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with a warm smile, Charles crossed his arms and spoke to Jasmine in a voice as soft and sweet as honey.

"I don't have time to play games with you, sis. But if you ever realize that your greed has led you astray-if God spares you and you decide to hand back what's rightfully mine, then come find me. Return the throne of Vancouver to its true king.

He turned sharply on his heel, tossing a final jab over his shoulder. "I hope you figure out the right path instead of chasing demons. But I won't hold my breath."

Jasmine stood there, her eyes wide in disbelief.

Their father had once assured her that Vancouver would belong to her, while Charles got Los Angeles.

How could Charles now claim that he was in the right-and she was the one in the wrong?

Alex placed a comforting hand on Jasmine's arm.

"You know how it is when someone sets their desire and ambition on something. They'll rationalize anything to get it destroy whomever they need to, all under the guise of good intentions."

The road to hell is always paved with good intentions. 1

Jasmine's voice trembled. "Did I make a mistake, Alex? Should I just give everything to Charles and end this ridiculous family feud?"

"I can't say," Alex replied with a small shrug.

"But I believe your father had his reasons for giving Vancouver to you. Maybe you should ask him directly."

Jasmine let out a long sigh and nodded.

"Fine. I'll do that. And... thanks for helping us get out of Vermont and back here to Vancouver."

"No problem," Alex said, though a puzzled look crossed his face. "But how exactly did we end up here?"

"You get us into Vancouver, and Kelly called her friends. They're the ones who got us the rest of the way, Jasmine said.

She kissed Alex on the cheek, then turned and walked away.

As soon as Jasmine was gone, Alex slipped into the hospital ward- only to be stopped by Florence, her eyes burning with fury.

"What do you think you're doing here, Alex?" she snapped.

He offered a subdued nod. "I heard Granddad's sick. I came to see how he's doing."

Her lip curled in disgust. "Don't pretend you care. You're no longer my son-in-law; we don't want you here! I suppose you sniffed out that my father's not got long, and you're hoping to sink your claws into the family fortune?"

From the other end of the hallway, Sophia rushed over, looking alarmed. "Mom, calm down, What's going on?"

"What's going on? This bastard is trying to worm his way back in," Florence spat.

"He's acting concerned, but I bet he wants a piece of your grandfather's inheritance."

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Sophia squared her shoulders, stepping between them.

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Mom, please. Let him in. Grandpa always treated Alex like his own grandson." She shot Alex a wary glance. "Just... behave yourself, okay?"

Florence looked ready to protest again but forced her lips into a thin line and stepped aside begrudgingly.

"Fine. But I'm warning you: keep your distance, and don't you dare make trouble."

Alex hurried into the room.

Abraham Lancaster looked ghastly pale, his breathing shallow.

One glance told Alex something was terribly wrong; when he laid a hand on the old man's wrist, he discovered signs of poisoning-an artificial toxin, far more complex than any common ailment.

Who on earth would poison Abraham?

Alex wondered, his mind already racing with possible antidotes.

Human-synthesized poisons were treacherous, often showing hot-and-cold symptoms that confounded doctors.

"Sophia," Alex said in a low, urgent tone, "go get me some hot water-now."

She folded her arms across her chest, narrowing her eyes at him.

"Excuse me? Why on earth would you need that? Since when did you become some kind of medical genius?"

"Because if we wait any longer, it'll be too late," Alex replied. He took a breath, forcing himself to remain calm. "Please just trust me."

Florance let out a short, disbelieving laugh. "Oh, please. You're going to save him? Do you even hear yourself right now?"

She glanced around, as though seeking confirmation that everyone else found Alex equally ridiculous. "You're not a doctor. You're not even certified to give someone a band-aid."

Alex's eyes hardened and looked at Sophia. "I've told you before-I'm known as 'God's Hands.' It's not a joke."

"God's Hands?" Jack echoed mockingly, eyebrows shooting up. "You really never get tired of tooting your own horn, do you? Next, you'll be telling me you can bring back the dead."

Sophia looked at Alex's serious face and sighed. She tried to trust him and went to fetch the water.

Moments later, she reappeared with a bowl of steaming water, only for Florence to slap it out of her hands.

The bowl shattered against the floor, water splashing everywhere.

Florence stepped in next, glaring at Alex with the force of a thunderstorm. "So this is your latest stunt?" she demanded. "Risk my father's life with your self-important grandstanding?"

"Yeah," another family member chimed in, voice thick with disgust. "As if he isn't suffering enough. You want to play hero and make it all worse?"

Alex clenched his jaw, suppressing the urge to snap back. "I'm not playing at anything-I'm trying to help."

"Help," Florence repeated with a cold sneer. "From a guy who can't even hold down a stable job, never mind a medical license. You think you can fix what professional doctors can't? Will you take responsibility when it all

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goes to hell?"

Someone else scoffed in the background. "You're nothing more than a washed-up ex-soldier. Stop pretending to be something you're not."

Alex's frustration was painfully clear. "I'm telling you, I can help! You have to believe me!"

But Florence stood firm, glaring daggers at him.

"We're not letting you experiment on him! This is Abraham Lancaster's life we're talking about, you arrogant fool."

Alex forced himself to remain composed. "So who's going to save him, then?"

Florence's voice dripped with condescension. "Dr. Vincent Foster is on his way. He can save Abraham. Not you."

At that moment, Charles arrived with a tall, bespectacled man in a crisp white coat. The man walked in wearing an air of superiority so thick you could almost taste it.

"Dr. Foster," Charles introduced him proudly, "thank you for coming on such short notice."

A chorus of flattery and praise followed as everyone tried to impress the renowned apprentice of Dr. Jonathan Owens, the country's legendary physician.

Dr. Foster gazed around with a smug smirk as though the entire world existed to applaud him.

He barely inclined his head. "I only came out of respect for Mr. Charles' request. Normally, I'm far too busy treating high-level officials or VIPs to bother with house calls."

He stepped over to Abraham's bed. "Now, let's see this so-called mysterious illness."

While he took the old man's pulse, Alex stood by, bristling with impatience. He'd already recognized the cause. He could stop the poison, if only they'd let him. Dr. Foster hummed thoughtfully, then straightened his white coat. "Hm. Cold and hot fever, yes? Some rare variation, I see. In that case, a special mixture of herbs and heat treatments will do. It'll be a touch challenging, but nothing I can't

handle."

Flores and Charles all but beamed. "So you can cure him?"

"Of course I can," Dr. Foster declared. "Though it won't be cheap. "That's fine!" Florence exclaimed, excited. "Anything, as long as he's saved."

Alex's patience snapped. "You're mistaken," he said, his voice dangerously low. "What Granddad has isn't some hot-and-cold fever. He's been deliberately poisoned with a synthesized toxin. Your herbal bowl might worsen his condition." Dr. Foster whipped around, eyes flaring. "What did you just say?" Alex took a step forward, jaw tight. "I'm saying that if you treat a poison like a mere fever, you'll kill him. So maybe you should swallow that pride and let someone who knows the difference step in."

Stunned silence flooded the room, broken only by the outraged scoffs of Florence and Charles. Dr. Foster's face grew red with anger, and he pushed his glasses up his nose.

"How dare you question me, boy? Who the hell do you think you are?"

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Florence forced on a syrupy smile for Dr. Foster, then wheeled around to face Alex with fire in her eyes.

