

Shadows 421

Chapter 421 Photos Tilda swirled her wine glass slowly , propping her chin on her hand while watching the boats glide across the river . The city lights sparkled everywhere , making the whole view look unreal . " Tilda , the holidays are almost here . Want to head to Jeselton and hang out with Andy ? " We've been talking about going forever , but we never do , Next month is the winter holiday . If we don't go now , we'll miss our chance . " " That sounds perfect ! I miss Andy too ! " " Then it's settled . Oh , check this out !

" Una pulled a few photos from her bag . Tilda glanced at them . Two were photos she once uploaded to the Motrar Girl Forum under her alias " X " . The other two were shots of the painting that won her the world title . " Una , what's all this ? " Una laughed . " My whole family is obsessed with you . Knowing I was meeting you today , they dug out these photos , begging me to get your autograph . " It turns out my brothers are die - hard fans of X. When they found out it was you , they freaked . but they're too chicken to meet you .

They're worried they'll embarrass themselves and leave a bad impression . Come on , you've visited my house many times ! " Thinking about her two brothers , who always acted tough , Una rolled her eyes hard . Who knew her best friend could actually keep those two in check ? She couldn't help being impressed . " No big deal . " Tilda smiled knowingly and signed her name across the photos . Then , she pulled a USB stick from her pocket . " Here , this is for you . " " Tilda , what's inside ? " " It's my updated game design program . Didn't you always dream of esports and designing games ?

With this , you'll crush it . " I even wrote down all the steps for you . If you get stuck , just call me . I'll help .

" No way ! Tilda , you're a genius ! My good luck charm Una snatched the USB like it was gold , her eyes lighting up . She couldn't help herself , jumped up , and kissed Tilda's cheek . Tilda winked . " Careful , Una . If you fall for me , you'll regret it . " " Ugh ! Finding out you're not a guy already broke my heart ! If I were a dude , I'd marry you in a second ! " The more she said it , the sadder she looked . No way !

She downed her drink in one gulp . Fueled by alcohol and heartbreak , she dashed to the karaoke stage . Grabbing the mic , she started singing at the top of her lungs : " You're getting married , but I'm not the groom ... " Let's split with some dignity ... Don't bother saying sorry ... " Thanks for letting me witness your love ... Maybe I'm just fated to be the guest Tilda almost smacked her forehead . Oh my god . Since Una increased her drinking tolerance , Tilda hadn't seen her act that crazy for a long time .

And weirdly , when Una was drunk , her voice dropped lower and turned rougher . She actually sounded much better singing drunk than when she was sober. But she loved to freestyle and couldn't hold herself back . The crowd was loving it , shocked faces everywhere , cheering her on . Since Una wasn't totally wasted yet , Tilda let her burn off the energy . Then , someone stumbled over , barely able to stand . " Mr. Preston , pull it together ! " " Geez , how much did he drink ? " Somebody stop him ! " " I tried ! He smacked me so hard !

My check is still red ! " " When Mr. Preston's drunk , he doesn't know his own strength . Better leave him alone for now ? Preston reeked of booze , his shirt half - open and his hair a mess . Even looking wrecked , he still had that perfect gene - tall , handsome , and impossible to ignore . At over six feet , he made every girl in the bar swoon . And he wasn't just any random guy - he was from the Bells . If anyone got his attention , it didn't matter how successful they were in Slosa . They'd instantly level up ! It was unusual to see Preston so bewildered and unconcerned about his image .

He must have been deeply hurt . What he needed was a woman . Right on cue , a stunning girl in clothes way too skimpy for January sauntered over . She fluttered her fake - colored contacts , then " accidentally " bumped into him , spilling her drink all over . Preston felt the cold liquid soak his pants . He frowned but barely reacted . " Oh no ! Sir , are you okay ? I'm so sorry . I'm so clumsy . I spilled it all over your pants ! " Let me clean it up . If they're ruined , I'll pay you back ...

Thinking her trick was working , the woman grabbed napkins and started wiping the inside of Preston's thigh .

Chapter 422 Trouble Fraighed The woman was flaunting her curves and low - cut top like crazy , hoping to catch Preston's attention . Even a one - night fling with him would've been a dream come true for most women . Being the lover of the Bells ' scion was way better than kissing up to some old , rich dude . But Preston didn't even feel a spark . His eyes landed on her fawning face . For a second , it changed into Kyla's gentle smile - the same one he'd adored for years . Kyla ... He almost reached out , longing to touch that familiar , sweet face . " Sir ...

The woman noticed his dazed , lovesick expression , and her heart skipped a beat . She thought she'd hit the jackpot . But just as she tried to grab his hand , her face morphed into Tilda's in his mind . It was a face he hated , the one he wished didn't exist . And somehow , it stung . " Get lost ! " Preston shook off the flood of emotions and slapped her hard across the face . Her heavy makeup smeared all over . The woman froze , stunned by the slap . She held her stinging , swollen cheek , staring at Preston in disbelief . " Get out , bitch ! You think Mr.

Preston would ever fall for your games ? " " Many women are trying to get Mr. Preston . You ? You're not even worth shining his shoes , ugly bitch . " Thought he was drunk and you had a chance ? Dream on

, slut ! " Preston's lackeys jeered , throwing insult after insult . Humiliated , the woman grabbed her purse and ran off without a word . The scene drew plenty of attention . But since it was the Bells causing the scene , nobody dared to step in . Tilda watched the whole drunken chaos . She just stared , speechless . Great , she ran into him again .

