**Intern 641**

Chapter 641

Harper's eyes widened in shock, her face draining of all amusement as she instinctively rushed forward.

"Hiro!" she yelled.

But before she could get any farther, Damlen caught her by the arm.

"Wait."

Harper whipped toward him. "What do you mean, wait?! He's attacking your best friend!"

Damien remained calm. "Watch."

On the field, Nick barely had time to register the second attack before instinct took over. He moved out of the way again, his exhaustion momentarily forgotten as adrenaline surged through his body.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" he snapped.

Hiro didn't answer. He simply came at him again.

This time, Nick was ready.

He avoided the incoming blow and immediately put some distance between them, his expression hardening as he stared at the man in front of him.

The exhaustion was still there. His lungs were still burning, his legs still felt like f*****g lead, and sweat was pouring down his body.

But something in him had changed.

Hiro saw it too.

Nick slowly straightened, and the moment he lifted his head, Hiro found himself staring into eyes that were almost unrecognizable. Dark, cold, and frighteningly empty, they fixed on him with the quiet promise of violence.

Even exhausted and breathing hard, Nick suddenly looked lethal. A dark, intimidating aura seemed to settle around him, his stance radiating raw power and ruthless confidence, enough to make any sane man think twice before taking another step toward him.

The Prince of the Underworld.

A rare flicker of intimidation crawled down Hiro's spine, but instead of backing away, a slow smile spread across his face.

Damien released Harper's arm, a knowing smirk tugging at his lips as he watched the scene unfold, completely unbothered.

Harper, however, stood frozen.

She had heard the stories. The rumors. She knew the reputation Nicholas Ashcroft carried, but she had never seen this side of him herself. Her lips parted slightly as she stared at him, momentarily speechless.

Damien leaned closer to her. "Sit down and enjoy the show."

His voice snapped her out of her daze.

Harper swallowed, her gaze drifting back to Nick. That dark, dangerous aura should have scared the hell out of her.

And it did.

But damn, it was also ridiculously hot.

That confidence. That look in his eyes. And because apparently her brain had chosen the worst possible moment to betray her, her gaze dipped lower.

That body.

Those damn abs.

A sudden rush of heat swept through her body, and she quickly pushed the entirely inappropriate thought aside.

Okay. She wasn't going to lie. Her boyfriend was turning her on.

But this was definitely not the time for that.

She finally tore her eyes away and joined Damien and Maya on the sidelines, though her attention immediately returned to the two men on the field.

Hiro raised one hand, his eyes never leaving Nick.

"Kare ni nani ga dekiru ka mite miyou."

His voice was cold and confident.

Let’s see what he can do.

At the command, two men dressed in black stepped away from the sidelines.

They were among the largest men there, both heavily built. The moment they began walking toward Nick, several of the younger trainees instinctively moved out of their path.

Maya’s eyes widened as she recognized them.

They were among the men from that night. She had watched them deliver hours of brutal punishment to the Shibata brothers beneath the estate and had witnessed firsthand what they were capable of.

And now they were walking straight toward Nick.

“Harper… aren’t they the…”

“s**t!” Harper shot to her feet, but before she could call out to Hiro or take another step toward the field, Damien’s calm voice stopped her.

“Let it be.”

She spun toward him. “What?! You don’t understand. He’ll end up paralyzed!”

She pointed toward the two men now approaching Nick.

“Hiro is the future Wakagashira. He’s been trained to command every combat unit we have, and those two are from Alpha Team!”

Damien merely raised a brow. “And?”

Harper stared at him in disbelief.

“Alpha Team is Hiro’s personal unit. They’re trained differently from everyone else. They’re the best of the best, made up of the strongest and deadliest men we have. We don’t send them out for ordinary security work or minor problems. They handle the situations nobody else is trusted to handle.”

“Good. That’s even better,” Damien said calmly.

Harper’s eyes widened. “Didn’t you hear a word I just said?!”

“We should stop this,” Maya chimed in, her worried eyes fixed on Nick. “He’s already exhausted, and now it’s two against one? He’ll lose.”

Damien glanced at her, the corner of his mouth lifting.

“You’ll be surprised, love. Don’t worry. He can handle it.”

Neither woman looked convinced.

Harper looked pleadingly at Maya, silently urging her to do something.

Maya immediately reached for Damien’s hand.

“Damien…”

His expression softened, and he chuckled.

“Okay.”

Relief washed over both women. Harper was already preparing to give the order to stop everything when Damien continued.

“I promise I’ll step in if it gets to be too much.”

Both women’s heads whipped toward him simultaneously.

“WHAT?!”

Pointe

“This is what combat training is for.” Damien leaned back casually, looking far too entertained by the entire situation. “You don’t really know what someone is capable of until you put them under pressure. And men like us don’t back down just because the odds are against us.”

His attention returned to the field.

“Besides, I could use a chance to let off some steam myself.”

“But…”

Damien exhaled and gave Maya’s hand a reassuring squeeze.

“Nick says some of the dumbest s**t, but the guy isn’t just a pretty face with a big f*****g ego.” His gaze shifted toward Hiro. “And what Hiro’s doing is just a test. He wants to see what Nick is really made of.”

A knowing smirk tugged at his lips.

“After all, if things work out between him and Harper, he might end up marrying their future boss.”

They had been so caught up in the conversation that none of them noticed the fight had already started.

The scrape of boots against packed dirt snapped their attention back to the field just as one of the men charged.

Nick moved on instinct.

One second the much larger man was coming straight at him, the next Nick had slipped out of his path and struck back, sending him staggering sideways.

The second man came at him almost immediately. Nick barely avoided the swinging fist before

THRU answering with a hard blow of his own, the heavy impact echoing across the training ground.

The fight continued, fast and relentless. Nick took his share of hits, but he gave back just as hard.

Harper slowly lowered herself into her seat, her mouth slightly open. Maya wasn't faring much better.

Damien, on the other hand, sat there with a smug look on his face, as though he had expected nothing less.

Minutes later, both Alpha Team members were on the ground while Nick remained standing, exhausted but far from defeated.

His chest heaved, sweat running down his face. Yet his confidence hadn't wavered.

He looked past the two fallen men and directly at Hiro, dragging his thumb across the corner of his mouth and wiping away a thin streak of blood.

"Is that all you've got?"

Chapter 642

Paro couldn't deny it. He was impressed.

An ordinary man wouldn't stand a chance against a member of Alpha Team. Even a skilled fighter would struggle against one, and taking on two at once was another matter entirely.

Yet the man standing before him had done exactly that, despite being exhausted, barely able to catch his breath, and running on whatever strength he had left.

Damn impressive.

Still, it would take more than that to earn the respect of the Takahashi men who would one day serve under Harper's command.

A slow, almost sinister smile spread across Hiro's face.

Without a word, he raised his hand again.

Two more men stepped forward, every bit as large and intimidating as the first pair.

Nick's eyes narrowed, but he didn't flinch.

Harper immediately shot to her feet, her fists clenched.

“Are you f*****g kidding me?! Hiro Takamura! Are you out of your damn mind?!”

Hiro turned toward her, completely unfazed by her outburst.

“You owe it to your people. They deserve to know what kind of man might one day stand beside their future Oyabun.”

He raised his voice, addressing the Takahashi men gathered around the training ground.

“Sō darō?!” Isn’t that right?!

“Hai!” they answered in unison, their voices ringing across the field.

He then turned his attention back to Nick, a challenging smile spreading across his face.

“A man who intends to stand beside our future Oyabun must first earn the respect of her men.”

He tilted his head slightly.

“Wouldn’t you agree, Mr. Ashcroft?”

Nick let out a low snicker.

So that’s what this is all about.

He straightened despite the exhaustion weighing heavily on his body, a cocky grin spreading across his face.

course.”

Then his grin faded, his expression turning cold and dangerous.

“Bring it.”

The two men charged.

Fists collided, heavy blows landed, and the sounds of the fight echoed across the training ground.