"Dr. Foster, please ignore this piece of garbage. He's clueless."

"Alex, shut your damn mouth! You're trying to sabotage Grandfather's treatment, aren't you? Trying to nab the inheritance early? Is that why you'd rather see Abraham die? God, you're disgusting."

Alex merely shrugged, seemingly unfazed. "All I'm saying is if Dr. Foster doesn't even notice there's poison at play, then yeah, I question his qualifications."

Dr. Foster's face hardened, his eyes flashing with indignation. "Boy, do you have any idea who you're mouthing off to? That kind of disrespect can cost you dearly."

Alex crossed his arms. "I heard you're Jonathan Owens's apprentice-nothing more. If treatment's needed, it should come from the master himself. You're still wet behind the ears."

Florence gasped at Alex's audacity.

The rest of the family practically bristled with rage, while Charles, standing nearby, offered his own warning. "Alex, Dr. Owens is in seclusion and can't be reached that easily. Even Dr. Foster respects that boundary."

Charles shot Alex a knowing smirk.

Alex caught it-and realized Charles was well aware of Alex's true abilities. Yet Charles was deliberately letting things escalate.

The man was relishing the chaos.

Dr. Foster flung a hand in the air in frustrated outrage. "Mr. Kingston, you personally asked me to come here. Now, I'm being insulted by some two-bit know-it-all. If this is the thanks I get, I'm out of here. Let the old man croak!"

Instantly, everyone clamored in panic.

"No, no, Dr. Foster, please don't leave!" Florence grabbed hold of the doctor's sleeve, then shot a venomous glare

at Alex.

"You bastard, quit running your mouth and get lost! You've got no right to insult Dr. Foster's expertise."

Jack chimed in, pointing angrily at Alex, "Yeah, who do you think you are? Piss off!"

"How can you be so cold, Alex?" another family member snarled. "Do you actually want Old Mr. Lancaster to die, you heartless prick?"

Amid the flood of insults, Dr. Foster raised his chin. "I've had enough. Throw him out or I won't lift a finger to help."

Florence spun on her heel, still clinging to Dr. Foster. "Don't worry, doctor. He'll be gone in a second."

She glared at Alex. "You heard him. Get the hell out!"

"Get out!" the family echoed in a venomous chorus. "Don't sabotage Grandpa's treatment!"

Alex held his ground for a moment, frustration etched on his face. "I'm only trying to protect Grandpa. This man can't be trusted," he said firmly.

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Sophia, stepping forward, roared, "Shut up! If you can't do anything useful, don't make things worse. Get out right now!"

You don't believe me?" Alex asked, his voice low.

She sneered, her finger trembling as it aimed at the door. "Why would I? You're a compulsive liar. Leave. Now." Alex, seeing the seething glares all around him, fell silent for a moment before quietly exiting 1

Once he disappeared down the corridor, the remaining onlookers unleashed a torrent of insults behind him.

"What a nuisance," someone spat.

"He's lucky we haven't kicked his teeth in," another hissed

Florence patted Dr. Foster's shoulder, her tone syrupy again. "Doctor, I'm so sorry. That brat's gone. Please, let's continue."

Charles stepped forward, putting on a diplomatic face.

"Vincent, please. For my sake-let it slide this time. Treat Old Mr. Lancaster, and I promise you'll be compensated handsomely."

Dr. Foster-Vincent-shot Charles a stern look, then flicked an invisible speck of dust off his coat. "I'll do it, but only because it's you asking, Mr. Kingston. Next time, I won't be so forgiving."

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief and thanked Charles profusely, casting hateful side-eyes toward the hallway where Alex had disappeared.

Outside, Charles sauntered out to find Alex slumped in a waiting chair, arms folded, face taut with anger.

Charles gave a low laugh. "Isn't the Lancaster family wonderful? They've practically rolled out the red carpet for me."

Alex shot him a deadly glare. "What do you want, Charles?"

Charles leaned against the wall, crossing his arms. "I want to destroy everything you hold dear. Your precious people... even your dear grandfather-in-law's legacy. He didn't approve of me being with Sophia, so maybe it's time he learned a hard lesson."

Alex's anger flared, eyes darkening. "You gave him the poison, didn't you?" Charles scoffed, feigning outrage. "Me? Poison the old man? Don't be dramatic." He paused, a grin tugging at his lips.

"Though if I did, I'd never admit it. You can keep playing detective, but you'll only end up hurting yourself. And just look at how easily the Lancaster clan worships me. They think I'm some kind of savior and you're just the scum on their shoes."

"You're a sick man," Alex snapped, giving Charles a sharp shove that nearly knocked him off balance. "Play these games all you want-but you'll regret it."

"Regret? Me?" Charles laughed. "A wolf doesn't need to kill the sheep when the flock turns o they'll be the ones to tear you apart."

elf. One day,

"They'll see your true colors first," Alex shot back, spinning on his heel. He refused to argue any longer and

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stormed down the hall, fists clenched at his sides.

Charles snickered. "Go on, Alex. Struggle all you want. The harder you fight, the more they'll hate you. I don't even need to lift a finger to make Sophia despise you your own family does the work for me."

Meanwhile, back in the ward, Dr. Foster wasted no time. After scribbling on a prescription pad, he thrust it into Florence's hands. "Get these meds. Hurry."

Jack raced out, returning in under ten minutes with everything he needed.

Without ceremony, Dr. Foster mixed up a quick dose and forced it between Abraham's lips.

The watchers held their breath as the old man's color returned. His limbs, which had been stiff and cold, began to relax.

Relief washed over the room like a tidal wave.

"He's looking better!" someone exclaimed. "Dr. Foster, you're a miracle worker!" another added, clasping the doctor's hand.

Vincent soaked up the praise, his chest puffed with self-importance. "Not to brag, but I've learned at least eighty percent of my mentor's brilliance. No ailment scares me."

"Indeed!" Florence chimed, smiling widely. "If that loser Alex were still here, we could show him what real skill looks like!"

But just as the words left her mouth, Abraham's face twisted in agony. His cheeks flared crimson, sweat poured down his temples, and a frantic cough erupted from

his lungs.

"What the-?" Florence gasped.

Abraham lurched forward, hacking up a dark stream of blood before collapsing backward in a limp heap. The crowd froze in horror, each of them paling.

"Doctor, what's happening?" Sophia cried, her voice tremulous with terror.

"This isn't possible," Vincent muttered, blinking rapidly. "I treated him correctly. It should've worked-there's no way it failed."

But Abraham's condition spiraled fast. His heart hammered uncontrollably, and his limbs shook as if in seizure.

Dr. Foster pressed a trembling hand over Abraham's heart, face drawn. "This is bad. The old man must've had some pre-existing condition that amplified the fever. I-" He swallowed.

"I'm afraid there's no saving him. Prepare yourselves for the worst." Everyone in the room went silent, horror etched on their faces. Then Sophia rushed forward, clinging to the doctor.

"No, no, no. Please, Dr. Foster, I'll pay anything. Just save my grandfather!"

At that moment, the door swung open with a violent bang. Alex strode in, his expression set in grim determination.

He pulled acupuncture needles from his jacket pocket and, before anyone could object, swiftly in Abraham's neck, chest and some key pressure points, instantly calming his body.

ed them into

"What the hell are you doing?!" Vincent roared, outraged.