Ugh , terrible luck . She decided to just ignore him . Preston sobered up slightly .. His gaze swept the room and locked on Tilda . " Damn it ... Tilda , why are you stuck in my head ? Go away ! " His face flushed . Preston wiped his mouth , muttering drunken nonsense . No way ! I won't admit it ! He was supposed to hate Tilda - nothing but hate . Why couldn't he forget her ? He'd always loved Kyla . Always . Tonight , Preston was drowning his sorrows at Nightingale Bar . First , it was because of Rebecca .

No matter how furious he was with her for embarrassing the family , she was still his little sister . They grew up together . He couldn't be cold like Ryan and just cut her off . Preston watched Rebecca lying in the hospital , connected to machines and still unconscious , while Daphne pined away with worry . He felt heartbroken .

Second , he couldn't bring himself to truly hate Tilda . She started all the trouble ! But lately , he found himself thinking about her way more than Kyla . That never happened before . That thought made Preston snap .

He thought that if he could punch Tilda , he could erase her from his mind . That bitch must've put a spell on me ! I'll kill her ! " Mr. Preston ! " Completely wasted , Preston was unpredictable . His lackeys couldn't stop him . They just watched him storm toward Tilda , his eyes full of rage . " Tilda ! " On stage , Una , half - drunk and singing , jumped in shock . She saw Preston rushing over , but she didn't recognize him at first . She thought he was just some drunk creep after Tilda . She wanted to jump off the stage and kick him .

Tilda saw him barreling toward her , clearly ready for trouble . She let out a sharp click of her tongue . Shit . Even drunk , he still wanted to cause trouble . The moment she saw Preston , her eyelid already twitched . And he acted as she expected . She grabbed a bottle from the table and smashed it over his head before he could even react . The place went silent .

Everyone froze . Preston's lackeys couldn't believe it . Tilda actually smashed a bottle over Preston's head in front of everyone ! That was impressive ! The blow left Preston dazed .

Already Junk , he staggered and tumbled backward . His head throbbed , warm liquid dripping down his scalp . Before he could even think . Tilda grabbed another bottle . She pressed her foot onto his chest . "

Damn ! That hurts ! " Preston growled , trying to struggle . But with her foot pinning him , he couldn't move .

Chapter 423 Step on His Face The impact was deep and merciless , In the next heartbeat , the bottle exploded against Preston's skull again . Shards of glass scattered through the air and rained to the floor like a deadly shower . Preston collapsed instantly , his body limp , his consciousness engulfed by blackness . Tilda pressed the bottom of her shoe into his face , grinding it down with the contempt one would show to something rotting on the road . Only when she was satisfied did she clap her hands together as if dusting them off . She then turned her back on him .

She never gave Preston another look . His head was split open , blood soaking his hair , and he lay there barely clinging to life . " Tilda , are you okay ? " Una rushed to her , her voice carrying both panic and fire . Tilda bent down and brushed her fingers lightly through Una's hair . " I'm fine . Just warming up . Taking out trash doesn't even count as effort . " Warming up . Taking out trash . If Preston had been awake to hear that , his pride alone would have knocked him out all over again . " That bastard ! Him again !

He tried something with you , and now he made you dirty your hands dealing with him ! " Una's voice rose with rage , her eyes flashing like sparks . Months of following Tilda had burned away the old mediator she once was . The girl who always calmed tempers was long gone . Her brows arched , her jaw locked tight , and she charged forward to unleash several savage kicks . Her target was clear . She aimed straight for Preston's crotch .

Lie Lace Dir That was a lesson Tilda had drilled into her .

No amount of martial arts mattered in a real moment like this . The only way to stop a man instantly was to crush him where it hurt most . That would take them out immediately . It was the one pain that no man could withstand . And sure enough , even though Preston was completely unconscious , his body jerked and convulsed when the blows landed . His features twisted , his lips tightening with the echo of agony that pulled him deeper into misery . The bottles to his skull had been vicious , but Una's kicks cut deeper than both combined . " What the hell are you two doing !

" Preston's crew finally snapped out of their daze . Fury lit their faces as they stormed toward the women , their shouts filling the bar . " Mr. Preston , can you hear us ? " " God , he's out cold ! Look at all the blood ! " " Of course he's bleeding ! He just got a bottle broken over his head twice ! " " Call an ambulance now ! " One man's glare could have torn flesh . His voice dripped with hate as he pointed at Tilda and Una . " You're done . You touched Mr. Preston , and by tomorrow Slosa won't even remember your names ! " Tilda and Una exchanged a knowing glance . What an idiot .

He doesn't even know who the people standing before him are ? Tilda had broken far more dangerous people than Preston . Rebecca had been left gasping for life beneath her fists .

Her Faces Entire branches of the Bells had been crushed under her hand . She had even destroyed Rebecca right in front of Abram himself . And this was Preston . Preston was nothing . " Quit running your mouths ! Whatever they did to Mr. Preston , we'll make them pay it back with interest ! " Every man in Preston's circle knew the truth .

