**Intern 481**

Chapter 481

Bill Franklin looked genuinely terrified now.

The confidence he had been forcing earlier was completely gone, replaced by a cold sweat

clinging to his temples.

Dark stains had already started spreading beneath the arms of his light gray suit, and his breathing

was shallow-the unmistakable rhythm of a man in a full-blown panic.

“I… uh…” Bill swallowed hard, visibly struggling to gather his thoughts. “Mr. Blackwood… Brandy, sh

Ah-I can explain.”

Brandy let out a quiet scoff and shook her head.

Honestly? She wasn’t built for this corporate nonsense.

The stiff dress codes, the fake professionalism, the exhausting need to sound polished and

respectable every second of the day.

People here walked around pretending to be refined while stabbing each other in the back behind

meeting room doors and HR emails.

At least in clubs like Annie's Fannies or the Velvet Room, everyone knew the score. Nobody

pretended to be innocent; it was the one place where these rich bastards felt safe enough to let

their inner animals out to play.

But here?

Here, they wore three-piece suits and practiced polite smiles, acting morally superior while burying

secrets far more disgusting than anything you'd find on a pole at 3:00 AM.

Watching Bill Franklin stammer and play the victim, Brandy felt a wave of nausea hit her.

She knew exactly what he was capable of behind closed doors-she'd seen his twisted fetishes firsthand and smelled the desperation on his skin.

She rolled her eyes so hard it bordered on theatrical, her patience finally snapping under the weight of his hypocrisy.

She couldn't take another second of his desperate performance, watching him make a complete fool of himself trying to lie his way out of the gutter.

"Oh, for Christ's sake," she snapped, her voice cutting through his stuttering like a whip. "Cut the pathetic act already, you dirty old man."

The entire floor went silent.

Several employees looked completely stunned.

Even Bill froze mid-sentence.

Brandy glanced around at everyone watching before letting out an exaggerated laugh, loud enough to echo across the department.

“I’m done with this corporate nonsense,” she said sharply. Then, she pointed a manicured finger directly at Bill. “I’ll save you the trouble of explaining.”

Bill’s face drained instantly, turning a sickly, translucent white.

Brandy turned toward Hudson without hesitation, her eyes cold and steady.

“Mr. Blackwood, Bill Franklin’s a regular at Annie’s Fannies… and I’m the ‘mistress’ he hired to play

secretary so he could have a fix on company time.”

A ripple of shock moved quietly through the nearby employees.

“He promised me a better salary, a ‘respectable corporate position, and all that polished executive

garbage,” she continued mockingly. “Secretary position. Stable future. Fancy office. Benefits.”

Her lips curled coldly.

“In exchange for keeping him entertained, of course.” Her eyes flicked toward Bill, her gaze dripping

with a look of pure, unadulterated disgust.

“Shut up!” Bill roared, his face turning a frantic, blotchy purple. He took a staggering step forward,

his hands trembling. “Shut your mouth!”

Brandy didn’t even flinch. If anything, his panic only made her smirk grow sharper.

Brandy turned back to Hudson, her voice steady and mocking. “Everything you said is true-but as

you can see, your director seemed far more interested in what was under my blouse than anything

written on my résumé. My only real ‘qualification’ was being willing to let him put his hands

wherever he wanted.”

Bill looked seconds away from collapsing. But Brandy wasn't done.

"As a matter of fact," she added, her voice dropping into a flat, lethal calm that cut through the

room like a razor.

"Your director was too busy sucking my t**s, he didn't even hear you coming."

A collective, horrified gasp rippled through the rows of employees.

"He was desperate to get inside me, right up until the very second you arrived," she sneered, her eyes locking onto Hudson's. "Ask him yourself-I'm sure he still has the taste of me in his mouth."

The silence that followed was absolute. It was the sound of a thirty-year career hitting rock

bottom.

Bill Franklin's face went through a sickening transformation. First, the deep crimson of embarrassment drained away, leaving his features slack and colorless, as if the blood had

abandoned his face to pool in his shaking hands.

His mouth fell open, his lips trembling as he tried to find a breath that wouldn't come.

"I… I…" Bill stammered, his hands shaking so violently he had to grip the edge of a nearby desk just

to stay upright.

He looked frantically at Hudson, then at the rows of his own employees who were now staring at

him with a mixture of horror and morbid fascination.

"She's lying! Don't believe her! This is just her delusional fantasy from a disgruntled…"

But his voice cracked, thin and high-pitched. A bead of sweat rolled down his temple, tracing a

path through the expensive foundation he'd started wearing to hide his age.

He looked at Brandy, his eyes pleading for her to stop, but she only met his gaze with a look of

pure, vengeful triumph.

The room seemed to turn red for Bill Franklin as his last shred of dignity vanished.

The “Director” mask shattered, leaving behind nothing but a cornered, desperate man.

“You bitch!” Bill roared, his face contorting into a mask of pure, ugly rage. “I’ll kill you! I’ll fucking

kill you!”

Chapter 482

His eyes went wild as he lunged forward, his hands reaching for her throat as if he could choke the

truth right back into her lungs.

But he didn’t even get close.

Before Bill could take a second step, Monroe was a blur of motion. He closed the distance

instantly, his hand clamping onto Bill's shoulder like a steel vice while his other arm locked across

the older man's chest in a crushing hold.

"That's enough," Monroe said. His voice was dangerously low and steady, a sharp contrast to Bill's

hysterical screaming.

Despite the older man's frantic struggling and the veins popping out in his neck, he couldn't move

an inch.

Brandy nearly toppled backward, her high heels skidding across the polished floor as she jerked away to avoid Bill's lunging attack.

The sudden, undignified stumble tripped a wire deep inside her, but instead of screaming, she

threw her head back and let out a sharp, insulting laugh that echoed off the high ceilings.

“Not so high and mighty now that you’re being pinned like the animal you are, are you?” she jeered, her eyes dancing with a jagged, manic light.

