

The Devil's Love For The Heiress by LiLhyz Chapter 11

Chapter 11: One More Month

"You take a lot from Manuel Ronaldo," Hugo Bonnet said, his eyes studying Carlos cautiously, waiting for a reaction.

While Carlos felt rage running throughout his entire body, he swallowed all his emotions down his throat. He quickly formed a sneer as if revolted by being compared to his own father.. Carlos replied, "I am... nothing like my father."

Carlos turned to his friend, Alexander. Then he shifted his attention back to Hugo. He said, "My father was selfish. More than that, he failed to manage his finances and left mother and me in a helpless situation."

"I would appreciate it, Mister Bonnet, if you don't mention him before me," Carlos requested. While his eyes were filled with fury, they were bitterness secretly meant for Hugo and not for his father, Manuel

Hugo's former mischievous grin turned into a wide beam. He declared, "Well, I think... we can get along just fine."

"I hope so, Mister Bonnet. I am here for money and money only. I know making businesses with you is the **fastest way to go** about it." Carlos returned his attention back to Alexander and introduced his friend. "This is Alexander Jenkins, my practice partner."

Like Carlos, Alexander also greeted Mister Bonnet. He said, "It's a pleasure, Mister Bonnet."

They were all settled in a private **restaurant owned** by the Bonnet gang. It had tight security, **and there were cameras all over. Around them were three security personnel** watching their surroundings.

"I came to see both of you for a very important matter," Hugo spoke. "I understand how you have taken part in our match—fixing games for a long time." Hugo turned to his assistant, receiving hints in a whisper. "Five years, huh? Good. Good."

Hugo's eyes thinned. The lines on his face became apparent as he smiled from ear to ear. Hugo **was a man** in his late fifties, the said leader of the Bonnet gang, a syndicate that began ten years back. The Bonnet gang controlled not just the corruption in tennis but also other famous sports such as soccer and football.

"**Five years,**" Hugo repeated. "**And you have contributed nicely** by bringing in other **players** too, like your friend Alexander."

“Mister Ronaldo is also our point of contact for the US games as of this year,” said Hugo’s assistant.

Hugo’s grin grew wider. He said to Carlos, “You really are not your father.” Under the table, Carlos’ hand clenched. It took everything in him to give Hugo the proper response. “I am... nothing like my father... He died pathetically.”

Smirking, Hugo remarked, “And he... he had it coming.”

“I tried to offer your father the best, given his situation, but he never listened. Instead, he went against me,” Hugo revealed. He pointed a finger at Carlos, warning him, **“What happened to your father is an example of what will become of you, should you cross me, young man.”**

“This is my warning.”

“I have no reason for me to cross you,” Carlos quickly replied, “I’m in this too deep really. What do you think will happen to me should the authorities know? This is *my* only life now being part of this. And like I said, I loath my father”

This was always what Carlos said in the past, even to the first person who approached him into the scheme. Since the police asked for his cooperation, he had made it appear as though his own father disgusted him,

It was sometime last year that fixers hinted they tried to recruit his father idrough another tennis player, but this was the first time Carlos heard an actual admission Carlos Thought Hugo was so bold, or perhaps he was too confident he could get away with everything

In response to Carlos’ claims, Hugo said, “While that might be true. You have given us many Secret wins by losing your matches, but you never did so during the Grand Slams. It was always in the minor tournaments, Why is that?”

Hugo turned to Alexander and stated, “At least your friend here gave up his chances on one Grand Slam event.”

“Mister Bonnet, why not?” Carlos shrugged, “It has always been my aim to become the number one ranked tennis player in the world, and the Grand Slams could easily give me that title. You must understand, Mister Bonnet, that I am a very ambitious man”

“And what’s the difference now? Why should I believe you are willing to sacrifice your Grand Slam win in the French Open?” Hugo asked,

Carlos and Alexander turned to each other. They both nodded before Carlos answered, "Mister Bonnet, I'm sure you know how the ranking is counted. I am at the stage where I belong to the elites of the tennis world. You should know by now that there is a cap to the point system in tennis ranking, at least in my ranking stage."

"The tennis association only counts five hundred seventy points a year, and I already have two thousand points from the Australian Open. And while the ranking won't count everything, I have enough point ranking to keep me afloat for this year and remain number one, even if I fail in the French Open. Besides, there are still two major events this year, the Wimbledon and the US Open."

Hearing Carlos, Hugo nodded. It was true. When elite tennis players reached the top rankings, there was already a cap to earn points, and Carlos, having had his winning streak, was already set in his number one spot.

"You are wise, and I like your ambition," Hugo complimented. "You made the right decision." Hugo pointed out, raising his hands, "How much will you win during the men's finals? Huh? You only get a little over two million dollars." He laughed and proudly announced, "I can give you more."

Hugo turned to Alexander and said, "For you, Mister Jenkins, I'll offer you a million dollars to lose the match during the quarterfinals. Whereas, if you win the quarterfinals, you only get a hundred dollars. We both know you don't stand a chance against Ronaldo here, and I have yet to see you win the semifinals in all the major tournaments."

Alexander nodded. Unlike Carlos, he started his tennis career much later and has yet to prove himself. Still, he had always acknowledged that Carlos was more determined in his wins. He

replied, "I have no complaints. I have yet to win my first million dollars in a tennis tournament, and here I am, getting it for throwing a match."

"As for you, Mister Ronaldo," returning his attention to Carlos, Hugo offered, "Given your experience and titles, I am offering you six million dollars to lose during the semifinals."

"Is that a deal?" Hugo asked.

"And which gambling site are you going to bet against me?" Carlos sought.

Hugo merely narrowed his eyes at Carlos, saying, "If I tell you, I'd have to kill you." "That's none of your business, Ronaldo. Just do your part, and I'll take care of the gambling," Hugo suggested. "Is it a deal or no?"

"It's a deal," Carlos confirmed.

