didn't open... "Let's use the truck," | yelled to K iki, who was massaging her shoulder. "Come on. It's only way in." K iki nodded her head and gave me a thumbs up sign. | turned to run to th truck when | heard K iki call out to me.

"Hold on, C," Ki ki suddenly yelled. "Do you hear that?"

Inspite of the loud irritating ice cream truck music, we heard the unmistakable sound of the door unlocking. Oh thank G od!

| immediately placed my hand on the grip of my gun tucked in the rear waistband of my shorts and gestured to Ki ki.

She took her gun out and glanced inside the store before crouching low. She gestured she

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CHAPTER 144 No Excuse

had eyes on one bogey standing near the door... right before she barged in.

Awave of relief flowed through my body seeing Joy standing with a gun in her hand aimed. at the poor schmuck crying on the floor. She was okay! Actually, she was more than okay. She had killed two men without any help. A dead man was lying on top of a wooden rack, his blood staining the merchandise. And judging by the blood splatter on the wall, another one

was behind the counter.

| wanted to cradle Joy in my arms and kiss her, but it wasn't the place nor the time. Good thing Kiki had her wits about her. She quickly barricaded the door from where the two thugs emerged from and quickly decided it was best if we set the whole place on fire.

| picked up the wounded man named Douglas off the floor and led him outside to the camper trailer, realizing the filthy motherfucker had peed in his pants. He was terrified.

If you want to live, be a good boy. You never know... we might need you for something else," | whispered in his ear, giving him hope so he would cooperate.

Inside the camper trailer, | had to fight the urge to strangle him with my bare hands while |

locked him to the sink in the bathroom.

| toughed in disgust as | inhaled his horrid stench. His smell was so terrible, | had to make the conscious effort to breathe in through my mouth, while | binded his arms and legs together, to prevent myself from puking.

| doubted his lack of hygiene was because of the lack of water. It was more likely it was because he and his friends seldomly left the basement. An old man behind the counter wasn't much of a threat to the campers who happened to drive through these parts kept out of sight to lure them in.

When I was sure Douglas couldn't escape, | hit him in the head with the butt of my gun rendering him unconscious for the trip to Mandan headquarters.

This was all my

fault! | had a lapse in judgement. | knew Pete wanted Joy delivered to the gas

station... that alone should have been enough for me to suspect that the gas station was one of Pete's hotspots.

My

At Mandan, I only had to take one look at Xavier's enraged face to know I really fucked up. When he learned we had dealt with one of the men who tried to kidnap Joy, he quickly pulled out his gun and entered the camper trailer to confront the sonofabitch. Both Joy and Kiki had to restrain him before killing the bastard, convincing him that we still needed

Douglas for questioning.

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CHAPTER 144 No Excuse

"What is that smell?" Xavier yelled, kicking Douglas awake. Douglas woke up screaming, the sound muffled by the duct tape covering his mouth. "You fucking stink... You worthless piece

of shit!"

Red-faced Xavier lifted his gun above his head to hit Douglas in the face, but stopped, knowing that hitting him was futile. Unexpectedly, Xavier raised his face towards the ceiling and bellowed out his rage and frustration through clenched teeth in front of a cowering Douglas and a frightened Kiki. It was very rare to see Xavier so furious, so it wasn't a surprise when Kiki jumped back in

alarm.

After he was done releasing some of his pent up anger, he spat at Douglas before gesturing to Sam and Max to take him into a holding cell. You know what to do with him. And hose him down, will ya? He fucking smells like shit."

Xavier quickly exited the camper trailer with Kiki close behind him.

"Xavier, brother. I need to tell you something... Kiki began.

I raised my finger to silence Kiki and shook my head at her, warning her not to say another word. This wasn't the time to make excuses.

"You three, come with me. And the rest of you, get back to work," Xavier said, walking towards the offices at the end of the warehouse.

With our heads hung low, we followed him quietly amidst the curious eyes of our fello Blood Disciples.

There was no excuse.

And I... | never ever wanted to feel that helpless again.

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Chapter 145

CHAPTER 145 Disappointment

Cristos

Xavier led us through the warehouse to an empty office space that had a small sofa, a desk and an office chair inside. He motioned for us to take a seat on the sofa while he sat down on the edge of the desk with his arms crossed in front of his chest, glaring at each one of us.

“| want to hear it... all of it,” Xavier said. Joy and Ki ki opened their mouths and both spoke at once. | closed my eyes and rubbed my forehead, feigning a headache, as | listened to the two girls tell Xavier their version of what happened at the gas station. Xavier scratched his head then raised his hands to stop them. “One at a time, you two,” Xavier shouted, then pointed at his sister. “Ki ki, | want you to start. You said you needed to put up a VSAT system. You brought one with you?!”

“Yes, I did and I know what you're thinking... Why in the world would I need to bring something like that, right? You see, dear brother, I haven't been completely honest with all of you,” Kiki said in a small voice. Joy and I turned to face her, wondering what she hid from us. She sighed, scunching her face in shame.

“Last night, when I told Primo I was the one who cracked the code, I lied. I didn't necessarily break the code all on my own. I had help from Dina,” she admitted, placing a finger in between her teeth like a little girl caught with her hand in a cookie jar. Xavier ran his hands through his hair, his frustration apparent. Then he shook his head while looking up at the ceiling, as if he was asking God, ‘Why me?’. “I'm sorry, X, but I really wanted to come here and Dina needed a portable VSAT system. So I promised to bring her one, if she told Primo I

broke the code on my own.”

This was just great. I was

played by two of my own. Not only was I careless, I was clueless as well. I made a mental note to scold Dina for going behind my back.

“Cristos will decide your punishment, Kiki, since you work for him,” Xavier said, looking at his sister sternly. “If you worked under me, I'd send you packing. I hope Cristos will take my suggestion into consideration.” Kiki's worried half-smile instantly turned into frown.

However, her eyes suddenly lit up. I grimaced, wondering what bright idea popped into her head.

Kiki, I knew, didn't want to go back home. Whatever was going through that clever brain of hers, it was likely she had thought of something that would make her indispensable to the,

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CHAPTER 145 Disappointment

group. She was both cunning and scheming.

And I wasn't wrong.

"Before you guys get any ideas and send me home, may I remind you Joy, a.k.a. Virtue, already told Liam she was on her way to pick me up. So it'll look really bad if I don't show up with her, yes?" She asked, a sly smile playing on her lips.

Xavier glared at his sister, clenching his jaw, obviously restraining himself from strangling

her.

But Kiki had a point. She had to stay.

This was my first time to see this side of Kiki. She was a manipulative woman. No wonder

Xavier didn't want her under him. She was a handful.

Unfortunately, we had no choice. Xavier reluctantly nodded his head in agreement. Kiki's lips -curved into a big, bright smile until she saw my pursed lips and my narrowed eyes. Her happy expression faded, quickly replaced by nervousness,

"Where was I again? Oh yeah, back to my story, Kiki said, coughing to hide her distress. "Uhm, when we lost cell service, I decided to assemble the VSAT system so we can get in contact with you and so I can continue my satellite tracking. I know we were only supposed to survey the area, including the gasoline station, but I wasn't aware that dump was a front. X, if there's someone you should be mad at, it's me. I was the one who told Primo to stop there. I was also the one who instructed Joy to enter the convenience store and scout the premises... while I put up the satellite dish. If it's any consolation, I checked before Joy entered the store. I only saw an elderly person inside. None of us suspected there were people living underneath the convenience store.

"Hold on a sec," Xavier said. "You didn't hoof it to the gasoline station?" Kiki smiled sheepishly at her brother before hitting her forehead with her knuckle.

"I forgot, X," Kiki admitted. "It's been a while since I've been in the field. Fuck! I should have

done recon on foot.”

“And did you check the back?” Xavier asked her calmly.