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Alex didn't even glance at him. "Step aside. If you can't cure him, then I will."

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"Who says I can't cure him?" Vincent demanded boldly, his eyes flashing with defiance.

"My medicine is still working, but you-putting all these strange needles into his body-you're making him worse! You're killing him!"

Alex let out a sharp sneer. "So you're saying this is my fault?"

"Of course, it's your fault! If anything goes wrong, you should take full responsibility!" Vincent barked.

In truth, he had been panicking earlier, unsure if his treatment would work.

But now that Alex had appeared, disrupting everything, he saw the perfect opportunity to shift the blame.

"Thank the heavens!" Vincent thought. Finally, a scapegoat.

Alex's lips curled in mockery. "You're not good at anything besides shifting blame.

I don't understand how you can be a doctor."

"You bastard! What the hell are you talking about?! I'll kick your ass!" Vincent exploded, his patience snapping.

Alex didn't even flinch. His gaze turned cold, sharp like a blade. "Go ahead and try-if you don't mind dying."

Vincent's breath hitched. The look in Alex's eyes sent a chill down his spine.

"Alex! What on earth are you doing?" Sophia's voice rang out, sharp with frustration.

"You don't have any medical skills! Why are you messing around?!"

Everything had happened so fast the moment Alex entered the room that Sophia had only just gathered her thoughts.

Alex turned to her, his expression icy. "Are you guys blind? This so-called doctor made your granddad cough up blood-and you still believe him?"

"Dr. Foster said he knows how to treat him-until you came in and made things worse!" Sophia snapped back, her temper rising.

"So you just believe everything he says?" Alex scoffed. "Would you all drink poison if he told you it was a health supplement?"

"You-!" Sophia started, but her words stuck in her throat,

She had no argument.

"Enough talking! Get out of my way!" Alex's voice cut through the air like a knife. His sheer force of presence made everyone freeze in place.

Florence, who had been watching anxiously, finally stepped forward. "Don't you dare-"

"Shut up!" Alex's roar thundered through the room.

Florence staggered back, completely shocked into silence.

Ignoring the stunned expressions around him, Alex grabbed a glass of warm water.

He crushed the miracle pill into fine powder and mixed it into the water, stirring carefully. Then, he gently fed it

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to Abraham, ensuring he swallowed every drop.

Although Alex could have cured him using his own medical techniques, it would have taken too much time and effort.

The miracle pill contained an antidote function, making it the fastest solution.

Sophia crossed her arms, her expression still filled with doubt. "Are you sure this will work?"

Alex didn't even glance at her. "Effective or not, you'll see in a minute."

Vincent let out a mocking scoff. "How ridiculous! You really think you can cure him with some random powder? What are you, a wizard?!"

Alex ignored him and calmly removed all the acupuncture needles, placing them neatly back into their box.

Florence's voice snapped through the tense air. "Alex! I'm warning you! If anything happens to Granddad, I won't let you off easily!"

Before anyone could respond-

Abraham's eyes shot open.

Gasps filled the room.

"He... He's awake?!"

Stunned silence followed.

No one had expected that a single glass of warm water would be all Abraham needed to wake up.

It was nothing short of a miracle.

"No way... Did Alex really cure him?!"

"That's insane! Even Dr. Foster couldn't do it! How the hell did he pull it off?!"

The crowd exchanged shocked glances, their earlier doubt crumbling into something else-respect.

They had underestimated Alex.

Sophia rushed forward, gripping her grandfather's hand. "Granddad, how do you feel?"

Abraham blinked, touching his own body as if testing whether it was real. "That's... strange. One moment, I felt like I was freezing to death. Then I was burning. But now..."

He sat up slowly, realization dawning on his face.

"...I feel perfectly fine."

His words shattered whatever doubt remained.

Everyone stared at Alex-not with ridicule, but with awe.

"Dad... you... you're really okay?" Florence asked, still in disbelief.

Abraham let out a hearty laugh. "Of course! I feel refreshed and full of energy!"

Hearing this, the tension in the room finally eased. Everyone sighed in relief, though suspicion still lingered in

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their eyes.

Since Since when has Alex known how to cure illnesses?

Vincent, who had been frozen in shock, finally snapped out of it.

"No! No way!" His face twisted in disbelief. "The patient was clearly dying! How the hell did you save him?!"

He clenched his fists. Only he knew how abnormal Abraham's condition had been-his heart had been on the verge of complete failure.

It was impossible to treat, even for him.

Yet somehow... Alex did it?

Alex met his gaze with a cold smirk. "You couldn't cure him. That doesn't mean I couldn't. Maybe you should actually learn something from your mentor so you

don't keep making a fool of yourself."

Vincent's face darkened with rage.

Just then, a sneering voice cut through the tension.

"Don't be so arrogant, Alex."

Charles.

He stepped forward, his lips curled in mockery.

"I heard you begged Jasmine for a miracle pill even kneeling and kissing her feet just so you could pretend to be a great doctor."

Alex's eyes sharpened, locking onto Charles like a blade.

The room fell silent.

Charles turned to the others, his voice dripping with false sincerity.

"Everyone, you all know that recently, a miracle pill was being sold in Vancouver.

My dear little sister Jasmine knew I bought one and begged me to have it, claiming it was an emergency."

He sighed dramatically.

"I refused, of course. I had already planned to use that pill to save Grandfather."

He paused for effect, before adding, "But Jasmine stole it from me... and gave it to Alex."

A murmur ran through the crowd.

"What?! Jasmine stole it from you?" Florence's face darkened as she turned to Alex. 1

Charles quickly continued.

"Yes, I just realized it when Alex pulled out the pill." He shook his head as if graciously forgiving them.

"But, well... since it was used to save Grandfather, I suppose it was worth it."

Jack couldn't hold back his sneer. "So what you're saying is—Alex stole what was rightfully Charles'?"

A few others nodded in agreement.

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Charles sighed, shaking his head in fake disappointment. "Alex, Alex... to think you would beg Jasmine to steal from her own brother. What a great man you are."

Mocking and insulting spread through the room.

The atmosphere turned hostile-and all eyes were on Alex

"He led a good woman astray... Only hell awaits him." someone muttered in disdain.

Florence sighed dramatically, turning to Charles.

"Don't worry, Charles. We know the truth. This loser could never afford such a pill.

He's just an arrogant bastard trying to act like a hero. You are the one who truly saved the family."

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Chajes wore an over-the-top bumble expression, all but shrugging off the family's astonishment.

The room, once filled with the quiet hum of relief, was now heavy with tense curiosity.

Dr. Vincent was still reeling from the shock when he practically shouted, "Of course! It was the Miracle Pill! That's why it worked so damn fast!"

Sophia's brow furrowed. "Miracle Pill? Are we supposed to know what that is?"

Vincent's eyes glistened with something close to fanatic awe.

"They call it a miracle for a reason. It's so rare, it practically doesn't exist. Legend says it was crafted by some old sage who lived-wait for it-five hundred years!"

His words set the Lancaster family abuzz. Some whispered in disbelief; others stared, transfixed

"And the person who got it from," Vincent added, voice low and dramatic, "claimed she nearly sold her soul just to lay hands on one."

A collective gasp rippled through the family.

A pill so powerful it could haul someone back from death's door? It sounded like the stuff of fever dreams.