She stepped closer, leaning into the space Monroe had cleared, her voice dripping with venom.” Fuck you, Bill! You’ve been shoving your filth down everyone’s throats for years-it’s time you finally had a taste of your own medicine. Swallow it.”

She turned her attention back to Hudson, her expression shifting from mocking laughter to a cold,

unblinking focus.

“Do you want to know what’s really happening under your nose during paid company hours, Mr. Blackwood?” she sneered. Her voice trembled, not with fear, but with the volatile weight of a secret that had been waiting for the right moment to explode.

“I’m not the first. There was a girl before me-from the same club-offered the exact same setup. But this old creep got her pregnant.”

She jerked her chin toward Bill, who looked violently ill.

“He ended up paying her a fortune in hush money just to get rid of the kid and flee the country before his wife found out,” she spat, her laughter turning cold.

“All his dirty laundry, all his twisted little fantasies-they’re all being handled right here in the

comfort of your company."

She stepped closer, her voice rising to reach every ear in the room.

"This sleazebag director of yours turned this place into his personal brothel, and you're the one

signing the checks."

Bill's knees buckled so hard he completely collapsed, sagging uselessly in Monroe's grip. He was the pathetic picture of a man caught in a trap he had set for himself.

The air in the office grew impossibly heavy as Hudson finally broke the silence.

He adjusted his stance, his gaze shifting from the broken man on the floor to Brandy, his

expression unreadable and stony.

"Ms. Martinez," Hudson said, his voice low and vibrating with a dangerous level of authority. "This

is a serious accusation."

Brandy didn't blink. She didn't retreat. Instead, she let out a dry, humorless huff and tilted her head,

meeting his stare with a look of pure, unvarnished defiance.

"Accusation?" she repeated, the word sounding like a joke on her tongue. "I'm not accusing anyone,

Mr. Blackwood. I'm just telling the truth."

She gestured dismissively at Bill, who was still gasping for air in Monroe's grip.

"I may not be educated like you or anyone else in this room, but I am not stupid, and I am definitely

not a liar," she said, her voice sharpening to a lethal edge.

"An accusation is what you do when you're guessing. I'm not guessing. I lived it. I watched him do

it to the girl before me, and I watched him do it to the other women in the club."

She took a step closer to Hudson, her eyes burning.

“And I didn’t just watch him do it to me-I felt it. Every disgusting second his filthy hands roamed

over my body. If the truth sounds like an accusation to you, Mr. Blackwood, that’s your problem.

Not mine.”

Bill, seeing Hudson’s stony silence, mistakenly thought he saw a flicker of doubt.

He surged against Monroe’s hold, his face a twisted mask of desperation as he found a new burst

of venom.

“I paid you, you bitch!” Bill roared, his voice cracking with frantic rage. “Don’t act like you’re a victim! You may not have enjoyed the work, but you sure as hell enjoyed my money!”

The room went deathly quiet. It wasn’t a denial; it was a confession.

Brandy didn’t flinch. She simply looked at Hudson and arched an eyebrow, the trap finally snapped shut.

“See?” she said softly. “He’s even doing the math for you.”

The silence that followed was heavy and absolute, broken only by the sound of Bill’s own ragged breathing. It took a few seconds for the adrenaline to clear-seconds where the words “I paid you” seemed to hang in the air like a neon sign.

Bill’s eyes went wide, darting from Brandy’s smug expression to Hudson’s icy, immovable s

The realization hit him like a physical blow.

His mouth opened and closed, but no sound came out. He looked down at his own hands as if they belonged to a stranger, finally understanding that he hadn’t just insulted Brandy-he had signed his

own death warrant.

He tried to pull back, to swallow the words, but they were already out there, vibrating in the ears of every employee on the floor.

Hudson didn't just speak; he projected a cold, predatory stillness that made everyone else in the

office feel like they were breathing thin air.

He looked down at Bill-not with the anger of a boss, but with the cold, detached curiosity of a

man looking at a bug he was about to crush.

"What you do in your personal life and your own time is none of my business," Hudson began. His voice was a low, silky rasp that sent a shiver down the spines of everyone watching. "It only becomes my business when you start dragging my name and my company into the dirt."

He stepped closer, the polished leather of his shoe stopping mere inches from Bill's trembling hand. He leaned down, his voice dropping to a whisper that only Bill-and the terrified front row-

could hear.

“And nobody… I mean nobody in their right mind dares to cross me. I actually admire your confidence, Mr. Franklin. You have the kind of guts that usually end up spilled on a sidewalk.”

Hudson’s eyes were black voids, devoid of any humanity. “But your horns are getting a little too long. It’s time to snap them off at the skull.”

Chapter 483

Hudson stared down at him without expression.

No sympathy.

No hesitation.

Just cold, absolute disappointment.

Behind Hudson’s composed expression, the real Damien Blackwood-still hidden beneath the disguise of an ordinary security personnel-was already seething.

Not because of Bill Franklin’s private appetites.

Damien couldn't care less about whatever filthy fantasies a man indulged in behind closed doors on his own time.

But dragging Blackwood Enterprises into it?

Using company resources, company offices, company authority-and the reputation of his corporation-to feed those impulses?

That was different.

That crossed a line Damien never tolerated.

Because Bill Franklin hadn't just disgraced himself – He had contaminated his company.

Turned one of Blackwood Enterprise's most sensitive departments into a playground for his own corruption while hiding behind the title Damien himself had entrusted him with.

And that betrayal alone was enough to make Damien already start imagining exactly how far he intended to ruin the man.

The entire department had gone so silent that Bill's broken breathing sounded unbearable against the polished stillness of the room.

For fifteen years, Bill Franklin had walked these halls like a respected executive.

Feared by subordinates.

Admired by newer employees.

Trusted enough to oversee one of Blackwood Enterprise's most sensitive departments.

And now-

He was on the floor.

Sweating through his tailored suit.

Half restrained in Monroe's grip like a criminal dragged out of some back alley raid instead of a corporate director standing inside one of the most powerful companies in the country.

