

Billions's Regret: Finding Her #Enemy 421 - Read Billions's Regret: Finding Her Enemy 421

Enemy 421

The assassin remained silent. Tyler and James took turns hitting him, but the man didn't make a sound.

As boarding time approached, Sebastian gave a quick order: Tyler and his team would stay behind to deal with the attacker, while the rest of them would board the plane and return to the U.S. as scheduled.

Once they boarded first class, everyone found their seats. Xavi noticed he'd been seated next to Zinnia and couldn't stop the grin spreading across his face.

Caitlin took the window seat beside Sebastian.

They had just settled in when other passengers began boarding. Across the aisle from Sebastian, a tall figure dropped into the seat.

Zinnia glanced over casually and immediately froze. Her eyes widened, and she covered her mouth in shock.

Xavi noticed her reaction and followed her gaze. When he saw who it was, he instinctively sucked in a sharp breath.

A second later, he leaned forward and poked Sebastian through the seat gap.

Feeling the jab, Sebastian turned his head. "Xavi, what is it?"

"Mr. Vanderbilt..."

Xavi motioned toward the seat across the aisle.

Sebastian turned and looked—and there he was.

Sitting across from him, separated only by a narrow aisle, was none other than ****Zeke****.

What the hell was Zeke doing on this flight?

Under Sebastian's gaze, Zeke slowly turned his head, a devilish smile curling on his lips.

“Mr. Vanderbilt. Long time no see.”

Sebastian’s brows knit tightly. He glanced at Caitlin, who was sitting beside him, wearing earbuds, resting with a U-shaped travel pillow. She

hadn’t heard anything.

Tension immediately gripped Sebastian’s body. His mind flashed back to Graystone Castle—how he’d injured Zeke while rescuing Caitlin.

Was Zeke here for revenge?

“What are you doing here, Zeke?”

Sebastian moved slightly to shield Caitlin from view, his voice low and cold.

“I’m here for Caitlin. I heard she was flying back to the States today, so I came after her.”

Zeke didn’t bother hiding anything anymore. He was done suppressing his feelings, done running from his past.

The last time, when he narrowly escaped death, something had changed in him.

He had decided—this life, he would love freely and fearlessly. He wouldn’t waste another moment.

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This was the real start of the battle between him and Sebastian.

Sebastian’s temple pulsed with restrained rage. “You don’t get to call her Caitlin.”

“You didn’t trademark her name, did you? Why can’t I call her that?”

Zeke’s tone was calm, even mocking.

Sebastian’s voice dropped. “What do you want?”

“Just to say hi.”

Zeke tried to peek around Sebastian to look at Caitlin.

“She’s resting. Don’t disturb her.”

Sebastian wasn’t about to let him anywhere near her. Even if he couldn’t stop them from seeing each other forever, he’d do whatever he

could.

He knew Caitlin still felt indebted to Zeke for nearly dying to save her.

And that kind of emotional leverage was dangerous.

Zeke didn't push it. Instead, he glanced at Sebastian's bandaged hand and scoffed lightly.

"You injured, Mr. Vanderbilt?"

"None of your business."

Sebastian barely spared it a glance.

Zeke leaned back, eyes dark. "If you can't even protect yourself, how can you protect Caitlin? How can you give her the life she deserves?"

The words hit like a silent dagger—sharp, precise, and devastating.

Sebastian didn't reply. His stare locked with Zeke's, unflinching.

They didn't need to speak.

Anyone sitting nearby could feel the heavy, suffocating tension.

Xavi silently broke into a cold sweat.

Oh no, this was bad. Mr. Vanderbilt's love rival had just gone full throttle!

Zinnia, too, looked uneasy. She knew what had happened in the past—and she could see the fearless determination in Zeke's eyes.

This was going to be a hell of a headache for Caitlin.

Even James and the other bodyguards picked up on the hostility.

James, especially, kept a close eye on Zeke. As a known Shadow Moon Pavilion member, Zeke couldn't be trusted.

If he made any wrong move, James would be the first to take him down.

The plane took off without issue. Once it reached cruising altitude, Caitlin drifted off to sleep.

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Sebastian carefully pulled a blanket over her.

Zeke watched the small gesture quietly.

So that's how he won her over—being thoughtful, playing the long game..

Well, Zeke could do that too. And from now on, he'd do it better.

Caitlin slept soundly until turbulence shook the plane and woke her.

She opened her eyes to find Sebastian turned toward her, watching her quietly with a protective arm around the back of her seat.

“You didn’t rest?”

“I was watching you. Go back to sleep.”

“I’ve slept enough. I’m going to put on a face mask.”

She grabbed her toiletry bag and stood up.

Sebastian wished he could hide her from Zeke altogether, but that wasn’t realistic.

He stepped aside so she could pass, and she walked straight to the restroom—without noticing who was sitting across the aisle.

Zeke saw her get up and immediately stood as well.

Sebastian stood too.

Two tall, powerful men rising at the same time made the first-class cabin feel ten sizes smaller.

Their competing auras collided like thunderclouds—suffocating everyone nearby.

Xavi didn’t dare breathe. He was half-convinced the two would throw down right then and there.

James’s eyes narrowed. If Zeke tried anything, he’d intervene no hesitation.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Sebastian asked coldly.

“Can’t a guy stretch his legs?” Zeke said casually, already walking toward the restroom.

Sebastian followed without hesitation.

Now Zeke couldn’t even say a word to Caitlin without being shadowed. Sebastian wasn’t letting him near her.

The two men stood outside the restroom, one on each side.

Even their bodyguards looked confused—were the bosses trying to put them out of a job?

The stalemate stretched on until the restroom door opened.

Caitlin stepped out, face mask peeled and moisturized skin glowing.

She stopped in her tracks when she saw who was standing there.

“Zeke?”

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Love rivals, face to face.

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Enemy 422

Chapter 422

“Caitlin.”

“What are you doing here?”

Caitlin gave Zeke a once-over, surprised by his sudden appearance.

His complexion looked pale and a little sickly, his frame thinner than before, and there were faint shadows under his eyes.

“Wherever you go, I go.”

Zeke had promised to protect her. As long as she was around, so would he be

Because his injuries hadn't fully healed, he was holding himself back emotionally. Even his voice sounded colder than usual.

Hearing those words, Caitlin felt something stir inside her. She couldn't quite describe it, but Zeke did seem different from before.

Sebastian's face darkened. His gaze fixed on Zeke as he warned, “Mr. Preston, in case you've forgotten—I already proposed to Caitlin, and she said yes.”

“I was unconscious and recovering when you proposed. I don't accept it.”

Zeke didn't hide his feelings. When he had finally woken up and heard that Sebastian had proposed, the pain nearly tore him apart.

“Mr. Vanderbilt, have you also forgotten who put me in that hospital bed?”

Zeke suddenly grabbed Sebastian by the collar, eyes burning.

“I did. I won’t deny it.”

Sebastian smacked his hand away without hesitation.

Feeling the tension rise and fearing they’d actually come to blows, Caitlin stepped in quickly to defuse the situation. “Zeke... have your injuries healed?”

Zeke’s sharp expression softened slightly as he turned to her.

“No. Look.”

He pulled open his shirt, revealing the gauze still wrapped around his left chest—his heart.

“I’m sorry...”

Caitlin looked at the wound, her emotions complex. He’d only been hurt because of her.