"I even heard a single dose can go for over a hundred million dollars." Vincent's voice cracked under the weight of that staggering figure.

That revelation practically knocked the wind out of the room.

No one spoke, but the looks on their faces spoke volumes.

Then Jack broke the silence with an unfeeling snort. "What a damn waste," he muttered, every syllable dripping

contempt.

"All that money spent on an old man who won't be around much longer? Think of what we could've done for our kids our grandkids-if we'd sold it! But hey, guess we just toss money down the drain now, right?"

His words rang like a death knell.

A grim truth sank in. The hushed glances the Lancaster family exchanged turned pointed and suspicious.

It was as if, in unison, they shifted their hostility toward Alex, painting him as the villain who'd just squandered the family's golden ticket.

Vincent seized the moment, glaring at Alex with renewed confidence. "So that's how you pulled off your little magic trick. You took credit for something the Miracle Pill did. You're not a genius doctor-you're a con man."

He paused, then snapped his fingers in realization. "Wait a minute... you must've stolen it from Charles! You pathetic thief. You're gonna pay for that."

Alex kept his composure, though his patience was nearing its limit. "Steal? Me?" he scoffed. "I'm not that kind of lowlife."

Jack folded his arms, voice dripping venom. "So you're telling me you can just drop a hundred m Yeah, right."

Charles took a delicate step forward, putting on his saintly concerned" face. 1 on a pill?

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"Let's see, Alex. Must've come from my dear little sister, Jasmine. That means you snatched it from me, indirectly."

Alex held Charles's gaze. "She gave me the pill. I didn't steal a thing."

Charles responded with a lifeless laugh.

"Yeah, well, she 'stole' it from me first. So you're just as guilty by association.

You've taught her to lie, to cheat me out of what's mine. How does it feel to groom someone into betraying family?"

His words spread like poison gas, infecting the air and fueling the Lancaster family's suspicion.

Heads shook. Mouths twisted in disgust or pity, no one entirely sure where they stood-but it wasn't on Alex's

side.

Florence snapped first. "Alex! Don't you have a shred of dignity? This entire stunt- stealing some precious medicine-just to impress us?"

"Can you believe we almost bought into his stupid hype?" someone else chimed in, voice dripping with scorn.

"He's got zero skills and clearly no morals, either. Great job pulling the wool over our eyes, Alex. Bravo."

One after another, they joined in with sneers and insults, the atmosphere bristling with contempt.

Sophia's voice rose above the angry crowd, shaky with disbelief. "Alex... tell me why. Why would you do this?" She looked anguished, like someone had just told her Santa Claus wasn't real

"I really, truly believed you had some gift. But all this time, you were stealing from Charles?"

Alex's jaw tightened. His eyes flashed with an icy resolve as he surveyed the hostile faces.

"I'll say it again. I. Did. Not. Steal. Anything. Jasmine gave it to me as a gift- freely."

Charles put on a contrite smile, raising his hands in a show of benevolence. "Everyone, he's right. It was a gift from Jasmine, so Alex did nothing wrong. Please, let's not accuse him any further," Charles said, his voice soft and reasonable the perfect mask of innocence.

He exhaled theatrically, as though he were the real victim.

The family paused, silent just long enough to let suspicion settle more deeply on Alex.

Florence broke that silence, practically hissing, "What, so he gets off scot-free because of some sweet talk? He needs to kneel. Right here. Right now. And grovel for forgiveness."

A chorus of approval erupted:

"Kneel and apologize, Alex!"

"You worthless piece of trash-stealing and strutting around like a hero!"

"Someone ought to lock you up for this!"

Jack turned to Charles, eyes brimming with malice. "Why not just send him packing to jail? Show him the consequences of messing with you."

Charles let out a world-weary sigh, shaking his head. "No. That would hurt Jasmine. I can't do that to her."

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"Charles, you're way too nice," Dr. Vincent snarled, stepping up and grabbing Alex's shoulder in a tight clamp,

"This piece of garbage needs a lesson. You'd better start kneeling and begging or you'll regret it."

Slowly, Alex turned his head, his expression dark and foreboding. "Take your hand off me."

Vincent's lips curled. "Or else what? Gonna slap me with your miracle pill, too? Who do you think you're messing with?"

SMACK!

A sharp crack split the air. Vincent staggered back, nearly losing his balance.

All eyes locked on Alex in horror-and a hint of admiration for the sheer audacity. "You... you hit me?!" Vincent choked out, pressing a trembling hand to his burning cheek.

Alex shrugged, unbothered. "Sure did. You want an invitation next time?"

Vincent's face blazed red with fury. "You miserable punk. You think you can get away with this? That was a big mistake, boy. If you know what's good for you, you'll drop down right now and beg me not to ruin you."

Alex's voice was like steel. "Beg you? As if you deserve that."

Vincent's nostrils flared. "Fine. You asked for this."

He fumbled for his phone, stabbing at the screen to call someone-someone who could presumably make Alex's life hell.

Charles's sneer grew more pronounced as he sidled up to Alex.

"If I were you, I'd get on my knees for Dr. Foster. Do you have any idea how

connected he is? You're not just going up against one man. He's got Dr. Owens and the entire Owens family in his corner."

Alex just gave him a cool look. "I'm supposed to care?"

Charles blinked, momentarily stunned by the apparent idiocy of that response.

Then he laughed bitterly, shaking his head.

"Good God, you're dense. You're about to make the whole damn world your enemy. You might not care about that, but when they come for you, they'll come for the Lancasters, too."

He leaned in, voice cutting like a knife. "You're a walking disaster for this family!"

And once again, Charles had successfully painted Alex as the villain - the disease

the family was desperate to

purge. 13

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One of the Lancaster cronies hissed under his breath, "Hold up. Shouldn't Dr. Owens be taking Alex's head off? "Why is he playing Whac-A-Mole with Vincent?"

"You flaming halfwit! You dare use my name to inflate your puny ego? To con people who don't know better? I'll make sure you regret the day you learned to speak!"

Dr. Owens only roared louder, launching a kick at Vincent that connected with a thud.

Vincent sprawled like roadkill, blood streaming from his cracked lips.

That smug grin he'd worn earlier? Now just a grotesque mask of pain and shame. Any bravado he had was beaten out of him in record time.

Jonathan Owens turned, meeting Alex's steady gaze.

He could practically feel his own heart punching the inside of his ribcage.

This was the man who had once saved his life, the person he'd spent years trying to find.

And thanks to that useless pretender, he'd almost missed the chance to repay the biggest debt of his career-no, of his entire existence.

Still shaken, Sophia ventured, "Dr. Owens... Do you actually know Alex?" Jonathan's throat constricted as he stole a sidelong glance at Alex.

Remembering Alex's earlier statement-the oh-so-innocent I don't know this guy, and he doesn't know me the famous doctor quickly pivoted, forcing an awkward cough.

"I—uh—no. I don't know him, and he doesn't know me," he said, voice stumbling.

It was so obvious he was lying through his teeth, but he plastered on a feeble smile anyway. 4

"But it's never too late, right? I heard your name's Alex. I'm Jonathan Owens. Pleasure meeting you under these... circumstances."

Alex merely gave a single nod, keeping it cool.

And then-like a glitch in reality-Dr. Owens dropped onto his knees before Alex.