The fall had been so fast it almost felt unreal.

Even the employees watching nearby looked shaken by it.

Because no matter how much they disliked Bill…

Nobody expected to witness a public execution like this.

Then, finally, Bill broke.

“No… no… sir,” Bill whimpered, his voice breaking into a pathetic sob. He looked up, searching for a spark of mercy in Hudson’s face and finding only a desert. “Mr. Blackwood, please… I’ve given you fifteen years… let me-”

“ENOUGH.”

The word wasn’t loud, but it had the finality of a coffin lid slamming shut. Bill stopped breathing mid-sentence.

“I want your desk cleared in thirty minutes. If I see a single paperclip belonging to you after that, I’ll consider it a personal insult.” Hudson straightened his tie, his expression returning to a terrifying, mask-like composure.

“And you have twenty-four hours to leave this country. If you’re still breathing this air after that-you won’t just be out of a job. You’ll be out of options. Do you understand me?”

Bill couldn't even nod. He just shook, his eyes wide and glazed with the knowledge that his life as he knew it was over. He had walked into the office as a king, and with one panicked sentence, he had turned himself into a carcass.

Hudson's gaze shifted briefly toward the man standing silently behind him.

For a split second, his eyes met Damien's.

No words were exchanged.

None were needed.

A quiet understanding passed between them instantly-cold, sharp, absolute.

Then Hudson turned slightly, his attention shifting first to James before finally landing on

Monroe.

Whatever faint restraint had remained in his expression disappeared completely, leaving behind something far colder.

“Handle this,” he said quietly.

The command wasn’t loud.

It didn’t need to be.

Because the moment those two words left Hudson’s mouth, everyone in the department understood one thing immediately-

Bill Franklin was finished.

Then Hudson finally shifted his attention toward the woman standing several feet away.

Unlike the disgust he had shown Bill, the expression he directed at her was calm.

Professional.

Detached.

Brandy instinctively straightened beneath the weight of his gaze.

But before Hudson could speak-

“Hold up.” She lifted a hand abruptly. “I already know what you’re about to say, so let me stop you right there, Mr. Blackwood.”

Several employees looked stunned by the interruption.

But Brandy didn’t seem intimidated anymore.

If anything, the public destruction of Bill Franklin had burned away whatever nervousness she walked in with earlier.

“Let me speak first,” she said firmly.

Chapter 484

Hudson said nothing.

That alone seemed to encourage her.

Brandy let out a sharp, humorless laugh before throwing her hands slightly into the air.

“Do you think I actually want to work here?” she snapped, her gaze sweeping over the rows of stunned employees. “I can’t stand the fakery in this place! Everyone walking around with their degrees and their titles, acting like they’re better than the rest of us because they can talk in spreadsheets and corporate bullshit.”

She let out a sharp, jagged laugh that cut through the sterile air of the R&D floor. It was a sound born from the grit of basement clubs, sounding utterly alien against the hum of expensive servers and hushed professional tones.

She stepped toward the center, her heels clicking aggressively against the floor-a war drum in the sudden silence.

“At least in my line of work, we’re honest about what we’re selling. Here? You’re all just selling different versions of the same lie.”

She took a breath, her chest heaving as she leaned into the silence of the room. She didn’t look like she was drowning anymore; she looked like she was ready to burn the whole place down.

“Yes! I’m a stripper. I’m a hooker. I’m all the things you whisper about in your little breakrooms,” she shouted, her voice echoing off the glass walls. “I sleep with men for money. So you’re right, I am sure as hell out of place in a room full of people who do the exact same thing but call it a ‘career.”

She reached out sharply, snatching her bag off the nearest desk before slinging it over her shoulder.

Then her eyes flicked briefly toward Cruz.

A strange mixture of humiliation, resentment, and wounded pride flashed across her face before it hardened again almost instantly.

“So,” she said coldly, looking back at Hudson, “I’ll save everyone the trouble.”

A brief pause followed before she lifted her chin slightly.

“I quit.”

Hudson looked at her calmly.

“Are you done, Ms. Martinez?”

The question instantly drained some of the momentum from her outburst.

Brandy’s expression tightened slightly, a flicker of embarrassment finally surfacing now that the adrenaline was fading and the entire department was still staring at her.

“….Yes,” she answered stiffly. “I am.”

Only then did Hudson continue.

“Ms. Martinez,” he said evenly, “under different circumstances, I might have considered offering you a position within this company if your qualifications aligned with our hiring standards. However, as you already know, you do not possess the educational background or professional experience required for employment at Blackwood Enterprises-particularly within the Research and Development department.”

Brandy’s jaw tightened slightly, but she stayed silent.

Hudson continued without pause.

“However,” he said smoothly, “your time here will still be compensated appropriately. Your salary for the week, including any onboarding and administrative processing, will be released in full.”

A brief silence followed before he added,

“Please report to Human Resources before leaving the building. They’ll handle the necessary documentation for your formal separation from the company.”

His tone never changed.

Cold. Efficient.

Like the entire disaster unfolding around them had already been reduced to another corporate mess waiting to be cleaned up.

Then Hudson’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“And Ms. Martinez,” he added quietly, “whatever arrangement existed between you and Mr. Franklin ends today.”

The warning beneath the statement was impossible to miss.

Brandy let out a sharp scoff, tightening the strap of her bag over her shoulder.

“Damn right it ends today,” she muttered coldly.

Hudson’s gaze swept slowly across the frozen department.

Rows of employees immediately lowered their eyes the moment his attention passed over

them.

“The show’s over,” he said flatly. “Get back to work.”

The spell broke almost instantly.

People hurried back toward their desks, pretending not to look at one another despite the tension still hanging heavily across the entire floor.

Then Hudson turned slightly toward James.

“You know what to do.”

James gave a single nod without hesitation.

“Yes, sir.”

No further explanation was needed.

Both men already understood exactly what would happen next.

Internal investigations.

Departmental restructuring and realignment.

Damage control.

