

Bogus Billionaire by Shining Riviera (Caroline Evans)

Chapter 131

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Chapter 131

Caroline was **so** exhausted that she fell asleep as soon as her head hit **the** pillow

Finished with his shower, Kirk walked **out** of the bathroom. He **found** Caroline asleep on the bed with a smile on her face, as though she were having a sweet dream.

He felt **the** sudden urge to do something, yet he didn't want to wake her up. **In** the end, he simply hugged her from behind and suppressed his urges.

"You ungrateful brat," he muttered with a smile, kissing her gently on her lips. Doing so helped quench his desire **a** little.

The night passed silently. When Caroline woke up, it was already morning. She tossed and turned a little in Kirk's arms, stirring him from his sleep. Still, he didn't open his eyes.

His warm palms were pressed against her tummy, and he pulled her closer to him.

It made Caroline blush. "Kirk," she murmured. She sounded sluggish, but her voice was music **to** his ears.

Kirk opened his eyes and moved closer to her until their noses touched. "Call me honey," Kirk said teasingly in his raspy voice.

Caroline opened her mouth slowly as she playfully hit his chest with her fists. **No** way," she said, although she totally wanted to call him that.

Kirk propped himself up on one elbow and raised an eyebrow at her. The mole at the corner of his

eye made him look as if he were trying to seduce her.

“Really? Are you sure about that?” He pinched her waist and added, “Who are you going to call ”

honey” then?”

Caroline was particularly sensitive when it came to her waist. She’d almost squealed when he’d pinched her just now. “Stop that. Dad’s waiting for us.”

This made Kirk pinch her again, and he said, “It’s so easy for you to call my dad yours, eh? Why is

it so hard for you to call me “honey“?”

Caroline didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, so she scrambled away from him instead. “Quick, go

and freshen up.”

Kirk didn’t move an inch. “Give me a kiss, and I’ll go,” he said stubbornly.

Caroline pressed a hand to her forehead. She’d never known Kirk could be so childish. Regardless,

she closed her eyes and kissed him on the lips. “Now-”

Before she could finish her sentence, Kirk pressed his lips against hers and deepened the kiss

Blushing, she tore her eyes away from **him** and urged, “Go.”

Satisfied, Kirk happily **got** out of bed. He had suffered the whole night trying to hold himself back Everything was worth it now that he’d received a wake-up kiss from her.

Sitting on the edge **of** the bed, Caroline recalled the kiss and felt her cheeks start to burn

Just then, her phone rang. She picked it up hastily and answered the call before even seeing

caller’s name.

the

When she finally glanced at the screen, she saw that it was Gwen. It made her feel guilty.

“Carol,” Gwen said, sounding sluggish as if she were sick. “Is it done?”

“Yes. Last night.”

“Sorry, I drank so much that I forgot to call you,” Gwen explained.

Caroline **laughed**. “**Your** company’s having a team–building activity?”

Gwen hesitated for a brief moment before replying, “Y–yes”

Suddenly, Gwen’s eyes widened with enthusiasm. She leaned closer to the phone and demanded

“What’s the color code of that lipstick you have on? It’s so pretty!”

Dumbfounded, Caroline couldn’t respond. She tried to change the topic. That was when she

suddenly noticed a red mark on Gwen’s neck. “Gwen, why’s there a red mark on your neck?”

Shocked, Gwen immediately moved back. It was awkward, so she covered her neck with one hand

and tried to explain. “Um there were too many mosquitoes last night. I must’ve been bitten.”

“I see. Caroline didn’t doubt her. Gwen knew when to draw the line, even though she liked going

out with men.

She enjoyed looking at the handsome faces of men, but pleasure and desire were entirely

different. To conclude, she might have lots of ex–boyfriends, but she had never done it with them

“I’m going to work,” Gwen mumbled as she covered her phone’s camera with her fingers. “I’ll call

you after work”

Caroline hadn't questioned Gwen's words. But once the call ended, she realized that it must be

midnight back in Easton now

How come Gwen had work even though it was already so late?

On the other end, Gwen's heart was still beating wildly in her chest as she hung up the phone. A moment later, she remembered the hickey on her neck and darted into the bathroom.

She looked into the mirror and saw the red mark in **the** reflection. She immediately tried to rub it off forcefully.

She knew she shouldn't have agreed to have dinner **with** Sean last night..

She had **been** upset enough to begin with, and the alcohol had made her drunk. When she woke up, she found herself **lying** beside Sean.

Her whole body felt as though it was going to fall apart. There was no need for an explanation to know what had happened.

She didn't have the courage to wait until Sean woke up, so she grabbed her belongings and ran away.

When Caroline and Kirk got downstairs, they saw Avery and Ivan chatting in the living room.

Avery noticed how red Caroline's lips were and felt something twist inside of her. The feeling was so intense that she thought she would explode at any moment.

Despite that, Caroline didn't notice the change in Avery's expression. She smiled and greeted them, "Good morning, Dad. Hi, Ms. Mendeley. Sorry, I slept in and kept you two waiting."

Hearing that, Ivan beamed. He silently wished they would sleep longer so that he could get himself a grandchild soon.

"No worries. You must be hungry. Hurry and have some breakfast," he told her. He and Avery had already eaten.

Caroline and Kirk went to have breakfast while Avery carried on chatting with Ivan. Still, she couldn't focus during their chat, so she excused herself

"Ivan, I'm going to talk to Caroline about the party"

Lowering his voice, Ivan said, "I gave it some thought last night. Even if Kirk and Carrie faked their marriage, risking her life to find out the truth is simply wrong. We'll leave things as they are."

Avery's expression shifted instantly. Putting on a smile, she started to speak "But-

"I won't object if you're just thinking of inviting them to the party." Ivan waved his hand dismissively "But let's leave it at that."

His insistence made her hands ball into fists. Once again, her expression changed, but she still smiled at him.

"Alright, I understand. To be honest, I've thought about that too. Even if there are prevention measures, it's still risky. Don't worry, though I won't do it if you don't want me to."

Ivan nodded **and** went **off**. As she watched him disappear upstairs, **Avery** could no longer hide **the** hatred in her eyes.

Ivan summoned Kirk upstairs after breakfast. Hence, Caroline watched the TV alone in the living

room. Since **the** shows were in Faladorian, she **couldn't** understand anything and **kept** switching

channels.

Out of the blue, a plate of sliced fruits appeared before her. She looked up to see Avery smiling at

her.

Even though Caroline **didn't** have a good impression of her, she was Kirk's friend. She didn't want to make things awkward between them.

Smiling, Caroline asked, "Ms. Mendeley, aren't you going to work?"

It was idle talk, but to Avery, those words stung. Although she smiled at Caroline, it didn't reach her eyes. "My friend's holding a pool party tonight. Care to join?"

"I don't like crowds," said Caroline.

