

Chapter 27

Haven Kramer POV:

Mrs. Villarreal writhed on the floor, her nails digging into the expensive rug, her eyes shot with blood and pure, undiluted terror.

"Antidote... give me the antidote..." she gasped between agonized moans.

I crouched down, meeting her terrified gaze. "An antidote? Why would I give you an antidote?"

My words were a bucket of ice water, extinguishing her last sliver of hope. She stared at me, stunned, before her pleas devolved into desperate, incoherent sobs.

"I was wrong... I was wrong... please..."

"Oh? And what, precisely, were you wrong about?" I asked, my tone full of detached curiosity, like a cat toying with a mouse.

"I shouldn't have... shouldn't have withheld your supplies... I shouldn't have disrespected you..." she blubbered, tears and snot streaming down her face.

I nodded, satisfied. "Good. It seems you're not entirely stupid."

I stood and walked to the window, gazing out at the manicured gardens. "The 'dessert' I gave you has three stages. What you just experienced was merely the first. The appetizer."

I continued, my voice calm and conversational. "In the second stage, the toxin will begin to corrode your nerve endings. You'll feel as if thousands of ants are chewing on your bones. The pain will be unbearable."

"In the third stage, your internal organs will begin to slowly liquefy. After seven days, you will dissolve into a puddle of pus in unimaginable

agony." I described the most horrific fate in the most placid tone.

Mrs. Villarreal's body trembled even more violently. She looked at me as if I were a demon crawled up from the depths of hell.

Her psychological defenses, battered by pain and terror, shattered completely.

"No... please, no..." She reached out a trembling hand, trying to crawl toward me, to grab the hem of my dress. "I'll give you anything! Anything!"

I took a fastidious step back, avoiding her touch.

"Excellent." I took another small vial from my pocket, shook out a single white pill, and tossed it on the floor in front of her. "This is an inhibitor. It will temporarily halt the pain and allow you to survive the day."

She scrambled for it like a starving dog for a scrap of meat, grabbing the pill and stuffing it into her mouth without a second thought.

A few minutes later, the violent cramps in her body began to subside. She was still weak and trembling, but the all-consuming agony receded.

She lay panting on the floor, looking up at me with nothing but raw, primal fear in her eyes.

I stood over her and stated my terms. "First, the keys to every storeroom in this manor, and the master keys to every room. Now."

"Second, all of the estate's account ledgers and full authority over all financial expenditures. Now."

"And third, from this day forward, the hiring, firing, and assignment of all servants in this manor will be decided by me."

With each demand, her face grew paler. I was stripping her of the very foundations of her power, the source of her wealth and authority.

Her lips moved, a silent, pathetic protest forming.

I let out a cold laugh. "You can refuse, of course. But the inhibitor only lasts for twelve hours. If you haven't made up your mind by then, you can enjoy the 'ants chewing on your bones' experience."

That was the final blow.

"I'll give them to you! I'll give you everything!" She surrendered completely, pressing her forehead to the cold floor in a gesture of absolute submission.

She immediately ordered the terrified Holly to fetch a large ring of keys and several thick, leather-bound ledgers.

I took the heavy keys and the ledgers, feeling the weight of power settle into my hands. Checkmate.

"As for the full antidote," I said, looking down at her, "that will depend on your future performance. Every day, you will receive one inhibitor pill. If you behave, after seven days, you will receive the antidote for the first stage." ⓪

I turned to leave the cloying, perfumed room. "Clean this place up. I don't want the Alpha to smell anything... unpleasant." It was my first command as the new mistress of the house.



