Intern 87

Chapter 87

A pause. Then Ashcroft added carefully, “If we play it right-leverage that neutrality, maybe offer him a crack at something long-term-he might listen. He won’t trust easy. But he’ll respect power. Especially if it offers him more than the throne ever could.”

Damien finally looked up, eyes glinting with a dangerous calm.

“Then maybe it’s time we make it his.”

He stood slowly, voice low and lethal.

“We let Marco taste power,” he said, his voice low, measured. “Feed the hunger. Stroke his ego. Make him feel like the crown is within reach-like he’s finally getting what he’s owed.”

He circled a name on the map with the marker, slow and deliberate.

“Then once he’s cleared the field for us… once the real threats are gone and he thinks the throne’s his to take-”

Damien looked up, eyes gleaming.

“- we cut him down before he claims the throne.”

Damien’s gaze stayed fixed on the map, voice low-almost calm.

“No loose ends. No survivors.”

A pause. A breath.

Then, colder:

“We don’t just win this-we erase them. Names. Bloodlines. Legacy. Gone-like they never existed.”

His finger dragged across the last marked name.

“When it’s over, there won’t even be anything left to bury.”

Ashcroft’s voice was low, almost a warning.

“You know this only works if you stop hiding behind clean lines, D.”

He paused, letting the silence stretch like a noose.

“Once you make that step… there’s no turning back. So think it through.”

Damien didn’t answer immediately. He glanced toward the darkened skyline. The reflection staring back at him was unreadable.

“I know,” Damien said quietly.

“But she’s different. In every way.”

His eyes darkened, voice dipping lower.

“She’s already been hurt once. That’s more than enough.”

Ashcroft studied him for a beat, then spoke-measured but pointed.

“I know you’re doing this to protect her. To protect you. To carve out a clean path in case there’s a future worth reaching for. But is it worth it, D? What if she can’t accept this world? She’s already hesitating now… what happens when she sees the rest of it?”

Damien’s jaw tensed, but his voice was steady.

“It’s a risk I’m willing to take. I’ll burn every bridge, clean every stain-anything to keep her safe. Anything to make sure there’s a future ahead of her…”

A pause. Something bitter crept into his voice.

“Even if I’m not in it.”

Ashcroft didn’t argue. He picked up a marker, circling names on the map-slow, methodical, like a man signing death warrants.

“We’ll clear the board, D. Strip them of leverage. Cut out the threats. Leave no one with claws to strike back.”

He glanced up, eyes steady, voice low but resolute.

“If this is the war you’ve chosen… then I’ll fight it with you. Start to finish. No matter how bloody it gets.”

James looked up from his tablet, his expression unreadable but his voice slightly more

cautious.

“What about contact with Ms. Thompson?”

There was no judgment in his tone-only the weight of unspoken understanding.

Damien’s eyes flicked down to the table, voice low but firm.

“Discreet. For now. Keep everything inside the company-as if nothing’s changing. Let the

ghosts sleep a little longer. Let them believe the game hasn’t changed.”

Ashcroft quirked a brow. “Planning to keep your distance?”

Damien didn’t answer. He didn’t need to.

Every second away from her felt like restraint carved into bone.

But lately, restraint felt like a slow bleed.

He’d been impulsive-reckless in moments he couldn’t help. Drawn to her in ways that defied caution, defied reason.

But desire was a weakness he couldn’t afford. Not now. Not when the stakes were this high.

Because one wrong move-one careless show of affection-and the past would rise. Not just to haunt. But to destroy.

And that… Damien would never allow.