“No, I was busy-”

“Enough! Your first day here and you're already a huge disappointment,” Xavier told his sister, cutting her off. “Cape Bas tone Cristos Primo, did you happen to check the back? Did2/5

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PTER 15 Dicas Disappointment

even bother to check the entire perimeter? Don't tell me you didn't do your homework.”

vier, that was why we were driving through the area,” Joy reasoned. “Ki ki was making a finding of satellite imagery as we drove. The satellite images we obtained prior to Kiki's

val were obscured.”

sorry... Are you Cap Kupo Bastone Cristos Primo?” Xavier asked, eyeing Joy with contempt, voice dangerously low. She shook her head. “That's right, you aren't an Underboss. You're

Idiot. So why don't, think you keep your mouth shut, soldier, and let the Underbosses do the

ing.

tier!” Kiki exclaimed loudly. She only used Xavier's name when she was trying to stress a point. “Show some respect! I killed two men and wounded one other all on my own!”

yeah, she did? And who put her in that situation in the first place? Hmmm?” he asked, looking straight at me. “That's right Cid, Cristos, you did... by listening to my two bit sister. As the Underboss, the leader, therefore you should get all the blame,” Xavier pointed out,

ending up

from the desk. He began to pace back and forth in front of us. "Remember what I did this morning about you being as reckless as Sebastian? This proves me right. You were supposed to pick up Kiki and come back. But no, you had to go and make up your own story. And you know what irks me the most? You... deciding to tell me last minute." He waved his arms up in the air, utterly frustrated. "Cristos, this was why I wanted satellite gear and information before heading over there. What were you thinking?!" Xavier yelled

me.

"Sorry, I wasn't thinking," I said quietly, feeling small. I bowed my head low, placing my hands on the top of my head, wanting everything to just go away. But the damage had been done.

"It's begun to fill my eyes as I remembered how terrified I was... thinking Joy had

died. I was ramming myself against the door, I actually thought Joy was dead. It scared

me. I literally thought my heart was going to stop. I quickly wiped my tears, but I was showing emotion. "She hit just got real, Xavier. I don't know if I can go through something like that again."

I said

me.

"You mean you don't know if you can go through something like that again?" Xavier

asked. "I can't do this any more," I answered, finally making the difficult decision to leave. "I'm heading back to California. You can use my men at your disposal, Xavier. I'll take Joy's place in mine. 'I hope you get your revenge. Joy. I really do. I love you so much, much, but I can't

do this anymore."

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CHAPTER 145 Disappointment

do this anymore."

Joy raised her beautiful blue eyes and stared into mine, searching for the truth...

While I only saw disappointment in hers.

"It was just one minor setback, Cristos," Joy reasoned, hoping I'd see it her way. "Mistakes happen. Look at me, Cristos... I'm fine. I did what you trained me to do. I didn't hesitate... and my acting has become convincing." Joy placed her hand on my cheek. "Look how far we've come. Don't back out now. I still need you!

"But I just ca

ist can't, Joy. I just can't bear the thought of you dying in my arms. Xavier's right. It was all my fault. I was complacent. I forgot the first rule... Stay vigilant at all times," I said. "I'm so sorry, love, b-but I've made up my mind. I'm going back home. I can't make another stupid mistake."

"Xavier, help me," Joy urged, hoping he could convince me otherwise.

But Xavier just stood there, caught off-guard at my sudden decision. Ki ki had to stand up and punch him on the arm to get him to speak.

"A Blood Disciple never runs from a fight, Capo Ba stone," Xavier reminded me when he finally spoke. "And if mistakes have been made, we need to accept them, learn from them. It makes us better men. I may have been too harsh on you, but we can't afford another

mistake."

"I'm not running from the fight. I-I j-just can't... I tried to explain, but I couldn't find the right words to tell Joy I was frightened at the prospect of her dying because of me.

was and

"You are running... period," Joy said, taking her hands out of my grasp and standing up. She angry with me. "Xavier, Ki ki and I need a ride back to New Salem after we've had a snack. We have a dinner date with Liam at five-thirty and Liam is rarely late." And without even a glance, Joy gestured to K iki to follow her out of the room..

Joy opened the door, but suddenly stopped. Without even looking at me, she spoke.

“Cristos, when you get to California and you happen to see my parents, please tell them I’m busy with work in New York and I miss them,” Joy said gruffly and walked out.

“Primo, am I allowed to stay?” Kiki asked, hesitating to follow Joy. She knew she was in big

trouble.

4/5

CHAPTER 145 Disappointment

“Shadow her,” I said. “Wherever she goes, you go. Got it?”

“Yes, Primo,” Kiki replied gleefully. She bowed and quickly left the room.

I stood up extending my hand to Xavier. He took it and we shook hands.

“Good luck, Xavier. Give me a call if you need something from Los Angeles,” I said, pulling my hand from his grasp, but he wouldn't let go.

“I'll allow you to leave, but under one condition, he said. “You need to tell Sebastian you're leaving. That shouldn't come from me.” He released my hand and patted me on the shoulder. “You're the second disappointment of the day. And it's not because of what happened at the

gas station. You guys did good under the circumstances. I just wanted to scream at my

sister.”

“How long have you been sitting there?” Sebastian suddenly asked me, interrupting my thoughts. I didn't even notice him move. He was seated upright, with a concerned expression.

-on his face.

“Too long,” I answered.

“How long have | been asleep?” He asked.

“Twelve hours, give or take.”

“Well, you look like shit and I’m hungry. Get me some grub and let's talk.”

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Chapter 146

CHAPTER 146 Laughter

Xavier

53%

Because of Theodore Cohen’s wake, businesses and establishments throughout New Salem closed early, Bo’s included..

After closing up the grocery store and having a quick dinner, | jumped into the shower, grateful for the warm water cascading down my body, washing away the anxiety from this afternoon. | needed to relax before heading up to Cohen Mansion.

| opted to wear dark pants and a white collared long-sleeved shirt underneath a dark gray knitted cardigan to conceal my firearm and to keep me warm. Cohen Mansion was situated.

atop a hill and the air was much cooler there at night.

Satisfied with my appearance, I picked up the two small silicone cases off my desk and placed one in each of the pockets of my pants. I inserted my earpiece, tucked my

microphone under my collar, then I tested the button camera of my cardigan.

I was planning to use the crowd as a distraction and see if I could find my way to Theodore Cohen's office. I needed information on the Angels of Darkness and judging by how

meticulous Liam's father was when he was still alive, I knew he had records, maybe even

locations or addresses.

Maybe he even had an idea who this Nestor Villegas was.

"Dina, are you getting the feed?" I asked through my communication device. Dina was in the warehouse with Lou, getting ready to leave for the mansion.

"Yes, X, Dina answered.

"I will be placing CCTV cameras in the mansion, so you and Lou have more eyes. If you see anything out of the ordinary, holler, I instructed. Without waiting for an answer, I switched. coms to get a hold of Sam..

"Location?" I asked Sam. After I raised a red alert at headquarters, Sam stayed behind with Max to eliminate any threats.

"At New Salem, standing underneath Old Bertha he answered. Old Bertha was the large cottonwood tree fronting the complex along Main Street. "Right now, I see Deputy Randall Evans driving by in scrubs toward the general direction of Bismarck." Earlier, Cristos had 1/5

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CHAPTER 146 Laughter

himself. He believed Dina was way more convincing than him.

"Right on schedule. Any word on Sebastian?" I asked.

"Before I left, Emma was asking the cooks to make her some chicken soup. I assumed Domenico asked her for some food," Sam replied. I glanced at my watch, taking note of the time. If all ends well, I'll be seeing Sebastian at Cohen Mansion with Cristos in tow.

What I expected Cristos to do was apologize and agree that when it came to certain situations, I would be in charge of strategy. What I didn't expect was for him to back out.

To pacify our fathers, we made a blood pact and vowed that we would see this mission through... 'til the very end. This is why I was speechless when Cristos announced he had decided to go home.

He knew full well there would be a heavy price to pay if he abandoned us. Knowing our fathers, once he set foot in California, he would be shunned and stripped of his title. But I -guess, between the two evils, he was willing to face our fathers' punishment rather than see

Joy die.