"But Kirk's friends will all be there. Don't you want to get to know him a little better?"

That was all it took for Caroline to reconsider the offer.

Today's Bonus Offer

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Once she agreed **to attend** the pool party, **Caroline** started **to** worry. She hadn't **brought** her

swimsuit with her, and buying **one** here would be quite difficult since she wasn't **familiar** with this place.

Just as she was deep in thought, she spotted Kirk coming downstairs. "Are you heading outside?" She asked

"Yep. I'm going **to** the city for a while."

He had occasionally flown **back** from **Easton** to deal with work. Still, the company was big, and leaving it without showing up for too long would affect the influence he had—Ivan had just called him to the study to discuss that too.

"Can I tag along?" Caroline asked, to Kirk's surprise.

Caroline lowered her head and shifted from foot to foot. "I'm... thinking of buying myself a

swimsuit."

Her words made Kirk raise both eyebrows now. "I'll go with you then."

His intention was obvious. Needless to say, he wanted to see her in a swimsuit.

“But didn’t you **say** that you have something to attend to there?”

“I can do it in the afternoon,” replied Kirk.

He hooked an arm around Caroline’s waist, and they both walked out of the house.

As she got into the passenger **seat**, Caroline was still concerned. “Are you sure I’m not taking up

too much of your time?”

“No, you’re not.”

He started the car and then asked, “Why do you want to buy one all of a sudden?” He smiled

inwardly, thinking that she was finally starting to learn to please him.

“Ms. Mendeley invited me to the pool party,” explained Caroline.

Kirk’s face darkened instantly.

“So, you’re buying a swimsuit because of the party?”

“Yeah.” Caroline failed to notice the change in his expression.

Kirk snorted and started driving in silence.

Soon, Caroline sensed that the atmosphere in **the** car was rather tense and that Kirk was upset.

make things worse.

They finally arrived at **the** city center Kirk had **to** take several detours before **they** finally found a

mall his family hadn’t **invested in**.

As they **got** out of the car, they captured the attention of many passersby. **Quite** a few men made **catcall** sounds when they saw Caroline.

That only made the scowl on Kirk's face deepen. He pulled her **into** his arms to block others from seeing her **face**,

Their **proximity** unsettled Caroline. Given how close they were, she could catch his scent as they

walked. When he finally let go of **her**, they were already standing in a swimwear store.

The owner of the **store** was a pretty woman with long blonde hair. She eyed Caroline from head to

toe, then took out a few bikinis for her.

When Caroline saw what the woman had gotten for her, she winced and politely asked for

something more conservative, like a one-piece suit.

The woman looked as though she had been given a tough problem to solve.

"Um... it's kind of hard to find that here. My customers usually ask for something like this. But

look at your body! You'd look super good if you wore these. What do you say, mister?"

She glanced at Kirk, who swallowed a couple of times as he stared at the bikinis.

"We'll take all of these," he said.

"Kirk-

Caroline was interrupted by the store owner, who said, "Alrighty."

"And find her one that shows less skin," he added, his voice low.

This time, the store owner relented and rushed off to the back of the store to check the inventory

Now, Caroline finally had the chance to put in a word "I won't wear those. Why did you buy so

many of them?”

Kirk leaned close to her and bit her earlobe. His warm breath fanned out on her neck as he

whispered into her ear, “Put them on for me.”

Caroline shuddered, and her cheeks flushed red

She wanted to say something in response, but the door to the inventory opened with a creak. She leaped away from him as if he were some kind of bomb that was about to explode.

The store owner had a swimsuit in her hands. Indeed, it was a one-piece suit, which was exactly

This is the only one left”

“Wrap this up and send it here.” Kirk gave her their address, scooped up the bag containing the bikinis, and pulled Caroline out of the store.

The store owner watched as they left, thinking that the man looked kind of familiar.

Kirk led Caroline back to their car. Confused, she asked, “Why didn’t you bring **all** of it back?” **It** wouldn’t have taken much time for the store owner to pack the swimsuit.

Kirk’s voice was raspy as he started the car and said, “Because I can’t wait any longer.”

A vein pulsed **on** his temple. He didn’t think he could bear it much longer just by imagining

Caroline in a bikini.

Only now did he realize that his eyes looked bloodshot, as if he were a wild wolf that had been

starving for days.

A chill ran up her spine

when she realized that the road they had taken was completely

unfamiliar to her.

“Where are we going?” she asked, but Kirk pursed his lips in silence.

A moment later, they parked in front of a luxurious-looking hotel. Kirk lifted her out of the car and

strode to the lobby. He tossed his ID to the staff in charge of registration at the front desk.

When the staff saw Kirk’s name, he started to bow and greet him. “Mr. Mor-”

“Get me a room. Now.” Kirk was already impatient and didn’t bother to wait **for the** staff to finish.

The staff shuddered in fear. He didn’t even dare to look at Caroline. After getting his job done, he

handed Kirk the access card to the room with trembling fingers.

Kirk grabbed the card and headed straight to the presidential suite. Once they got into the room,

he pushed Caroline against the door. Soon, she found herself overwhelmed by his passionate

kisses.

The room was engulfed in darkness when she woke up. Startled, she shot up from the bed. Pain washed over her entire body, so much so that she inhaled sharply.

Kirk caressed her back with one hand and locked his other hand around her waist, trapping her in his embrace. “Why are you in such a hurry?”

Caroline was kind of pissed. “I told you I wanted to join the party tonight. It’s so dark already. I’m late for sure.”

smiling, Kirk pulled her back into his arms and his warm chest pressed against her bare back.

He took out the remote control and pressed a button. The curtains slid open, lighting up the entire room. It’s only **12** pm.

Caroline finally saw just how huge the room **was**. Besides the bedroom, there was also a living room, gym, and tearoom. Realization dawned on her, and she asked, "Is this a presidential suite?"

"Mhmm" As Kirk hummed in response, he pressed his lips against her back.

His reply made Caroline start worrying about his wallet "Isn't it a bit too expensive?"

"Nope." Kirk smiled as he relished how thrifty she was

"But-" Caroline's words were cut short when Kirk pressed his lips against hers.

"Stop overthinking," he muttered.

Time passed, and it was past 1 pm now.

Caroline was famished, so Kirk called for the hotel's room service. Lunch was very sumptuous, and Caroline happily gobbled it all up.

She wanted to get off the bed, but Kirk stopped her by pulling her and moving on top of her.

Helpless, she said, "Kirk, I'm full."

"But I'm not."

However, Caroline was worn out already. "Strenuous exercise after meals is bad for digestion," she said.

Kirk pressed his nose against hers and paused for a moment before turning and lying down beside her. "You're right, my darling."

Before she could heave a sigh of relief, she heard him say in his raspy voice, "Since we can't do it yet, you should put on the bikinis. You'll have time to digest the food while you're at it."

