

250: The Battle for Her Daughter – The Tide Has Turned

Caitlin said nothing, her cold gaze locked onto Ximena.

The expert beside them added, "The box itself may be real, but the manuscript inside is definitely a replica. The pages have aged, but the ink is fresh. This confirms it's a forgery."

Ximena stood up and sneered. "Caitlin, do you really think you can pull such a childish trick in front of me?"

Caitlin had anticipated this response.

"I told you from the start, Ximena— I would never hand over the original manuscript. Giving you a replica was already my biggest concession.

"If all you care about is developing Fragrance Garments, then the original or a replica shouldn't matter... unless, of course, you have other ulterior motives."

Her voice was calm, unwavering as she stared down Ximena.

"So you're backing out of the deal? You don't want your daughter back?" Ximena's eyes darkened, her tone colder than before.

"I'm taking my daughter no matter what," Caitlin declared, her stance firm. "Whether we make a deal or not is up to you."

Ximena let out a low chuckle. "Since you've gone back on your word, don't expect me to give her back to you."

"I knew you'd say that. Ximena, from the moment you took Patricia in, you were after the manuscript. You've waited so long for this day—you really went through a lot of trouble."

Caitlin had seen through her from the beginning. The moment Ximena demanded the original manuscript in exchange, Caitlin knew exactly what she was after.

"And another thing—you claim to have been close with my mother, but based on the letters and records she left behind, I don't see much evidence of that. The only reason you ever got close to her was because you wanted the manuscript, wasn't it?"

Ximena didn't respond, but her silence spoke volumes.

Caitlin's gaze grew even sharper. "At first, I was grateful to you for raising Patricia for five years. I even thought of repaying that kindness.

"But now that I know it was all part of your scheme, I don't feel an ounce of gratitude toward you anymore.

"You think that by threatening to keep Patricia, you can force my hand? You're overconfident. She is my daughter, and I will take her back—whether you like it or not. Expect a court summons soon."

She turned to leave, but Ximena called after her.

"Don't forget, Caitlin! You may be her biological mother, but for the past five years, you haven't fulfilled a single parental duty. I am her legal guardian. Even if we go to court, they won't award you custody!"

Caitlin, already at the door, turned back with a cold smirk.

"But the court wouldn't award custody to a criminal either, would it?"

Ximena's expression darkened. "What do you mean?"

"Oh? Has age made you forget, Ximena? The scandal involving Freya and

Xavian back then—it shook all of New York. Do I need to remind you who was behind it?"

Ximena's face went pale.

"Should I walk you through it?" Caitlin continued, her voice icy. "Professor Xavian loved my mother, but you were obsessed with him. When you couldn't have him, you resorted to revenge. You bribed Freya to destroy him."

"That was your method, wasn't it? If you couldn't have him, you'd rather see him ruined."

"You're talking nonsense! You have no proof!" Ximena snapped, her composure cracking.

"Proof? Do you want witness testimony or physical evidence? Because I have both."

"My mother's diary recorded everything—your obsession, your jealousy, and your schemes. And as for a witness? Freya is in my hands."

"What do you think would happen if the world found out that it was you who orchestrated the downfall of the renowned Professor Xavian?"

"For years, Freya has taken the blame for you. If the truth comes out, XEG won't survive the backlash."

The tide had turned.

Caitlin had taken control of the situation.

Ximena's face turned an ugly shade of gray as she stood frozen, unable to refute Caitlin's words.

She had never imagined that Caitlin—whom she had underestimated—could be so ruthless.

She had miscalculated.

Caitlin was far more formidable than her mother had ever been.

Meanwhile, in another part of the building, Zora was playing with Patricia in her office when her assistant rushed in, whispering something in her ear.

Zora's expression changed instantly. She quickly turned to Patricia.

"Sweetheart, let's go home, okay? We need to leave now."

She grabbed Patricia's backpack, held her little hand, and hurried toward the exit.

Her assistant had just informed her that Patricia's biological mother was here to take her back. Ximena had ordered Zora to hide the child immediately.

Zora had no idea who Patricia's real parents were.

Ximena had never told her.

But hearing that Patricia's birth mother had come to claim her, she knew she had to act fast.

She hurried Patricia through the back exit of XEG, but the moment they stepped outside, she saw a line of bodyguards standing by a parked luxury sedan.

The man sitting in the backseat was instantly recognizable.

Sebastian.

As soon as he saw them, Sebastian stepped out of the car.

"Miss Harris, where are you taking Patricia?"

Zora stiffened. "Mr. Vanderbilt, I'm just taking her home."

She was confused. Why was Sebastian here, waiting for them?

Sebastian's voice was calm but firm. "Patricia is going home."

He then turned to the little girl. "Patricia, come here. I'll take you to your mommy."

Patricia hesitated, wanting to go to him, but Zora held onto her tightly.

"There's no need, Mr. Vanderbilt. Patricia doesn't have a mother—she's been raised by my aunt and grandmother since she was a baby."

Sebastian studied Zora for a moment before asking, "Miss Harris, has your mother never told you the truth about Patricia's origins?"

Zora frowned. "What do you mean? What does this have to do with you?"

She had always been told that Patricia was an abandoned child her mother had taken in.

For years, they had loved and raised her as their own.

Sebastian's next words shattered that belief.

"Patricia has a biological mother. That mother is Caitlin."

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Zora's entire world shifted.

Patricia was Caitlin's daughter?

Then that meant... she was Sebastian's daughter too?!

Oh my god.

Zora felt like she had been struck by lightning.

As the truth sank in, she started to connect the dots.

A painful realization followed.

She looked at Sebastian and asked quietly, "So... from the very beginning, you got close to me only because of Patricia? It wasn't because you liked me?"

Sebastian nodded. "I'm sorry for keeping the truth from you."

Zora felt like her heart had just been torn apart.

She had thought Sebastian might have feelings for her.

She had even started imagining a future with him.

But now, she understood.

It had never been about her.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she choked out, "Mr. Vanderbilt... so all this time, you never felt anything for me?"

Sebastian's voice was unwavering. "I'm sorry. I only love Patricia's mother."

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 +20 Bonus

Zora's heart shattered completely.

Sebastian crouched slightly and reached out his hand. "Come here, Patricia."

But Zora, desperate and devastated, held onto Patricia even tighter.

"She's mine! None of you are taking her away from me!"



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