Nick was already exhausted, but his movements remained sharp. He ducked beneath a vicious swing, drove his fist into one man’s ribs, then twisted aside just in time to avoid the second man’s attack.

A powerful punch caught him across the shoulder, forcing him back a step.

Max immediately rushed forward, intending to intervene, but two Takahashi men stepped into his path, blocking him before he could reach the training ground.

“Get out of my way!” he snapped.

Neither man budged.

Furious, Max turned toward Damien, but Damien merely shook his head once.

A silent warning not to interfere.

Max clenched his fists, his gaze darting back to Nick. Every instinct screamed at him to step in, but with Damien clearly telling him to stand down, he had little choice but to remain where he was and watch his boss being ganged up on.

Back on the training ground, Nick retaliated with a brutal combination that sent one of his opponents stumbling.

The other man lunged.

Nick caught his arm, used his momentum against him, and slammed him onto the ground.

Before the first man could recover, Nicholas drove forward with another series of blows, finally sending him crashing down beside his fallen comrade.

Both men were down.

But before Nick could properly catch his breath, Hiro raised his hand again.

Another two stepped forward.

DW

Harper stared at him in disbelief.

“Hiro, I swear to God!”

But Hiro didn’t even look her way.

Nick barely had time to straighten before the next pair came at him.

The fight resumed, each exchange taking more out of him.

His reactions were beginning to slow. A fist connected with his jaw, snapping his head sideways. Another blow struck his abdomen, forcing the air from his lungs.

But he fought back.

He caught one opponent with a vicious elbow, staggered the other with a punch to the face, and somehow found enough strength to bring them both down.

Six Alpha Team members.

Three consecutive fights.

And Nick was still standing.

The air was thick with the metallic scent of blood, the salt of sweat, and something far more palpable than either.

Pride.

But this time, the toll was impossible to ignore.

His breathing was painfully labored, sweat streamed down his face, and every muscle in his body burned from the relentless punishment. Every movement demanded more effort than the last, and even standing upright was becoming a struggle.

Still, he refused to back down.

Throughout the ordeal, Damien remained calm, observing every brutal exchange.

Then, as though he had finally seen enough, he leaned toward Maya and casually pressed a kiss to her cheek.

“That’s my cue, love.”

She blinked in confusion.

“What cue?”

He merely smiled, rose from his seat, pulled off his shirt, and handed it to her.

Maya instinctively took it, staring up at him in surprise.

“Wait. What are you…?”

He gave her a playful wink.

“I’m keeping my promise.”

Before she could say anything else, Damien turned and casually made his way toward Nick.

Maya stared after him, dumbfounded.

Why the hell was he taking his shirt off?!

Harper leaned closer and whispered appreciatively, “Damn, girl… that’s one beautiful, sexy body! bet he tastes absolutely delicious!”

Maya blushed furiously, a giddy little thrill fluttering through her chest despite herself. She nudged Harper with her elbow.

“Your boyfriend isn’t exactly lacking either. Just look at him!”

Harper grinned proudly.

“Oh, I know! And I’m definitely getting f****d tonight!”

Maya burst into laughter.

“Well, at this rate, I doubt he’ll have any energy left for that!”

Harper shrugged without the slightest embarrassment.

“Oh, I don’t mind. He can just lie there while I do all the work. I’ll ride him like a wild horse galloping across an open field!”

Maya’s eyes widened, her cheeks turning an even deeper shade of red.

“Shhh! Harper, keep your voice down! Someone might hear you!”

But Harper couldn’t have cared less. She merely flashed her a shameless, mischievous grin, clearly pleased with herself.

Their playful exchange was cut short as Damien stepped onto the training ground, drawing the attention of the men gathered around it.

Hiro watched Damien approach, raising an eyebrow as an amused smile tugged at his lips.

Damien stopped beside Nick and gave his shoulder a firm squeeze.

“You did well, brother.”

Then he turned his attention to Hiro, a confident smirk playing on his lips.

“All in.”

Hiro understood exactly what he meant.

After a brief pause, he dipped his head in acknowledgment before turning toward the four remaining Alpha Team members standing behind him.

At his nod, all four stepped forward, taking positions beside him.

Nick and Damien stood side by side, facing Hiro and his four men across the training ground.

Five against two.

Harper stared at them in disbelief, while Maya watched with growing apprehension.

Then all five men charged.

Hiro went straight for Nick, and Damien made no move to interfere. This was between two men destined to play significant roles in Harper's future.

One was her lifelong best friend and future right–hand man, while the other was the man she loved and might one day call her husband.

Hiro had pledged his loyalty to the empire she was destined to inherit, while Nicholas Ashcroft had given his heart to the woman destined to rule it.

Whatever they needed to prove to each other, Damien would let them settle it themselves.

Chapter 643

The first punch came fast.

Damien tilted his head just enough to avoid it, caught his attacker's wrist, and drove a vicious elbow into his ribs.

A second man lunged from behind.

Damien spun aside, narrowly avoiding the blow before retaliating with a powerful kick that sent his opponent staggering backward.

The other two immediately joined the assault, and soon all four were attacking Damien simultaneously, forcing him to dodge and block a relentless barrage of punches and kicks.

From the sidelines, Maya watched with her heart pounding against her ribs.

She had never seen Damien in a physical fight before. She knew he was dangerous, knew the kind of man he was and the power he commanded, but witnessing him exchange blows with four trained fighters was something entirely different.

Her stomach twisted with anxiety as her eyes followed his every movement, terrified that one wrong move could leave him seriously injured.

Harper glanced at her and noticed the worry written all over her face.

“Relax, girl.”

Maya turned to her incredulously.

“Easy for you to say! How am I supposed to relax when four huge, highly trained men are attacking him at the same time?!”

Harper actually laughed.

“You really have no idea who your husband-to-be is, do you?”

“It doesn’t matter who he is!” Maya protested, her eyes darting back to Damien. “He’s still human! He can get hurt!” She turned toward Harper again. “And look at Nick! How can you possibly be so calm watching him get beaten up like that?!”

Harper’s smile faded slightly as she glanced toward Nick.

“Oh, trust me, I’m anything but calm. But this is a matter between men, and for now, I’m letting them settle it themselves.”

Her eyes narrowed dangerously as her gaze shifted toward Hiro.

“Doesn’t mean I’m not f*****g pissed, though. Hiro and I have a score to settle once this is over!

Across the training ground, Hiro and Nick were locked in a fierce exchange of blows.

Damien glanced their way but didn’t interfere. He knew what Nick was capable of, and as long as he was still on his feet, he saw no reason to step in.

Meanwhile, the four Alpha Team members had recovered from his earlier blows and were advancing toward him again.

Damien turned to face them, casually rolled his shoulders, and flashed a cocky smirk.

“Ready for another round?”

All four men lunged at Damien from different directions, but he moved with remarkable speed and precision, weaving between their attacks, blocking punches, and delivering punishing counterstrikes that gave his opponents little chance to retaliate.

Damien struck two of the men in quick succession, sending them stumbling backward.

The remaining two charged at him together, managing to grab hold of him and briefly pin his arms, but their advantage lasted only a split second before Damien drove his elbow into one man's ribs, breaking free from his grip.

He ducked low and swept his leg beneath the other man's feet, knocking him off balance and sending him crashing to the ground. Before the first man could recover, Damien seized him by the arm and hurled him onto his back with enough force to knock the wind out of him.

Just as Damien brought the two men down, the first pair had recovered and were already coming at him again. This time, they put up a fiercer resistance, attacking relentlessly until one of them managed to land a solid punch against Damien's side while the other caught him across the jaw.

Maya gasped, her hand flying to her mouth.

But Damien barely flinched.

He retaliated with a rapid combination of punches, forcing both opponents backward before delivering a final, powerful blow to each that sent them crashing to their knees.

Within minutes, all four Alpha Team members were down.

Maya could hardly believe what she had just witnessed.

Only moments ago, she'd been terrified that Damien might get seriously hurt, yet there he stood in the middle of the training ground, breathing steadily and looking as though he'd barely broken a sweat.

