

The Devil's Love For The Heiress by LiLhyz Chapter 7

Chapter 7: The Girl

He Left Behind Taking a deep breath, Carlos tried to control his emotions. He shut his eyes as he took the lift to CSK Apparel, a company he founded with his friend, Alexander.

That day would mark the beginning of his soon-to-be relentless pursuit of the girl, the girl he left behind; Kate Wright.

"Relax, friend. This is the moment you have been waiting for," Alexander reminded him, and that made Carlos nod.

"I hope I made the right decision," Carlos expressed. The plan was to see Kate after the end of the French Open, when he was confident everything was safe. However, Alexander convinced him otherwise.

"No one will find out. We just need to be... discrete about your real relationship with Kate," Alexander suggested. "Besides, your assistant is still in France, covering for both of us."

Carlos nodded. He knew that he needed to make it clear to his directors that no one must know of his visit too.

At the thought of Kate, Carlos smiled. He was a few minutes away from finally seeing her up **close**.

It was during his birthday

when Carlos last saw Kate. When he noticed her familiar frame walking out of the Four Seasons Hotel's grand ballroom, it was too late. That was when he finally understood Hailey's objective – **her reason** for stealing a kiss from him in front of all **the guests**.

Kate saw Hailey kiss him, and he could only imagine what went through her mind. After the **party, he ordered his assistant to have one** of his security team follow her. When he **learned** she got stuck at the airport, Carlos pleaded with JetSuite to arrange a charter flight for Kate.

In the days that followed, Carlos ended his management contract with William **Mckenzie**. **It was inevitable**, and William was starting to lose control of his daughter, Hailey. Carlos could not have that. Besides, the only reason he held on to William was due to his contract's **terms**.

William **was supposed to manage** him for ten years, including the initial years of his training, **where he only** participated in club matches. Carlos paid the price and canceled the contract with a heft

y five million dollar **termination fee**. Still, freeing himself from William felt good. Carlos ultimately had complete control of his life **now**.

“Mister Jenkins. Mister Ronaldo. It’s good to see you.”

A woman with **glasses greeted them when they stepped outside the elevator doors**. **Carlos remembered this woman to be Catrina’s assistant**. “Right this way, please. The directors are **eager to meet** both of you.”

Catrina’s assistant was

already made aware of the conditions of their visit. They **took a route** through the back of the cubicles **where he and Alexander were not visible** to the rest of the **employees**.

Finally, standing in front of the **conference door**, Carlos sucked in a breath. He gulped, **knowing he would eventually see Kate again**. Carlos let Alexander enter first, giving him **the time to collect**

himself. When he walked in, he scanned the room in search of Kate. She wasn’t

very hard to find

There she stood, in a beautiful white three–

fourth sleeved dress. Her brown hair cascaded down to her chest, and her eyes were glued to his.

Immediately, she took his breath away. Despite how many **years had passed**, **Kate remained to** have that charming and youthful glow on her face. It took everything in Carlos **not to go over** and hold Kate in his arms. Only the heavens knew how much he missed her so.

Before he could decide what to do, Catrina introduced her. Then Kate quickly replied, “It’s nice to meet you, Mister Jenkins and Mister Ronaldo.”

‘Okay, I probably deserved that,’ Carlos said in his head. Even if Kate’s actions drove him **away, he knew she deserved** an explanation. After the store **director was introduced**, **Carlos welcomed** the team of executives. He made sure they understood their importance to the **company’s success**. The CSK

Apparel was very significant to Carlos, for Kate’s dreams would come true through this company. Her **dream was his altogether. He loved her that way**.

While Alexander was talking, Carlos thought of a plan. He had **to extend this meeting one way or another. Later on, he would get his chance to have a decent talk with Kate. If not a personal one**, at least they could **cover work. The goal was to take it slow, let her know he was already** within her grasp. After the French Open, then his problems would be over. The said **tournament was a few days away**.

Having a lightbulb moment, Carlos proposed, "Shall we all have dinner as a team? Somewhere, private?"

