

### 23: Publicly Exposed

For a moment, the room was abuzz with whispers. Caitlin, unfazed, asked calmly, "I'm curious, Jasmine, where exactly did you hear such rumors? Do you have any evidence to back them up?"

"Of course I do!" Jasmine retorted confidently. "I know the manager of Vera personally. I can call him right now and let everyone hear the truth!"

Jasmine's plan was clear: she intended to ruin Caitlin's reputation in front of everyone. Megan didn't step in to stop her, secretly hoping that Caitlin would embarrass herself. 1

"Go ahead and call," Caitlin replied, her faint smile steady and her eyes serene, betraying no hint of panic.

Jasmine wasted no time. She dialed the Vera manager's number, turned on the speakerphone, and asked the question directly: who had purchased the Vera haute couture gown?

Chin raised, Jasmine waited smugly for the answer, confident she was about to expose Caitlin. The surrounding crowd leaned in closer, their curiosity piqued.

Soon, the manager's voice came through the line, clear and unambiguous:

"Miss Jasmine, the Vera haute couture gown you were interested in was purchased in full by a woman named Caitlin."

The room went silent. Jasmine's confident expression faltered as she quickly responded, "That's not right! Last time, you told me it was bought by a married tycoon."

The manager sounded confused. "Miss Jasmine, you must be mistaken. When you inquired about the haute couture gown, it had already been sold to Miss Caitlin. At the time, you chose a different blue dress instead, but that gown was later purchased by a wealthy businessman. Afterward, you didn't place any other orders. If you need assistance, we'd be happy to welcome you back to our flagship store..."

Before the manager could finish, Jasmine hastily ended the call.

Her face turned pale, her fingers trembling. She had planned to humiliate Caitlin, but instead, she had managed to humiliate herself.

Now everyone knew the truth: Jasmine wasn't wearing Vera couture but a knockoff. It was as if she had personally confirmed it in front of everyone.

Low murmurs and suppressed laughter filled the room as the realization spread.

Megan, seeing her daughter's predicament, quickly stepped in to salvage the situation. She hurriedly pulled Caitlin aside, saying, "Caitlin, it's so rare for you to visit. Let me introduce you to some of my friends. Come, come."

Once Caitlin had been led away, Jasmine stood frozen in place, feeling her blood rush to her head. Her entire body seemed to radiate heat from the shame and anger coursing through her veins.

She had never felt so humiliated in her life.

Her thoughts spiraled. It was all because of that gown she couldn't secure. She'd bought the counterfeit version to save face at the party, only for Caitlin to expose her in front of everyone.

Caitlin, you're so cruel! I hate you!

Jasmine dug her nails into her palms, her jealousy and rage overwhelming her.

Joanna approached to console her. "Don't take it to heart, Jasmine. It's just a dress. She was obviously trying to embarrass you on purpose. Come, let's go find you something else to wear."

Joanna led a seething Jasmine out of the banquet hall to cool down and change.

Meanwhile, Megan brought Caitlin into the main hall, where Jonathan was chatting with a few business associates.

The men were quick to offer compliments:

"Mr. Lewis, congratulations on reuniting with your eldest daughter. She's absolutely stunning—truly extraordinary!"

"Indeed, Mr. Lewis, with two such remarkable daughters, you must feel incredibly blessed. And on top of that, today is your wife Megan's birthday—a double celebration!"

"Thank you, thank you..." Jonathan forced a smile, awkwardly accepting their congratulations.

In truth, both he and Megan felt uneasy, worried that Caitlin might bring up the skeletons in their closet.

After all, they were deeply aware of the fire that had devastated the Lewis family five years ago. Not only had they chosen not to report it, but they had also worked to bury the truth.

Caitlin maintained her composure, her lips curling into a faint smile as she spoke:

"Five years ago, I narrowly escaped a fire in the Lewis estate. Just two months later, my mother tragically passed away. Now, coming back after all these years, I see so many changes in the Lewis family. Father, I didn't realize you and Aunt Megan had been married for five years already. Time really flies, doesn't it?"

Her words struck like a thunderclap.

The guests were taken aback, and whispers began spreading through the crowd as the implications of Caitlin's statement sunk in.

Five years ago, a fire broke out, nearly costing Caitlin her life. Shortly after, her mother passed away. Yet Jonathan had remarried Megan, his late wife's sister, in what seemed like record time.

How could anyone do such a thing?

To some, it was clear: Megan must have been involved with Jonathan long before the tragedy.

One guest couldn't help but comment to Megan, "So, Mrs. Lewis, you're not just the wife but also the late Mrs. Kelly's sister? Wow, I suppose that makes this a real family affair—keeping it all in the family!"

Megan's face burned as if slapped. The humiliation was palpable.

But she quickly tried to smooth things over, putting on a teary-eyed act.

"Losing my sister was devastating for me," Megan said, forcing a pained expression. "I only wanted to step in to help take care of her children. I've always treated Caitlin as if she were my own daughter..."

Caitlin as her own daughter? What a joke.

Caitlin's icy gaze pierced Megan as she responded, her voice sharp but calm:

"Wow, Aunt Megan, you're so kind. My mother only had two children — me and my brother. But my brother went missing when he was just a boy, and then I nearly lost my life in that fire. With my mother gone, I wonder, which of us have you been taking care of all these years?"

The question hung in the air, cutting like a blade. Megan's lips moved, but no words came out.

The silence was damning.

Jonathan quickly stepped in, forcing a smile to diffuse the tension. "Caitlin, we're just so glad you're back. It's been five years — we've missed you so much."

Megan played along, dabbing at imaginary tears. "Yes, Caitlin, every day without you was so hard. I'm just so grateful you're alive."

Caitlin's lips curled into a smile, her voice sweet but laced with venom. "Aunt Megan, it's clear how much you've missed me. I'll make sure to repay you properly for all your care in the future."

She leaned in to hug Megan, patting her gently on the back, and whispered just loud enough for Megan to hear:


"Don't worry, Auntie. I'll take such good care of you."

Though her smile remained, the ice in Caitlin's eyes was unmistakable.

Megan forced a dry laugh, but her heart pounded in fear.

Releasing the hug, Caitlin's lips carried a faint curve as she thought to

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 +25 Bonus

herself:

I didn't come back to reconcile, Megan. I came back to settle the score.  
The fun is just getting started.

Her gaze sharpened. You'll pay for everything.



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