That entire room felt like it'd been slammed into a brick wall at a hundred miles an hour.

Jaws fell open. Heartbeats practically pounded in unison.

"S—sir... I'm ashamed you had to see this ugly side of me." Whispers flared:

"Wh-what the hell is going on? Dr. Owens is kneeling? Like, kneeling kneeling?"

"Is Alex some kind of secret mob boss? This is insane!"

The Lancasters just stood there as though they'd all been collectively tasered. No one could spit out anything coherent beyond startled gasps.

Charles, meanwhile, looked like he'd swallowed a live frog

1/3

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Vincent, hugging his busted face, asked in a shattered voice "M-master... You actually know this guy?"

Owens spat, "Know him? I don't know you and I don't claim that man either. But I won't stand here while you soil his name. Get on your miserable knees and beg for forgiveness!"

Vincent's eyes darted like a cornered rat.

He was shaking so hard he could barely hold himself upright. "I-I'm sorry, Mr. Alex. Please... h-have mercy..." Without hesitation, he crashed to his knees, looking like a sideshow attraction that'd been thoroughly wrecked.

Dr. Owens took the chance to twist the knife deeper.

"This second-rate hack took a giant dump on my reputation. He's too blind to see you for who you are, and worse yet, he insulted you. If you need to punish him further, be my guest. You can turn him into a smear on the floor, and I'll take full responsibility."

Vincent gave a strangled whimper.

He could practically see his entire future going up in smoke, courtesy of his enraged master.

Alex waved him off, voice calm as still water. "No thanks. If you really want to help, maybe make sure the people under your banner aren't total scumbags next time."

"Of course," Owens agreed, bobbing his head so fast you'd think it might roll off.

"If this disgrace ever starts another con in my name, I'll throw him onto the street myself."

Alex nodded. "Your call. I don't particularly care."

"Idiot!" Owens snapped at Vincent. "You're alive right now because Mr. Alex can't be bothered to squash you like the cockroach you are. Thank him, you ungrateful little leech!"

"T-thank you, Mr. Alex!" Vincent stammered, pressing his face to the floor.

"That'll do," Alex said bluntly. "Just get up already."

Jonathan Owens turned back to Alex, forcing a polite smile as though they were old pals.

"Mr. Alex, now that we've gotten this nastiness out of the way, how about joining me for lunch sometime? It'd be an honor."

The rest of the room collectively choked on its own envy.

Getting asked to share a meal by Dr. Owens was like being handed a golden ticket in a world where everyone else had to stand in line outside with no chance of ever getting in.

"This is insane! Does Alex have a four-leaf clover crammed up his—"

"Seriously, that jackass lucked out big time. Dr. Owens doesn't just invite people to meals."

But Alex simply shrugged them all off. "No time right now. We can talk when I'm free."

A ripple of disbelief washed over the crowd, leaving them spluttering.

"H-he just turned down the world's top doctor? The same guy who literally got kicked out of the Lancaster family?"

2/3

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But Dr. Owens only seemed more eager, nodding as though Alex had just promised him a pot of gold.

"Sûre, sure. Let me know whenever you're available, Mr. Alex. I'll drop everything."

With that, he offered Alex a respectful handshake, then grabbed Vincent by the ear-like a mother punishing a brat—and hauled him out, leaving half the people in the room reeling and the other half on the verge of fainting.

As soon as the door clicked shut behind them, the place exploded in chatter.

"Alex, how on earth do you know Dr. Owens?" Sophia ventured, stepping forward first.

Alex shrugged. "You just watched us not know each other, didn't you?" Sophia blinked, torn between suspicion and confusion. "That was it, huh?"

He gave her a bored look. "What else did you want? A love letter from him?" Even though that answer didn't clarify a damn thing, most of the crowd looked relieved.

It was as if they needed an excuse to tell themselves that Alex had simply lucked out, that he wasn't actually connected to the legendary Jonathan Owens.

A few, though, still refused to swallow their pride. "Ha! So you got a little polite chit-chat outta Dr. Owens. Big whoop. Doesn't mean he's going to solve your problems, does it?"

"Exactly. You can't ride someone else's coattails your whole life, Alex. Good luck finding him next time you need a favor. He'll be too busy to remember your name!"

Their jabs were laced with a petty bitterness that practically fizzled in the air.

'Some people will hate you simply because your strength reminds them of their weakness.'

Sophia, suddenly uneasy, cleared her throat. "Alex, I... thank you for helping my grandfather earlier. Really."

He cut her off before she could finish. "Don't mention it. He's your family, but I did what I did because I wanted to -not because anyone forced me."

Sophia froze, a spark of confusion flashing in her eyes. She'd tried to be gracious, and he'd brushed her off with an icy retort.

"Okay, fine. I thanked you, so... what else do you want?" she thought, biting down

on her lip in growing irritation.

3/3

Chapter 187

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 187[1,085 words]

"Alex, what the hell's wrong with you? So you saved the old man-good for you. That doesn't mean you get to "treat us like garbage!" Florence spat, practically shaking with rage.

She glanced at Sophia, her eyes flashing with worry.

If Alex dares to talk to my daughter like this, how long before he's stepping on my entire family?

"You think we're all beneath you now just 'cause Grandpa owes you his life?"

Alex answered with a dismissive snort. "At least I did something. All of you just stood around twiddling your thumbs while he was halfway to the grave. That's on you. Maybe try having some shame next time."

Florence's face turned an unpleasant shade of purple. "You. You ungrateful little- Don't go thinking you're suddenly this big shot! You're still nobody compared to our family."

Before the shouting match could ramp up into fists flying, Abraham's gravelly voice cut through like a razor.

"Enough! Both of you, shut it. You're making fools of yourselves. Florence, take the others and get out, I need a word with Alex-alone."

Florence glared one last time, then stomped out, dragging half the crowd with her.

The moment they were in the hall, the whispers turned vicious:

"You think Old Man Lancaster's changing his will or something? Why else would he want that punk alone?"

"God, I hope not. Jack's his actual grandson! Alex is just some nobody. Grandpa's losing it in his old age!"

"Shh, shut up... He's already made it clear he favors that guy for some weird reason. With our luck, maybe the entire family fortune's going to him next."

A sudden ringing cut through the gossip. Jack glanced at his smartwatch. "Sorry, that's my buddy. Gotta run."

Sophia's eyebrows shot up. "Where are you going?"

Florence sighed, exhausted. "Where else? Some bar. When has he ever been useful for anything besides guzzling beer?"

"Tch, yeah, real responsible," Sophia muttered darkly. With a brother like Jack, no wonder Grandpa seemed more impressed by Alex.

Inside the hospital room, Abraham leveled a grim look at Alex. "Thank you for helping me out."

Alex folded his arms, "You're not the type to roll over that easily. Someone must've gone to serious lengths to slip you poison. Any idea who?"

Abraham closed his eyes, his expression turning stormy. "Charles Kingston."

A flicker of understanding crossed Alex's face. "I had a feeling. He's got his claws out for Sophia, right?"

"Damn straight," Abraham growled, fists clenching against the hospital blanket.

"He showed up with her two days ago, spouting some nonsense about wanting to marry her. I told him to buzz off. Next thing I know, I'm coughing up blood."

Alex exhaled, frustration edging his voice.