Whatever happened at the gas station must have given him extreme stress.

"You just wanted to yell at your sister." Cristos's laugh was hollow. Clearly, he didn't find it funny. "Is that supposed to make me feel better? Because frankly, it isn't." He opened the door to the office, gesturing for me to exit first.

"All three of you came back unscathed and you even set the gas station on fire. You guys did all of that without calling for help. The way I see it, you did good. It's quite obvious the three

of

you make a good team," I replied as we both walked out of the office. "Unlike Sebastian. Of all the people he could have brought with him, he had to bring De Luca. He should have called me to do recon with him or he could have at least told me he was heading to Huff Hills. Ugh! It really irks me when I'm the last one to know about these things.

"Sorry, Xavier. We thought it would be an easy job. We weren't expecting to lose cell service," he said, rolling his eyes, still mad at himself. "So what happens now? We're supposed to deliver

gas station K iki just blew up.” at the

“That is a problem,” | murmured. “But this whole thing has got me thinking... If there isn’t

service in the you think they contact Pete? Did you see anything there that area, how do remotely resembles a satellite dish? How far do you have to drive out to get cell service. anyway?

mouth.

| don’t know what had gotten into me. The questions just came popping out of my

2/5

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CHAPTER 146 Laughter

“Well, | didn’t see anything remotely resembling a satellite dish, not even an antenna, and the hills closest to the gas station are just too far away to even set up a dish. It’s simpler to just drive out and get a signal which | estimate is about five miles away from the gas station. | did notice a motorcycle conveniently hidden against the wall of the car shed beside the convenience store. | suspect that’s how they send their messages through smartphone,” Cristos stated as we walked through the maze of offices within the warehouse. “Just to let you know, K iki has the smartphone of the old man at the counter and his CB radio.”

The little minx... she didn’t even bother to tell me.

“Five miles isn’t far, but it’s far enough so people have difficulty calling for help,” | said, agreeing with his theory. “It’s weird though, they didn’t target the both of you outside.”

*| know and I’m utterly grateful,” Cristos replied, “Just have Sam or Max ask Douglas why they didn’t even seem to care we were outside.”

“| forgot about that a sshole. On second thought, I’ll go and ask him. He’s probably hosed down by now. Let me just grab a soda first. All that yelling has made my throat dry.”

“By the

way, I hacked into Lisa’s phone and her laptop. One of the numbers on her call log is Pete’s. I overheard Dan talking about it while he was on his phone,” Cristos said.

That was music to my ears.

“That’ll give us a chance to triangulate his location. Let’s call him now-”

“Xavier, I’ll just send Dina and Lou the data. I’m done for now,” Cristos mumbled pitifully. I nodded my head and decided it was best to leave him alone.

Cristos and I quietly walked the rest of the way to the rundown building beside the warehouse. As we walked in, we saw Joy and Kiki having a quick snack full of sweets. The adrenalin pumping into their bodies earlier must have hit them hard making both of them very hungry.

I saw Cristos pause, debating whether to talk to Joy or not. But instead of walking to the

kitchen, he heaved a sigh and with his head hung low, proceeded up the stairs to Sebastian’s bedroom without another word. As he disappeared, I smiled. Cristos was taught a valuable lesson today just like Sebastian from the night before. Neither of us could take down an organization alone. We needed each other. And if Cristos only knew, his decision puts Sebastian in a bind which I had a

feeling Sebastian will explain once he was awake.

3/5

12:19 Wed, Apr 3 MU

CHAPTER

146 Laughter

Unknown to

53%

Cristos, Sebastian was called to meet with our fathers before he and I flew to Bismarck. I wasn't privy to the details of the meet, but when he met me at the tarmac, I saw the steely glint in his eyes and I instantly knew our operation carried grave consequences.

If I couldn't sway Cristos from leaving, Sebastian most certainly could. I just had to console

Joy until Cristos shows up later tonight.

"Why are you smiling?" Kiki asked gruffly, finding it odd.

"Why can't you mind your own business, Kiki?" I answered her question with one of mine. I

eyed the plate she was carrying, noticing it had a mouth-watering chocolate and banana crepe. "You know, Kiki, you shouldn't get too comfortable here. When Cristos is finally done

having a crisis of faith, I will make sure the first thing he does is send you home."

"I don't understand why you dislike having me here, X," Kiki scoffed, placing a forkful of crepe into her mouth.

"Because you aren't suppose to be here, Kiki," I muttered under my breath, noticing her blonde hair and her barely there make-up for the first time. She actually looked nice compared to all that black gunk she usually had on her face. "On second thought... Since you look a little like Joy, I may have the perfect job for you. Grab me a Coke and I'll tell you all

about it."

Her eyes widened with curiosity before scurrying back to the kitchen. When she came back, she was holding two cans and quickly handed me one.

"I got you what you wanted, now spit it out," she said impatiently as she opened her can of

soda.

"What's Joy doing?" I asked. I saw her laughing as she scrolled through her phone.

"She's reading her messages," K iki answered. "Now are you gonna tell me or what?"

"Liam has a pal named Jack, so | want you to-

"Seduce him. Got it," K iki said, cutting me off to my surprise.

"That was quick," | said, stunned.

"Isn't that the reason why you wanted me to come as a girly-girl? To seduce someone? I'm ready. But do you think I'm his type?" 4/5

12:19 Wed, Apr

CHAPTER 146 Laughter

"As much

mumbled.

as 1

| don't want to admit this, you're prettier than most of the women there," |

153%

"| kind of guessed that when | heard you're cougar bait of New Salem," she said, laughing loudly. | glared at her before turning to the door.

"Make sure you guys are ready when | get back. I'm going to go ask Douglas a few questions,"

| grumbled, quickly leaving the building, annoyed at her laughter.

"X, you there? Where should | proceed next?" Sam asked, interrupting my thoughts.

"Cohen Mansion. Hitch a ride with Lou."

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Chapter 147

CHAPTER 147 Douglas

Xavier

It was almost seven-thirty. The girls were probably done with dinner and on their way to Cohen Mansion.

After taking one last look at myself in the mirror, I exited my office and headed to my car.

Lou's white van had already left for the mansion while most of my men were in another big room watching the feed from the CCTV cameras we set up at the Ol' Barn.

"X, I'm on my way to Cohen Mansion," I heard Link say through my earpiece. "Highland Oaks is quiet, but word on the street says people will be assembling here after the wake."

"I'm about to leave myself. You have your

needed to see all angles of the house.

camera on?" I asked as I entered my car. We

"Yes. Dina's already hooked up to my feed," he answered.

"Good. I'll just see you at the mansion then," I replied, driving out of the warehouse.

Recon work. It was tedious, but we couldn't afford to go in blind.

The gas station incident was more than enough to make everyone realize the importance of

homework.

Questioning Douglas earlier made me realize that Pete operated using an intricate network with small cells seemingly working alone, yet part of a much larger operation. Pete was smart, but he was arrogant and egotistical.

I was hoping his insolence would be the key to taking him down, but the bastard was slick.

My infuriating sister's laughter followed me as I headed straight to the basement of the warehouse. Once inside, I immediately saw Douglas's dirty clothes thrown into a heap in one corner, as well as droplets of blood leading all the way to the bathroom... While carefully avoiding the blood on the floor, I tiptoed to check the bathroom. There was dirt residue as well as leftover blood all over the wet floor and walls. The son of a bitch was

bleeding bad.

1/6

12:08 Thu, Apr 41

CHAPTER 147 Douglas

"Beaufort, he's bleeding profusely," Sam greeted me. "I called the Doc and he's digging the

bullet out from Douglas's arm. I got Max grabbing a bag of blood from the clinic. Doc says he needs a blood transfusion."

"Is he conscious?" I asked.