Speechless, Caroline got out of bed and went into the bathroom to change.

When she took off the bathrobe she wore, she looked into the mirror to see countless red marks all over her body. Her face instantly flushed red at the sight of them.

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Kerk lay on the bed and stared patiently at the frosted bathroom door Caroline had been in there for half **an** teen steady

When he spoke, There was a very noticeable hint of glee in his raspy voice. “Babe, I’m going in if You’re not coming out”

Caroline had already put on one of the **bikinis** **in** the bathroom Startled, she almost jumped in fright when she heard **him** say that

Heshly, she placed one hand on the bathroom door and yelled, “Don’t! I’m coming out now.

She closed her eyes, opened the door, and finally stepped out of the bathroom. Slowly, she walked out into the bedroom while trying her best to cover her body with both hands.

A hungry look flashed through Kirk’s eyes once again

Caroline **was** wearing a red bikini. Her skin was fair enough, and the red color made her skin glow even more. It also emphasized the red marks all over her body.

She looked very enticing, like a strawberry he wanted to gobble up in a single bite. He couldn’t Jestrain himself any longer

Reaching out to her, he pulled her into his arms and easily removed the straps on her shoulders.

Blushing, Caroline held on to the thin cloth of the bikini as if it were her last sliver of hope. “Kirk... “she muttered

It was sunset when Caroline finally got up from the bed.

“What should I do now?” She put a hand behind her waist to support herself.

“How am I supposed to go to the party tonight?”

“Don’t go then. Kirk smirked.

Caroline shot him a sideways glance and said, "You did this on purpose, didn't you?"

A smile hung on his lips, but he remained quiet. It seemed as though he was admitting it. He

kissed the side of her head and asked, "Why don't I send you home?"

"No!" **She** exclaimed and moved further away from him. "Ask them **to** deliver the swimsuit here. I'll go to the party straight from here."

Caroline needed to find a way to cover all the red marks on her body.

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60 min re he agreed to it say is here someone bring it here wait

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"Aren't you coming with me tomah

04 course "Burk put the clothes, looking all prim and proper again "But I'll be a bit late If you

don't want to go also, you can just wait for **me**

In your dreams, the blurted.

Kirk walked over to her and pecked her lips

"Alright then. Don't wait for me il meet you when I get there. He kissed her gently on the joehead **and** left

Caroline sighed in relief. She sat on the couch and refused to move a muscle.

At

around 7 pm, someone sent her swimsuit over It wasn't the same person who had met them at

the airport Still, he was very respectful toward her

"Mr Kuk asked me to drive you to the party before he left."

“How much will the ride cost?” Caroline asked.

Fursing his lips, the staff recalled Kirk’s orders and told her, “Don’t worry. This service is included, in the presidential suite’s package. No extra fee is required.”

Caroline couldn’t help but think that the service offered here was way better than when they were back in Easton Still, she winced inwardly at the thought of Kirk paying a lot for this.

After getting into the car, she unlocked her phone to check if she had missed any important

information

It was exactly as she had expected. She had several missed video calls from Jude. It was rare for him to video call her, and she started worrying if something urgent had come up. She quickly called him back.

“Grandpa. She greeted him when he answered the call.

Jude smiled. “Where are you? I’ve had my men search for you, but they can’t find you anywhere.”

“I’m not in the country now.” Caroline didn’t have the courage to tell him that she was visiting Kirk’s family with him.

If she did, it would seem like she was pouring salt on Jude’s wounds. After all, he had once wished that she’d become Eddy’s wife.

The smile on Jude’s face faltered momentarily, but he smiled again and said, “Really? Where are **you**? Why didn’t you tell me that you were going abroad?”

min onze, aaid caroline. She wanted to say something **atter** that, but **the car** came to a halt Mat then

The driver said, “Miss, we’re here.”

Caroline looked out the window **to** see **a** white castle and nodded at **the** driver in **the** rearview

mirror.

Then, she **said to** Jude, “Grandpa, I’ve got something to do. If there’s nothing else, I’ll call you after I’m done with my work here, alright?”

It was silent on the other end **of the** line. When Caroline looked at her screen again, Jude appeared to be in a daze. **He** finally snapped out of his thoughts after she’d called him a few times.

“Sure. Go ahead.”

This made Caroline worry about him. “Grandpa, are **you** okay?”

Why did he look upset?

Jude wiped a hand over his face and smiled. “It’s nothing. Go and do what you have to.”

Hesitating, she asked him a couple of times if he was okay before ending the call.

After she hung up, the smile on Jude’s face vanished instantly. He was certain that the person she had married was indeed Kirk.

“Grandpa Eddy came into sight.

He had heard Caroline’s voice when he’d been by the door just now. He quickened his footsteps and approached Jude. “Did Caroline finally answer your call?”

As he talked, he inched closer to see Jude’s phone, but the screen was black now.

Jude raised his eyes to look at this useless grandson of his. He could feel the corners of his eyes twitching in annoyance.

“Didn’t I ask you to go after Caroline? You don’t even know that she’s gone overseas!”

“Overseas? Why has she gone overseas?” Eddy was puzzled

“She’s gone to meet her in-laws.”

Now anxiety washed over Eddy’s face. “In-laws?”

It took him a moment to gather his thoughts and ask, "Is her husband a foreigner?" That must be why they hadn't been able to find out who her husband was.

"Grandpa, did you meet her husband?" he asked

the date and they turned the wheels

the woman answered: "I'll tell you the second time he'll be in the art museum"

The hotel Jude or an east at seating the doctor

ada

Atur & money

bring card

this

will wet with that lets the way to die **in** the dark

to his seat I asked you to wait, so you

Sandy

Fafallus get out of the car and followed the Butler's shrieks until she finally saw Avery

Avery was wise in her swimsuit, which revealed most of her body and emphasized her femininity

ship Even Caroline blushed as she stood before Avery

"You're here" said Avery

Caroline nodded "Where can I change?"

Avery pointed in a direction She pretended to sound casual when she asked, "Isn't Kirk coming?"

Didn't you two get married just recently?"

“He’ll be here ‘Caroline smiled. “But he’ll be late I go and get changed”

As she spoke and turned to leave, a breeze blew over Her hair moved in the wind, revealing the

red marks on the fair skin of her neck

Avery noticed them right away and gritted her teeth. “Lily Amy!” She screeched

Two women in bikinis rushed over to her “Avery, what is it?”

Follow our plan. When she comes out, push her off

“Aren’t we going to wait for Kirk?”

“No!” Avery **no** longer wanted to find out if Caroline and Kirk were married for real. Those marks on Caroline’s neck said enough

The sight of them pushed Avery to the very edge of sanity.

She needed to give Caroline a piece of her mind

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Caroline changed into her swimsuit. Embarrassed, she walked slowly out of **the** room toward **the**

swimming pool.

