Intern 491

Chapter 491

Brandy's shoulders trembled violently as another broken laugh escaped her throat. The sound was ragged, hollow, and painfully self-deprecating, carrying the bitterness of sor watching the final scraps of their dignity crumble away in real time.

"Of course it was just a transaction," she choked out, nodding weakly to herself as if fin forcing herself to swallow the truth.

"Of course someone like me is just a pastime to men! A tool!"

Another laugh burst out of her, sharper this time, teetering dangerously close to hysteria

She pressed a trembling, dirt-stained hand to her face, a hysterical sob ripping through h chest.

"Of course! Ha… haha… of course! What the hell was I even thinking? Someone like you w never spare someone like me a second glance!"

Her voice cracked violently as tears streamed unchecked down her face.

"If I were a man, I probably wouldn't even look at me either," she whispered bitterly.

“Because that’s all I am, right? Just used goods. Someone men throw money at to satisfy their fantasies or to just scratch an itch.”

She choked on a sob, her eyes vacant.

“A piece of flesh for a few hours of fucking pleasure while I smile and take it to feed my ow selfish greed because I wanted the luxury that came with it.”

She clawed weakly at her clothes, her fingers catching on the expensive fabric.

“But no matter how expensive the clothes I wear, or the purses I buy, or the shoes I walk in- none of it changes the fact that I am just…”

She let out another hollow laugh, shaking her head slowly.

“…in your words, a high-priced escort.”

The words sounded like poison on her tongue.

“How could someone like me ever compare to the pristine, well-educated women in your world?” she asked, her voice dropping into a fragile, shattered whisper.

“Women with status.”

“Women with dignity.”

Women you could actually stand beside without feeling ashamed.”

Ashcroft didn’t flinch. A heavy stillness settled over him, his features hardening as he le words hang between them

“The decisions we make in life are our own, Ms. Martinez, he said, his voice terrifyingly cutting through her hysteria like ice.

“What you chose to do for work, why you chose it, and how you live your life is none of business. I have never judged your past, nor do I care to.”

He took a slow step closer, the sheer authority rolling off him forcing the gathering onlo to look away,

“But you have been crossing lines since the moment you saw me today.”

His gaze narrowed,

“My time is exceptionally valuable, and you have already wasted far too much of it on a public spectacle. In this world, we survive by knowing our boundaries. You do not cross boundaries you were never meant to cross.”

His expression remained completely blank, offering her no warmth and no anger-just absolute finality,

“You are right. You cannot compare,” he said, his voice dropping lower. “Because they understand the rules of engagement. And it is about time you finally understand yours.”

The boundary was drawn, clear and uncrossable, and something inside Brandy completely

shattered.

The crushing weight of his rejection didn’t keep her pinned to the concrete this time. Instead a spark of pure defiance flared through the frigid ache in her chest.

Brandy forced herself up, brushing the tears from her face as she stood.

She squared her shoulders and looked Nicholas dead in the eye.

“Yes! I am delusional!”

Her voice cracked violently, fracturing under the sheer weight of her obsession.

“For two years, you were the only man I could think of! I lived under the beautiful illusion that there was something special between us Every single day. I hoped we’d see each other again Hoping you’d come back Hoping our paths would cross

She let out a harsh, self deprecating gasp, gesturing wildly toward the towering corporate skyscraper behind bin

1 even went the extra mile to walk around here all day, pacing through this corporate a hours like a lunatic, just hoping I might bump into your

She took a ragged step forward, her eyes wide, entirely unhinged

“Do you want to know the truth about Bill Franklin?

She stopped, her head tilting slightly as a low, mocking chuckle bubbled up from her th

“When I found out that old geezer was an executive here, I seized the opportunity. I swa shifts with the other girls at the club just to get close to him. And it didn’t take long”

A look of profound disgust crossed her face, swallowed quickly by a bitter, triumphant s

“That lecherous old man was so easily played. It only took a few touches, some empty flirting, and a bit of sweet bullshit to have him wrapped around my finger. It started with hefty tip, which turned into a generous weekly allowance.”

She pointed a trembling finger at the building.

“And eventually, he offered me a job inside Blackwood Enterprises. I accepted it without a single second of hesitation.”

She choked back a sob, staring dead into Nicholas’s icy eyes.

“Because I knew… I knew the chances of me seeing you again would be higher if I was insi

Nick stared at her, his disgust completely shifting into genuine alarm.

“You need help,” he said, taking a step back as if looking at a monster. “You’re fucking crazy

He turned on his heel, about to walk away, but Brandy lost all control.

She lunged forward, throwing herself onto the pavement and sliding to her knees

She wrapped both arms tightly around one of his legs, clinging to him with a death grip and pinning him to the spot

“Please, Mr. Ashcroft…” she sobbed into his expensive trousers, completely shameless

“I don’t care if you’re in love with someone else! I don’t care if you want to mess around with

a hundred other women as long as I’m one of them, I don’t care at all!”

She tightened her hold, her tears soaking through the pristine fabric of his suit.

“Please you don’t have to love me Just don’t ignore me completely.”

She choked on a sob, her voice fracturing as she threw her last shred of dignity at his feet.

“I’m begging you… please, just give me the scraps! Just a fraction of your attention— anything!”

Chapter 492

For a fraction of a second, the surroundings fell dead silent, punctured only by the desper unhinged cries of a woman harboring a completely unreciprocated obsession.

Ashcroft's patience was entirely spent. The sheer audacity of her touch sent a jolt of pure shock straight through his veins, instantly curdling into venomous rage.

"Get off me!" he barked, his face pale with fury as he violently wrenched his leg, dragging t a few inches across the concrete as he tried to rid himself of her like a parasite.

"No-no! Please!" Brandy shrieked, her fingers slipping against his suit fabric. "I can chang I'll change for you! I'll be good, I'll be decent-I'll be whatever you want, just please don't ignore me!"

Max rushed in, grabbing Brandy by the shoulders to forcefully rip her away. He hauled her back, lifting her entirely off the ground to break her grip on his leg.

Ashcroft didn't even look back. His voice cut through her screams like a blade.

"Lock your pathetic obsession in the dark, Ms. Martinez. Because it will never happen."

Then he walked away from her.

His footsteps halted as he reached the open car door. The silence hung heavy, suffocating the air as he stood there, his back still rigidly turned to her.

“You’ve pushed your luck too much,” he spat, his tone laced with pure venom. “I already warned you, but you just keep pushing it.”

His voice dropped, turning darker, laced with a chilling finality.

“Show your face in front of me again, and you will see a side of me you don’t want to see.”

His words sent a violent chill straight down her spine. Even the onlookers standing nearby froze, a collective shudder passing through the crowd.

