Intern 611

Chapter 611

Maya remained quiet as she looked at her grandmother.

She understood what Cecilia was trying to tell her. More than that, she could see the genuine remorse behind every word. It was there in the emotion in her voice and the regret written

across her face.

But Maya could also see something else just as clearly.

Cecilia genuinely wanted to protect her and Jaime, even if it meant facing the consequences of decisions she had spent years regretting.

“Grandma Cecilia…”

Cecilia slowly shook her head, cutting her off.

“I stood by and allowed it to happen once. I made a choice that cost me my daughter, and I have lived with that regret ever since.” Her voice trembled with emotion. “I will not stand by and allow those same beliefs to destroy my grandchildren’s lives too.”

Maya gently covered one of Cecilia's hands with her own.

"That was a long time ago, Grandma. You can't keep blaming yourself for every choice that was made back then, and we can't spend our lives afraid that history is going to repeat itself."

Cecilia opened her mouth to respond, but Maya continued.

"If he comes knocking, then let him knock."

Cecilia looked startled by her response.

"But Maya…"

Maya's voice remained firm.

"I am my mother's daughter. He couldn't force Mom into submission back then, and if Mom could stand her ground against him, so can I."

"Is there another way?"

Damien’s voice cut through the tension, drawing everyone’s attention.

“Can we get the blood without alerting him?”

Cecilia gestured toward the case.

“That case is temperature–controlled and protected by a tamper–evident seal. The individual units inside are inventoried and tracked, and any access to the reserve is electronically monitored.”

Damien’s expression hardened.

“So the moment someone opens it…”

“There will be a record of it,” Cecilia finished. “And because the reserve is maintained specifically for members of the royal family, opening it will trigger a security notification. Even if Tobias doesn’t receive the alert personally, someone responsible for the reserve will.”

Harper, who had been quietly examining the case while Cecilia spoke, suddenly looked up.

“Then we don’t stop the alert.”

Everyone turned toward her.

“We let it happen. We just make sure it tells them the wrong location.”

Damien stared at her.

“What do you mean?”

Harper crouched beside the case and examined the locking mechanism more closely before tapping a small component built into its frame.

“This is where the tracking system is integrated. The moment the seal is broken and the case registers that it’s been opened, it triggers the alert. The report tells them the case was accessed, where it happened, and how much of the reserve was removed.”

Harper studied it for another moment.

“So we leave all of that alone.”

She rose to her feet and brushed her hands over her pants.

“We’re not going to disable the tracker or stop it from sending anything. That would only make it obvious someone deliberately tampered with it.”

She looked at Cecilia.

“We manipulate the location data instead.”

Damien’s expression shifted as he began to understand.

“So when the case is opened…”

“They’ll still get their alert,” Harper finished. “Everything will look exactly the way it’s supposed to, except according to their system, the Queen will be somewhere else.”

Nora’s expression suddenly changed.

“Lisbon.”

Everyone looked at her.

Nora turned to Cecilia.

“The children’s hospital.”

Recognition immediately crossed Cecilia’s face.

“Yes.”

Harper looked between them, confused.

Nora explained, “One of the foundations Lady Cecilia oversees has supported a children’s hospital in Lisbon for years. She recently funded an expansion of one of their treatment programs.”

She looked back at Harper.

“We can use that as the location. It would give His Majesty a believable reason for her to be

there.”

Harper considered it for a moment before a slow smile appeared.

“Even better.”

Cecilia looked at her. “Why?”

“Because now we don’t have to invent a reason for you to be there.” Harper gestured toward the case. “If I can make this thing report that it was opened in Lisbon, the King already has a perfectly believable explanation for why you might be there.”

Cecilia nodded, quickly following Harper’s reasoning.

“And if Tobias calls, I’ll tell him there was a medical emergency. Someone needed blood, I happened to be there, and I authorized the reserve to be used.”

Harper grinned.

“You got it, Pontiac!”

“Harper!”

Ken immediately shot his daughter a warning look.

“Mind your manners. Be mindful of who you’re speaking to.”

Harper’s grin vanished.

She looked at her father, then at Cecilia, suddenly remembering that the woman she had just casually addressed was, in fact, a Queen.

“Oh, right.”

She quickly straightened herself before dipping into an awkward curtsy.

“My apologies, Your Majesty. Please forgive my disrespect.”

The unexpected formality coming from Harper was so unlike her that it briefly lightened the tension in the room.

Cecilia’s lips curved with amusement, while Ken and Alice could only shake their heads at their daughter, who suddenly looked more like a child being reprimanded for forgetting her manners than the confident woman who had just devised their entire plan.

Nora, however, still looked uncertain.

“And what if His Majesty investigates further?”

Harper straightened from her curtsy, her playful expression fading as she returned to the matter at hand.

“Let him. We just need him to waste time proving it isn’t true.”

Cecilia fell silent.

Harper’s expression turned serious again.

“By the time he checks the location, starts asking questions, and figures out you were never there, we’ll already have what Jaime needs.”

Her eyes shifted briefly toward the room where Jaime still lay unconscious.

“And hopefully, by then, Jaime will be stable enough that none of this matters anymore.”

She looked at Maya, and a faint, almost mischievous smile tugged at her lips.

“By the time he figures out the truth, we’ll be gone.”

Once everyone agreed to the plan, Harper pulled out her phone and quickly got to work.

Her fingers moved rapidly across the screen as she connected to the tracking system embedded in the case, working quickly to intercept the signal before the seal was broken.

After a few moments, she looked up.

“Okay. Take it in.”

Lee and Max immediately carried the case into the adjoining room where Dr. Brown had instructed them to bring it. The lab technician was already waiting inside, along with one of

the nurses.

Harper followed closely behind.

“All right. Open it.”

Lee carefully broke the seal.

The moment the lock disengaged, Harper's phone came alive with a stream of incoming

data.

"There you are," she murmured.

Her attention remained fixed on the screen as she intercepted the outgoing report and replaced the case's actual location with the one they had agreed upon.

Lisbon, Portugal.

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While Harper worked, the technician began removing the blood bags one by one, carefully checking each label before placing them on the prepared counter.

By the time the last bag had been removed and accounted for, fifteen units were lined up and ready for testing.

Lee closed the case while Harper made a few final adjustments on her phone. She reviewed the information before allowing the altered report to go through, then watched the screen until confirmation appeared.

A satisfied smile spread across her face.

“All done.”

A collective sense of relief swept through the room. What had seemed like another impossible problem had been handled, and they finally had the blood Jaime might need.

Nick, however, appeared impressed for an entirely different reason.

The moment Harper stepped back beside him, he leaned down until his lips were close to her

ear.