Quiet removal of everyone tied too closely to Bill Franklin’s misconduct.

And whatever final consequences Damien Blackwood decided Bill Franklin deserved once this entire mess was handled behind closed doors.

Chapter 485

The employees slowly returned to their screens, pretending to reclaim a normality that no longer fit.

Hudson stepped forward with the chilling authority of Damien Blackwood, while Cruz–perfectly

maintaining his role as Ashcroft–followed right beside him, his posture dripping with casual confidence.

James fell into place a half–step behind them, tablet in hand, while the real Damien and the real Ashcroft blended seamlessly into the rear as part of the security detail, perfectly maintaining the illusion.

The executive elevator waited at the end of the hall, doors open as if expecting them.

They walked toward it without urgency, without discussion, and without a single glance back.

There was nothing left to see except consequences already in motion.

Behind them, Brandy stood frozen for half a second too long.

Then, she suddenly broke from her spot, desperately rushing forward to catch up to the man she thought was Ashcroft.

“Wait!”

Her voice cracked through the corridor as she lunged forward, clutching her purse tight against her side.

“Mr. Ashcroft-!”

She tried to reach out, but it was too late–he had already stepped inside the cab.

He did not turn. He did not pause. He didn't even glance back to acknowledge her voice, completely shutting her out as if she were invisible.

The heavy doors began to slide shut, sealing him away.

Her knuckles turned white around the strap of her bag as a sharp mixture of crushing dismay, humiliation, and wounded pride flashed across her face.

He hadn't even given her a second glance.

A suffocating silence immediately slammed back down over the floor. Brandy stood unmoving, deeply offended as she stared at the closed executive elevator like it had personally insulted her existence. Then slowly, she exhaled through her nose. Her expression hardened from defeat into pure fury.

Spinning on her heel, she marched toward the standard employee elevator bay and aggressively slammed her thumb into the call button.

A few seconds passed.

Ding.

The mechanical tone sliced through the quiet, and the heavy metal doors slid open.

Brandy gasped, instinctively stepping back as the sheer, intimidating aura of the passengers hit her.

Two elite security personnel stepped out in unison. Unlike the front desk guards in standard blazers, these men were dressed in tastical black, the embossed crest of Blackwood Enterprises gleaming against their Kevlar vests

Startled by their imposing size and cold expressions, Brandy instinctively stepped back.

The guards ignored her completely as they stepped forward, their attention locking onto Monroe.

“Sir.”

Monroe acknowledged them with a single nod before hauling Bill Franklin upright with controlled force.

Bill let out a broken sound as his knees nearly gave out beneath him, his expensive suit hanging off his body like a shroud.

“Alright,” Monroe muttered, steering him forward. “Move. You heard Mr. Blackwood.”

He paused briefly.

“Your clock is already ticking.”

Bill tried to speak, but only panic came out.

Monroe ignored it completely.

“Follow me,” he ordered the guards as he dragged Bill down the corridor toward his office.

When they reached the door, Monroe opened it and shoved Bill inside, not enough to hurt him–just enough to make him stumble.

Bill tripped forward, catching himself on the edge of his mahogany desk. The sudden loss of dignity seemed to ignite a final, desperate burst of delusion.

“How dare you!” Bill hissed, turning around to straighten his rumpled jacket.

The fabric stretched tightly across his bloated waist, his carefully maintained salt–and–pepper beard twitching with pathetic rage.

“I am the director of this department! I built this-”

Monroe let out a harsh snort.

“Yeah? Keep telling yourself that.”

He crossed his arms, looking down at Bill with open disgust.

“You really screwed yourself this time, Bill.” Monroe clicked his tongue slowly. “Honestly, you should feel lucky the boss is even letting you pack.”

His eyes drifted toward the expensive gold–plated pen set displayed neatly across the desk.

Then, with deliberate disrespect, Monroe lifted his hand and rubbed the bridge of his nose using his

middle finger while staring directly at Bill.

Only after a long beat did he lower his hand and tap the desk lightly.

“But I wouldn’t get too attached to any of this if I were you”

Bill’s chest heaved, his eyes wide and bloodshot against his pate face.

“What… what do you mean by that? What do you mean!”

“Enough!” Monroe snapped, cutting him off instantly.

He lifted his wrist, peeling back his sleeve to glance down at his watch

“Your thirty minutes started the exact second the boss walked away from you out there. Which means you

currently have exactly twenty minutes left.”

Bill choked on his next breath, his eyes darting frantically around the room.

“Pack your stuff,” Monroe commanded, his voice cold and flat. “And make sure absolutely nothing of yours is left behind. You heard the boss–not even a paperclip.”

Monroe looked Bill up and down one last time, from his sweating forehead down to his straining, ruined corporate attire.

The sheer pity in Monroe's eyes was more insulting than a slap to the face.

He turned his back on the broken director and looked at the two guards standing like statues in the doorway.

"Keep a close eye on him," Monroe ordered them.

"The moment those twenty minutes are up, whether he's finished packing or not, drag him out of here. Make sure he is completely out of this building in twenty minutes flat."

The guard on the left gave a sharp, clinical nod.

"Copy that, sir."

The response was flat, professional, and completely devoid of sympathy.

Bill's shoulders slumped as the finality of the words hit him. There would be no negotiating, no pleading, and absolutely no extensions.

Monroe didn't say another word. He turned on his heel and walked out, leaving Bill alone under the unblinking watch of the two guards.

Meanwhile, the standard elevator doors finally closed, cutting Brandy off from the suffocating tension of the executive floor.

She leaned heavily against the metal wall as she stared at the illuminated panel of buttons. Part of her just wanted to smash the button for the lobby, walk out those glass doors, and never look back.

She had absolutely had enough of this place.

If there was one silver lining to this entire chaotic nightmare, it was that she was finally out from under Bill's disgusting grip. Watching his pathetic downfall had been a victory, even if it was short–lived.

Her eyes flicked to the button as Damien's cold voice echoed in her mind. Should she even bother stopping by, or just cut her losses and vanish?