Nicholas Ashcroft was not a man to make empty threats, and the witnesses could only stare in a wave of silent pity-not for her pathetic love, but because she had genuinely, irrevocably ruined herself.

But Brandy was far too blinded by her own obsession to feel the danger. The terror didn’t break her; it fractured her sanity.

She thrashed violently against Max’s iron grip, her eyes wide, flashing with a sudden, dangerous defiance.

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“No!” she screamed, the desperate screech echoing violently across the driveway “1 that! You’re underestimating me, Mr. Ashcroft!”

Max tightened his grip, but she barely seemed to feel it, her voice rising to a fever pitc

“I don’t wait for things to be given to me! I take what I want!”

Nicholas’s body locked rigid as her voice sliced straight at his back.

Slowly, he turned around.

A slow, deeply sinister smirk spread across his handsome face, his eyes turning pitch | The sheer malice radiating from him made the air temperature drop.

“You have the guts, Ms. Martinez,” his voice dropped to a deadly whisper more terrifying any roar. “But you really don’t want to know what happens to people who threaten me.”

Brandy involuntarily swallowed hard, a sudden wave of primal fear hitting her chest und dark gaze.

“I’d love to see you try,” Nick whispered.

He turned, stepped into the SUV, and slammed the heavy door shut with a definitive click.

At the sound of the latch, Max dropped his grip, leaving Brandy to stumble as he sprinted the driver's seat. Before she could even find her footing, Monroe caught the eye of the security guard standing by the entrance. With a sharp nod, Monroe signaled him forward.

The guard marched down the steps, grabbing Brandy's arms from behind with a crushing grip, ensuring she couldn't break free to chase the moving vehicle.

"Get off me! Let me go!" Brandy screamed, twisting and pulling, but the guard didn't budge a

inch.

Only when Ashcroft's luxury SUV sped out and vanished into the bustling city traffic did the guard finally release his grip.

Brandy stumbled forward, screaming into the empty road. "This isn't over! I'm going to make you love me, Nicholas Ashcroft! I'll make sure of it!"

"Don't push it, Ms. Martinez," Monroe's calm, icy voice cut in from behind her. "Nothing will ever come out of this in your favor."

Brandy whipped around, breathing heavily, her hair disheveled and her makeup ruined.

Monroe stared straight ahead, his face a stony, unreadable mask.

“Go home, Ms. Martinez,” he said, his voice entirely flat. He finally snapped his gaze down,

locking his cold eyes onto hers. And never set foot near Blackwood Enterprises again if are seen anywhere near Mr. Blackwood or Mr. Ashcroft, security will not be this gentle.”

He gave her a curt, hollow nod “Have a good day

you

Without waiting for a response, Monroe turned toward the building. Before stepping inside, his icy gaze swept across the entrance, landing sharply on the employees who had gathered nearby to watch the show

His look alone told them everything they needed to know.

The crowd immediately dispersed, resuming whatever they were supposed to be doing and minding their own business as if nothing had happened.

Brandy was left standing alone on the cold pavement, panting, her heart hammering against her ribs

But Brandy wasn't as alone as she thought-someone had been watching the entire time…. and had heard every single word she said.

Chapter 493

The echo of Brandy Martinez's desperate promises still hung in the heavy afternoon air long after her voice had given out.

Her mind didn't process the departure. It replayed everything instead.

His eyes.

His voice.

The way he looked at her like she was nothing. And yet, beneath the crushing humiliation, something else lingered.

A dark, stubborn obsession she couldn't name, tightening its grip on her chest as she stared blankly down the empty street.

HOOOOONK!

A loud, aggressive horn shocked her back to reality.

A sleek, black sedan surged past her onto the driveway, the sudden, violent gust of wind from its passing almost knocking her off balance.

Brandy stumbled back a step, her eyes flashing with instant rage. The windows of the sedan were tinted so heavily that she couldn't catch a single glimpse of who was sitting inside the backseat.

"Asshole!" she yelled into the street, sharply raising her hand to give the retreating vehicle a dirty finger.

Panting, she patted the dirt and concrete dust off her knees, trying to gather what was left of her dignity.

She took a deep breath, straightening her posture as she forced herself to look up one last time at the towering skyscraper of Blackwood Enterprises-the place where she had just wasted a week of her life.

Then, tightening the strap of her purse, she turned on her heel and began to walk away down the sidewalk.

What she didn't know was that sitting inside the deep shadows of that black sedan was her worst nightmare.

Inside the vehicle, Bill Franklin stared through the heavily tinted glass of the rear window.

His eyes were locked onto Brandy's disappearing form as the sedan pulled away from the

Predator's Perspe

curb. His face was twisted into a mask of pure, venomous hatred.

Looking back at her through the glass, he watched her grow smaller in the distance-a lone, pathetic figure still standing on the concrete where Nicholas Ashcroft had abandoned her.

Only minutes earlier, Bill had descended to the ground floor in time to witness the entire chaotic spectacle.

The two elite security guards hadn't given him a single shred of dignity. True to Monroe's cold command, the moment his twenty minutes evaporated, they had escorted him out of his office-resolutely denying him the quiet isolation of the underground garage.

Instead, they had marched him straight through the grand, marble-floored main lobby.

It was a public execution in every sense of the word.

Clutching a heavy cardboard box of his personal belongings, Bill had been forced to walk the length of the floor under the unblinking, judgmental stares of the front desk staff and lingering employees.

His expensive suit felt like a shroud, his carefully maintained composure completely shattered as his pathetic, sweating form was paraded out like a common criminal.

The guards had shoved him toward the massive glass doors of the main entrance, where his personal driver had just pulled his premium sedan up to the front entrance of the building.

Just as the glass doors began to slide open to expel him, that piercing, unhinged shriek had shattered the air outside, making Bill freeze dead in his tracks.

“You want to know the truth about Bill Franklin?!”

The sound of his own name had sliced through him like a physical blow.

Bill’s blood ran completely cold, the cardboard box turning heavy and awkward in his trembling arms.

The spectacle on the main driveway had been so total, so utterly consuming, that the entire entrance ground to a halt. The elite guards flanking Bill immediately shifted their weight, their eyes locking onto the chaotic struggle outside.

Through the pristine glass, the raw, echoing madness of Brandy’s voice had bled right back into the lobby.

He had heard every single word.

Every frantic confession.

Every desperate threat.

Now, sitting in the accelerating car, Bill kept his eyes fixed on Brandy's shrinking silhouette

She had stripped him of his fifteen-year career, his reputation, and his life.

"I will make you pay, bitch."

The promise tasted like copper and ash in the back of his throat.