"Yes, but barely," Sam said. "I'd usually let scumbags like him bleed out, but needed answers. Hell, I want answers."

you said your

I walked in and saw Douglas lying on a sleeping bag as the Doc tended to him. Douglas's skin was pale from blood loss and he was obviously in pain, shivering and wincing while the Doc operated on him. He was naked underneath the sleeping bag except for a gold necklace around his neck.

“Doc, sorry to interrupt, but | need some answers,” | apologized. Doc nodded his head without looking at me, focused on the bullet lodged in Douglas ‘s arm. “Douglas, | want to know how you get messages out to your boss.”

“The old man drives out until he gets cell service,” he murmured in an accent.

“Does he ever try to contact you?” | asked. He nodded his head.

“He drove by the gas station and had a meeting with the old man in his car,” he answered.

“When was that?” | asked.

“About a couple of months ago. He needed younger women,” he said.

“How does he pick up the girls?”

“He sends a white van every Friday night at nine. Those friends of yours were supposed to be

delivered tomorrow. | don’t know what happened, but his order changed. He only wants

blonde hair and blue eyes.”novelbin

“Do-you ever ride out and send messages?”

“We aren’t allowed outside. If we try to exit the basement without the call from the old man or the old woman, they’ll shoot us,” he answered, wincing in pain. Sam scoffed at his answer. Douglas wasn’t being honest.

“Old woman?”

2/6

12:08 Thu, Apr 4d

CHAPTER 147 Douglas

kidnap, then we eat. If not, we starve. | haven’t eaten in two days,” he mumbled before passing out.

So, Pete rarely contacted them, but they had a delivery scheduled for tomorrow. I'll send someone to tail the van. It might lead us to Pete.

"Patch him up and give him something to eat when he wakes up, I instructed the Doc. Sam quickly bent down and placed handcuffs on Douglas, then took the necklace off of his neck.

"Beaufort, I have a small request," Sam said following me out.

"What is it, Sam? Don't tell me you've fallen in love with a stray?" I asked, turning around to face him.

"No, it's nothing like that, although he does remind me a bit of myself when I was nineteen," Sam answered, pulling out a garbage bag from the supplies on one of the shelves. "You do remember my story right?"

"How can I forget? Don Domenico believes you are one of his best handpicked talents," I said. Sam had a dark past and was fortunate enough to cross paths with Sebastian's father. After a bit of training, he enlisted and came back a tightly wound killer. "Yeah, Don Domenico help me realize my full potential in a way. But my tours in Africa and the Middle East made me cold inside," Sam said, walking to the heap of dirty clothes on the

floor. "There's something about Douglas that doesn't add up and I want to keep him alive, maybe use him as bait." He pulled the garbage bag open and began placing Douglas's dirty

clothes inside. "In the trailer, I noticed the rage in his eyes when someone mentioned the gas station blew up. Now, all of a sudden he's telling us a different story. He's probably related to the old man and woman. First of all, he doesn't look like he's starving and second of all, his necklace is made of gold. He took the necklace out of his pocket and raised the pendant to the light. "It has the markings of the Angels of Darkness."

I peered at the pendant and noticed a small diamond in the middle of the emblem. He was important somehow.

"Do you think he has a tracker on him?" I asked. He nodded his head.

"Yep, that's why I'm using a blocker," he answered, gesturing at the antenna of the GPS signal blocker hidden behind a container of bleach. "I already have the men on the lookout."

"Cristos said K iki took a smartphone behind the counter," I mentioned. "Do you think they can be tracking it?"

3/6

12:09 Thu, Apr

CHAPTER 147 Douglas

"It's possible," Sam murmured, thinking. "He knows too much for someone who's working against his will. And that statement about not being allowed out... He has so much dirt on his shoes for someone who isn't allowed outside." Sam picked up Douglas's sneakers from the floor and showed me the bottom of the shoes. It was true. There was so much dirt stuck in between the grooves of the outsole.

I took a sip of my coke. Fuck. If it wasn't one thing, it was another. Joy and my sister needed to head back to New Salem now. I wanted to kill him, but Sam may be right... he could be of more use to us. "Have that necklace scanned, then tell everyone we're on red alert status. Close the gate and seal off the premises. Also, have someone head to the lake to throw away those clothes. Lastly, tell Doc to give Douglas a scan. If he has a tracker inside of him, take a scalpel and pluck it out."

"What about Domenico and Primo?" Sam asked.

"I'll warn Cristos before we leave, so he knows what to expect, then I'll have Max take point."

"I'll stay behind while you get the girls to safety, Sam said. "I'll drive out as soon as I know there isn't a threat."

"Thanks Sam," I replied, patting him on the shoulder. "By the way, any word on the driver who crashed into Nicole? Has he talked yet?"

In "The driver said he was called to fulfill a promise he made to his friend, Luis Villegas, behalf of his son, and as a gesture of good faith, he was paid a nice

sum of money,” Sam said. “We looked into the manifest of the airline he took. He came alone. He probably didn’t want to split the dough with anyone else.”

“Did he meet with Luis’s son?” | asked.

“No. He got the call from Capo Ba stone De Vega Everything he needed was waiting for him once he got off the plane. We tried calling the number De Vega used, but it’s off. Must be a burner,” Sam replied.

In other words, the driver was no longer valuable.

“Kill him and bury his body beside Cris’s,” | instructed. “We don’t need him anymore.”

“You got it.”

In New Salem, the details of Theodore Cohen’s wake greeted us. After loading my

my sister’s

4/6

12:09 Thu, Apr 4

CHAPTER 147 Douglas

luggage drove of

the trunk of Joy’s Mercedes-Benz and giving them last minute intructions, they to the Old Taylor House to get ready for their dinner date with Liam.

Surprisingly, | found Link shopping for groceries at Bo’s.

“Bo, I’ve been looking for you,” he said loudly. “I heard that you’re the go to man if ever | need something delivered. | was wondering if | can order some champagne. I’m having a homewarming party within the week.”

“Whatever you need, Mr. Murphy,” | said. “This way please.” | gestured for him to follow me to my office amid the curious stares. Once the door to my office closed, he voiced out his frustrations.

"I've been trying to get a hold of you since noon," he grumbled. "Where have you been?" He sat down on one of the chairs in front of my desk.

In Mandan. | lost contact with Chip and Virtue and was about to send a search party them," | answered. His demeanor changed abruptly.

"Dear, Lord. What happened? Are they okay?"

for

"They got into some mess with some of McDowell's friends, but they're fine. So, what do you have for me?" | asked, hoping it wasn't another problem.

"Tomas Martin is going to spend the night at Highland Oaks. | wanted to know if | should intervene," he said. "I have a very strong feeling Liam is going to make him sign a deed of sale. He visited Lisa Murdock this afternoon and asked for the number of her real estate attorney. He also asked for the number of her mystery caller. | got the details from Chef. He was there when Liam paid her a visit."

"Do you have an idea where Tomas Martin lives? Link nodded his head.

"He lives along the lake in Southeast, Mandan... in one of the million dollar homes on Lakeshore Drive. He actually wants Ford and Norma to move in with him temporarily, but Ford isn't allowed to leave New Salem just yet. | called the DA and asked him to reconsider, stating Ford's life is at risk, but the DA won't budge and according to him, the judge won't either. The DA's furious at Ford for sexually harassing his daughter."

you

"Since have the information we need, you don't need to intervene. We want Liam to get hold of the pharmacy. Once it is under the Cohen name, Joy will inherit it once Liam dies," |

HTC

non foin me and Sam later at the Ol' Barn."

5/6

12.09 Thu, Apr 4

CHAPTER 147 Douglas

“Nah. The townsfolk are angry at the Martins. I'll be going straight home after Cohen Mansion to keep watch,” he said, standing up.

“Here,” I said, handing him a button camera and a silicon case. “I think you know what you have to do.” He smiled.

“I sure do,” he replied, turning towards the door. “Before I forget... I got Nicole’s mom to-sign for a transfer. The doctor you sent for is already preparing everything.”

“Good work,” I said. “Nicole has valuable information. I want our doctors to bring her back good as new.”