“That was fucking hot,” he whispered, keeping his voice low enough for only her to hear. “I’m so fucking turned on right now. You’re amazing.”

The warmth of his breath against her ear sent a small shiver through her, and heat immediately crept into her cheeks.

Damn him. She knew exactly how much satisfaction he would get from seeing how easily he could affect her, and she refused to give it to him. At least not yet.

Instead, Harper merely shrugged and slipped her phone back into her pocket, wearing her most unaffected expression.

“I know.”

Nick chuckled, clearly not fooled, and slid an arm around her waist, drawing her a little closer. But beneath his amusement was something else, a warm surge of pride that caught him

slightly off guard.

Watching Harper take control of the situation so effortlessly, confidently doing something none of them could have pulled off without her, had stirred something in him beyond simple

attraction.

He had always known how brilliant she was, but seeing her like this made him ridiculously proud that this incredible woman was his.

And, fuck, if that didn’t make her even hotter in his eyes.

Damien, standing close enough to witness the entire exchange, glanced at Nick and caught

the proud expression still plastered across his face.

He leaned slightly closer to him.

“Tone it down,” he muttered under his breath. “You look like an idiot.”

Nick glanced at him, completely unbothered.

“I think I’m in love, man.”

Damien gave him a flat look.

“No shit.”

Harper caught the quiet exchange between them and narrowed her eyes suspiciously.

“What are you two whispering about?”

She directed the question at Nick, who immediately shook his head.

“Nothing important.”

Harper raised a brow, clearly unconvinced, but Nick only smiled innocently and tightened his arm around her waist.

With the immediate problem handled, the medical team wasted no time.

The next hour was spent inspecting and testing the reserve units. One after another, the units were cleared for use, giving them the compatible blood supply they had desperately needed.

Another round of bloodwork was also performed on Jaime.

His hemoglobin was still lower than the doctors wanted, and after reviewing the results, they decided another transfusion was necessary.

This time, the unit prepared for him was Cecilia’s.

Maya sat beside her grandmother as the transfusion began inside Jaime's room.

For Cecilia, there was something almost overwhelming about knowing that her own blood was flowing into her grandson.

After all the years she had lost with Malia, after all the years she had unknowingly lost with Maya and Jaime, a part of her was now helping keep her only grandson alive.

Cecilia pressed her lips together as her eyes filled with tears.

Maya noticed and without saying anything, she reached over and gently took her grandmother's hand.

Cecilia looked down at their joined hands, visibly caught off guard by the gesture. After everything that had been revealed between them, she hadn't expected Maya to reach for her

so naturally.

Her fingers slowly closed around Maya's hand, holding on tightly.

Maya gave her hand a gentle squeeze before turning to her.

“Once Jaime wakes up, let’s talk.”

Cecilia’s expression softened, emotion immediately welling in her eyes again. There were so many things left unsaid between them, so many questions she knew Maya deserved answers to. But hearing that Maya was willing to have that conversation meant more to her than she could put into words.

“Yes,” Cecilia replied softly, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. “I’d love that.”

The hours that followed were less frantic than the ones before them.

Jaime continued to be monitored closely, and when his bloodwork showed that he needed additional support, the doctors used the newly cleared reserve to give him the necessary

transfusions.

Thanks to Cecilia, they no longer had to worry about running out of compatible blood. Her reserve had given them fifteen units, fifteen precious reasons to hope that Jaime would have everything he needed while his body fought to recover.

And most importantly, he remained stable.

Amid everything that had happened throughout the day, Dahlia had also found an opportunity to sit down with her son and Maya and explain why she had made the decisions she did.

There had been questions, particularly about the risks and possible consequences. But after everything they had witnessed since the truth came out, neither of them could bring themselves to be upset with her.

They had seen Cecilia's genuine love for Maya and Jaime, her acceptance of Damien, the regret she still carried over losing her daughter, and how quickly she had been willing to risk

the consequences if it meant saving Jaime's life.

It didn't mean Damien and Maya agreed with every decision she had made, but they understood why she had made them, and that was enough.

By the time evening settled over the estate, some of the suffocating tension that had consumed everyone throughout the day had finally begun to ease.

Ken and Kenji had already excused themselves to attend to other matters, while Alice left shortly afterward to make sure the staff had dinner prepared for everyone.

With Jaime's condition stable and the immediate crisis under control, Dr. Nakamura and the

rest of his team eventually took their leave as well.

Maya, however, still refused to go far from her brother.

It took considerable convincing from Damien, Nick, and Harper before she finally agreed to

leave long enough to eat.

“I’m not hungry,” Maya insisted.

“You haven’t eaten properly all day,” Damien reminded her.

“I can eat here.”

“You could,” Harper said, “but then you’ll stare at that door the entire time and forget there’s food sitting in front of you.”

Maya gave her a look, but Harper simply raised her brows.

“You know I’m right.”

Maya glanced toward Jaime’s room again, still torn between leaving and staying.

Damien rested a hand gently against her back.

“He’s stable. The doctors are with him, and we’re not going far.”

She hesitated, but Nick reminded her that the dining hall was still inside the estate and they could be back within minutes if anything changed.

Finally, she sighed.

“Fine.”

With one last look toward the closed door of Jaime’s room, Maya stood with everyone else, ready to leave, when a sudden beep sounded from inside.

Nurse Daniel immediately rushed into the room to check on him. Seconds later, he reappeared at the doorway and called urgently for Dr. Brown and Dr. Anderson.

“The patient is awake!”

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“The patient is awake!”

Maya immediately stopped in her tracks, unsure if she had heard him correctly.

“He’s awake?” she muttered. But when both doctors immediately rushed toward Jaime’s room, she realized it was true.

She instinctively moved to follow, but Damien caught her gently by the arm before she could reach the door.

“Let them check him first.”

She stopped reluctantly as the door closed behind the medical team.

“Did you hear that?” she whispered, turning to Damien as the reality of what they had just heard began to

sink in.

“Jaime’s awake. He’s finally awake.”

Damien wrapped an arm around her and pulled her against him.

“Yes, he is.”

Inside, Jaime had opened his eyes and was responding to the doctors, although he was still visibly groggy from the anesthesia and everything his body had endured over the past several hours.

Dr. Brown asked him a few simple questions, checking that he knew his name and understood where he was. His responses were slow and weak, but appropriate.

After completing their assessment and confirming that he was neurologically responsive, the doctors decided there was no reason to keep him fully awake. Jaime needed rest more than anything else.

A small dose of medication was administered through his IV to keep him lightly sedated and comfortable, and within minutes, his heavy eyelids closed again.

Not long afterward, Dr. Brown stepped back into the hallway.

Maya immediately approached him.

“How is he?”

