

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori Chapter 96 -

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Duane was still smiling confidently at the start of the battle.

But it was not long before he noticed something was very wrong. Dustin was much stronger than he **had** expected. He could feel terrifying surges of energy rushing at him like waves in the ocean. They made the bones in his hand tremble. They would break any minute!

Duane's expression darkened, and he couldn't take it anymore. He threw a hard punch at Dustin, trying to

make him fall back. However, Dustin did not dodge and faced it head-on instead.

Their fists collided, and Duane's chair was smashed into pieces! The force of the punch shoved Duane

backward until he hit the wall to catch his balance.

Even so, Dustin remained seated calmly. They both knew who was more powerful!

"Damn! I never knew you had tricks up your sleeve. I underestimated you!" Duane's eyes narrowed as a

complex mix of expressions clouded his face. With how young Dustin was, Duane had never expected him to **be** so powerful. Considering how young he was, he never expected Dustin to be so powerful. Just one punch

had thrown him off his feet.

Although strength couldn't completely represent his fighting skills, it was enough to prove his physical

strength.

"Thanks for the Panax root, Duane." Dustin didn't waste any time. He picked up the box and got up to leave.

Duane was already on his blacklist for being untrustworthy. This was the last time they would do business together.

"Sir Anderson, do you want me to send some men after him to get it back?" asked the Cobra hesitantly.

He could tell that Duane and Dustin weren't actually friends. If so, he **had** nothing to fear anymore.

"He is quite strong. I'm afraid your men won't be able to take him on." Duane cautiously moved his numb arm.

"Are... are you going to let him go just like that?" The Cobra was a little disgruntled. After losing face earlier, he was eager to redeem it.

"Let him go? Hmph. Not so easily!"

Duane laughed coldly. "I'll **get** my hands on the Gemiphen formula. Just wait and see. I have many ways to

make him surrender to me!"

Meanwhile, outside the bar, **Lyra** arrived with the company's bodyguards. When she saw that Dahlia and the others were safe and sound, she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Ms. Nicholson, is everything resolved?"

"I guess you could say that." Dahlia nodded.

"I heard this is the Cobra's turf and thought there might be trouble. I didn't think it would be so easy. I'm sure Mr. Laney is to thank for this?" Lyra smiled.

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The suggestion caused Matt's expression to sour immediately. This woman just had to annoy him!

"Hmm? Why is he here?" Lyra wondered as she spotted Dustin leaving the bar.

He questioned, "What are you guys still doing here? Waiting for someone to take revenge on you? I don't have the energy to save you again." He spoke with a calm voice, grasping the wooden box in his hand.

"Who needs saving? You're so nosy!" Florence snapped **rudely**.

"Hpmh! Stop showing off. If it wasn't for Ms. Harmon, could you have walked out of there alive?" James

mocked brashly.

"That's enough!" Dahlia waved her hands to stop their bickering. She turned to Dustin and said, "Dustin.

thanks for saving us, but I don't condone your behavior."

"Oh? Do you have **any** advice, Ms. Nicholson?" Dustin cocked an eyebrow.

"You're too impulsive! You don't think before you act. Did you **ever** consider the consequences your actions

might bring?" Dahlia asked.

"I don't know what consequences my actions would have caused, but I'm certain that your brother's hands

would have been chopped off," Dustin retorted matter-of-factly.

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“I’m just trying to remind you to think twice before you act. Just because you have support from the higher-ups doesn’t mean you can run amok.” With a solemn look, Dahlia added, “Dustin, you must realize that your worth has to be backed by ability. Currying favors with powerful people can propel you to greater heights, but it won’t last unless you can prove you’re a person of high caliber. So don’t think you’re all high and mighty-

consider this a lesson from me.”

Dustin snickered upon hearing this. “How can you be sure that I’m currying favors with the powerful?”

“Is that not the case? If it weren’t for Ms. Harmon’s reputation, would the Cobras have let you go so easily?” **Dahlia** didn’t hold back with her remark.

“Whatever you say. I know that, whatever I do, I’m nothing but a useless prick in your eyes,” Dustin sneered as

he shook his head.

