

Chapter 54

In a bleak, rain-lashed suburb of Zurich, Connor Snow stared at his reflection in the cracked mirror of a third-rate hotel bathroom. The man looking back was a stranger. His face was gaunt, his eyes hollowed out and rimmed with red. The arrogant heir was gone, replaced by a ghost haunted by the phantom limb of his former life.

The public humiliation had been absolute. The economy flight, the sneering headlines, the frozen accounts—it was a death by a thousand cuts. His mother, Beatrice, had collapsed into a state of hysterical denial, spending her days weeping and making futile calls to lawyers who no longer took her calls.

Connor punched the wall, a flare of the old, impotent rage burning through him. It wasn't just the money. It was the look on Anissa's face in that final moment he saw her, wrapped in his uncle's arms. It was a look of pity. She hadn't hated him. She had dismissed him. That was the wound that wouldn't stop bleeding.

His burner phone, a cheap piece of plastic he'd kept from his old life, buzzed on the nightstand. He had been expecting a call from one of the few pathetic sycophants he had left, begging for a loan he couldn't give.

He answered, his voice a raw rasp. "What?"

The voice on the other end was cultured, calm, and laced with an unnerving amusement. It was a voice that did not belong in his new, squalid world. "Mr. Snow. I trust your accommodations are... humbling."

Connor's spine went rigid. "Who is this?"

"Let's just say I'm a private investor with a keen interest in the recent activities of the Snow family," the voice said smoothly. "Specifically, in the meteoric rise of your aunt, Anissa. It's quite the story. A true phoenix from the ashes."

The use of the word 'phoenix' was too specific to be a coincidence. News of her foundation had already begun to leak. This person was well-informed.

"I have a proposition for you, Connor," the voice continued. "I understand you feel a certain... grievance. A sense of injustice I find myself in a





similar position. Harding Snow has cost me a great deal over the years. It seems we have a common enemy."

A toxic sliver of hope, something Connor thought had died on the flight over, began to twitch in his chest. "What do you want?"

"I want to offer you a chance to reclaim what was stolen from you," the voice said, its tone dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "I have resources. Information. Anissa may seem untouchable now, but every fortress has a weakness. And I believe her weakness... is her past. A past you know better than anyone."

Connor's mind raced. The man was right. He knew things about Anissa—her fears, her insecurities, the fragile girl she used to be.

"I'm listening," Connor said, his voice trembling with a desperate, burgeoning hatred.

"Excellent," the voice purred. "A package will be delivered to your hotel tomorrow. It will contain a new phone, a plane ticket, and your first set of instructions. It's time to stop mourning your old life, Connor. And start building a new one. On the ruins of theirs."