1/3

Chapter 187

"Yeah, well, good luck convincing your family. Half of them think he's some business savior. They're practically rolling out the red carpet, even though he's a snake."

They both sank into uneasy silence.

Hours later, Megan-one of the Lancaster Group's employees-rushed in, still in her business attire, panting like she'd just sprinted a mile.

"Ms. Sophia! Something bad's happened!"

"What?" Sophia asked, eyes narrowing,

"It's Jack. He's at some bar-Paradiso, I think-and he's gotten into a fight. He's drunk off his backside, and he's in real danger. Word is, the other side's got more people. A lot more,"

Florence practically screeched. "Who dares lay a finger on my son? I'll kill them!"

Megan winced. "I, uh... I heard he started the fight. Something about a woman. There's a big mob forming..."

"Doesn't matter," Sophia snapped. "He's my brother. Let's go. Megan, call for backup. Now."

With that, Florence and Sophia thundered off, dragging half the family in their wake, each of them ready to storm the bar like they were in a bad action movie.

Meanwhile, in a different wing of the hospital, Alex's phone buzzed.

Raymond's voice crackled on the other end. "Yo, Alex. I found that five-hundred- year-old Wild American Ginseng you wanted. Are you free right now? Let's meet."

Alex's eyes lit up. "Where are you?"

"Paradiso Bar. Come quick."

"Got it. I'm on my way."

He said his goodbyes to Abraham, hopped in a cab, and arrived at Paradiso Bar half an hour later- only to spot the entire Lancaster brigade loitering by the entrance, wearing grim faces.

Alex thought, rolling his eyes. Can't I go anywhere without running into these people? (1)

Inside Paradiso, a huge crowd had formed around the barstools, half gawking at the spectacle, half acting as backup.

The center of the commotion? Jack and his ragtag friends, all on their knees.

Some sported black eyes, others clutched bloody noses, looking like they'd gone twelve rounds with a freight train. Sophia pushed through, her voice tight with anger. "Jack, what in God's name happened to you?"

Jack's face lit up at the sight of his sister. "Sis! Thank God! You gotta help us! They beat the crap outta us for no reason!"

Florence elbowed her way forward, eyes blazing. "My boy! Which worthless scum touched you? Point 'em out! I'll tear 'em to pieces!"

Jack flung a shaky finger toward a small table.

A stunning woman in a slinky red dress sat sipping her drink, completely unfazed

as the younger man beside her

arrogantly spat on the floor in front of Lancasters.

Behind him stood several hulking bodyguards, each looking like they could snap Jack in two without breaking a

*sweat.

"That's him!" Jack howled.

"That jerk took my woman, and his goons jumped me! They're dead meat now- you'll see. My sister's the president of Lancaster Group. We've got business ties with the Kingstons. You guys are so done."

The young man gave a lazy smirk, took another sip of his wine, and even kissed the beautiful woman beside him as if he were watching a boring TV show.

"Lancaster Group, huh? Should I be impressed?"

Florence puffed up like an enraged hen.

"You'd better be impressed, jerk. We're powerful around here, so unless you're suicidal, you'll apologize to my son. And then-maybe-we won't have you arrested."

A ripple of snickering moved through the crowd.

The young man took a drag of his cigarette and blew out a thick cloud of smoke, unimpressed.

"Adorable. So, you're telling me to beg for forgiveness... after you started the fight? Tried to steal my woman?"

He looked at Jack, who was swaying on his feet, reeking of booze. "Yeah, that's

not happening. Let's fight to the death, shall we?"

He took out a small knife and slammed it into the barstool, ready for blood.

Without Jack or the young man realizing it, the woman subtly exchanged a secret

smile with Charles, who stood behind Jack. 1

Something in her eyes seemed to say, "Mission accomplished."

Charles responded with a slight nod, acknowledging her silent message.

'Sometimes, the dagger doesn't come from the enemy... but from the ones who

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Today's Bonus Offer

GET IT NOW

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 187[1,085 words]

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Today's Bonus Offer

GET IT NOW

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 188[1,293 words]

Chapter 188

"You think you scare me just 'cause you are challenging me to a fight to the death? I might be old, but I'm not afraid to risk my life with the likes of you."

Her bold words completely clashed with the way she stumbled backward, nearly tripping over her own feet.

If anyone bothered looking, they'd notice how badly her hands were shaking.

Sophia, trying to defuse the tension, raised her palms.

"Look, there's no need to blow this out of proportion. Can we at least talk this through and figure out what happened before limbs start flying?"

The man in white cocked an eyebrow and gestured at Jack like he was pointing at a piece of trash.

"Why don't you ask that genius what happened? He strolled in, grabbed my woman like a drooling dog, and threw punches at my men when they told him to back off."

"That's more than enough reason to hand him a lesson. Now you show up like a pack of chihuahuas, yapping about calling more people to bust up my bar?"

Sophia's gaze swung to Jack. The idiot was still clutching his swollen cheek, fear and anger warring on his face.

"Jack," she snapped, "did you seriously grope this guy's girlfriend? Are you out of your mind?"

"She was flirting! She was basically begging me for it!" Jack protested, though it came out as a whine.

A second later, he got slapped again-hard-by the thug's ringed hand. A fresh trickle of blood dripped from the corner of his mouth.

"Jack!" Florence shrieked, frantic. "Why do you have to be so rough on him? Look at his face-it's like you're trying to kill him!"

"Kill him?" The man's lips curled into a chilling smile.

"Lady, you should be thanking me for not snapping his arms off. That would have been rough. Anyway, I'm done playing games. You wanna make peace? Fork over 800 grand-or else we bury your cocky brat right here.",

Jack nearly choked on his own breath. "Eight...eight hundred thousand? Are you out of your damn mind? Where the hell do you think we'll get that kind of money?"

Florence thrust a trembling finger at the man's face. "You've got some nerve, demanding money after you battered my son like a slab of meat! If anything, you owe us!"

The man gave a sardonic laugh that bounced off the bar's smoky walls. "I can make him owe me more than money, lady. And I'm done listening to your screeching."

One of the bigger bodyguards took a menacing step forward machete glinting under the neon lights.

Jack, face going pale, shrank back behind Florence, while she herself retreated another step, heart hammering so loud it was practically audible.

"You fools better cough up while I'm still in a generous mood," the man said, jaw set.

"But if you want to keep running your mouth, fine. Once my big brother gets here, the price doubles - and you definitely won't get outta here with all your limbs intact."

Chapter 188

Florence stiffened, summoning one last shred of her façade "Oh yeah? So who's this big, scary brother of yours? Some random meathead?"

"The man smirked at the sheer stupidity of the question. "You must be new around here... or suicidal. Ever heard of

"The Viper'?"

The second those words hit the air, half the bar gasped; the other half fell dead silent.

Fear washed over the spectators like a tide. Even Sophia felt her heart stutter.

The Viper was a name that came with rumors of dismemberment, drug rings, and a human trafficking ring.

The stuff of nightmares-someone no sane person poked with a ten-foot pole. "Oh... oh God," Jack moaned, cold sweat gathering at his hairline.

Of course this place was owned by The Viper. If he'd had an inkling of that, he would've crawled under a rock instead of starting this fight.

Florence, normally a mama bear on steroids, now stood mute, all her fire extinguished.

She could bully small fry all day, but The Viper was a whole other beast.