First impressions truly were tough to change. Even with the evidence in front of their eyes, some people would simply refuse to believe it. **They** preferred scoring for excuses in an attempt to consolidate their prejudices.

“Oh, Dustin, don’t be disheartened. Keep your dignity and utilize your capabilities to carve out your own career and legacy instead of being a lazy bum who leeches off others,” Dahlia urged in a deep voice.

“So what if I’m a bum? Catching easy fish is also a skill. It just means I work smart,” Dustin shrugged.

“You...” Dahlia **was** starting to get annoyed. She had put sincere effort into trying to talk sense into him, but

her advice seemed to fall on deaf ears. Not to mention the fact that he did not appear ashamed of his behavior

at all. It was apparent that there was no saving some people from their stubbornness.

As the two went back and forth, a few patrol cars pulled up and blocked the intersection.

The doors of the patrol cars swung open, and **several** uniformed police officers stepped out and approached them swiftly.

“We’re looking for Dustin Rhys,” said one of the police officers.

“That’s me.” Dustin responded, “Is something wrong, officer?”

“We just received a report that you’ve stolen some valuable objects. Please come with us!” shouted the officer.

“Stolen? Officer, there must be a misunderstanding.” Dustin declared, squinting **his** eyes.

“Alright, **may** I ask what’s inside this box?”

“Panax root.”

“Then that proves it! Come with us immediately for further investigation!” The officer said little more as he

handcuffed Dustin.

“Officer! What exactly is going on?” exclaimed Dahlia, as she rushed forward, the color drained from her face.

“Who are you?” asked the patrol officer.

“I’m his friend,” she replied.

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“Hmph, suspicious! You could be an accomplice. Take her away as well!”

In one swift movement, the officer clicked a pair of handcuffs around Dahlia’s wrists. This incident left everyone at the scene stunned.

“Officer, this has nothing to do with her. It’s all me,” said Dustin with a frown.

“He’s right, he’s right! This is all Dustin’s doing. It has nothing to do with my daughter! If you want to arrest him, then do that! My daughter has done nothing wrong. She’s innocent!” pleaded Florence.

“That’s right, officer! My sister is innocent. She’s a kind soul!” James exclaimed, panicked.

“We’ll find out if she’s innocent once the investigation is over. Take her away!” barked the police officer. With a single command from the squad leader, Dustin and Dahlia were escorted into the police cars.

““Wait!” Matt stepped out from the crowd and began, “I’m of the Laney family of Millsburg. Please cut us some slack and let...”

“Any more nonsense, and you’ll all be coming along!” snapped the officer. His cold glare silenced Matt instantly.

There was nothing anyone could do as they watched Dahlia leave with them.

“It’s over! Goddamn good—for—nothing Dustin, getting my daughter in trouble!” cried Florence as she stomped

the ground in distress. 1

“I don’t give a damn if he digs his own grave, but to drag Dahlia with him? What a bastard!” James scowled with resentment.

“Now’s not the time for this. Quick, we need to think of a way to save Ms. Nicholson!” said Lyra.

“You’re right! We have to find a way. I know a friend who works at the police station. I’ll give him a call at once!”

“I know a relative who has connections with some police officers of higher ranks. I’ll find out if he can offer us

any help.”

Suddenly, the air was filled with the excited chattering of everyone in the group, gathering assistance from anyone they could think of.

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Nighttime, in the interrogation room of the police station.

Dustin and Dahlia sat with their backs against each other, bound to the chairs in the middle of the room.

The air in the room was cool and damp, and darkness shrouded them completely. They could feel an invisible

weight on their shoulders.

“My bad, I didn’t mean to drag you into this mess,” Dustin spoke first.

“They claimed you stole some valuables. Is that true?” Dahlia asked, cutting to the chase.

“What do you think?”

“You don’t look that bold to me, so my guess is someone is trying to frame you. Does this have anything to **do** with the Cobra?”

“The Cobra is merely a pawn. The mastermind is none other than Duane Welch.”

“Duane Welch? Are you talking about Sir Anderson?” Dahlia was dumbstruck.

“Weren’t you on fairly good terms with him before? Did you strike a nerve? How?”

“I punched him,” Dustin admitted flatly.

“What?” Dahlia choked, struggling to keep her calm, “You You dared hit Sir Anderson! Are you out of your

mind?!”