“There’s no need to apologize. Getting hurt for you... it was my choice. I don’t regret it.”

“You shouldn’t be walking around like this. You need rest.”

Zeke’s eyes dimmed, a flicker of anger flashing through them. “I know. But I couldn’t stand by while someone plays dirty—pretending to save you, when really, they were trying to kill me.”

He shot Sebastian a cold glare, accusing him of attacking under the guise of heroism.

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Sebastian said nothing. No explanation would make a difference.

Caitlin knew Zeke misunderstood Sebastian. “Zeke, it was an accident. He didn’t realize it was you—he thought you were an enemy.”

“Don’t defend him. He wanted me out of the way so he wouldn’t have competition.”

Zeke’s voice turned heavy and sorrowful. “Caitlin, if one day I’m not around anymore... be careful who you trust. Keep your eyes open.”

The implication was clear: if he died, it would be Sebastian’s doing.

“Mr. Preston, I admit I’m responsible for your injury. But slandering me in front of Caitlin crosses a line.”

Sebastian’s voice was dangerously low, his fists clenched tight at his sides.

Had Zeke not still been recovering, he might’ve already punched him.

“I’m just stating the facts. Unless you feel guilty, Mr. Vanderbilt?”

“Don’t think I won’t hit you.”

Sebastian grabbed Zeke’s collar again, shoving him against the cabin wall.

“Sebastian, stop!”

Caitlin threw her arms around him, pulling him back. “He’s still injured!”

Sebastian exhaled sharply through his nose and let go. But in the next second, Zeke’s body slid down the wall and collapsed to the floor,

unconscious.

“Zeke? Zeke!”

Caitlin crouched beside him, visibly panicked.

Sebastian stared down at him, unconvinced. “He’s faking it. Don’t fall for it.”

True or not, Caitlin wasn’t about to take the risk. “Even if he is this could be serious! Sebastian, help me get him to his seat–now!”

Sebastian wasn’t happy about it, but seeing her genuinely worried, he let his men step in.

But Zeke’s bodyguards got there first. They lifted him and laid him flat in his seat, reclining the chair.

Caitlin checked his vitals: no eye movement, unstable pulse and blood pressure–he really was unconscious.

“He’s not doing well. We need to stabilize him!”

“I’ll help,” James offered, stepping forward.

“No CPR–his heart was injured. Chest compressions will make it worse.”

“I’ll do it myself,” Caitlin said. “Zinnia, get my needle pouch from the bag.”

“On it!”

Zinnia quickly retrieved the pouch, sterilized the tools, and handed them to her.

Caitlin applied acupuncture to several pressure points on Zeke’s body, twisting the needles delicately. After a few moments, he slowly began

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to regain consciousness.

When his eyes fluttered open, both Caitlin and Zinnia let out a breath of relief.

Sebastian stood nearby, silent but skeptical.

He still believed Zeke was faking, just as Zeke believed he had attacked him on purpose.

“Caitlin...”

“You’re okay now. Just rest. Don’t move around. Once we land, I’ll take you to the hospital.”

“Will you stay with me?”

Zeke’s voice was soft and pleading as he gazed at her.

Caitlin paused for a moment, then nodded. “Alright. Let’s talk about it later. Just rest for now.”

After making sure Zeke was stable, Caitlin returned to her seat. Sebastian followed and sat beside her, shooting Zeke a long, hard stare.

What trick will he pull next?

Eventually, after a smooth flight, the plane landed safely in New York.

Vaughn and King were already waiting at the airport with a convoy of cars.

As everyone disembarked, Caitlin turned to Sebastian. “You go home to the Vanderbilt estate. I’ll take Zeke to the hospital first.”

Sebastian was fuming inside, but there was nothing he could do.

Zeke was a walking time bomb. He couldn’t be beaten, couldn’t be scolded, and absolutely could not be allowed to die.

Because if Zeke died now, Sebastian would never escape the blame.

At the hospital, after a full check-up, it was clear Zeke needed to be admitted. Caitlin took care of the arrangements.

When everything was settled and she was about to leave, Zeke spoke up.

“You’re leaving?”

“Yeah, I have to go see my son. Get some rest, okay?”

Caitlin took a few steps before pausing and turning back.

“Oh—should I contact your family? To have someone come take care of you?”

“My family?”

Zeke frowned deeply, clearly confused.

He didn’t understand what she meant by “family.”

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Enemy 423

“If Sienna and Teresa were still around, they could take care of you. But... Sienna’s in prison.”

“Sienna’s in prison?”

“You didn’t know? They killed Freya. The police are after them.”

The mention of Freya darkened Zeke’s expression. His brows furrowed with mixed emotions.

He couldn’t help but wonder—had those sisters sold him out after being caught?

No... probably not.

If they had, Caitlin would’ve questioned him by now.

“Looks like you really didn’t know.”

“I didn’t...”

He had only been out of the hospital a couple of days when he rushed from Country S to find her. He hadn’t had time to check what had happened in the US.

“There’s more. Teresa is dead.”

“What?! Teresa’s dead?”

The news struck Zeke like a lightning bolt. His expression froze in disbelief, laced with sorrow.

Sienna and Teresa weren’t just subordinates—they had grown up with him. They were like sisters. Loyal, fierce, and irreplaceable.

Suppressing his emotions, Zeke asked in a low voice, “Didn’t you just say she was in prison? What happened? How did she die?”

“She was murdered. The police are still investigating.”

Caitlin let out a quiet sigh.

Zeke clenched his fists tightly, fury in his eyes. “Who did it?!”

Caitlin shook her head. “The case is still open. I’ll let you know if anything comes up.”

His gaze burned red with grief and anger. Staring blankly at the ceiling, he slammed his fists against the mattress twice. “They’re gone... all

gone...”

“What do you mean?”

Watching him spiral like that, Caitlin felt a twinge of guilt. Should she not have told him?

“I have no one left...”

Zeke’s voice cracked with pain. “Sienna and Teresa were like family to me. We grew up together. Now they’re both gone. I have no one left.”

He looked at her with a hollow expression. “Caitlin, for you, I’ve already cut ties with my father. I’m no longer the son of a Count.”

That... was probably the hardest decision of Zeke’s life.

To give up his status, his title, his blood ties—all for love.

Caitlin remained silent for a long time.

She hadn’t expected that. He’d really severed his relationship with Zorro? That surprised her.

Maybe Zeke truly wasn’t like his father after all. Maybe she’d been wrong to lump them together.

As for what he said about having no family left, Caitlin didn’t mention Ximena for now. She didn’t want to hit him with more emotional blows.

Once Zeke calmed down a bit, Caitlin left the hospital. She promised to visit him again.

Just outside, by coincidence, she ran into Simon, who was just getting off work. He’d already changed out of his white coat and was striding along energetically, full of life.

“Simon!”

Hearing her voice, he stopped in surprise. “Caitlin? What are you doing here?”

“I just got back. Brought a friend in for a check-up. What about you?”

“I’m off to pick up Molly at the Vanderbilt estate.”

He looked a little sheepish. It was date night with Molly.

“I’m heading there too. Let’s go together.”

“Sure.”

On the way to the Vanderbilt estate, Caitlin caught up on all the updates.

Molly had been discharged and was doing well. She and Simon were officially dating now, texting and calling every day—pretty much inseparable.

