

Chapter 5

"Sold! To Miss Barron for ten million dollars!" the auctioneer declared.

A wave of relief washed over me. For a moment, the tightness in my chest eased.

I went to the back room to finalize the purchase. The attendant swiped my exclusive, unlimited black card. It was declined.

"That's impossible," I said, my voice tight. "Try it again."

He did. "I'm sorry, Miss Barron. The card has been frozen."

I stared at him in disbelief. My father would never freeze my card.

Javier, who had followed me, stepped forward. "Don't worry, Elena. I told you, it's my treat." He handed the attendant his own card.

It was also declined.

Javier looked stunned. "What? My accounts are fine. There must be a mistake."

A commotion started to build outside the room. People were whispering, laughing.

"Did you hear? The Barrons are broke!"

"She bid ten million and can't even pay for it. What a joke."

My face burned with shame. I had never felt so humiliated in my entire life.

Just then, Damien appeared in the doorway. He had watched the whole scene unfold, a cool, unreadable expression on his face. He walked slowly towards the attendant.

"Allow me," he said, pulling a card from his wallet.

The payment went through instantly.

The attendant handed the velvet box containing the necklace to Damien.



And then, in front of everyone, Damien walked over to Eve, opened the box, and fastened the "Tears of the Ocean" around her neck.

I was no longer just a joke. I was the punchline.

My eyes stung, and I fought back the tears that threatened to fall.

Javier swore under his breath. "That son of a bitch. He must have hacked our accounts. He did this on purpose."

A bitter laugh escaped my lips, and then the tears came, hot and unstoppable. Of course, he did. He was a genius coder. He could cripple financial systems with a few keystrokes. This wasn't just about a necklace. This was a public execution of my dignity.

He had the power to ruin me, and he had just proved it.

Damien turned to Javier, his voice low and menacing. "Stay away from her."

Then he looked at me, his eyes cold as ice. "Let's go home, Elena."

"I'd rather die," I whispered, my voice choked with grief.

I turned and walked away, not looking back.

For the next week, I locked myself in my room. Javier tried to visit, leaving trays of my favorite desserts outside my door. I ignored them. I remembered his voice from the library, laughing about how he'd manipulated me. He was no better than the rest of them.

One afternoon, I turned on the security feed I'd secretly had installed in the main living areas of the house. I'd done it after overhearing their conversation in the library, needing to know the true extent of their deception.

The Fellows were sprawled on the couches, complaining.

"Is she ever coming out?" Kenneth groaned. "Eve wants us to take her to the Hamptons, but Damien says we can't go until Elena is 'stable' again."

"Why is it our job to cheer her up?" another Fellow, Leo, whined. "I'd much rather be with Eve."

"Damien's orders," Javier said with a sigh. "He wants one of us to

go up there and coax her out."

"I'm not going," Kenneth grumbled.

"I don't want to either," Leo added. "Javier, you go. You're the best at pretending to care."

"Why should I?" Javier shot back, his good-natured facade gone. "Damien's the one who caused this mess at the auction. Let him clean it up."

Just then, Damien himself walked into the frame. He looked at the others, his expression dark.

"I'll handle my fiancée," he said, his voice laced with a cold possession that made my skin crawl. "You all just stay out of it."

He picked up a small gift box from the table and headed for the stairs.

I quickly shut off the monitor. My fiancée. He still had the audacity to call me that.

Downstairs, I could hear Kenneth's angry voice through the door. "His fiancée? Who does he think he is? She belongs to all of us... or to none of us."

Javier's voice was heavy with resignation. "It doesn't matter, Ken. In the end, she'll still choose him. She always does. We're just the supporting cast in their twisted play."