Sir Anderson wasn't just anyone—
he was like a brother to Mr. Anderson. Not to mention being of the

prominent Welch family of Millsburg! He was someone even the vicious, unyielding Cobra would kneel to. Yet

Dustin dared place a hand on him, the epitome of digging one's own grave!

“He hit me first. I only hit back in self-defense.” Dustin didn't seem bothered in the slightest.

“Y—
you act too rashly!” Dahlia fumed, “Who do you think Sir Anderson is? Do you think he's someone you can

afford to offend? One order
from him is all it takes to wipe you off the face of the earth!”

“Since I've already offended him, there's nothing else we can do than go
with the flow,” Dustin said with a

shrug.

“Easy for you to say, but do you think you can handle this?” Dahlia's patience was running thin. She asserted, “You better find an opening to call Natasha later. She's the only one who can save you now!”

As the words left her tongue, she felt an acrid taste at the back of her throat. Although she wouldn't admit it if she didn't have to, there was no denying that there was no comparing herself to Natasha when it came to family background.

Suddenly, the metal door to the dark room creaked open, interrupting their conversation. A man with a rotund beer belly appeared in the doorway and **stepped** into the room. He sat down on a chair and flicked the switch of the bright lamp on the desk.

The glare from the lamp made the two detainees squeeze their eyes shut instinctively.

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“So, you’re Dustin Rhys or something.” hissed the fat man maliciously.

“Yes.” Dustin continued squinting until his eyes grew accustomed to the intense light.

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“Do either of you know who I am?” the man asked.

“No clue.”

“Then, allow me to introduce myself. I go by Gardner, the inspector here. I am nicknamed Heinous Hades by

many!” The fat man lifted his chin with pride. 1

Dahlia’s heart dropped. Having spent a good chunk of her life mingling in this field, it was not her first time

hearing that

nickname. He was a **man** of barbarian cruelty, always baying for the blood of his next victim. Any offenders who fell into his hands could only pray for an outcome less than horrific.

They were in grave trouble this time around!

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Gardner. We’ve heard a lot about you.”

While Dahlia anticipated the worst, Dustin seemed relatively calm and breezy.

“Great! Given that you’ve heard of my name, I assume you’re familiar with my habits. I recommend that you

learn your place and cooperate. That is your only hope of leaving here alive!”

The inspector lit a cigar, slid it between his teeth, and took a deep breath.

“Mr. Gardner, what do you need my cooperation for?” Dustin asked with a calm voice.

“The lot of you stole some valuable items, and the law can sentence you to prison. However, I am giving you

the chance to straighten out the issue with the original owner. If we reach a mutual agreement, no charges

will be pressed.”

“Mr. Gardner, you must be mistaken. I didn’t steal anything. The Panax root belongs to me,” Dustin rebutted

politely.

“Hey! Kid! Are you sure you know what’s happening?” The fat man snorted. “Does it matter whether you stole it or not? Once you step foot in my territory, I make the rules. If I say you stole it, it means you stole it. Do you

understand me?”

“Mr. Gardner, isn’t the way you’re approaching this case a little unreasonable?” Dustin’s eyebrows creased

into a frown.

“Unreasonable? Haha. My words could not be more reasonable!” snarled the fat man. A sinister smirk stretched across his face. “Now, you both have two options. One, to reach a deal with Sir Anderson. Or two,

spend the rest of your lives in jail!”

“Can I choose neither?” Dustin asked.”

“Hey! I’m trying to engage in a peaceful discussion with you. You’d better be sensible and take the option, or else you won’t have it easy if you cross me!” Hostility flashed in his **eyes**.

“Are you trying to threaten me?”

“What if I am?” the inspector sneered. The cigar hung from his teeth as he continued with disdain, “I know you

have some punch in you, but even superpowers won't be useful in my territory! **Besides, need** I remind you that your gorgeous girlfriend will be very popular if she ends up in prison! Even if you could not care less about yourself, you should keep her in mind! That is, if you can bear watching as the other prisoners ravage such a delicate beauty!"

Dustin's expression hardened. Murderous intent seeped from his eyes. "If you dare touch her, rest assured that nothing but death will await you!"