Because of you…

His fists clenched in the dark backseat until his joints popped, his fingernails digging deep

into his palms.

Because of you, my life is ruined. My career, my reputation… everything.

A dark, dangerous realization bloomed in his mind as he watched her disappear from view.

She wanted Nicholas Ashcroft.

She had used him as a disposable ladder just to get close to the executive floor.

Bill’s lips curled into a sickening, vengeful smile.

She had destroyed his life-and now, he knew exactly how he was going to destroy hers.

He only needed one thing: revenge.

He wanted her dead. But a simple death was too merciful for what she had done.

If he was going to be hunted out of the country in twenty-four hours, he wasn’t going down quietly.

He was going to use his remaining time to ensure she paid the ultimate price, transforming her unhinged obsession into a trap that would lead to her own demise.

And he knew exactly who would be the perfect scapegoat to pin the blame on.

He was going to make sure he left a devastating fire burning behind him.

And Brandy Martinez was the perfect fuse to light.

Chapter 494

“Turn around,” Bill spat, his voice trembling with a cocktail of rage and adrenaline “Follow that woman, and make sure you keep a distance-don’t let her see us!

The driver’s hands tightened on the leather steering wheel. “Sir, I-I’m not sure that’s a goc idea. Those men earlier said-”

“I said turn the car around!” Bill roared, his fist slamming against the back of the driver’s s “Don’t forget who’s signing your paycheck!”

The driver swallowed hard, “Yes, sir.” He glanced at the rearview mirror before swinging the wheel.

Just as the sedan began to pivot, a flash of movement in the mirror caught his eye-two matte-black SUVS had peeled out from the curb behind them. The driver's face drained of color. "Sir… I… I think we're being followed."

Bill squinted, his voice sharp with irritation. "What are you talking about?!"

The driver pointed a trembling finger at the mirror. "Those cars… Aren't those Mr. Blackwood men?"

Bill whipped around, peering through the rear window. The SUVs weren't just following, they were stalking, maintaining a distance that spoke of absolute intention.

"Shit!" Bill hissed, his blood turning to ice. He realized in a heartbeat that Damien Blackwood would not let him go that easily. The man was making sure he disappeared exactly as ordered.

"Forget it," Bill snapped, his voice a cold, sharp blade. "Drive normal Don't look back Just get me home-now."

The driver didn't need to be told twice. He gripped the wheel, forcing his hands to steady as he merged into traffic, unable to ignore the way the SUVS stayed glued to their bumper

Bill didn't watch the road. He pulled his phone from his pocket, his thumb hovering over the screen before he tapped a burner number he hadn't touched in years

It rang three times

When the line clicked open, there was only a long, measured silence heavy, rhythmic breathing on the other end

Bill didn't waste time with pleasantries His voice was a low, jagged whisper stripped of all corporate pretense "I need you to take care of some trash for me"

He paused, letting the coldness of the instruction sink in as he watched the SUVs in the mirror.

"Give it twenty-four hours," Bill continued, his voice dropping into a register of pure, cold malice. "I'll be gone by then, and my involvement will be non-existent. I'll send you the det Don't worry about the payment-I'll wire you fifty percent now and the other fifty when it's done. Just name your price."

The voice on the other end didn't speak. Only a low, guttural "Hmm" came through the line

Then, the line went dead.

Bill tucked the phone away. His eyes, once full of panicked confusion, had hardened into something darker, more sinister.

He stared through the windshield, his mind already carving out the path of his retribution.

Not long after, his vehicle pulled into the circular driveway of his estate. He didn't move to out immediately; he just sat there in the silence of the car, letting the leather-scented air ground him.

The weight of the day pressed against his temples, but as he looked at the sprawling, perfectly manicured grounds of his estate, he felt a flicker of cold satisfaction.

This wasn't a defeat, he told himself. It was a pivot. If Blackwood wanted to force him out, hi would treat it as an early, long-overdue retirement. He was finally free of the board's suffocating oversight.

He didn't just want a drink; he wanted to disappear into the comfort of his home, surrounded by the opulence he had spent fifteen years building. He needed the walls to remind him that he was still Bill Franklin-wealthy and powerful.

Before he finally stepped out of the vehicle, his gaze drifted to the heavy oak of his front door and with it, his thoughts turned to his wife, Trudy.

He wondered briefly what he would tell her, but the thought withered before it could take root She was so painfully submissive, so utterly devoid of spark, that the idea of an argument was laughable. She couldn't challenge him, she couldn't excite him, and heaven forbid, she couldn't even give him an heir

When they had first discovered she was barren, he had been devastated a brief, sharp pang of disappointment. But in hindsight, he realized he had dodged a bullet. A child from someone as tedious as Trudy would be a bore, a hollow legacy

And a child from the kind of women he actually enjoyed? That was an entirely different nightmare-a liability, a permanent stain on the pristine reputation he'd spent decades

He thought of the woman before Brandy, the one he'd gotten pregnant. The memory didn't bring guilt, only a cold, clinical satisfaction.

He was far too old to be a father; he enjoyed the pleasure, never the responsibility.

That had been a simple business transaction: a check, a clinic, and a prompt, final disappearance.

It was efficient. It was controlled.

He thought of Brandy, and the others before her-the young, beautiful, expensive distractions he kept at the clubs. They were fantasies he could purchase, things Trudy could never comprehend.

The only good thing about his wife was her status and her family's money.

Trudy was a status symbol, a decorative asset bolstered by her family's wealth. She was perfect for parading at high-society galas and board dinners, but behind the closed doors of their bedroom, she was a complete void.

She was nothing more than a log, incapable of providing the fire he craved or the satisfaction he demanded.

Bill finally stepped out of the vehicle, loosening his tie as he approached the front door.

He was the one in control. He always had been.

He would tell Trudy some sanitized version of his “career change,” she would nod and pour his scotch, and he would sleep soundly knowing the cleanup was already underway

He liked the narrative better this way: he wasn’t being ruined; he was simply moving on to a more interesting game.

Chapter 495

Bill Franklin slowed as he approached the entrance of his estate, the memory of the matte-black SUVS still lingering at the edge of his thoughts. His eyes swept the perimet of instinct-gated driveway, hedges, shadows.

Nothing.

Just the long stretch of empty road and fading afternoon light.

Yet the silence didn’t feel normal. It pressed against him, heavy and wrong.

A cold prickle crept up his neck. He dismissed it at once.

Paranoia, he told himself. Nothing but the adrenaline of the chase.

Damien Blackwood didn't waste time with noise. Whatever had followed him earlier wasn threat-it was enforcement. A silent command to fall back into place.

That thought steadied him.

Fine.

If they wanted him out, he would leave-but on his terms.