Hugo and his assistant discussed how their games would go in the next few minutes. They plotted out everything, including the potential reasons for Carlos' and Alexander's losses. Hugo also mentioned how **the referee was in** on it and would be ready to call the balls out if they land on the sidelines. The more they covered the plan, the more names were mentioned. It was precisely what the detectives **wanted from the meeting.**

After covering their strategies, Hugo said, "That's it, gentlemen. Pleasure doing business with you." He shook Alexander's hand first before taking Carlos'. He leaned in, whispering to Carlos

ears, "If you cross me, Mister Ronaldo, you'll find yourself six feet underground... just like your father." Chills ran down Carlos' spine, but he collected himself. He kept his cool, knowing Hugo was testing him. His lips twitched **before answering** sternly, "I can assure you, my father will be **different.**"

He looked straight into Hugo's eyes, not blinking for a second, letting him know how he **meant every word.** "Very well, then." Hugo fixed his coat, saying, "Until our next deal."

Returning to his hotel room. Carlos' face was red in anger. The words that Hugo said kept ringing in his head. 'You'll find yourself six feet underground... just like your father.' **He walked** into his suite, and then his steps picked up the pace, finding the door to the **adjoining room. Alexander followed behind him, trying to soothe** him. "Chill, man. Chill."

Carlos barged into the second room, walking past his assistant and two of his security team. **In another adjoining room, he walked past an empty space. In the last room, he knocked on the door. He pushed the door open, and finally, in the fourth connecting room, he found the detectives that had listened in to them the entire time.**

"That's it. **That was an admission! He admitted to killing my father!**" Carlos indicated, **taking off the wires taped in between his** body. "We can get him now!"

"Not yet, Mister Ronaldo. Not yet!" The French detective, Mister Bernard, said, moving closer **to Carlos.** With Carlos losing his temper, he pushed him against the wall, explaining, "We are this close. It's not only about your father. **Remember, we need to catch everyone,** and by **everyone, I mean every network,** including the extended gangs that participate in the Bonnet **gang's schemes!**"

"The trap has already been set. What is one more month? What is one more month of waiting?"

'One more month?' Carlos hissed as he pushed detective Bernard off him. 'Have they forgotten how I had been part of this investigation for five long years?' "One more month, Mister Ronaldo. Not only will your father get justice, but the corruption in sports fixing will end." Mister Bernard looked earnestly in Carlos' eyes, saying, "We need you. We need your help. Please... One more month... Think about it; the more solid evidence we have against Hugo Bonnet, the more years he will spend in prison." "One more month," Carlos muttered. He took several deep breaths, thinking, 'One more month before my father gets his justice, and one more month... to see Kate again.'

Meanwhile, back in Braeton City, Kate was ogling at her email signature, more specifically, at the company logo below her name and designation. Under her breath, she muttered, "CSK." She frowned and repeated the name, "CSK... CSK Apparel." "Now that I think about it, and knowing Carlos owns the company, could CSK mean... what I think it is?" With the idea, heat crawled up to her cheeks.

Chapter 12: CSK?

"Hello, Catrina," Kate greeted, entering the door of the CEO's office. She extended her hand, giving Catrina a copy of her marketing proposal. "This is the marketing plan my team and I have devised. I also sent you a soft copy of the entire outline as well."

"I understand that Carlos' endorsement contract with Rolex ends in two months, so my suggestion included for him to wear the watches even before our official launch – "

"Carlos?" Catrina raised a brow and said, "You are on a first-name basis now with Mister Ronaldo?"

"Kate, I don't mind that we call ourselves on first name bases, but our boss remains to be our boss. Unless he says otherwise, you will address him as Mister Ronaldo, " Catrina directed. "Is that clear?"

Kate fell silent. She gulped, realizing how the entire office was not yet aware of her connection with Carlos. Her father, Ethan, had specifically reminded her to keep it to herself, given Carlos 'involvement in an undercover police operation. In response to Catrina, Kate forced a smile, saying, "Right. I – I'm a fan, and I call him by his first name all the time. Apologies for that, Catrina."

"No worries. I understand. I just wanted to remind you." Catrina accepted the folder and said, "Thank you for your diligent work. You really surprised me, Kate. To be

honest, I thought you were one of those spoiled heiresses who did not know how to work.”

While Catrina’s words stung her ego, Kate somehow appreciated her honesty. She answered, referring to her older brother, Kyle, the CEO of The Wright Diamond Corporation, “Trust me, there are no free passes to working under a tyrant, boss brother.”

“He is that scary, huh? I’ve heard stories about Kyle Wright. It must be a lot of pressure working under your older brother. He is known to be a very cold person,” Catrina remarked.

It was true. Many feared Kate’s brother. Apart from his success in expanding the biggest company in the city, he was known for his savage glares. Kate’s older brother was handsome, but to others, he was frightening at the same time. Reacting to Catrina, Kate smiled. She suggested, “He isn’t really that bad. He is just... a little choosy as to with whom he speaks to.”

“Anyway, Kate. Thanks for this,” Catrina said.

Kate knew that was her signal to leave, but she remained in front of Catrina, itching to ask a question. It had been almost a week since Carlos left Braeton, and she had not **heard a word** from him since. Even her father had not heard from Carlos. Ethan, however, confirmed through his dispatched men in Paris that Carlos was constantly practicing for the upcoming matches with Alexander.

A few days back, Kate realized that the company name was very familiar. She speculated on **what CSK stood for**, but to confirm it, Kate had to get the information from either Catrina, the stand-in CEO, or Arman, the HR director.

“Anything else you need, Kate?” Catrina asked.

“Um... I’m just curious. What does CSK stand for?” Kate probed. “I’ve gone through the company profile. I don’t also believe Arman gave me the meaning during my orientation. I just

Cape 12 CSK

thought that perhaps, if there is a deeper meaning to the company name, I could also add that to the marketing campaign.” Kate shrugged and hinted, her eyes rounded as she said, “You know if this is about a love story, perhaps? A story of a long-lost love? Or maybe friendship?”

Biting her lip, Kate waited anxiously for Catrina’s reply.