Meanwhile, Hiro and Nick were still locked in a brutal exchange of blows.

Hiro fought with the full force of his strength, his movements swift, controlled, and relentless.

Nick, on the other hand, was running on the last remnants of his endurance, relying on sheer adrenaline and stubborn determination to keep himself on his feet and fighting.

His arms felt unbearably heavy, his legs threatened to buckle beneath him, and every breath burned in his chest.

Yet somehow, he continued to withstand Hiro's attacks.

A powerful punch struck his ribs, nearly sending him to his knees, but Nick gritted his teeth and retaliated with a vicious blow that caught Hiro across the jaw.

Hiro staggered back a step, reminding everyone watching that even in his battered, exhausted state, Nicholas Ashcroft was still a formidable opponent and not someone to be underestimated.

Hiro recovered quickly and launched another fierce attack.

Nick blocked the first punch, narrowly avoided the second, and drove his fist into Hiro's abdomen with what little strength he had left.

The impact drove Hiro back several steps before he regained his footing.

He hadn't fallen like the others.

But he had been driven back.

And considering that the man standing before him had already defeated six of his finest fighters, Hiro knew exactly how extraordinary that was.

Nick stood before Hiro, breathing heavily as he struggled to draw air into his aching lungs.

Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth, bruises marked his face, and every muscle in his battered body screamed in protest.

The adrenaline that had kept him going was finally beginning to wear off, and the pain from every punch and kick he'd endured was catching up with him.

His entire body ached, and he wasn't sure how much longer he could remain on his feet.

This f*****g psycho just won't give up! For f**k's sake, just call it quits already!

At this point, all Nick wanted was a long, hot bath, an ice-cold beer, and maybe, if he was lucky, some damn good s*x as a reward for surviving this insanity.

Hell, he'd settle for a few hours of peace without another lunatic trying to beat the living s**t out of

him.

Across from him, Hiro regained his composure and fixed his gaze on Nick, his expression unreadable.

Nick clenched his fists and raised his guard, refusing to back down despite the exhaustion threatening to overwhelm him.

His vision was beginning to blur, and he knew another powerful blow might finally send him crashing to the ground.

But surrendering was out of the question.

The only surrender he'd ever accept was death.

Hiro began moving toward him, his steps slow and measured. Nick remained on guard, ready to defend himself with whatever strength he had left.

But to his surprise, Hiro stopped a few feet away and simply stood there, staring at him.

What the f**k is this asshole up to now?

Before Nick could make sense of his sudden change in behavior, Hiro lowered his head and bent forward in a deep, respectful bow.

For a moment, Nick could only stare, too stunned to comprehend what he was seeing.

Hiro Takamura, the future Wakagashira of the Takahashi clan, was bowing before him in a gesture of unmistakable respect.

Around them, the Takahashi men had fallen completely silent, watching the extraordinary scene unfold.

Hiro slowly stood upright and met Nick's gaze.

“Anata ni keii o hyōshimasu.” (You have my respect.)

His voice was firm and clear, loud enough for everyone on the training ground to hear.

Chapter 644

Awave of shocked gasps swept across the training ground as Hiro’s declaration sank in.

For a brief moment, the entire place seemed to fall into stunned silence, as though no one could quite believe what they had just witnessed.

Then, as though responding to an unspoken command, every Takahashi man present bowed in unison before Nick, including the six Alpha Team members he had defeated earlier and the four who were still struggling to recover from Damien’s punishing blows.

Despite their battered conditions, not a single man hesitated to lower his head in a powerful display of respect.

Watching from the sidelines, Harper felt her chest swell with pride. A radiant smile spread across her face as she looked at Nick, overwhelmed with love and admiration for the man who had just earned the respect of her people.

Witnessing Hiro and the others acknowledge his worth meant more to her than words could express.

Beside her, Maya finally released a breath of relief.

Her gaze shifted from Nick to Damien, who stood a short distance away with his arms crossed over his bare chest, a satisfied smirk playing on his lips as he watched his friend receive the recognition he deserved.

Maya couldn't help smiling herself. She was proud of Nick, but more than anything, she was relieved that the brutal confrontation had finally come to an end.

Not far away, Max breathed a sigh of relief, feeling immensely proud of his boss. It wasn't that he'd ever doubted Nick's abilities, but watching him fight one opponent after another while already exhausted had been nerve-racking. As Nick's head of security, every instinct in him had screamed to protect his boss, especially given how unfairly the odds had been stacked against him.

Lee, on the other hand, had never been worried about Damien. He knew his boss too well. If 1 anything, he felt sorry for the four Alpha Team members who had gone up against him.

Nick, however, seemed completely oblivious to the pride and admiration surrounding him.

He blinked in surprise, his eyes darting around the training ground as he tried to make sense of what was happening.

"Huh? What the f**k is going on?" he muttered under his breath.

Hiro took a step forward, drawing Nick's attention back to him. His expression remained solemn as he continued, his voice carrying the authority of the future Wakagashira.

“Nicholas Ashcroft, on behalf of all the men and women sworn to the Takahashis, we formally acknowledge you as worthy of becoming our future Danna-sama.”

“Wareware mo kore o mitomemasu!” (We, too, acknowledge and accept this!)

The Takahashi men responded in unison, their voices echoing across the training ground as they bowed their heads once more in a show of respect.

Hiro turned his attention back to Nick, a genuine smile finally breaking through his stern expression.

“And speaking as Harper’s childhood best friend, I have to admit, you put up one hell of a fight, M

Ashcroft.” He extended his hand toward Nick, his smile widening slightly.

“Harper chose well.”

Despite the blood staining the corner of his mouth and the exhaustion weighing heavily on his battered body, Nick managed a faint, crooked grin as he reached out and clasped Hiro’s hand, giving it a firm shake.

“Damn right she did.”

Just then, Damien walked over and came to a stop beside Nick, placing a firm, reassuring hand on his shoulder.

Hiro released Nick’s hand and turned toward Damien, offering him a respectful bow before extending his hand.

“Great session, Mr. Blackwood.”

Damien accepted the handshake with a satisfied smirk.

“I agree.”

Hiro let out a hearty laugh before glancing past Damien toward the four Alpha Team members who were still struggling to recover from their earlier beating. He shook his head with a hint of amusement.

“Looks like my men are going to need a long recovery.”

The three men shared a laugh, the tension that had dominated the training ground finally giving way to an easy camaraderie.

That was, until a furious voice suddenly rang out across the training ground.

“HIRO TAKAMURA!!!”

All three men turned toward the source of the voice.

Harper was storming toward them, her expression thunderous and her eyes fixed squarely on Hiro. Maya followed closely behind her, with Max and Lee bringing up the rear.

“Uh-oh… here she comes,” Nick muttered, watching his furious girlfriend approach.

The moment Hiro saw the look on Harper’s face, his smile vanished.

“s**t!”

Damien glanced at him, almost feeling sorry for what was coming, and gave Hiro a sympathetic pat on the arm. “Good luck!”

Nick turned toward Harper, a faint smile tugging at his bloodied lips. But the moment he tried to take a step toward her, his knees buckled beneath him, and he began to collapse.

“Nick!”

Harper lunged forward and caught him by the shoulders, barely managing to slow his fall before Max and Lee rushed over to help.

“Boss!” Max exclaimed, immediately dropping to one knee beside him, his face pale with panic.

“Are you okay?!” Harper demanded, her voice trembling despite her attempt to remain composed. “Water! Somebody get me some water! Now!”

Anko immediately hurried off to fetch some.

While everyone else scrambled around Nick in a panic, Damien simply stood there, watching the commotion unfold with an amused expression.

Maya, who had been following closely behind Harper, finally reached Damien and immediately took hold of his arm, her eyes scanning him with concern.

“Damien! Are you okay? Are you hurt?” she asked anxiously.

Damien slipped an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close before planting a gentle kiss on top of her head. “Of course.”

Maya pulled back slightly to examine him more closely, her worried gaze moving over his bare chest and face.