Her swimsuit was more conservative compared to what the other women wore, but her long and slender legs showed beneath the skirt. They shone under the light, and she instantly took the spotlight.

Quite a number of men approached her and invited her to drink with them. Caroline had never liked being so close to strangers. So she tried her best to refuse them.

However, more and more people crowded around her, and she found herself helplessly surrounded by them.

Glancing around for help, she tried to find anyone who looked familiar. She **kept** searching, but

her efforts were in vain

Meanwhile, Avery stood on the second floor, looking down at Caroline.

Caroline was being flocked by a group of men, and she was steadily moving back toward the pool. The gentle smile on Avery's face was now replaced by a cruel smirk.

The group of men continued to close in around Caroline. Taking a deep breath, she **told** them she'

was married in an attempt to stop them from getting closer.

One of the men with a glass of wine in his hand laughed. "Why are you saying that when we're all

trying to have fun here? I just want to invite you for a drink."

His words were the opposite of his actions. His eyes were glued to her exposed skin.

Caroline frowned. It was unsettling, and she thought that things were getting out of hand.

"I **don't** want to drink," she said, voicing her stance once again as she turned to look behind her.

Behind her, the water rippled in the swimming pool. There were lots of people in it. All of their

attention was on her thanks to the commotion. However, none of them tried to help.

Caroline took another glance at the pool and turned to look at the people who were surrounding her like vultures. When they spoke, she could hear all sorts of obscenities and vulgarities.

Eventually, she clenched her jaw and jumped into the pool.

She would just swim to the other side of the pool and go back home right after that.

She'd thought that Kirk's friends would be courteous and polite. But her time here confirmed that wasn't the case.

they behaved like hooligans and scumbags. She started to doubt **if** they were truly Kirk's friends,

The smile on Avery's face became more twisted when she noticed that Caroline was already in **the**

pool.

Fortunately, Caroline was good at swimming. With **just** a couple of strokes, she managed to reach

the other **side** of the pool in no time.

Just as she placed both her hands on **the edge** of **the** pool **to** push herself up, she felt something

wrap around her leg. It yanked her down into the water.

Her heart skipped a beat, and she glanced down **to** see two women grinning **at her** underwater.

Before she could respond, they pulled at her legs once more. Their hands were like the tentacles of an octopus, clinging onto her and yanking her deeper underwater.

Caroline wasn't prepared, and she accidentally took a gulp of water. It made her lose control of her breathing, and she started flailing her arms like a person about to drown. "H-help... me!"

Amused, the people standing around the pool watched on. The two women in the water became bolder and continued their attack with more force. They grabbed Caroline by her hair and pulled

her head underwater.

Caroline felt as though she had lost control **of** her limbs. She could no longer move, and darkness

closed in on her.

All this time, Avery stayed on the second floor and watched the show.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed a person clad in black quickly move forward. Her expression changed instantly, and she rushed downstairs.

When she reached the ground floor, she happened to bump into Kirk. "Kirk-" she greeted him.

with a smile, only **to** be completely ignored.

Kirk rushed over to the edge of the pool with long strides. He started searching for Caroline, but to

no avail.

Finally, he caught sight of a pair of hands thrashing about on the surface of the water.

A shadow flitted across his face, and he hurried across the pool to where he'd seen the hands.

Realizing that he was going to jump into the water, Avery immediately grabbed his arm to stop him. "Kirk, what are you doing? Have you forgotten that you get claustrophobic underwater?"

Yanking his **arm** away from her, Kirk dived into the pool without even the slightest hint of

hesitation.

As soon as he was in the pool, he felt the pressure of the water bearing down on him. It enveloped his entire body.

He felt as though he were suffocating. For a moment, **his** vision turned black,

In spite of that, he thought he could still hear Caroline's cries for help. She yelped over and over

again, and her cries echoed in his ears and in his **mind**.

He gritted his teeth and made his way toward Caroline.

Stunned by it all, Avery stood frozen on the spot. Her heart twisted and writhed in **spite**, so **much**

so that she **forgot** how to breathe.

All the onlookers were stupefied by Kirk's actions. The two women underwater were so astonished that they immediately **let** go of Caroline

Now that nothing weighed her down anymore, Caroline could finally **catch** her breath. She broke

the surface **of** the water and gasped for air.

Her sight had been **blurred** by the water, but she'd thought she had seen Kirk underwater.

Relief washed over her as she thought that she finally had someone to rely on. Smiling, she called

out, "Kirk!"

Before she could utter another word, she saw him lean forward and drop to the bottom of the pool.

Shocked, she dived into the water and swam to him at top speed. She dragged him up to the surface and yelled frantically, "Kirk, what happened?"

Avery finally snapped out of her daze. She started yelling, "Lifeguard! Where's the lifeguard?"

Only then did she remember that she had sent all the lifeguards away out of anger after Ivan had refused to let her continue with her plan.

She'd wanted to make Caroline suffer since she couldn't check if her marriage to Kirk was real.

It had never crossed Avery's mind that Kirk would ignore his claustrophobia and dive in to save Caroline. Everyone else started fretting. Some of the calmer people helped carry Kirk to the edge

of the pool.

Caroline was so worn out that she thought she would collapse on the spot. She lay sprawled out on the ground for a moment as she tried to catch her breath.

Then, she crawled toward Kirk and pressed both her hands against his chest.

She had no strength in her anymore. The helplessness she felt made her sway to the brink of

consciousness.

“Kirk ... wake **up** ...” She mustered every ounce of strength she had left to do chest compressions. However, Kirk only managed to cough out a little bit of water. He still looked like he was in a deep sleep.

Overwhelmed **with** anxiety, Caroline glanced around for help. Her eyes fell on Avery, who was standing in a corner.

Caroline’s gaze snapped Avery out of her **stupor**, and the latter responded **by rushing over to** Kirk.

She shoved Caroline **aside**, her eyes red with rage, “**It’s** all **your** fault! You almost killed him!” She forced those words **through** gritted teeth.

Caroline was **stupefied**, but she knew this wasn’t **the time to talk** about it. “**Hurry and** take him to **the** hospital.”

“**Stop** being a hypocrite!” Avery snapped at Caroline. Then, she ordered two brawny men to carry Kirk into the **house**.

Caroline followed after them but was stopped by Avery once again.

“You’re not welcomed here. Get lost.”

Caroline was stunned, but she managed to retort. “Kirk is my husband. Why can’t I go in there?”

“Because you almost killed him!” Avery spat and called over a bodyguard. “Get her out of here!”

Caroline tried to resist. She struggled against the two well-built bodyguards, but it was of no use. She stood no chance against them and was tossed out like trash.