If the Bells discovered Preston had been reduced . to this in their company , they would be the ones to pay . Their only option was to hand over the women . It was the only way to save their own skins . Chivalry , dignity , pride - none of it mattered against the weight of survival . Their eyes glimmered with malice as they closed in , ready to spill blood . The tension snapped tight , ready to break into violence at any second . The rest of the bar scrambled for safety . Nobody wanted to be caught in what was coming . Plenty of them pitied Tilda .

First she had been hunted down by Preston , and now she was trapped by his men . But pity would not be enough to save her . Preston still carried the name of the Bells . A woman smashing his head in for all to see was a crime too great to ignore . No one dared to step in . None had the power to . At most , a few slipped out to find the Nightingale Bar's security . " How interesting . I don't remember anyone having the guts to break my bar's rules . Are you going to start this trend ? " The voice cut through the noise like a blade , sharp and cold , and the room froze at once .

Alfie stepped forward , dressed in a suit the color of dark wine . His height towered at six - foot - three , his hand buried in his pocket , and his face carried the grim power of a king carved out of another century . Behind him trailed a mass of men , their bodies like a wall of muscle and steel , their eyes forward . locked

They were armed and eager , waiting for nothing but his word to tear through the crowd " Shit , that's Alfie ! " " Goddamn it , why is he here ?

" On paper , the Woodward family might not rival the Bells , but Alfie Woodward was untouchable . He was the heir to the Woodward Group , and everyone knew his bond with Jude , the leader of the Bells , was iron . Between a minor player like Preston and a man tied to Jude himself , the choice was clear . The crowd stood frozen in fear . This was the man destined to lead the Woodward Group . His very presence was overwhelming . Alfie rarely appeared in the public spaces of his own bar . On the rare occasions he came , it was always to the highest VIP suites .

Even the most loyal patrons almost never laid eyes on him . The women in the room shifted instantly , their hearts turning in a single breath . Preston might have been good - looking , but beside Alfie , he was dirt on the floor . They could not even be compared . And if Alfie carried this kind of presence , then Jude himself , Slosa's most feared and admired man , could only be something beyond imagining . And they say he carries the strongest aura of them all . " M ... Mr. Alfie , " one of Preston's men stammered , his voice breaking under the weight of the moment . " She blindsided Mr.

Preston . She smashed a bottle over his head . We can't let that go unanswered . " Yeah , exactly ! Maybe we should call the police ? Then again , this can't go public . It would be better to handle it in private . "

Chapter 424

One of Preston's lackeys finally found the courage to speak , But the response he received was worse than cold . " You demand an answer . Alfie's eyes cut straight through him like a razor . " Do you think the security cameras in my bar are just for show ? If that fool hadn't tried to lay his hands on Ms Tilda , none of this would have happened . " Before the man could reply , Alfie's foot slammed into his chest . The impact launched him backward . He hit the floor hard and rolled , clutching himself as screams tore from his throat . The rest of them froze in place .

Not a single one dared to even speak . Their hearts pounded so heavily they thought the sound might betray them . Every last one of them wanted to crawl into the floor and disappear . They prayed to God that Alfie had not noticed them . They all knew how far Alfie's power extended in Slosa . If he set his eyes on them , Preston's protection would be worthless . By sunrise , their families could be erased from the city as if they had never existed . " Beautiful work , Alfie ! That's it , keep crushing them ! Bastards came after my precious Tilda ! Make them wish they were never born !

" Una's voice rang out , sharp and cager . She hopped in place , her fists flailing like the paws of a playful but furious kitten , overjoyed to see justice carried out . Alfie glanced at her , and the faintest trace of a smirk tugged at his lips . His strikes grew sharper , every kick laced with more fury .. " Alfie ? " The crowd gawked in disbelief . She had spoken his name with casual ease , as though he were some college buddy And instead of bristling at the disrespect , Alfie seemed entertained .

Whispers spread like wildfire .

Curiosity churned in the air as eyes darted to Una . She looked so young , hardly out of college , yet she spoke to the heir of the Woodward Group without a shred of fear . Tilda's voice rang clear , smooth as glass . " Alfie , I need some hangover cure . " Alfie turned his eyes to her , the weight of his gaze impossible to ignore . A small smile lifted his . mouth . " Of course . " He eased back a few paces , giving her the space she wanted . Preston's men stiffened , their faces drained of color .

None of them could tell if Alfie was about to let them live or if he was setting them up for their end . Then Tilda's words cut the silence like a judge's gavel . " Stand up and come at me together . If you manage to beat me , we will forget all of this . But if you lose , no matter how badly you end up bleeding , you will have no one to blame but yourselves ." Tilda rolled her shoulders , her joints snapping with a crisp crack . Fire still churned through her body . The alcohol in her veins and Preston's vile touch had only stoked her rage .

If she didn't burn it out now , it would smolder inside her all night . " What what did you just say ? " one of them muttered . The words barely left his lips before Tilda struck . Her leg shot out and slammed into a man's stomach . His body lifted like a rag doll , flew across the floor , and smashed into a stack of tables thirty feet . away . He didn't even get out a scream before his body went slack . Alfie moved to Una's side in one smooth step , his presence towering . His eyes glinted with frost . " If you don't fight now , you're already ." That snapped the lackeys awake .