“Well, I tell you this? Some of the company’s information is still a secret. Even I don’t know. **Last**

week, I honestly thought the third shareholder was Hailey Mckenzie, but now that you mentioned it.” Catrina thought deeply. Then, she suggested, “I also contemplated about Mister Ronaldo’s relationship with the top female tennis player, you know, the Irish player, Savannah Knight?”

“Didn’t they model for the swimwear, Speedo, two years back?” Catrina fanned herself with one hand, saying, “I honestly thought those photos were hot, hot, hot! They look good together!”

Leaning forward to her table, Catrina suggested, “Who knows, Savannah might be... the third shareholder of the company – Shhhh. Don’t say I suggested that. We don’t want to spoil it for **everybody**.”

Kate’s full name was Sarah Kate Wright. However, her family was used to calling her Kate, since Sarah was her maternal grandmother’s name. Now that she knew Carlos owned CSK Apparel, she speculated about the company’s name. A big part of her wisdom had it meant Carlos’ **and her name, Sarah Kate**.

However, hearing Catrina’s suggestion, she glowered. While Catrina returned to her work, Kate’s head quickly became filled with doubts. Yet again, she left the CEO’s office, reluctant **about where she stood** in Carlos’ heart.

Later that evening. Entering her twin brother’s penthouse, Kate awkwardly said hello to a new caregiver. Instead **of the usual youthful nanny** her nephew had, she was looking at an older **woman who seemed to be in her fifties**.

Kaleb was a single dad to Liam. He has had three nannies in the past. Two of them tried to seduce Kaleb, including the recent one. The **previous nanny was dismissed on the spot**. Finding her brother in the dining area, Kate asked, “How is the new nanny?” **“She seems decent. My assistant got her from a reputable agency**, so I hope this one lasts... What brings you here?” Kaleb inquired **before chowing down a piece of his steak**. **“I want your two cents,”** Kate admitted. She sat next to her brother and revealed, “CSK Apparel, the **company I work for and the same one owned** by Carlos. Rings a bell? Carlos and Sarah Kate? Right?” Kate’s blue eyes gleamed in the hopes her twin brother would have the same idea, but Kaleb quickly **crushed her hopes when he** replied, “SK. Should it only be Sarah Kate? How many SKS **are there** in the world?” Raising his shoulders, Kaleb suggested, “Possible, Kate, but isn’t he close to that Irish tennis **player? What’s her name, Savannah Knight?** In fact, they had an exhibition game today. It was

Chapter 12. CSK?

all over the internet.” Kate’s face turned red, angered by Kaleb’s suggestion. As she frantically searched on her phone, she mumbled, “Which side are you on? I can’t believe you!”

“You asked me a question, and I answered it honestly,” Kaleb claimed. “It could also be Sarah Kate, but it could also be... Savannah Knight. Geez, don’t be so uptight. Besides, didn’t you just... reconnect? And for only a few hours?”

When Kate found the videos that circulated the internet, she grimaced, seeing how the top tennis players from both the female and male singles categories were having fun, playing doubles. Her eyes narrowed, recognizing how Carlos and Savannah were on the same team, often giving each other high fives after winning points.

Kate even went far enough, searching for the old modeling pictures between Carlos and **Savannah. There were two** photographs. One with both of them facing the sea. Carlos was half naked, wearing a speedo board short. His sexy muscular back was on full display, and his hand **was around Savannah’s waist.**

The second picture definitely irked Kate to the core. Carlos was smiling down on Savannah while the latter was seductively looking up at Carlos, her hand on his bare abs. **Kate scoffed** and said, “She isn’t even that sexy!” Kaleb laughed at her, saying, “Sour graping?”

After returning home for the rest of the night, Kate went through online for any potential link **between Carlos and Savannah.** She hated herself for having missed it. **Kate was so focused on Hailey** that she did not realize the other competition was out there! Heck, **there could be even more!**

There were many pictures of Carlos and Savannah together, but then again, **it was the same** with the other players. Especially during tennis gatherings. After tiring herself for two long hours, she fell asleep at one in the morning, her mobile **settled next to her in bed.**

At four in the morning, Kate awoke to the sound of her phone buzzing. She **frowned at the sight of an unknown number.**

Kate was determined to cancel the call, but decided otherwise. She groaned as she picked up her mobile and answered, “Do you know what time it is?”

“It’s nearly noon here in Paris,” Kate’s eyes widened at the sound of a familiar voice. It was deep and sexy, resulting in her heart galloping as she jerked up in her bed.

She responded, “Carlos?”

“Kate, I miss you,” Carlos said on the other line, and Kate found herself grinning like a teenage girl. ‘Oh, my god!’ Her mouth parted, excited to say back the words, “I –

Chapter 13: Crazy For This Girl

Kate’s eyes fluttered open. She winced, realizing her phone was vibrating. Still half asleep, she checked the time. When Kate realized it was still four in the morning, she groaned, complaining, “Who calls at this time?”

She was about to cancel the call, when something in her, call it an unknown force, urged her to answer her phone. When she slid the home screen open, she mumbled, “Do you know what time is it?”

“It’s nearly noon here in Paris.” Hearing that voice, she longed for; **Kate was wide awake in a flash.**

Her voice broke in and out as she called his name, “C–Carlos?”

“It’s the first day of the tournament today. I’m sorry I woke you up. I was just... wondering if maybe... you’ll wish me luck?” **Carlos said on the other line.**

Kate’s heart was already racing, thrilled at the unexpected call. She replied, “Of course, good luck with your game. I know you’ll do great. **As usual.**”

There was a second of silence, but soon Kate heard Carlos say, “I miss you, Kate.”

‘Oh, my god!’ In her head, Kate was screaming at his words. Her face turned bright red, and she was grinning like a fool. She bit her lip before timidly answering, “Carlos, I – I miss you too.”

“Carlos?” Kate frowned, and once again, she checked on his response. “Carlos?” **When she looked** at her phone, it displeased her to see that her battery had died! “Oh, my god! Like, why do you die at the perfect moment? Arrgghh!”