While his aggressive remark stunned Dahlia, she couldn't help the warmth that filled her chest.

"Haha! You can barely stand up for yourself. And to think, you're trying to threaten me! If you have brains in that head of yours, just hand over the Panax root and call it quits. Otherwise, you can't blame me if I throw your beloved in prison! Give it some thought. You'll have thirty minutes to think it through. I'll be back with hopes of an affirmative answer."

With a grotesque grin, Gardner turned to leave, leaving nothing but a loud, resonating bang in his wake. The room plunged back into darkness.

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The night progressed slowly. Florence, James, and the others waited anxiously outside the police station.

Dahlia **was** the backbone of the Nicholson family. If something were to happen to her, the Nicholsons would undoubtedly fall apart. Therefore, to save themselves, they did everything they could to arrange for her release.

which meant pulling **every** string possible.

A policeman appeared out of nowhere.

James immediately stepped forward and asked, "Mr. Clarke, how's it looking? Can you let my sister go?"

“James, I dug around and discovered that Gardner is the inspector in charge of this case. A mere policeman

like myself won’t be able to do much to help,” the man said with a shake of his **head**.

“What else can we do? Do you **have** any other ideas?” James lamented with panic.

“Mr. Clarke, we would **be** eternally grateful for whatever you can do to help us!” Florence pleaded.

“I’ll try my best, but I can’t promise anything. Plus, don’t forget the sum of money.”

“Sir, I’ve just forked out two million dollars. Take it for now, and I’ll get more if it doesn’t suffice. Please help us out. We can talk about further payment later!” James **cried** as he pulled out a card and handed it to the

policeman.

“Alright then, I’ll give it another shot.”

The policeman slid the card into his pocket discreetly, turned around, and walked back into the station.

“James, two million isn’t a small amount. Are you sure we can trust your friend?” Florence asked, her voice

uncertain.

“No matter what, we still **have** to give it a **go**.” James muttered through gritted teeth.

“By the way, has anyone seen Mr. Laney?” someone in the crowd quipped.

“Matt said he went to meet a friend who may be able to help get Dahlia out of his pickle,” Florence replied.

“So that’s where he’s gone. With Mr. Laney’s help, we have double the reassurance. I’m sure it’ll be alright.”

With that, the group let out a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, in a luxurious villa, Matt was having the time of his life with a gorgeous woman in a hot tub. His **body** intertwined with hers as they blissfully made love to each other.

“I doubt you’re here simply to visit. You must have a favor to ask of me, am I right?” the woman smirked.

“Nothing ever gets past you, does it?” he conceded with a slight smile. He began, “I have a friend who’s being held at the police station, and I need your help bailing her out. I’m sure you know that Swinton is not my home ground.”

“A friend? What’s the **name**?” she asked.

“Dahlia Nicholson.”

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“Oh? A woman? Is there something going on between you and her?” The beauty raised an eyebrow suspiciously.

“Hehe... she’s just a friend. She helped me out awhile back, so I’m merely returning the favor.” Matt

maintained a nonchalant expression.

“Is that so?” Dubious, the woman pressed on. “Matt, don’t claim I’ve never reminded you that you are mine and mine only. You best believe you’ll regret being promiscuous out there. If a vixen dares to try to seduce you, I will make her life a living hell!”

“What are you even talking about, baby girl? You are the one I **love** most in life. How could I possibly have eyes for other women?” Matt quickly pulled her into a tight embrace.

“Since you say you love me so much, you shall attend my birthday party in two days and meet my father **as** “my boyfriend,” the lady **said** with a smile stretching from ear to ear.

“Are you introducing me to your family already?”

“Why? Are you afraid?”

“Your father is the one and only Sir Hummer. I bet you won’t be able to name me someone who isn’t afraid of the prospect of meeting him! However, it goes without saying that I would cross the highest mountains and the deepest seas for you!”

“Aw, aren’t you the sweetest! Alright then, it’s a deal!”

At the same time, at Java Joys.

Natasha was seated on the couch, reading silently, when Ruth barged in.

*Sis! Bad news! Dustin’s been arrested!” she blurted as soon as her lips parted.

“Arrested?” Natasha was taken aback. “What happened?”