“He’s doing well,” Dr. Brown assured her. “He woke up on his own and responded appropriately to our questions. He’s still very groggy, which is completely expected, so we’ve given him something to help him rest comfortably through the night.”

The tension in Maya’s shoulders finally began to loosen.

“What about his blood levels? Are they getting better?”

“His hemoglobin is still below the normal range, but it has improved since the last transfusion.”

The lingering worry on Maya’s face didn’t disappear completely. Her lips parted to ask another question,

“That’s not necessarily a cause for concern. Considering the amount of blood he lost earlier, his levels are

moving in the direction we want them to.”

Maya nodded, though the concern in her expression remained.

“Most likely he’ll need one more unit tonight,” Dr. Brown continued. “We’ll repeat his bloodwork afterward and continue monitoring him closely. If his levels continue moving in the right direction and there are no signs of further blood loss, we should be able to move away from transfusion support and manage his recovery from there.”

Maya took in every word, visibly reassured by the improvement, even if she wasn't quite ready to stop worrying yet.

Dr. Brown seemed to notice and gently placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Maya, I know you're worried, but Jaime is stable," he assured her. "His new heart continues to function well, and right now, I'm very pleased with his progress."

He then looked around at the exhausted faces gathered in the hallway.

"You've all had a very long day. There's nothing more any of you need to do here tonight. Jaime will be resting, and we'll continue monitoring him closely."

Dr. Brown glanced toward Jaime's room before lowering his voice slightly, a hint of amusement entering his expression.

"Dr. Anderson will be heading back soon as well. The man looks like he's aged ten years since the surgery."

A few quiet chuckles helped ease the tension.

“He’s exhausted, and now that Jaime is stable, I’m practically ordering him to get some sleep,” Dr. Brown continued. “I’ll be staying here and monitoring Jaime throughout the night, so you can all get some rest knowing he’s being well taken care of.”

Maya still looked reluctant.

“If anything changes…”

“We’ll come get you immediately.”

That was finally enough to convince her.

With Jaime stable and under Dr. Brown’s constant supervision, everyone eventually left and returned to the main house.

Dinner was already waiting for them when they arrived. Alice had made sure everything was prepared. knowing most of them had barely had a proper meal throughout the day.

The atmosphere around the table was considerably lighter than it had been earlier. With the worst of the uncertainty surrounding Jaime finally easing, everyone was able to enjoy a proper meal and settle into easy conversation.

Maya was still understandably distracted, occasionally checking her phone despite knowing she would se notified immediately if anything changed, but even she managed to eat more than she had expected

By the time dinner ended, exhaustion had begun catching up with everyone.

Cecilia and Nora were among the first to excuse themselves after dinner. With the altered report now sent, there were still a few things they needed to take care of in case Tobias called or began asking questions about Cecilia's supposed presence in Lisbon.

Dahlia and Alice retired for the night shortly afterward, followed by Kenji, Harper, and Nick, leaving Maya and Damien preparing to head upstairs as well.

Before they could leave, however, Ken called out to him.

"Damien."

Damien stopped and turned.

Ken stood a short distance away, his expression noticeably more serious than it had been over dinner.

"Do you have a moment to join me in my study?"

Damien studied him briefly before nodding.

“Of course.”

Maya looked between them, immediately curious, but Damien gently touched her lower back.

“Go ahead. I’ll meet you upstairs.”

She hesitated, then nodded.

“Okay.”

Damien waited until Maya had gone before turning back to Ken.

“Lead the way.”

He followed Ken through the quiet hallway and into his study. Once they were inside, Ken closed the door behind them.

“Have a seat.”

Damien settled into one of the chairs while Ken walked over to the bar in the corner of the room and poured himself a glass of whiskey.

“Whiskey?” he offered.

“I’ll pass, thank you.”

Ken gave a slight nod, picked up his glass, and crossed the room before taking the chair across from him

“I’ll get straight to the point.”

Damien’s attention sharpened at the sudden seriousness in Ken’s tone..

What do you know about the couple who died in the accident involving Volkov’s daughter seven years

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Damien’s expression changed at the question.

When Ken asked to speak with him privately, he had assumed it would be about Harper and Nick. After what he had witnessed between the two of them today, Damien wouldn't have been surprised if Ken had questions.

Or perhaps it was something business–related.

What he hadn't expected was for Ken to bring up that night.

Especially after seven years.

The question had caught him completely off guard, not only because of how much time had passed, but because from the very beginning, Ken had made it clear that the Takahashis wanted no involvement in the conflicts between the other families.

Especially anything involving Viktor Volkov.

Even seven years ago, when Damien had desperately turned to the Takahashis for help deciphering the anonymous coded message that ultimately led them to Cassandra, Ken had initially refused to get involved. It had taken considerable persuasion, and in the end, even Dahlia had resorted to asking Alice to convince her husband to help.

So why, after all this time, was Ken suddenly asking about the accident?

That night had remained one of the darkest chapters of Damien's life. It was also where everything with Volkov had begun.

The guilt Damien carried over what happened had become an invisible chain between them, one Volkov had never hesitated to tighten whenever Damien tried to pull too far away.

"Not much more than what I knew seven years ago," Damien finally answered. "I tried to find out who they were after the accident, but all I could ever get was Jane and John Doe. A woman in her early forties and a man in his mid–forties."

His jaw tightened.

"Volkov made sure everything else disappeared. Their names, their identities, anything that could tell me who they were or where they came from. I used every connection and resource had, but every time I tried to dig deeper, I hit another dead end."

His eyes narrowed slightly.

"What's with the sudden interest?" Damien asked. "You've stayed out of anything involving Volkov for years, so I doubt you're asking me this out of simple curiosity."

He studied Ken's expression.

"Do you know something I don't?"

Ken set his glass down on the table beside him.

“I might.”

Damien’s attention sharpened immediately. He was about to press Ken for an answer, but Ken seemed to have expected the reaction and cut him off before he could.

“But before I tell you what I found, I needed to know how much you already knew. Whether you had ever managed to get past whatever Volkov buried seven years ago.”

“If you’re asking whether I ever found anything beyond what I just told you, no. I didn’t,” Damien replied flatly.

He leaned back in his chair, his jaw tightening.

“I even asked Viktor about them twice. Both times, he told me everything had been taken care of and that the couple’s family had been well compensated. That was all he would give me.”

Ken drained the rest of his whiskey in one gulp.

“And you believed him?” he asked, his tone almost mocking.

Damien caught the underlying mockery in his tone and immediately felt the need to defend himself.

“Of course not. But Cassandra’s mental state had already deteriorated badly by then, and I had nothing else to go on.”

Ken nodded slowly before rising from his chair and walking back toward the bar.

“Then he made sure there was nothing else for you to find.”

