

**277: A Brilliant Move**

No one applauded, but Zoe was quick to set the tone.

"Alright, Caitlin's painting will be included in today's auction. Let's see how it performs."

The gala continued, and Caitlin's status in Luminary League was now officially cemented. She was immediately appointed as a permanent board member, standing on equal footing with Ximena, possessing the same level of authority.

In the crowd, Ximena approached Caitlin with a glass of wine, a faint smile playing on her lips.

"Congratulations, Caitlin. That was quite a move—getting yourself into Luminary League."

Caitlin clinked her glass lightly against Ximena's, her own smile cool and unreadable.

"Not as impressive as your ability to read the tides and win favor with the right people. If we're talking about strategy, I should call you my mentor."

Both women smiled, but the underlying tension between them was something only they understood.

Just then, Zora walked up, her eyes scanning Caitlin from head to toe.

"Caitlin, tell me, is there any identity of yours we don't know about yet?"

She was still reeling from the previous revelations. First, finding out Caitlin was Kayla, the renowned designer, was shocking enough.



Now, discovering she was also O'Brien?

It felt like a direct slap in the face.

Caitlin was far from ordinary.

She had been hiding her true abilities all along.

Caitlin raised an eyebrow, her voice light yet sharp.

"Miss Harris, why are you so invested in my private affairs? You and I are both designers—you should know that art and design go hand in hand. If you had chosen to develop your painting skills further, this wouldn't be such a surprise to you."

It was true—Zora was a skilled artist herself.

But in the design world, neither painting nor sketching were defining skills.

She had never considered them important.

However, there was one thing she excelled at—marksmanship.

Trained by her mother since childhood, her shooting skills were among the best at the elite shooting club. 1

Determined to beat Caitlin at something, Zora issued a challenge. 1

"Fine. Since painting and design aren't worth competing over, how about something else?"

Caitlin's expression remained impassive.

"What exactly are you proposing, Miss Harris?"



Zora smirked.

"Tomorrow at 9 AM, at the largest shooting range in New York — I challenge you to a marksmanship competition."

Caitlin chuckled, tilting her head slightly.

"Are you sure you can beat me?"

Zora's eyes flashed with defiance.

"Hmph! The match hasn't even started, and you're already doubting me?"

She leaned in slightly, voice dripping with provocation.

"Unless... you're afraid of losing? If you don't show up tomorrow, I'll take that as a forfeit."

Caitlin said nothing.

Zora took her silence as fear and scoffed.

"It's settled, then. See you tomorrow. If you don't show, I'll assume you've admitted defeat."

As the mother-daughter duo walked away, Caitlin remained as composed as ever.

If Zora wanted to provoke her, she would have to face the consequences.

The Charity Auction Begins

The event moved into the final segment — the charity auction.



Zoe, along with the other board members, donated their luxury jewelry and rare collectibles as auction pieces.

Caitlin's painting, "Resurgence," was included as the last item.

The first five exquisite jewelry pieces were snapped up quickly, with enthusiastic bidding wars breaking out.

Then—Caitlin's painting went up for auction.

The starting bid was \$100,000.

And yet...

The room fell silent.

None of the wealthy socialites seemed interested.

Or rather—none of them wanted to show interest.

Zora smirked, feeling smug.

"See? No one is bidding."

She believed Caitlin had made a fatal mistake by revealing her identity as O'Brien.

Instead of elevating her worth, it had tarnished the prestige of her artwork.

"That painting isn't even worth \$100."

Or so she thought.

Just then—



A deep voice broke the silence.

“One million.”

The crowd gasped and turned to look.

It was Louis.

Zora’s smug expression froze.

“What the hell?!”

Did Caitlin bribe him to be a shill bidder?

Caitlin was just as surprised.

She hadn’t expected Louis to stand up for her.

But he genuinely appreciated her talent.

Unlike the petty, envious socialites, Louis saw Caitlin for who she truly was.

Just as everyone thought the auction would end at one million—

A calm yet commanding voice echoed from the entrance.

“Two million.”

Heads whipped around.

A tall, imposing man strode in, followed by a team of assistants.

The women gasped.

Zora’s eyes widened in curiosity.

Ximena, on the other hand—her fingers clenched around her wine glass.

Her usually unreadable expression wavered for just a second before she quickly masked it again.

Few people recognized the man.

But Caitlin did.

It was Zeke.

He came here... for her?

Zeke walked up smoothly, his dark eyes sweeping across the crowd before resting briefly on Caitlin.

Then, he turned to Zoe.

“Apologies for arriving uninvited.”

Zoe, intrigued, asked politely, “And you are...?”

Before Zeke could answer, one of his assistants stepped forward.

“Our president is Zeke Lowell, CEO of SY Capital Partners. We’ve recently entered the U.S. market.”

The realization hit the crowd like a thunderclap.

SY Capital Partners?!

The very same international financial powerhouse that had just announced its expansion into the U.S.?!

Zoe’s eyes brightened.

Commented [Ma1]:



"Ah! The very same SY Capital Partners that's been making headlines?"

Zeke nodded with a small smile.

"Indeed. I happen to be quite interested in O'Brien's artwork. May I participate in the auction?"

"Of course, of course!" Zoe gestured for the auctioneer to continue.

Louis raised the bid again—

"Three million."

Zeke countered instantly—

"Five million."

The audience whispered excitedly.

Two high-profile men were competing over Caitlin's painting.

To the wealthy socialites, this was better than any romance novel.

Several mothers nudged their daughters, whispering:

"Seize this chance! Get close to them before Caitlin does!"

Louis sighed and made one final bid.

"Ten million."

Zeke smirked slightly.

"Fifteen million."

The bidding war intensified.



Finally, Zeke raised his hand.

"Fifty million."

A hush fell over the room.

Even Louis hesitated.

He wasn't willing to cross SY Capital Partners over a single painting.

The auctioneer counted down.

"Fifty million once... fifty million twice..."

Then—

A cold, indifferent voice rang out from the back.

"One hundred million."

The entire room went still.

All heads snapped toward the voice.

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