It was a steep climb to Cohen Mansion after passing the guard house. As I finally drove through the gates, I noticed there were many cars already parked on the grounds fronting the massive art deco mansion that stood proud on top of Prairie Hill.

I parked my car beside a dark pickup truck and walked out, carrying with me a sympathy gift basket and some flowers.

“Hey, Bo! Nice to see you here,” a familiar voice said.

I grimaced.

It was Noah.

Chapter Comments

Katherine Payne

so they are bringing her back for information and then going to kill her?

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Chapter 148

CHAPTER 148 Chicken Soup

Sébastien

I was in the car listening to Cristos narrate what had happened while I was asleep.

I was impressed to learn Joy had killed three men. Not only did she kill two men at a gas station near Red River where she was supposed to be delivered to Pete McDowell, she had finally crossed out Cris Murdock off her list..

Nicole was in the hospital. There were many possible reasons as to why, but I was sure it was.

to shut her up.

The rest, I believe, was irrelevant to me, although learning Norma's husband was Hispanic made it clear the relationship she had with Cynthia wasn't just purely friendship.

When I woke up earlier, the first thing I noticed was Cristos sitting beside my bed, mumbling to himself. One look at his eyes told me he was thinking the unthinkable. I asked him to get me some food before he told me what was on his mind. It's incredibly difficult to think on an

empty stomach.

He had just left to get me some food when Emma walked into my room. Guessing I was hungry, she placed a tray with a bowl of steaming chicken noodle soup in front of me. I pushed the bowl away, refusing to eat hospital food.

"What are you doing here, Caruso, and what the hell is this?" I asked bewildered while pointing at the bowl, scowling.

After the Doc stitched me up, I was out like a light. And now that I was awake, I wanted

answers.

"I took a day off from work, Domenico," Emma answered while she took a look at my vitals, avoiding my eyes. "And in case you wanted to know, the Nurse Administrator, unm, she ambushed me in the parking lot... at gunpoint."

"Let me get this straight. Your boss, who's an old lady, held you, a trained Blood Disciple, at gunpoint?" I asked rhetorically.

"It doesn't make much sense when you Say it... in that way, but yes, that's basically what happened," Emma answered sheepishly, still avoiding my eyes. She began to change my

bandage.

1/6

CHAPTER 148 Chicken Soup

"And?" I asked, urging her to continue.

"And what?" She asked cleaning the skin around my wound. I saw the stitching was immaculate. Doc did a good job.

"Emma, I'm wounded and hungry, so stop with the games," I grumbled, annoyed at her for playing dumb. "What happened to your boss? Did you kill her? Is that the reason why you're

here? To hide?"

"Ah, I didn't kill her... Link did... while she was trying to negotiate a deal with me. He staged

it to look like a suicide," Emma answered as she dressed my wound.

In short, she didn't do squat.

"Emma, your aversion to taking a person's life may be endearing to most, but in the organization, you have to be the one to pull the trigger. But, I have to say, you did good with Theodore Cohen. I have to give you credit for that. Anything else happen while I was

unconscious?"

"A lot, actually, but I think it's better if you hear it from Primo," Emma answered, fluffing my pillows.

"Where's Xavier?"

"Beaufort, Joy and K iki drove back to New Salem a while ago. Joy has a dinner date with Mayor Cohen, then they'll be going to Cohen Mansion for his father's wake. The mayor has invited all of the townsfolk to Cohen Mansion, so they can pay their last respects," she spoke in a monotone as if nothing concerned her.

"You just said the name K iki. Ki ki, as in K iki, Xavier's baby sister?" I asked puzzled.

How did that happen?

"One and the same," Emma answered, trying to feed me a spoonful of chicken soup. I averted my face, avoiding the spoon. "Forget it. I don't want to know how she got here," I mumbled, trying to keep my lips tightly closed. She immediately gave up, dropping the spoon into the soup in frustration. "What I want to know is why is Cristos here, if there's an open house happening there?" I asked, more confused. "He should be there to bug the place. Hell, I should be there." I pushed the blankets off of me and swung my legs to the edge of the bed. "I need to get dressed." I stood up, feeling a bit woozy, but just like my wound. It was nothing I couldn't handle "Will my 2/6

CHAPTER 148 Chicken Soup

stitches hold?"

"Yes, just no sudden movements and no heavy lifting," Emma said. "If you feel any pain, Doc left you painkillers." She picked up a small plastic bottle filled with white pills from the nightstand. "Take one when needed. Just one."

I glanced at her with an irate expression on my face and snatched the bottle of pills from

her.

"I got it, Emma. You know I dislike medicating when I'm on a mission. I don't want to zone out in the middle of something important, I argued. She was

about to open her mouth to explain, but the door to my room suddenly opened and in walked Cristos.

Perfect timing.

“Sebastian, what are you doing out of bed?” Cristos asked, holding a plate with a sandwich in one hand and a glass of orange juice in the other.

“Give me that,” I said, grabbing the sandwich. I took a big bite, purring at the delicious taste. of ham and cheddar cheese. I was so hungry, I gobbled the rest in record time. “I’m going to get dressed so we can head back to New Salem. I don’t want to miss the chance to check out Cohen Mansion when Liam’s opening his doors to the public.” I took the glass of juice and washed the sandwich down. “By the way, why are you here, Cristos?” I took the plate from him and handed both the glass and the plate to Emma, then gestured for her to leave. She nodded her head and left us to discuss, whatever pressing matter Cristos was about to throw my way, in private.

I waited for Cristos to speak, but he seemed tongue-tied for whatever reason.

I decided it was better to just get dressed and ask him later in the car. I opened the closet and found a few of my personal belongings along with a nice dark gray suit hanging inside, fit for a wake. I took it out and hung it on the closet handle.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Cristos asked.

“Duh. To New Salem and you’re going to drive me there,” I smirked. “Why don’t you get out novelbin

of those hiking clothes and change? That look is awful on you.” I turned to head to the

bathroom to wash up, but Cristos stopped me.

“Joy told Stanley you’re sick with the flu and I, ah, I’m not going back to New Salem,

Sebastian. I’m going home, back to California, for good.” I turned around to face him, noticing his defensive attitude. But that wasn’t all I noticed. I saw the scared look in his 3/6

CHAPTER 148 Chicken Soup

eyes. | instantly knew where his anxiety was stemming from.

“Did something happen to Joy? Is she okay?” | asked, suddenly worried. Then it dawned on me... Emma just said she was on date. “What am | talking about? She must be okay if she’s on a dinner date with Liam. You almost got me, Cristos.” | chuckled and sighed. “No time for pranks. Get dressed. I’ll meet you downstairs in ten minutes.”

“I’m serious, Sebastian. I’m heading home. You can’t stop me. I’m taking the first flight out tonight.”

| sighed. Something must have happened. Last night, all | remember was Xavier staying behind at Huff Hills to conduct his own recon while Cristos was with Joy in New Salem.

“Does Xavier know about this?” | asked him. He nodded, his head hung low in shame. “And what did he say?”

“He told me he will allow it, but | needed to tell you first,” he answered. | nodded my head in -understanding. Xavier knew | had a private meeting with the bosses after we made the

decision to push through with all of this. Xavier wasn’t privy to any of the details of the meeting, but he had a good idea what was at stake.

My deal with the bosses was the reason why we had all these resources at our disposal. Although our main objective was to provide justice for Joy, | also had another mission to take care of... after Joy had exacted her revenge.

| grabbed Cristos’s shoulder with my good arm and pulled him towards me. He needed a reality check.

“No you’re not, Cristos, unless you want to see me or Joy die,” | muttered through clenched teeth. “We swore an oath to our fathers that we would see things through until the very end. We made a blood pact and vowed. If you go home now, not only will you be shamed and your father shunned, our fathers’ men will storm in and kill, not only me, but-Joy too. Xavier, unfortunately, has orders from his father to stand down if he receives his father’s ring by

messenger. There will be no way of saving us.” He quickly lifted his eyes to gaze into mine, searching for the truth.

