Chapter 7 The step reverberated sharply , cutting through the ambient hum of the corridor and drawing the attention of several passersby .

Heads turned as people paused mid stride , curiosity sparking in their expressions .

Dominick heard snapped to the side from the force of Paisley s strike , and a cool , angry imprint of her rigers blooned across his cheek .

For a moment , he froze , as if stunned that she dared to hit him .

Slowly , he turned back to her , his gloomy eyes narrowing with disbelief and something more dangerous simmering beneath the surface .

From the far end of the hallway , the click of high heels against the polished sur announced Marissa arrival .

She stepped out of the private room her gaze immediately landing on the scene in front of her .

Her eyes widened , and a sharp gasp escaped her lips .

Oh my goodness she cried , rushing toward Dominick , the rapid staccato of her heels echoing her urgency .

Ms.

Sutton , why would you hit him ? Marissa voice pitched higher , laced with outrage as her wide eyes darted to Dominicks reddened cheek .

Dom ...

are you okay ? Does it hurt ? Her hand ottered nervously near his face as though she wanted to comfort him but dont dare touch him ...

Paisley couldnt bring herself to entertain this melodrama .

She didnt bother looking at Dominick , she didnt need to .

His palpable anger radiated from him like heat from a furnace ... making the air around them thick and oppressive .

Before anyone else could speak , a voice broke the weirdly heavy tension with almost comical abruptness .

Whats going on here ? Lucy familiar tone rang out as she walked toward them , her curious eyes darting between the trio .

Relieved to see her here .

Paisley exhaled softly and seized the moment to redirect her focus .

Where have you been ? Youve been in the Ladies room forever , she asked , her tone tinged with mild annoyance .

Oh , I got caught up scrolling on my phone in the restroom Lucy said nonchalantly , waving her phone for emphasis .

I stumbled on this crime she video something about dismemberment and I got hooked ... Her voice trailed o as her gaze lingered on Dominick and Marissa , her tone furrowing slightly .

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Marissas expression st ered noticeably , her discomfort plain to see .

Ms.

Sutton , I didnt realize you weren dining alone with that guy she said .

her tone carefully neutral but her words laced with subtle implications

Paisley refused to dignify Marissas comment with a reaction .

She merely nodded briefly and said , Work dinner Out of the corner of her eyes , she caught Dominicks expression shifting , his jaw tightening as though he had something to say .

But she didnt give him the satisfaction of her attention .

Lucy edited closer , tugging lightly at Paisleys sleeve .

Who are these people ? she whispered , her curiosity unabated , her brows knitting in confusion .

Gary had explicitly told Lucy that only the and Paisley were invited to todays dinner .

You dont need to worry about them .

Paisley replied curtly , shaking her head .

It time Oh , okay .

Lucy , ever obedient , nodded and turned to head back toward their private room .

Guess Ill leave you to it , then .

Take your Theres nothing to discuss .

Im coming with you , Paisley said coldly , cutting a pointed glare toward Dominick .

Mind your own business , Dominick .

And keep your hands out of things that dont concern you Outside the restaurant , Dominick and Marissa stood in silence , the atmosphere between them as heavy as the humid night air .

was unreadable , his features Marissa shifted uneasily , watching his face for any sign of what he might be thinking .

But Dominicks expression w carved into an empassive mask .

Dom , Im sorry , I didnt mean to jump to conclusions about Ms.

Sutton .

If my words caused any Finally , she broke the quiet , her voice hesitant .

Ds misunderstanding between you two Theres no need to apologize , Dominick interrupted , his tone distant , almost bored .

His large hand rose to his collar , deftly undoing two buttons on his shirt as though the very air around him was st ng .

She and I have nothing to do with each other .

Tut ther small act loosening his shirt betrayed him .

Even as he tried to mask in an unshakable restlessness lingered with him .

Something about Paisleys defiantly , her words , and her step had unsettled him in a way he couldnt quite tune .

ong I remember Marissa delicate features softened momentarily as she turned the neatly packed dessert box to Dominick .

I packed this for Sonny he has a sweet tooth , she said with a gentle smile that didnt quite reach her eyes 12 2 Chapter 7 A sleek car pulled up , coming to a smooth stop in front of Dominick Dominick accepted the box with a brief nod , his tone polite but distant .

Thank you on his behalf .

Bye , Marissa .

Without waiting for a reply , he turned and stepped into the car Marissa stood rooted to the spot , watching the car disappear down the street until it was a speck in the distance .

Slowly , the warmth in her expression faded , replaced by a cold calculating gleam in her eyes , her gaze steered back toward the restaurant , narrowing as it landed on Paisleys private room .

A faint , almost imperceptible smile tugged at the corner of her lips as she pulled out her phone and dialed a familiar number .

The call barely rang twice before Kayla , Dominicks younger sister , picked up .

Kaylas teasing voice came through , light and playful .

Marissa , so , how did your little date with my brother go without me around to third wheel ? Kayla Marissas voice dropped , laced with a feigned sadness that she wielded with precision Immediately .

Kaylas tone shifted , concern creeping in Marissa ? Whats wrong ? Did Dominick do something to you ? That doesnt sound like him .

Has always so good to you , isnt he ? No , its not Dom .

Ds Marissas hesitated for dramatic e ect , letting the tension build .

Then she continued , her words measured and deliberate .

Its Paisley .

Shes back .

We ran into her at the restaurant tonight , and she and Dom ...

What ? That scheming little bitch is back ! Trying to seduce Dominick again Kaylas voice rose , bristling with anger .

Marissa , hold on .

Im calling Dominick right now .

Shes not going to get away with this . Chapter 8