She hesitated, her finger hovering over the panel. No, she resolved, her expression hardening. Money is still money. If she was leaving this place, she was going to squeeze every single cent out of them first.

As the cab dropped, a dark, obsessive thought took root, chilling her fury into something lethal.

If she lingered just a little longer, she might just cross paths with Ashcroft again. And if that happened? She would make sure he could never look past her again.

Chapter 486

Back on the executive floor, the large glass doors had barely clicked shut before the storm broke.

Slam!

Damien's palm hit the surface of his desk with a deafening crack that echoed off the high ceilings. His chest heaved, his face contorted in rare, unfiltered fury over the betrayal he had just uncovered.

"Tell Mary to take care of this right away!" Damien barked, his voice laced with a lethal edge as he glared at his assistant. "I want results within the next twenty–four hours!"

James merely dipped his head, his fingers already flying across his tablet. "Understood, sir."

"Damn it!" Damien hissed, turning his back to pace fiercely toward the floor–to–ceiling windows overlooking the city skyline.

Ashcroft sighed, leaning casually against the edge of a low leather sofa. “But D, we’re leaving tomorrow. How are you going to manage this from across the country?”

“I’ll talk to Dad about it tonight,” Damien snapped, not turning around. “He’ll know exactly what to do.”

He paused, his shoulders tense, before he slowly turned around. His dark eyes locked directly onto

Ashcroft. “And what the fuck was that out there, Nick? Brandy Martinez? Really?”

Nick raised his hands defensively, a lazy, unbothered smirk playing on his lips. “Hey… don’t look at me like that. You know how it works. It’s not my fault she’s so hung up on me.”

Shifting his gaze, Nick nodded toward Cruz. “Thanks, by the way. You handled that well out there. For a second, I thought she’d notice something was off and ruin the whole plan.”

Cruz, still standing with rigid, professional posture, shook his head subtly. “We can’t be too sure, Mr. Ashcroft. It looks like she isn’t someone who will take no for an answer.”

“Yeah, well, neither am I,” Nick replied, his tone turning frosty. “She’s completely delusional if she thinks I’ll ever give her the time of day.”

Nick reached up, tapping the edge of his jaw. “Anyway, are we done playing roleplay for the day? Can! finally take this face off?”

Damien didn’t object this time. In near unison, the four men reached for the edges of the high–grade prosthetic masks, peeling away the deceptive layers dissolving the illusion and revealing the real men

underneath.

As the masks were secured for sanitization, the curtain officially closed on the day’s theater

Not long after, a firm knock cut through the quiet.

Monroe walked in, his expression unreadable. “Everything is taken care of, boss.

Damien’s eyes narrowed into slits. “Have someone follow that piece of trash the exact moment he leaves

this building. Make sure he goes straight home.”

He paused, a terrifying, pitch–black shadow falling over his features.

“And give him a nice farewell gift before he completely disappears. You know what to do.”

Monroe’s gaze hardened. “Understood.”

As Monroe turned to leave, Nick suddenly slid his phone back into his pocket and straightened up, tossing his jacket over his shoulder. “I’ll go with you.” He glanced at Damien. “I just need to take care of a quick matter. I’ll meet you at the manor tonight.”

Damien gave a single, curt nod. “Fine, be there at 7!”

“You got it,” Nick replied smoothly, offering a brief nod before following Monroe out.

Meanwhile, on the lower floors, the sharp snap of a purse echoed in the quiet HR office.

Brandy folded the official severance document, sliding it into her bag alongside a check that amounted to a meager one week’s worth of pay. It was a pathetic pittance, but money was money. She had officially

signed her separation papers.

She was done.

Walking out into the grand, marble–floored lobby, she surrendered her security badge to the front desk guard. When the turnstile clicked open, letting her through, she walked out toward the main entrance.

She stood on the sidewalk for a moment, the cool air hitting her face. She pulled out her phone to check the time. It was still early. What was she supposed to do now? Where was she even supposed to go?

As she debated her options, her eyes idly scanned the curb, noticing a sleek, heavily armored black SUV idling by the VIP lane. She didn't think much of it–until a sudden movement in her peripheral vision caught her attention through the glass doors.

Brandy spun around. Her breath hitched.

Emerging from the private executive elevator bay were Monroe and Ashcroft.

Panic and adrenaline surged through her as her heart began hammering wildly

It's him. He's here.

The two men paused in the center of the lobby, exchanging a few brief, quiet words. Monroe gave a nod, turning in the opposite direction toward the parking garage, while Ashcroft continued walking directly toward the main exit, his phone already pressed to his ear as he murmured a command to whoever was on the line.

The moment he stepped through the doors onto the pavement, Brandy threw all caution to the wind, rushing forward in a desperate bid to catch him.

“Mr. Ashcroft!”

sian ningy the same

my head sora momentarily hatering under th

Before Brandy could open her mouth to explain, a hulking figure matenalized from the shadows near the

Marshal

“Sir, everything is ready Max reported, his massive frame instantly imposing

“Good Let’s go Nick said, completely dismissing Brandy as he went to step past her

“War” in a flash of desperate panic, Brandy reached out and grabbed his arm

The reaction was indertenUIA

Nick jerked his arm back as if disgusted by her touch, his voice dropping into a dangerous, lethal growt

“Don’t touch me”

Mex moved We Wightning, stepping directly between them and planting his massive chest in front of Brandy, completely breaking her line of sight. “Miss, Step back”

“No War” Brandy shrieked, trying to peer around the human wall, her voice echoing down the street.

“Mr. Ashcroft, wait! Please just listen to mer

Chapter 487

The loud, desperate commotion outside immediately caught the attention of the security guards stationed inside the main lobby.

Spotting the frantic woman screaming at a high–profile guest through the glass doors, the lead guard didn’t hesitate. He pulled the radio from his belt, his voice urgent as he patched directly through to the head of security.

“Sir, we’ve got a situation at the main entrance. The terminated employee, Martinez, is causing a scene with Mr. Ashcroft.”