He continued toward the estate, forcing his shoulders to loosen.

But as he approached the massive front entrance, the air around him felt… wrong.

The silence of the grounds wasn't peaceful-it was expectant, heavy with a stillness that fell manufactured. He shook his head, forcing the unease away. Just a phantom of his own overstimulated nerves, nothing more.

He pressed his thumb against the biometric scanner. The heavy oak door gave a sharp. clinical click as it unlocked, the sound echoing a heartbeat too long in the quiet

Inside, everything was still. Too still.

He frowned, glancing at his watch-just past 3:00 PM Right He wasnt supposed to be home for another five hours. The servants must have been on their mid afternoon luil or perhaps the house was just reacting to his uncharacteristic early arrival.

He didn’t think much of it, his mind was already busy weaving dark, sinister fantasies of retribution.

He exhaled as he walked further inside Of course, Trudy wouldn’t be around she rarely moved about the house during the day

fusion of Cond

There was nothing unusual here. Nothing at all. Control restored. Or so he believed

He walked straight to the mahogany bar in the study, his footsteps muffled by the carpet. He poured two fingers of amber whiskey, the ice clinking sharply against th He didn’t bother with a glass; he took the decanter and the tumbler to his favorite le armchair, sinking into the familiar, expensive grain. He kicked his feet up onto the o loosening his tie with a sigh of relief.

Then, he heard it.

A soft, rhythmic thud-drag, thud-drag coming from the foyer.

He squinted toward the hallway, his vision struggling to penetrate the shadows.

A figure rounded the corner-Trudy.

She was already dressed, not in anything casual, but in a structured coat. A sleek, carr suitcase rolled behind her.

Something about the sight made the air feel thin. Bill's expression shifted, but only slig He studied her for a moment before letting out a faint, almost amused breath.

"Going somewhere, darling?"

Trudy didn't stop. She didn't offer a smile, or a greeting, or even the performative submissiveness he had come to expect. She reached the bottom step and stopped, her fixed on him.

The look on her face wasn't the usual vacuous, glassy-eyed stare. It was sharp. It was col was, quite clearly, disgust.

Bill chuckled, undeterred by her silence. He gestured lazily, his arrogance swelling to fill the room. “Cat got your tongue? Well, honey, aren’t you glad I’m home so early? And tell the maids to prepare me a snack-I’m famished!”

Trudy didn’t move. She locked her eyes on him with an intensity that felt like a physical weight.

If looks could burn, he would already be ash.

Bill’s smirk vanished. “Are you deaf?! I said-”

“They’re gone,” Trudy cut him off.

Bill blinked, caught off guard. “What do you mean, they’re gone?”

Trudy stood her ground-something entirely new. “I sent them all home.”

Bill clicked his tongue, annoyance radiating from him. “Tsk, whatever! Then you go m something to eat! Go! I’m hungry!”

Trudy didn’t flinch. Her gaze only sharpened.

“What are you still standing there for? Go!”

“No.”

The word hung in the air, defiant and absolute.

Bill slammed his tumbler onto the table and stood up in one fluid, aggressive motion, h face darkening with rage.

“… What did you just say?”

Trudy stepped closer.

“You heard me. I said, No.”

For the first time, Bill looked at her properly-not as decoration, not as background-but something unfamiliar.

“You ungrateful b-” He raised his hand, his fingers curling into a fist, ready to strike.

“Don’t you dare!” Trudy’s voice cracked like a whip.

Bill froze, his hand suspended in mid-air. The shock of her defiance held him back more th the threat itself; he had never seen this side of her, and the sudden shift in power left him momentarily paralyzed.

Bill’s jaw tightened.

“What is this? Some kind of tantrum?”

“No,” Trudy replied, calm as glass. “It’s divorce.”

The word hit the room like a cut.

“You’ll hear from my lawyers soon,” Trudy continued, her voice devoid of its usual tremor it was steady, cutting, and entirely devoid of emotion

“You’ll keep what you came in with,” she said. “And what you earned before this marriage. Everything after that belongs to me.”

Bill laughed-loud, sharp, almost relieved. “You can’t do that.”

Trudy matched his laugh, but hers was cold, devoid of humor. “Just in case you’ve forgotten. you are nothing without me. Your name, your status-it’s all a veneer I provided. I am stripping

you of everything, and you’ll be back to exactly who you were before you met me.”

Bill stared at her, then threw his head back and laughed-a loud, mocking sound that ech off the walls. “You wouldn’t survive a week without me.”

Trudy crossed her arms and leaned in, her eyes boring into his as a predatory smile touch her lips. “Oh, watch me. Besides, you were never the man of this house, Bill-you were the mistake I finally corrected.”

She pulled back, turned, and grabbed the handle of her suitcase. “Make sure to leave this house as soon as possible and take all your trash with you. I’ll have someone clean this place tomorrow.”

She took a few steps and then paused, looking back one last time. “Bye, Bill.”

She turned and pulled the main door open, revealing Monroe waiting on the other side. Flanking him were several men in sharp black suits, along with the two guards who had escorted Bill out of the building earlier.

The moment his eyes landed on them, a sensation like cold ice water washed over him. dousing the last embers of his defiance.

Monroe bowed slightly. “Mrs. Franklin.”

Trudy gave a sharp nod. “Not for long. He’s inside.”

Bill stood frozen, his world collapsing in seconds. “What… what’s the meaning of this? Trud What…!”

Trudy didn’t even look back, only glancing over her shoulder. “It’s over, Bill. You’re over.”

She stepped out, her driver waiting to take her suitcase. As she reached her car, she stopped one last time and looked at Monroe.

“Tell Mr. Blackwood I said thank you.”

Chapter 496

“It’s over, Bill. You’re over.”

The words lingered in the foyer long after the woman he had spent over fifteen years with walked away.

Bill stood frozen in the center of the room, staring at the entrance as the sound of Trudy’s heels faded into the distance.

It wasn’t her final insult that clawed at his mind.

It was the last thing she said.

“Tell Mr. Blackwood I said thank you.”

Thank you?

For what?

His brow tightened as the thought took root, slow at first, then sharper, more intrusive.

What did Trudy have to do with Damien?

Why would she thank him?

Had Damien told her something? Or had she known all along what was coming?

The questions didn’t settle-they multiplied, each one twisting into something darker, more uncomfortable, as if the ground beneath his assumptions was starting to shift.

For a moment, his mind refused to process it. His body, however, did. His fingers twitched, then curled into tight, shaking fists.

“No…” he muttered, the word barely audible.

The sound of movement near the threshold shattered his stupor. Bill looked up just in time to see Monroe step across the entrance, followed by the men who had come with him.

Bill’s shock hardened into a jagged, desperate rage.