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Chapter 135

Caroline was soaked from head **to** toe, and she was only dressed in a swimsuit. But she didn't notice it **at** all. The only thing she was focused on was the gigantic castle in front of her.

Kirk was inside, and she **couldn't be** sure if he was going to be alright. She couldn't force her way **into** the building. If only she could contact Ivan right now

However, her clothes and phone were still inside. Glancing around **at** the desolate street, **she** felt chills in **her** heart as she recalled everything.

Flonza was known **for** its vast land and tiny population. It would be difficult for her to find someone to borrow their phone.

All of a sudden, she remembered the hotel staff who had driven her here tonight. Perhaps she could get help from the hotel staff.

Besides, the hotel wasn't too far from here. It had only taken about ten minutes or so to reach here by car. If she walked there, it would probably take about an hour.

Time was of the essence, and Caroline's mind was set on going to the hotel. She tried to recall the way there and hastened her footsteps.

This area was kind of deserted. She had to walk for a long time before she finally came across a street lamp.

Night fell. As she passed a few houses, she realized that people **were** starting to turn their lights off for the night.

Everything was becoming darker.

There wasn't a single shadow of a person on the streets now. She felt as though she were treading through a bleak and godforsaken desert.

Since she didn't have her shoes, her feet were bare. They left light footprints on the ground with **every** step she took.

”

It took her more than an hour to reach the hotel. When the manager in charge of night duty, Henry Diaz, saw Caroline's state, it gave him a fright. He was the one who'd brought her her swimsuit in

the afternoon.

Caroline was in her swimsuit, and her face was rather red from exhaustion now. There were water droplets on her forehead. No one could tell if it was sweat or water from the pool.

Quickly, he strode to her. “Madam—Mrs. Morrison, what happened?” He signaled for one of the other staff members to bring her a towel immediately.

Caroline recognized him **trying** to catch her breath, **she** asked, “**U—can you help** me make a **call?**”

“Certainly Who do you want me **to** call?”

Help me call. Her voice trailed off, and she furrowed her brows.

“Are you okay?” Henry asked, concerned

A shadow fell across Caroline's face. She took a deep breath and waved one hand in the air **to** dismiss the thought “Never mind.”

She was so worried about Kirk that she **became** muddle-headed. She didn't have Ivan's number.

Glancing up to look at the couch in the lobby, she bit her lip and asked, “Can you give me a map of the state?” Maybe she could walk back to Kirk's house based on her memory.

Henry guessed what she was worrying about. “Did you forget someone's number?”

Caroline forced a laugh. “No. I don't even know his number.”

“It’s okay.” Henry assured her and continued, “We have the best search tool to look for someone’s number. Just tell me who you’re looking for. Perhaps we can assist you.”

Caroline was stunned. “Isn’t this a hotel?”

Henry smiled expectantly, which made Caroline hesitate for a bit. In the end, she decided to give it a try. “I don’t know his name, but his son’s called Kirk.”

The corners of Henry’s lips twitched ever so slightly. “Okay. Please wait.”

No more than a minute later, he came back to her with a printed copy of an address book.

“The person you’re looking for is the first on the page,” he told her.

Utterly puzzled, Caroline couldn’t help but comment, “Are hotels’ services so advanced now?”

.

Henry only smiled in response. It wasn’t about how advanced their hotel was. It was just that the person she was looking for happened to be their boss’ father.

Caroline quickly dialed the number.

Soon, Ivan answered the call. His expression changed the moment he learned that Kirk had

passed out. “Okay. I’m on my way.”

After ending the call, Caroline finally sighed in relief. She turned to face Henry and thanked him.

Henry didn’t know how to respond. Everything here belonged to Kirk, after all. Even the phone she had used was no exception. There was no need to thank him.

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Jost den one of the stall merateis came over to them with a towel Henry passe
d it to Caroline

and esked. "Miss, would you like **se** to prepare a fresh set of clothes for you?"

They professionalism and thoughtfulness came as a pleasant surprise to Caro
line. Still, she

refused them "Nope. Thanks for everything **fra** going back

"Back? **Where to?**" Henry blurted

"**The** pool party"

Suddenly, Henry noticed that Caroline didn't have shoes on. There were even
traces of blood on

her feet

His expression morphed into one of concern. He asked with worry. "Don't tell
me that you walked

all the way here from the swimming pool"

The hotel and Caroline's destination were quite far away. It would have taken
at least an hour to

come here on foot

Yet Caroline had walked here alone. This alone said enough about her courag
e.

"Mrs Morrison, let me arrange a car to drive you there," Henry suggested.

"That's not necessary." Caroline refused, thinking the hotel's services were far
too good to be true.

Instantly, Henry rushed forward to stop her from
walking away. "Wait! You can't just walk away

like this”

“Why?”

An idea suddenly popped into Henry’s mind, and he said, “Your husband booked a presidential suite here. Therefore, he will be permanently considered a VIP here.”

Henry paused before adding, “It is our priority to take care of our customers’ well-being. Their family members are no exception”

“If you leave,” he continued, “my superiors will surely put the blame on me. Take pity on me. Please have a change of clothes before you leave.”

Caroline couldn’t bear to refuse him again, so she quickly changed into the new set of clothes and got into the car. Then, they headed straight for the white castle.

In one of the rooms on the second floor of the castle, several professional staff helped remove the water from Kirk’s lungs. They left once they were done with their job

Now, Kirk and Avery were the **only** ones left in the room, Sitting beside him, Avery held one of his

hands. Her heart broke a little **to** see **him** in such a state.

“**You did it on purpose, right?** You **were** just pretending, right? You once told me that only a fool **would** sacrifice himself for another person.”

Avery sobbed. “**Surely**, you wouldn’t do that. You did it just so we would believe **your** relationship **with** Caroline **is real**.”

Kirk’s face was pale as he lay on the bed with his eyes shut tight. Avery stared at him in pity and

reached out a hand to caress his face.

Just then, Kirk started coughing violently. His lips opened slightly, and he started mumbling,” Carrie...”

A shadow fell across Avery’s face when she heard him take Caroline’s name.

She flung Kirk's hand away and yelled, "Carrie, Carrie, Carrie! **You've** only known her for such a short period of time! Do you even know what kind of person she is?"

Right **after** that, she fell to her knees beside him and held on to the edge of **the** bed for support. Her face was full of anguish as she spoke next.

"Kirk, why can't you just love me? We've known each other for so long. I know everything about you, and you know everything about me too! We'll make the perfect couple!"

She cried, "**Just** wake up, alright? Caroline doesn't deserve you!"

All Kirk knew was that it was very noisy. Annoyed, he raised one hand and rested it against forehead. Still, the noise didn't subside. The only word he could make out was "Caroline."

his

He jerked awake, and his eyes snapped open. "Carrie!" His voice was hoarse since he'd swallowed

the pool water.

Avery glanced up at once. Kirk had finally woken up!