Without waiting for a reply, the guard pushed through the heavy glass doors to intercept the disturbance. The moment he stepped out onto the pavement, he found Max standing like an immovable fortress in front of Brandy, obviously blocking her from getting any closer to the vehicle.

“What’s going on here?” the guard asked, his hand resting instinctively near his belt as he assessed the threat.

It was Ashcroft who answered, his voice dripping with smooth, insulting calmness. “Nothing to concern yourself with. Just some unnecessary noise.”

Nick didn’t even glance back as the hysterical shrieks echoed down the pavement. To him, she was just

background noise–an annoying pest easily brushed aside.

He pulled open the heavy door of the armored SUV, ready to slide into the plush leather interior and leave the chaotic scene behind. Behind him, Max remained a solid, immovable brick wall, completely cutting off Brandy’s advance and ensuring she couldn’t take another step forward.

Nick paused with one foot inside the vehicle, his hand resting on the doorframe. Without bothering to look at her, he threw a careless command over his shoulder. “Max, don’t waste your damn time on her. She isn’t

worth it. Let's go."

"Yes, sir," Max replied.

The moment Max turned his back to head toward the driver's side, Brandy saw her minuscule window of opportunity. Ignoring the burning ache of humiliation, she threw herself forward, slipping past Max's

massive frame.

The security guard immediately stepped forward, reaching out to grab her arm. "Miss Martinez –"

But Brandy didn't even hear him. Fueled by pure adrenaline, she bolted toward the passenger side, her hands outstretched in absolute desperation. "Mr. Ashcroft-!""

Slam.

The heavy, tinted glass door shut firmly right in her face, completely cutting off her voice. Through the dark reflection, she could barely make out Nick's silhouette as he casually pulled his phone back out,

completely erasing her existence from his mind.

Before she could even pound on the glass, the security guard's hands clamped tightly around her arms, yanking her backward. He held her in a firm, unyielding grip, pinning her arms to her sides to make sure she couldn't do anything reckless.

"Miss Martinez, you need to step away from the vehicle right now," the guard ordered loudly, before leaning in, his voice dropping into a sharp, hurried whisper right against her ear. "Are you crazy? That is not someone you want to mess with. If you want to live freely and keep your future intact, you'll back off right now."

The warning hung heavily in the air, leaving her frozen in place as she hopelessly watched Max slide into the driver's seat. A second later, the powerful engine roared to life with a deep, intimidating rumble.

The guard loosened his grip, assuming his words had finally snapped her out of it. Brandy staggered back a step, the exhaust fumes stinging her face as a wave of crushing defeat washed over her. Her hands trembled violently. For a split second, she just wanted to walk away, to find a dark corner and break down..

But as the SUV's brake lights flickered, preparing to pull out into the VIP lane, a terrifying realization hit her.

Now or never.

If she let this car leave, she would never see him again. She would be blacklisted, ruined, and left with

absolutely nothing. Heck with this, she thought, a desperate, reckless fire igniting in her chest.

Before her mind could talk her out of it, she twisted violently out of the guard's grip, breaking free before his fingers could lock back around her wrists.

Brandy lunged forward, sprinting directly into the path of the heavy vehicle, spreading her arms wide to

block it.

The tires screeched violently as Max slammed on the brakes, the massive grille of the SUV stopping mere

inches from her knees.

At that exact moment, Monroe stepped out of the building, his expression cracking into sharp disbelief as

( he witnessed the scene unfolding.

Inside the vehicle, the sudden, violent jolt was the absolute final straw.

“WHAT THE FUCK!!!” Nick roared, his head snapping up from his phone as his body jerked forward.

Max’s hands were white on the steering wheel, his breathing heavy. “Sir, that woman just ran right in front

of the vehicle.”

Nick’s sharp eyes cut through the tinted windshield. There, standing dead center in the headlights with her arms stretched wide, was Brandy.

“Is she trying to commit suicide now?!” Nick snapped out loud, his voice dripping with pure rage as he stared at her through the glass. “This woman is fucking INSANE!!!”

The passenger door flew open with terrifying force. Nick stepped out onto the asphalt, his casual, lazy demeanor completely replaced by a freezing, murderous rage. He didn’t just look annoyed anymore–he looked ready to destroy her.

“What the fuck!” Nick shouted, his voice cutting through the open air like a whip. “I thought I already made myself clear earlier! What else do you want from me?!”

Seeing the dangerous level of rage radiating from him, Monroe immediately stepped forward, raising his hands in a calm, professional gesture to try to intervene. “Sir… let me handle this. It’s-”

Before Monroe could even finish his sentence, Nick aggressively swiped his hand through the air.

“No! This crazy woman is getting on my nerves!” Nick snapped, his eyes locked onto Brandy with lethal intensity.

Brandy flinched under his glare, but before she could even form a single syllable, Nick marched a few steps closer, his eyes narrowing into slits of pure disgust.

“What the hell do you want?” he demanded, his voice dropping into a dangerous, biting register. “Are you short on customers? Or maybe you’re just short on tips?”

“No… it’s-” Brandy stammered, her voice shaking as she tried to defend herself.

“Bullshit! Save me the theatrics!” Nick cut her off instantly. “You know what? That old geezer Bill seemed like quite the provider, didn’t he? And it seems to me you’re totally fine with it, considering you were ready to bend over for him if we hadn’t arrived.”

Brandy’s breath hitched. She tightly clenched her fist around the strap of her purse, her knuckles turning white as she tried to anchor herself against the onslaught.

“That’s not fair…”

She squeezed the words out, but it came out like a fragile whisper, completely swallowed by the heavy rumble of the engine.

Veintiocho

Looks like even our charming Nicholas Ashcroft has his limits.

But the real question is….

Who exactly is Brandy Martinez?

A desperate woman?

A future problem?

Or something far more dangerous?

And after today's stunt… do you think Nick went too far with his words, or was Brandy already crossing the line?