Their survival instincts roared inside them . Their eyes hardened into feral glares as they lunged at Tilda . They either fought , or they perished .

To them , she was only a woman . If they won , maybe they could live . If they stood still , they were already dead . Tilda spun , her heel whipping into one man's jaw . His body flew into another , sending both crashing down like toppled pins . FIBRA She snatched up a bottle from the table , and with one brutal swing , shattered it across another man's skull .

Glass burst like fireworks, spraying across the floor . The brawl turned into a showcase of her wrath . One by one , they collapsed , broken bodies piling around her . Their groans vanished beneath the bass still thrumming faintly through the bar's speakers . When her fury finally drained , Tilda exhaled , her breath sharp but steady . Una slipped from Alfie's protective shadow and skipped toward Tilda . With a triumphant grin , she pulled a handkerchief from her purse and lifted it high . " Tilda , do you feel better now ? " Tilda wiped at her brow and gave a short nod . " A little better .

" Then she drove her foot into Preston's limp body . " Take this worthless bastard and get him out of my sight in ten seconds . " " Yes ... yes ! " The survivors stumbled to their feet , their bodies aching and broken . They dragged Preston's dead weight across the floor , scraping together the last of their strength to flee the bar . Only once they were gone did Alfie turn back to the women . " Are you both alright ?" Una crossed her arms , her lips pursed in frustration . " We're fine . Those idiots could never hurt our Tilda . But Alfie , you need to step up your security here .

"We came here to relax , not to get harassed . You can't just let every random nobody wander in . You need to start checking who you let through those doors . This is supposed to be the best bar in Slosa . " Gasps rippled through the onlookers . They could not believe their ears . Una had just chewed out Alfie Woodward , the heir of the Woodward Group , as if he were some sloppy bouncer . She had to be insane . Yet Alfie only smiled , his expression softening with warmth . " Alright . Whatever you say , I'll handle it .

" He reached out and ruffled her hair gently , like a man spoiling the one person he could never refuse . The crowd nearly fell apart . What in God's name are we watching here ? Have our eyes betrayed us ? Did the world change when I didn't notice ? Alfie wasn't just ignoring her disrespect . He was indulging it , treating her words like gospel . The men stared , dumbstruck . Una wasn't nearly as polished or striking as Tilda , but Alfie was clearly drawn to her . The women seethed with envy .

They would have traded their souls to stand where Una stood , even if it lasted for just a single night with Alfie . It was the only explanation . Una had to have saved the universe in another lifetime . Nothing else could explain why Alfie Woodward treated her with such tenderness . Even Tilda's eyes widened as she watched the two together . This can't possibly be real . Could it ?

Chapter 425 Surprised Tilda Does Alfie like ... Tilda , as her closest friend , could not stop worrying about what kind of man Una might end up with . The thought of Allie , the heir to the Woodward Group , becoming that man made her uneasy . She believed he was far from the right choice . Still , she held herself back . Breaking them apart now felt wrong . It was better to watch quietly and see how things turned out . Besides , with Una's cluelessness in love , she probably had no idea how close she already seemed . with Alfie . Alfie's voice carried a steady authority .

" No one usually tries to stir up trouble in the Nightingale Bar , since everyone knows it belongs to me . But these people did it anyway , so they'll pay for it . Preston , especially . " But the one Preston had crossed was Tilda . Alfie didn't need to lift a hand . All he had to do was make sure Jude knew about this . One word to Jude was enough to seal Preston's fate . Una scrunched her lips , her tone sharp and annoyed . " Alfie , don't think this makes everything fine . You ruined my night . I don't even want to drink anymore . " Alfie tilted his head , his eyes gleaming with mischief .

Then I'll make it up to you . How about I take both of you somewhere fun another day ? " He's taking us on a ride ... Una wanted to reject him , to sound firm , but the thought of where Alfie could take them made her falter . Those places were not open to ordinary people . She turned to Tilda . " Tilda , what do you think ? " Tilda closed her eyes for a moment , reading his intent . Then " If it's not Lave him a way o worth it . I'm not going . " " It will be worth it , " Alfie promised , his smile carrying quiet mystery .

He reached out again , ruffling Una's hair . Una huffed and swatted at his hand . " Stop it . I'm not some little animal for you to pet ? She tried to shove him off , but at five foot five she looked laughably small against Alfie's six foot three frame . She really did resemble a little kitten trapped in the grip of a giant . Alfie's smile softened without him realizing it . " Your hair feels nice , Una . " " God , I told you to stop , and you still won't ! Tilda , do something ! " Tilda stared at them with wide eyes . Am I being forced to watch PDA here ?

Oh my God . After seeing Una and Tilda off , Alfie pulled out his phone and called Jude . " Jude , are you busy ? " " Not really . What's going on ? " It wasn't Alfie's imagination . Ever since Jude had grown closer to Tilda , something had shifted in him . The man who had once been frozen solid seemed to thaw , showing signs of warmth like he was learning to be human again . To Alfie , it was a good sign . Even though Alfie still spent time with Jude and Maurice , there were moments when Jude's life . looked unbearably cold . He had been raised inside the Bells by Abram himself .