“Sebastian, how could you? How could you make this sort of deal without telling me?” Cristos asked, stunned at the realization that there was more at stake here.

“Our fathers felt compelled to do so, as insurance, since we were going to do this for a woman the three of us share, which, to them, is suicide. They actually believe we will make a mess of things here and as a consequence, elicitia retaliation from the Angels of Darkness 4/6

CHAPTER 148 Chicken Soup

wanted to prove them wrong because | believe our brotherhood is as strong as our love for Joy,” | said, staring at him. “Have | made a mistake thinking that, Cristos?”

“Sebastian, I’m scared. |-”

“You don’t think I’m scared?! You don’t think Xavier’s scared?! We are terrified, but we are Blood Disciples. Blood Disciples never run from a fight. No matter the cost... even if it means we might lose Joy in the process. Our fathers gave us a choice before we came here, stressing this mission was risky. Now, we have to honor the choice the three of us unanimously made or die trying.” | looked him straight in the eyes. You can’t turn your back on her or us. Ever. Do you understand, Cristos?”

He hesitated, but he nodded his head.

“| will tell you this, but do not breath a word to Xavier. He loves Joy too much, he might feel betrayed by our fathers.” | waited for him to nod his head before continuing. “Joy was present at the meeting. She agreed to sacrifice her own life for our brotherhood, if it came down to that,” | said in a low voice.

“No, she didn’t. You lie, Sebastian,” Cristos accused me, shaking his head.

“She did, Cristos. She understands her place in the organization. A good soldier puts those above him... first,” | said, squeezing his shoulder for emphasis. “If she is brave enough to stake her life for us... even marry the bastard who raped her for us... the least you can do,

Cristos, is stay.”

As I gazed into his eyes, I noticed a renewed fire kindling in their depths. He understood

what needed to be done.

“You’re right, Sebastian. I will stay,” he said with conviction. I grinned at him and patted him on the shoulder.

“There’s my Blood Disciple brother. If you need to, tomorrow, you can take the day to

unwind. But for now, get dressed. I need you to tell me what

happened while I was out.”

Cristos quickly turned to leave to get dressed, but before he exited my room, he asked, “Do you ever think of losing Joy?” “Every single day. This is why I will never turn my back on her.”

Our car came to a sudden stop after passing through the gates of Cohen Mansion, interrupting my thoughts..

5/6

CHAPTER 148 Chicken Soup

A deputy, who was managing traffic, signaled at us to turn left.

“So many people actually came,” Cristos murmured, parking our car at the very end of the mansion’s grounds. “It’ll be difficult for us to maneuver our way through the mansion. Too

many eyes.

“You’re probably right,” I said. “But we can use the crowd to our advantage. All we have to do is split up. You got your earpiece on?” He was wearing a jeans shirt under a brown trench. coat paired with black jeans and brown Chelsea boots. Somewhere in his outfit was his

hidden mic.

“Yep,” he answered, grabbing the teddy bear and flowers from the backseat.

“A teddy bear?” | asked, glancing at the bottle of wine | brought with me. “Are you going on a date or something?”

“| couldn't find a gift basket at HQ and this was the only thing | could stick a camera and a listening device on to. It'll have to do. Now, let's go. Bo says he needs some help and Link seems to be talking to someone about a deed of sale.”

From the car, Cristos and | walked to the open doors of the mansion where several people were gathered talking among themselves. They nodded their heads in greeting as we made our way into the grand hallway.

| was stunned to find the place packed with people. Judging by the incredulous look on

Cristos's face, | wasn't the only one.

“Wow, it's a party.”

Chapter Comments.

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Chapter 149

CHAPTER 149 Talons

Sebastian

The mansion was a stark contrast to the rest of New Salem. It spoke of a rich history and of an extravagance that was definitely only reserved for the Cohen family name.

The first floor of the mansion was packed. The hallway and the base of the stairs were crowded with people enthusiastically chatting away, all with a drink

in their hands or a plate of appetizers. No doubt, Liam was clearly making an effort to campaign as early as now.

As I entered the mansion with Cristos by my side, I marveled at the huge crystal chandelier sparkling above our heads. It was obviously an antique and well-maintained. I estimated that in today's market, the stunning chandelier was worth a pretty penny. "I think they're in the main living room," Cristos said, nudging me with his elbow. "Follow me... this way." I followed him through the throng of people, nodding my head in greeting while I surveyed the collection of art on the walls as well as the priceless trinkets displayed in their glass enclosures, impressed at all the finery the Cohens had amassed throughout the

years.

It was sad though. The Cohens rarely entertained guests nor did they have true friends. All they had was money and close associates who they were willing to betray at any given moment. All they had was each other. Just thinking about it made me feel blessed knowing I had two brothers outside my immediate family and a woman who loved me.

Anyway, when all of this was over, this mansion will be left to rot on top of Prairie Hill, unless someone donates it to the people of New Salem. I figured that would be Joy unless she plans to burn this place to the ground.

Theodore Cohen's coffin was situated against a wall inside the grand living room surrounded by numerous funeral wreaths from many friends offering their condolences. Facing the coffin, rows and rows of wooden chairs were neatly placed side by side each other, reaching the other end of the room. As expected, all of the seats were occupied by townsfolk who were either sipping coffee from their cups or drinking whiskey from their crystal glasses. Those without seats stood in groups, positioned near the walls or the windows.

In the farthest corner, I saw Ki ki-flirting unabashedly with Jack. She was wearing a dark blue short sleeved dress with high heels to match, her pink lips curled into a seductive smile while her long blonde hair cascaded neatly down her back, swaying ever so slightly as she

moved.

CHAPTER 149 Talons.

| couldn't believe it. She looked a little like Joy. | guess it was the blonde hair and the dress. Ki ki rarely wore dresses and she was usually seen wearing black...that included her make-up and accessories.

Ki ki and Jack were both casually leaning against the wall, facing one another, engrossed in conversation. Jack had this goofy grin on his face while he gazed into her eyes... looking as if he was already in love.

Go, K iki.

"Dom, aren't you suppose to be in bed?" A familiar female voice asked behind me. | turned around and found Joy holding two glasses of red wine. | smiled affectionately at her.

"I'm doing much better after having some much needed bed rest," | said, taking a glass from her. "I guess it was just a case of fatigue." Her eyes narrowed slightly at my reply. | wiggled my eyebrows at her, hoping to get a smile and | did. She giggled and turned to Cristos.

You actually made it. | thought you had somewhere else to go," she said, her voice laced with venom. | coughed, trying to resist the urge to laugh. Joy was angry.

"I'm so sorry, Virtue," Chip said in a girly voice. "I don't know what came over me. | guess it was just a bunch of hormones. You, of all people, would understand. It won't happen again."

"Promise?" She asked icily, before taking a sip of her wine.

"Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye," Cristos answered. Joy glared at him for a moment, then her lips curved into a grin.

"Alright. | forgive you," she quickly said, her eyes sparkling with happiness. Joy could never be mad at us for long. It was a curse. "Is that teddy bear for me?" Joy suddenly asked, pointing at the stuffed toy tucked under Cristos's arm. This time, | laughed out loud. Bringing a teddy bear to a wake. That was original.

Cristos took Virtue's arm and led her to a corner | followed, wondering why Cristos moved her away from the crowd.

“Ah, no. This is for Liam. I couldn’t find any place open for a sympathy basket,” Cristos quickly explained. “But I do have something for you from Chicago that I forgot to give you.” He pulled out a Tiffany’s blue box from his pocket and handed it to her. I pursed my lips. Cristos... one. Sebastian... zero

2/6

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Slick.

“Oh my gosh! This is so sweet of you,” Joy gushed, opening the blue box and finding a diamond studded platinum tennis bracelet. “Thank you.” She closed the box right away and placed it in her designer bag. “I’ll wear it some other time when no one else is-”

“There’s my fiancé,” Liam said loudly. He was standing behind me. “What are you guys doing hiding over here?”