Kate frantically fetched her bag and found the charger. After plugging her device, she waited nearly a minute. When her

phone switched on, she attempted to call Carlos back. **However, even as she undertook to dial the unknown number,** her phone died again. "Agrrrh! I hate this! Why is this happening to me now?"

Of course, she knew the answer to that. She was up, researching about Savanna Knight with **the use of her mobile instead of sleeping.** In the end, she waited for at least five minutes before she turned her phone back on. **As soon as she entered her passcode, she called back the unknown number. Sadly, it seemed like Carlos**

mobile was already switched off.

She groaned in annoyance, cussing while she was at it. Very quickly, she sent him a text, and it read:

(Carlos, I'm sorry. My battery died. I was on the internet till one in the morning and fell asleep without charging my phone. I miss you too.)

"Please, answer. Please, answer." Kate anticipated, but an hour passed, and **there was still no answer. Nor did Carlos call back**

Earlier in Paris.

Carlos and Alexander were preparing to leave for the start of the French Open tournaments. He peeked outside his room, and seeing that the detectives were not in his suite, Carlos went to his in-room safe and opened it.

He had a backup phone, only for his personal use. The police had already warned him of how his known device may be tapped. That was why he avoided making phone calls. Should he do so, he was to use a secured device.

It was the same with his assistant and Alexander. Each of them had a private phone that no one knew about. Carlos and his party evaded calling out at all costs despite having a secret phone. There was always that slim chance the enemy could infiltrate a new device.

After turning it on, he typed the number he memorized by heart. It rang up to five times. Carlos was about to give up on the call, but to his luck, Kate answered, complaining about how early he called

Hearing Kate's voice gave him a sense of happiness. He knew, this way, he could still survive the remaining three weeks of being away from her. After receiving Kate's wishes for his games, Carlos unwittingly said, "I miss you, Kate." 'What the hell? Why did I say that suddenly?' It was the longing of his heart. While he tried to hold back and keep it all in until he returned to Braeton, his mouth betrayed that quickly.

"1—

." Carlos frowned. He seemed to have lost Kate. He tried calling her back repeatedly, but her phone was switched off. He ran his hand down his face, thinking, "Fuck, I hope I did not upset her."

"She did not seem upset. Was she?" He tried calling again and sending her a message, but when he did not receive a reply, Carlos just turned the phone back off and shoved the device back in the mini vault.

During Carlos' match that afternoon, he was so edgy. It was just the first round, and he missed **two serves**. Usually, his first match would last five to ten minutes, tops. His opponents often would miss his serve, landing him an easy win. However, that day, Carlos was distracted, thinking about the call with Kate.

Alexander, who cheered him on, yelled at him, "Get it together, Ronaldo! This isn't like you at

all!"

Carlos still won, but he was grumpy all the way. He refused to join the mini celebration with other male tennis players for getting through the first round. Carlos and Alexander went straight to their accommodation in Paris.

While the two tennis players were on the lift, going up to their hotel room, Alexander whispered to Carlos, "What is wrong with you today? Your mind is somewhere else?"

Sucking in a deep breath, Carlos answered, all while keeping his voice down, "I called Kate earlier today. The call got disconnected. I called her back, but her phone was off." "I don't know if I upset her, calling so early in the morning or if." He leaned back, suggesting, all while maintaining to whisper, "Maybe I'm coming on too fast. What do you think? Maybe I'm scaring her." While it was just the two of them, Carlos and Alexander were still cautious of their **surroundings**. Alexander softly suggested, "Are you kidding me? Coming on too fast? You have liked this girl since you were in high school. I doubt you are coming on too fast... I'm sure

there is an excellent explanation. Just you wait and see."

When Carlos returned to his room, the first thing he did was to check on his secret phone. He impatiently turned it on and waited, his eyes seemingly burning a hole through the device.

Eventually, with the phone already on, messages came through. He quickly read all three messages. All of them came from Kate.

(Carlos, I'm sorry. My battery died. I was on the internet till one in the morning and fell asleep without charging my phone. I miss you too.)

After charging my phone, I tried to call you back, but I could not reach you.) (Good luck with your game. I'm rooting for you always. When you get the chance, please call me back.)

Relief

overwhelmed Carlos. He was smiling like crazy, ready to reply back, when he heard voices outside his door. He immediately recognized the police officers' tones. Carlos was left with no choice. He quickly replied, saying he would call her again soon.

He turned off the other mobile and returned it to the safe deposit box. Outside his room, Carlos received instruction from the detective to proceed to the fourth room, and he nodded. This happened, all while secretly hiding the excitement that warmed his chest.

Before heading to the fourth room, Carlos pulled his friend aside and whispered to Alexander, "Hey, wanna get a drink at the bar tonight? My treat." Carlos' smile was recognizable that Alexander curiously asked, "Now, what's up with you? You were so uneasy earlier, and now you are smiling like a fool?" Checking the surroundings, Carlos scanned their living room suite. After seeing no one, he leaned closer to Alexander and revealed, "Kate texted me. She said she misses me too." Shaking his head, Alexander declared, "See what I mean? You were getting paranoid for no reason. Fucking love. You are a crazy, man." Raking his fingers through his hair, Carlos replied, still in a whisper, "Yeah, I am. Crazy for this girl." Under his breath, he muttered, "Three weeks more to go."

Chapter 14: The Devilish Serve

Second Round of the French Open.

Stade Roland Garros, the complex hosting the French Open, had its tennis courts' surfaces made with white limestones and covered with red brick dust. Crushed bricks were pressed onto the limestone surface with rollers, then drenched in water. Every step, every glide, and every ball landing left a mark on the tennis courts.

They say, in the French Open, there were few miscalculations on whether the ball went in or out, but that day, Hugo Bonnet made it a point to let Carlos know how he had control over the French games. Hugo attended the game for the first time since Carlos went undercover into the match-fixing schemes.

“The ball was in!” Carlos yelled at the referee, and many of his supporters inside the stadium did the same. They were booing the referee for having counted the ball out.

Carlos' face was red in resentment. Everyone could feel the heat throughout the entire stadium

When the organizers tried Hawk-Eye's assessment, the findings came undetermined.

