

## Paragon 18

### Chapter 18 Paying Back a Debt

When Klaus woke up, he felt a hot sensation on his back, right where the tattoo was. For a few seconds, there was a strange connection, like the tattoo was alive, but just as quickly as it came, the feeling faded away. He tried to reconnect with it, focusing as hard as he could, but nothing happened. It was like a door had been shut, and he was locked out. Klaus could only sigh in frustration.

He lifted himself off the chair, standing there bare-chested. James, Jojo, Xian, Matt, and Ziggy were all grinning at him. Klaus returned the smile, but something felt off. Their smiles weren't directed at him—they were looking somewhere else. Confused, Klaus turned to glance at the mirror and saw teardrops on his cheek.

He blushed slightly, quickly wiping them away. "Hahaha, it's normal. I'm surprised you didn't scream during the process," Matt laughed, giving Klaus a hearty pat on the shoulder.

"This is a sign he's a real man," Jojo said, puffing out his chest with pride. "Real men have a strong resistance to pain."

Xian nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I've seen grown men cry like babies in this chair. But you, Klaus, you took it like a champ."

Ziggy, the tattoo artist, smiled and added, "It's rare to see someone stay so calm during their first tattoo, especially one as detailed as yours. You've got guts."

James, who had been quiet, finally spoke up. "And here I was, betting you'd pass out halfway through," he said with a smirk. "Guess I lost that one."

The group started bragging about their own experiences. Matt went on about how he got his first tattoo when he was just 16 and how he'd fainted right after it was done. Jojo, not to be outdone, told the story of getting a tattoo on his ribcage, which everyone knew was one of the most painful spots.

"I didn't make a sound," Jojo claimed proudly. "Even though it felt like someone was digging into my bones."

"Yeah, right," Xian teased. "You were whimpering the whole time."

"Was not!" Jojo shot back, but the others just laughed.

Klaus listened, feeling a mix of amusement and relief. The pain from the tattoo was still fresh in his mind, but hearing these stories made it feel more manageable. It was like he was now part of some unofficial club, one that came with its own set of bragging rights.

Ziggy looked at Klaus and said, "You did good, kid. Wear that tattoo with pride. It's more than just ink on your skin now."

Klaus nodded, appreciating the sentiment. He still felt that strange disconnection, but he pushed it aside for now. There was no point in dwelling on it, especially when he had just gone through something so intense.

The men continued to joke around, talking about their next tattoos, comparing designs, and laughing at each other's stories. The atmosphere in the shop was light and filled with camaraderie, a stark contrast to the dark and mysterious experience Klaus had just gone through.

The process he has just gone through is too real. He saw chaos and carnage. He saw bloodshed on a smaller and larger scale. He saw worlds destroyed, planets, stars, and galaxies destroyed. He couldn't help but wonder where he was in this chaos.

"So Klaus, where are you staying now, and how's your mother?" Jojo asked, his voice carrying a bit of concern even as the group continued to joke and laugh.

"My mom's fine," Klaus replied with a smile. "As for where we live, well, after my dad went missing, we had to move to the slums. But that's just temporary." He tried to keep his tone light, not wanting to stir any trouble or make them feel sorry for him.

But Klaus quickly realized he had underestimated how much they cared. Jojo's smile faded, replaced by a look of anger. "Who forced you out? Tell me, and this big uncle will storm over there right now!" Jojo stood up, his aura flaring as he clenched his fist, veins popping out on his arm.

Klaus's eyes widened slightly at Jojo's reaction. He hadn't expected that. "It's only temporary," Klaus said, shaking his head with a reassuring smile. "We'll be back in the city soon enough. You don't need to waste your time on things like that, Uncle Jojo."

Jojo's fists slowly unclenched, but the intensity in his eyes didn't fade. "Temporary or not, no one should be pushing you and your mom around," he muttered, still clearly upset.

Xian, noticing the tension, chimed in with a grin, trying to lighten the mood. "Klaus is right, Jojo. Besides, you're too old to be storming anywhere. Let the young ones handle it."

Jojo huffed but sat back down, his expression softening a bit. "Just know, Klaus, if anyone gives you trouble, you come to me, okay? We've got your back."