Everything was going smoothly until Hailey walked in, declaring her presence, "Oh good! I made it!"

Hailey had that mischievous look as she turned to Carlos, her hands clinging around his arm. She giggled and said, "I wasn't so sure if I could make it, but I'm glad I did. I missed you, **Carlos.**"

Hailey rubbed it in, and Carlos could only speculate what Kate assumed of them. He tried to **show Kate** how he disliked Hailey's touch, but **unfortunately, Kate looked away.** Carlos pulled his arm off Hailey's grasp, asking with a full frown on his face, "Hailey, **what are** you doing here?"

Alexander was equally stunned by Hailey's arrival. He also sought, "Yeah, how did you get here?"

"Well, Kendra mentioned you would be here, so I came! I flew all the way from New York!" Hailey replied. She sounded jolly and unaffected by how Alexander and Carlos were showing their disappointment in her.

Swiftly, **Carlos squinted at Alexander. Kendra was Alexander's girlfriend, and wistfully, the woman had formed a bond with Hailey. Kendra was all in for Hailey, and Carlos knew it. Alexander's girlfriend had, on many occasions, set him up on a surprise date with Hailey.**

Grabbing Hailey's arm, Carlos said, "Let's go to the office and talk." He gestured for Catrina and Alexander to follow him, and they all left the conference room.

Inside a private office designed explicitly for Carlos and Alexander's occasional visit, Hailey was trying to start a friendly conversation with Carlos. She said, "So this is your company. It's nice. You should really consider me being one of your business partners. Come on, let me **invest.**"

"No. I want this business all to myself," Carlos curtly answered. He huffed, trying to control his anger at that point.

"But you let Alexander be your partner?" Hailey pointed out. She pouted her lips, walking closer to Carlos in a seductive way.

Behind them, Carlos saw the sneer formed on Alexander's face. Next to him was Catrina, looking all confused. The stand-

in CEO asked, "So, Miss Mckenzie is not your girlfriend?" "She is not and will never be," Carlos answered Catrina, and he also saw how his reply made Hailey frown.

Hailey tried to cover it with a giggle. She turned to Catrina, suggesting, "He can be amusing sometimes."

with his jaws clenched, Carlos grabbed Hailey's wrist and said, "Hailey, this is the last time that you try to get involved in my life. I warned you after you kissed me at my birthday party, but clearly, that did not get into your head... I tried to be nice and be respectful for all the help your family gave me, but if you cannot accept that we can only be friends, then I suggest you stay out of my way!" Carlos' head snapped in the direction of Catrina, his stand-in CEO. He ordered, "Do not let this woman enter my company ever again. Do not entertain her calls and do not forward any **messages coming** from her."

"But Carlos –"

"Alex, escort her out," Carlos ordered without listening to any more of Hailey's cries. After seeing Alexander and Hailey go, he dashed out of the office, returning to the conference room. Unfortunately for him, the room was nearly empty. It was his HR director who remained to wait for him. Arman said, "Miss Wright left, sir." He gulped. "She looked agitated. I wanted to stop her, but she just... would not listen." "Arman, take the team to dinner without me. Alex will join you, but I have somewhere I need to be," Carlos said before turning on his heel and walking away.

"Understood, sir."

Heartbeats later, Carlos was standing in the living room of the Wright Mansion. Kate's mother first walked down the long staircase. Her eyes quickly became filled with tears. While taking **her steps** toward him, she softly called his name. "Carlos?" "Aunt, Sam. Long time no see," Carlos weakly replied. He took a deep breath and said, "I'm

sorry, I –"

Before he could finish his line, Samantha embraced him tightly. Carlos hugged back, recognizing the unspoken longing from the woman he considered his second mother. **Samantha** kept crying while securing Carlos in her arms. Her cheek rested on his chest. As she

sniffed away her tears, she asked, "Was it worth it? Was it necessary to leave?" With his voice breaking, Carlos replied, "For me, aunt. It – it had to be done."

