



**286: A Bait Too Tempting to Ignore**

Uesugi's car sped like a bullet, tires screeching against the pavement as he tried to shake off his relentless pursuer.

James clung desperately to the roof, gripping the edges with all his strength.

"Damn it!"

Uesugi's expression darkened. Since James refused to back down, he had no choice but to deal with him once and for all.

Reaching for his weapon, he aimed at the car roof.

Bang!

A bullet tore through the thick metal, nearly hitting James.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three more shots rang out.

James gritted his teeth as pain seared through his arm. His grip faltered. His strength was slipping.

His fingers finally gave out.

His body rolled off the roof, tumbling down the side of the road and plunging into a steep ravine.

The sound of his fall disappeared into the abyss.

Uesugi slammed on the brakes twenty meters ahead, his tires skidding across the pavement.



Reversing the car, he stepped out and surveyed the scene.

Blood was splattered on the car's roof.

He approached the edge of the ravine, peering down into the darkness below.

Silence. No movement.

Satisfied, he turned back, got into his car, and drove off.

As he sped down the empty highway, he made a call.

"Master, I encountered interference during my mission. James tried to stop me. We fought, and I killed him. He fell off a cliff."

There was a long silence on the other end before a low voice responded.

"If he betrayed me, then he deserved it. Continue with the plan. Do not kill Caitlin before securing the manuscript."

"Yes, sir."

A cruel smile curled on Uesugi's lips.

To him, that meant once the manuscript was in his hands, Caitlin was fair game.

Beautiful women were the most fragile. Breaking them was the real pleasure. [1](#)

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At DanCa Estate.

Tyler and his team arrived to investigate.



As they combed through security footage, Tyler reported to Sebastian.

"Mr. Vanderbilt, we reviewed the surveillance logs. About an hour ago, someone tampered with the security system, causing a brief disruption. That's when the intruder slipped in.

"We managed to capture a silhouette, but the footage is blurry. He was too fast, and his face was covered.

"Our teams searched the perimeter but found no trace of the suspect."

Sebastian absorbed the report, his gaze sharp.

"Strengthen the security. Upgrade the system. If anyone tries to break in again, I want them caught—dead or alive."

"Yes, sir."

The luxury car pulled away from the estate, heading toward The Vanderbilt Family residence.

Caitlin sat in the passenger seat, deep in thought. Then, a sudden realization struck her.

"Sebastian... Do you think it could be Black Hawk?"

"If it were Black Hawk, he'd be coming for me," Sebastian said, his voice steady. "He had a weapon, but he didn't try to kill you. That doesn't fit Black Hawk's style. If it was him, you and Patricia would be dead by now."

Caitlin's mind raced. "Then who was it? And what about that gunshot? Who fired it?"

The timing was too precise.



She had woken up just as the intruder attacked. Sebastian had rushed in just moments later.

Whoever fired that shot—it felt like a warning.

A name surfaced in her mind.

Sebastian's eyes met hers.

"You're thinking what I'm thinking."

They had both come to the same conclusion.

James.

He was still watching over her, protecting her from the shadows.

A lump formed in Caitlin's throat.

"If he's been nearby all this time, why won't he come to see me?" she murmured. "It's my fault. I pushed him away."

Sebastian reached over, squeezing her hand.

"He hasn't abandoned you. He's still watching. Just give him time."

Caitlin exhaled slowly.

Time.

Or maybe...

Maybe she needed to create the right opportunity.

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Deep in the wilderness.

Somewhere in the overgrown ravine, James lay motionless.

Pain seared through his body, jerking him awake.

His breath was ragged, his arm throbbing from the gunshot wound.

Uesugi had tried to kill him.

That bastard.

Their so-called brotherhood was over.

If James survived this, he would hunt Uesugi down himself.

With excruciating effort, he dragged himself out of the wilderness.

By the time he reached his temporary hideout in New York, his body was drenched in blood.

He locked the door behind him, fumbling for medical supplies.

Seated on the couch, he gritted his teeth and removed the bullet from his own arm.

The pain was unbearable.

Sweat dripped from his forehead as he forced the metal out, the bullet clinking into a metal tray.

He bit down on a cloth, barely suppressing the scream rising in his throat.

With shaky hands, he disinfected the wound, the burning sensation making his vision blur.

Then, with a needle and thread, he stitched himself up. 

By the time he finished, exhaustion took over.

He slumped back against the couch and closed his eyes.

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The Next Morning.

New York's headlines were buzzing about one thing.

O'Brien's latest masterpiece, *Life*, had sold for a record-breaking one billion dollars.

The art world was in an uproar.

Thanks to Zoe and Sebastian's efforts, Caitlin's identity as O'Brien had not been revealed to the public, shielding her from unwanted attention.

At breakfast, Caitlin personally prepared a meal for everyone.

Sebastian and the children were delighted.

It was a rare, precious moment of peace.

After breakfast, the tutors arrived to take the children to their lessons.

Meanwhile, Caitlin met Sebastian in his study.

Sebastian pulled her onto his lap, showing her a video.

"I just finished this," he said. "Take a look."

Caitlin leaned into him, watching the screen.

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]:



When the clip ended, she nodded.

"It's perfect. I just hope Harrison sees it and understands how much I miss him."

"He will," Sebastian assured her.

He sent the video to the VEG media team, ensuring it would be broadcasted widely.

Caitlin could only hope.

She had to find her brother.

But before she could dwell on it further, it was time to leave.

She had an appointment.

Today at 9 AM, she was set to face Zora in a shooting competition. 

Given what had happened the night before, Caitlin left the house with a full security team.

Sebastian refused to leave her side.

As they neared the shooting range, Caitlin's phone buzzed with a message.

Zeke.

He wanted to meet.

She declined.

Not today.

As she put her phone away, Sebastian's caught her attention.

"Caitlin, look at this."

He turned his screen toward her.

Her eyes widened.

An official announcement from Christie's Auction House.

"Tomorrow night, at Christie's elite auction, one of the featured items will be...

'Yun's Aromatic Codex'—the missing second half of the manuscript."

Caitlin's heart pounded.

"The second half of the codex... is finally appearing?"

"That's right," Sebastian confirmed. "It's officially listed as one of the auction's top items."

A chilling sense of foreboding crept over Caitlin.

The timing was too perfect.

Why now?

Why had this long-lost manuscript suddenly resurfaced at this precise moment?

Who had thrown out this bait... and who was the prey?