“Looks like wedding bells are coming.”

Caitlin grinned.

“Way too early for that,” Simon chuckled. “Molly gave me a six-month probation period. She wants to test me first. I’m nervous.”

He looked worried. He really didn’t want to screw it up.

“Come on, with that thick skin of yours, there’s no way she can resist you.”

Simon touched his own face. “Well... I guess I have gotten bolder lately.”

“If she gets her memory back, she’ll love you even more. Trust me, you’ve got nothing to worry about.”

“You think so?”

When they arrived at the Vanderbilt estate, Molly was already waiting by the gate. As soon as she saw Simon, she ran over excitedly.

“Simon!”

She was wearing a wig to cover up her hair loss, but her face glowed with happiness. Love really did wonders.

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She threw her arms around his neck and teased, “Did you miss me?”

“Uh...”

How was he supposed to answer that?

“Say it! Say you missed me!”

Blushing, Simon muttered, “I missed you.”

“Heehee!”

Molly giggled like a little girl. Just hearing him say that could brighten her entire day.

“Oh my god, this is way too sweet,” Caitlin joked as she got out of the car. “My teeth are rotting.”

“Caitlin! You’re back!”

Molly beamed and ran over. “Everyone’s been waiting for you!”

“I know. Now go enjoy your date and stop force-feeding me your lovey-dovey moments.”

“Hey, you used to make me sick with you and my brother, remember?”

Molly accidentally spilled the truth—her memories were back.

Caitlin caught it instantly. “Wait... you got your memory back?”

Molly froze, then quickly waved her hands. “No, no, not really! Just bits and pieces!”

Grabbing Simon’s hand, she quickly said, “Come on, let’s go on our date! Let the other single dogs deal with the sugar overload!”

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She didn’t want to admit her memories had returned—not yet. She liked the way Simon treated her now. What if he changed once he knew?

Caitlin watched them leave with a smile before walking through the gates of the Vanderbilt estate.

Inside the main hall, Beatrice, Eliza, and Raymond were all waiting. Caitlin greeted them warmly.

“Beatrice, Raymond, Eli.”

“Caitlin, you’re finally home!”

“It’s good to have you back—we’ve all missed you!”

Eliza pulled her down to sit and they chatted for a while. Soon, Faith arrived with the children in tow.

“Mommy! Mommy!”

“My babies!”

Caitlin knelt down and hugged them tight, kissing their faces.

As dinner was served and everyone gathered, Caitlin couldn't help but notice someone missing.

She turned to Eliza. "Eli... where's Sebastian? Didn't he come back earlier?"

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*He came back earlier, said hello, and then went out again," Eliza replied. "Why don't you call him? Ask if he's coming back for dinner?"

"Alright, I'll give him a call."

Caitlin dialed Sebastian's number. It connected, but no one picked up.

She had no choice but to send him a text message, asking if he was coming back for dinner.

The message was sent, but there was no reply. That unsettled her a little. She tried reaching out to Xavi, who told her Sebastian was currently

at Club No. 8 drinking with Yates and a few of the other guys. He wouldn't be coming back to the Vanderbilt estate tonight.

“Eliza, Sebastian’s with some friends. He’s not coming for dinner. Let’s just start without him.”

“Alright.”

Club No. 8

Sebastian was drinking in a private room with Nolan, Yates, Benjamin, and Louis—the owner of the Lisson Gallery.

Also present was a stylish young woman, Jillian, Nolan’s younger sister.

Jillian had just returned from studying fashion design in France. Nolan had arranged a private room to welcome her back and had invited his

circle of friends, including Sebastian.

Jillian, the cherished daughter of the Mitchell family, had always gotten whatever she wanted. She had once liked Sebastian, but her brother had stopped her from pursuing him—especially since, at the time, Sebastian was deeply involved with Camellia.

“What are your plans now that you’re back?” Nolan asked. “Do you want to work at the company? I can set something up for you.”

“I studied fashion design. I don’t need your help—I want to find a job on my own.”

“Alright, suit yourself.”

Nolan didn’t push further. Jillian cast a glance at Wendy, the chubby girl sitting beside Benjamin, and wrinkled her nose in visible disdain.

In a lowered voice, she asked, “What does Benjamin see in *that*?”

“Everyone’s **got** their taste. It’s none of your business.”

Nolan gave a mild warning.

“She has *no* sense of appeal,” Jillian muttered.

Her gaze shifted to Sebastian, who was seated alone on a separate couch, looking more handsome and captivating than anyone else in the

room.

If the saying “close to the water, close to the moon” ever applied, this was it.

Among her brother’s group of friends: Benjamin had already been scooped up by that chubby girl; Yates was attractive but too moody and cold toward her; Louis was too artsy and boring. The one she truly wanted was Sebastian—rich, handsome, masculine, and born into a

powerful elite family. The perfect husband material.

She’d liked him before, but Nolan had stopped her. Now that Sebastian was divorced and she was a graduate, surely her brother wouldn’t interfere anymore?

Sebastian sat with a brooding expression, drinking glass after glass of strong liquor.

His phone buzzed repeatedly in his pocket. He knew who it was—he just didn’t answer.

Let that woman know what it feels like when he ignores ‘her*.

Jillian noticed his mood and asked Nolan, “Is Sebastian upset? Did he get into a fight with his girlfriend?”

“I don’t know.”

Ever since Nolan invited Sebastian, the man had been drinking quietly, radiating a “don’t bother me” vibe. No one dared to ask.

Jillian couldn’t stop staring at Sebastian’s perfect side profile. Her heart skipped a beat.

She grabbed a glass of wine and walked over, her tone sugary sweet. “Sebastian, is something bothering you?”

He glanced at her but said nothing.

“We haven’t seen each other in what, three years?” she continued. “I studied abroad in France and missed home. And all of you, of course.”

Whether he responded or not, she pressed on. “I heard while I was away that you found a girlfriend—Caitlin, right? And that she gave you three kids. Wow, I never expected that.”

“Not three,” Sebastian finally spoke. “Four.”

“Oh—right, four. You’re so lucky,” she said awkwardly.

Not far away, Wendy noticed Jillian chatting with Sebastian. She frowned. “Why didn’t Caitlin come?*

If Benjamin hadn’t said Caitlin would be there, she wouldn’t have let herself be dragged here.

“She’s not coming? I’m leaving.”

Wendy grabbed her bag and stood up, but Benjamin pulled her back—causing her to stumble right into his lap.

The full weight of her body practically knocked the air out of him.

Wendy panicked and scrambled to get off, but in the flustered moment, her hand landed somewhere it shouldn’t have.

“Ahh-!”

Benjamin sucked in a sharp breath. “Wendy, you-”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to-”

Wendy's face turned crimson as she bolted for the door, fleeing in embarrassment.

"Hey! Get back here!"

Benjamin yelled after her, but she didn't stop. Despite her size, she was surprisingly fast.

He had no choice but to leave the group and chase after her.

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The room quieted down. Jillian bounced between the remaining guys, probing for attention. She seemed intent on flirting with every eligible man who wasn't her brother.

Sebastian had no idea how many drinks he'd had. Eventually, staggering with a drunken sway, he stood up.

Nolan caught him by the arm. "You alright? Going home now?"

"Not going back."

Sebastian's tone was sharp, like a defiant child.

“Alright, then sleep it off in the upstairs suite. I’ll take you.”