“Get out!” he yelled, his voice bouncing off the high ceilings “Get out of my house! This is private property-my property!”

He lunged toward the door, trying to force it shut, but the men didn’t even slow. They were immovable-already inside the space, already treating it as controlled territory rather than contested ground.

They stepped further into the house, ignoring him completely.

“This is illegal!” Bill shrieked, backing away as they fanned out into the house. “You’re trespassing! Do you know who I am? I will sue you-every last one of you!”

His voice climbed higher with every word, desperate now, as if authority alone could force them to acknowledge him.

But they didn't even look at him.

Monroe stopped in the center of the foyer, his expression detached.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Franklin, but this isn't your house."

His eyes swept calmly across the massive estate before returning to Bill.

"This property is registered solely to your soon-to-be ex-wife, Ms. Trudy Donnelley."

A faint pause.

"And in case you missed it, she knows we're here and gave us permission to be here and do what we need to do."

"Bullshit! She's my wife! Everything she owns is mine!" Bill snarled, his voice rising higher with every word. "And Damien gave me twenty-four hours! You were there-you heard him! You people have no right to be here!"

Monroe didn't bother to answer. He simply gave a subtle tilt of his head.

The men immediately spread through the house.

Two headed upstairs toward the master bedrooms while the others moved straight for the study.

Bill's expression twisted as panic finally began bleeding through the cracks of his rage. He rushed after them, shouting, "What the hell are you doing?! Where are you going?!"

Monroe followed him into the study, catching up effortlessly as Bill stormed after the men tearing through the room.

"Mr. Blackwood gave you twenty-four hours to leave," Monroe said calmly. "But as a former executive of the company, you're still subject to corporate asset recovery."

His eyes swept across the study as the men continued opening drawers and cabinets.

"We're here to secure everything tied to Blackwood Enterprises."

Bill watched, paralyzed, as they dismantled his world.

They moved with a terrifying, efficient rhythm. Drawers were emptied, safes were bypa and hard drives were systematically pulled from their housings.

Anything tied to the company was immediately confiscated and sealed into evidence t

Even the expensive gold-plated pen set that had been displayed neatly across his offic earlier that day wasn't spared.

"That's personal! You can't take that!" Bill snapped as he watched them pack away the

Monroe stepped into his path immediately, blocking him hard enough to send him stum backward.

"That set was issued by Blackwood Enterprises to executives upon promotion," Monroe calmly. "Which means it belongs to the company."

His eyes swept across the wrecked study.

"And as I stated earlier, Mr. Franklin, anything provided by the company is subject to reco

"

Monroe checked his watch, completely unbothered by Bill's outrage.

"Consider this part of your separation process."

Bill stared at him in disbelief, chest heaving violently. "You people are insane…"

His eyes darted frantically around the room as drawers were emptied and files disappeare into bags like worthless trash.

Fifteen years of status, authority, and identity-stripped away in minutes.

Like it meant nothing.

When the house had finally been picked clean, the men in suits-whom Bill now realized wer part of Damien's personal security detail-retreated outside one by one, carrying boxes, sealed bags, and confiscated devices with them.

The once pristine house now looked like a storm had torn through it.

Only Monroe and the two elite security guards Bill recognized from earlier that day remained standing in the foyer.

Bill stood amidst the disarray, his expensive suit rumpled, his chest heaving with exertion and

humiliation.

“What else do you want?” Bill gasped, gesturing wildly toward the hollowed-out room. “You’ve already taken everything!”

A thin smile slowly touched Monroe’s lips.

“Before we leave, Mr. Blackwood wanted to send you a farewell gift.”

Bill blinked, confused. “What gift?”

Monroe gave a small nod, and the response was immediate.

Bill barely registered the movement before a brutal punch slammed into his stomach, forci the air violently out of his lungs. A sharp gasp tore from his throat as he doubled over.

Then came the second hit.

A heavy boot crashed into his side, sending him sprawling across the hardwood floor.

Pain exploded through his ribs.

Bill curled instinctively, coughing and choking as the blows kept coming-fists, boots, sharp bursts of pain landing one after another with terrifying precision.

Monroe stood over him calmly, watching the beating unfold like it was just another task on schedule.

“You should have known better, Mr. Franklin,” he said evenly. “Corruption. Hidden transactions. Personal indulgences funded through company accounts.”

Another kick landed.

Bill groaned against the floor.

“And bringing your disgusting personal affairs into Blackwood Enterprises?” Monroe continued. “Did you really think you could stain Mr. Blackwood’s company and walk away untouched?”

Bill wheezed, his cheek pressed against the cold hardwood as another wave of pain tore through his body.

Chapter 497

The beating stopped, but the damage was already done. An eerie silence swallowed the room, broken only by Bill's ragged breathing and the ringing in his ears.

He lay on the floor trembling, his pride completely stripped away-too broken to even move too stunned to fully process what had just happened.

Monroe stood over him in calm silence, as if nothing about the scene required urgency or emotion.

He simply watched Bill struggle to catch his breath, curled into a tight ball on the floor, bloo staining his clothes.

Then he stepped forward and crouched down, lowering himself to Bill's level.

Monroe studied him for a moment before letting out a faint chuckle.

"Do you want to hear something funny, Mr. Franklin?"

Bill didn't answer.

He remained curled on the floor, struggling to breathe through the pain. Every part of his bod ached. His ribs felt like they were on fire.

“It turns out your little affair wasn’t the most interesting thing we found.”

His smile widened slightly.

“As it happens, you had a lot more skeletons in your closet than anyone expected.”

Bill’s stomach twisted.

Monroe raised a hand.

One of the elite guards immediately stepped forward and placed a thick manila folder into his hand.

Monroe opened it and casually flipped through the contents.

“You really enjoyed the privileges that came with your position, didn’t you?”

He pulled out the first document

“$288,750.00. Two nights at the Burj Al Arab in Dubai.”

His eyes moved across the page.

ted as accommodations for an executive conference.”

A pause.

“Except there was no conference. Just a romantic getaway with your mistress.”

Another page.

“$118,920. Dinner at Guy Savoy in Paris.”

Monroe looked amused.

“Reported as a client development meeting.”

He glanced down at Bill.

“Our investigation determined it was actually a birthday celebration with another woma

He flipped to the next document.

“Oh, this one’s impressive.”

“$623,000. Private golf resort package in Scotland.”

Another pause.

“Filed as a strategic networking retreat.”

Monroe closed the page.

“It turns out the only networking involved was with a casino hostess.”

Another sheet emerged.

“$347,800. Luxury yacht charter along the Amalfi Coast.”

His eyebrow rose slightly.

“Officially categorized as executive relationship building.”