“Are you sure? Does anything hurt? What about your ribs? Your jaw? How about your-”

Damien smiled at her concern and gently cut her off. “I’m fine, love.”

She studied him for another moment, searching his face for any sign of pain. When she found none, she finally relaxed a little.

Then her gaze shifted toward Nick, and her concern immediately returned at the sight of him being supported by Harper and Max.

“Maybe we should take him to the hospital.”

Damien leaned slightly closer to her. “There’s no need for that.”

She turned to him in disbelief before gesturing toward Nick.

“What do you mean? Look at him! He can barely stand!”

Damien lowered his head toward her ear and whispered, “He’s just acting.” He then pulled back and gave her a knowing wink.

Maya’s eyes widened in surprise, but she said nothing. Instead, she turned her attention back to

Nick, curious to see how the whole situation would unfold.

Nick’s gaze remained fixed on Harper, a small, almost amused smile playing on his bloodied lips.

He was genuinely exhausted, but he couldn’t resist exaggerating his condition a little, especially now that he had his girlfriend fussing over him.

It wasn’t often that he got to see such a genuine reaction from Harper, much less see her this openly worried about him.

Harper was usually so stubborn and difficult to read that witnessing such an unguarded side of her was a rare treat. And he had to admit, he was enjoying every second of the extra attention.

Harper noticed his smile and frowned.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

Chapter 645

Nick said nothing, merely continuing to smile at her, which only made Harper more suspicious.

Her brows drew together as she studied his face, her concern growing with every passing second.

Then her eyes suddenly widened in alarm.

“Wait… Oh, for f**k’s sake!” She whipped her head around. “He has a concussion! Anko! Get a doctor here! NOW!”

Anko, who had just returned with the water Harper had demanded earlier, froze in his tracks.

Water or doctor first?!

For a split second, he stood there in a panic, unsure which order to prioritize. Finally, he shoved the bottles of water into the hands of the nearest person before turning on his heel and rushing off to fetch a doctor.

Concussion?!

Nick was momentarily thrown off by her sudden conclusion.

He had been giving her the sweetest, most affectionate smile he could muster, and this woman thought he had a concussion?!

Unbelievable!

He cleared his throat before attempting to reassure her.

“I’m fine,” Nick murmured, his voice hoarse.

“Nuh-uh! You’re clearly not fine!” Harper snapped, turning back to examine his face. “You’re looking at me funny, and you’re smiling like an i***t! That’s not normal!”

Nick could hardly believe his ears.

So apparently, smiling lovingly at his own girlfriend was now considered a symptom of a head injury?

This woman was truly something else.

But then again, he was rather enjoying all the attention. And if a simple smile was enough to send Harper into such a panic, he was suddenly curious to see just how far he could push his luck.

Then a rather shameless idea crossed his mind. He suddenly squeezed his eyes shut and let out a pained groan.

“Ughhh… Ahh! Ouch… that hurts!”

Harper immediately panicked.

“What?! Where?! Tell me where it hurts!”

Nick grimaced dramatically, slowly raising a trembling hand toward his shoulder.

“Here… owww, I can barely move it…” He paused, drawing another labored breath before looking up at her with the most pitiful expression he could muster.

Harper immediately reached for his shoulder, gently pressing her fingers against the area he had indicated.

“Here? Is it here?” she asked anxiously, carefully moving her hand along his shoulder. “Does it hurt when I touch it?”

“Yes… owww!” Nick groaned, wincing dramatically. “It hurts so much…

He paused, looking up at her with an almost pleading expression.

“I think… I think you should kiss it so the pain will go away.”

Max’s eyes widened.

For a moment, he could only stare at his boss in utter disbelief.

Then, overcome with secondhand embarrassment, he silently rose to his feet and took several steps back, pretending he had absolutely nothing to do with the shameless man in front of him.

Maya turned to Damien, and their eyes met. Damien merely shook his head, looking almost embarrassed on his friend’s behalf at the sheer shamelessness of his antics.

Even Hiro was momentarily stunned. He had certainly not expected Nicholas Ashcroft, the same man who had just fought his way through six of their toughest fighters, to be capable of such shameless behavior.

Harper stared at Nick, momentarily speechless.

Then realization finally struck.

Shameless bastard! He had been exaggerating his injuries this entire time just to get her to fuss over him!

Her worry instantly gave way to exasperation, but instead of calling him out, she decided to play along.

She slowly leaned closer, lowering her face toward his injured shoulder as though she were

But just before her lips could touch his skin, she deliberately shifted toward his ear instead.

“Kiss my ass!” she hissed.

Then she straightened, gave his shoulder a light shove, and made to stand up.

Nick winced slightly. Although he had been exaggerating his injuries to get her attention, his body was genuinely aching from the brutal fights he had endured.

Harper, who had already risen to her feet, paused when she noticed his wince. This time, the pain that flashed across his face was unmistakably real.

Her expression softened for a fleeting moment, and Nick, noticing the change, couldn't suppress his grin.

"Okay, okay… I'm sorry," he said with a chuckle. "I'm fine. Really."

He pushed himself to his feet, wincing slightly at the effort before flashing her a reassuring smile.

"Damn, I'm really beat! A nice hot bath would be nice right about now."

As far as Nick was concerned, the ordeal was finally over, and they could all head back and relax.

But just as he was about to suggest leaving, Harper abruptly turned away from him, her expression hardening as her narrowed eyes settled on someone behind her.

After all, she hadn't forgotten who was responsible for putting Nick through such a brutal ordeal in the first place.

Her furious gaze locked onto Hiro.

"You…"

Hiro raised an eyebrow, but before he could utter a word, Harper's next words came through gritted teeth.

"You're dead meat, Hiro Takamura!"

And without another word, she lunged straight at him.

Nick's eyes widened in shock. He instinctively reached out to grab her arm, but Harper was already moving, far too fast for him to stop her.

Her fist shot toward Hiro's face with such speed that he barely managed to raise his arm in time to block the blow.

The impact cracked sharply through the air.

Hiro immediately countered with a powerful punch of his own, but Harper ducked beneath it and spun, unleashing a vicious kick aimed straight at his ribs.

He twisted aside just in time.

"You piece of s**t!" Harper snarled, launching another punch.

Hiro blocked it and countered with a sharp elbow, forcing her to pivot out of the way.

“Harper-”

“Don’t you f*****g Harper me!”

She drove forward with a rapid combination of punches, each one delivered with precision and unmistakable fury.

“A sparring match is one thing!” she snapped, throwing a punch toward his jaw.

Hiro deflected it.

“A friendly competition is another!”

She followed with a sweeping kick aimed at his legs, but Hiro jumped back before it could connect.

“But you went after him like he was your f*****g enemy!”

Her next punch came dangerously close to his face.

Hiro caught her wrist and attempted to pull her off balance, but Harper anticipated the move, twisted free, and drove her knee toward his abdomen.

He blocked it with his forearm and shoved her back.

She landed firmly on her feet, already preparing to launch her next attack.

Nick, Damien, Maya, Max, and Lee could hardly believe what they were witnessing. One moment, the fighting had finally come to an end, and the next, Harper and Hiro were going at each other.

Yet everyone else around them seemed completely unfazed by the sudden confrontation, as though watching Harper and Hiro exchange blows was nothing out of the ordinary.

The two had been sparring partners for as long as anyone could remember, their training sessions often escalating into fierce, full-contact battles that left neither willing to concede defeat.

Hiro knew Harper's fighting style almost as well as his own. He could anticipate the angle of her punches, recognize the slightest shift in her stance, and predict which direction she would strike next.

Unfortunately for him, Harper knew his techniques just as intimately.

And today, she was furious.

“You arrogant, insufferable asshole!” she shouted, launching herself at him again.

Chapter 646

Piro barely had time to brace himself before Harper came charging at him again, her fist slicing through the air with enough force to make him instinctively lean back.

“Would you calm the hell down?!” he snapped, narrowly avoiding another blow.

“Calm down?!” Harper repeated incredulously, her eyes blazing with fury. “You put him through hell and you expect me to calm down?!”