Nolan guessed Sebastian must’ve had a fight with Caitlin. Since the man didn’t want to go home, he’d have to stay at the club for the night.

Outside the private room, Xavi approached when he saw Sebastian exiting.

“Mr. Vanderbilt, are we heading home now?”

“Go home? Who said anything about going home? Get out of my sight!”

At that moment, Sebastian saw Xavi’s face and, fueled by liquor and frustration, it seemed to morph into Zeke’s.

All his pent-up anger surged.

“You! Why are you always hanging around? You look so damn weak—it pisses me off! Stop pretending! Just stop pretending!”

Xavi was stunned into silence.

What? He was weak now?

When did I ever pretend anything?!

“You guys wait in the car,” Nolan said to Xavi and the others. “I’ll take him upstairs. Let him cool off.”

He helped Sebastian to one of the upstairs suites. Xavi and the rest went to wait in the car, hoping Sebastian would sober up soon and decide

to go home.

Once Sebastian was lying in the room, Nolan returned to the party.

Jillian saw her brother and quickly asked, “Did you drop Sebastian off?”

“He’s in my suite upstairs. Don’t bother him—he’s drunk.”

Jillian nodded obediently—but her mind was already scheming.

Sebastian was drunk... lying in a private room... completely alone.

Wasn't this a perfect opportunity?

She had no intention of wasting it.

Not long after, while everyone was distracted drinking, Jillian excused herself, claiming she needed the restroom.

She slipped away, headed upstairs, and approached the front desk.

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"I'm Nolan's sister," she told them sweetly. "He asked me to go grab something from his suite, Could I have the spare room key?"

The staff at Club No. 8 knew Nolan and his circle very well. After confirming her identity, they handed over the spare key card.

With that, Jillian made her way to the suite.

She slid the keycard into the slot. The lock clicked.

The door opened.

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The moment Jillian stepped into the room and saw the man sleeping soundly on the bed, her heart practically burst with excitement. His handsome features, so sculpted and perfect, looked like a masterpiece. Her lips curled into a satisfied smile she could no longer hide.

“Sebastian, are you asleep?”

“You’re so good-looking... A man this handsome should belong to me.”

Sebastian wasn’t answering his calls or replying to texts. Caitlin knew very well that he was angry—and it had to be because of Zeke.

If he wouldn’t come home, then she’d just go to him herself.

James, worried about her heading out alone at night, insisted on driving her to Club No. 8.

Outside the venue, Caitlin spotted Xavi waiting near the car. “Xavi!”

“Ma’am!” Xavi walked up to her. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to find him. What room is he in?”

“He’s not in the lounge anymore. I just took him upstairs to a suite to sleep it off. He’s drunk.”

“Got it.”

Caitlin didn’t waste time. She headed inside with James to search for Sebastian.

On the suite floor, Caitlin approached the front desk and asked casually, “Can you tell me which room is Nolan’s? He asked me to meet him,

but I don’t have the room card.”

The front desk staff glanced at Caitlin, who was wearing a mask. Assuming she was one of Nolan's private guests, they politely informed her, "Sorry, Miss. A lady already came by earlier and took the spare key card."

"A lady? Who?"

Caitlin's expression immediately tightened. Her brows furrowed deeply as a knot formed in her chest.

"It was Jillian—Nolan's sister."

The staff, perhaps out of kindness, offered the information to save her from walking into something unpleasant.

"Thank you for the heads-up."

Caitlin turned away, her expression dark as thunderclouds.

She could only hope she wasn't about to see what she feared.

Inside the suite, Jillian had already set up a camera across from the bed. She intended to film everything that would happen between her and Sebastian—just in case he denied it after sobering up.

Once everything was in place, she made her way toward the bed.

“Sebastian... Sebastian...”

No matter how she called him, he didn’t react. He was truly passed out, deeply unconscious.

“After tonight, I’ll be your woman. You’ll see—I’m a thousand times better than Caitlin.”

With a smile playing on her lips, she began removing her clothes, calming her racing heart as she approached the bed.

But just as her hand was about to reach him, a loud bang echoed from the *door*.

The room’s door burst open with a violent kick, and a blast of cold air swept in.

Two figures appeared in the doorway.

When they couldn’t get a spare key, James had hacked into the suite management system, located Nolan’s room number, and led Caitlin straight to it. Now, they’d forced their way in.

Jillian jolted in fright and instinctively yanked the blanket over herself.

The room lighting was dim, and the figures in the doorway were silhouetted in shadow, their faces obscured.

“Who are you people?” she demanded warily.

No one answered.

But the intensity in the air was enough to slice flesh—sharp, cold, and lethal.

Under the warm glow of the bedside lamp, Caitlin could see the scene clearly.

Sebastian was lying on the bed, and beside him was a woman wearing nothing but lingerie.

No woman could remain calm seeing that.

Her hands clenched into fists at her sides. Then, with heavy steps, Caitlin stormed forward and grabbed Jillian by the hair, yanking her off the bed.

“Ah-!”

Jillian let out a shriek of pain. The tug on her scalp was fierce, and her body hit the ground hard.

“You dare touch my man? Are you looking to die?”

Caitlin loomed over her like a storm, voice cold and sharp.

She could feel someone trying to encroach on what was hers—and that didn’t sit well with her at all.

Her possessiveness was no less than any man’s.

Jillian scrambled up from the floor, but Caitlin wasn’t done. She slapped her across the face—twice.

Smack!

Smack!

Jillian cupped her stinging cheeks in shock. “What the hell is your problem? You yank my hair and slap me? How rude can you be?”

“Oh, I *can* be rude. I only show manners to people who deserve them. You try to climb into another woman’s man’s bed—how’s that for polite?”

Caitlin’s voice was icy and sharp.

Jillian quickly pulled her clothes on. “You’re Caitlin, aren’t you? Look closely when did I ever come on to him? Sebastian was drunk. I was “taking care of him.”

Caitlin let out a cold, mocking laugh. “I’ve never seen anyone take care of someone half-naked. Do you think I’m blind?”

“Believe it or not, I genuinely meant to help. I didn’t do anything inappropriate to him, so why are you acting like this?”

Jillian, emboldened by the fact that she hadn’t gotten what she wanted, wasn’t backing down. Her torie turned defiant. “I’ve known Sebastian longer than you have. When I was hanging out with him, you weren’t even in the picture. You think popping out a few kids makes you his equal?”

Yes, the Vanderbilt and Mitchell families had a long history, and Nolan had always been close with Sebastian. But that didn’t give Jillian a free pass to step on Caitlin’s boundaries.

“Oh, really?”

Caitlin stared her down. Jillian tried to hold her gaze but faltered after a few seconds.

Her eyes darted away, exposing her guilt.

Caitlin scoffed. “Jillian, for someone raised in a prestigious family, you sure act like a desperate amateur. I’m sure your brother told you- Sebastian proposed to me, and I said yes. That makes us engaged.”

She stepped closer. “He’s **my** man. The father of **my** children. So do yourself a favor and keep your filthy thoughts to yourself.”

Having had enough, Caitlin turned to James. “Take Sebastian out of here.”

James nodded and stepped forward to support the drunk man. Sebastian was still fully dressed, and it was clear nothing had actually happened.

As they were about to leave, Nolan returned after finishing his drinks, only to see a stranger attempting to walk Sebastian out.