The man carried the blame of his mother's death , was abandoned by his father , and was forced to lead the Bells at a young age . Now that Tilda was in his life , Jude finally had a chance at warmth . If she became Jude's wife one day , they would all feel at ease . Alfie told him what had happened at the Nightingale Bar .

At once , the phone seemed to freeze in his hand . A chill sharper than steel slid through the live The weight of Jude's silence was suffocating , filled with killing intent so strong Allie's own chest tightened .

" I know you can deal with this , so I'll stay out of it . Alfie said quickly , already trying to cut the call short . Even after years of friendship , Jude's fury still felt like the end of the world . Not even Maurice , as reckless as he was , dared to act out when Jude was like this , It had been a long time since Alfie felt this kind of raw , merciless rage from him . Of course , it was because the one harmed had been Tilda . No matter how badly Preston had been beaten , Jude's vengeance would be far worse .

" I will handle this , Jude said , each word slow and cold , like the tolling of a funeral bell . Alfie ended the call in a rush , finally free of that suffocating weight pressing through the phone. It wasn't his problem . He had no plans to let Preston drag him down too . When Daphne and Ryan heard the news , they rushed to the hospital . Preston's head had been stitched and bandaged , his body laid in the best care money could buy . He had sobered up , though his skull still pounded . He remembered what had happened . " Son !

" Daphne hurried to his side , clutching his hand with trembling fingers . Her eyes brimmed with tears as she choked out , " You're safe . Thank God . What happened ? How could something like this happen ? You nearly scared me to death . " " Mom ... I'm sorry . I'm fine , " Preston muttered , his voice low and guilty . He remembered drinking , losing control , and laying hands on Tilda before passing out . He didn't even dare to raise his voice . Ryan's face was hard and shadowed as he growled , " What exactly happened ? I went to the Nightingale Bar and asked for the surveillance footage .

They refused to give me anything . "

Ryan , don't talk to him like that ... " Shut your mouth ! " Ryan snapped , his glare sharp enough to cut . Daphne flinched , silenced instantly . She stroked Preston's hand instead , her touch filled with aching affection . " I'm sorry , Dad , Preston whispered , his voice small . " I was drunk ... and I got into this whole mess

Chapter 426 Ryan's Fury " Have you completely lost it ? You saw what happened to Rebecca , and yet you still went and stirred up this disaster ? " If your grandfather hears about this , you won't survive it . You'll lose more than just your pride You'll be thrown out of this country like some beaten stray , with nothing left . " Preston kept his head low , unable to meet Ryan's eyes as his father's fury struck like a whip . In the end . Preston could only blame himself . He had placed the weapon straight into his enemies ' hands .

This was his mistake . For as long as he could remember , Ryan had never unleashed his temper like this . Not until now . Ryan wasn't just furious . He was afraid . He could already see Preston heading toward the same ruin that had swallowed Rebecca whole . If that happened , then his family would be crushed , stripped of every chance it still had . " I know I messed up , Dad . Whatever you want to say to me , I'll accept it . " Preston didn't argue . He didn't offer excuses . He knew words would only fuel the fire . The only path forward was to bow his head and admit his fault .

Ryan's eyes burned into him , his chest tightening with rage that had nowhere to go . Useless . His daughter had already destroyed their chances , and now the son who was supposed to restore hope had ruined everything at the worst possible moment . If not for the looming threat of Marcus ' family , Ryan would have fathered more children long . ago , hidden away with his mistresses , so he wouldn't be cornered like this now . Heavy footsteps echoed in the hall . " Sir , wait , this is the VIP ward . You can't just go inside ... The door burst open with a crash .

A man entered , tall and sharp in his movements , his black tailored suit pressed to perfection Gold - rimmed glasses caught the cold hospital lights , his sun - darkened skin and steady stride filling the room with authority . Ryan's face darkened as soon as he recognized him . " Vassal ? " There was no mistaking him . Jude's shadow , his enforcer , the man who carried out his orders . without hesitation . Ryan had seen him before . He knew nothing good would follow him here . The nurse stumbled in behind him , flustered and pale .

" I'm sorry , Mr. Bell . I tried to stop him , but he forced his way in ... " I only need a moment , " Vassal replied coolly . His gaze shifted to Preston . " Mr. Bell has made his decision . Because of your corruption at the branch , your abuse of power , and your embezzlement , your position is revoked . From this day forward , you will have no ties to DY Group . " " What ? " Preston's voice cracked , his face twisted in disbelief . Jude had cut him down without hesitation , severing his future with a single blow .

The shock rattled through him until his skull throbbed and his stitches felt like they might tear apart . Ryan's fury surged . He nearly lunged forward , his eyes bloodshot . " Impossible ! My son would never stoop to this ! " But the weight of the words pressed on him like a sentence already passed . And he cut off all our ties with DY Group . Without Preston , his family was . Preston had been their only chance to challenge Jude . Without him , there was no fight left to give . wasn't Without a stage to play with , there was no performance to put on . " Mr.

Bell knew this would be hard for you to accept , " Vassal said , his tone flat and unshaken .

Which is why he prepared evidence . " He placed a thick stack of files on the table . Ryan and Preston leaned closer . Their faces drained of color as they flipped through the pages , Everything was there . Every false number , every cut corner , every scheme for quick profit . Preston had returned from overseas desperate to prove himself , desperate to rise fast as head. of the branch . Ryan had guided him , even orchestrated much of it himself .