“I just received news that Dustin was arrested and escorted to the police station for **the** theft of valuable

items!” Ruth managed between pants.

“Theft? Is that it?” Natasha’s confusion **grew**.

“The theft is nothing but a coverup. In reality, Dustin is being framed. However, things don’t look good given

that he’s fallen into the hands of that fat man Gardner,” Ruth continued.

A string of protests rang from Natasha’s mouth immediately.

“That fat bastard! Such audacity—how dare he touch my man? Gather your men at once and follow me to the police station to get our people back!”

Meanwhile, in Hunter Anderson’s mansion.

“Dad! Bad news! Something major happened!”

Jeff Anderson rushed into the study with large beads of sweat covering his forehead, startling Hunter as he practiced his brush strokes.

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“You idiot! How many times have I told you that you must stay calm when facing problems instead of overreacting? Why don’t you ever heed my advice?!”

“Dad! I’m not overreacting this time. Something big really did happen!” Jeff wiped the sweat from his face.

“Pah! You better remember: no matter how big a situation, you must stay calm! That is how a real man should act!” After relaying his teachings, he finally asked, “Now tell me, what’s going on?”

“It’s about Mr. Rhys. He’s been arrested by Gardner!” Jeff exploded.

“What?”

Hunter started trembling in fear. Even the brush in his hand broke in two.

“Quick... call someone! We have to go to the police station,” he instructed his son. He roared, “That fat f*ck “Gardner. If he dares touch a hair on Mr. Rhys’ head, I’ll skin him alive!”

“Dad, shouldn’t you remain calm?” Jeff’s lips twitched with irony.

“To hell with calm!”

The news struck him like a lightning bolt, so shocking that Hunter broke into a cold sweat.

“If Mr. Laney emerges unscathed, all will be well. But if something were to happen to him, everyone in Swinton would suffer. Not to mention Gardner, you, and even myself!”

“Huh! Is the situation so grave?” Jeff winced. He still had zero clue about Dustin’s true identity.

“What are you doing still lingering around? We have to get him out of there!” ordered Hunter.

After slapping his son awake, Hunter darted out the door.

Deep in his heart, he prayed, “Gardner, Gardner, you fat motherf*cker better not mess around! If you do, Swinton will be soaked in blood!”

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As the chaos unfolded in the outside world, nothing but peace and calm hung in the air of the inspector’s

office at the police station.

“What’s the situation, Mr. Gardner? Has the kid confessed yet?” asked the Cobra impatiently as soon as he sat

down.

“It doesn’t matter whether he has or not. Any prisoner who falls into my hands is sure to **give** in eventually.”

The fat inspector took another drag of his cigar with a smug expression.

“It’s not a problem if you’re on-site, but you can’t guarantee that things won’t take a turn for the worse. I think you ought to get it out of the way while you can,” the Cobra suggested.

“Why do you say that? Are you trying to teach me how to do my job?” Gardner cast a cold glare at him.

“Of course not. I wouldn’t even dream of it. It’s just that the kid has someone backing him up. If this isn’t

resolved soon, trouble may arise,” the Cobra explained with a quick apology.

“What trouble could possibly arise? I’m just doing my job. Plus, this is my territory. Who would dare disobey

me?” he reminded the man with certainty.

“Well, that’s true, Mr. Gardner. You are Mr. Granville’s son-in-law after all—who would dare disrespect you?”

agreed the Cobra flatteringly.

“Hmph! At least you’re smart enough to know that!” the inspector guffawed.

He was perhaps prouder of having the mayor as his father-in-law than of his identity as an inspector. The title of mayor denoted the highest position of power in the whole of Swinton.

“Mr. Gardner, this is a gift from Sir Anderson. Please accept it,” said the Cobra as he held out a gift box with

both hands.

Gardner opened the box, and the shimmer of the gold accessory put a smile on his face.

“Hehe... Sir Anderson is simply too generous. Send him my thanks! Also, reassure him that I will handle this with extra care and ensure nothing goes wrong!”

“Thank you, Mr. Gardner!” The Cobra bowed in gratitude.

While the two spoke, the squad leader who had made the arrest entered the room unannounced.