"Thanks, Uncle Jojo," Klaus replied, genuinely touched. "I appreciate it, really."

Ziggy, who had been quietly observing, nodded in agreement. "The slums can be tough, but it's not where you'll stay forever. You're a tough kid, Klaus. You and your mom will make it through this."

Ziggy could sense the determination in Klaus's voice when he said he would handle things. It was a rare quality, one that spoke volumes about his character. Ziggy knew that if they stepped in and took over now, it might undermine Klaus's growth and resilience in the long run. Sometimes, the best thing to do was to step back and let a person face their challenges head-on.

All he could do was watch and be there if needed.

"We will, Uncle Ziggy," Klaus said with a smile, appreciating their concern. The others nodded in agreement, their expressions softening but still carrying a hint of seriousness.

Ziggy leaned in slightly, his voice calm but firm. "But just so you know, in the future, if things get a little sticky, remember that you've got five uncles right here who will do everything in their power to help you. Your father helped us so much that we can't even repay all he did for us in this lifetime." He shook his head, a mix of respect and regret in his eyes.

The room grew quieter as the weight of Ziggy's words sank in. Klaus could feel the depth of their bond, how much his father had meant to these men. They had been away when his father, Pete, went missing, and by the time they returned, they couldn't find Klaus or his mother. They had assumed the two had moved away.

But now, hearing that Klaus and his mother had been forced into the slums, their emotions shifted. Even though they were trying to keep calm, Klaus could sense the simmering anger beneath their surfaces, a quiet but intense killing intent directed at whoever was responsible.

They were ready to fight if it came to that.

Klaus, though touched by their fierce loyalty, knew that this was his battle to fight. "Thank you, all of you," he said, his voice steady but full of emotion. "I know I can count on you if things get bad, but I've got to do this on my own for now. My mom and I will get through this, I promise."

Ziggy gave him a knowing nod, the others following suit. They understood, even if it was hard to stand by and watch. But they respected Klaus's choice.

"Just remember, Klaus," Jojo said, his tone a bit lighter now but still serious, "we're not just here for when things get bad. We're here for all of it—the good, the bad, and everything in between."

Klaus smiled, feeling a surge of gratitude and determination. "I'll remember that, Uncle Jojo. I really appreciate it."

The mood in the room gradually shifted back to something more relaxed as they started to talk about lighter things again.

"By the way, how many people have you killed so far?" Xian suddenly asked, cutting through the lighter conversation with an unexpected question.

Jojo immediately smacked Xian on the back of the head. "You bastard, why would you ask him that?" he said, clearly annoyed.

Klaus watched their antics with a chuckle. They were older, but they acted like children sometimes, which was oddly endearing.

Ziggy shot Xian a disapproving look before turning to Klaus. "You don't have to answer that," he said, clearly uncomfortable with the question.

Klaus waved it off with a shrug. "It's okay. I haven't killed many—just an idiot who tried to steal my monster corpses and threatened my mom." He said it with a casual air as if it was no big deal.

The room fell silent for a moment, then suddenly, everyone burst into resounding laughter.

Jojo, perhaps overly happy at Klaus's response, clapped him on the back. "Good kid, you did well. In this life, our lives should be devoted to the ones we love. Real men protect their mothers."

The laughter continued, and a warm and genuine sound filled the room. Klaus felt a sense of belonging and relief. Despite the tough circumstances, he was surrounded by people who genuinely cared for him and his mother.

Ziggy shook his head with a smile, joining in the laughter. "Alright, alright, let's not get too carried away. Klaus, you've got a lot of potential. Just keep your focus and remember who you're doing this for."

Klaus nodded. He is devoted to his mother, so he knew no matter what, he will always protect her. They chatted for a while and when the sun started to dip, Klaus left. But before leaving, the five uncles gave him some stuff saying he should count them as a fraction of the debt they owe his father.

Klaus could only accept them after some persuasion. After leaving, he went to some stores and bought some more foodstuff, ice cream, and some leather clothes before heading home. That night, Klaus had a dream: he was fighting on an ancient battlefield surrounded by dead frozen bodies.

The next day, he got the surprise of his life.