If they made every move taking no risks at all , they could never fully control the subsidiary , let alone work their way into DY Group headquarters and fight Jude for the throne . Together they thought they had hidden every trace . They thought they'd erased every evidence perfectly .. But Jude had been watching all along . Every step , every move , quietly collected until the moment came to strike . The evidence was irrefusable . Neither father nor son could speak in their defense . " There is one more matter , " Vassal continued coldly . " Mr.

Abram is aware of what happened at the Nightingale Bar . He expects Mr. Preston to restrain himself from now on and stop causing disgrace . " Preston's hands shook as he clenched his teeth . " You told him ! Jude , is this what you call strength ? You strike from the shadows because you're afraid . You're terrified that I'll rise , that I'll step into headquarters and take your place . " A faint smirk tugged at Vassal's lips , contempt gleaming in his eyes . " A man who drinks himself senseless , loses control , and ends up beaten half to death in a hospital bed is not someone Mr. Bell fears .

" " You- " " And do not fool yourself , " Vassal cut him off , his words slicing the air . " Mr. Abram knows more than you think . Much more . " Goodbye . " He turned and left , his final words lingering like blades in the silence .

Out in the hall , he pulled out his phone . " Boss , it's done . " " Good , " Jude's voice replied . He stood before a floor - to - ceiling window on the hundredth floor , the glittering city stretching beneath him like a sea of stars . His gaze was sharp , his thoughts unfathomable . " Preston, he murmured .

" you think this is the end . But it has only just begun . " In the past , Jude had allowed the second branch to exist as puppets under his thumb , sparing them for the sake of family ties .

Chapter 427 Revenge . Now ? Now you've touched Tilda with those filthy fingers of yours . I swear you will pay a price worse than death . Inside the hospital room ... * Pribaned ? Preston's skin had gone white . " Dad ... what do we do now ? I can't get into DY Group anymore ! " Ryan's face looked just as bleak , his jaw locked tight , his silence saying more than words ever could . Preston kept mumbling in panic beside him , his voice like nails on a chalkboard . Ryan's patience , already frayed from sleepless nights and the disaster with Rebecca , finally snapped .

He lifted his hand and struck Preston hard across the face . " Shut the hell up ! " The sound rung through the room . Preston's eyes widened in shock . His wound tore open , blood spreading across wrapped around his head . the bandage The nurse gasped , her body frozen in fear . " Um ... Mr. Preston's bleeding again . I'll get the doctor right away ! " She turned and bolted . This was far beyond anything she wanted to be mixed up in . She had only been assigned to care for Preston , secretly wishing for some silly fairytale romance . Now , staying alive felt like more than enough .

" Honey , please don't get so angry . Preston's just scared , Daphne stammered , stepping in front of her son and facing her husband with shaking hands .. " You stay here and watch him . I'll figure out what to do next , " Ryan said , his voice flat and cold . He shoved his hand into his pocket , the same hand that had just struck his son , and walked out without a backward glance .

No matter how much fury burned inside him , he had to hold it in Preston was his one chance of standing above the Bells and defeating Jude That hope could not be allowed to die . But even Ryan himself no longer knew how to set things right . After he left. Daphne leaned over her son and whispered with desperate tenderness . " Don't be afraid , my boy . As long as I'm here , no one will ever lay a hand on you , even if it takes my life to keep you safe , " " Mom ... what am I supposed to do ?

I've been thrown out of DY Group , and Grandpa knows about everything . I have no place left in the Bells . " Preston's tears streamed down his cheeks . you make " It's all right . Your father and I will carry you if we must . Nothing is final . If y something of yourself , I'll beg your grandfather to let you back into DY Group . " You can't lose yourself to despair . Heal first , then wait for the right moment to show Jude you're not beaten . " " Mom ... there's no way . Jude dragged me to the bottom this time .

He won't ever give me the chance to rise against him . " His voice sounded empty , drained of all fight . The doctor rushed in , quickly tending to the bleeding wound . Preston sat like a statue , his face blank , letting them move him around as if he were a doll . Daphne's chest ached as she watched him , the pain twisting so deep she could hardly breathe . " Preston , you must be strong . You're all I have left now . " Your sister is gone , so you cannot collapse . This family is waiting for you to pull it back together . Seeing you like this breaks me apart . " " Mom ... I'm sorry .

I just need to calm down and figure out where to go from here . Jude already destroyed me , and I couldn't fight back . I'm worthless . " " Preston shook with grief and slammed his fist against his thigh . " Mr. Preston , please era calm ! That will only tear your wound open again ! " Mrs. Bell , let him rest . He needs to settle himself " " Son , focus on healing . I'll come see you tomorrow , " Daphne said softly , brushing her tears away as she walked out . A rush of icy air hit her the moment she stepped outside , snapping her mind clear .

Her eyes gleamed with fire and hate . Tilda . That cursed girl . If Preston has never crossed paths with her ... And Rebecca None of this would have happened. Both of her children , her very heart and soul All destroyed because of Tilda . She imagined Tilda's smirk , her mocking laughter , reveling in their ruin . Daphne's chest seethed with rage so fierce it threatened to consume her . Her nails bit into her palms , yet even the sting could not pull her back to reason . Ryan and Preston had both pleaded with her not to interfere .