He immediately stepped in. “Hey, who are you? What are you doing with him?”

James paused, holding up Sebastian. Caitlin stepped out of the room. "I'm here to take him home."

"Caitlin?"

Nolan looked surprised. "How did you get in here?"

Before she could answer, Jillian burst out of the suite and clutched Nolan's arm, crying pitifully.

"Nolan! You're just in time! I was attacked!"

Nolan frowned. "What happened?"

"It was her! They barged into your room and hit me! Look at my face—it's swollen!"

Tears streamed down her cheeks as she wailed, "She slapped me! You *have to stand up for me!"

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 426

What a perfect example of the thief crying thief.

Caitlin told James to take Sebastian out first, then looked at Jillian calmly and asked, “Your face is swollen? Isn’t that from your recent cosmetic injections? That puffiness is clearly a post injection reaction—what does that have to do with me slapping you!

“In fact, your asymmetrical face looks more even now. Honestly, you should be thanking me

Caitlin could tell at a glance whether a face was natural or not.

Having her secret exposed so casually m

made Jillian’s face turn beet red. She glared at Catlin but couldn’t come up with a single retort.

All she could do was turn to her brother for help. “Nolan... I

“Enough. Just stop. She’s Sebastian’s woman.”

Nolan didn’t want his sister clashing with Caitlin That would never end well.

Being scolded by her brother made Jillian pout and sulk with a sharp humph.

Turning back to Caitlin, Nolan apologized. "Sorry, Caltlin. My sister just got back from abroad. She's not exactly well-behaved. I hope you'll let

dide

Caitlin had no quarrel with Nolan himself, but she had something to say to his sister. "I can forgive ignorance, but don't you want to know why I slapped her in the first **place?**"

Jian shot Caitlin a glare. "My brother said to drop it. Why are you still going on about it?"

"I'm not as forgiving as **you** think. You crossed a line, and I won't let it slide."

Nolan frowned. "What exactly happened?"

"Sebastian **was** resting in **your** suite. That's fine. But your sister came into the room under the pretense of taking care of him, stripped down, and tried to climb into bed with my man. Do you think I was wrong to slap her?"

Caitlin's voice was cold and sharp. Nolan's face darkened with rage. He turned to Jillian and shot her a withering glare. "What the hell were you thinking? Didn't I tell you not to disturb **Sebastian**? How could you do something like this?"

Nolan raised a hand, furious, ready to strike her. Jillian cowered and covered her head with a scream, "I didn't! I didn't do anything like that!"

Don't listen to her lies! I didn't even touch Sebastian!"

"You "wanted" to, though. Luckily, I showed up in time. This is the camera I found in the room! You weren't just planning to do something-

you wanted to record it!"

Caitlin held up the camera and pressed play.

Jillian instinctively reached for it, but Nolan held it high, out of her reach.

The video showed Jillian adjusting the camera angle to point at the bed. Then it captured her removing her clothes and crawling toward Sebastian...

Next came Caitlin's entrance, pulling Jillian off the bed by the hair and slapping her across the face.

Nolan paused the video and looked down at his sister with utter disappointment and rage. Jillian ducked behind him, face pale.

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This whole incident made Nolan feel thoroughly disgraced. He bowed to Caitlin repeatedly. “I’m sorry. I should’ve kept a better eye on my sister. This is my fault. Please forgive us.”

“The one at fault is her. You don’t need to apologize. “She should.”

Caitlin didn’t let emotions cloud her sense of right and wrong. What needed to be addressed had to be addressed.

Nolan understood her well—Caitlin never let things slide when it came to principles.

*Jillian Apologize to Caitlin. Right now!”

His voice thundered with anger.

Jillian glanced at her brother, knowing she had no way out. With clenched teeth and red eyes, she turned toward Caitlin. "I'm sorry, Caitlin. know I was wrong. I apologize."

ed at her coldly, her gaze sharp as blades. "You'd better remember this lesson. Don't mess with me again."

Caitlin stared at

She turned to Nolan. "Nolan, I'm leaving"

Without waiting for a response, Caitlin walked **away**.

tinto the **car**. She glanced at the man passed out in the back seat and sighed softly.

Outside Club No. 8, Caitlin got i

She reached out and gently pulled him into her arms, letting his head rest on her shoulder.

They say alcohol hits harder when you're emotionally down. Tonight, Sebastian must've been hurting.

“Drive,” she said softly.

James pulled out into the road. Xavi and the others followed in their cars back to the Vanderbilt estate.

Summer nights were thick and heavy, with a humid breeze brushing against the streets.

Benjamin had been chasing after Wendy for blocks, calling out to her the whole way. But the chubby girl only picked up her pace, ignoring

him.

By the time he finally caught up, Benjamin was drenched in sweat.

“Hey! Didn’t you hear me calling you?”

Wendy stopped, her arm caught in his grip. “What more do you want? I already quit. I’m not your employee anymore. Don’t think you can boss me around just because you’re my ex-boss”

Benjamin huffed, hands on his hips, glaring at the pudgy girl in front of him. “You’ve grown guts, huh? Talking to me like this now?”

“What do you expect? We agreed to cut ties, I told you—I don’t know you! I’m going home.”

She turned to leave, but Benjamin grabbed her again, pressing her **against** the wall nearby.

His strength was no joke. If Wendy hadn’t been... generously padded, she might’ve gotten hurt.

“What do you want now?”

“You think you can touch me and just run off?”

“I already said it was an accident! And I apologized!” she fumed.

“That’s how you apologize?”

“What else do you want, Benjamin? Why are you clinging to me—me, of all people? I’m just a fat nobody. You’ve got all those skinny, hot babes around you. Go flirt with them!”

Wendy wasn’t delusional. She knew her worth or lack thereof. She knew Benjamin was way out of her league.

He'd made it clear she wasn't his type. Said he wouldn't even take her if someone gave her to him.

Every time she remembered those words, it still stung.

Benjamin stared at her, his gaze deep and intense, like it could swallow her whole.

girls hanging around," he said slowly. "But I like the ones with some meat. Soft, squishy—ke a sponge

"I do" have a lot of those skinny girls Feels amazing."

As he said that, he pinched her cheek, tugging gently at the chubby flesh.

"Ah—1" Wendy slapped his hand away, furious. "Jerk! I'm not your toy!"

What kind of messed-up kink was **this**?

"Then "be" my toy."

as low and serious for once.

His voice was

Benjamin held her shoulders, staring into her eyes, lowering his head toward hers.

His ridiculously handsome face inched closer and closer.

Wendy's eyes went wide in shock.

Even *chubby* girls get their spring

AD

No Ads

-ment

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

She almost forgot to breathe. Her mind went completely blank, like it had short-circuited. Her entire body froze as if under a **spell**

A warm kiss landed on her lips, and in that instant, it felt like an invisible current surged through every nerve in her body.

But Benjamin's kiss wasn't the usual cocky, domineering kind one might expect from him. It was unbelievably gentle—so gentle it didn't feel

real

In all her twenty-something years, Wendy had never been treated this tenderly by a man. She forgot to respond, even forgot to breathe.

It felt like a dream—so unreal.

Only when she was on the verge of suffocating did she finally shove him away.

For reasons she didn't understand, tears welled up uncontrollably. She wiped her mouth furiously.

Benjamin watched as she wiped her lips, and his mood instantly sank. **Was** she disgusted by him?