"Kirk! Thank goodness you're alright!" She exclaimed.

However, Kirk completely ignored her. He sat up from the bed and asked, "Where's Carrie?"

Posted by **Hamaaa**, ? Views, Released on October 7, 2023

Chapter 136

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Kirk, why can't you just believe me? We've known each other for 27 years! You've only just met her Why **don't you** believe **me**, even if it's just for once?"

Kirk flung her hands away from him. His voice was as cold as ice when he **said**, "Avery, I'm married. You're crossing the line"

"Yes, I know that She put her arms around him again and yelled, "I should've done this a long time ago I love you, Kirk

She continued. "Back then, I thought it was inappropriate for a girl to be the one to confess, but I can't wait any longer I don't care about that anymore. Losing you is worse than anything else"

Kirk pried her arms away from him again and warned her, "I'm a married man."

"I don't mind if you're married Your marriage is fake, after all." Avery refused to relent.

Kirk turned to look at her with his cold, piercing eyes. They seemed distant more than ever now.

"I'll repeat this one last time Caroline and I are married for real. I've decided to spend the rest of my life with her

His words were like a bomb detonating right in front of her.

Her body swayed, and she stumbled backward as she tried to deny the truth. "No! You're lying to me. You must be lying."

Furrowing his brows, Kirk took a final glance at her and rushed downstairs.

At the same time, Caroline had just arrived at the entrance of the castle.

Both of them bumped into each other at the door. She caught his scent and looked up to see his face. The fear that had been gripping her heart finally disappeared.

"Kirk!" She called out his name in relief.

Kirk placed one arm around her waist and asked, "Are you okay?" Her face was pale.

Caroline sniffed and shook her head to let him know that she was fine. "Why did you pass out all of a sudden?"

Kirk didn't want her to worry about him. He leaned closer **to** her and whispered into her **ear**,

Maybe it's because I indulged myself **a** little too much with you around."

Instantly, Caroline's face flushed **red**. "This isn't the time **to** joke!"

Kirk kissed her on the lips, only to discover just how cold they were against his. **They** were even

trembling.

He glanced at Caroline and lifted her up bridal-**style**. "**I'm** taking you home."

Avery watched their **interaction from** the second-floor balcony. Jealousy seeped into every inch of **her** body.

Her eyes were bloodshot, and she clenched her hands with so much force that her fingernails dug

into her palms.

After getting into the car, Caroline remembered that she had called Kirk's father before she came.

"Dad's on the way here. You should call him now that you're alright. Don't let him **worry** about you.

Kirk took out his phone to call Ivan. He ended the call soon after he'd told Ivan that he was fine.

Caroline felt totally worn out after everything that had happened today. She slumped against the seat and murmured, "Wake me up when we're there."

Kirk hummed in response as he reached out to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear.

Once Caroline drifted off to sleep, he got out of the car and bent over to pick her up and place her

in the back seat.

He gently moved her into a comfortable position before starting the engine and hitting the road.

Later, he parked the car at the entrance of the hotel and carried her into the lobby.

When Henry saw Kirk enter, the drowsiness he felt vanished without a trace. He rushed forth to greet them both. "Mr-

However, Kirk shot him a glance and said, "Get some hot chocolate ready."

Henry wasted no time running to the kitchen.

Then, Kirk took Caroline up to the presidential suite and placed her on the bed. Soon after, Henry came with a flask of hot chocolate, two mugs, and a bag of medicine.

"Mr. Kirk, I had the staff buy some medicine to treat a cold and fever. There's also iodine for the injury on her feet," he said.

A shadow flitted across Kirk's face. "Her feet?"

GET IT NOW

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Chapter 137

Kirk's heart missed a beat. One of his hands was still placed against the door as he **asked**, "What **happened**?"

Henry **then briefed** him about what had happened **before**.

Kirk fell silent afterward, unsettling Henry. "Mr. Kirk, did I do something **wrong**?"

"You've done a good job." Kirk assured Henry, despite the gloom in his eyes.

“**You’ll** be the **new** owner of this hotel starting–tomorrow.”

Henry’s eyes turned as wide as saucers when he heard that. He stared in a daze at the closed door before him, flabbergasted.

He was merely one of the staff there. How did he just turn into its boss all of a sudden?

In the room, Kirk carefully took off Caroline’s shoes. Once her feet were bare, he finally saw the

cuts and blisters on the bottom of her **feet**. His eyes widened in shock.

After taking out the bottle of ointment from the bag that Henry gave him, he started to slowly and

gently apply the ointment.

Only after he was done with both her feet did he pat her cheeks to arouse her from her sleep.

Wake up,” he said.

Still sleepy, Caroline tried to toss around, but Kirk held her legs together to stop her.

“Be good. Get up and have some hot chocolate. I don’t want you to get sick.”

Caroline then pouted and mumbled, “I don’t want that. I’m tired. I want to sleep.”

“Come on.” He coaxed her as if she were a young child.

With one hand on her waist, he helped her up slowly and gingerly so that the ointment on her feet

wouldn’t rub off on the sheets.

Although Caroline was sitting up now, her mind was still groggy. She absentmindedly opened her mouth to take sip after sip of the hot chocolate. She looked very much like a cute little bunny.

After finishing the drink, she slid under the sheets and started mumbling again . “I wanna sleep...

Kirk... come sleep too.”

After planting a kiss on her cheek, Kirk pulled the blanket over her shoulders. Then, he stood up and walked out to the balcony.

He dialed Charles’ number and said, “I want to know what happened at the pool party tonight”

Half an hour later, Kirk returned to the swimming pool. The party had ended long ago, and there was n’t **a person** in sight.

The only **thing** that moved was the rippling water under the lights. Avery stood near Kirk, her face

pale.

His silence made her heart clench in fear. She had grown up with him, so she knew just how terrifying he could be at times like this.

“Where were you when Carrie jumped into the pool after getting surrounded by all those people?”

His face was firm. The soft glow of the moonlight only served to emphasize the coldness in his

eyes.

Avery shuddered and muttered. “I was changing upstairs.”

“Are you saying that you didn’t hear a thing even though something like that happened?”

“I heard it, but parties are supposed to be noisy. I didn’t think much about it,” Avery explained.

Kirk turned to face her. His eyes were cold and indifferent. “Charles,” he called out.

Charles appeared, shoving two women in front of Kirk. The women were tied up, and they were Avery's good friends, Lily and Amy.

They started crying for help the moment they saw Avery. "Ave, help us!"

Avery **felt** panic wash over her, and she found herself trembling uncontrollably. Clenching her fists, she took a deep breath and asked, "Kirk, what are you doing?"

"They're your friends. Do you need me to say more?"

Kirk's brows were drawn closely together now, and the look in his eyes was sharp and ruthless.