A faint smile appeared.

“You spent the entire weekend with a social media influencer.”

Another page.

“$189,400. Presidential suite at The Plaza in New York.”

Monroe tapped the document.

“Claimed as accommodations during merger discussions.”

He looked down at Bill.

“The merger discussions apparently involved champagne, shopping sprees, and yet ar mistress.”

The folder snapped shut.

For the first time, genuine panic flickered across Bill’s battered face.

Monroe noticed.

“Oh, and by the way,” Monroe added, leaning in slightly. “Your wife already knows everyt

Bill froze.

“The security footage from today’s revelations. The files on the girl you got pregnant and to keep silent. Every one of these expenses. Every mistress. Every lie.”

His voice remained calm.

“It’s all been delivered to her.”

Monroe crouched slightly closer.

“You are not just fired, Bill.”

A cold smile touched his lips.

“You’re exposed.”

Monroe paused for a beat, then casually patted Bill’s back-more insult than comfort-befo straightening up.

He rose slowly from the crouch, his expression still calm.

“And before you start convincing yourself this ends with an early retirement,” Monroe continued, “let me save you the disappointment. It doesn’t.”

He adjusted his suit and looked down at Bill.

“Your wife is leaving you with nothing. No money. No career. No leverage.”

A brief pause.

“By the time the divorce is finalized, you’ll be lucky if you have enough left to start over.”

His expression remained unchanged.

“You’re done, Bill.”

“And if you’re not out of this country when your twenty-four hours are up,” he then your problems will extend far beyond losing your job.”

He adjusted a cufflink.

“Mr. Blackwood has been remarkably generous today.”

A faint pause.

“Leave, and you might still have the opportunity to disappear quietly and start o somewhere else.”

His gaze settled on Bill.

“Stay… and ever door available to you will close.”

The room fellent, but something darker settled into Monroe’s expression.

“And when man runs out of options, Mr. Franklin, the ending is rarely a pleasant on

“And the the said quietly, “is the consequence of your own actions.”

“Fift ears of power,” Monroe said, straightening his coat as he turned toward the

d in an afternoon. Mr. Blackwood is showing you mercy by letting you walk aw ht push your luck.”

another word, he turned and walked away.

wo security guards followed immediately behind him.

their footsteps echoed through the ruined house, growing fainter with every second until t bund of the front door opening and closing finally broke the silence.

Then they were gone.

The door clicked shut, leaving him in the hollowed-out silence of his own home

Bill was left alone on the floor.

Bruised. Bloodied. Abandoned.

The once-pristine estate stretched around him in complete disarray, drawers hanging open, cabinets emptied, and entire sections the house stripped bare.

For the first time in over

his success, or the

longer felt like a symbol of his status,

It felt like a tomb.

Bill shifted on the floor, trying to push himself up, but his body didn't respond the way he wanted it to. The pain was still sharp, but it wasn't what made him still anymore-it was realization that no matter what he said next, nothing here was going to bend for him again

His rage, once a fire that burned at his ego, cooled into something denser.

He didn't think about Damien Blackwood.

He didn't think about Nicholas Ashcroft.

He didn't think about Monroe or the guards who had left him broken on the floor.

He didn't even think about his wife.

Those people were beyond his reach.

No.

His mind settled on only one name.

Brandy Martinez.

She was the infection. She was the one who had brought the chaos to his door, the one wh had forced his hand.

In the wreckage of his life, something cold and sharp finally took hold.

If his life was over, then Brandy Martinez would not walk away from it alive.

Chapter 498

The silence of the house was absolute, broken only by the hitching of Bill's breath. I movement was a chore, his ribs were a roadmap of agony, and his side screamed ir with every shift of his weight.

He gritted his teeth, his knuckles turning white as he hauled himself upward, using ti edge of his mahogany desk for support.

For a fleeting second, he stood on unsteady legs-but the agony in his ribs flared, for choked gasp from his throat. His knees buckled.

He collapsed back to the floor, reduced to crawling on his hands and knees.

Bereft of his shoes from the beating, he had no protection against the wreckage. Shar shards of monitor glass and the razor-edged scraps of torn documents bit into his skii every desperate movement-a stinging, constant reminder of the price he was paying.

He dragged his body over the hollowed-out casings of his hard drives, his jaw locked tic against the rhythmic fire in his chest.

His eyes scanned the room, landing on the ruins of his safe. It was picked clean, save fc few stray documents and a pathetic stack of cash.

The sight hit him like a physical blow, fueling the dark fire in his gut.

“You’ve destroyed my life, you filthy bitch,” he rasped, his voice trembling with a mixture of agony and pure, unadulterated hatred. “I’ll see you burn for this. I’ll make you beg for the mercy I’m never going to give you!”

He scanned the floor, sweeping aside papers and broken hardware until his fingers brushed against something cool and metallic near the base of the leather chair.

His phone.

He flipped it over, his heart skipping a beat as he saw the screen-a map of spiderwebbed cracks covering the display. He pressed the power button, holding his breath. The screen flickered to life, showing the familiar interface.

A sharp, unexpected sliver of relief washed over him it still works.

Using the base of the chair for leverage, he shimmied his back against the upholstery. inching himself up.

“Urgh ahhh f-fuck,” he hissed, the movement sending a jolt of lightning through his side He squeezed his eyes shut, letting out a jagged, rattling breath. “God dammit… motherfucker

With a final, pained heave, he slid himself into the seat. He slumped back, his ch

He stayed there for a few seconds, eyes closed, simply waiting for the white-hot agon ribs to dull enough for him to think.

Once his breath stabilized, he opened his eyes. His fingers, trembling slightly, navigate his call history and hit redial.

Two rings. Then, a click.

“Double!” Bill spat. His voice was a jagged rasp, trembling with a volatile cocktail of phy agony and pure, corrosive hate. “I’ll double the price, but it has to be done tonight!”

He heaved a ragged, wet breath that sounded like a death rattle.

“And no mercy! I want her agonizing. Do whatever you want to her-just make it last. Do understand me?”

A low, noncommittal hum came from the other end of the line.

Bill gripped the phone tighter, his eyes narrowing as he stared into the emptiness of the study.

“And I’ll throw in extra for a video. I want to see every second of her suffering. I want to he every single scream.” He paused, his breath hitching in his chest, his voice dropping to a dangerous, wet whisper.

“Ruin her. I want her broken, begging for an end before you finish her for good. I want it slow I want her pleading for the grave. I want to watch the light go out of her eyes.”

Bill finished his demand with a wet, shuddering gasp, his heart hammering against his nbs i he waited for the other man to share his bloodlust.

Instead, there was only a chilling silence on the line.