“Is something the matter?” Gardner instantly slammed the gift box shut.

“Sir, the Nicholson family has just sent someone to intercede, and they’ve offered to pay a hefty amount to release Dahlia Nicholson on bail,” the officer reported.

“Pah! That woman is a wanted criminal. There’s no way she can be released on bail. Send them away!” commanded Gardner with a dismissive wave of his hand.

“Yes, sir.” The squad leader turned and left.

However, he knocked on the **door** again in less than a minute.

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“What is it this time?!” barked the inspector, clearly losing his patience.

“Sir, Ms. Harmon called in earlier, claiming that we’ve arrested the wrong person. She has asked us to release Dustin Rhys immediately.” the officer said.

“Ms. Harmon? Do you mean Natasha Harmon?” Gardner’s expression froze.

“That’s her.” The officer nodded.

“Cobra, what’s going on? You failed to mention that this kid had anything to do with Natasha!” The inspector’s eyes turned feral. Natasha was a lady of superiority in all aspects; money, power, and influence. Under normal

circumstances, she was not someone he would offend for no reason.

“Mr. Gardner, he’s just a good-for-nothing Natasha dotes on. In fact, he has no proper background. With your status, you need not pay him much attention,” the Cobra assured the inspector.

“Hmph! That better be the case!” Slightly flustered, Gardner instructed the squad leader, “Tell Natasha Harmon that we are holding no such person in our patrol room.” Since he had already given his word to Duane, there

was no going back. For now, the best course of action would be to sweep it under the carpet.

However, **as** soon as the squad leader left, Gardner’s phone started ringing.

“Mr. Anderson?” He was baffled by the caller ID displayed on the screen. For Mr. Anderson to call at this hour..

could it be for the kid as well? Wasn’t this too much of a coincidence?!

Brushing the thought from his mind, he decided to pick up the call, still feeling apprehensive.

“Hello, Mr. Anderson! Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Mr. Gardner! Tell me, did you arrest a young man named Dustin **Rhys**?” Hunter cut right to the chase without

wasting a second.

“Oh? Did I? Why is it that I’m not aware of this?” Mr. Gardner questioned. His heart skipped a beat, but he didn’t let it show. He asked, “Mr. Anderson, did something happen?”

“Gardner! Don’t you dare pull tricks on me! Heed my order and release Dustin right this instant! Or else, don’t blame me for cutting you off for good!” Hunter yelled into the phone.

“Mr. Anderson, there must have been a misunderstanding! I don’t know a Dustin at all. How about I look into it

for you?” The officer desperately put on an act.

There was no way he would spill the beans on the plan.

“Alright then, you fat bastard. You have no idea what you’re getting yourself into! Mark my words— if anything happens to Dustin, you and your whole family will go down with him!”

Hunter hung up the phone with a threatening growl:

“Did that old man get up on the wrong side of the bed today?” grumbled Gardner, his displeasure written all over his face.

“Sir, what’s wrong?” the Cobra asked cautiously.

“What’s wrong? Where did you get the guts to ask me that?” Gardner slapped a palm onto the table. “Didn’t

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you say the kid had no background? Mr. Anderson just called to speak to me about the fellow! Does that sound like someone with no background to you? Are you deliberately trying to set me up, you motherf*cker?!"

Natasha Harmon was already a handful. Now that Hunter Anderson was also in the picture, this was equivalent to stripping him down and tying him to a skewer over an open fire.

"No way! There's no way that he has relations with Mr. Anderson! I— I really didn't know about this," the Cobra stuttered as the color drained from his face.

"Quick, call Duane now. This situation is getting way out of hand. He'll have to pay me more if he wants this matter settled smoothly," Gardner ordered.

"Alright, alright. I will call Sir Anderson immediately!"

The Cobra did not hesitate as he dialed Duane's number. Over the phone, he briefly explained Gardner's request.

After confirming an affirmative answer, he reported, "Sir, Sir Anderson has agreed to double the price as long as you can get the job done!"

Hearing this, the tense muscles on the inspector's face finally eased.

"Sir Anderson is truly generous! In that case, I'll do my very best!" he declared with a smile of contentment. Well, money did do wonders, after all. A middle ground is always more easily reached with a good payout.