“Carlos.” Samantha and Carlos turned to find Ethan standing by the foot of the staircase. Ethan’s eyes were looking lethal. He said, “In my office. Now!”

Chapter 8: Who Is Your Girlfriend? “Were you followed?” Ethan asked Carlos. He was frowning after learning about Carlos’ current predicament. He rose from his seat and turned his back on Carlos. Ethan looked distantly through the windows, taking it all in.

“I don’t believe so, uncle. The French gang still believes Alexander and I are in Paris, preparing for the French Open,” Carlos answered. “And the driver who drove me is a company employee. Like all my employees, he had signed a privacy clause. He won’t say a thing.” “I understand you, Carlos. I understand your reasons for leaving, for chasing your dreams, for going after the reason for your family’s downfall, but it should not have been reason enough to cut us completely,” Ethan berated.

“I.” Carlos gulped. “I regretted not explaining my side. Again, I am sorry, uncle, but when it all got complicated, I was already stuck in the situation and... I wanted to be man enough to handle everything.”

Hearing his defense, Ethan sighed. He replied, “Carlos, dealing with everything doesn’t make you the man you think we want you to be... A real man’s power lies in his inbred values, **sense** of balance, intellect, ability to hold his own in any situation, and his mature handling of relationships.”

“Relationships,” Ethan repeated. “Relationships are equally important to any man... because no man is an island.”

“Nonetheless, I am proud of how you made it this far... without my help,” Ethan turned to face Carlos. “I am proud of what you have become. And I am very sure you made your father

proud.”

At the mention of his father, Carlos sensed his chest becoming heavy. He nodded repeatedly and said, “And I will revive his legacy. Take **it even higher.**”

Carlos did not expect it, but he noticed Ethan open his arms for him. He walked closer and accepted the hug from Ethan. He said, “Thank you, uncle. Thank you for understanding.” Ethan patted Carlos’ back. He suggested, “Go to Kate and talk to her. I can’t promise she will be as open-minded with everything, but don’t give up. Try your best to bring back the friendship you once shared.”

‘Friendship?’ Carlos choked. He did not work so hard for nine long years just to settle for friendship, but **that was good enough for now. He cleared**

his throat and answered, “Yes, uncle. May I see her now?” “Go ahead,” Ethan approved.

Kate heard a knock on the door. Immediately assuming it was her mother, she said, “Mom, **come in**. I’m still fixing my hair.”

She was in the bathroom, combing her hair and adjusting her blouse when she heard the door **to her room creaked open**. After studying herself in the mirror, she walked out, saying, “Mom, what do you think of this look –”

Seeing it was Carlos and not her mother, who was standing at the door, Kate froze in her stance. Her heart raced.

Carlos was leaning on the frame of her door, his grey eyes looking straight at her. She did not miss how his Adam’s apple repeatedly bobbed as he studied her. Kate sensed her knees turning into noodles, as if her whole body weakened to his presence. Her mouth parted, but no words left her mouth.

“I think... you look nice,” Carlos implied. He cleared his throat and said. “Kate, can we talk?”

“Talk? Don’t you think we are nine years too late for that talk?” Kate replied. “I’m surprised you still remember the way to this house. How did you even get past dad without a scratch?”

“So.” Carlos huffed and asked, “You don’t want to talk? I can come back next month when you are ready to talk.”

Kate’s mouth fell open. She thought, ‘How could he throw it back at me?’

She was planning to play hard to get, but it looked like Kate would have to wait another month to get her answers! She frowned and countered, “I... I’ll be too busy next month, planning the promotion of your jade watches, so I think... now is better.”

‘Arrgghhh! To think I was planning on leaving. How am I going to handle seeing Hailey every so often?’ She said silently.

Kate saw a smile form on his athletic face, and she quickly sensed the butterflies in her stomach going wild. Carlos looked so different nine years back. To see him up close made a huge difference. Gone was that clean-shaven face that made him look innocent. The Carlos today looked captivating in every

way; his gaze, his stance, his beard, the tan on his skin, and even the way he **narrowed** his eyes appeared to be an invitation. 'How does one age so handsomely?'