Hiro blocked her next punch, his own patience beginning to wear thin.

“For f**k’s sake, Harper! He’s going to be standing beside you as the future Danna-sama! Did you honestly think we were just going to roll out the red carpet and welcome him without finding out if he can even protect you?!”

Harper’s jaw tightened.

“WELL, NOW YOU f*****g KNOW!”

“And he gave as good as he got!” Hiro shot back. “Or did you somehow miss the part where he took down every single man we put in front of him?!”

“That doesn’t mean you had to beat the s**t out of him!” Harper fired back, her eyes blazing with renewed fury.

“Oh, I’m going to enjoy wiping that smug look off your face!”

She lunged again, forcing Hiro to abandon any hope of reasoning with her and focus entirely on defending himself.

He caught her next punch and countered with a strike aimed at her side, but Harper managed to deflect it.

She twisted beneath his next attack and landed a solid kick against his thigh.

Hiro stumbled half a step before recovering, a familiar, amused glint appearing in his eyes.

He knew that look on Harper’s face.

He'd seen it countless times growing up.

And he knew better than to expect her to calm down anytime soon.

Still, he made no attempt to go easy on her.

He lunged forward with a fierce combination of punches, forcing Harper to defend herself before she slipped past his guard and retaliated with a sharp strike to his abdomen.

Their movements were fast, aggressive, and remarkably fluid, each anticipating and countering the other's attacks with the instinctive familiarity of two fighters who had spent years training together.

From where he stood, Nick watched the spectacle unfold, his face slowly breaking into a grin.

Even after everything he'd endured, he couldn't help finding the sight of his furious girlfriend trying to beat the hell out of her childhood best friend strangely entertaining.

And damn, there was something incredibly sexy about watching her fight with such fierce, unrestrained aggression. The fire in her eyes, the confidence in every movement, the sheer ferocity of her temper… it was turning him on.

And judging by the way Hiro was fighting back and how completely unfazed everyone else seemed to be, this was apparently just another ordinary day around here.

The fight continued, with Harper and Hiro exchanging one fierce blow after another, neither showing the slightest intention of backing down.

Nick was still watching them with an amused grin when he suddenly felt a warm hand gently touch his arm.

He turned his head and found a woman standing beside him, seemingly around Maya's age. She was dressed in a fitted, all-black tactical outfit that hugged her slender figure, consisting of a tight, long-sleeved top, form-fitting pants, and black combat boots. Unlike the uniforms worn by the other trainees, her attire suggested she belonged to a different group altogether.

She offered him a flirtatious smile before holding out a bottle of water.

"Hi, Mr. Ashcroft. I brought you some water."

Nick gave her a brief once-over before taking a step away, deliberately putting some distance between them. Without acknowledging her offer, he turned his attention back to Harper, who was still exchanging blows with Hiro.

The woman let out a soft chuckle.

"She's rather aggressive, isn't she?"

Nick didn't respond. His gaze remained fixed on Harper, making it perfectly clear that he had no interest in entertaining a conversation.

The woman's smile faltered slightly at his blatant indifference. She was clearly growing impatient, but then a sly, almost sinister smile slowly curved her lips.

Without warning, she deliberately stumbled forward, letting out a startled gasp as she pitched straight toward Nick.

Caught off guard, Nick reacted purely on instinct, reaching out to catch her before she could hit the ground.

The next thing he knew, the woman was pressed against his bare chest, her hands resting against him as she looked up with a seemingly innocent expression.

"Oh! How clumsy of me!" she exclaimed with a breathless little laugh. "Thank you, Mr. Ashcroft.

Nick's brows immediately drew together in irritation, and he firmly pushed the woman away from his chest.

She stumbled back a step, clearly not expecting such a cold reaction.

Nick’s expression darkened. He knew exactly what kind of game she was playing. He had encountered enough women who relied on cheap, flirtatious tricks to recognize one when he saw her, and frankly, he found the whole performance irritating.

Unfortunately, the woman seemed determined not to take the hint.

Instead of backing off, she deliberately loosened her grip on the bottle of water, allowing it to slip from her fingers and fall to the ground.

“Oops!” she exclaimed, feigning surprise.

Then, rather than simply crouching to retrieve it, she turned her back toward Nick and slowly bent forward at the waist, deliberately arching her back and pushing her hips out in his direction.

Every movement was calculated to draw his attention as she reached down for the fallen bottle, making absolutely no effort to conceal what she was trying to show off.

Not far away, Hiro happened to catch sight of the woman’s shameless display, and an amused smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth.

Unfortunately, Harper noticed.

Seeing that infuriating smirk on his face only made her angrier. She immediately assumed he was mocking her, deliberately provoking her while she was already furious with him.

“Oh, you think this is funny?!” she snapped.

Without giving him a chance to respond, she lunged at him again, throwing a powerful punch straight toward his face.

This time, however, Hiro was ready. He swiftly caught her wrist, stepped to the side, and used her

Claim own momentum to pull her closer, effectively stopping her attack.

With their faces now only inches apart, Hiro leaned toward her ear, the same irritating smirk still playing on his lips.

“Careful, someone’s trying to steal your man.”

Harper froze.

“What did you say?”

Hiro merely tilted his head toward the area behind her.

“Look behind you.”

Her brows furrowed in confusion, but she instinctively turned her head to follow his gaze.

And what she saw made her blood boil.

There, a short distance away, was a woman dressed in a tight black outfit, bent forward at the waist with her backside shamelessly pointed straight toward her boyfriend.

“b***h!”

Harper violently yanked her wrist free from Hiro’s grip and stormed toward Nick and the woman, her expression darkening with every furious step.

Her vision had practically gone red with rage.

As she closed the distance between them, she reached behind her waist and pulled out a small throwing knife concealed beneath her clothes. Without breaking stride, she flicked her wrist, sending the blade flying through the air.

Just as the woman was about to straighten up, a sharp whistle sliced through the air.

THWACK!

A piercing shriek echoed across the training ground, followed by the clatter of a bottle hitting the ground.

Chapter 647

The entire training ground fell into stunned silence.

Every head turned toward the source of the shriek, their eyes falling on the water bottle lying on the ground, a throwing knife lodged firmly through its middle.

For a moment, nobody moved.

Even those who had barely batted an eye at Harper and Hiro's earlier fight seemed momentarily taken aback by the sudden attack.

Maya flinched at the sight, instinctively bringing a hand to her mouth as her eyes widened in shock.

The woman stood frozen, staring at the knife embedded in the bottle she had been holding just seconds earlier.

Then Harper's furious voice shattered the silence.

"Touch my man again, and the next one will cut your f*****g hand off!"

Every head snapped toward her.

Harper was storming straight toward the woman, her expression murderous, her eyes blazing with barely restrained fury.

And judging by the look on her face, that warning was anything but an empty threat.

The woman finally tore her gaze away from the knife and turned toward Harper, who was rapidly closing the distance between them.

For a brief moment, surprise flickered across her face. But she quickly regained her composure, straightening to her full height and folding her arms across her chest. She lifted her chin defiantly, as though daring Harper to confront her.

Meanwhile, Nick quietly took a step back, putting even more distance between himself and the woman.

He wanted absolutely nothing to do with whatever was about to happen. He hadn't encouraged her, hadn't entertained her advances, and had made every effort to ignore her.

As far as he was concerned, he was completely innocent!

The woman watched Harper approach, a smug smile spreading across her lips.

“Why so angry?” she asked sweetly, her tone dripping with mock innocence. “I was merely showing

Mr. Ashcroft here how a real lady should behave. You know, a little softness, a little femininity…

something you clearly know nothing about.”

Harper came to a stop directly in front of her. But before the smug smile could even fade from the woman’s face, Harper’s hand shot out, grabbing a fistful of her hair and yanking her head down so violently that she was forced to bend forward at the waist.

“AHHHHH! You psycho!” the woman shrieked, struggling against Harper’s grip.

“Is that right?” Harper asked, her voice dangerously calm. “Say that again, and I’ll rip your f*****

scalp clean off your skull!”