Damien frowned.

“What are you saying?”

Instead of answering, Ken poured himself another whiskey. Then he reached for a second glass and poured another.

He returned and held it out to Damien.

“You’ll need this.”

Damien looked at the glass, then at Ken. This time, he didn't refuse. He took it from him

Ken returned to his chair and took a sip of his whiskey before continuing.

"Think about it. The less anyone knew about that couple, the less there was to investigate. No names, no identities, no records that could lead anywhere. Nothing that could connect what happened that night back to his daughter."

He looked directly at Damien.

"It was the only way Volkov could protect his daughter. Or perhaps I should say, protect his

name."

Damien leaned forward, growing increasingly confused by what Ken was trying to imply.

"Protect it from what? If what happened that night was nothing more than an accident, there was nothing a good lawyer and enough money couldn't have handled."

"Exactly."

Ken leaned back in his chair, his expression growing more serious.

“Volkov is a snake, Damien. The kind that finds a weakness, sinks his teeth into it, and refuses to let go as long as that weakness remains useful to him.”

His eyes settled firmly on Damien.

“Volkov took advantage of what happened that night. He made you believe that because you didn’t return his daughter’s feelings, somehow everything she did afterward became your responsibility. That she ruined her life because of you.”

“He knew exactly what he was doing. He took that guilt and used it to keep his hold on you.”

Damien’s jaw tightened, his fist slowly clenching against his thigh.

“And seven years later, he’s still there,” Ken continued. “Still lurking in the shadows of your life because for years, that guilt was the one thing stopping you from cutting him out of it completely.”

Damien remained silent.

Because Ken was right.

It had taken Maya coming into his life for Damien to finally see what Volkov had spent years making sure he never did.

The guilt he carried over the innocent lives lost that night because of Cassandra's recklessness was real. So was the guilt he carried over the downward spiral the accident had triggered in Cassandra afterward.

But the guilt Volkov had forced onto him for Cassandra's choices was not.

Damien had never been responsible for Cassandra falling in love with him. He hadn't been responsible for not returning her feelings. And he certainly hadn't been responsible for her choices that night.

Yet Volkov had spent seven years making him feel as though he was responsible for all of it simply because he hadn't loved Cassandra the way she wanted him to.

And for seven years, Damien had allowed him to.

Ken let out a quiet sigh, a trace of sympathy crossing his expression. It was unfortunate how effectively Volkov had used Damien's guilt against him for all those years, but there was no point dwelling on it now.

He continued.

“I may not involve myself in every detail of your affairs, but that doesn’t mean I know nothing about what’s happening.”

Ken paused, his expression turning serious.

“I’m also aware that once Jaime is out of the woods, you have some unfinished business to take care of.”

Damien knew exactly what he meant.

“Viktor Volkov.”

Damien gave a single nod, his eyes darkening.

“He’s overstayed his welcome in my life long enough. It’s time I finally get rid of some old dead weight,” he said coldly.

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Something deeper.

Back then, Ken had seen the determination of a man fighting for someone who mattered to him. What he saw sitting across from him now was the determination of a man fighting for the woman he truly loved, and for the future he wanted to build with her, live with her, and grow old together in.

And Ken knew enough about men like Damien to understand the difference.

Love had given him something far more powerful to protect, and anyone foolish enough to threaten it would discover just how dangerous that could make him.

Damien Blackwood was not a man anyone should make the mistake of crossing, especially when it involved someone he considered his own.

Ken had been genuinely impressed by the man he had become.

And looking at him now, seeing that unwavering determination in his eyes, Ken knew the decision had already been made.

Viktor Volkov's time in Damien's life was coming to an end.

Ken lifted his glass and took another sip of his whiskey.

"Hmm."

He studied Damien thoughtfully over the rim before lowering the glass.

“And how exactly are you planning to do that?” he asked, genuinely curious.

Damien answered without hesitation.

“Slowly, but surely,” he answered calmly and confidently.

He paused, raising the glass Ken had handed him and taking a measured sip before continuing.

“I’m going to dismantle his so–called empire piece by piece. I don’t want to take everything from him at once. I want him to watch it disappear slowly, knowing there’s nothing he can do to stop it.”

His expression hardened.

“I’ll cripple him financially first. Take away his businesses, his connections, his influence Everything he spent years building. But more importantly, I want to cripple him mentally”

Damien leaned back in his chair, his voice remaining eerily calm.

“I want him paranoid. I want him questioning everyone around him, wondering who betrayed him and what I’m going to take from him next. I want him looking over his shoulder every fucking day until he realizes there’s nowhere left for him to run.”

His eyes turned cold.

“And when he’s paranoid enough that he thinks he knows where the next attack is coming fifrom, that’s when I’ll come from somewhere he never expected.”

AA chilling finality settled over his expression.

“And I’ll be the one who puts the bullet in his head.”

KKen gave a slow nod, seemingly unsurprised by what he had just heard.

““Hmm. That explains the explosion.”

AA flicker of surprise crossed Damien’s face, but it disappeared almost immediately. The Ccorner of his mouth lifted into a faint smirk.

“Nothing really gets past you, does it, Mr. Takahashi?”

KKen simply shrugged before raising his glass toward him. Damien lifted his own in response, a a silent acknowledgment passing between the two men before they both took another sip.

KKen placed his glass down and leaned back in his chair.

“I’t see Harper has developed a very close relationship with Maya, and she clearly considers yyou amally as well,” he began.

His expression softened slightly.

“AAnd considering the circumstances that brought them together, I still owe you my gratitude. Thank you for protecting my daughter.”

DDamien gave a slight shake of his head.

“I“dididn’t protect her. She protected herself.”

“Ubdder your roof.”

Kke passed before letting out a short laugh and shaking his head.

“UubbletievableCCareless, but clever.”

“From AAdaint smirk touched Damien’s lips. “She managed to hide under my ra Claesemadedd”

Ken couldn’t argue with that.

He fell quiet briefly, his thoughts returning to his daughter and the future that was rapidly approaching.

“As you know, Harper will soon be taking my place as Oyabun.”

He paused, and a faint look of disbelief crossed his face before he shook his head.

“And now, apparently, the Ashcrofts may eventually become our in–laws.”

Despite the seriousness of the conversation, Damien almost smiled.

Ken continued before he could respond.

“The point is, you have the Takahashis, the Ashcrofts, and the strength of Maya’s own family behind you. Whatever uncertainty still surrounds her situation with the Lockwoods, her bloodline alone carries an influence that cannot simply be dismissed.”

Ken leaned forward slightly.

“If this were only about power, money, and influence, Viktor Volkov wouldn’t stand a chance aagainst what you have behind you now.”

His expression hardened.