More importantly… do you think she’ll finally back off?.

Drop your theories below. I’m reading everything.

Chapter 488

Ashcroft let out a harsh, mocking laugh that cut through the open air and made her blood run

cold.

“Not fair?” Nick echoed, throwing the words back at her like a slap. “What’s not fair is that the moment you saw me, you literally dumped your latest sugar daddy, ruined his life, and destroyed his career in a single afternoon.”

He shoved his hands casually into his pockets and leaned a little forward, his expression

twisted into one of absolute disdain.

“And now you’re standing in front of my car, desperate to get my attention?”

Nick took one step, towering over her with eyes full of utter contempt. “What’s your game here? You thought you could just leech off of me next? You thought because you were done with the trash, you could step up to the jackpot? You’re pathetic.”

Every single word felt like a physical blow. The raw insult pierced straight through Brandy’s chest, shattering whatever pride she had left.

Her hands clenched into tight fists at her sides, her fingernails digging so deep into her palms that it bit into her skin. Tears of pure humiliation and rage pooled rapidly in her eyes, blurring her vision as her chest heaved.

“STOP IT!” Brandy screamed, her voice cracking under the weight of the agony.

Ashcroft raised a brow, a devilish smirk playing on his lips. He could see he had hit a nerve-e xactly what he wanted. He expected her to finally break down and back off now that her pride was completely shattered.

“That’s way out of line, Mr. Ashcroft!” Brandy choked out, tears finally blurring her vision as her voice trembled with pure indignation.

Nick snorted, a mocking grin cutting across his face as he took in her pathetic state. “Did I hit a nerve, Ms. Martinez? Tell me, what exactly is out of line if everything I said is true? Truth hurts, doesn’t it?”

Brandy’s mouth opened, a desperate instinct to fight for her dignity clawing at her throat-but no sound came out. The defense died before it could even form.

Because he was right.

Just an hour ago, she had been entirely prepared to bend over for Bill. She had been ready to let that old man use her body again, just like she had done with so many others.

It was what she did.

There was no tragic backstory to shield her, no starving family or desperate childhood to justify it, her family was a comfortable, typical middle-class household. No one had forc her into this line of work.

It was her choice.

Born out of her own greed, her craving for quick money, and her refusal to settle for a mundane life when she could have the luxury that only wealthy men could provide.

She had the face for it, she had the body for it, so she chose to profit from it.

A sharp twist of shame burned in her chest, but it was quickly swallowed by a bitter sense reality.

Sure, she was often disgusted by the old, ugly clients she had to endure, but she loved the money. And it wasn't all bad-some nights were actually good.

Especially the night she had spent with Nicholas Ashcroft.

Nick didn't miss the way her silence stretched.

Her gaze dropped, the weight of the truth pinning her to the spot.

He looked her up and down, a slow, clinical sweep from head to toe, before letting out a sharp, cold smirk.

"Let's stop playing corporate, Ms. Martinez. Civility obviously didn't work with you," he said.

His voice dropped into a lethal, quiet register that forced her to listen. He leaned in closer, ensuring every single syllable burned.

"So let me be straight with you, and hopefully, you'll finally get this through your head-you are nothing but a high-priced escort."

He paused, letting the insult sink in.

"You serve drinks, you serve food, and you sell your body to men for cash."

He let the words hang in the freezing air between them, his dark eyes boring into hers.

“That is your utility. Don’t mistake a transactional night with me for an invitation into my life.”

Brandy flinched as if he had physically struck her.

But Nick wasn’t done.

He stepped even closer, his shadow completely swallowing her.

Why did his disdain feel like a blade twisting directly into her chest?

But Nick didn’t show a single shred of pity. His expression remained a mas disgust.

“Now get lost,” he commanded, his voice returning to a normal, cutting volu

to hear.

He took a step back toward the open door of his SUV, delivering one final, i shoulder.

“And don’t you dare show your face in front of me again… or else you’ll reg even knew my name.”

Top Pick

By Storm

TO

MADE TO BROKEN

The Boston Hawks Hockey Series

Made To Be Broken – The Boston Hawks Hockey Se…

Astrostorm | Ongoing

No emotions-until Rory shatters Marcus’s ironclad rule.

Chapter 489

Ashcroft had just reached the open door of his SUV.

Before he could take that final step inside, something snapped within Brandy.

The suffocating weight of the humiliation suddenly gave way to a desperate, burning spark of

raw courage.

She swallowed the copper taste of her own panic, forcing her trembling lips to move.

For two years-two agonizing, endless years since the night he became her client-Nicholas Ashcroft had been her entire world, her quiet obsession.

No other client mattered. No amount of money could replace the high of him.

She hadn’t spent a single second without his ghost occupying her mind, twisting her reality until she couldn’t even breathe without thinking of him.

She had spent two years hoping, praying, and dreaming for this exact opportunity to arrive.

She couldn’t let it end like this. Not in the dirt. Not like a piece of discarded trash.

Brandy threw her head back, tearing the air from her lungs.

“I LOVE YOU!”

The scream tore from her throat with all her might, a raw, jagged sound that shattered the freezing air around them.

It was the sound of a woman completely unraveling, pouring two years of suffocating secrecy and manic desperation into a single, breathless declaration.

Nick stopped dead in his tracks.

His entire body went completely rigid, the words pinning him to the spot, his fingers wrapped around the edge of the heavy SUV door, gripping the cold metal so violently that his knuckles turned stark white.

The air in the driveway instantly turned to ice.

He didn’t answer right away. He just stood there, the silence stretching between them like a taut wire ready to snap.

A dangerous, lethal darkness flashed in his eyes as he stared straight ahead, a muscle in his jaw twitching violently with pure, unadulterated rage.

Brandy aggressively wiped the tears from her face with the back of her hand, forcing her chin

She took a deep breath, throwing every ounce of her remaining pride to the wind, her voice echoing louder, vibrating with a manic sort of conviction.

