

## Cologne

It was the third day. The conference room buzzed with nervous energy. Richard Calloway sat to the right of the large leather chair at the head of the table -- his father's chair. His father would be late again, as he always was. The interns shifted uncomfortably in the back of the room.

"Richard, where is your father?" an impatient manager rasped from the other side of the table.

"How'm I supposed to know?" Richard grumbled and looked up to glance at the older man. He hated his father's employees. They were all twice his age and believed they could belittle him. The graying man stared back at Richard, beginning to fidget after moments of eye contact, and it was all Richard could do not to laugh. He didn't know why his parents worried. Even the older employees knew they held no true power, no matter how much they tried to intimidate him.

"Hello hello, everyone!" Richard's father burst through the gleaming glass doors, a plastic cup with coffee in his hand. A skittish secretary followed behind him. "I hope you were all productive in my absence."

A disgruntled murmur ran through the room and one of the leading analysts stood up to greet their boss.

"Mr. Calloway, we--" Richard's father held up his hand, the man quieted.

"Someone tell me what my son is doing wrong."

A silence fell over the room as all heads turned to Richard. He frowned. Of course his father would find some way to humiliate him, again. His father gazed down at him, a sneer pulling at his mouth, accentuating the wrinkles on the man's face.

An intern in the back raised her hand and Richard's father nodded at her. She stood up and cleared her throat. "He's- well, he's playing mobile games at..."

at the start of a meeting.” She looked about ready to die until Richard’s father gave her an encouraging smile, a nervous smile spreading across her face in response. He waved a hand and she gratefully sat back down.

“Exactly,” he said, taking long strides to his seat and settling down, but not before glaring at the phone in his son’s hand. “My son, the next CEO to this company, has some special needs regarding his attention span, so please call him out whenever you deem appropriate.” The man’s glare travelled up to Richard’s face, his mouth forming into a thin line. With an irritated sigh, Richard slipped his phone under his leg, fully planning on pulling it out at a later point in the meeting.

“You could have just told me to put it away,” Richard leaned over to his father and murmured, “it’s not like we’ve started yet.”

Richard looked up to meet his father’s stony gaze. The elder’s response was curt. “How else would you learn?”

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Richard stormed into his apartment, the door slamming behind him. Sunlight poured in from his wall of windows, but that didn’t stop him from flicking on the lights. The excessive light glinted off almost every surface in the room, only succeeding in worsening Richard’s headache. Richard was furious. He took his father’s stupid classes, worked with those beneath him, and studied stocks and statistics until he felt his eyes were bleeding. And what did he do it for? His father’s approval?

His father didn’t care. His father was solely focused on making sure Richard didn’t sully the family name.

With an angry huff, Richard stomped over to his room, practically ripping the door from its hinges. He paused to stare out his large bedroom windows, feeling his anger boil in his core. A pigeon flew by his window, seemed to hover in the air, before exploding, splattering blood and organs across the once clean windows. Richard blinked and the gore was gone, the pigeon flapping on as usual. He shook his head. It had been a while since the last time.

He walked over to his bedside drawer, opened the first drawer to withdraw a black case. Settling onto his bed, Richard input the code and applied his fingerprint before the case's top snapped open.

Richard carefully grasped the object and lifted it up. It was a glass cologne bottle, small and square, with a swirling design lifting off the body slightly, liquid sloshed inside. Richard dragged a finger across the surface of the bottle, taking a deep breath. He removed the cap and lifted the bottle up to his neck, gently pressing on the nozzle on top of the bottle. Tingles shot across his skin the moment the liquid touched him. He exhaled. The effect was almost immediate, a wave of calm washed over him as the tingling continued to dance across his skin.

Richard blinked slowly, glanced at his arm. His veins were pulsing a deep purple, hardly noticeable if you weren't looking. He'd have to wait for it to fade, though, otherwise his father would have a conniption.

Eventually the tingles became a soft buzz under his skin and the purple color had faded. Maybe now he'd be able to focus, even with his father breathing down his neck the rest of the day. Richard placed the delicate cologne bottle back in its place and closed the case with an emphatic smack.

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“Richard, have a seat.” Richard paused at his father’s voice and turned. His mother and father were sitting at his kitchen table, hands folded primly on the waxed wooden surface.

“How did you get into my house?” he asked as he slowly made his way to the table. He sank into the chair and eyed up his parents. His mother had a mask of disappointment and he didn’t care for his father.

“Have you forgotten we pay for almost all your assets -- including this house?” his father snapped, his expression grave. “Only to be turned over to you once you’ve inherited the company, which won’t be happening anytime soon.”

Richard clenched his jaw. Then what the hell was he training for? “What do you mean, *father?*” Richard put as much venom behind his words as he could.

His father’s expression darkened and he reached into his coat pocket, pulling out a glass bottle. Richard went rigid. His cologne. He fought to keep his expression under control. He must not look guilty or afraid, or otherwise he’d play right into his father’s plans.

“You must take me for a fool, Richard,” his father said. Richard glanced over to his mother, but she wouldn’t meet his eye. “You didn’t think your mother and I would find out about this *disgusting* habit of yours? Magic? Really? What would the city- the world think if Calloway Design’s CEO was taking magic?”

“They would think it was normal,” Richard said irritably.