“But that man has never survived on power alone. He survives because he’s cunning. He lies, manipulates, betrays, and strikes where people least expect it. That makes him dangerous eeven when the odds are against him.”

“know,” Damien replied. “Eliminating him would be doing the world a favor.”

He drained the remaining amber liquid from his glass in one gulp and set it down, the brief ddistraction fading as his attention returned to the question that had been lingering in the blaack of his mind ever since Ken brought up the accident.

Hilis eyes narrowed.

But what does any of that have to do with why you brought me here and asked about an aaccident that happened seven years ago?”

Keemheld his eyes.

“FiBecause I found something that might give you an even greater reason to erase Wokkov from this world for good.”

Dannnier expression immediately hardened.

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Ken didn’t answer immediately. He studied Damien carefully, seemingly considering where to begin.

“The first time I saw Jaime, something about him caught my attention.”

Damien frowned, clearly not expecting his answer to begin there.

“Jaime?”

Ken nodded.

“He looked familiar.”

Damien’s brows drew together.

“I couldn’t place it at first,” Ken continued. “I knew I had seen those features somewhere before, but I couldn’t remember where or on whom.”

He leaned back in his chair, his expression thoughtful.

“Most people probably would have dismissed it as nothing more than a passing resemblance. Unfortunately, I’ve never been very good at leaving questions unanswered.”

Damien remained silent, waiting for him to continue.

“So I started digging.”

“And what did you find?” Damien asked, his curiosity growing.

Ken looked directly at him.

“Something that was never supposed to be found.”

The weight behind those words only deepened Damien’s confusion. He frowned, trying to understand where Ken was going with any of this, but his patience was already beginning to

wear thin.

“I’m sorry, but I’m not following you.”

Rather than explain, Ken reached toward the desk and picked up a small remote.

“I could explain it to you,” he said, pressing a button, “but I think it would be better if you it yourself.”

A soft mechanical hum filled the study.

Damireort durned toward the sound assassectionofthewall to his left illuminated. A projector camedddifiéecoasting gray surveillance footagesacoesst the previously dark surface.

His atteetitionmeediately shifted toothe screen

At first,thes smpblywatched, trying to understamakwaa teenaanted him to see.

Then something aboutthedooation caught thissaateertion.

Damienrieanedd forwards shghtly, studying the streethod frogabdisplayed across the wall. The longer heddokkechatit; the stronger the sense of if baniilaanyybbecame.

“Wait”

His eyes narrowedd.

“This placedcokssaanniaar

Then he noticed headdseesand timestamp at the bottom of ft bleef footage.

His entire expression changed.

The date.

The time.

The bridge.

Recognition struck all at oncee

Damien abruptly pointed owe add mees screen before looking at Kleen

“Is this the surveillancedfootaged foom the bridge the night of thecacontéert??”

Ken met his eyes and gave assigteenood.” “Yes.”

His answer was calm and chatteettaastakk contrast toolanieerssogoowing confusion and unease as even more questionssbeggarppiling uprimhis mind.

“How? The police told me there was shoof boodage. They said the camerascocoveening that section of the bridge were under maintenanced thanright.”

Ken’s lips curved into a knowing sariée” 00 Course How.convenient dotyouth

Damien turned back toward the screeeptisseexpression darkengast bearinpl

words sank in.

Someone had deliberately made sureabed todagewas never foundbduing bevestig

hapter 344 Seven Years Buried

His hands slowly curled into fists as anger began to simmer beneath his skin. Looking back now, he felt like a damn fool for allowing Viktor to manipulate the entire situation so thoroughly. Every dead end, every missing record, every convenient explanation had eventually pushed him toward the conclusion Viktor had wanted him to reach.

And Damien had allowed it.

His jaw clenched as his eyes turned icy cold.

He looked at Ken again. “How did you get this?”

Ken leaned back comfortably in his chair, seemingly unfazed by the question.

“Have you forgotten what my family does?”

Damien remained silent, prompting the faint smile on Ken's face to deepen.

"People tend to believe that once something has been deleted, it no longer exists," Ken continued. "But very few things disappear completely. You simply have to know where to look and, more importantly, how to recover what someone went through considerable trouble to bury."

Damien's attention returned to the screen as Ken's words settled heavily in his mind. Seven years ago, he had searched for answers and had been told there was no footage, no identities, and eventually, nothing left for him to find.

Yet evidence from that night had never been completely erased. It had simply been buried far beyond his reach.

His fists tightened again.

Ken studied him briefly, easily recognizing where Damien's thoughts had gone.

"And don't waste your time blaming yourself for not trying harder," he said. "The footage

really was deleted. Volkov made certain of that. Anyone searching through ordinary channels would have found exactly what you found seven years ago. Nothing."

Damien’s eyes shifted toward him.

“You could have searched for another seven years and still come back empty–handed. There was nothing more you could have done with what was available to you.”

Ken raised the remote slightly, a trace of quiet confidence returning to his expre

“Unless, of course, you had access to our technology.”

Damien understood exactly what he meant. The Takahashis possessed resources and

P

capabilities that very few people in the world even knew existed, much less had access to

[en turned his attention toward the screen.

So, are you ready to see what really happened that night?”

lamien’s eyes followed his, locking onto the footage once more.

Yes. Play it.”

[en pressed the button, and the footage began to move.

The bridge was relatively quiet at that hour, with only a handful of vehicles passing in either

lirection. For several seconds, nothing seemed unusual.

Then a car appeared in the distance, traveling at a dangerously high speed.

Jamien recognized it immediately.

Cassandra’s car

fis jaw tightened as the watched it race down the bridge, swerving dangerously before rossing the center line and veering into the opposite lane.

Inother vehicle appeared from the other direction.

ts driver barely had time to react.

lassandra’s car slammed into it.

he force of the collision sent the other vehicle spinning violently across the road before rashing into the barrier and coming to a stop at an angle.

lamien stared at the footage without blinking.

le had read the reports countless times. He had listened to Cassandra’s broken recollection if that night and replayed the details in his head more times than he cared to remember.

ut he had never actually seen it happen.

In the screen, the driver’s door of Cassandra’s damaged car opened and she stumbled

ven through the grainy footage, her panic was obvious. She stood beside her car bri efore turning toward the other vehicle and hurrying over to it.

he peered inside

Chapter 618

Thee senle of the damaged veelude and the poor quality of the old surveillance footage made thee occupants wifficult to washqgwista at først

Daameensstared at the emaggecoocerrarating on the man behind the wheel until his features

oradually became clearer.

Hissenyes were still open wan's ooreeting about iss face immediately caught Damien's

aateeniton.

Werneentanged the image futthecaan Doameerwent completely still.

Theeeewaasssomething cistinoty raamiaaaaoout the man.