“Booo! Boo! Hawk-Eye is a fail!”

“It was in! It was in!”

“The ball was in!”

Hawk-

Eye was the technology used in many tennis tournaments around the world. It comprised ten cameras around the court that followed the tennis ball wherever it went. It was often used

to disprove or prove the referee's findings. Sadly, during Carlos' match, the same advanced technology

failed. Carlos was going head to head with a wild card opponent. The event organizers often chose a wild card, regardless of whether they qualified for the tournament. It was their way of featuring potential new tennis stars in the Grand Slams.

“The ball is out. Call stands,” the referee insisted, and Carlos did not miss how the same referee regarded Hugo Bonnet from the VIP seats.

Carlos understood how Hugo was playing his game. Hugo was warning him, trying to make him realize that he could also ruin his matches, but to Carlos, there were shots that the **referees** could not call “out.”

During Carlos' next serve, he soothed himself. He took a deep breath before fishing out a pendant dangling from his necklace. He held a golden compartment locket with his fist and pecked it, believing it as his good luck charm. He gave Hugo one unfazed look. Then, he glanced at Alexander. His friend was mouthing him an instruction, ‘End the fucking game! Carlos nodded, knowing what to do. Lifting his racket up, ready to serve, he tossed the tennis ball and hit it with his remarkable strength. It landed on the opponent's center ser

vice area, garnering him a point. His rival stood no chance at the powerful serve, merely frozen in his stance, shocked at how fast the ball came his way.

“We love The Devil!”

“What a speed!”

“No one beats The Devil in court!”

“Love you, Carlos!”

The stadium became filled with applause. Many of Carlos’ supporters stood up with their hoots while pointing to the LED screen. The same screen showed how Carlos performed.

The average tennis serve speed within the men’s singles category was 120 miles per hour (mph), but Carlos’ serve measured at 146 mph.

Glaring at the referee, Carlos waited for the announcement. Eventually, the referee declared, “Fifteen all.”

During Carlos’ next serve, he struck it with the same strength. His opponent managed to hit the ball, but it clearly landed outside the service line.

“Out,” the referee called and explained where it landed, “Thirty, fifteen. Advantage, Ronaldo.”

From above the stadium, the sports commentator described Carlos’s performance. “Wow! Carlos Ronaldo is taking this match seriously. Have you ever seen him show off his Devilish serve during the second round? He meant to prove a point. There is no beating The Devil himself!”

On Carlos’ succeeding serve, his opponent missed the ball again. On the next, his rival fell down the red court. He hit the ball, but it never went past the net.

“And it’s a game in favor of Carlos Ronaldo, The Devil in court!” From above the stadium, the sports commentator announced. “Did you see that? One hundred fifty miles per hour! Clearly, a very good display of talent at this early stage of the competition.”

Carlos won easily. His game was determined as the shortest match in the French Open, lasting only seven minutes.

Carlos walked into the locker rooms, still fired up by Hugo's schemes. Alexander followed behind him, and after finding an isolated spot, he whispered to Carlos, "He is trying to test

us."

"I

know," Carlos said before clenching his jaws. "It's just that his methods get under my skin." Still controlling their voices, Alexander proposed,

"Let's hurry up and return to our hotel." The two quickly changed, not bothering to get a shower. They wanted to meet up with the French detectives and assess the situation. Just as Carlos collected his belongings, his phone rang. Carlos saw it was Hailey calling. Wanting to get rid of her quickly, he answered the call saying, "Hailey, I thought I told you —"

"Carlos, baby! I'm here with Kate. Poor little thing is expecting you to call her back. I thought I would do her a favor and make that call instead. Do you want to speak to "

Remembering how his known mobile phone may be tapped, Carlos quickly ended the call, utterly in a panic.

He cursed, realizing how Kate's name had been mentioned. Another reason for his displeasure was the fact that Hailey was still in Braeton. She was probably seeking Kate out on purpose and doing whatever it took to push Kate away from him.

Alexander and Carlos promptly left the locker rooms. They reached the complex's driveway and waited for their vehicle. Their bodyguards kept them secured the entire time. Before their car could reach them, Hugo and his men approached, driving by in another vehicle.

Hugo rolled down the window of his car. He said, "Hailey Mckenzie, huh? Baby? I guess I've always known."

Carlos' tensed at his words. He sucked in a breath and replied, "Listening in to my calls now? That's how you work with your business partners?" "Just making sure I'm all covered, Ronaldo. Just avoid having phone sex," Hugo winked at him before laughing. He then asked, "By the way, who is Kate?" Carlos' chest tightened, scared of what Hugo may have found out. He frowned, acting not to recognize the name. He asked, "Who?" "Dude, you know. Kaitlyn, the blondie who tried to seduce you at your birthday party? Yeah, Hailey calls her Kate, remember?" Alexander suggested.

Carlos still maintained his frown, saying, "I don't remember."

“Gentlemen, I came to remind you of our agreement. The quarterfinals are around the corner. Mister Jenkin’s will be the first to prove his worth.” Hugo smirked and said, “My men will be in touch.”

Hugo rolled up his car **window**, and his vehicle gracefully left the driveway of Roland Garros’s complex.

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Three hours later.

Carlos and Alexander were having a meeting with the detectives. It was there that Carlos expressed his concern. He said, “Detective Bernard, I may not like Hailey Mckenzie, but I sure don’t want her dead because of me.”

“We have already reached out to the US authorities. They will give her undercover surveillance,” detective Bernard promised. “And Kate?” Carlos asked. “You have no idea how many soldiers are secretly following behind her. I think her father did the work for us,” the detective revealed, leaving Carlos assured.

“However, it is better that you cut off all contacts for now,” Bernard instructed. “**Better safe than sorry.**”

Carlos retired for that day, already past midnight in Paris. Inside his room, he opened his safety deposit box with a heavy heart, knowing it may be the last time he would call Kate until **the covert operation was over. When he turned his mobile on, he received text messages from Kate.**

He already expected her to have many questions, including how Hailey was able to reach him freely. Knowing Hailey, Carlos already guessed **how he needed to do some damage control.** He

Chapter 15: I’ll Be Your First?