When he'd watched the video, a thousand ways to torture these two women had flashed through his mind after seeing how they had bullied Caroline.

Avery raised her eyes to meet him and smiled softly at him.

"I **don't** understand. Care to explain?"

Slowly, Kirk opened his lips to say her name, pausing at every syllable. "Avery!"

Chapter 138

Bogus Billionaire (Shining Riviera)

Posted by **Hamaaa**, ? Views, Released on October 7, 2023

Chapter 138

A chill ran up Avery's spine, but she still pretended **to** be clueless. "Kirk, **what** are **you** trying **to tell me?** Don't **beat** around the bush."

"I've **given** you a chance." Kirk's **voice** was dangerously low.

"If it hadn't been for your parents, **I** wouldn't even be here to talk to **you.**"

"I **get** it now." Avery smiled bitterly at him. "After everything, **you're** saying that I was the one who told them to do it, right?"

Kirk stared at her unblinkingly. "Isn't that so?"

The smile on her face became brighter, yet her voice was laced with bitterness.

"I don't understand why you'd think that way. Yes, I love you, but why would I hurt Caroline? Even

if I did, you wouldn't come back to me. Besides, there will always be people who like to abuse others for no particular reason.

"They are my friends," she continued to spin her lies.

"But I don't need to do whatever they do. **If** you want to blame me, the only thing I've done wrong was bring Caroline here. Something like that wouldn't have happened then, and your life wouldn't have been in danger."

She sounded reasonable and sincere. Kirk couldn't find fault with her words.

He asked, "Why did you chase Carrie out after I passed out then?"

"You passed out because of her. I was mad at her and didn't think about the consequences. I'm willing to apologize if loving someone is wrong."

Kirk furrowed his brows. "So... you had nothing to do with tonight's incident?"

"**If you** don't believe me, you can take me to the police. My conscience is clear."

The frown on Kirk's face deepened at her words. "You'd better keep that in mind. Don't blame me

for what I'll do if I find out that you've done anything that could hurt Carrie."

-

Kirk turned away and left. Charles followed after him, taking the two women along with him.

After getting into the car, he asked Kirk, "Mr. Kirk, where are we going now?"

"The hotel."

Silence occupied the air the entire time they were in the car. Charles would look at Kirk in the rearview mirror from time to time.

Kirk had his eyes closed, but suddenly he asked, Do **you** have something to say?

Charles scratched his head. "**Yes.**"

Then **say it.**

"Was Ms. Mendeley telling us the truth just now?"

Kirk opened his eyes. "What do you think?"

Charles had been working for Kirk for more than ten years already, so he knew quite a lot about

him. It was no secret that Avery liked him.

"I think that her feelings for you are genuine. Perhaps this incident today really had nothing to do

with her."

Kirk's eyes sparked with rage.

It didn't matter if Avery was the one behind this incident. He'd warned her that Caroline was

important to him and that hurting her would be crossing the line.

Avery was smart. She should be able to figure out what would happen if she were to do anything

of the sort.

"Have you dealt with those men?"

Charles nodded as he answered, "I've sent them for chemical castration." He couldn't help but

shudder in fear for those men.

Kirk's methods for getting things done were ruthless. Nobody would have the guts to bother

Caroline ever again.

The next morning, Caroline woke up to find herself in an unfamiliar place.

She got up from bed and walked to the door to open it, only to discover that she was in an ordinary

apartment.

There were three rooms, with a living room in the center. This apartment was way smaller than the castle. Still, its decor gave her a rather cozy feeling.

Two **pots** of fiddle—

leaf figs stood in one corner of the living room. They made Caroline feel as though she were back home in her apartment in Easton.

“Do **you** like it here?” Kirk's deep, husky voice sounded from behind her.

Caroline turned to face him and asked, “Is this your home?”

Kirk nodded. This was the place he had prepared before their trip. He had brought Caroline here

This **was** their **home**.

Caroline **nodded**. “I like it here. **It's just** like my house.”

You silly.” Kirk **enveloped** her with his arms. “This is your house. Our house.”

It made Caroline smile shyly. “**You're** taking advantage of me again.”

Kirk lifted her up and strode to the **couch**. They sat, and he took her shoes off

.

Startled, she curled her toes away from him, but Kirk held them steadily in his grasp.

Her cheeks flushed. Even though a person's feet weren't considered private parts, it still felt weird

that someone would stare at her feet like this.

Besides, her feet were injured yesterday. They surely wouldn't be pretty to look at.

"Stop looking at my feet."

"Why shouldn't I?" Kirk chuckled and traced the edges of the cuts. "Do they still hurt?"

"**No.**" Only then did she realize that the cuts had grown into scabs.

"Did you ... help put some medication there?"

"Yes," replied Kirk as he inspected **her** injuries. "You're such a fool."

Caroline felt her heart melt like chocolate. "I had no choice... I didn't have my phone with me, so I had to go to the hotel for help."

Her reply warmed Kirk's heart too. He reached out to brush away the stray strand of hair on her cheek. "Carrie," he called

The look in his eyes made her panic. Lowering her eyes, she said, "Yes?"

Leaning in, he placed one hand around her waist and muttered, "I want you. What should I do?"

Caroline blushed.

The two of them spend quite some time entangled with each other on the couch. It was only in the afternoon that they finally had their breakfast,

As they finished their meal, Kirk got a call from his father. He stole a glance at Caroline before grabbing his phone and walking to the balcony.

"Kirk, where are you?" Ivan looked down at Avery, who was kneeling before him.

"I'm at the apartment that I had arranged for back then."

Sighing, Ivan stood up and walked out the door. "I already know what happened last night. I know

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I've dealt with everyone involved in it but won't take toleres feftir vetullavery ba
d ed udent

that if something like this were to happen wan in the fare, *i wokale go away ha
y*

Ivan sighed again. I won't comment on the truth

this for the and Mrs Mendeley

brought Avery here to apologize. We're old friends, after all. There's no proof t
hat Every was behind it. We shouldn't be so harsh on them"

Ivan continued," "Bring Caroline home when you're free Give Busty the chanc
e to epdogs to tar

Kirk fell silent, so Ivan tried to persuade him.

"Even if you're mad at Avery, you should consider
Caroline's feelings How do you think she'll feel If no one apologizes to frer alte
r what she's been through? The person who started it has to end it

he said

"You're sinart, so you get what I mean, right?"

Frowning deeply, Kirk turned to look at Caroline

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Chapter 139

Caroline toyed with a roly-
poly in the living room. **When** she looked at Kirk, he was staring back at her. It
was as **though they** were telepathic. She tossed him a smile.

Kirk swallowed before finally speaking into the phone. "I'll ask Carrie about it."

"**Okay.**" Ivan finally heaved a sigh of relief. After ending
the call, he went back **to the** living room.

