

#### 249: A Tearful Father-Son Reunion

Raymond broke down instantly, tears streaming down his face. He felt as if he were dreaming—he couldn't believe it.

After all these years, he was seeing his son again.

His son had grown into a man!

"It's not a dream, Dad. I'm your son. I'm Sebastian... I've grown up... Dad ..."

Sebastian pulled his father into a tight embrace. Raymond wrapped his arms around his son, and after eighteen long years apart, father and son wept openly in each other's arms.

"I thought I'd never get the chance to see you all again..."

Raymond had been imprisoned for so many years, yearning for his family every single day—his wife, his children. He had never given up hope of escaping.

And now, finally, he was reunited with his son.

They held onto each other for a long time before finally pulling apart.

Staring into his father's tearful eyes, Sebastian pressed, "Dad, tell me—what really happened eighteen years ago? How did you end up at Black Wolf Fortress?"

He needed to confirm whether Jasper's account matched his father's.

Raymond sighed deeply, his voice heavy with the weight of years of suffering. "It's been so long... There's a lot to tell..."

He began recounting his story.

Eighteen years ago, he had traveled to negotiate a business deal. However, the people he was meeting were killed by Black Shark, and he himself was captured.

Black Shark Raze had ordered him to work for them—to act as their puppet, shielding their operations from scrutiny.

But Raymond refused. He would rather die than submit.

What shocked him most was when Black Wolf Fortress presented a man who looked exactly like him.

They claimed this man was his biological twin brother.

It was the first time Raymond had ever seen his own brother. But neither of them had any choice in the matter. From that moment on, Raymond was held hostage while his twin was sent back to The Vanderbilt Family, taking his place.

Hearing this, Sebastian realized that everything Jasper had told him was true. It was all part of Black Shark's grand scheme.

"Sebastian... this was all their doing. I was imprisoned, unable to return home. But for all these years, I never stopped thinking about you..."

"I missed you too, Dad. We all did. Mom, she..."

"What about your mother?"

Sebastian told him everything—the changes in The Vanderbilt Family, his mother's suffering, all of it.

After listening, Raymond let out a long sigh.

“...I understand now.”

Everything made sense. His twin had been under Black Shark’s control long before taking his place. Even his marriage to Grace had been part of their plan.

Forced to replace Raymond, his brother had returned to The Vanderbilt Family and married Grace, just as they had intended.

But the real tragedy was Eliza—Raymond’s actual wife.

She had been kept in the dark, believing he had betrayed her. She must have been devastated.

Then she had fallen off the cliff and remained in a coma for years... Just thinking about it was heartbreaking.

All of this... was Black Wolf Fortress’s doing.

Raymond clenched his fists. “Sebastian, your uncle endured all of this for our family. The Vanderbilt Family owes him more than we can ever repay.”

“I know, Dad. Once you’ve recovered and returned home, he can reclaim his rightful place in The Vanderbilt Family.”

Raymond nodded solemnly.

Because of his fractured ribs, he needed time to heal before making any long journeys. When Sebastian returned to New York, he left his father at the base to recover.

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That Night

At Vanderbilt Manor, Caitlin spent some time playing with the children before tucking them into bed.

After freshening up, she lay down in the guest room, but sleep wouldn't come.

Her mind was restless, filled with thoughts of the past, the future... and Sebastian.

Some people just couldn't be forgotten. The more you tried not to think about them, the more they occupied your thoughts.

As if on cue, her phone rang.

His name flashed on the screen.

She hesitated for a few seconds before answering.

"Hello?"

"Caitlin, are you asleep?"

His deep, magnetic voice carried through the speaker, sending a shiver down her spine.

"I was just about to sleep. And you?"

"I can't sleep. I miss you. If only I could hold you in my arms right now..."

His playful tone carried a hint of seduction.

"You'd be much better if you learned to talk properly."

Despite her words, Caitlin couldn't stop the small smile tugging at her lips.

"You want me to be serious? Fine. I'll show you a magic trick."

"A magic trick?"

Caitlin raised an eyebrow. What could this man possibly pull off over the phone?

"I'll count to three, and whatever you're thinking of will appear right in front of you. Now, tell me—what are you thinking about?"

"..."

Caitlin wasn't about to admit that he was the only thing on her mind.

"No answer? That's okay. I already know. Now, go to your door and open it. You'll see your wish come true."

"Liar. I don't believe you."

Even as she spoke, she had already climbed out of bed.

Driven by curiosity, she walked over and gently pulled open the door—

And there he was.

Tall, imposing, dressed in a long black coat, Sebastian stood at her doorway, phone still in hand, his dark eyes locked onto hers with warmth and intensity.

Caitlin's breath caught in her throat.

"When did you get back?"

Sebastian smirked, lowering his phone.

"While you weren't looking. So? Was I right? Did your wish come true?"

Their call was still connected, but Caitlin—blushing—couldn't hold back her smile.

Sebastian ended the call, and like a magician performing a trick, he pulled a bouquet from behind his back.

"These are for you. I picked them myself. They still have morning dew on them."

It was a bouquet of white daisies, the petals glistening with fresh droplets.

Despite the late hour, he had come all this way... and even thought to bring her flowers.

Her heart swelled.

"Thank you."

"No other reward?"

"What do you want?"

Sebastian stepped inside, wrapping her in his arms. His voice dropped to a husky whisper.

"I want... you."

She had given him three months to prove himself, and Sebastian was going to seize every opportunity.

Before she could react, he pulled her into his coat and kissed her deeply.

Somewhere along the way, without realizing it, they had started to feel like lovers.

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]:

And perhaps Caitlin had been missing him far more than she had admitted.

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#### The Next Morning

Caitlin and Sebastian went their separate ways.

Caitlin headed to XEG with the replica of Yun's Aromatic Codex.

Ximena was already at the office, waiting for her. As soon as Caitlin arrived, the receptionist escorted her straight upstairs.

Inside the large conference room, Ximena and her team were seated.

"Ximena."

"Right on time, Caitlin."

Ximena stood to greet her before they both took their seats.

"So? Did you bring Yun's Aromatic Codex?"

"I did. But this is only the first half. The second half is not in my possession—like I told you before."

"I know. But I also know you have the means to get it."

Ximena's confidence was unsettling—she acted as if everything was under her control.

Caitlin said nothing, instead pulling a cloth-wrapped bundle from her bag.

She carefully unwrapped it, revealing an exquisite box.

Ximena's eyes sparkled with excitement. She reached for it—

But Caitlin swiftly pulled it back.

Ximena arched a brow.

"Oh?"

Caitlin smiled.

"I'll hand over the first half—but first, I'm taking Patricia with me."

"Of course. Once you sign this exchange agreement, you can take the child today."

Ximena motioned for her assistant to hand over the contract.

As Caitlin reviewed it, Ximena called in three of the most authoritative authentication experts in the industry.

The experts used precision instruments to examine the manuscript. After a thorough analysis, they whispered something to Ximena.

Hearing their verdict, Ximena's expression shifted. Her gaze snapped to Caitlin in disbelief.

"Caitlin... this manuscript is a forgery?"