“We don’t take chump change ‘extras for that kind of work,” the voice replied, the tone so detached it was insulting “Twenty-five percent additional, upfront for the footage. Wire the money before we move. And make it clean.”

Bill’s grip tightened on the phone, his jaw muscles corded. He didn’t care about the price-

he’d burn every last cent to see her suffer-but the hitman’s cold, transactional greed grated against his raw nerves like sandpaper

“Fine,” Bill hissed, his voice trembling with hate. “Check your account in five minutes.”

Click

The click of the disconnected line hit Bill like a slap. He stared at the glowi of his phone, the silence of the room rushing back in to swallow him whole

Suddenly, a sharp click echoed from the foyer, followed by the soft sound

Bill’s heart hammered against his bruised ribs-a cold, sickening dread wa swallowed hard, his eyes fixed on the study door, muscles tensing as if ex and his men to come back and finish what they started.

He wasn’t ready to die.

Top Pick

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Bonded

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Will she choose love or destiny when her true mate appears?

Chapter 499

The sound of approaching footsteps grew louder, each one sending another wave of ten through Bill's battered body.

His grip tightened around the phone.

Every muscle in his body screamed at him to move, to get up, to do something, but fear rooted him to the chair.

Monroe's warning echoed in his mind. The beating. The threats. The cold certainty in the man's eyes when he spoke about consequences.

Had they changed their minds?

Had Damien Blackwood decided twenty-four hours was too generous after all?

A cold sweat broke across Bill’s skin as the footsteps drew closer.

Each one echoed through the hollow silence of the mansion like a countdown to an execution.

His pulse hammered in his ears.

It had to be Monroe.

Who else would come back after what happened?

Bill’s breathing quickened, every muscle in his battered body locking up.

The footsteps stopped.

Then finally, a figure appeared in the doorway.

Bill’s breath caught and the fear on his face shifted instantly into confusion.

“What are you doing here?”

It was his driver.

The man stood frozen in the doorway, his face pale as he took in the destruction around him.

His eyes swept across the wrecked study–the overturned furniture, the shattered glass, the gutted cabinets, the scattered documents littering the floor.

Then his gaze landed on Bill

His disheveled hair.

The blood matted near his temple.

The split lip.

The bruises already darkening across his face.

The panic on the driver's face was immediate.

"Sir…?"

He rushed forward without hesitation.

"Sir! What happened to you?" he asked, his voice rising with alarm. "What happened her

Bill let out a shuddering breath of relief, which quickly curdled into bile-filled rage.

"Stop asking questions, you moron!" he snapped. "Where the hell were you?!"

The driver stumbled back, visibly rattled.

"I-I didn't leave, Sir," he stammered, shaking his head frantically. "I was in the undergroun garage. After I parked the car, I went to the restroom and…"

His face paled.

“Two men in suits grabbed me when I came out. They locked me inside and wouldn’t let n

leave.”

The driver’s eyes darted nervously around the wrecked study.

“I kept banging on the door, Sir. Nobody came. They only let me out when they were leaving

Bill waved him off impatiently.

“Useless.”

The driver immediately fell silent.

A moment later, he hesitated.

“Sir…” His voice trembled. “Those men…”

He swallowed hard.

“Were they Mr. Blackwood’s men?”

“Who else would it be, you dimwit?!” Bill roared, though his voice cracked from the pain.

His chest rose and fell violently.

“What are you standing there for? Be useful and get upstairs!”

He pointed toward the staircase.

“Pack my things. Anything valuable you see, take it. Jewelry, watches, cash-I don’t Take everything.”

A brief pause.

“We’re leaving this place in two hours.”

His eyes hardened.

“Now move!”

The driver flinched at the outburst.

For a moment, he looked as though he wanted to say something, but one look at Bill's bloodied face and murderous expression was enough to change his mind.

"Yes, Sir! Yes, I'm going!"

The driver turned and scrambled up the stairs.

As soon as he was alone, Bill's attention returned to the phone in his hand.

His fingers trembled as they moved across the cracked screen.

Ignoring his primary accounts, he navigated through a series of hidden menus before opening an encrypted folder concealed deep within the device.

A grim smile tugged at his split lip.

They thought they had taken everything.

They were wrong.

He opened a private account-his off-the-books sanctuary.

The sight of it immediately eased some of the panic clawing at his chest.

This was his real insurance policy.

The home of his casino winnings, undeclared commissions, side deals, and countless transactions that had never found their way onto an official record.

Money accumulated over years of quiet greed and careful deception. Money hidden from auditors, accountants, and even his own wife.

$195,000,000.

Dev’s Insurance

It wasn’t the empire he had lost, but it was enough.

Enough to disappear.

Enough to become a ghost.

And more than enough to buy the kind of retribution he had in mind.

Ignoring the pain radiating through his battered body, Bill initiated a wire transfer.

Five million dollars.

A painful amount of money under normal circumstances.

Today, it felt insignificant.

Compared to what he had lost, it was nothing.

Bill’s expression hardened as he attached a message to the transaction.

50% now. Send the video and I'll transfer the rest.

Beneath the message, he included a photo of Brandy Martinez along with the addresses her home and workplace.

For a moment, Bill stared at her picture on the screen.

A bitter feeling twisted inside him.

Looking at her now, he couldn't help thinking about how all of this had started.

Back then, he had genuinely believed she was interested in him. She had laughed at his jokes, sought him out whenever she had the chance, and looked at him in a way that made him feel years younger than he really was. At the time, he hadn't questioned any of it.

Why would he?

He had power. Status Influence.

Women had always been drawn to men like him.

Only later did he realize that none of it had ever been about him.

It had always been about Ashcroft.

The realization still infuriated him.

Everything she had done, every conversation, every calculated move had been centered

kuchyni aging string & means is an end

IN THE TIMES,

*** What Tim

Mw

had collected in a single day

show, the carson he blamed most for all of it was still out there breathing comfortably. completely unaware of what was coming

The thouge alone was enough to harden the hatred already festering inside him.

Bill hit sand and watched the money vanish from his account.

Only a few seconds passed before his phone buzzed and a single message appeared o

Copy

Bill stared at the word.

Just like that, it was done.

A slow, vicious smile spread across his battered face.

Brandy Martinez had taken everything from him and now she was finally going to pay for it

For a moment, that thought brought him satisfaction.

Then another realization surfaced

It wasn’t enough.

Why should he be the only one left carrying the consequences?

“I will not be the scapegoat for some cheap whore’s obsession,” he muttered.

His eyes darkened as he opened a new message and began typing.

Whatever happens, my name never comes up. Keep it clean. Make sure nothing traces back

to me

His thumb lingered over the screen before adding one final instruction.