"Then." Carlos offered his hand and said, "Shall we walk around the mansion as we talk?"

Kate did not know for how long she gawked at his hand. She wanted to take his hand and feel his touch, the roughness of his skin against her palm, but she held back. Kate returned her regard to him, saying, "I don't need you to hold me."

They walked side by side through the hallways, down the stairs, and through the living room. Kate and Carlos made it out to the garden, only to stop at the spot where Carlos often practiced his passing shots.

Carlos smiled as he tucked his hands inside his trouser pocket. He said, "This was my favorite spot right here. The wall that bounced back my tennis balls."

"Until dad bought you the tennis ball machine, then you started practicing more often at school," Kate **reminded**.

Silence fell upon them. Carlos shifted to her and said, "Kate, your father did so much for me already. I did not want him to be obligated to **provide for my tennis needs.**"

"Oh, so you went to the Mckenzie's instead because you did not owe them anything?" Kate **sarcastically** suggested. "Mmmm." Carlos looked at Kate and revealed, "My deal with William wasn't necessarily for **free**, Kate. It came at a heavy price."

"What do you mean?" Kate sought.

"I had a ten-year contract with William. Termination fees varied in each year that passed and at every stage of the tournament where I was at," Carlos explained. "William planned it all strategically. While I was still training, the termination clause required a hundred thousand dollars. That would have been easy at that point, except I was penniless back then and only earned a few bucks from club matches."

"The termination fee grew larger as the years passed, and the higher I climbed up the ranks, his estimated income share also grew bigger."

"And it wasn't only that, the contract required a 30% force savings from all my earnings withdrawable after eight years." Carlos scoffed in irritation upon revealing, "I requested my forced savings to be given to me since late last year. He only delivered it after I suggested terminating my contract." Internalizing everything, Kate asked, "Wait, but it hasn't been ten years?"

"I paid for the termination fee. I was planning to wait another year, but." Carlos looked down before answering, "Something happened that ticked me off. So I paid the price and terminated the contract."

"How— how much did you pay?" Kate asked. "It's not important. You don't need to bother yourself with my problems. Besides, William is a problem that is already dealt with," Carlos responded.

"So that meant you aren't really on good terms with William?" Kate asked.

"We had a good relationship. I did not mind that William was gaining from my success. After all, he invested in me, and he was my manager. But when I noticed he was trying to manipulate me into extending my contract and purposely delaying the release of my forced savings, things changed," Carlos revealed. "Since last year, I was simply bearing his presence and control over my career." "Gosh, I thought the parting was... cordial," Kate remarked. "When presented in the media, it isn't what it seems to be, Kate. When you are a public figure, you need to choose your actions and words wisely," Carlos explained. **Kate was frowning** at Carlos' retelling. She remembered the girlfriend that arrived at the office. As they returned to walk around the gardens, she asked, "But what about Hailey? She's your girlfriend, right? How does that affect your relationship?" "She is not my girlfriend," Carlos said outright.

Kate looked elsewhere, all while her eyes widened in surprise. Relief overwhelmed her. It was as if a needle had been plucked out of her heart. She reacted, "Oh? Really? I thought you were."

"No, **she is not and was never my girlfriend.**" Carlos stopped walking. He gently grabbed **Kate's arm and asked, "Whatever... made you think that?" 'Whatever made me think that? I saw you kiss, but I cannot tell you that! Kate screamed in her head.** She dug through her brain and finally found a better retort. Pulling **her hand away, she answered,** "Well, she came today to the office, right? And I heard from Catrina that the third shareholder is your girlfriend. So is she not the third shareholder?" **Kate was expecting a serious answer from Carlos,** and she braced herself to accept a **heartbreaking truth.** However, he laughed. He was at it so hard that his eyes thinned, and he clutched his stomach.