Earlier that day in Braeton City.

“Yes! Yes!” Kate squeaked after Carlos won his match. She was at a coffee shop across the street from her office building, ordering an excellent strong drink to **wake her up.**

She almost missed Carlos’ game, but thankfully, she witnessed everything through her mobile, all while ordering her drink. It had been two days since Carlos first called her. The

first time it happened, her phone died. Earlier at dawn, she missed his call because she was fast asleep. Kate was so exhausted that she failed to hear her phone ring, despite having her mobile next to her.

The time difference between Braeton and Paris wasn't helping at all. Recognizing she still had an hour and a half before work would start, Kate sat at an empty table and sipped her coffee lazily. Just then, a woman with wavy honey hair walked up to her. The woman gripped on the empty seat next to Kate and asked, "Can I take this chair?" The woman was none other than Hailey Mckenzie, and she gave Kate a shock. Hailey turned to Kate, saying, "Hello. It's nice to see you again, Kate. How long has it been? Nine years?" "Wow, are you... stalking me?" Kate asked, her blue eyes scanning the cafe.

"Why would I be?" Hailey asked back.

A scoff left

Kate's lips, and she answered, "It's seven in the morning. I doubt your coming here was unplanned. Besides, why are you still here in Braeton? I thought you already live in New York." "I'm dealing with some matter," Hailey replied curtly. She leaned in, saying, "Listen to me, Kate. Carlos and I are having problems." She narrowed her eyes, adding, "But eventually, he will come back to me. He always does. We've been there for each other for nine long years. **I am the one that knows him the best.**"

It was the way Hailey said it that made Kate frown. She was absent in Carlos' life for that nine years, and thus, envy crept into her heart.

Hailey fixed her gaze on Kate. She suggested, "You know, there are so many women out there **who want to sleep** with Carlos. There is Linda White. Hannah Dil, Savannah is the bitch of all! She thinks she owns him..."

Kate's eyes widened, hearing Savannah's name. However, despite how Hailey went on suggesting how Carlos had flings left and right, she swallowed all those theories down her **throat, not wanting to give away any reaction.**

She sucked in a breath, thinking about how there was so much more she needed to know about Carlos.

"Are you going to be one of his flings? Someone to conquer because he failed in the past?" Hailey suggested. She shrugged and added, "Perhaps." "I am not going to be one of his flings," Kate proclaimed, her hands clenching below the table. "Oh, we will see about that," Hailey replied. "You see. It has always been Carlos' goal to **conquer you.** You rejected him in high school, and he is back to teach **you a lesson.**"

Kate's blood was boiling. She gritted her teeth before saying, "I don't believe you. Carlos is not like that at all."

"And what do you know about Carlos? What makes you think he is the same person you used to know?" Hailey suggested. "Don't tell me you are falling for his lines? Pfft! Typical."

"Can you even please him? Because the new Carlos has this crazy sex stamina. Sometimes, we'd have sex all night." A smirk formed on Hailey's face before she said, "He likes a girl who knows how to be on top. Can you handle that?"

When Kate paled at her words, Hailey laughed. She declared, "Oh, my god. You are a virgin?" She shook her head and said, "Dear, dear. We can't have that. You should at least... have experience if you want to take Carlos to bed - ."

"Why are you assuming that I want to have sex with Carlos?" Kate asked in anger. "Well, don't we all? Admit it or not, Kate. Carlos is the new hot thing. He is sexy as hell, his net worth is already around a hundred million dollars, thanks to his wins and sponsorships, then, he is a superstar! He is a fashion and sports model! Who doesn't want to get their hands on Carlos, The Devil?"

Irrked by Hailey's words, a big part of Kate wanted to get answers right then and there. She suggested, "Let me call Carlos, and let's straighten this out, shall we?" Kate saw the reluctance on Hailey's face when she called Carlos. Hailey's reaction gave her an inkling that the woman was spouting lies. Sadly, his phone was out of reach, just like the last. When Kate grimaced, Hailey considered it a win for her. "What's wrong? Can't call him?" Hailey sought. She then took out her phone and dialed Carlos

number. When the phone rang, a mischievous grin became painted on her face. She put the phone on speaker for Kate to hear.

"I don't know why you are not able to reach him, but I can call him just fine," Hailey pointed out.

Carlos answered. His voice was loud enough for the two ladies to hear. He said, "Hailey, I thought I told you -"

Greeting in a cheerful tone, Hailey was quick to say, "Carlos, baby! I'm here with Kate. Poor little thing is expecting you to call her back. I thought I do her a favor and make that call instead. Do you want to speak to -"

The busy tone could be heard next, and both Hailey and Kate **recognized how Carlos had** avoided the call.

Hailey sneered and said, "I guess he doesn't want to talk to you, Kate." She reached for Kate's hand, saying, "I'm sorry you had to find out this way, but at least, you can protect your poor heart from falling for Carlos."

Getting up, Hailey said goodbye. "I better go. It's nice talking to you, Kate."

"Thank goodness it's a **Saturday tomorrow**," Kate mumbled. It was **past seven in the evening**, and she was determined to stay up all night, hoping to get a call from Carlos. Her earlier chat with Hailey threw her off that she barely got work done that day. Kate badly

wanted to get answers from Carlos. She had sent him a text asking how Hailey could reach him and not her.

Almost an hour passed, and the call she had been waiting for arrived. She abruptly answered it, saying, "Carlos, what was that with Hailey? How come when I tried to call you, I could not reach you, but Hailey could – "

"Kate, let me explain," Carlos said on the other line. He revealed how he had a second phone." We had our suspicions, and we confirmed that earlier. The gang could listen to my calls. My usual number has been tapped. You won't be able to reach me most hours because I leave this number at the hotel. Only you, uncle Ethan, my assistant, Alexander, and Arman, know this private number of mine."

"What did Hailey talk to you about? Please don't listen to anything she says because whatever it was, it is a lie," Carlos suggested.