The man in white ginned nastily. "What's wrong? Didn't you all have plenty to say earlier? Go on, keep throwing your threats around. Entertain me."

At that moment, Charles Kingston appeared, smoothly cutting in. "There's no need for that. They're with me. If anyone's going to decide how this ends, it's me."

Relief flashed across Florence and Jack's faces.

They'd almost forgotten about their precious golden ticket-Charles from the almighty Kingston family. 19

For them, that name was a fortress. No matter how infamous The Viper was, surely he wouldn't dare cross someone with the Kingstons' clout.

Jack latched on to Charles's arm like a drowning man clinging to a lifebuoy.

"Charles... are you sure you can handle this? I mean, The Viper... he's practically the king of the underworld here."

"Underworld scum is still scum, no matter how high they think they are." Charles gave a smug shrug. "Trust me. This Viper is nothing to me."

Florence's bravado reignited at those words. "Damn straight! You heard him-we have the Kingston family on our side. You wouldn't dare lay a finger on us now." Eyes narrowing, the man in white observed Charles with cool detachment

"So you're from the Kingstons, huh? Big deal. I've seen guys from rich families scream when their bones are getting sawed through. If you think dropping your family name is enough to scare me, you might be in for a nasty surprise."

Charles's lips quirked in a half-smile. "I don't need to scare you; I just need you to back off before you provoke the wrong people. My family is not someone you can afford to offend."

A murmur rippled through the crowd. People recognized the Kingston name, the lord of Vancouver and it did carry weight.

Chapter 188

Charles gave a smug little half-smirk as he surveyed the fear in the young man.

"Sa you've heard of me. Wonderful. Saves me the trouble of schooling you. Now tell me how are you going to fix "this crapfest you started?"

The young man's jaw clenched, forcing out a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

He sure thinks highly of himself.

"Mr. Kingston, since you asked so nicely... let's chalk this up to a misunderstanding. We can drop it."

"Drop it?" Charles let out a disdainful snort.

"My friend here got smacked around by your goons. You really think two measly words are enough to settle the score?"

The young man's brow furrowed. "What else do you want?"

"First, you're going to apologize-on your knees, if you have any brains. Then, you're going to cough up some cash." Charles spoke as if it were the most natural demand in the world.

"Apologize? Pay up?" The man in white felt his temper spike.

If this were just a personal scuffle, he might have swallowed his pride. But it wasn't just about him—this was Sir Viper's territory.

Kneeling to these stuck-up brats would be spitting in his big brother's face.

"Are you deaf, kid? Get on with it!" Florence shripped, her earlier fear replaced by that toxic arrogance she always displayed when someone powerful had her back. "You heard my mom," Jack piled on, rolling his shoulders like some big shot.

His face was still swollen from the beating, but his mouth sure wasn't.

"You punks bashed my face in. Hand over a million dollar in compensation for my pain and suffering! Let's see if that covers it."

The young man's expression turned downright murderous.

"Look, Mr. Kingston. I'm just trying to keep things chill for everyone's sake. This is

Sir Viper's turf. Show us some respect, and maybe we can all walk away."

Charles sneered, arms folded behind his back like he was royalty. "Respect? Who the hell do you think you are? Even if the Viper himself slithered out right now, he would owe me an apology. So I sure as hell won't be bowing to his flunkies"

At that exact moment, a gravelly voice thundered through the bar: "Really? You

think I owe you what, boy? Do you really have a death wish, Charles Kingston?"

Today's Bonus Offer

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 189[1,050 words]

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Chapter 189

Chapter 189

Heads whipped around at the sudden commotion to reveal tall man swaggering into the bar like he owned every "inch of it.

A ragged scar cut across his cheek, and a half-smoked cigar jutted from the corner of his mouth.

He had one arm draped possessively around a voluptuous brunette, while the other hand hovered near his hip- exactly where a holstered pistol might be.

The crowd in Paradiso parted like they were avoiding a contagious plague. Even Charles felt a spike of dread sink into his gut.

"Big Bro, you made it!" The young man in white hurried over, relief etched on his face.

"Got ourselves a little situation here. These jackasses want you-of all people-to kneel and apologize." He practically spat the last word.

Viper gave Charles a flat, indifferent stare. "So you're the genius demanding I apologize, huh?"

Charles, never one to swallow his pride, jutted his chin defiantly. "Your goons messed with one of my men. Don't you think you owe him a little regret-and compensation?"

Viper raised an eyebrow, then without a flicker of warning, slammed the back of his hand across Charles's face.

The impact echoed sharply, and everyone in the bar froze.

Charles stumbled, pressing trembling fingers to his burning cheek.

"You... you hit me?" His voice quivered with a mix of rage and disbelief.

"Damn right I did," Viper growled, flexing his knuckles.

"You prance in here with your chin held high, trying to throw your weight around on my turf. Then you want an apology? You must be suicidal, kid. I don't care if you're the spawn of royalty-no one storms my place and demands I bow down."

Charles spat a thin line of blood onto the floor, eyes brimming with hate. "You're messing with the Kingston name. Do you have any clue who I am?"

"Yeah, I know exactly who you are," Viper sneered.

"A fallen Prince, some has-been kicked out from a family. Your sister might still pack some punch, but you?" He let out a cruel laugh.

"You're just a leftover. A cheap leftover. And right now, I'm deciding if I should tear you to pieces or let you c away."

"You'll regret this," Charles snarled, though his voice wavered.

Viper's hand shot out like lightning, clamping around Charles's throat.

"The only one who'll have regrets here is you, hotshot. I could snap your neck right now and pin it on any of my men. But let's say I'm in a generous mood."

He loosened his grip and flung Charles into a corner booth, sending splintered wood and shattered glass flying as bottles toppled and crashed onto the floor.

1/3

Chapter 189

He didn't owe Charles an apology, but lie had no interest in making an unnecessary enemy out of him either.

Elorence and Jack watched in horror. The last shred of arrogance drained from their faces—especially when Viper ""said:

"You see, I'm not just some random thug with a big mouth I'm bankrolled by Sir Raymond-one of Chicago State's top power players. Ever heard that name, genius?"

Charles's face turned ashen.

Vancouver had been in turmoil since the civil war erupted between Charles and Jasmine.

Meanwhile, other states had already begun secretly plotting to divide their territories.

It wasn't just Jericho Kane, the king of Vermont, making moves-Chicago's union was also eyeing a piece of the Vancouver pie.

"The wolf on the hill is never as hungry as the wolf climbing the hill.

Now, they found themselves staring down a ruthless gangster with deep connections.

Humiliation burned through Charles.

He had paid the woman to stir up trouble for Jack, hoping to swoop in as the hero-but he had forgotten one crucial fact. His power was already slipping.

His plan had failed spectacularly, leaving him with nothing but a stinging slap to show for it.

Meanwhile, the color drained from Florence's and Jack's cheeks.

They'd banked on the Kingston name stopping any trouble.

But if even Charles was getting slapped around like a nobody, what chance did they have?

Viper took a long drag of his cigar, exhaling smoke in lazy circles. "Alright, enough with the foreplay. Which one of you morons picked a fight in my bar?"

Jack felt his knees go wobbly. His mouth opened, but no sound came out.