Theestlane offis face. His feautes Etgenrough the distortion of the footage, the ressentrance was unmistakable.

Jaarnee

Modecorat Tree naan was conssiemolycalec but once Damien saw the resemblance, he

couuntunseen.

Theanissaaternion shifted toward the assseneessaat.

Heragewaspartially obscured, and she appeared unconscious, but enough of her features remnaredwssterton recognition to hihimeggemharder

Marvan

Damensseyess writtened.

Hissheadstamped toward Kendbetore returning nimmediately to the screen.

The manwhitobanummtakable resemblanced doJaime.

The womanwixed strikingly like Maya.

A marriedbaupleithheffotties.

The accident seven years ago,

Damien abruptlypustremseffout of the cham

Arethose."

"Yes."

Ken answered before Damien could finish, his expression completely serious

Damien stared at him, momentarily at a loss for words. His mind raced to make sense of what he was seeing and what it could possibly mean. The resemblance was too strong 10 dismiss, but the implication behind it was so staggering that he didn't know which of the countless questions flooding his mind to ask first

Before he could settle on one, Ken turned his attention back to the screen.

"There's more."

Damien’s eyes narrowed, but before he could ask another question, Ken pressed the button again and the footage resumed

Instead of skipping ahead, Ken allowed the footage to continue exactly as it had happened that night.

Cassandra eventually climbed back into her damaged car and moved it closer to the other vehicle, positioning it in a way that partially blocked the wreck from the view of approaching traffic while leaving it visible from the camera’s angle.

Damien’s eyes narrowed.

Minutes passed on the timestamp.

Five.

Ten.

Fifteen.

Nearly twenty.

Vehicles continued passing the scene. Most never stopped, but throughout those agonizing minutes, Damien could still see movement inside the wrecked car.

Two vehicles eventually slowed and pulled over.

Each time, Cassandra approached before anyone could get close enough to inspect car. She smiled, waved them off, and raised the phone in her hand as though reassuring that she had already called for help. At one point, she even gave one of the drivers a thumbs–up.

To anyone passing by, it would have looked as though the situation was already under control, that emergency services had been contacted and there was nothing more for them

do.

it Damien knew better now.

› ambulance came.

› police arrived.

id the two people inside that car continued to move, though their movements gradually came weaker as the minutes passed. What had once been desperate attempts to move id slowed to barely perceptible signs of life as they began slipping in and out of

nsciousness.

mien’s hands curled into fists at his sides.

en two black vehicles appeared in the distance, and Damien immediately recognized them

s entire body tensed as they stopped near Cassandra.

e rear door of the first vehicle opened and Viktor Volkov stepped out.

issandra rushed toward him immediately and threw herself into his arms, sobbing as ktor held her. He appeared to speak to her briefly before guiding her toward one of the hicles and helping her inside.

ktor then turned toward the wreckage, his men gathered behind him as he began issuing ders. He gestured toward different areas of the scene while they listened closely, nodding acknowledgment before moving to carry out his instructions.

imien watched every movement, his fury mounting with each passing second.

st before Viktor returned to his vehicle, however, he suddenly stopped and looked up.

rectly at the surveillance camera.

pointed toward it without a word, then looked at the man standing in front of him. The an followed the direction of his finger and gave a single nod, clearly understanding the

der.

conds later, the screen went black.

imien stared at the empty screen, breathing heavily as the full weight of what he ha tnessed crashed over him. His blood ran cold.

hey were still alive." His voice came out low and dangerous.

His eyes remained fixed on the dark screen as the realization fialys

"They were fucking alive!"

Damien slammed his fist against the desk.

“She saw them moving. She saw him reaching for her, and she fucking hackeaway!) Has voice rose with every word as seven years of buried anger collided with what head quas witnessed.

“She had almost twenty minutes! She could have called an ambulance: Sheeopold ravee stopped one of those cars and asked for help. She could have done anything

His chest rose sharply as he looked back at the dark screen.

“If she had done the right thing and gotten them help immediately, they could still beave

Ken didn’t interrupt him or attempt to calm him down. He simply remained wheree leewass allowing Damien to release the anger that had been building with every second of it blee footage.

Only when Damien finally fell silent did Ken reach for the folder resting on the desk beside him and place it directly in front of him.

“Everything you need to know is inside that folder.”

Damien’s eyes dropped to it.

Ken’s expression remained grim.

“Opentit.”

CComments

Vote

Ongpter 346: Three Versions of the Truth

Damien Sibany 3owered himself back into the chair and pulled the folder toward him

He opened it and began scanning through the documents inside

The fast wass a police report

Damea’s spreession changed.

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records he had managed to obtain seven years ago.

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BBy the time the couple were transported to the hospital, both had been declared dead on

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Cassandra had made a reckless, devastating mistake, but afterward, she had supposedly diocree/whatsite.coutd

Daameenkkreew now that almost everything beyond the collision itself had been a fucking lie.

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Hissattention immediately settled on Julian’s.

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tadebeensa sking for help.

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Then the hasmtal arrival time

His jaw stawy cencheat.

+25 Ports

There was more than amour between the collision and their eventual arrival at the hospital.

Yet the original medical findings placed both estimated times of death well after the cailision, approximately thirty minutes before they were finally brought to the hospital.

They had survived the crash, and they had remained alive long enough for help to have

reached them.

The footage had already shown him that much, but seeing it documented in black and white made the deception even more horrifying.

The report he had been given seven years ago hadn’t technically lied about one thing.

Juuliam and Malia had been dead.com arrival at the hospital.

What Viktor had buried was everything that happened before they became DOA.

Xaamien turned another page and found an independent medical assessment based on the Dodginal autopsy findings.

Hee read it carefully.

Wulan’s abdominal injuries haut required immediate control of the hemorrhage, blood taasstasions, and emergency surgery Maia had required urgent stabilization of her internal bleeding atong with neurological intervention for the hemorrhage caused by her head trauma.

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Bible conclusion was clear

Theemanes had been potentially suwwable.

Haakeemengency services beem contacted immediately and both victims received appropriate taaungacearedduring the critical period following the collision, each would have had a ubissaaraachance of survival!

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or seven years, headbetreed the couple’s murres hat sumpteen too severe for anyone

save therm

nd Wiktor had knowweaasd/wwhat he was allowing Damiento believe.

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was a photograph of Mandarine.

Meya was much youngget heestanding beside a little boy, Both were dressed in black,

atching as their parents weerd daid to rest.

amien stared at the photograph.

aimedooked so small and Maywasn't much more than a childherself Wet she stood ose beside her little brother as though she already understand that from that day forward, newas the only person ne haadéétt.

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en's voice finally broke throughsst homes.