But after watching her son and daughter crushed like this , how could she still call herself a mother if she stayed silent ? Her hands shook as she pulled out her phone . She typed and sent a single message . " I want you to kill someone for me . It must be seamless . No matter the cost , I'll pay it . Tell me if you accept . " The answer came in seconds . " And the target ? " " Tilda Jenson . " Silence for a moment .

In an instant , the other side pulled Tilda's file . " World university painting champion . The long - lost daughter of the Jensons .

Rising star at Orica University , Winner of a motorsport title in Motrar . " The person you want dead carries quite a list of titles . " " I know exactly who you are . You're the top assassin network on the dark web . Once you accept a contract , there isn't a soul alive you cannot reach .

Chapter 428 Foolish Move " I don't care how much it takes , I want Tilda gone ! I want it done perfectly , without the smallest mistake ! " Daphne , the Bells ' daughter - in - law and the Kahler princess , had crossed path with this shadowy group by accident . After only a handful of exchanges , she had grown certain of their skill .. Anyone could be erased , so long as their price was paid . Even ... Tilda . That cursed woman . This was the plan Daphne had been crafting from the very beginning . " We're overloaded right now , and we don't have the manpower to test things in the field .

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You know what's inside my heart . " Then you should know what's inside mine , Jude . We have a long road ahead of us . There's plenty of time for us to take it slow . " " Alright . " way in to reno Vassal was on his on Ryan and the others .

Chapter 429 Unbelievable . Vassal froze , his mind blank , his chest rising and falling as if the air earlf weighed the much He wondered if this was nothing but a dream , some trick his brain played on him . Or maybe it was just his eyes blurring what was real . To prove it , he pinched the flesh of his thigh hard enough to leave a mark . The stab of pain made his jaw tighten . This was real .. Not a dream . Oh God . Where was the boss he once knew ? The Jude he remembered stood like a wall of ice , distant and unreachable .

That man had vanished , and in his place was someone else entirely . Vassal's breath hitched . The man who ruled with cold command and cast a shadow too deep to escape . Now Jude seemed more dangerous in silence than he ever did in fury , and that thought crawled down Vassal's spine . He backed away slowly and carefully , his heart pounding against his ribs . Lord above . If the others who followed Jude saw him like this , the shock would crush them . Fear would take root in their bones . Then Jude's voice sliced through the stillness .. " Vassal . " " Yes , sir !

Vassal flinched , sure Jude had caught him sneaking off . He stumbled forward quickly . " Boss , I came to give you the latest report on Ryan and the others ... " That isn't important right now . " Vassal's eyes went wide . " What ? " In all his years with Jude , he had never heard him speak those words . Jude had never dismissed business as unimportant . " Call the nearest country that sells Juliet roses . I want one hundred of them flown in immediately . I need them tonight , no matter the cost . " Juliet roses . The crown jewel of roses .

Delicate , radiant , and regal . Soft as silk , yet burning with passion . And the price was staggering . Three million . Not dollars . Drechmes . The number meant nothing to Jude . But it was not the money that rattled Vassal . It was the fact that Jude wanted roses at all . For anyone who knew Jude , it was like the earth had split open beneath their feet . Unlike Alfie and Maurice , who already understood Jude's devotion to Tilda , Vassal was only now beginning to see it clearly . The Bells were bracing for a storm . Darkness fell when Vassal drove Jude to Tilda's apartment .

Jude had taken care with every detail of his appearance A deep green shirt , fitted slacks , polished high - top leather boots . Casual , of course . His flawless features sharp as a statue , his lips pressed together in stern control , yet a trace of wicked charm lingered there too . In his arms , he carried a fresh bouquet of Juliet roses . No woman alive could resist a man like that - magnetic , breathtaking , carrying roses worth millions that shimmered like sparks in the night . Still ... To Vassal , the sight felt unreal .

The king who once seemed carved from stone had bent himself this far for one woman . It was something Vassal never imagined he would live to see . " Vassal , what do you think of me right now ? "

Jude's question broke the silence . " What ? Uh ... Vassal blinked , lost in thought . " I asked if I look good , " Jude said , his tone cooling . " Yes ... yes , you look good , " Vassal answered quickly . The words were not empty . They were true . Jude was beyond compare . Yet the man who once stood proud and unshakable now needed reassurance . " Good .

" Jude breathed in deeply , steadied himself , and stepped out of the car with the roses in hand . Vassal stayed behind , his body trembling and drenched in sweat . He sank back into his seat as if every ounce of strength had left him .

When Tilda received Jude's message , she rushed to the door ... The moment she opened it , her eyes landed on the bouquet first , then on the man who carried it . He was so striking he seemed unreal . Her lips lifted into a grin as she took the roses without hesitation . " Well , look at you , Mr. CEO .

These roses don't even sell in Cetherland . You must've spent a fortune on them . " " As long as you like them . Tilda , I don't care what they cost . " " Smooth talker . Come on in . Dinner's almost done . " She carried the roses into the living room and set them gently on the couch . Then she hummed a tune as she hurried back into the kitchen . The second Jude stepped inside , a wave of rich fragrance wrapped around him . The scent tugged at his senses , twisting his stomach with hunger . His training had taught him to endure every need , but this smell was impossible to ignore .