“We just wanted to get away from the crowd,” I answered, turning around, “and this corner was free. I handed him the bottle of wine. ‘I’d like to extend my sincerest condolences, Liam.’ I extended my good hand, and without hesitation, he took my hand and shook it warmly.

“Thank you, Dom, he replied, smiling. Liam was wearing a gray and black argyle sweater and dark gray slacks. I was expecting him to be in a suit, but of course, he was home. Behind him, to my utter surprise, was Link. “Virtue said you were sick with the flu and that Chip wasn’t going to make it tonight.”

“I just needed some sleep and Chip decided last minute,” I replied, keeping a straight face. “Anyway, before you interrupted us, we were talking about visiting Nicole at the hospital tomorrow. We heard she was involved in a terrible accident.”

All of a sudden, Link coughed loudly, grabbing our attention.

“Nicole Davis is being transferred to another hospital tomorrow morning,” he said, “one that has the proper facilities for her care.” “I’m sorry. Do all of you know Attorney Lincoln Murphy or do I have to make the necessary introductions?” Liam asked. All three of us nodded our heads. “Of course, you know him. He’s Bo’s attorney. I completely forgot.”

“Attorney Murphy, what about Nicole’s mom?” Joy asked. “Will she be leaving with Nicole?”

“You may

call me Link,” Lincoln said before answering. “Yes, Ms. Davis will be leaving with Nicole. Don’t worry, Ms. Davis will be well taken care of. There are doctors there who will monitor her as well. Currently, Nicole is in stable condition and the doctor has given a favorable prognosis.”

“She’s actually gonna come out of it okay?” Asked a male voice laced with... panic? No...

dread.

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All of us moved our heads to find the source of the voice.

It was Noah.

| raised my eyes above his head and saw Xavier quickly making his way out of the living

room.

“Guys, keep Liam occupied,” | heard Xavier whisper through the earpiece. “I’m going to search this place.”

| surreptitiously glanced at both Joy and Cristos and noticed by the slight nods of their heads that they had gotten the message too.

“What’s up with you? Don’t you want Nicole to get better?” Cristos asked, not amused. “Aren’t you guys supposed to be together?”

Liam continued to stare at Noah, his eyebrows raised, wanting to hear Noah’s... excuse.

“Chip, we’re just friends now. And of course, | want her to get better. I’m just surprised because | heard from Bo that Nicole flew out the windshield. Usually, a person doesn’t come back a hundred percent from something as

tragic as that,” he replied casually, but his attention wasn’t on Cristos. | noticed his eyes move from the rock on Joy’s finger to her face... with a tenderness in their depths. Then, his eyes moved to look at Liam and | caught something...

He was jealous. Noah hadn't moved on yet, unlike Jack over there.

Norma said Noah wasn’t the timid, quiet man all of us thought he was. Maybe | could ask Link to get the information out of her. Her husband was an Angels of Darkness member after all.

“| forgot. You broke up with her in Chicago,” Chip scoffed. “Anyway, I’m starving.”

“There’s a buffet set up in the dining hall. Please, help yourselves, Liam said. “Virtue, sweetheart, the reason why | came looking for you is because Link and | have to discuss business and | didn’t want to leave you alone since,” Liam paused and glanced at Jack and Ki ki, “Jack and your bestfriend seem to be hitting it off. Anyway, your other bestfriend is here, so I’m sure you'll be left in good company.

“Sure, Liam. I'll be with Chip and Dom until you’re done with business,” Joy said, kissing him on the cheek.

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“Liam, by the way, here,” Chip said, handing the teddy bear and flowers to Liam. “I’m sorry. It was all | could find at such short notice.”

Liam chuckled. “This is one of those rare moments | get a teddy bear. It’s original just like you, Chip. Thank you. Just take care of my girl for me.”

“No problem, Liam. I'll watch over her like a hawk,” Cristos said flamboyantly, with his hand. twirling in the air.novelbin

“Hey, can I tag along?” Noah asked, much to our surprise. While Cristos shook his head, Joy and I nodded ours. Cristos rolled his eyes, annoyed he was outnumbered.

Personally, I never spent much time talking to Noah.

Xavier, right off the bat, hated him. Cristos, after spending some time with him in Chicago, was convinced he was bad news. As for me, I wanted to know what was in that blonde head. Of his that made the other two despise him so much.

“Noah, keep tabs on my girl, okay? I don’t want anything to happen her,” Liam instructed.

“You got it, Li-”

Noah wasn’t able to finish his sentence. A husky female voice interrupted him.

“There you are, Noah. I had trouble finding you,” Sarah Hughes greeted him, wrapping her arm around his, her long dark hair swaying as she moved. From the few times I’ve seen her, she was always dressed in jeans and a shirt. Tonight, she was wearing a black evening dress.

Noah tried to wriggle his way out from her grasp, but Sarah held on to his arm, clinging like

a leech.

The evening dress looked expensive, however she didn’t do it justice. She was so thin and her nose was so big, she actually looked like a hawk...

A hawk who had her talons around Noah. Good thing I wasn’t him.

“Hughes,” Liam uttered, his voice dripping with disdain. “You’re the last person I expected to come. What are you doing here anyway?”

I sighed. Here we go.

5/6

Well on the bright side, this little confrontation bought Xavier more time.

The Joy of Revenge

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Chapter 150

CHAPTER 150 Laughingstock

Joy

“Hughes, Liam muttered through clenched teeth. “You're the last person I expected to come. What are you doing here anyway?” Perfect. I didn't need to stall Liam to buy Xavier more time.

But Sarah Hughes at Cohen Mansion? Who would have thought?

Sarah was wearing a black long sleeved satin evening dress which fitted nicely on her willowy frame. Her long dark hair flowed freely down her back while her red lips were curled in a twisted smile. There was something off though... She couldn't quite keep her balance.

“She's drunk,” Cristos whispered in my ear. I nodded my head, my mouth silently forming an

“Oh”.

Yet, even in her drunken state, she reminded me of a wicked witch, all in black, about to cast. one of her evil spells.

“Noah, aren't you going to introduce me to your friends?” She asked, eyeing Link curiously. Link coughed uncomfortably, focusing his eyes on his shiny shoes, feigning indifference.

You can splash

“Sarah, you're drunk,” Noah mumbled. “How about we go to the washroom, so you some cold water on your face to sober up?” “I'm fine,” she sneered, the expression on her face unnerving. “I just want to meet your

friends, that's all.”

I have to admit, she wasn't the prettiest of girls, but that wasn't what made her unattractive. It was her unpleasant attitude.

Just like Liam and Lisa, Sarah lived a pampered life, but unlike the two, Sarah was such a snob. That was probably the reason why she got along so well with Pete in the first place.

Those two had that in common.

Sarah stood her ground, swaying ever so slightly, completely unperturbed, taking advantage of the situation... and judging by that smile on her lips, she was enjoying how much her

presence made Liam squirm.

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blush on his cheeks that he was embarrassed to have her on his arm.

I'd empathize with him, if he wasn't such a do uche.

Around us, the people had quieted down, eager to watch the two rivals slug it out.

Liam didn't hide his shock nor his distaste learning that Sarah and Noah were apparently an item. His nose was scrunched up in disgust.

"Hughes, why are you here? I don't see your parents with you. At least your father had a working relationship with mine," Liam said calmly, although his eyes told a different story. "Or are you here to pick Noah up? You two are dating now? Really, Noah? After Nicole?" Liam smirked while he placed a possessive hand on my waist and pulled me to his side.

Noah didn't answer. He was looking at the ice in his glass, his whole face a scarlet shade of

red.

Sarah took one look at me and scoffed, like she was being compared to a dumb blonde.

“Mayor Cohen, I believe you invited everyone in New Salem to come pay their last respects

father. In case you've forgotten, I've lived in New Salem all my life. We even went to school together. Right, Noah?” Sarah asked, smirking.

to

your

Noah ignored her question and continued to stare absentmindedly at his now empty glass. I suspected he was thinking of a way to get himself out of this mess.