His reaction puzzled her, but even in the dark, she noticed how his eyes glistened as he chuckled. Kate thought, 'Gosh, he looks so gorgeous when he laughs.' It took seconds before Carlos composed himself. He was clearly amused by Kate's assumptions. When he diverted his attention to her, he clarified, "Hailey is not my girlfriend, and she does not have a share at my company." Briefly, Kate paused, but soon, she pursued, "Then... who is your girlfriend?"

Chapter 9: You **Did Not See Me** 'Who is my girlfriend?' Carlos pretended to ignore her question and asked, "I haven't seen Kaleb. Where is he?"

"Are you avoiding the matter here?" Kate suspected. "Why aren't you answering my question?"

"Why are you interested in finding out who is my girlfriend?" Carlos asked back, and he could see Kate's stunned expression. He swore; he saw her clench her jaws as a reaction. "I – I just figured I want to know who I am working for," Kate reasoned. "What's wrong with that?"

"Really?" Carlos pursued. He folded his arms across his chest, looking intensely at Kate. "You don't have any other reason for asking that?"

Carlos caught how Kate struggled to reply. She wound up snorting, letting out a laugh before answering, "No. That's it. What other reasons would I have?" "I don't have a girlfriend," Carlos finally cleared the misunderstanding. "I don't know why Catrina thought I had one, but no, I don't, and you will eventually meet the company's third owner."

Before Kate

could ask more, Carlos' phone rang. He excused himself from Kate, seeing it was Oliver, his assistant, calling. "Sir, Hugo Bonnet would like to have lunch with you tomorrow. He wants to talk about the matches," Oliver reported.

Carlos hissed. He raked his fingers through his hair before answering, "Tell him I have plans tomorrow. Try to push it the next day. The flight alone going to Paris will take up to seven hours –"

"But sir, detective Bernard had asked me about Hugo Bonnet. He wanted to know what Mister Bonnet needed," the assistant revealed. "Do I tell him the truth that you are in Braeton?"

Hearing that, Carlos groaned. Flying to see Kate was never part of the plan, and thus, they **never informed the detective** in charge in Paris. **He wanted more time** with Kate, but that would not happen if he was needed in Paris. After ending the call, Carlos contacted Alexander. He

updated his friend about the lunch request by one leader of the Bonnet Gang in France. After

speaking to Alexander, Carlos turned to Kate and described, "Kate, I don't have much time. I need to go back to Paris."

"Already?" Kate asked. "Why – why did you even come here if you were just going to spend a few hours in Braeton?"

"It was a rash decision," Carlos admitted. "And we wanted to meet all the directors."

“Kate,” Carlos warned. “Don’t go seeing me in France, okay?”

Immediately, Kate frowned. With a hint of dismay in her tone, she asked, “Why?” She rolled her eyes and reacted, “Well, it’s not like I have the time.”

Carlos walked closer to Kate. He kept her steady with his hands on her arms. He revealed, “Kate, what I am about to tell you is only between us. Well, your father already knows, but I

supposed you need to know, so you’ll stay put. Do you remember when you came to see me my game years back, and I asked you to return to Kaleb?”

“I could not speak to you then because I did not want you to get involved in my situation. I am helping the authorities track down the gangs that are match fixing the tennis games.”

“This started five years ago. Someone approached me to purposely lose my game for a hefty amount of money,” Carlos cautiously explained.

“Why – why you do that, and why would they want you to lose?” Kate asked curiously.

“It’s the world of gambling, Kate. There are many gambling sites out there that are betting on tennis matches. Syndicates are trying to manipulate the outcome,” Carlos revealed. “Anyway, I refused the offer. Instead, I reported the incident to the tennis association, but rather than apprehending the person who approached me, the authorities came to me for help. The tennis **association** wanted to end the corruption in tennis match-fixing.”

“I did not want to have any part of it at all. I just wanted to play tennis and not complicate my life, but then.” Carlos gulped and explained, “The detective who approached me revealed that he was familiar with my father’s case.”

“What are you saying, Carlos?” Kate sought. She looked at him intently and demanded, “Tell me.”