Kate was silent for a moment. She analyzed Carlos' responses, and they made sense to her. After taking his word, she reported what Hailey suggested, "She said you're back to take revenge on me for rejecting you in high school."

"I'd never do that to you, Kate," Carlos quickly answered. "You know me. I'm not that kind of person." "She said you have flings left and right, and you plan to make me part of this dating scheme you have going on," Kate revealed.

"I haven't dated anyone," Carlos said without hesitation. "My only goal was to be number one. I played back-to-back tennis. I never took a break."

“She said you had a lot of sex and that you plan to use me the same,” Kate revealed.

“That is crazy. I haven’t done it with anybody, Kate, and I would rather die than have sex with that woman. I used to think she was a good friend, Kate, but over time, I learned of her lies. She is a selfish woman. Don’t ever believe her,” Carlos explained.

Silence fell upon them. Kate recounted his confession over and over again. She asked, “Say that again.”

“About what? Don’t believe Hailey,” Carlos said. “No.no. In the first part,” Kate sought. “I haven’t done it with anybody?” Carlos reluctantly replied.

“Hailey somewhat suggested that you sleep around –

” “I’ve never been with a woman intimately, Kate. I swear. Admittedly, Hailey tried to get to me multiple times, but nothing, absolutely nothing, happened between us,” Carlos firmly

clarified.

“And what about... Linda White, Hannah Dil, and Savannah Knight?” **Kate named.** “What’s your relationship with them?”

“I have no relationship with Linda White and Hannah Dil. I never gave them any of my time,” **Carlos revealed.** “Savannah is only a friend. Nothing more.”

“And no, I haven’t slept with anyone of them. I.” Carlos paused before repeating, “I haven’t been intimate with anyone.”

‘He hasn’t done it with anyone?’ His admission echoed in her head repeatedly. Kate did not know why. Perhaps it was the relief that overwhelmed her that she unwittingly asked, “So... I’ll be your first?” 1

Realizing what she said, Kate’s eyes widened. She covered her mouth and hung up the phone, ashamed of her motion. Again and again, she scolded herself, “Stupid! Stupid! What did I say?! Oh, my god!”

When Carlos called her back, she refused to answer her phone. She was mortified beyond words that she found no courage to speak to Carlos again. Kate thanked the heavens that they were not in front of each other. Otherwise, Carlos would see her in such a ludicrous state.

Kate received multiple texts from Carlos. She replied, admitting she was ashamed and did not know what came over her.

Carlos

replied in a text. It read, (Kate, I need to go. Have a press conference in the morning.) (We will be very busy in the following weeks, Kate. And with what's at stake, I'm not sure when or if I can call you again, but know that I always think of you. You'll understand, right?) (And don't worry about what you said. If it weighs anything, with you, I experienced many of my firsts.) "Aaaahh..." Reading his message, Kate nearly fainted. Multiple ideas stormed into her head, her face turning bloody red with the hidden meaning of his words.

She rolled to the other side of the bed and fell to the floor. "Damn, Carlos!"

Chapter 16: The Compartment Pendant

"Oh, my god, Kate? What are you doing up so early?" Samantha called, alarming Kate in her seat. She had come from the kitchen to get a pitcher of water, and upon her return, she heard noises from their second floor family area.

Kate turned to Samantha with a pout on her lips. She responded, "Hi, mom." She pointed to the television screen and revealed, "I'm watching Carlos' interview. The French open had its second press conference, and I wanted to see him."

Briefly gazing at the television, Samantha sighed. She placed the water pitcher on one table and sat next to Kate. She embraced her from one side, saying, "You really love him."

With one heavy gasp, Kate admitted, "Yes, mom." She brought her knees up to her chest and wrapped them in her arms, saying, "I can't help it, especially since I know he is back." "Well, I hope that this is it for both of you. I hope there is still a chance, but wait, did you already clarify with him about Hailey McKenzie?" Samantha asked, her head snapping at Kate.

Kate simply shrugged and responded, "Carlos said they aren't in a relationship – "

"Did you ask him about the incident in New York when you saw them kiss?" Samantha inquired.

Kate shook her head and replied, "Each time we talk, there seemed to be insufficient time. And no, I failed to ask him about that because that would be admitting I was even there! And that's not going to happen."

"But he said they are not in a relationship, and I believe him, mom." Kate frowned and said, "Come to think of it, before the kiss happened, Carlos seemed confused on stage with what Hailey was talking about, and after the kiss, I did not get to see his reaction anymore; I just... left."

Kate told her mother about how she bumped into Hailey and how the same woman suggested she had a complicated relationship with Carlos. She defended, "If what she said was true, she **was giving me rather too much info**, don't you think?" "Or trying to make you believe that was the case," Samantha supplied. She shook her head and said, "Well, in cases of competition, you simply need to eliminate the rival. Simple!" "And how do you suppose I do that?" Kate asked, amused at her mother's suggestion. "By winning Carlos' heart all over again," Samantha suggested. She winked at Kate and said, " **Don't worry, mommy** is going to help you."

"Mister Ronaldo, we see you often holding your pendant and kissing it before your matches. We've always wondered, is that for good luck?" Before they could tackle Samantha's suggestion, the mother and daughter's heads turned in the television's direction. A news reporter asked Carlos a question.

On the screen, they saw Carlos looking down at his golden chain necklace. He gripped a visible pendant and said, "Yes, this pendant pushes me to do my best. It is... my inspiration." "Yeah, I noticed him often holding on to that pendant before his every match, too. **Sometimes he would just hold it, and sometimes, he would kiss it.** Probably for good luck," Samantha remarked, her eyes remaining glued to the screen.

"Yes, I noticed it too." Kate frowned and speculated, "But I wonder what it is?"

"Is that pendant from someone special? Perhaps a woman in your life?" Another reporter asked.

The camera focused on Carlos' smile. He said, "This is for a special woman." He paused and soon added, "My mother."

Looking down at the pendant, he described, "As you can see, it's a compartment pendant, a little bulkier than a locket, but smaller in dimension. Inside is my mother's favorite ring. I always keep it with me to remember our family and my father's aspirations. For this ring was a gift from my father during her fortieth birthday."