Sarah waited for a response that never came. Realizing Noah wasn't going to intervene on her behalf, she rolled her eyes and pouted. Technically, she was a lone soldier traipsing into enemy territory and she could either fight 'til the death, retreat or surrender.

Judging by the wicked glint in her eyes, she was going to fight until the very end.

you

“Anyway, Mayor, I saw a video of the riot from this morning and it was such a shock to see

there doing absolutely nothing to stop the townsfolk from hurting our men in uniform,” she said smugly. You see, if I become mayor, I will make sure the people follow the law to a T. None of this nonsense of men raping and kidnapping women. But of course, knowing you, you are probably duty-bound to protect your own kind.” She giggled, obviously pleased

with herself.

Liam, you

“Watch your tongue, Hughes,” Liam muttered, his voice dangerously low. “You're on my turf and I'm still the mayor of this town. I can sue you for slander.”

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"Sue me for slander? You must be joking," she replied, smirking at him. "Oh, I see now. You're afraid. What? The beautiful fiancé doesn't know?"

Liam removed his arm around my waist and tapped Cristos on the arm, gesturing for him to lead me out of the room. Cristos quickly nodded his head and reached for me.

"Come, Virtue. I'm starving. Let's leave them to discuss whatever this is... privately." Cristos placed a hand on the small of my back, leading me to the dining area, when Sarah called out

my name.

"Ms. Sullivan, how does it feel being engaged to the mayor? Honestly, now. You've only been here what... for two... maybe three weeks. Is this sham of an engagement a ploy for Liam's reelection? It seems convenient don't you think?"

"You seem to have made up your mind about our engagement. So why don't you tell me what you think," I answered vaguely.

"I think you two aren't going to get married. After the election, both of you will announce the engagement is off and go your separate ways," Sarah stated. "A sham."

"For your information, Ms. Hughes, Liam has already processed our marriage license and we'll be getting married next week, during the Spring Honey Bee celebration," I announced. I heard gasps and excited squeals escape from many of the people in the room.

"A rich and powerful man marrying a beautiful woman who has no background whatsoever, just a store with her name," she answered, insulting me. "Mayor Cohen, from what I know of you, it isn't in your nature to do things so foolishly. I take that back. Foolish isn't the right word... I would say it's stupidity."

"Stupidity huh? I guess that's why you're still single. No one is stupid enough to fall for you," I said scornfully. "Anyway, I'd invite you to our wedding, Ms. Hughes, but no one seems to

like you. You are such-

“A bit ch, Cristos said, finishing my sentence for me. | was actually going to say a misanthrope, but bi tch was a good enough word to describe her.

Sarah quickly released Noah from her grasp and closed the gap between her and Cristos in an instant. Noah, relieved she had finally left his side, grabbed her hand to pull her away from us.

“Sarah, knock it off. Chip didn’t mean what he said, right Chip? It’s all a big-”

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Sarah swatted his hand away and pointed a finger at him, warning him to shut up. Noah raised his hands in surrender and backed off.

“And who are you to say something like that to me, Chip?” Sarah asked in a low voice, her eyes wide as saucers. “You might regret ever saying that. | can ruin you in this town, fairy.” It gasped. She was so vile.

“With that little gossip page you have on social media? Be my guest. People will still come to the pub especially since I’m so charming,” Cristos remarked flamboyantly, “and when they do, | am going to whisper in their ears and tell them not to vote for you.” He turned to head towards the dining hall, but abruptly stopped. “By the way, Sarah, tell your minions to stop putting posters of your ugly face up on my pub or I’ll sue for vandalism. My patrons find. your face disgusting to look at. And how do | know that? There’s always puke on your posters. Ugh, gross.”

Liam howled with laughter and so did everyone else. Sarah’s gloating expression from a moment ago had disappeared, her cheeks now a beet red from the humiliation. She glared at Cristos, her hands shaking at her sides and for a second there, | thought she was going to

slap him for making her the current laughingstock of New Salem.

| placed myself in between her and Cristos. If she slapped me, Liam will come to my defense and throw her off his property. Noah, chuckling himself, placed an arm around her shoulders and pulled her away from us as

the people continued to laugh.

“Sarah, don’t do anything you might regret. You started this. Everyone was getting along until you came,” Noah warned her while maneuvering her towards the exit. “Why don’t we head on to the restroom so you can calm down and freshen up a bit? Come on, I’ll show you to the restroom.” He leaned over to Sebastian and whispered something in his ear. Sebastian nodded his head, then patted Noah on the shoulder before Noah turned to assist a red-faced

and very furious Sarah.

“Where are they going and why is everyone laughing?” Lisa asked, finally showing up. She began to giggle, then quickly composed herself. Sorry, but their laughter is contagious.” | caught her surreptitiously glancing at Link who was chuckling behind Liam.

The laughter was contagious. | myself had to stifle a giggle.

“We’re all laughing at Hughes... just like back in high school,” Liam said sighing. He glanced. at his watch. “Link, | have some time left to discuss business. And Lisa, there’s a buffet table in the dining hall. Drinks are at the bar.” Liam kissed me on the cheek before gesturing to 4/6

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Link to follow him.

“What was that all about?” Lisa asked bewildered, following Link with her eyes as Liam led him to his office. “Sarah looks like she could kill someone.”

“My fault,” Cristos said, tugging on the sleeve of my blazer. “She came here to offend people, but she wasn’t prepared to be offended herself. Can we please get some food, Virtue?! I’m

starving.”

To our surprise, we found Xavier at the buffet table, helping himself to some roast beef and. some sandwiches. He looked happy to see us..

“What did | miss? | heard people laughing in the other room,” he said after swallowing a forkful of roast beef. “You guys have got to try this. It’s so tender, it practically melts in your

mouth.”

“Oh yes, please,” Cristos said, handing out plates and utensils.

“I was wondering when you'd get here,” Xavier said. “What took you guys so long?”

“I couldn't find a sympathy basket,” Cristos answered, helping himself to slices of roast beef and some gravy. While we ate and drank, K iki finally showed up, wanting a refill of wine.

“I was looking all over for you, Virtue,” Ki ki said, taking a glass from the tray at the end of the buffet table. “I thought you left me here. I was about to ask Jack to give me a ride home.”

“Everyone this is Ki ki. K iki this is everyone,” I said, introducing her.

“Hi everyone!” Ki ki exclaimed, smiling brightly.

“You didn't hear or see us laughing a while ago? Sebastian asked.

“I was preoccupied,” K iki answered. “Although I was wondering why everyone was laughing. Did someone tell a joke?”

“Oh thank goodness... There's someone else who's as clueless as me. Hi, K iki. I'm Lisa.” Lisa's eyes swept over Ki ki, looking at her from head to toe. “My gosh! Do they make all of you this beautiful in Nevada?”

“My sentiments exactly,” Jack said, finally making his way through the crowd. “God must have heard my prayer this morning, because I think I've found the one.” He winked at ki ki.

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“As if you pray, Jack, Lisa said, giggling. “Where's Dan by the way?”

“He's busy, so he just sent a funeral wreath.”

“And the Sheriff?” Lisa asked, grabbing a glass of wine from the tray.

“He has some important business to take care of in Bismarck,” Jack answered. “By the way, I need a word with you in private., Ki ki, I just need to talk to Lisa for a minute. We'll be back.”

“Sure, Jack,” Ki ki replied, grinning from ear to ear.

Both of them left, heading back toward the grand living
g room.

“Jake, I need you to eavesdrop on Jack and Lisa for me,” Xavier instructed through his coms.

“Sheriff's at Bismarck. You don't think?” Sebastian asked Xavier.novelbin

“I do. Don't worry. I sent Max-” Xavier suddenly paused. “Guys, Noah and Sarah Hughes are fighting outside.”

Drama... drama... drama...

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