“Let go of me! Let go!” the woman screamed, desperately trying to wrench herself free.

Harper finally released her with a rough shove, sending her stumbling backward before landing hard on the ground.

Without so much as a flicker of remorse, she stood tall and unruffled, casually dusting off her hands as though she’d just touched something filthy. Her sharp eyes remained fixed on the woman sprawled on the ground, looking down at her with undisguised contempt.

The woman scrambled to her feet, her face burning with humiliation and rage. Furious at being humiliated in front of everyone, she thrust an accusing finger inches from Harper’s face.

“You’re f*****g unhinged! You’re just threatened by me!” she spat venomously. “Do you seriously believe any sane man would want to be with someone as loud, rough, and aggressive as you?!”

Before she could utter another word, Harper seized the finger pointed at her face and twisted it viciously.

CRACK!

“AHHHHHHHHH!” the woman screamed, her face contorting in agony.

Harper released her finger, and the woman immediately cradled her injured hand against her chest, tears streaming down her face as she sobbed in pain.

But instead of backing away, she turned toward Nick and hurried straight for him, even daring to throw herself into his arms.

“Mr. Ashcroft! Help me!” she cried desperately. “She’s crazy!”

Harper’s head immediately snapped toward her boyfriend, her eyes narrowing into a murderous glare.

Nick’s expression changed instantly.

He quickly sidestepped the woman, leaving her stumbling awkwardly as the embrace she had

Claim been expecting never came. Then he raised both hands in surrender, looking utterly horrified at/ being dragged into the confrontation.

“Whoa! Don’t look at me like that!” he protested, staring at Harper. “I ignored her! I swear!”

Then, as though determined to make his position absolutely clear, Nick stepped forward and stood beside Harper, slipping an arm around her shoulders and pulling her close.

He turned toward the woman, his expression losing every trace of amusement.

“Miss, whatever you’re trying to pull here isn’t going to work,” he said bluntly. “Those cheap little tricks of yours? They’re not nearly as attractive as you seem to think.”

The woman stared at him in disbelief, her tear-streaked face twisting with humiliation. Her eyes widened, clearly stunned that the very man she had been trying so desperately to impress was openly humiliating her instead.

Nick continued without hesitation.

“And for the record, I’d choose crazy over your idea of a ‘real lady’ any damn day.”

He tightened his arm around Harper affectionately, drawing her even closer.

But when his gaze returned to the woman, the warmth in his expression vanished, replaced by an icy, unmistakable warning.

“And call my woman crazy one more time,” he said, his voice dropping to a chilling calm, “and that won’t be the only broken finger you walk away with.”

The woman stood frozen, her lips trembling as she stared at Nick in utter disbelief.

She had expected him to come to her defense, perhaps even condemn Harper for her violent behavior. Instead, he had humiliated her-and worse, even threatened her in front of everyone-

making it painfully clear where his loyalty lay.

Her face burned with shame and fury, tears continuing to stream down her cheeks as she glared at the couple with barely concealed resentment.

Still clutching her injured hand against her chest, she felt the last shreds of her composure slipping away. She could tolerate the pain, but being humiliated so thoroughly, especially in front of an audience, was something her wounded pride simply couldn't accept.

And just like that, the last remnants of her carefully maintained facade crumbled.

"YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO HUMILIATE ME LIKE THIS!" she screamed.

Harper let out a mocking snicker, looking thoroughly unimpressed by her outburst.

"YOU'RE WRONG!" she shot back. "I HAVE EVERY f*****g RIGHT!"

Meanwhile, Hiro had rejoined the others, taking his place beside Damien and Maya as they watched the confrontation unfold from a short distance away.

Maya studied the woman for a moment before turning to Hiro, unable to contain her curiosity.

“Who is she?”

Hiro glanced toward the woman, a faintly amused expression crossing his face.

“That’s Kira,” he replied, barely sparing the woman a glance. “She’s Harper’s cousin.”

“Her cousin?” Maya repeated in surprise.

“A rather distant one,” Hiro clarified. “And those two have never gotten along. In fact, calling them mortal enemies would be putting it mildly.”

“YOU CAN’T JUST TREAT ME LIKE THIS! I’M A LADY OF THIS FAMILY TOO!” Kira screamed, her voice cracking with outrage.

Harper took a deliberate step toward her, her expression turning dangerously cold. The murderous look in her eyes was enough to make Kira instinctively retreat.

“What are you doing?!” Kira demanded, taking another hurried step backward as Harper continued advancing. “Stay away from me!”

Before Harper could respond, a man’s voice suddenly interrupted the confrontation, carrying a hint of authority.

“What’s going on here?”

Chapter 648

older gentleman had just entered the training ground, impeccably dressed in an expensive tailored suit, a polished cane in one hand. Several bodyguards followed closely behind him.

Kira turned toward the voice, and the moment she recognized the newcomer, her eyes lit up with relief.

“Dad!” Kira cried, immediately rushing to his side, tears streaming down her cheeks. “She attacked me! I didn’t do anything to her! She just came at me for no reason!”

Her voice broke into another sob as she raised her injured hand for him to see.

“Look! She even broke my finger!”

The older gentleman’s expression darkened with fury at the sight of his daughter’s injury.

“Who the hell dares lay a hand on my daughter?!” he demanded angrily.

“Me.”

The single word came from behind them, delivered in a voice so cold and utterly unapologetic that the man immediately turned toward its source.

Harper stood a few steps away, a smug smirk playing on her lips as she regarded him with chilling confidence.

The moment the older gentleman recognized her, his anger vanished, replaced by unmistakable nervousness. However, he quickly attempted to regain his composure, straightening his posture as though nothing had happened.

“Harper,” he said, visibly caught off guard. “It’s you! I didn’t know you were back!”

Harper slowly folded her arms across her chest, the smirk never leaving her face.

“I don’t believe I need your permission to come home to my own house, do I? And since when did you earn the right to address me by my first name?”

The man stiffened, completely at a loss for words.

"… …" He cleared his throat, struggling to recover his dignity. Glancing around, he noticed the numerous people watching the exchange, and the thought of being humiliated in front of so many. witnesses made his pride bristle.

Desperate to save face, he straightened his posture and forced a stern expression.

"That's not what I meant," he replied defensively. "But I would appreciate it if you watched your

OOKG words, I'm still your uncle, and I deserve some respect!"

Harper let out a sharp, mocking laugh.

"Uncle?" she repeated incredulously. "You've certainly got some nerve."

Her smile disappeared, replaced by an icy expression that made the older gentleman visibly tense.

"As far as everyone is concerned, you're not even part of the family tree, much less that slut of a daughter of yours."

She took a deliberate step forward, her gaze never wavering from his face.

“So who the hell do you think you are to demand respect from me?” Harper scoffed. “Clearly, you’ve forgotten your place.”

The older gentleman’s face flushed with humiliation, his grip tightening around the handle of his cane.

He opened his mouth to retaliate, but the icy warning in Harper’s eyes made him hesitate. His jaw clenched, clearly struggling between his wounded pride and the knowledge that provoking her any further might not end well for him.

Just then, Anko arrived at the training ground, accompanied by Dr. Brown.

Earlier, he had sent someone to fetch the family doctor. Unfortunately, the physician was in the middle of surgery and wouldn’t be available anytime soon.

Knowing Harper’s notoriously short temper, Anko had no intention of keeping her waiting. That was when he remembered Jaime’s doctors.

After all, Harper hadn’t specifically requested the family physician. She had simply ordered him to bring a doctor, and Dr. Brown was more than qualified.

So, without wasting another moment, Anko had gone to fetch him.

However, on their way to the training ground, a familiar vehicle had pulled into the estate.

Ken, Alice, Dahlia, and Aiko had just returned from the auction.

Noticing Anko accompanying Dr. Brown toward the training ground, Ken stopped them and asked what was happening.

Anko quickly recounted everything that had transpired throughout the day, from the grueling assessments Nicholas had been subjected to, to his brutal sparring match with Hiro, which had ultimately left him with a concussion.

