

22: Instantly Outshining Everyone

Megan had no choice but to explain with a forced smile, "Five years ago, we all thought Caitlin had perished in the fire. But it turns out, she was lucky enough to escape and survive. She just recently returned."

"Oh, I see!"

"Five years gone, and Caitlin has grown into such a stunning woman! I wonder if she's married yet?"

As the guests shifted their attention to Caitlin, Megan's irritation grew.

Though she maintained her composure outwardly, Megan felt deeply vexed inside. She put on her best hostess smile, approached Caitlin, and said warmly, "Well, look who's back—Caitlin!"

Jasmine also noticed Caitlin's uninvited arrival. Confused, she wondered what Caitlin's intentions were in showing up so suddenly today.

Scott's reaction was even more dramatic. Hearing Megan address the woman as Caitlin, he froze, his entire body stiff with shock.

It felt like an earthquake of magnitude 12 had just rocked him.

He had no idea Caitlin was still alive. The Lewis Family hadn't mentioned her return at all.

Seeing Caitlin now, Scott's shock quickly morphed into unease and fear.

For a brief moment, he thought he was seeing a ghost.

After all, five years ago, he'd tried to end her life.

Back then, he had orchestrated the fire, intending to burn her and the "

bastard" child in her womb, erasing all traces of them. Who could've imagined that not only was she still alive, but she had returned stronger than ever?

And that transformation! It was beyond recognition.

The Caitlin he remembered was plain, timid, and painfully naive—easily manipulated with a few sweet words.

But now?

The Caitlin standing before him radiated beauty, confidence, and a cold sharpness that was as dazzling as it was intimidating.

Scott couldn't believe his eyes.

Leaning toward Jasmine, he asked in a low voice, "Jasmine, is that really Caitlin? Is she human or... a ghost?"

"She's very much alive," Jasmine replied curtly, her face twisting into an uneasy smile.

She then stepped forward, greeting Caitlin with feigned enthusiasm.

"Caitlin, what brings you here to attend my mother's birthday party?"

Her question carried an undertone of accusation. After all, shouldn't Caitlin be staying at The Vanderbilt Family estate, tending to the half-dead Sebastian? Why was she free to wander around?

Caitlin responded with a faint smile, her words laced with meaning:

"I just got back to the country two days ago and stood in for you as Sebastian's bride. Since today is Megan's birthday, how could I not come

to celebrate?”

Her statement packed a punch.

The upper echelons of New York society had long heard about The Vanderbilt Family searching for a bride with a compatible star chart to “revive” Sebastian. Now they learned it was Jasmine who had been chosen—only for her father, Jonathan, to send Caitlin as a substitute.

To outsiders, it almost seemed like Jonathan didn't even see Caitlin as his own flesh and blood.

Caitlin also deliberately addressed Megan as “aunt.” That title alone was enough to remind everyone of Megan's history.

Jonathan's ex-wife had barely left before Megan swooped in and replaced her, marrying Jonathan with startling speed. It wasn't long after that Megan introduced Jasmine as her biological daughter. The timeline only cemented Jonathan's reputation as a scoundrel.

Caitlin stood next to Jasmine, and soon, the murmurs among the crowd grew louder.

“They say Jasmine is one of New York's top three beauties, but standing next to her sister Caitlin... she seems a bit outshined, doesn't she?”

“Caitlin's beauty has a timeless elegance. She's even more striking!”

Comparison is the thief of joy.

Jasmine had long been touted as one of New York's most stunning women. But now, with Caitlin standing beside her, the contrast was painfully evident.

Caitlin seemed to glow with an inner light. Her elegance and beauty made her appear almost otherworldly, as though she could dim the stars themselves.

She didn't even need to speak. Her regal demeanor and stunning looks effortlessly outshone everyone in the room.

Megan, who had always believed her daughter to be unmatched in beauty, now had to grapple with the fact that Caitlin had stolen the spotlight the moment she appeared.

Desperate to shift the dynamic, Megan quickly looped her arm through Caitlin's and led her further into the room.

"Come, come! Let's not just stand at the door. Let's all move inside."

Scott followed behind Jasmine, his gaze glued to Caitlin the entire time.

"Is that really Caitlin? How could she change so much?" he murmured in disbelief.

Jasmine, noticing Scott's lingering stares at Caitlin, clenched her fists. She also realized that most of the men in the room—including her own brother—couldn't take their eyes off Caitlin.

Jealousy boiled in her chest.

That shameless wench! First, she seduces every man in sight, and now she's back to ruin my life again!

Scott's younger sister, Joanna, sidled up to Jasmine.

"Jasmine, is that really Caitlin? She's not dead?" Joanna whispered, equally stunned by Caitlin's transformation.

"Yes, it's her," Jasmine replied through gritted teeth, her gaze cold and venomous.

"I can't believe it," Joanna said, her voice tinged with awe.

Five years ago, Caitlin had been plain and unremarkable, blending into the background. But now? She was dazzling.

"What's she doing back here? Do you think she's going to try and take your place as the eldest daughter of The Lewis Family?"

Jasmine's face turned as dark as storm clouds. There was no way she would let Caitlin succeed.

Joanna nudged Jasmine with her elbow, her tone laced with curiosity.

"Hey, Jasmine, is she wearing the same brand as you? Her dress looks an awful lot like that Vera couture gown you were eyeing. Don't tell me she managed to snatch it?"

Jasmine's anger flared. Suppressing her rage, she said, "Impossible! How could she afford Vera couture? I looked into it—the dress was bought by a wealthy businessman for his wife. I'm certain the one she's wearing is a knockoff. Just watch—I'll expose her."

Jasmine sauntered toward Caitlin, plastering a saccharine smile on her face.

"Caitlin, you look absolutely stunning today! That dress is gorgeous. Is it from Vera's latest couture collection?"

Caitlin saw right through Jasmine's façade. With a faint smirk, she glanced at Jasmine's own dress and replied,

"You're not wrong. But Jasmine, your knockoff Vera dress suits you perfectly."

Her words were like a slap.

All eyes turned to Jasmine.

Vera was a wildly popular luxury brand, especially among New York's elite. If Jasmine's dress was an authentic Vera, she would've drawn admiration.

But if it were fake?

The murmurs began almost immediately.

"Wait a second. Now that she mentions it, Jasmine's dress does look a little off. The pattern isn't quite right."

"True. And look at the stitching—it's sloppy!"

"I recognize Caitlin's dress, though. It's definitely from Vera's flagship collection."


The contrast was clear: Caitlin wore a masterpiece, while Jasmine was draped in an imitation.

Jasmine's face burned with humiliation.

Refusing to back down, she snapped, "Are you sure yours is genuine, Caitlin? I heard that gown was purchased by a married businessman. Could it be... he gave it to you?"

With one sentence, Jasmine turned the tables, implying Caitlin was some wealthy man's kept woman.

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 +25 Bonus

The crowd buzzed with gossip. Could Caitlin have stooped so low as to become a mistress?

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