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itbotaanotherword, Ken opened one of it inleddesk drawers and pulled out two more foitters placed them side by side in front of Daanteen.

beemrethree versions of what happeneethaanight, hessaid.

arggested toward the folder already opperin Daamers bands.

“And this is the version he wanted the grieving family and the rest of the word to believe

Damien’s eyes settled on it.

“This,” Ken continued, “is the version Maya and Jaime know.”

Damien placed the folder in his hands on the desk and reached for the other one

He opened it.

The deeper he read, the colder his expression became

It was completely different.

According to this version, Julian and Malia had died in an unfortunate traffic accident after a truck lost control and collided with their vehicle.

There was no mention of Cassandra. No intoxicated driver. No Volkov. No indication of criminal wrongdoing or deliberate interference of any kind.

The investigation had supposedly found no evidence of foul play or circumstances warranting further investigation.

Then Damien reached the accompanying autopsy report.

His eyes darkened further.

It bore little resemblance to the one he had just read.

According to the report Maya had been given, both of their parents had sustained catastrophic injuries during the collision and died at the scene. Their deaths were attributed directly to the force of impact and the multiple traumatic injuries they had sustained.

There was nothing about Julian remaining conscious.

Nothing about his prolonged internal bleeding.

Nothing about Malia surviving the initial impact.

Nothing about the estimated times of death showing that both had remained alive

It was a carefully orchestrated lie, built around just enough believable details to make it almost impossible to question.

Chapter 619

Damien slowly lowered himself back into the chair and pulled the folder toward him.

He opened it and began scanning through the documents inside.

The first was a police report.

Damien’s expression changed.

He recognized many of the details because he had spent countless hours going through the records he had managed to obtain seven years ago.

Cassandra had been intoxicated.

That part, at least, had been true.

The report Damien had obtained back then stated that Cassandra, impaired by alcohol, had caused the collision. It also stated that despite her own injuries and disorientation, she had immediately called for emergency assistance after checking on the occupants of the other

vehicle.

By the time the couple were transported to the hospital, both had been declared dead on

arrival.

It had painted the picture of a horrific but straightforward drunk–driving accident.

Cassandra had made a reckless, devastating mistake, but afterward, she had supposedly done what she could.

Damien knew now that almost everything beyond the collision itself had been a fucking lie.

He had just watched the truth with his own eyes.

He turned the page and found the original autopsy reports.

His attention immediately settled on Julian's.

Damien read quickly at first, but several details soon forced him to slow down and go through each line more carefully.

Julian had suffered multiple injuries in the collision, including fractured ribs and severe abdominal trauma caused by a section of the crushed interior penetrating his lower abdomen. The injury had resulted in extensive internal bleeding.

But it had not killed him on impact.

Damien went still.

His eyes moved over that finding again.

Julian's injuries indicated that he had survived the initial impact, his condition progressively deteriorating as the internal hemorrhage continued. Eventually, the uncontrolled blood loss had resulted in severe hemorrhagic shock and cardiac arrest.

The footage immediately replayed in Damien's mind.

The movement inside the wreckage. The arm lifting. The hand reaching desperately toward

Cassandra.

Julian hadn't been reaching out in some final reflex.

He had been conscious.

He had been asking for help.

And Cassandra had stepped away from him.

Damien’s grip tightened around the folder as he continued reading, his eyes moving carefully over every line as though he needed to make absolutely certain he hadn’t misunderstood any

of it.

Then he turned to Malia’s report.

Her injuries were different.

She had suffered significant head trauma during the collision, resulting in intracranial bleeding that likely accounted for her lack of responsiveness immediately afterward.

She had also sustained abdominal injuries that caused substantial internal bleeding.

But Malia hadn’t died on impact either.

She had been unconscious, but she had still been alive.

Damien’s fingers tightened around the pages as he continued reading.

Then he reached the estimated times of death.

His eyes stopped.

He checked the time of the collision.

Then the estimated times of death.

Then the hospital arrival time.

His jaw slowly clenched.

There was more than an hour between the collision and their eventual arrival at the hospital.

Yet the original medical findings placed both estimated times of death well after the collision, approximately thirty minutes before they were finally brought to the hospital.

They had survived the crash, and they had remained alive long enough for help to have reached them.

The footage had already shown him that much, but seeing it documented in black and white made the deception even more horrifying.

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Julian and Malia had been dead on arrival at the hospital.

What Viktor had buried was everything that happened before they became DOA.

Damien turned another page and found an independent medical assessment based on the original autopsy findings.

He read it carefully.

Julian's abdominal injuries had required immediate control of the hemorrhage, blood transfusions, and emergency surgery. Malia had required urgent stabilization of her internal bleeding along with neurological intervention for the hemorrhage caused by her head trauma.

Neither survival could ever have been guaranteed.

But the conclusion was clear.

Their injuries had been potentially survivable.

Had emergency services been contacted immediately and both victims received appropriate trauma care during the critical period following the collision, each would have had a substantial chance of survival.

Damien lowered the report.

His stomach twisted.

For seven years, he had believed that despite causing the accident, Cassandra had at least done the right thing afterward and immediately called for help.

For seven years, he had believed the couple's injuries had simply been too severe for anyone to save them.

And Viktor had known exactly what he was allowing Damien to believe.

Damien continued through the folder until he reached the final page.

It was a photograph of Maya and Jaime.

Maya was much younger then, standing beside a little boy. Both were dressed in black, watching as their parents were laid to rest.

Damien stared at the photograph.

Jaime looked so small, and Maya wasn't much more than a child herself. Yet she stood close beside her little brother as though she already understood that from that day forward,

she was the only person he had left.

Something tightened painfully inside Damien's chest.

Maya had told him about losing her parents. He knew the version of their deaths she had grown up accepting, believing it had simply been a terrible accident, one of those cruel tragedies no one could have predicted or prevented.

She had spent seven years believing there was no one to blame.

Ken's voice finally broke through his thoughts.

"At that point, all Viktor cared about was cleaning up Cassandra's mess and making sure nothing could be traced back to his daughter."

Damien slowly lifted his head.

Without another word, Ken opened one of the desk drawers and pulled out two more folders. He placed them side by side in front of Damien.

“There are three versions of what happened that night,” he said.

Ken gestured toward the folder already open in Damien’s hands.

“The truth is what you just read.”

Then he tapped the first folder on the desk.

“This is the version Viktor allowed you to see.”

His hand moved to the second.

“And this is the version he wanted the grieving family and the rest of the world to believe.”

Damien’s eyes settled on it.

“This,” Ken continued, “is the version Maya and Jaime know.”

Damien placed the folder in his hands on the desk and reached for the other one.

He opened it.

The deeper he read, the colder his expression became.