It was proof of Tilda's skill in the kitchen . Or maybe it was more than that . It was because she , the woman he loved , had cooked this meal with her own hands . That made it the finest food he could ever taste . He watched her move in the kitchen , apron tied , her steps quick and graceful as she worked . His eyes softened , filled with a warmth he had never allowed himself before . For the first time , Jude felt a happiness he had chased his whole life . The simple kind . The aroma of dinner in the air . The woman he cherished waiting for him at home .

The promise of laughter , shared stories from the day , and quiet talks about tomorrow .

Chapter 430 Dinner Steam drifted up from the pot , wrapping the kitchen in warmth as Tilda carefully ladled soup into a waiting bowl . She could feel it again , that steady weight of Jude's gaze pressing against her , steady and unwavering , watching her every move . She set the soup down on the table with a soft clink and tugged off her oven mitts , rolling her eyes so hard it was almost theatrical . " Quit staring at me like that . You're making it impossible to keep my head straight . Look , I'm already five minutes behind schedule .

I had everything planned out , " Jude's voice dropped low , strained as though he was fighting to keep control . " I'm sorry . Tilda . It's just that ... when it comes to you , I can't make myself look away " He sounded nothing like his usual self . His words tumbled out quickly , as if he was afraid she might take offense . Tilda gave a small cough , her face warming . " Yeah , I know I'm stunning , but saying it like

that I don't even know how to answer you now . " Her grin came out crooked and awkward . Jude shook his head slowly . It isn't only about that , Tilda .

You know what my life was like . Even though my grandmother took care of me , I never knew what a family felt like . " My mom died giving birth to me . My dad collapsed after she passed . He never raised his hand . against me , but he looked at me the way everyone else did , like I was the reason she was gone . " For me to sit here while someone I care about makes a hearty meal , and to wait for it to be set in front of me ... it sounds pathetic , but this has never happened to me before . " Her chest tightened at the raw edge in his voice .

She breathed out a soft sigh and slid the bowl of soup toward him . " Go on , have a taste . I bought chicken and mushroom . Tell me what you think . " " Alright . " Jude realized he had said too much , turned the moment too heavy . Tonight wasn't supposed to feel that way . He lifted the spoon , dipped it into the broth , and brought it to his lips .

The flavor hit him all at once . His brows arched , surprise breaking across his face . This s strange ... why Tilda leaned forward , eager . " So , is it good ? Does it finally taste like real soup to you ?

" He gave a firm nod . " You expected this , didn't you ? Tilda , how did you make this happen ? " His senses had sharpened somewhat since meeting her , but his taste was still faint , muted . Food usually came to him in dull hints , never the way it was meant to . Yet now her cooking poured over his tongue with richness , giving him back nearly eighty - five percent of what he thought he had lost . It wasn't a hundred percent , but it was better than before . Her lips curved into a proud smile . " Remember when I asked for that research diet you came up with for Omega - type blood carriers ?

I slipped some of those parts into my recipes . " Back when you couldn't taste anything , you had to use that black powder to get by . Now that you've regained at least ten percent of your taste , the mix works in your system . I honestly didn't think it would , but look at this - it worked . Ha ! " Jude found himself caught , unable to look away from her smug little triumph . His mouth softened with a faint smile . " So I've been turned into your test subject . " Of course you have . But you just tasted something wonderful , didn't you ? So are you going to complain ?

" Her grin burned bright , playful and daring , as if she carried the fire of the sun . The sight of her struck him harder than any blow could . Warmth spread through his chest , chasing away every shadow that had ever tried to claim him . His eyes narrowed slightly , his voice steady and certain . " No. If it's you , you can do whatever you want with me . " Tilda sucked in a breath the wrong way , choking and

coughing , her shoulders jerking as she tried to catch air . She had only been teasing . He did not have to be so serious about a line like that . Do whatever I want with him ?

What does that mean ?

Her mind rushed to places she shoved away at once . No. Absolutely not . " Tilda , are you okay ? " Jude leaned in close , his hand firm against her back , concern carved into his face . " I'm fine . Just swallowed wrong . Tell me this though , your grandmother never cooked for you ? " Jude shook his head slowly . " She came from old money . She never touched housework . Her family made sure her hands stayed smooth and untouched .

" " Oh , that's rich people's thing , I wouldn't know anything about that . " She wasn't trying to be funny . She had been born into the Jensions , then abandoned at birth . She grew up in an orphanage , doing chores from the time she was little , scrubbing floors , washing clothes , and standing at the stove when she was tall enough . " Tilda , you're brilliant , " Jude said in a low , steady tone would " That formula wasn't built to be easy . Even a scientist with decades of experience struggle with those codes and numbers . " She waved him off with a laugh . " Don't butter me up .

We both carry the omega blood type . This much was bound to be possible . Call it a gift from above . " Tilda stuck out her tongue cheekily then speared a piece of steak with her fork and slid it into her mouth . " Mmm , perfect texture . I knew it . I'm incredible . " She didn't bother hiding her self - praise , reaching for another bite without shame . Tilda had no issue with a little wine at dinner . She wasn't one to drink hard , but a sip or two calmed her nerves and always helped her drift off to sleep .