Make it look like Nicholas Ashcroft ordered the hit.

He hit send and watched the message change from Sent to Seen.

A cruel sense of satisfaction settled over him.

Veintiocho

Uh oh… just when everyone thought the dust was finally settling.

For those wondering if we're getting sidetracked, we're not. Every piece of this arc connects to the bigger picture…

Chapter 500

Bill continued staring at the screen long after the message had been seen.

The cruel satisfaction lingering inside him refused to fade.

For the first time since Monroe and his men had left, he feit as though he had regained sure measure of control.

Not much. But enough.

Enough to make sure he wasn't the only one paying for what had happened.

The sound of hurried footsteps echoed from the upper floor as the driver moved through the mansion gathering valuables.

Bill barely noticed.

His attention remained fixed on the phone in his hand.

Then suddenly, the device vibrated.

His eyes dropped to the screen.

Private Number.

Bill frowned, a strange feeling creeping into his chest. The call was coming far sooner than he had

expected.

For a moment, he considered letting it ring, but the uncertainty gnawing at him won out and he answered.

‘What?”

A brief silence followed.

Then the familiar voice from earlier came through the speaker

‘The deal is off. You’re on your own.”

Bill’s expression tightened instantly.

“What?!” he barked. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“I saw your last message.”

For the first time since sending it, uncertainty crept into Bill’s expression.

“Framing Nicholas Ashcroft changes the situation,” the man said emotionlessly

Bill’s eyes narrowed.

“What does that have to do with anything?” he asked, a hint of panic creeping into his voice.

The man didn’t answer immediately.

When he finally spoke, his voice remained as calm as ever.

“Crossing à man like that comes with a price.”

“You greedy son of a bitch!” Bill exploded: “I already doubled the price and now you want more?!”

“Fifty million dollars.”

The man’s voice was steady, leaving no room for negotiation-

Bill nearly dropped the phone.

“What?!” he roared. “Fifty million?! No way! That bitch’s life isn’t worth a penny!”

“Then find someone else.”

The response was immediate.

Bill’s face twisted with fury.

“Bullshit!” he barked. “You’re just looking for an excuse to back out.”

The man’s indifference only fueled his anger.

“Send me my money back and I’ll find someone who actually has the guts to do the job.”

A brief pause followed, then a low, mocking laugh came through the speaker.

“Good luck finding someone.”

Then, just like that, the line went dead.

Bill stared at the screen in disbelief.

His chest rose and fell heavily.

Fifty million dollars.

The bastard had to be out of his mind.

Even with nearly two hundred million hidden away, the thought of spending fifty million dollars on Brandy Martinez made Bill's blood boil.

She wasn't worth it.

Not even close.

Yet as the anger slowly settled, the hitman's warning echoed in Bill's mind

The problem wasn't Brandy.

It was Nicholas Ashcroft.

Consumed by his hatred for Brandy, Bill had failed to confront an uncomfortable reality.

A simple job had become fifty million dollars the moment Nicholas Ashcroft's name became involved.

of Hatred

The realization left a bitter taste in Bill's mouth.

"Even in death, you're still squeezing me dry, you bitch," he muttered through clenched teeth.

For several seconds, Bill stared at the phone, contemplating whether it was even worth it.

Then his gaze drifted around the wrecked study.

The destruction surrounding him made the decision for him. –

Cursing under his breath, Bill redialed the number.

The call connected almost immediately.

"Changed your mind?" the voice asked.

Bill closed his eyes briefly, forcing down the frustration bubbling inside him.

“Fine,” he spat. “Fifty million.”

The response came immediately, as though the man had been expecting that answer all along.

“Wire the remaining forty-five million now.”

Bill nearly choked.

“What? No!” he snapped. “What’s my guarantee you won’t take the money and disappear?”

A brief silence followed.

Then the man sighed.

“You don’t seem to understand what’s at stake here.”

Bill’s expression darkened.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“A dead woman is one thing,” the man replied calmly. “Making look like Nicholas Ashcroft ordered the

hit is another.”

Bill fell silent.

“The moment that body is found, someone might point a finger at him. If Ashcroft starts digging, me and my men become targets.”

A brief pause followed before the man added,

“We’ll need to disappear the moment the job is done.”

The man’s tone remained matter-of-fact.

“We’ll do the job. You’ll get your video. Then we both disappear.”

The line fell silent for a few seconds.

“You’ll get exactly what you paid for. But I need the full payment upfront.”

The man’s voice left no room for negotiation.

“Take it or leave it.”

Bill’s grip tightened around the phone.

For several seconds, he said nothing.

The bastard was right.

The moment Ashcroft’s name became part of the equation, everything changed.

If something went wrong, he would be the obvious suspect-the only man with a motive and the first person they would look at.

No.

He couldn’t afford to take that gamble.

“Fine,” he snapped. “Fine. I’ll wire the money.”

His eyes darkened.

“But for fifty million dollars, this entertainment better be worth every cent.”

“Wire the money and consider it done,” the man replied without hesitation.

Then the call disconnected.

Bill remained motionless, staring at the dark screen/in his hand.

Fifty million dollars.

The number alone was enough to make his chest tighten.

With trembling fingers, he reopened the account and authorized the transfer.

The balance dropped instantly.

A fresh wave of anger surged through him.

This is your fault.

If you hadn’t dragged me into your obsession with Nicholas Ashcroft, none of this would’ve happened.

I’d still have my career. My reputation. My life.

Instead, he was being forced to spend a fortune cleaning up a mess she had created.

The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that she deserved whatever was coming.

Bill slowly lowered the phone.

A dark smile crept across his face.

Soon, all of it would finally he over.

Meanwhile, at Blackwood Enterprises, Monroe's vehicle pulled into the underground parking garage just as Damien and the others were preparing to leave.

The moment Monroe stepped out, he headed straight toward Damien.

"Is it done?" Damien asked.

"Yes, Sir," Monroe replied. "He's alone now. Just him and his driver."

Damien nodded, his expression unreadable.

"Have someone keep an eye on him. The moment he makes a detour, you know what to do."

"Already taken care of, Sir," Monroe replied. "I left the others behind to keep watch. They know exactly what to do if he tries anything."

Damien simply hummed in acknowledgment before checking the time on his watch.

Almost six.

“I still need to take care of something,” he said. “Take Hudson and Cruz with you and head straight to the

manor.”

“Yes, Sir.”

With that, they parted ways.

Damien headed toward the waiting vehicle with James.

Meanwhile, Hudson and Cruz climbed into Monroe’s vehicle while Monroe took the wheel.

Moments later, both vehicles exited the underground garage and disappeared into the evening traffic, heading in opposite directions.