He'd heard the horror stories: Viper's men cutting off limbs as casually as trimming weeds, dumping bodies in the river. His nightmares were coming true. Sophia, pulse hammering in her ears, thrust herself forward.

"Mister Viper, please. My brother is just... an idiot. He doesn't think before he acts. We'll pay for damages- double, triple-anything! Just please, let's not escalate this "

"Double? Triple?" Viper snarled.

"You think I need your damn pity cash? If word gets out that a bunch of clueless punks waltzed into my bar and left without consequence, I'll be a laughingstock by sunrise Time to set an example."

He flicked his hand, and six of his hulking henchmen moved in, machetes glinting under the neon lights.

The sudden reflection of steel sent a chill through every onlooker. "Boys, chop off some hands. Show these fools how we handle disrespect."

Jack practically wet himself. "S-Sophia!" he wailed, scrambling to hide behind her. "D-do something!"

2/3

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One brute rushed forward, machete raised, ready to end Jack's short career as a jerk.

But before the blade could descend, crack! An ashtray hurtled through the air and smashed into the henchman's skull, sending him crumpling to the floor like a marionette with its strings cut.

Every head in the bar pivoted in shock. Viper's men instantly tensed, scanning the room like wolves on high alert.

Viper's eyes narrowed to predatory slits.

"Who the hell threw that?" he thundered, voice dripping with barely restrained fury.

Before anyone could muster a response, more ashtrays and bottles flew out of nowhere, hurtling with pinpoint accuracy toward the other five men.

Shards of glass exploded upon contact, driving the thugs to the ground, howling in pain.

A stunned hush fell, thick as molasses.

No ordinary bar brawler could knock out half a dozen armed men with tossed beer bottles and ashtrays. Gasps rippled through the onlookers.

"Show yourself, coward!" Viper roared, chest heaving. His furious gaze raked over the startled crowd. "Who the hell do you think you are, messing around in my domain?"

Slowly, a silhouette separated from the throng, strolling forward with an air of controlled cool that made people step back in awe.

A calm, almost casual voice sliced through the tension. "Sir Viper, I hear forgiveness is a virtue. But you don't seem to be the charitable type, do you?" Chapter 190

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Chapter 190

Who the hell does this asshole think he is, going up against Sir Viper?"

A wave of chatter rippled through the crowd:

"Dude's suicidal..."

"Balls of steel, though. Nobody messes with Viper and lives"

"If it'd been me, I'd have chucked that bottle and sprinted the hell outta here, not strolled in like some badass."

Sophia stared at Alex, stunned. (1

She hadn't expected to see him here-much less launching beer bottles at Vancouver's most notorious underworld boss.

"Wh-what are you doing?" she whispered, half in awe, half in terror.

Viper stepped forward, radiating pure menace. "And just who the hell are you, smartass? Think you can waltz in and break my men's heads, then tell me to call it quits?"

Alex merely flicked his gaze over Viper's bloody henchmen.

"My name doesn't matter. For your own good, I'm telling you to walk away while you still can."

His tone was calm, almost bored-as if he was talking about the weather.

The veins in Viper's neck bulged.

"Walk away? Did you just say 'walk away'? Who the fuck do you think you are?"

He lunged, half-intent on strangling Alex, but-whack! Another beer bottle flew, smashing right into Viper's forehead.

Beer and blood dripped into his eyes, making him reel.

"Holy shit... Did he just-?"

"He did. He actually hit Viper, right in the damn face!"

A moment of stunned silence took over the bar, then exploded into pandemonium.

"R.I.P. to that guy. Maybe I'll leave some flowers."

"He's insane! Doesn't he know how many people Viper's killed?"

"Alex!" Sophia gasped, her voice hitching in pure disbelief. "You-do you have any idea what you've done?!"

Off to the side, Jack's eyes shone with vile glee.

Finally, he thought. Alex, you suicidal bastard. Go ahead-get yourself killed and leave us out of it!

Charles watched the chaos unfold with a twisted smirk. At last, he thought, this reckless fool is going down-and I won't even have to lift a finger.

"How... how dare you hit me?!" Viper muttered, wiping blood off his shaved head, disbelief washing over his scowling features.

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"Boy, you must have one hell of a death wish."

Al's reply was maddeningly calm. "Last warning, Viper. Walk away. Nobody needs to die."

"Fuck you," Viper snarled, righting himself. "You're dead meat. Once I'm done with you, they'll need a mop to scrape your sorry carcass off my floor!"

He took his gun.

This time, Alex moved like lightning.

A broken bottle appeared in his hand-shattered glass wickedly sharp-and pressed against Viper's throat.

Blood trickled where the jagged edge bit into skin.

One wrong move, and Viper's jugular would be severed.

An icy hush strangled the entire bar. Viper froze mid-threat, eyes wild. Everyone else had gone silent, too rattled to even whisper.

The corner of Alex's mouth twitched up in a cruel half-smile. "Still feel like talking tough?"

Viper's jaw tightened, but he refused to back down. "If you so much as nick my artery, you'll never see daylight again."

"You're half right. Maybe I won't walk out alive," Alex cut in coldly. "But I guarantee you'll be in the morgue before me. Is that a risk you're really dying to take?"

He gave the glass a slight push. Blood dribbled faster down Viper's neck, and the gangster stiffened.

A sudden shriek from behind:

"Stop! Stop it now!" The young man in white had seized Jack, pressing a blade to his throat. "Let Sir Viper go, or I'll slit your friend's throat like a pig!"

Jack whimpered, regret mingling with terror. He'd prayed for Alex to get himself killed, sure-but not if he got dragged down with him! "A-Alex, you idiot-put that thing down! You're getting me killed!"

"Alex, what are you thinking?" Sophia shouted, voice trembling with panic. "Don't do something you can't take back!"

Florence, never Alex's biggest fan, was now openly cursing him. "Damn it, are you trying to drag us all to hell?! Let Viper go!"

Viper, forcibly keeping himself calm despite the glass biting his skin, said icily, "I'll give you one shot at survival, kid. Put that bottle down and I might let you crawl out of here breathing. If you're lucky."

"Or," Alex murmured, pressing the shard a fraction deeper. "I keep it where it is- and you shut up."

A thin rivulet of blood slid down Viper's chest. A visible tremor of fear flickered across the gangster's eyes, matter how hard he tried to hide it.

Alex lowered his voice so only Viper could hear: "I promise, I've taken scarier guys than you apart-limb by limb."

Viper's bravado faltered. This kid was no typical hothead.

The calm in Alex's voice suggested real experience-someone who'd stared death in the face before.

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The gangster swallowed, careful not to move too much against the broken glass.

"La Sir Viper go, you lunatic!" the young man in white barked, pressing his own knife tighter against Jack's

"throat.

"You want your buddy's blood on your conscience?" Jack wheezed, eyes bulging with terror.

Sophia, desperate, reached out. "Alex, please. You're going to get Jack killed-and yourself with him! Just let Viper go, and we'll figure something else out!"

Alex's gaze flicked to Jack, whose face was turning a lovely shade of purple, then back to Viper.

Without warning, Alex let out a cool laugh. "Well, then. Looks like we have ourselves a standoff, Viper."

A tense moment stretched, both sides locked in a silent battle of wills, the entire

bar too scared to even breathe. Charles, crouched in a corner nursing his swollen face, watched with a mix of horror and grudging hoping all of them die.

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