"The ruby ring?" Samantha sought, her brow raising as she tried to dig through her brain. "I remember how Carlos cherished that ring." Leaning back, Samantha added, "Though, did you catch how he said it is for a special woman?" "Mom? It isn't the ruby ring, though," Kate suggested.

"What do you mean, Kate?" Samantha asked.

Pointing to the TV, Kate explained, "That could not possibly be the ruby ring that belonged to aunt Agnes because... Carlos pawned it."

Samantha's face **turned into** a full frown. She responded, "What do you mean, Kate? Why would he pawn it?"

He loved that ring so much. It was the only valuable reminder he had of his mother?"

"He... um. He

pawned it in high school, mom," Kate repeated. "And he... he probably forgot about it because I found the receipt in his room. He placed it in one of his old bags, which he left behind."

"Oh, my god." Samantha could not hide her dismay. She said, "I used to remember how he cried for many days after Agnes' death. He kept holding on to that ring. Why would he pawn it, Kate? Why didn't you stop him?"

"He did not tell me right away, mom. When I found out, he already pawned it. He promised me he would get the ring back," Kate revealed. "That was why he started getting a part-time job at the tennis club."

"I tried convincing him that I repurchase it, but he never gave me the receipt," Kate added. "And over time, I forgot about it. Then... he left."

"But you found the receipt? Let's buy it back. Your father can trace it." "Mom, calm down." Kate held Samantha's hand and said, "I bought it back. It's just that it had been such a long time, and it slipped my mind. The ring is in my gift box for Carlos. I had always hoped he would come back, and I would give it back to him." Pointing back to the TV, Kate said, "So whatever is dangling in Carlos' necklace is not aunt Agnes' ruby ring."

"Then, what could it be?" Samantha asked. "I don't know, mom. When Carlos returns, I will be sure to ask him... among my long list of questions," Kate belatedly replied.

For seconds, they were silent, merely contemplating. They watched as Carlos answered more questions about the tennis matches, and only after the press conference ended did Samantha return her regard to Kate.

"Kate, you still did not answer my question. What in the world was Carlos thinking, pawning such a valuable ring, one that had sentimental value? We provided him with everything?" Samantha thought, still unable to accept how Carlos had made such a decision in the past.

“Mom, he always felt he owed us so much, especially you and dad.” Kate looked down, recalling how she found out about the ring. “Do you remember losing that Gucci scarf you love so much?”

“Ah, yes? And then Carlos bought me the exact same design!” Samantha exclaimed, smiling from ear to ear. “God, I love that scarf. Which reminds me, I’m going to use it next week. It was a limited edition design, and I bet, today, it’s already worth two or three thousand dollars

Samantha choked on her words. She turned to Kate with an awakening. Stuttering, she asked, “Did he – did he?”

“Yes, mom. He pawned the ring so he could buy you the same scarf on your birthday,” Kate revealed with a sad expression. “The school sponsored him to join a tournament that time in Monroe, and the Gucci store there had the last piece of the same design. Carlos bought it for a thousand dollars. He also pawned the ring in Monroe. That was why he probably never got it back, because he didn’t have time to return to the same city.”

Right then and there, Samantha howled in tears. She said, “Why would he do that, Kate? Why would he trade the ring for my scarf?” “Mom.” Kate embraced her mother. She soothed her by caressing her back. Tears stung her eyes, feeling her mother’s sentiments. She replied, “Because your happiness was also his. He was always very grateful to you and dad for giving him a home.” Sniffing her tears away, Kate answered, “To him, it was the least that he could do. And you always talked about that scarf.”

Samantha kept sobbing, just broken-hearted at having learned of the truth. **Kate maintained** to hold her mother, and after successfully soothing her, she assured her, “Mom, enough. I repurchased the ring. Kyle helped me trace the new owner; thank goodness, she was a mere jewelry collector. At the right price, we got the ring back.” “Oh, my goodness. Carlos is just such a good boy,” Samantha remarked. She was carelessly wiping the tears with her fingers when she demanded of Kate, “You better make him my son in-law, Kate... or else!”

Kate leaned back. Her eyes grew wide as she asked, “Or else, what, mom?” Samantha thought about it, but after finding no alternative, she declared, “There is no or else! It is a must!”

Kate wound up laughing at her mother’s demands. She was at it so hard that she snorted as she clutched her stomach. “Gosh, mom. I really love you. You are the most supportive mother in the world... Though, I wish it were that easy.”

In the morning, Kate arrived at the dining area relatively late. She still had dark circles around her eyes, plus the added eye bags. It was all thanks to the crying she and her mother did in the wee hours.

As soon as she took her seat, she immediately noticed how her mother wore the scarf Carlos bought her. Kate leaned back and laughed. She observed, "Mom? It's not cold in here." "Oh, I know. I just want to wear the scarf. I should cherish it more often since my son-in-law gave it," Samantha claimed.

Ethan, who was sitting next to Samantha, frowned. He asked, "Andrew?"

Andrew was Kate's brother-in-law in London. He was the only son-in-law in the family. Thus, when Samantha declared another one, Ethan fell confused. Laughter filled the air, following Ethan's reaction. Soon, however, Kate clarified, "The scarf came from Carlos. Remember dad?" "Ah, yes," Ethan acknowledged. "And when will Carlos be my son-in-law? Is there a deadline?"

Yet again, the ladies giggled. It was Samantha who offered, "Don't worry, Kate. Let me help. I'm going to be mommy cupid and your dad?" Samantha turned to Ethan, her finger waving at him, "Your dad will not intervene."

"It's not my field of expertise. So, by all means," Ethan gave in. "Besides, I know a cupid's **arrow is very effective.**"

Kate laughed. She acknowledged, "And you **are a testament** to that, dad." "Oh, no." Ethan corrected. "I did not need a cupid's arrow to fall in love with your mother." "Aww, you guys," Kate grumbled. Seeing her parents peck on the lips, she added, "Get a **room!**"