



FACING THE NEW MASTER

Camila turned in the direction Leonard was pointing, irritation still tight in her chest. All she saw at first was the long corridor, warm light spilling across polished marble.

Then she caught movement to the side. A man with familiar clothing was walking away, hands in his pockets, shoulders drawn but straight. He was a few pieces away from where he had stood earlier, heading toward the main stairway.

Her heart jolted. "Wait," she whispered. "That is the CEO of Xavier Global Holdings?"

"Yes," Leonard replied, his voice carrying a quiet pride. "He just flew in today from Westeria. He is the grandson of Master Magnus Xavier."

The revelation nearly knocked the breath out of her. The same man she had dismissed not too long ago. The one she had spoken down to like he was in her way. Her stomach turned cold.

Ethan made only a few more steps before Leonard called out. "Master Ethan."

Ethan stopped. He didn't whirl around like someone eager for attention. He paused, gathered himself, then turned his head slightly.

Leonard moved toward him at once, footsteps quick but respectful. Camila stayed frozen for a heartbeat, shame pinning her feet to the floor. Then she forced herself to follow behind Leonard, her heels suddenly feeling too loud, too sharp.

When they reached Ethan, Steward Leonard bowed his head lightly. "



Master Ethan," he said, voice lower now. "Forgive the disturbance."

Camila hesitated, then bent at the waist as well, the folder pressed to her chest. She could not bring herself to look at Ethan's face.

She felt very embarrassed.

"Mrs Camila Rowan here," Leonard continued, "who is the Executive Director of Internal Operations in Xavier Global Holdings, has a presentation that needs your immediate attention."

Camila nodded quickly, as if her life depended on his words lining up in her favor. "Y-yes, Master Ethan," she added, her voice was smaller than she intended.

Leonard tried to soften the tension with a small laugh. "It looks like duty is already calling, even though it is less than an hour since power has been transferred to you Master Ethan."

Ethan's gaze slid to him, then to Camila. His eyes were calm.

He studied her like he was cataloguing everything she had just done and said.

"What is this presentation all about?" he asked.

His tone was even, but Camila heard the test inside it. He had heard her earlier. She knew it. There was no other reason for the weight in his voice.

Leonard glanced at her, gently motioning with his hand. "Mrs Rowan, please explain."



Her palms were damp. She shifted the folder and opened it, pages rustling louder than they should. Her fingers trembled, and one sheet almost slipped. She caught it with an awkward movement, cheeks burning.

"It... it's about the Titanflex Skytower Infrastructure Project," she began. Her tongue felt thick. "The, the engineers at Xavier Tech have completed the last internal audits and w-we are ready to begin the final construction and installation phase. Imperium Bank's new headquarters in the capital depends on this system. We only need your approval to activate the final sequence."

Ethan watched her, saying nothing.

She swallowed. "The Titanflex machine is the only construction system in the whole continent capable of handling a skyscraper of that scale. W-we designed it specifically for Imperium Bank's load requirements. If we don't get your approval t-today, the schedule collapses. Imperium Bank might take their business elsewhere and—"

Her voice broke on the last word. She forced herself to continue. "I... I also have a flight tomorrow. I'm due in Lingham for an interview with the election council. If I don't appear, I will be disqualified from the mayoral race. So I need, I mean, we need your approval now so that the project can proceed while I am away, and—"

Ethan lifted his hand slightly.

"Enough," he said.

The word cut clean through her panic. She went silent at once. Leonard straightened a little, eyes flickering between them.



"I am no longer interested in attending to any official duties today," Ethan said quietly. "I will attend to anything related to the Xavier Group in two days' time."

Camila stared at him, stunned. "Two days?" she repeated. "S-sir, with respect, we don't have two days. Imperium Bank—the board is watching us, and I have—"

"I heard everything you said to Mr Leonard earlier on," Ethan replied. "About Titanflex. About Imperium. About your politics. I understand your situation."

She clutched the folder tighter. "Then you know how serious this is. The project is at its final stage. We only need your signature. Ten minutes and this entire problem disappears."

"Not for me," Ethan said. His voice didn't rise. That made it worse. "For you, maybe. Not for me."

She took a step closer, desperation starting to crack through the professional mask. "Master Ethan, if we delay, Imperium Bank could lose faith in Xavier Global Holdings. We are talking about what could be the biggest financial tower in the capital. If they walk away, it will damage our reputation and our value. That affects you directly now."

"Imperium Bank can wait," Ethan answered. "The project can wait."

Her heart dropped. "I can't," she said before she could stop herself. "I have spent months preparing for this campaign. I've poured money, time, everything I have into it. I've already been scheduled publicly. If I miss that interview, my entire political ambition ends before it starts. I am not asking for much, just a brief review, your approval,



and I will—"

Ethan's eyes hardened a little. "Your political ambition," he said, "is not my responsibility. Xavier Global Holdings is."

The words hit like a slap, even though his tone never changed. Camila felt heat rush to her face. Pride and fear twisted together.

She was actually not prepared for all of this.