“They believed my father’s death was not an accident and that it had something to do with the gang that had attempted to manipulate my father’s tennis matches,” Carlos informed. “We did not know the extent of the gang’s connections. So playing it safe, I was not allowed to be in contact with close friends and relatives, you know, in case our deals go sour, or we make a mistake along the way – Kate, we are this close. We have narrowed it down to the gang’s leaders based in Paris.” “**Alexander** is also part of this.” Holding Kate tighter, Carlos reminded, “So, Kate. I don’t want you to be involved in this, and I don’t want the gang to know who are those that I truly consider family.” “Alexander and I are going to screw up their biggest bet. It involves millions of dollars, and w

hen they see their money going down the drain,” Carlos paused and confessed. “They are going to come after me. And when they do, I don’t want you there.” Carlos’ phone rang again, and he took the call a few steps away from Kate. He was confirming the charter flight to Paris with Alexander. When he looked back at Kate, he noticed her pale **face**.

He was about to say goodbye when she burst out in anger, “You know, Carlos. Just because you left us with so many unanswered questions doesn’t mean I’m going to let you get killed! I may be upset with how you left, but you are the same person I used to consider my best friend!”

She jumped at him and wrapped him in her arms and legs, her body pressed tightly against his **frame**. She declared, “You are not going anywhere! Stay here!” “Kate, what are you doing?” Carlos circled his arms around her, protecting her from falling to the ground. He essentially carried her weight at that point. “I’m not going to let you leave!” Kate asserted. “If you are going to leave, you will bring an entire battalion of US soldiers!”

“Dad! Dad!” Kate called. “Call the military! Call them now!” She screamed at the top of her lungs.

“Shhhhh! Quiet, Kate. This is supposed to be confidential,” Carlos complained.

“Oops. Sorry.” While continuing to snake her limbs around Carlos’ body, Kate reached into her back pocket and took out her phone. She called her father, and when Ethan picked up, she repeated her demands in a whisper, “Dad, call the military. Carlos is leaving. Don’t let Carlos go to Paris without—”

“Kate? That would draw attention, and how will the set-up work if they see me with a thousand US soldiers?” **Carlos was convinced** that Kate wasn’t kidding. After all, her family was well connected to the military.

Kate continued to insist that Carlos not leave, which made the man chuckle at her actions. Instead of resisting, he embraced her tightly and took a big whiff of her scent. He voiced out his inner thoughts, “I missed this. I miss the Kate I knew.”

Somehow, that got Kate to land her feet on the ground. She stilled in his arms and relished in his hold. Timidly, she replied, “I – I miss this too. I missed you, Carlos.”

Unfortunately, their **embrace was cut short** when Ethan walked in on them. Ethan ordered, “Kate, let Carlos go.”

“But Dad,” Kate groaned. While loosening her hold on Carlos’ body, she still held tightly onto **his sleeve**.

“Carlos **knows what he is doing, Kate. He is no longer a teenage boy,**” Ethan reminded. He turned to Carlos and asked, “Do you need to go soon?”

With a nod, Carlos answered, "Yes, unfortunately. Plans are moving forward."

Ethan and Carlos spoke privately, out from Kate's range, all while they walked back to the front of the mansion.

"Well, this time around, you keep in touch," Ethan suggested. Then, he and Carlos exchanged numbers.

Soon enough, Kate caught up with the two. She heard Carlos predict, "The driver is about ten minutes away. So, I'll just wait here in the driveway, Uncle."

"What? Already?" Kate complained. While Ethan stepped away, she stood before Carlos and expressed, "I have so many questions. You can't go. This can't be just it—" "If everything falls into place, I'll be back after the French Open, Kate," Carlos revealed. "We can talk then." "If?" Kate asked. "I'm not comfortable with that."

"But I need to go," Carlos reasoned. "Okay," Kate gulped. She looked down, back up to his grey eyes. She requested, "At least... At least answer me this. Why did you leave without a word? You could have at least told me about your plans?"

Silence stretched between them. Carlos turned in every direction. He sucked in a deep breath before he reluctantly replied, "I... I was hurt, Kate. You did not see me. You were my world, but I was not enough for you."