It was completely different.

According to this version, Julian and Malia had died in an unfortunate traffic accident after a

truck lost control and collided with their vehicle.

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criminal wrongdoing or deliberate interference of any kind.

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There was nothing about Julian remaining conscious.

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Nothing about Malia surviving the initial impact.

Nothing about the estimated times of death showing that both had remained alive afterward.

It was a carefully orchestrated lie, built around just enough believable details to make it almost impossible to question.

Chapter 620

Every caneéfully worded–line reinforced the same conclusion.

A tragiccaɛccident. A vehicle that lost control. Two people killed on impact. No foul play. No one to blame.

Nothining that would give two grieving children a reason to ask questions.

Nothing that would make them wonder whether their parents might have survived.

Manchabsolutely nothing that could ever lead them back to Cassandra Volkov.

Damien dowered the report and closed the folder, his expression turning dangerously cold.

Wiktor hadn’t simply covered up Cassandra’s involvement. He had created different versions of the same titragedy for different people, giving each of them exactly enough information to keep them from looking Bany deeper.

“But I honestly don’t believe he knew who those people were.”

KKen’s voice drew Damien’s attention away from the documents.

He frowned and looked up.

“What do you mean?”

Ken reached for another folder, opened it, and placed it in front of Damien.

The first thing Damien saw was a family portrait.

Malia and Julian stood together with their children between them. Maya looked no older than twelve or thirteen, while Jaime couldn’t have been more than two or three.

All four of them were smiling.

There was nothing extravagant about the photograph. No indication of wealth, power, or the royal blood running through Malia’s veins. They looked like any other family, dressed simply and standing close together, their happiness evident in the easy smiles on their faces.

The hardness in Damien’s expression softened as his eyes settled on Maya.

She was so young.

Happy.

Her arm was wrapped around her little brother, who stood pressed against her side with a wide smile on

his face.

Ken allowed him to look at the photograph before speaking.

“Malia Lockwood was an incredibly intelligent and resourceful woman she wanted a simpler life, and she and Julian made sure their family It from. They stayed well beneath the radar.”

‘se

Ken glanced at the photograph.

“Even with all the Lockwoods‘ power and resources, they spent years unable to find her. That should tell you how good Malia was at disappearing when she didn’t want to be found.”

Damien looked back at him

“Outside the Lockwood circle, very few people would have known who Malia was, much less recognized her on sight. To Viktor, they were most likely nothing more than two ordinary people whose deaths threatened to destroy his daughter’s life.”

The softness that had briefly entered Damien’s expression disappeared.

“So even now,” Ken continued, “I don’t believe Viktor understands exactly whose lives he destroyed when he chose to cover up what happened that night.”

His eyes hardened.

“He has no idea whose family he destroyed. He has no idea what line he crossed.”

Ken held Damien’s eyes.

“And he certainly has no idea how heavy the consequences of protecting his daughter are about to become.”

Damien’s grip tightened around the photo, a murderous darkness settling into his eyes.

“Then this gives me one more reason to make sure he finally pays for everything he’s done.”

Ken studied him briefly, his fingers tapping slowly against the desk.

“I have no doubt you will.”

He rose from his chair and walked toward the window, slipping his hands into his pockets as he stared out into the darkness.

A few seconds of silence passed before Ken spoke again without even bothering to look back.

“But Viktor’s manipulation didn’t end with rewriting what happened that night. What he did went far beyond just covering up his daughter’s involvement.”

A cold sense of unease settled in Damien’s gut as he immediately caught the implication behind Ken’s words.

“What do you mean by far beyond covering up Cassandra’s involvement?”

Ken finally turned from the window and met his eyes.

“It means Viktor didn’t just manipulate the truth behind Maya and Jaime’s parents‘ dea manipulated what happened to their lives afterward.”

Damien shot to his feet, the chair scraping sharply against the floor behind him.

“What did you just say?!”

Ken’s words had just opened an entirely different layer to Viktor’s manipulation, one that extended far beyond anything Damien had imagined.

Ken gestured toward the folder on the desk.

“Turn to the next page.”

Damien picked up the folder and did as Ken instructed, his brows immediately pulling together as he found pages of bank transfers made to different accounts.

Several were for five hundred thousand dollars, others for three hundred thousand, and a handful for one hundred thousand.

But one transaction immediately stood out from the rest.

Two million dollars.

Damien's eyes lingered on the figure before he continued through the remaining pages and noticed a different pattern.

Ten thousand dollars had been transferred to the same recipient every month for four consecutive years, always for the exact same amount.

His forehead creased as he looked up.

"What are these? What am I looking at?"

Ken released a heavy breath before walking back toward the desk and stopping across from Damien.

"Most of them are payments Viktor made to keep people quiet. Detectives. Officials. Anyone who needed enough incentive to forget what they saw, alter what they knew, or stop asking questions."

Damien stared down at the transactions, disgust twisting through him.

“That’s it?” His voice turned cold. “That’s all it took for them to shut their mouths and bury the truth? A few hundred thousand dollars?”

He looked up at Ken.

i

“These were people who were supposed to do their fucking jobs, and Viktor threw somě chump change at them and they just looked the other way?” His expression darkened. “That’s fucking insulting.”

Something shifted in Ken’s expression.

“If you think that’s insulting, you’re going to hate where the two million went.”

Damien’s attention immediately returned to the transaction that had stood out from all the others. Unlike the recurring payments, there was only one transfer for two million dollars, and the date showed it had been made only days after the accident.

“Where?”

Ken held his eyes.

“Julian’s family.”

Chaot #44tly Crchestrated Lie

Xamien’s baadsnapped up.

+25 Points:

Julian Thompson’s family? How is that possible? According to Maya, after the accident, they wanted othinggoaldo with her or Jaime. Not a single one of them even attendedtheeffuneral.”

enretressed a heavy sigh.

Add that,” he said, pointing toward the folder in Damien’s hands, “is exactly the reason why.”

Ide returned to his chair and sat down.

Niktor sent someone to them after the accident. They were offeree two million dollars in exchange for staying away from Maya and Jaime and cutting whatever remaining ties they had to them."

Damien stared at him in disbelief before his expression twisted with disgust.

*Fucking parasites! They took two million dollars to turn the backs on their own blood?"

His grip tightened around the folder before he slammeddittdown on the table.

He dragged a hand over his face in frustration and began pacing back and forth.

Every part of him wanted to punch something, to break something, just to release the anger burning through him, but he forced himself to hold back

This wasn't his territory, and no matter how furious he was, he wasn't about to disrespect Ken in his own

'No wonder they wanted nothing to do with Maya and Jaime. Viktor had already made sure their pockets were full enough to forget they even existed!!"