Upon hearing this, Ken's expression immediately turned serious, while the others grew visibly

OORG concerned.

Without wasting another moment, the four decided to accompany Anko and Dr. Brown to the training ground to see the situation for themselves.

And as luck would have it, they arrived just in time to witness Harper openly confronting the older gentleman, whose face was still burning with humiliation.

Before anyone could announce their arrival, Harper's voice rang out across the training ground, cold and commanding.

"Hizamazuke!" (Kneel!)

“You’re going too far!” Kira snapped, stepping protectively beside her father.

“Shut your mouth!” the older gentleman hissed, shooting his daughter a warning glare before turning back toward Harper. His expression immediately softened, and he forced a placating smile.

“Is that really necessary?” he asked cautiously. “There’s no need to take things this far. We’ll just leave, all right?”

But Kira refused to back down.

“No, Dad!” she protested indignantly. “She’s crossing the line! Just because she’s the heir doesn’t give her the right to treat us like this! We share the same blood! We’re family! The least she could do is show us a little respect!”

Her father’s eyes widened in horror.

He stared at his daughter, unable to comprehend how she could utter such words in front of

Harper.

Had she completely lost her mind?!

He immediately opened his mouth to silence her, but before he could get a single word out, Harper slowly turned her gaze toward Kira, a mocking smile curling her lips.

“Blood?” she repeated coldly. “Not all blood is equal, sweetheart.”

Then, just as suddenly, her smile vanished, replaced by a sinister expression. Her eyes turned icy, and when she spoke again, her voice was chillingly firm.

“Să, hizamazuke!” (Now, kneel!)

Kira’s mouth fell open, but no words came out. Her face flushed with humiliation as she struggled to find a response.

TUC

By then, Hiro, Damien, and Nick had already put their shirts back on and were watching the confrontation unfold from a short distance away.

This side of Harper was nothing new to Maya, who had witnessed her ruthless streak before. But for Damien and Nick, it was an entirely different story.

Neither had ever seen Harper quite like this. Gone was the playful, hot-tempered woman they were accustomed to. In her place stood someone entirely different-cold, ruthless, and commanding, with an authority that seemed to come as naturally to her as breathing.

Nick had been tempted to step forward and intervene, especially when the confrontation began escalating. But before he could make a move, Hiro had quietly stopped him.

“Don’t,” Hiro warned under his breath. “Let her handle this.”

Nick glanced at him, his brows furrowing slightly.

Hiro merely shook his head.

“Trust me. You don’t want to interfere when she’s like this.”

And so, despite his growing unease, Nick remained where he was, watching his girlfriend with a mixture of surprise and fascination.

“That’s enough!” the older gentleman suddenly interjected, striking his cane against the ground.” This has gone far enough!”

Deep down, he was seething with indignation. How dare Harper order them to kneel before her as though they were nothing more than lowly servants?!

His pride was taking a beating, and he wanted to lash out at her for such blatant humiliation.

But despite his wounded ego, he knew damn well that he was in no position to challenge her authority.

Chapter 649

Swallowing his resentment, he turned toward Harper and inclined his head slightly, forcing a conciliatory smile.

“I apologize for the trouble my daughter has caused,” he said carefully. “Let’s just put this unpleasant incident behind us, shall we? We’ll take our leave now.”

He lowered his head in a final gesture of reluctant respect, carefully concealing the resentment simmering beneath his composed expression. Then, without waiting for Harper’s response, he turned sharply and motioned for his daughter to follow him.

Watching the pair attempt to leave, Hiro merely shifted his gaze toward the men stationed around the training ground.

One look was all it took.

Almost simultaneously, the men straightened to attention before moving into position, forming an impenetrable barrier across the exits.

The older gentleman and Kira had barely taken a step when they found their path completely blocked.

Both froze in their tracks, while even the bodyguards who had accompanied the older gentleman immediately abandoned any thought of resistance, silently lowering their heads in submission.

Behind them, Harper's voice rang out once more.

"Don't make me repeat myself. The next will come with a blade to make sure you obey!"

Her expression was utterly devoid of amusement now, her eyes fixed on the father and daughter with chilling authority.

"HIZAMAZUKE!" (Kneel!)

The command thundered across the training ground, louder and far more forceful than before.

An oppressive silence followed.

Even the younger trainees, who had come expecting nothing more than their usual training sessions, stood frozen in fear.

Never in their wildest dreams had they imagined witnessing everything that had unfolded that day, much less seeing firsthand just how terrifying the future Oyabun could be when her authority was challenged.

They had always known Harper Takahashi was someone to be feared and respected. But knowing it was one thing. Witnessing the sheer power and authority she commanded was something else entirely.

Many of them had also trained alongside Kira and knew firsthand just how insufferable she could member of the Takahashi family to intimidate others and get whatever she wanted.

They had endured her arrogance and entitled behavior for far too long, knowing better than to challenge someone who so shamelessly flaunted her family connections.

So, seeing her backed into a corner like a frightened little mouse, her arrogance crushed as she was finally reminded who truly held authority in the Takahashi household, was undeniably satisfying.

Of course, none of them dared show their amusement.

Not when the future Oyabun was standing right there, looking ready to draw blood.

Then, just as the older gentleman appeared ready to protest, another voice cut through the silence.

Cold. Deep. And carrying an authority that demanded absolute obedience.

“IF MY DAUGHTER TELLS YOU TO KNEEL, THEN YOU WILL KNEEL!”

Every head turned toward the source of the voice.

The moment the older gentleman saw who had spoken, his face turned deathly pale. Whatever courage he had managed to summon vanished instantly.

Without another word, he dropped to his knees, grabbing his daughter by the arm and dragging her down with him.

“Dad! What are you-” Kira protested, but he tightened his grip, forcing her to remain kneeling beside him.

“Shut up!” he hissed under his breath.

Ken approached at an unhurried pace, his expression unreadable. He stopped beside Harper, casting a cold stare at the two figures kneeling before them.

“Mirai no Oyabun ni sakarau kenri o, dare ga omae ni ataeta nda?” (Who gave you the right to disobey the future Oyabun?)

The older gentleman visibly flinched at the accusation, immediately lowering his head as every trace of his earlier arrogance vanished.

TII

Clair

“B–Brother, no, no, no…” he stammered, desperately shaking his head. “It’s not what you think. Wé were just…”

“DAMARE!” (Shut up!)

Ken’s thunderous command cut him off mid–sentence.

The old man immediately snapped his mouth shut, his entire body stiffening under Ken’s furious gaze. Whatever excuse he had been about to offer died on his lips.

Ken stared down at him, his expression colder than ever, before turning his attention to his daughter.

“What happened?”

Harper casually shrugged, looking completely unbothered.

“Well, that filthy b***h over there was pulling every cheap trick in the book to seduce my boyfriend, so naturally, I taught her a lesson,” she replied matter–of–factly.

“Unfortunately, she also has a habit of running her mouth. She called me crazy, and even had the audacity to point her finger in my face, so I broke it.”

She paused briefly before continuing, as though recounting something utterly trivial.

“Then this old man came strolling in here like he owned the f*****g place. He even had the nerve to call himself my uncle and demanded respect from me because they both insist that we’re all family.” Her nose wrinkled in disgust.

“Honestly, it’s revolting. So I decided they both needed a little reminder of who’s who around here.”

“Th–That’s not what happened, Uncle Ken!” Kira hurriedly protested. “I didn’t-”

Ken turned his gaze toward her. It took only a single, cold look for Kira to fall completely still, the rest of her protest dying in her throat.

Without acknowledging her any further, Ken turned toward Maya, who stood a few steps away.

His expression softened, and his voice grew gentler.

“Maya, please come here.”

Maya was slightly taken aback by the unexpected invitation. She instinctively glanced at Damien, who met her gaze and gave her a small, reassuring nod.

She then stepped forward and approached Ken.

“Tell me, Maya,” Ken began kindly. “Is everything Harper told me really what happened here?”

Maya didn’t hesitate.