"I left without informing you because I did not have the courage to tell you this back then. The only way I could leave was with the thought of you, in the arms of Tyler." "I asked you back then... I asked you if you would ever see me more than just a friend," Carlos reminded. "You did not give me the answer." "Back then, I knew... I knew I had to be away from you."

"Carlos, I'm sorry—" "It's okay. I would have never forced you to reciprocate my feelings," Carlos added. He opened his mouth, ready to say more, when they heard the beep of a black car coming their way. Taking a deep breath, and said in regret, "I need to go, Kate.... I'll see you after the French Open."

Chapter 10: All I See Is You *** FLASHBACK: During One Of Carlos' Highschool Tennis Practices. ***

After tossing the ball up in the air, Carlos' knees flexed, and his trunk rotated at a forty-five degree angle in a pro-drop position. "Arrghhh!" He grunted as he hit the tennis ball with his racket in a powerful serve.

The ball landed on the opponent's service area, garnering Carlos his last points.

“Game Ronaldo!” The referee announced the win, making Carlos’ supporters jump in their seats, cheering him on.

When Carlos took the side bench to rest, Kate rushed across the court. “Here, let me get your water.”

“You did such a good job! I’m so proud of you, Carlos!” Kate squeaked in excitement. She was so happy for Carlos that she unwittingly helped him wipe the sweat off his face. “Kate!” Carlos groaned. “My team is looking at me now.” “So, what?” Kate replied, her eyes wandering to Carlos’ opponent for that practice match at school. “I can’t take care of you?”

When she saw Tyler walking in their direction, Kate’s eyes widened. Carlos may have won on this match, but Tyler had that confident walk, that sexy smirk on his face, and that warm aura he gives to most girls at school.

“Nice game, Ronaldo. Too bad you won’t join the juniors tournament,” Tyler said. “You would have easily outranked me if you participated more often.”

“Junior tournament?” **Kate asked Carlos.**

“He is talking about the ones from across the state, Kate. I won’t fly my ass there and spend on tickets and hotels,” Carlos reasoned while wiping his back with a towel.

Glaring at Carlos, Kate suggested, “I’ll tell dad –”

“Wait. Wait. Your dad pays for Carlos’ tennis tours? Haha!” Tyler laughed. With his fist up to his mouth, he cleared his throat and remarked, “Sorry, man. It’s just weird, you know. So if you two went out, Kate’s father would pay for it too?” “Why not? We are family,” Kate suggested. “Carlos is like a brother to me.”

“Ah, that’s right.” Referring to Carlos, Tyler suggested, “Since **you are like a brother to Kate**, then I guess you aren’t together.” Tyler winked at Kate, and Carlos saw how she flushed at the attention she **was given**. Kate giggled, and she answered, “We aren’t dating. Haha! We are just friends.” Returning her gaze to Carlos, she urged him to look back at her. “Right Carlos?” Kate failed to notice how Carlos’ grip on his towel tightened. He huffed profusely and faintly replied, “Yeah. We are... just friends.” Carlos saw that devilish grin on Tyler’s face. He knew Tyler secretly ridiculed him for not **earning Kate’s romantic affection**.

“Maybe we should go out sometime, Kate. Like on a date,” Tyler suggested. He winked at Kate again before leaving her on cloud nine. After seeing Tyler go, Kate squealed. She shifted her attention to Carlos and said, “Oh, my god. This is it, Carlos. This is it –”

“Why do you like him?” Carlos pointed out, cutting off her enthusiasm. His brows met as he collected his things.

"He just has this appeal, you know. Plus, he is super handsome," Kate replied. "Is just the looks, Kate? Sure, he is like the perfect Ken, but can't you look past that?" Carlos asked, his voice strengthening. "Why are you angry? What did I do?" Kate groaned. "You aren't a very supportive friend."

"We've known each other since we were kids, Kate? Don't you know me at all? I wish... I wish you would look at me the way you look at Tyler." Finally, Carlos admitted. He looked Kate attentively in the eye and said, "I care for you more than that Tyler will ever do."