Her first kiss—gone just like that. Wendy suddenly felt incredibly sorry for herself. Holding back the sadness swelling in her chest, she forced out the words, “Benjamin! Stop this! I’m not your toy! I’m not like you—I can’t afford to play around!”

“I was joking, Pudding,” he tried to explain. That whole toy comment—it wasn’t what she thought.

But that was exactly what she feared—his jokes. She could never tell when he was being serious or just messing around.

“Don’t call me Pudding! I hate it!”

Shouting, she turned and ran off crying.

“Hey—” Benjamin called after her but didn’t chase her this time.

He ran a hand through his hair in frustration. Why **was** he so drawn to this chubby girl?

Maybe it went back to his childhood.

When he was a sickly little boy, he had spent time in the countryside recovering with his mother. Because of his health, he was often bullied.

Back then, there was a chubby girl named Pudding who always stood up for him. She became his only friend, gave him joy, and more than anything—she gave him a **sense** of safety

That's it safety**

He felt the same thing from Wendy. That familiar, comforting sense of security

That's why he nicknamed her Pudding,

That's why, against all logic, he wanted to kiss her... and why he wanted to keep her within his reach.

What could he do? She **was** just so **adorably** squishy.

“Vanderbilt Manor**

James and Xavi helped Sebastian into the bedroom. Caitlin followed close behind

“I'll take care of him. You two go get some rest”

James and Xavi exited, leaving Caitlin alone with the thoroughly drunk Sebastian

She stood by the bed for a moment, watching him sleep, then slowly helped him out of his clothes and brought warm **water** to wash him **up** Midway through, Sebastian stirred, his eyes cracking open in a daze. Still in the haze of alcohol, he murmured like he was dreaming

“Caitlin... don’t go to him...”

He reached out and pulled her into a tight embrace. “You’re mine...”

His eyes drifted shut again, and a moment later he muttered, “Zeke... you again... gonna beat you up...”

Pressed against his solid chest, Caitlin didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. This guy was seriously drunk-dreaming about fighting Zeke?

Thankfully, he didn’t throw up during the night and seemed to sleep peacefully. Caitlin stayed close, watching over him without leaving his side.

The next morning, Sebastian finally woke up. Though his head still throbbed, he was at least sober.

He sat up and blinked down at his half-dressed state, Alarmed at first, he relaxed when he recognized his own bedroom.

He remembered drinking at No. 8 last night and Nolan helping him upstairs, but everything after that was a blur. He had no clue how he got

back home.

But **as** the memories of the flight and Zeke's sudden appearance resurfaced, the irritation returned

Outside, footsteps echoed-Caitlin's, he could tell. In a flash, Sebastian lay back down and pretended to be asleep.

Caitlin had already **made** breakfast. The kids were downstairs with James, eating happily. She came up to change clothes and check if

Sebastian was awake.

Seeing him "asleep," she didn't wake him. Instead, she went to the closet to change.

Sebastian cracked an eye open and caught a glimpse of her curvy silhouette as she slipped into a form-fitting dress.

That perfectly sculpted figure. That graceful back.

Just one look and he was practically losing his mind.

Was she really giving him “this” kind of eye candy first thing in the morning?

Caitlin turned around and caught his peeking. She raised a brow. “You’re awake?”

“No, I’m not.”

Sebastian rolled over, turning his **back** to her.

Still grumpy, huh?

“If you’re not awake, how are you talking?”

Caitlin circled the bed and sat down in front of him.

Now that they were face to face, there was no pretending.

“Okay, come on now. Don’t be mad anymore, alright?” She reached over to gently rub his head, coaxing him like a sulking kid.

“Hmph”

He grunted. “Do you even know why I’m mad?”

“I know,” Caitlin said softly. “You’re upset about what happened with Zeke yesterday. But let me explain.

“I only helped Zeke out of human decency. I do feel bad about what he went through, and I’m grateful that he risked his life to save me back at the Shadow Moon Pavilion

“But I’m just repaying a debt. Nothing more. Please believe me.”

Sebastian “did” believe her. That was the problem,

It was because she was so grateful, so loyal, that he was worried. That someone like Zeke would take advantage of that

“I believe you. But what if—what if, to repay him, he asks for your heart? Then what?”

He didn't doubt “her”—he just didn't trust “Zeke”.

Caitlin took his hand and smiled. “There's only one man in this world **I'd** ever give myself to willingly. Anyone else? They can take everything! own—but my heart and body? No chance”

“And that man is me.”

A **wave** of joy washed over Sebastian's face.

“Who else? There's only one Sebastian Vanderbilt.”

Men, just like women, liked hearing sweet words. Sometimes, they just needed to be reassured.

And Caitlin **knew** exactly what to **say**

aw to clear away!

the storm in his heart.

Sebastian stared at her for several long seconds. Then, with one quick move, he rolled **over** and trapped her in his arms.

Thinking of all the unnecessary jealousy and heartache he'd gone through last night, he regretted not just staying home and waiting for her like a good boy.

Now that the storm had passed, he wanted to start the morning right—with her in his arms.

Just as he leaned in for a kiss-

Bangl

The door burst open

“Daddy! Mommy-”

It **was** the kids.

Hearing their little voices and footsteps, Caitlin panicked and shoved Sebastian **away**.

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Chapter 427

“Argh!” he yelped, hitting the bed with a thud, his face twisting in pain,

“What happened to Daddy? little Patricia asked, peering

goves the bed with wide eyes.

“Nothing! Mommy’s just taking care of him,” Caitlin said with a sheepish smile.

Arthur stepped in and pulled his sister’s hand, in a very serious tone, he **said**, “Come on, Patricia. Let’s go play. Mommy and Daddy are gonna make a baby.”

“Yay! Mommy, Daddy-I want a little brother and a little sister! Make them **soon!**”

With that, the two kids skipped off hand-in-hand, even closing the door politely behind them,

“You heard that, right? The people have spoken,” Sebastian smirked. “We should give the masses what they want.”

Caitlin rolled her eyes and pushed him **away**. “You still reek of booze. I’m going to run your bath.”

She walked into the bathroom, the sound of running water soon filling the room.

Sebastian followed, leaning against the doorframe, watching her swirl the water with her fair hand by the tub.

The sight of her, graceful and soft in the morning light, stirred something in him again.

It was going to be a very sweet morning.

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 428

“The bath’s ready. Come on, get in

in.”

Caitlin turned and saw Sebastian entering the bathroom. She stood and urged him toward the tub.

Sebastian walked over but didn't get in right away. Instead, he pulled her close and asked, “I've got a question.”

“What is it?”

“Where do I rank in your heart?”

When Caitlin heard that, she thought he sounded exactly like one of those insecure lovers always fishing for reassurance. Was he having another wave of doubt?

She cupped his face in both hands and answered seriously, “You silly man. You're number one—how could you not be?”

“For real?”

He was clearly delighted but tried to keep a

a straight face.

Apparently, if she didn't give him a clear enough answer, he'd just keep spiraling.

"Of course it's real, Look, my mother gave birth to me—she's the closest person to me. But she also has my brother. And my brother? One day he'll have his own family. Our children, when they grow up, will leave us too. But you... you're the only one who'll stay with me for life.

"So what do you think? You're the most important one. Number one. Got it!"

It was a perfect answer.

