



## TWENTY FOUR – ENEMIES' DISGRACE

"We're unable to track the number, sir. It's been badly scrambled." One of the hackers said to the deputy.

The hackers had been trying to trace the number which delivered the kidnap video for hours. Apparently, there was still no luck.

"That's not good. Send it to our hackers at headquarters. Let them give it a shot." The deputy ordered.

"From the state of the building, it doesn't look like they're in the country." One of the officers observed.

Luke turned to him,

"What do you mean?"

"I'm just saying." He walked over to the computer, restarted the video and zoomed in on the plants peeking from the ceiling, "this kind of vegetation will never survive in the London cold. That video was probably shot in warmer areas, like Las Vegas."

"Wonderful job there, Kent." The deputy clapped him on the shoulder and turned to Luke.

"I think he's right. This means that our investigations may not be centred on London alone."

Luke could not believe this.



"Are you telling me that within twenty four hours, the kidnappers got Nina out of the country and had enough time to still shoot a video? That's impossible."

"It may look impossible, but it can definitely be done."

Something was tugging at Luke's mind. Then it hit him.

"What if they were in a green house? Surely, London has that."

The officers stared at each other in confusion.

"A rundown greenhouse? That place looked abandoned."

"Yes, but I was taught in Vegetation class that most dilapidated houses in London were converted to natural greenhouses because their walls supported growth of vegetation. Those might probably be in the warmer areas. Maybe up north."

The deputy paced to the window, mulling over Luke's words.

"It's worth investigating. Kent, locate Maria and get me a map of London immediately."

Kent saluted.

"Yes sir. Quick question though. Are we launching a direct attack? They may end up hurting the hostage if they notice we're after them."

The deputy stroked his chin silently.

"Luke, how quickly can you get the twenty million?" ①

Luke's gaze snapped to him in surprise, but he replied,

"I could arrange something in the next few hours."

"Good. Get the money. I've got a plan."

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Luke's driver came to a stop at Oasis International Bank, one of the top, leading banks in London.

His door was pulled open and he stepped down.

"You stay here," he said to his driver. "I won't be long."

"Yes, sir."

As he walked into the bank, he tried not to think about the fact that it was more than twenty four hours and Nina was still in the custody of kidnappers.

She could be hurt or worse.

He quickened his pace into the building, going straight to the receptionist.

"Hello. I would love to speak to the manager."

The young lady gave him an odd look.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but this is extremely important. I'm sure he'd want to

deal with it personally.”

“Okay, sir. What’s your name, please?”

“Luke. Luke Bradford.”

“Okay. Give me a minute.”

She picked up the phone on the desk and placed a call, probably to the manager.

“Hello, sir? There’s a Luke Bradford here to see you. You’re coming down? Oh. Okay.”

She dropped the phone and turned to Luke, surprise etched on her features.

“You must be a very important customer because the manager is coming down to see you.”

Strangely, those words did not put Luke at ease, neither did it bring a smile to his face.

He was ushered to a visitor’s chair. Five minutes later, the manager walked in and Luke got to his feet.

“Luke Bradford. What exactly are you doing here?”

“Hello, sir. We meet again.”

Trent Carmichael, father of his former fiancée, Fiona Carmichael was the owner of Oasis Bank. Since Luke’s epic disgrace and exile from Fiona’s birthday party a week ago, he’d never seen him again...until now.



Right now, the older man's face was twisted in a sneer.

"Who let you in?" He turned in a half circle, "who let this wretched riff-raff into my establishment?" His raised voice drew the attention of everyone at the reception area. Soon, he was drawing quite an audience.

Luke could feel embarrassment welling up within him but he tried hard to tamp it down.

"I am not a riff-raff, Mr Carmichael. I am no longer some orphan who was put in your care, neither am I still engaged to your daughter. I suggest you speak to me with respect."

Mr Carmichael stared at him for a beat, shocked at this novel display of audacity.

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to in that manner? Last I checked, you don't have one penny to your name. You have no business being here. Get out, Luke. Now!" He thundered.

Despite the growing crowd, Luke stood his ground.

"I just wanted to..."

"Are you still angry that my daughter rejected you? Is that it?" Mr Carmichael cut in. "You have to understand that we did you a great service. A church rat like you would never be able to care for my daughter like the princess she is. I'm sorry Luke, but we could not accept someone of your class into our family . It would have ruined our image."



All around him, the other customers were exchanging looks and laughing at the epic disgrace. Luke lowered his gaze for a second, waiting for the surge of anger and hurt to pass.

After all these days, he thought he'd be able to completely move past the shame. Guess he was wrong.

"I'm sorry, Mr Bradford, but I'm asking you to leave. Right now. If any of my customers complain of missing properties, you will be arrested immediately."