Kate was dumbfounded. Her mouth parted, struggling to find the words. Ultimately, she asked, "What? What are you saying, Carlos?" "Do I have to spell it out for you, Kate? I like you. I always had," Carlos confessed. "But – but, Carlos. You are like a brother to me," Kate stuttered in her words as she replied. "I – I don't see you that way."

Carlos walked away, alerting Kate. She repeatedly called for him, "Carlos?" Running after him, she pleaded, "Carlos, wait. Don't do this!"

Catching up with him, Kate grabbed his arm and forced him to look at her. She embraced him outright and rested her face on his chest, saying, "Tell me what I need to do to make it right? I'll stay away from him. I'll ignore him." "Why will you stay away from him?" Carlos asked. "Because you want to? Or do you feel sorry for me?"

Looking up at Carlos, Kate replied, "Because I don't want to hurt you. And I don't want to lose you as my friend? And you are like family to me."

Dead air fell upon them for seconds. Carlos returned Kate's embrace, weakly saying, "You don't have to do that, Kate. Really. I'll be fine. That would be... selfish of me to ask of you."

"But –."

"I'll be fine. This will all go away... In time," Carlos suggested.

"Nothing will change between us?" Kate asked.

Carlos' jaws clenched, but he nodded silently. He took a deep breath and leaned down, pecking **on Kate's forehead**. He suggested, "Nothing will change... I will always be here for you." *****END OF FLASHBACK: Back To Present.*** Kate was taking her breakfast. She was drinking coffee at their dining table when she remembered the past.**

That incident at the school's tennis court was just one. It made her reflect on the many more

instances when she may have hurt Carlos, and he said nothing. Kate concluded how Carlos took it all in.

Last night, when Carlos left their mansion grounds, Kate just stood at the gates. Even if Carlos

car was no longer in her line of sight, she kept looking at the road. A big part of her wished the car had turned around and Carlos stayed longer.

Kate wanted more of him. She wanted Carlos. Just when he finally appeared back in her life, he was gone, just like that.

'You did not see me.' Those words he spoke lingered in her head throughout the night and left her restless. She did not sleep a wink. Kate sighed, feeling her heart squeezed by a hand, and she said under her breath, "Now, all I see is you."

"Pondering about something?" Kate turned to find her father. He sat next to Kate, and soon her mother followed. Ethan asked. "You seemed to be troubled."

"... I just remembered something back in my high school days. Those times I spent with Carlos." Kate stated. "I wish I could turn back time. Why was I so blind?" "Are we still talking about how you realized you love him?" Samantha asked. "Sweetie, sometimes, you'll never really know the person's true worth until they are gone. It's a sad truth... But it's a lesson learned."

Turning to her father, Kate asked, "Dad, why did you let him go to Paris? It's dangerous for him? Why did you let him go alone?" "Kate," speaking softly, Ethan explained, "He has the French Police and the US detectives working on this operation. They won't let him go through with this plan if they think it was too risky."

She could not help it. Kate still frowned, worried about Carlos. He had to be safe. There **were so much more that she wanted to say**, so many questions in her head, too. Heck, she still wanted to tell him how she felt.

"And who said anything about letting him go alone?" Ethan declared, giving **Kate a wink**.

A smile formed on Kate's **face as she returned her regard** to Ethan. Water welled in **her eyes when she answered**, "Thanks, dad... You are just the best."

Meanwhile, continents away, Carlos was sitting in front of the man who was said to be responsible for his father's death. Deep inside, he was enraged, but he held his pent-up anger **and forced a smile** on

his athletic face. **Carlos extended his hand to Hugo Bonnet and greeted, “Mister Bonnet, it’s so nice to finally meet you.”** Mister Bonnet grinned playfully. While shaking Carlos’ hand, he said, “You take a lot from Manuel Ronaldo.” **Carlos did not know why, but his skin crawled at how his father’s name rolled off Hugo’s tongue.**