

254: Mr. Vanderbilt's Ruthless Strat

"VEG sent an official invitation. Tomorrow, they'll be holding a legal guardianship transfer ceremony at the Royal International Hotel. They're requesting your presence."

Ximena's assistant delivered the message carefully, watching her reaction.

Ximena's expression turned ice-cold.

They took the child and had the audacity to invite her to the ceremony? 🤔

How shameless could Sebastian be?

"Over my dead body! I'm not going!"

She collapsed into her chair in anger.

Her assistant hesitated, then cautiously added, "But... the police and major media outlets will be there. If you don't show up, wouldn't that—"

"Get out! Now!"

Ximena wasn't in the mood to hear any more.

The assistant fled the office, closing the door behind them.

Ximena let out a frustrated sigh.

She had lost.

And she had lost badly.

She had planned so much—only to end up losing everything.

—

Sebastian had orchestrated everything perfectly.

He had placed Ximena on such a high pedestal that even if she wanted to go back on her word, she couldn't.

He had studied her personality well—Ximena was a woman who valued power, prestige, and reputation above all else.

She would never allow herself to be seen as weak, nor would she risk public humiliation.

When Sebastian returned home that evening, he informed Caitlin about the upcoming event.

"This was a smart move," Caitlin admitted. "She's trapped now. No matter how much she resents it, she can't say a word."

"Exactly. Tomorrow, you'll attend with me."

"Of course."

—

That afternoon, The Vanderbilt Family gathered for a celebratory lunch.

Vincent and Hazel had also returned, making it a full house.

The atmosphere was warm and joyful—Patricia's return had brought an undeniable brightness to the entire family.

After lunch, the children ran off to play in the vast garden while Caitlin sat on a swing, watching them.

Sebastian approached, sitting down beside her. His arm rested casually

on the back of the swing, a natural closeness forming between them.

For him, this was the future he had always wanted — sitting beside Caitlin, watching their children play, surrounded by laughter and warmth.

As evening approached, he turned to her.

"Caitlin, why don't you stay here tonight?"

"I need to head back. I can't just move in."

"You can move in. Stay as long as you want. What about the kids? You're just going to leave them?"

"I'll take Patricia with me," she said. "She just got back, and I want to spend more time with her—help her feel comfortable."

"Then what about me?" Sebastian leaned in, voice dropping to a teasing murmur. "I need time with you too. Our bond still needs work."

With that, he rested his head on her shoulder, nuzzling against her like a cat.

Caitlin laughed. "Are you a cat now? Why are you so clingy?"

"Yes, and you're my owner. Pet me."

"Get off!"

She tried to push him away, but he didn't budge.

Seeing her smile, he smirked, satisfied.

From a distance, Vincent had approached with some business matters to discuss—but upon seeing the intimate scene, he chose to quietly retreat,

leaving them alone.

Just then, Caitlin's phone vibrated.

It was a message from James.

Attached was a photo, along with a single line of text.

Sebastian glanced over her shoulder, immediately noticing the young man in the picture.

His expression darkened.

"Who's this?"

"A friend."

"Let me see."

Sebastian snatched her phone, enlarging the image. 

It was a young guy—stylish, good-looking, and standing in a striking pose.

The name on the chat was James.

Sebastian's jaw tightened.

"What kind of friend sends you photos like this? Is he showing off his physique?"

Caitlin chuckled. "No. He helped me out, so I bought him three pairs of pants. He was just showing me how they fit."

Sebastian nearly choked on air.

"You bought him pants?"

"Yeah, three pairs."

Sebastian stared at her.

"You bought another man pants? Three pairs?"

"Yeah."

Sebastian was fuming.

She had never bought him pants.

He folded his arms, his tone sharp. "You think that's normal? Buying another guy clothes?"

"It's just three pairs of pants, what's the big deal?" Caitlin teased, noticing how childishly jealous he looked.

Sebastian turned away with a huff. "Hmph!"

"Are you... actually mad? Are you jealous?"

Caitlin found it amusing. How could he be this petty?

Sebastian refused to answer, crossing his arms.

At that moment, James sent another message—this time, a voice note.

The auto-play function kicked in.

["I know a great little restaurant. Want to grab dinner tonight?"]

Sebastian immediately whipped around. His glare could burn holes through steel.

Then Caitlin's casual reply played next.

["Sounds good, send me the location."]

Sebastian's entire expression shifted.

"You're just going to plan a date right in front of me?" His voice was dangerously low.

"Yes. Is there a problem?" Caitlin raised a brow. "Remember, you agreed to a three-month observation period. If you don't want it to end early, you better behave."

Sebastian clenched his jaw.

She was right.

As much as he wanted to forbid her from seeing other men... he couldn't.

He was just the ex-husband right now.

And he had no right to interfere.

But the thought of her having dinner with a good-looking young guy was driving him insane.

Caitlin smirked.

She turned her attention back to watching the children, but the small, satisfied smile on her lips made it clear—

She was enjoying torturing him.

—

Meanwhile, across the city, James stood atop a scenic hill, overlooking a

vast cherry blossom forest.

He had spent days tracking down this place.

After searching, he finally discovered that this was the only cherry blossom grove in New York.

Unfortunately, he had come at the wrong time—the blooming season had passed.

The trees were now lush and green, with no falling petals.

He closed his eyes, trying to recall his memories.

In his mind, faint, fragmented images surfaced—a blurry vision of himself running through falling cherry blossoms.

A soft voice called after him.

"Slow down, sweetheart!"

"Come quick, little brother!"

The whispers of the past grew louder.

James suddenly started running through the grove, chasing the sounds in his memory.

The wind rushed past him.

Somewhere, in the depths of his mind, a shadowy figure stood beneath the largest cherry tree, smiling at him and waving.

Then —

A distinct whistle echoed.

His own whistle.

James froze.

It was him.

He had blown that whistle before.

Driven by instinct, he searched the entire grove, running through every path, until he finally found the largest cherry blossom tree in the forest.

Breathing heavily, he circled it multiple times, running his hands along its bark.

Finally, he sat down, leaning against the trunk.

What was he missing?

What had he forgotten?

He shut his eyes, desperate for clarity.

Moments passed.

Then — his eyes snapped open.

Without hesitation, he jumped up—and started digging at the base of the tree.