“There! I said it!” she cried, taking a frantic step forward. “I LOVE YOU! I AM IN LOVE WITH YOU! Ever since that night, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about-”

Before the sentence could even leave her throat, her eyes widened in sudden, stark terror.

Nick moved like lightning. In a fraction of a second, he crossed the distance between them, his towering frame completely blocking out the light.

Before she could even gasp, a heavy, vice-like hand wrapped violently around her throat, cutting off her words in an instant.

“Shut the fuck up!” Nick roared, his face twisted into a mask of unbridled fury. His eyes were practically murderous, burning right into her soul.

Brandy choked, her hands instantly flying to his wrist, but his grip was a steel trap.

“Boss!” Max yelled, his door flying open as he bolted out of the driver’s seat.

Monroe was already moving, rushing forward to grab Nick’s arm, trying to pull him back before he did something irreversible. “Mr. Ashcroft… that’s enough. Please, let go.”

But Nick was completely blind with rage, his grip tightening as he stared down at the woman daring to utter those words to him.

He didn’t hear a thing.

Monroe leaned in closer, his voice dropping into a sharp, urgent whisper. “Not here. There are too many eyes.”

Monroe’s words seemed to pierce through Nick’s blind fury. He suddenly snapped back to reality, with a look of absolute revulsion, he released his hand and harshly shoved her backward.

Brandy hit the pavement hard, tumbling to the ground.

She collapsed into a heap, clutching her throat as she coughed violently, her chest heaving as she desperately sucked the cold air back into her burning lungs.

Tears streamed down her face as she looked up from the ground, staring at the man standing over her like a merciless god.

She was completely exposed. Broken. Humiliated.

Yet, as she looked at his cold, beautiful face, a ragged, hollow laugh escaped her trembling lips. It was a bitter, hollow sound that bordered on insane.

“Why is it a crime to love you?!” she choked out, her voice cracking as she pleaded with her

eyes.

“I would let you break me into a thousand pieces if it meant you would actually look at me! Why can’t I love you? Why am I not allowed to want you?!”

She didn’t care how pathetic she looked.

She didn’t care that she was groveling in the dirt.

She just needed him to look at her-really look at her-even if it was with hatred.

Chapter 490

The echo of her desperate plea bled out into the freezing afternoon air.

But the damage was already done.

Near the main entrance, a few employees heading out for their break stopped dead in t tracks, their jaws dropping at the scene unfolding.

Down the sidewalk, passersby slowed to a crawl, nudging one another and whispering furiously as they took in the sudden, scandalous spectacle of a woman groveling on the pavement.

Yet, despite the shock, not a single person dared to pull out a phone.

In this district, everyone knew better.

The name Nicholas Ashcroft carried the weight of an emperor. His face was instantly recognizable to almost anyone, especially in the heart of the high-stakes corporate distri where even the executives sitting at the very top of the towering high-rises could only dre of meeting him.

As the heir to one of the five most powerful families, he was known not just as a powerful billionaire, but as one of the most elite, untouchable bachelors in the city.

Messing with a man like him was practically a death wish.

Brandy remained on her knees, completely exposed to the gathering audience, her chest heaving as she stared through her tears.

She had expected a reaction.

She had expected him to match her fire, to burn her down with his wrath, or at least acknowledge the raw, bleeding confession she had just ripped from her chest

Instead, her grand declaration of love seemed to vanish into the void of his indifference.

The gathering crowd didn't faze him. Ashcroft didn't even look toward the onlookers, completely unbothered by the pathetic public scene unfolding around him.

He didn't yell. He didn't even sneer

Instead, he just looked down at her, his expression shifting from blind rage into a cold, devastating calm. The sheer pity in his dark eyes was far more punishing than a blow to the

face.

“It’s not a crime to love someone, Ms. Martinez,” he said, his voice terrifyingly quiet, dropping

like lead in the freezing air.

He took a slow step closer, towering over her as he gestured casually at her trembling tear-stained form on the pavement.

“But this?”

His voice turned icy, dripping with quiet disgust. “This pathetic public spectacle you’re on? It’s a disgrace.”

Brandy’s breath caught, her tears freezing on her cheeks.

“You knew exactly what this was from the very start,” Nick continued, his tone stripping all her romantic illusions with surgical precision.

“It was a transaction. A job. You were paid for your time, and you walked away with exac what you negotiated, probably even more.”

A short, humorless laugh escaped him as his hand swept lazily toward the concrete driveway.

“No one forced you into that place, let alone into that room, and no one forced you to stay So don’t sit there in the dirt acting like a victim of love when you’re just a professional who forgot how to do her job.”

His gaze narrowed, turning razor-sharp.

“I don’t owe you my time or attention, and I certainly don’t owe you my heart just because y decided to catch feelings, Ms. Martinez.”

His voice remained low-smooth, dark, and heavy enough to crush her without a shred of effort.

Leaning down slightly, he forced her to look into the absolute void of his eyes.

“You knew the rules of the world you chose. You were paid to be a fantasy for mosi, and a temporary distraction-a physical release to some. That is it”

The words hung in the air between them, stripping away every ounce of romantic delusion she had spent two years building.

“You’re paid for your silence and your convenience, not your obsession,” Nick continued A flicker of pure revulsion crossed his face before hardening into stone “And right now? You’re ruining the only thing about you that actually had any value”

He took a step back, looking at her like she was nothing but a stain on the pavement.

“Your professionalism”

The word struck her with the force of a physical slap.

She shrank back into herself, her fingers scraping helplessly against the cold concrete as if trying to find something, anything, to hold onto.

The tears stopped falling, replaced by a cold, hollow emptiness that opened up in her chest. She was completely bare before him, reduced to a line item on a ledger he had just closed

forever.

Transaction. Temporary distraction.

That was all it was to him.

Every touch, every thrust, every moan and grunt, every moment of that night she thought they were sharing a soul-it was all just a job well done.

The ultimate humiliation burned through her veins, turning her skin hot despite the chill in the air, leaving her trapped in the dirt under his absolute scorn.