Sebastian's

's heart melted. A warm, satisfied smile spread **across** his face.

"Love you," he murmured, his gaze burning with affection.

Caitlin laughed and shoved him toward the tub. "Enough with the sweet talk, Get in already!"

Water splashed up as he fell into the tub, dragging her in with him.

A perfect morning is waking up next to the one you love most.

By the time they finished bathing and got dressed, more than an hour had passed. Caitlin tidied herself up, then headed out with Zinnia. Xavi, noticing Zinnia with her, quickly stepped forward.

“Madam, heading out? Let me drive you.”

As **he** spoke,

he cast a glance at Zinnia, who remained cold and expressionless

Caitlin easily saw through his little crush but didn't call him out. “**Sure**, I'll trouble you, then.”

“It's my honort”

Xavi helped them into the **car** and took the driver's seat

After they left, Sebastian came downstairs. Cain had left him with a mission today: take care of the kids at home.

The kids were already in preschool, so there wasn't much for him to do. James saw him and gave a pointed warning

"Don't ever do that again. Even I was uncomfortable, let alone Callin."

"Do what?"

Sebastian looked genuinely confused. He had no memory of what happened after he got drunk..

"Didn't Call in tell you?"

"Tell me what? What happened?"

Caitlin hadn't said a word about it, and James' comments left him even more confused.

"You got drunk last night and nearly ended up in bed with another woman. Lucky for you, Caitlin's the forgiving type. If it were me? You'd be

out."

“What?!”

Sebastian was stunned. He vaguely remembered Nolan taking him upstairs to rest, but a woman?

“That woman—Jillian—isn’t she Nolan’s sister? You might want to ask your good buddy what kind of plan he had in mind.”

James walked away, clearly still upset.

Even if Caitlin could let it slide for the sake of their kids, James **couldn’t**.

Caitlin had kept quiet about it not because she didn’t care, but because she was smart enough not to dwell on something that could hurt their relationship—especially once she confirmed nothing actually happened.

From James’ words, Sebastian pieced together enough to suspect that something else happened after he went to rest in the private room.

Did Jillian try something!

If that was true, the thought alone made it hard to breathe. Did she do something while he was unconscious?

He needed to find out—immediately.

At the police station.

Caitlin came to see Felix and asked, “What’s the current status on Black Hawk?”

“Once the legal procedures are complete, there will be a public trial. He’s a special case—he was taken into custody before the verdict, due to the nature of his crimes.”

Caitlin understood. Black Hawk’s guilt was already a matter of public record. It was **just** a matter of time before the justice system formally sealed his fate.

Catching him again hadn’t been easy. They couldn’t afford to let him escape this time,

“I want to request a visitation. I need to ask him something about my mother.”

“Of course. No problem.”

Caitlin then brought up Teresa’s murder. “The anesthesiologist already confessed, right?”

“Yes. He admitted to billing her

“But what was **his** motive? Did he explain why he killed her?”

Felix shook his head. “No, that’s the problem. Without a clear motive, we haven’t been able to officially close the case ”

“Take me to him.”

er to meet the man who killed Teresa.

Felix escorted her to meet the

The anesthesiologist was a handsome middle aged man named Knox. According to his file, he was married—but his wife had been missing for over six months. He had reported it, and when the search turned up nothing, she was declared a missing person.

His social circle was small, Colleagues had only good things to say about him. He didn’t seem like a killer

To dig into his motives, Caitlin used a special hypnosis technique and successfully put him under

Half an hour later, she ended the session, and Knox slowly woke up from his trance.

“Knox, want to know what you just said?”

She held up a recorder.

1. **ad.** “What just happened?”

Knox blinked, still disoriented.

He hadn’t even realized he’d fallen asleep mid-conversation. Now he was wide **awake** and clearly confused..

y interesting things.”

“You fell asleep and said some very

His face turned pale. “You... you hypnotized me?”

As a doctor,

ha knew there

were forms of hypnosis that allowed **for** subconscious communication while the subject was asleep.

people tell the truth.

I can to ask your car Buscaia the body for trained in hypnosis-I

can bypass the mind and make

“You admitted why you killed Teresa. It’s all in this recorder. This can be used as legal evidence.

“So, what will it be? Are you going to confess? Or should I play it for you?”

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Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 429

Knox gradually composed himself “I’ve already confessed. What more do you want? Why does motive even matter for a murder”

“Motive always matters. There’s a difference between murder in self-defense and premeditated killing.”

Knox fell silent, unwilling to tell the full truth. So Callin hit play on the recorder.

When the recording finished, she fixed her eyes on him. “**You** didn’t just kill Teresa. You murdered your own wife, too. You’re carrying the weight of two lives.”

“No! That’s not true! Teresa—yes, I killed her. But my wife? No—I didn’t—I couldn’t..

Caitlin turned off the recorder. “You can deny it all you want. But if we search your property, we’ll find where you buried her.”

Even Caitlin hadn’t expected this interrogation about Teresa to expose a second murder.

Knox was speechless now, terror tightening around his throat. He clutched his hair, teetering on the brink of breakdown.

“I didn’t want to... I had no choice! Do you even understand what it’s like to be in that kind of pain?”

“I don’t,” Caitlin replied coolly. “A man who can kill his own wife? I don’t even want to imagine **what** his heart looks like.”

She packed up her things and left the interrogation room.

Felix was waiting outside. “So? Did you get the motive?”

“I did. He was being blackmailed.”

Caitlin played back the hypnosis recording for Felix and the others. Everyone was stunned by what they heard.

Felix rubbed his temple. “So he killed Teresa because he was afraid the truth about murdering his wife would come **out**?”

L

“Exactly. His marriage **had** broken down. His wife fell in love with someone else and asked for **a** divorce. He **couldn’t** accept being cheated on. During a heated argument, he killed her. Afterward, he staged her disappearance and filed a missing persons report”

“That’s why we never found a trace of her,” Felix muttered.

“You’ll **want** to check the water tank at **his** country house. That’s where the body is.”

“I’ll send a team immediately.”

Felix initiated a formal investigation. If they found the remains, it would finally close a long-standing missing person’s case—and a murder

case too.

But one piece still didn’t fit.

“He said he received a photo—his wife’s photo—from an anonymous sender who threatened to expose him unless he killed Teresa. But **he** didn’t name who it was.”

“I don’t think he knows who the blackmailer is,” Caitlin said. “Leave that to me.”

She turned to leave but paused. “By the **way**, how are things at home?”

“Better, thanks to you. After what happened, my wife turned **over** a new leaf. Things between us are going well now. She even wants to invite

you all over for dinner.”

For once, Felix’s stem lace softened into a smile. His family life was clearly on the mend.

“Let’s wait until this case is wrapped up. I’ve got something to take care of first.”

Caitlin left the station, on her way to confront Ximena.

It had been a while—and now, it was time to deal with her

At NO.8 Club.

Sebastian stormed in and kicked open Benjamin’s suite door.

His expression was thunderous, Benjamin nearly jumped out of his skin.

“Whoa, what the hell happened to you? Don’t tell me you got dumped?”

Sebastian's **face** looked like a walking storm cloud.

"Pull up the surveillance from last night."

Sebastian dropped onto the couch. Benjamin, puzzled but compliant, brought up the footage.

They watched together.

"You got drunk, and Nolan took you upstairs. That's all I see so far."