Richard’s father stood up abruptly, knocking over the chair, the sound echoing throughout the room. Richard pursed his lips -- he knew he made a mistake but backpedaling would only make his father angrier.

His father seethed, eyes so dark Richard wouldn’t be surprised if he was on magic himself.

“Magic will always be unnatural and as long as you continue to use this- this *substance* so will you.” Richard slowly rose from his seat. He was used to his

father's nitpicking and verbal abuse, but he had never felt this level of anger radiating off of the older man, and he wasn't going to back down now.

"You can't make me stop," Richard said, keeping his gaze level with his father's. He was a grown man for God's-sake -- how was his father going to keep him from doing anything? Especially when the thing he was doing was a direct response to his father.

The old man tilted his head back slightly. "I'm still head of the company," he said softly. "Until I die or pass on the leadership position, that fact won't change." Richard clenched his jaw, already seeing where his father was going. He wouldn't. He could feel his blood rushing through his veins, though, as his father smirked. "I have already thought to pass it off to your cousin Robert, but this only confirms my decision. He's sensible. *Clean*. Everything I had wanted for you that you refuse to be."

"You can't do that!" Richard had slammed the tabletop then, startling his mother and only succeeding in making his father's smirk wider.

"Everything under law says I can, and I will." His father tossed Richard's bottle of magic onto the center of the table, smiling when the bottle cracked and the magical liquid began to ooze onto the waxed surface. "I no longer consider you my son. Clearly, all you need is your magic, so that's all you will have."

Richard felt heat sear across his skin. He could hear his blood rushing in his ears as his eyes darted first to his father's, then his mother's, faces. His father adjusted his jacket and strode to the large glass windows as if he hadn't said anything. The city lights stared into Richard's apartment and he felt like a thousand eyes were on him. He needed a drink.

Richard stood abruptly. He made his way to his liquor cabinet and pulled out whatever his hand caught first. His mother -- could he call her that anymore?-- watched him with weary eyes and the man that was once his father,

as usual, ignored him. Richard pushed open the thick glass doors to his balcony and rested his glass on the edge.

“Do whatever you want,” Richard finally spoke. *Asshole*, he thought. Or at least he thought he thought. He felt a heavy presence behind him and his hand constricted around the heavy glass in his grasp.

“Say that to my face, boy.”

Richard’s grip on his glass turned his knuckles white and he slowly turned to meet the face of the man who was once his father. “I don’t have to say anything to the face of a man I don’t know.”

Richard barely registered the pain of his father's blow before his own fists were flying up. His glass was now on the ground, shattered, the liquid splashed on the window in front of him. Richard distantly heard a woman’s shriek as he stared at the man lying in front of him. Blood dripped from a cut on the man’s temple to the man’s once pristine jacket. His “father’s” look of surprise and pain was so satisfying Richard wished he could take a picture.

Richard kicked the pieces of glass to the side and bent down. Grasping the older man by the upper arms, he hoisted the man up and leaned him against the ledge of the balcony. He exhaled heavily and stared up at the light-polluted sky.

“Why did you do that?” Richard said, his voice softer than he thought it ought to be.

“Huh?” the man grunted out. Richard must have hit him harder than he thought, the man could barely stand on his own.

“Why did you hit me?”

“Because you disgust me,” the man spat out, finally managing to stand, holding himself against the ledge. Richard laughed, a quick exhale from his nostrils, and then his hands were against the man’s throat.

“Richard!” The desperate cry of the woman inside hit his ears. He had forgotten she was there.

The man laughed and Richard could feel the vibrations against his palms. “This is why you could never inherit the company. You act like a child.”

Rage seared through Richard’s body and his hands tightened around the older man’s neck, his vision turned red.

Then, Richard threw him over the edge. He heard a shriek from the interior. The older man’s feeble grab for Richard’s hand pulled Richard from his rage-induced trance. He stared down at the pavement. Iciness ran through his veins as he looked upon his father’s body, lying broken on the cement.

“Richard, what have you done?” The watery voice of his mother rasped from beside him.

Richard turned his head to look at the woman. Her face was filled with disbelief, her eyes with tears.

“Mother,” Richard whispered and reached out to her. The look on her face turned to one of fear and she took a step back. Richard felt his heart seize in his chest. She was against him, too. “Please.” His voice was barely audible as he reached for her again.

“Stay away from me!” she shrieked, scrambling back until she hit the other edge of the balcony. “You’re a- a *monster!*”

“*You* did this to me.” Richard felt his anger pouring back into his body, overtaking the ice that had rooted in his veins.

His legs seemed to move on their own as he walked over to the cowering woman. Dread filled her expression and she tried to run back inside, but he caught onto her arm. He dragged her back to the edge of the balcony. She had started to cry and she was clawing at him, at his arms, his face, anything. Richard barely felt any of it.

“Go to your husband,” he said.

Grasping her by her shoulders, he pushed her over the edge, a scream ripping from her throat as she plunged downwards. He didn't dare look over the edge. Silently, he turned and walked inside, closing the doors behind him. His gaze landed on his kitchen table, his bottle of cologne lying in the center.

Richard dragged himself over and picked it up, staring at the liquid that had seeped through the crack in the bottle. He pressed his hand to the small puddle and pressed it against his neck, immediately feeling its effects. Fatigue spread through his body alongside the tingling sensation as he collapsed onto the floor.

He'd worry about it in the morning.