Avery's parents were there. **As** Ivan returned, they asked him, "Ivan, what did Kirk say?"

"I told him to ask Caroline what she thinks of this."

Still, Avery's parents didn't relent. Instead, their faces were full of worry when they spoke. "Ivan, we're so sorry about this. Avery didn't know **that** something like this would happen either."

Ivan waved a hand in the air to dismiss it. "Enough talk about that. What's important is that

Caroline and Kirk are okay now."

His words made the Mendeley couple feel even more guilty.

They glanced at Avery beside them, but they didn't have it in them to reprimand her. She was their own daughter, after all. Besides, she was usually very gentle and obedient.

Even Ivan found this incident rather odd. Perhaps it had nothing to do with Avery.

Meanwhile, Kirk went back to the living room with his phone in hand. Caroline saw him coming and placed the roly-poly on the coffee table. "What happened? Was it a call from your office?"

"Why **do** you ask?" Kirk slid his arms around her waist from behind and kissed her head.

Caroline smiled. "I rarely see you looking so troubled. Did something happen at work? Do they

want you to go back?"

"Nope. It was a call from Dad," Kirk answered. "He said Avery wants to apologize to you."

The smile on Caroline's face vanished at once.

The incident replayed in her mind. Her gut instincts told her that Avery liked Kirk, even though there was nothing to prove it. What happened last night must have had something to do with

Avery.

“Do you want to go back there?”

Caroline turned around to face him and asked, “I have a question. Can you give me an answer first?”

“Sure.”

“You and **Avery** have known each other since childhood, **right?** **Were** you ever... **together** in the past?”

Kirk held Caroline’s chin with his hand and **said**, “**No.** We’re just friends.”

“Really?”

“**Don’t you** believe me?”

“No, I do.” Caroline laughed. “Does she like you then?”

Kirk frowned as if he were contemplating it. “I think so.”

“Do you like her then?”

Kirk rested his forehead against Caroline’s. “Are you jealous?” He teased her gleefully.

“Hey, **I’m** being serious right now.”

Caroline started to turn away from him, making Kirk’s face turn serious as he grasped the

situation.

Out of the blue, he lowered his head to kiss her on the lips. It made Caroline’s mind go blank.

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After some time, Kirk finally let go of her.

Caroline was still in a daze as she stared blankly at him. Despite that, her eyes were clear, and it made her look adorable. Amused, Kirk asked, "You still don't understand?"

Blushing, Caroline turned around and mumbled, "I don't."

Kirk chuckled. "Have **you** thought things through?"

Caroline took a deep breath and turned to face him once again. Her eyes shone with clarity when she looked at him. "Yes. Of course I'll go."

She didn't need to worry about anything else as long as Kirk didn't like Avery. She was also curious about why Avery wanted to apologize to her.

"**Are** you **sure**?" Kirk stared into her eyes for confirmation, and Caroline nodded in response.

"Then I'll call Dad back and let him know."

"Okay."

Today's Bonus Offer

Bogus Billionaire (Shining Riviera)

Posted by **Hamaaa**, ? Views, Released on October 7, 2023

Chapter 140

They decided to meet for dinner and made a reservation at a **high**-end hotel. Avery and her parents -Adam Mendeley and Lia Brooke—were the first **to** arrive, followed by Kirk and Caroline. Ivan wasn't feeling well, so he didn't join them.

The moment Caroline and Kirk entered the private room, the Mendeleys stood up from their seats **and** looked at Kirk with anxious **eyes**.

Avery was the first to speak, and her words directed everyone's attention to Caroline. "I'm sorry, Caroline."

Caroline tossed her a bright smile. "Don't apologize to me yet. I don't even know why you're apologizing."

The expression on Adam's and Lia's faces changed slightly. They glanced at each other, as though silently agreeing that Caroline wouldn't be easy to deal with.

Yet Avery had mentally prepared herself for this.

She maintained a smile on her face and explained, "I was the one who invited you to the party. Even though the incident had nothing to do with me, you wouldn't have been hurt if I didn't ask **you** to go."

Caroline leveled her gaze at Avery as if she were judging the latter. A moment later, Caroline smiled and said, "Ms. Mendeley, you shouldn't have said that. Since it had nothing to do with you, you needn't apologize. If you apologize, people will think that you were the one behind it."

Avery paled at Caroline's words. This was her first time seeing that Caroline had a sharp tongue.

"But I was the one who invited you to go to the party. I should've stayed by your side the whole time."

"I'm not a child." Caroline laughed. "I've furthered my studies abroad, and I know that Easton's

social circle isn't a big one. By tomorrow, everyone would probably know that you had asked me

for forgiveness."

Then, she added, "Although Kirk's office is based in Easton, I don't want him to be affected by it if

-people start to say that he married a fussy woman

Avery wanted to retaliate, but the words were stuck in her throat. She sensed that Caroline must

have realized something.

Adam and Lia didn't get the underlying meaning of Caroline's words. They only thought she

meant exactly what she said.

To them, she seemed agreeable and reasonable, and they were immensely grateful for that.

Caroline's night. However, it was Avery's fault for being irresponsible at the party last night Adam raised **his** glass in a toast. "How about this? Let's all have a drink and let bygones be

bygones."

"What do you think, **Kirk**?" Caroline asked as she glanced at Kirk, who stared at her with eyes full

of tenderness.

He gave her full autonomy to decide on this "Just do what you want," he told her.

Caroline smiled "We'll let this go then "

She took a sip from her glass of wine. The others followed suit.

Still, something turbulent stirred in Avery's eyes.

Kirk had never looked at her with such a gentle gaze before!

"Avery!" Mrs. Mendeley called out in warning as she nudged Avery's elbow. Only then did Avery snap out of her daze to raise her glass of wine and drink it.

After that, all of them took their seats. Adam initiated a conversation to get rid of the

awkwardness in the air. Lia also spoke to Caroline from time to time. Eventually, the atmosphere

became livelier and more relaxed.

Yet there was still a barely noticeable, ominous feeling in the air. Caroline sensed it when she looked at Avery, whose eyes showed more and more animosity as time passed.

Caroline got **up** from her seat to excuse herself. "Mr. and Mrs. Mendeley, I'm going to the restroom."

Seeing this, Avery stood up too and said, "Caroline, I'll go with you too."

"Okay." Caroline smiled at her, and they walked out of the room together.

Seeing them leave, Lia laughed and said, "Friendship between girls is so simple. I believe that Caroline and Avery will become best friends after this."

Kirk merely smiled in response.

Just **as** they reached the restroom door, Caroline raised her hand abruptly and slapped Avery

across the face.

Avery didn't have time to react. She tenderly held her cheek, which was stinging with pain from the slap. "Caroline! Why did you hit me?"

Caroline snickered. "Even if we put the party's incident aside, you're the person who kicked me

out of that place last night!"

"I was-"

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