

299: Who Will Come Out on Top

Two billion was no small sum, and Ximena had to consider whether the funds from her company would be enough to cover such a cost. However, once she thought about the financial situation of the group, she could only sigh and give up.

When it came to competing against The Vanderbilt Family, it was like using an egg to strike a stone.

Ximena quickly realized that Sebastian and Caitlin had teamed up and were determined to win, prepared to remove any obstacles in their way.

As everyone turned their attention to Ximena, she suddenly received a text message. The message contained only one word:

[Follow]

After reading the message, Ximena's confidence surged, and she raised her paddle again.

"200 million!"

"300 million!"

"400 million!"

"500 million!"

Ximena held her ground, not backing down, until Sebastian called out with a firm voice, "1 billion!"

The room erupted!

"Oh my God, 1 billion! Does Mr. Vanderbilt really want Yun's Aromatic



Codex that badly?"

"I've heard that there are treasures hidden in the Yun's Aromatic Codex. If the treasure is found, spending a billion would be worth it."

"But what if there's no treasure? Isn't that just half an old manuscript?"

Whispers filled the room. Just then, Ximena received another message:

[Stop]

That meant, after the price reached 1 billion, they were forced to back off.

"1 billion! Is there anyone willing to go higher?" the auctioneer asked. "1 billion once, 1 billion twice, 1 billion three times—"

Just as the auctioneer was about to call it, a loud explosion erupted from the stage.

The auction stage exploded, with thick smoke and sparks quickly spreading. The auctioneer was thrown from the blast.

Several front-row guests were also caught in the blast radius.

The sudden danger threw the entire crowd into chaos, and screams echoed as people scrambled for the exit.

Sebastian shielded Caitlin with his body. Fortunately, they weren't in the front, so they weren't hurt.

But with the scene in total disarray and further danger still possible, Sebastian quickly pulled Caitlin towards the exit.

As they were almost out, another explosion sounded inside.

The fire spread, and smoke filled the auction hall.



"Mr. Vanderbilt!" Tyler and his men managed to fight their way through the crowd and reach Sebastian and Caitlin. "Are you alright?"

"We're fine!" Sebastian led Caitlin to a safer area. Their expressions were grave as they exchanged a look. Both were thinking the same thing—this explosion was likely aimed at the Yun's Aromatic Codex.

"Protect Mr. Vanderbilt and Caitlin!" Tyler barked as he and his men shielded them from further danger. He then reported, "Mr. Vanderbilt, we've captured the person who attempted to attack James at the hospital. The explosion here makes me suspect that this is part of a coordinated plan—both attacks are happening simultaneously."

Sebastian nodded. Caitlin sighed. "Fortunately, we were prepared in advance. Otherwise, Harrison might not have made it."

Many people had already fled the building, while some remained in the lobby, unsure of what to do next. 1

Zeke came over to them. "Caitlin, are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

"It was really dangerous just now. It's not safe here. How about I take you home?" Zeke asked. 1

"You should go back. I need to stay here and wait for the police to arrive and handle things," Caitlin replied.

They hadn't yet confirmed the current status of the manuscript, so leaving prematurely wasn't an option.

Sebastian wrapped his arm around Caitlin. "I'll take care of her. Don't worry."



"Alright, if anything comes up, feel free to contact me," Zeke said before heading out.

After the explosion, the auction house's manager arrived, quickly calming down the frightened guests.

"We need to see if the manuscript is still here," Caitlin said.

The smoke in the auction hall was beginning to dissipate, and thankfully, there hadn't been a large fire. Tyler and his team managed to put out the flames with extinguishers.

Caitlin and Sebastian went back into the auction hall. Several injured people were lying on the ground, groaning in pain.

"Don't worry, everyone. We've called the police and the paramedics. Help is on the way!"

While comforting the injured, they searched the area and found the location where the manuscript had been displayed. The display case had been knocked over by the explosion, but it hadn't been damaged by the blast itself. The glass was shattered, and the manuscript, along with its box, was gone.

"The explosion didn't affect the display case. It seems it was knocked over by the shockwave. The manuscript must have already been taken," Caitlin deduced.

She turned to survey the area. "There's only one exit. The thief must have grabbed the manuscript during the chaos and escaped through that exit."

"The intruder might have been hiding in the crowd. We'll check the surveillance footage," Tyler said.

"Right!" Two of his men quickly left to investigate.

Caitlin noticed the auctioneer, who was lying on the stage. He wasn't dead but had his hand raised, pointing toward the display case.

"Do you know anything? Did you see who took the manuscript?" Caitlin asked as she crouched beside him.

"A man... A man in a mask..." The auctioneer, still dazed from the explosion, described what he saw through the smoke. "He smashed the glass and took the manuscript."

The auctioneer pointed upward toward the ceiling. Caitlin looked up and quickly realized.

"Sebastian, he didn't escape through the door! He went through the ceiling, into the ventilation system!"

"Quick! Search all the ventilation ducts!" Sebastian ordered. Tyler and his team rushed out to carry out the search.

Before long, the police, paramedics, and fire crew arrived. They began evacuating the injured and investigating the scene.

The lead officer took statements from everyone, including Caitlin and Sebastian, who reported everything they had seen and heard.

"Mr. Vanderbilt, Caitlin, please don't worry. We'll do everything we can to recover the manuscript," the officer reassured them.

Caitlin and Sebastian stepped outside the auction hall, only to encounter the man in the white suit again.

It seemed like he had been waiting for them to emerge. As they approached, he spoke.

"You don't need to waste your time looking for the manuscript. The one that was stolen was a replica."

"What? A replica?" Caitlin looked at the man, her curiosity piqued. "Why do you say that?"

"Yes, the one on display today was a replica, not the real one," the man answered nonchalantly.

Caitlin studied him closely. Without his white suit, he wore a white shirt beneath, exuding an elegant and refined aura. Yet there was something about him that was hard to read—his presence was full of mystery.

Sebastian narrowed his eyes, studying the man carefully. "Why are you saying this? Do you know something?"

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