“Yes, it’s true,” she answered honestly. “Harper was the first to get physical with her, but Kira was the one who started everything. She kept insulting Harper, even after Nick had already made it perfectly clear that he wasn’t interested in her.”

The moment those words left Maya’s mouth, Kira’s face twisted with fury.

“You-!”

She attempted to lunge forward, completely forgetting whose presence she was in.

But before she could even rise to her feet, Aiko, who had been standing beside Ken, reacted swiftly seizing Kira by the shoulder and forcefully shoving her back down onto her knees. He tightened His grip, keeping her firmly in place as she struggled against his hold.

Yet Kira was too enraged to recognize the danger.

“You nosy b***h!” she shrieked at Maya. “Learn to mind your own f*****g business?!”

Before anyone else could utter a word, Damien’s chilling voice cut through the air.

“Disrespect my woman again, and you’re going out of here in a box.”

The sheer coldness of his words sent an involuntary shiver down the spines of those who heard them.

His dark eyes remained fixed on Kira, cold and threatening.

And judging by the murderous look in his eyes, everyone present knew he meant every single word.

But Kira, blinded by her own arrogance, still failed to grasp the gravity of her situation.

In her foolish mind, nothing could be worse than facing Ken Takahashi's wrath.

And yet, some complete stranger had the audacity to threaten her life, right there on Takahashi territory, no less!

"How dare you!" she spat, glaring at Damien. "A nobody like you dares to threaten me?! Who the hell do you think you are?!"

Chapter 650

For a moment, an almost eerie silence settled over the training ground.

Then Harper burst into laughter.

Not a polite chuckle or a restrained giggle, but a full–blown laugh of genuine amusement.

Of all the things Kira could have said, calling Damien Blackwood a nobody had to be the most ridiculous.

"Oh, that's a good one!" Harper drawled, shaking her head in disbelief. "You really have no idea whose grave you're digging, do you?"

Still chuckling, she stepped closer and casually squatted in front of Kira, bringing herself to eye level with her.

“You’re not just a filthy b***h,” she remarked with an almost amused smile, lightly patting

Kira’s cheek. “You’re a dumb one, too.”

Then she glanced over her shoulder at Damien, a wicked smirk spreading across her face.

“That nobody you’re talking about? That’s Damien. Damien Blackwood,” she announced, deliberately emphasizing his name. “Oh, and the woman you just called a b***h? That’s Maya Thompson, the future Mrs. Blackwood.”

The smug expression on Kira’s face faltered.

Damien… Blackwood?

Something about that name sounded terribly familiar.

And then it hit her.

Her eyes widened in dawning horror.

Blackwood?!

As in the Blackwood family?!

The very family whose wealth, power, and influence extended far beyond anything she could ever hope to comprehend?

And the man she had just insulted was the very man whose reputation alone was enough to make even the most influential figures think twice before daring to cross him?!

Her gaze snapped toward Damien, who stood beside Maya, his cold eyes still fixed on her.

Suddenly, his earlier threat didn’t sound so outrageous anymore.

The blood drained from her face, leaving her deathly pale. An icy chill crept down her spine as her entire body began to tremble.

Her body grew so weak that she could barely remain upright, and had Aiko not been holding her firmly in place, she would have collapsed onto the ground.

Only moments ago, she had been foolish enough to call Damien Blackwood a nobody.

Worse, she had openly insulted his future wife.

Right in front of him.

And judging by the murderous look he was still giving her, Kira was finally beginning to realize just how catastrophically stupid she had been.

Aiko finally released his grip on her, leaving her kneeling helplessly on the ground.

Desperate to save herself, Kira finally found her voice.

“M–Mr. Blackwood!” she stammered, her voice trembling uncontrollably. “I–I’m so sorry!

Please forgive me! I didn’t know who you were! I swear, if I had known, I would never have dared to speak to you that way!”

Her frightened gaze darted toward Maya.

“M–Mrs. Blackwood! Please! I’m so sorry for insulting you! I didn’t mean any of it! I was just being stupid! Please, I’m begging you, forgive me!”

Her voice cracked as tears began streaming down her cheeks.

“I–I promise I’ll never do it again! Please, just give me one more chance!”

But neither Damien nor Maya uttered a single word.

Damien merely stared down at her, his expression as cold and merciless as ever, while Maya watched her in silence, her face devoid of even the slightest trace of sympathy or pity.

And somehow, their silence frightened Kira far more than any threat could have.

Ken’s expression remained unchanged as he slowly turned his attention back to the older gentleman.

“Haji, have I been too lenient with you lately?” he asked in a dangerously quiet voice. “Clearly, you and your daughter have forgotten your place.”

The older gentleman visibly trembled.

“N–No! Of course not!” he stammered, bowing his head even lower. “Please forgive us! I–I’ll discipline my daughter properly! I swear it won’t happen again! Please, spare us!”

But Ken offered no response.

He merely stared down at Haji, his expression unreadable, as though the man’s desperate pleas weren’t even worth acknowledging.

The silence was unbearable.

Growing increasingly desperate, Haji suddenly turned toward his daughter and struck her hard across the face.

SLAP!

The force of the blow snapped Kira’s head to the side.

She had still been in a daze after discovering Damien’s identity, but the sharp sting against her cheek immediately jolted her back to her senses.

“D–Dad?!” she gasped, pressing a trembling hand against her burning cheek.

“You ungrateful brat!” Haji roared, his face contorted with fury. “Look at the trouble you’ve caused! Apologize to your cousin this instant! Beg for her forgiveness!”

He grabbed her by the back of her neck, forcing her head downward.

“Bow your head! Hit your forehead against the ground if you have to! And don’t you dare stop until she forgives you! Do you hear me?!”

“Um, excuse me!”

Harper’s voice immediately cut through his furious tirade.

“Correction, old man. I don’t have a snake for a cousin,” she interjected, her expression twisting with disgust. “That daughter of yours has been jealous of me from the very beginning, and you’ve done absolutely nothing but enable her!”

She folded her arms across her chest, looking down at the father and daughter with undisguised contempt.

“You never bothered teaching her some manners, and look how she turned out! An arrogant, selfish, entitled little snake who thinks she can do whatever the hell she wants just because she gets to associate herself with the Takahashi name!”

Harper let out a humorless laugh, shaking her head in disbelief.

“Frankly, the fact that you two have even been allowed to enjoy the privileges that come with our family name is beyond me!”

Her eyes narrowed dangerously as she turned her attention directly to Haji.

“If it were up to me, you would’ve been thrown out a long time ago! Hell, you wouldn’t have even had the chance to spread your rotten genes and bring that little snake of a daughter into this world!”

Ken made no attempt to silence his daughter.

Instead, he stood quietly beside her, his cold gaze resting on the kneeling father and daughter. Not a single trace of pity or sympathy could be found in his expression.

After a moment of silence, he finally spoke, his voice calm yet carrying an unmistakable authority.

“Damien, punish her as you see fit.”

The words were spoken so casually that, for a moment, Kira wondered if she had heard him correctly.

But when their meaning finally registered, she felt as though all the air had been knocked out of her lungs.

Ken was actually giving Damien Blackwood permission to punish her?!

Her eyes widened in sheer terror, and a fresh wave of dread washed over her.

She swayed unsteadily, her vision briefly blurring as she struggled to remain conscious.

Ken, however, paid her no attention.

Instead, he turned toward Harper, his expression remaining stern.

“You are the next Oyabun of this family,” he reminded her. “Less talk, more action.”

“Wrap this up and head back to the manor afterward,” he added firmly.

Harper understood exactly what her father meant.

Her expression brightened almost instantly, and a delighted grin spread across her face.

“Got it!”

With that, Ken turned and walked away, accompanied by Alice, Dahlia, and Aiko, leaving Anko and Dr. Brown behind to attend to Nicholas.

Although Nick insisted that he felt perfectly fine and didn’t have a concussion, he reluctantly agreed to let Dr. Brown examine him since the doctor was already there.

After all, the last thing he wanted was to become the next target of Harper’s wrath.