Stunned at the acute insult, Luke opened his mouth to speak but a voice came from behind him.

"What is going on here?"

Everyone turned in the direction of the voice.

Mr. Carmichael's mouth dropped open in shock when he saw the legendary Lord George the second in his establishment.

He hurried over and gave the older man a bow, clearly in awe.

"S-sir. What a wonderful surprise. It's an honour to have you here. Please, come on in. To what do I owe this pleasure?"

Luke had forgotten that his Grandfather had stopped to speak with an old acquaintance and asked him to go on to the bank. He walked over and stood behind him.

"Grand pa, you didn't have to come in. I was handling things

here.”

Shocked whispers rippled through the entire crowd. Mr Carmichael on the other hand thought he was hearing things.

“Excuse me, your lordship. I can see you employed this young man as your driver.” He gave Luke a look filled with disgust. “ Actually, I know him and he has a very horrible reputation. Why are you letting him stand so close to you, your Lordship? And why is he calling you grandpa?”

Mr. George gave the man before him a hard look.

“Oh. So you’ve met this young man.”

“Yes, sir.” Mr Carmichael said hurriedly. “My father wanted him to get married to my daughter. Horrible, right? I threw him out of my home for a couple of misdemeanours a few days ago. I can see that rather unfortunately, the bastard has found his way into your service. Excuse my language.

I suggest you let him go immediately, your lordship. This young man is nothing but trouble and a parasite. All he does is to look for rich people he can rip off.”

Mr George had heard enough. He wanted to step forward but Luke held him back and gave him a look that said, “calm down,” but he refused to listen. No one spoke about his grandson in that manner and got away with it. No one.

He yanked his hand from Luke’s grip and got in Mr. Carmichael’s face.



"Trent, have you perhaps heard about the Diamond Empire?"

Fiona's dad narrowed his eyes in confusion.

"Yes, of course. The company owns a controlling share of my bank, and you're their leader."

"No, Trent. He's their leader." George stepped aside and pointed at Luke.

Mr Carmichael looked from Luke to his grandfather in confusion.

"What do you mean? Luke is a church rat. How can he head a multi trillion dollar company?"

"Luke. Come here." His grandpa called and Luke stepped forward.

"Now, Trent, I'm going to say this really slowly and I hope you understand because this is the last time I'm going to say it.

This is your boss, his Lordship, Luke George the fourth. He's the heir apparent to the Diamond Empire and my immediate grandson."

For a moment, time stood still. Everyone who'd been laughing at Luke was frozen in shock as Mr. George made the introductions.

Mr. Carmichael on the other hand could not believe his ears.





"Are y-you saying..."

"Yes, Trent. That is exactly what I'm saying. Luke is my lost but found grandson. MY grandson. Now, I will forgive your stupidity earlier on the assumption that you had no idea who you were talking to. However, if it comes to my notice that this radical display of foolishness has occurred again, you will not have a company talk less of food on your table. Am I understood?"

Mr. Carmichael's eyes widened in horror at the obvious threat.

"Yes, sir. Of course. I'm deeply sorry."

"I want you to apologise to my grandson, and that apology better be good. Make sure you bow as well."

Mr. Carmichael turned slowly in Luke's direction, embarrassment and shame burning in his guts. Who would've thought that Luke Bradford, the wretched church rat of a few days ago would one day stand beside one of the richest men in London?

He lowered his eyes to the ground and bowed.

"I'm very sorry, your lordship. Please forgive my mistake and accept my humble apology."

Luke wanted to harden his heart for the embarrassment Fiona's father had just caused him, but he realised that it wasn't worth it.



"It's fine. I forgive you."

"Now that all that has been cleared up, lead us to your office, Trent. We have important business to discuss."

"Right this way, your lordships."

They joined Mr. Carmichael in his office where they cashed a cheque of twenty million dollars as ransom money for Nina's kidnappers.

The intention was to keep everything hush hush, to prevent Nina's parents from finding out.

As they left, Mr. Carmichael sat back in his chair, his thoughts running in a million different directions.

His ego was still hurting from when he bowed before Luke Bradford like some humble servant. He could not believe that he'd just been reduced to the level of that poor church rat.

"How on earth did Luke become so lucky anyways?" He asked his empty office.

And why did they need such a huge amount of money?

Something fishy was going on and he must find out what it was.

He was going to get to the root of this matter, and exact his revenge on Luke.



He couldn't let this embarrassment slide.

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Luke dropped the travel bag filled with one thousand dollar notes on the deputy's table.

"So, what's the plan?"

The deputy leaned closer,

"The plan.

The kidnapers need money? Then we'll give them money. But we'll be monitoring this money until it leads us to the people responsible for this."

"Good. Good. But how will we do that?" Luke asked.

"Simple. We'll plant trackers in the bag."