



278: A Direct Challenge to His Limits

A group of black-suited bodyguards escorted a tall, imposing man as he strode in from the venue's entrance.

Wearing dark sunglasses, his sharp, chiseled features exuded an aura of power and control, with a natural air of dominance surrounding him.

Someone in the crowd gasped.

"It's Mr. Vanderbilt...!"

The moment people recognized Sebastian, murmurs broke out among the women.

Three of the most powerful and influential men in one place?

What kind of spectacle was this?

And more importantly—all three seemed to be here for Caitlin.

The jealousy and resentment in the air were palpable.

"How is Caitlin this lucky?" someone muttered bitterly.

"Three of the most desirable men fighting over her? It's not fair!"

Standing off to the side, Zora's heart clenched.

Watching Sebastian walk in, she could feel her anger boiling over.

She had given him her love, her devotion—yet all he ever saw was Caitlin.

Her fingernails dug into her palm, but her pain was nothing compared to the cold reality she had to face.



Sebastian walked right past her.

Not even a glance.

As if she was nothing.

As if she didn't exist.

Sebastian only had eyes for one person.

Caitlin.

The Bidding War Continues

Sebastian approached the auction area, his gaze sweeping over both Zeke and Louis.

Louis chuckled, shaking Sebastian's hand.

"So, Mr. Vanderbilt, you've come to steal this one away from me?"

He was referring to the painting, of course.

Sebastian's gaze then shifted toward Zeke.

"I see even Mr. Lowell has an appreciation for art. You settled in the U.S. just recently, and your first public appearance is to bid on artwork? How... refined of you."

His tone was laced with subtle mockery.

Last time, Sebastian had defeated Zeke in a private confrontation and warned him to leave the U.S.

But now—



Zeke had returned, standing right in front of him, establishing his new empire in the very place he had been warned to stay away from.

It was a blatant challenge to his authority.

Zeke smiled, unaffected.

"Mr. Vanderbilt. What a coincidence."

Their hands clasped in a handshake—a display of calm exteriors, yet underneath, it was clear.

A silent battle was already raging.

Caitlin, watching from the sidelines, felt her head throb.

She could already feel the storm brewing between them.

The auctioneer, unfazed by the tension, continued.

"Mr. Vanderbilt has bid one hundred million. Is there anyone who wishes to go higher?"

Zeke turned to Caitlin.

She shook her head slightly, signaling him to back down.

This bidding war had already gone too far.

Zeke smiled knowingly and stepped back.

"If Mr. Vanderbilt wants this painting so badly, I'll let him have it."

Just as everyone thought it was over—



Zeke suddenly spoke again.

"However, my previous bid of fifty million still stands. But now, I'd like to use it to purchase... a single strand of Caitlin's hair."

The entire venue fell silent.

What?!

A strand of Caitlin's hair?

People whispered in disbelief.

"Is this man insane?"

"Fifty million for a single hair? What kind of obsession is this?!"

Women were already jealous that Caitlin had three powerful men fighting over her.

Now—one of them was willing to spend a fortune just for a piece of her.

Sebastian's expression darkened immediately.

His fingers curled into tight fists under his sleeve.

This was no longer a simple auction.

This was provocation.

A direct challenge.

Zeke vs. Sebastian: The Battle Continues

Zoe quickly stepped in to ease the tension.



"We greatly appreciate both Mr. Vanderbilt's generosity and Mr. Lowell's dedication to charity. So let's do this—Caitlin, would you mind parting with a single strand of hair?"

Caitlin sighed.

It was just hair. 1

If this would finally put an end to the ridiculous battle between these two, she'd play along.

She gestured for Zoe to proceed.

Zoe reached over and carefully plucked a single strand of Caitlin's hair, placing it into a small, transparent bag before handing it over.

"Here you go, Mr. Lowell. The most unique auction item I've ever witnessed."

Zeke accepted it with a smile, briefly glancing at Sebastian as he did so.

Sebastian's temper flared.

If it weren't for the public setting, he would have already punched Zeke in the face.

The auction officially ended, marking the conclusion of the Luminary League's charity gala.

Zoe delivered a closing speech, thanking everyone for their contributions and wishing for continued success.

As the guests began to disperse, Caitlin prepared to leave.

Louis quickly caught up with her.



"Caitlin!"

She turned, smiling.

"Joe!"

"When will you have time to work on another piece? Please, let us showcase your work at Lisson Gallery!"

Now that Caitlin's identity as O'Brien had been revealed, Louis wanted exclusive access to her new works.

"No problem. I'll have my assistant coordinate with you."

"Fantastic! Also, I'd love to host an exclusive O'Brien exhibit at the gallery. Let's discuss it soon."

"Sounds good. We'll plan it together."

As Louis left, Zeke suddenly called out to her.

"Caitlin."

She turned to find him approaching.

Louis, noticing the interaction, raised an eyebrow.

"Wait, you two know each other?"

Caitlin nodded.

"He's my senior."

Louis chuckled.



"That explains a lot. I'll leave you two to chat."

As he walked away, Caitlin crossed her arms, her gaze on Zeke.

"Why did SY Capital suddenly enter the U.S. market? What's your real motive?"

Zeke smirked.

"What, can't I be here just to keep an eye on you?"

Caitlin wasn't convinced.

She knew Zeke wouldn't uproot his entire business without a bigger reason.

Just then—

Sebastian's voice cut through the air.

"Caitlin. Come with me."

Zeke turned, his expression unchanging, but his aura dangerous.

The tension between the two men was suffocating.

"I invited her first," Zeke countered.

Sebastian's jaw tightened.

"I need to talk to her."

Caitlin sighed, already exhausted from dealing with these two.

"I already have plans with Sebastian. We'll talk another time, Zeke."



Rather than choosing either man's car, she climbed into her own.

Sebastian followed without hesitation, sliding into the seat beside her. 

He shot one last warning glance at Zeke before the door shut.

As the car pulled away, Zeke watched in silence.

His sharp eyes darkened, deep in thought.

Meanwhile...

Not far away, Zora and Ximena had been observing the entire exchange.

Zora clenched her fists, her jealousy unbearable.

"What the hell is so special about Caitlin?! Why do all these men orbit around her?!"

Ximena, however, was eerily calm.

She turned to her daughter.

"Wait in the car. There's something I need to take care of first."

Confused, Zora obeyed.

Then, Ximena walked straight toward Zeke.

Zeke, about to get into his car, sensed her approach.

He turned his head slightly—

His gaze unreadable.

"Zeke..."



Ximena's voice quivered slightly—despite her best efforts to stay composed.

From the moment he walked in, she had barely held back her emotions.

Now, standing before him, she couldn't suppress them anymore.



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