Sebastian didn't respond. He fast-forwarded—until a familiar silhouette appeared in the footage, swiping a key card and entering the room.

"No way—that's Jillian! What the hell was she doing going into your **suite**?"

Sebastian's face darkened even further. The tension in the air became palpable

Benjamin rubbed his **jaw**. "You think Nolan set her

or up with you? No way...

“What about the footage inside the room?”

“Dude, it’s a private suite. I wouldn’t dare install cameras in there. You know I don’t do that.”

“Call **Nolan.**”

Sebastian’s voice was low and dangerous. Benjamin didn’t argue—he made the call.

Half an hour later, Nolan arrived at the club—with Jillian in tow.

“Sebastian! I’m here.”

Nolan greeted him cautiously. “About last night—I’m really sorry, I already explained things to Caitlin Jillian crossed a **line**, and I’ve already given her a talking to. I brought her to apologize to you face-to-face.”

Jillian hovered near the door, too afraid to enter.

“What are you waiting **for**? Get in here!”

Sebastian's voice was sharp as a blade. Jillian crept in, hugging the wall like a prisoner on death row.

Who gave you the nerve??

His fury still hadn't cooled. Jillian burst into tears.

"I'm sorry...I didn't mean to... I just wanted to take care of you. I didn't do anything, I swear..."

"I have a wife. What makes you think I need you

you to take care of me? Who the hell do you think you are?"

His words cut like knives. Jillian sobbed harder.

Nolan stepped in. "Look, she was out of line. But nothing happened. Can't you just let it go? For my sake?"

Sebastian's eyes narrowed. "You didn't orchestrate this whole thing?"

“I swear I didn’t! You know me, Sebastian. I’d never do that to you.”

“Good. If you’re not responsible, then I’ll punish the one who is. She can choose—left hand or right.”

He wasn’t joking.

Jillian collapsed to her knees, shaking with terror.

“I’m sorry! I was wrong! Please, don’t! I just—liked you, that’s all! I know I messed up... Don’t cut off my hand...”

It was only now, in the face of real consequences, that Jillian truly panicked.

Nolan knew Sebastian too well—when he said something, he meant it. But still, he couldn’t just stand by and watch his sister suffer.

“She’s spoiled, I admit it. But she knows she was wrong. I’ll make sure she never shows up in front of you again. Whatever damage she caused, I’ll make it right. Please let me handle this.”

Billionaire's Regret: Finding Her

Chapter 430

Sebastian didn't speak, but his silence was enough for Nolan to take the hint. He turned and barked at his sister, "Mr. Vanderbilt is letting you

off this time. Now get the hell out of here! Don't you dare show your face in front of him again. You hear me?

"I hear you..."

Jillian sobbed, nodding desperately.

"Then move it"

With that final shout, Jillian scrambled away like her life depended on it.

Once she was gone, Nolan turned back. "Thanks for giving me birthday is coming up soon?

one chance. To make it up to you, I've got an idea. Didn't you say Caitlin's

“Well, how about this—I’ll take care of the venue, book the Royal Philharmonic from Europe to perform, and throw her an unforgettable birthday party. Total surprise. What do you think?”

Sebastian rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He’d been racking his brain for a special way to celebrate Caitlin’s birthday, but hadn’t come up with anything concrete yet. This idea actually sounded pretty good.

“Alright. Let’s do it.”

The murderous chill in Sebastian’s eyes finally faded, Nolan let out a breath of relief. His foolish little sister had nearly ruined a lifelong friendship.

At XEG Headquarters.

The car pulled up outside the building. Caitlin told Zinnia and Xavi to wait downstairs while she went up to see Ximena alone

Which, naturally, left Xavi with a **rare** chance to be alone with Zinnia.

He kept sneaking glances at her. Zinnia was quiet, elegant, and stunning just looking at her made him feel inexplicably calm. Maybe it was because she was older than him, giving off that dependable **big**-sister energy

And God knows, he was a sucker for that type.

Trying to keep his nerves in check, Xavi struggled to come up with something to say.

After a long pause, he finally blurted, “Zinnia, **do** you have any hobbies?”

“No hobbies.”

Zinnia turned her calm gaze on him.

...Wow,” Xavi thought, caught off guard. That was probably the most unique answer he’d ever heard. No hobbies? Seriously?

“Okay, then... what do you usually spend most of your time doing?”

“Killing people.”

Xavi sucked in a breath.

Talk about a conversation killer.

An awkward silence fell. The air between them chilled.

“I—I’m gonna step out for a second. Be right back!”

Xavi bailed.

Inside the CEO’s Office

Caitlin walked in slowly. Ximena looked up from her desk and stood.

“No wonder my eye’s been twitching all morning—it’s you.”

“I thought I’d drop in. How have things been while I was gone?”

Caitlin kept her tone casual

“Whether I’ve been well or not hardly matters,” Ximena said, lips curling. “But I did hear you returned to the Yuncey Family and took over Yun’s Fragrance & Dye Studio. Not bad, Caitlin. **You** really know how to make a comeback,”

“Thanks”

“Take a seat.”

Caitlin sat down, and Ximena asked, “So, what brings you to me today?”

“I came to advise you to turn yourself in.”

Caitlin didn’t beat around the bush. Ximena snorted.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Are you seriously accusing me of killing Teresa?”

“It’s not just what I think. Knox already confessed. He said someone blackmailed him with evidence of his wife’s murder and **forced** him to kill Teresa, We’ve got solid proof. You really think you can keep playing dumb?”

Ximena’s eyes flickered, but her expression remained composed.

“I don’t even know Knox. I never told him to do anything. You must have the wrong person.”

Caitlin played part of the hypnosis recording—Knok’s voice admitted that a woman had coerced him into murder. No name, but Caitlin **was** certain there was no one else with both the motive and means like Ximena.

Still, she needed to go for the kill

“Well, if it wasn’t you, then there’s nothing more to say.

Caitlin stood and casually added, “Oh, by the way—I ran into Zeke on my flight back.”

Ximena’s brow twitched.

“I still feel guilty. He got hurt saving me, and now his injuries haven’t even healed properly. He passed out on the plane...”

Ximena’s grip Lightened on her clothes.

had him taken to the hospital. The doctor says he needs time to recover. I think you used to know him, right? Back when you were with Shadow Moon Pavilion

“Zorro was really hard on him. And he lost his mom when he was just a kid. It’s sad, really.”

Caitlin sighed and turned to leave. “Anyway, I won’t take up more of your time.”

After she left, Ximena sat frozen, hands trembling.

The thought of Zeke injured and alone tore through her like a blade. Her eyes filled with tears she didn’t even notice. Guilt gripped her like a

vice.

As Caitlin exited XEG, she ran into Zora, who was just arriving.

The air between them instantly **crackled** with tension,

“Caitlin? What are you doing here?” Zora snapped, blocking her path.

“I came to see Ximena. Just a chat.”

“You were pestering my mother again, weren’t you? What did you say to her?”

Zora was practically seething.

“Nothing much. Don’t get so worked up.”

Caitlin brushed past, **but** Zora suddenly shouted, “Wait”

Caitlin paused. “Something else, Miss Harris?”

“You’ve heard about the upcoming Design Expo, haven’t you? You’re Kayla, the designer behind VERA. I’m a designer too. I represent XEG

“How about **we** compete? Let’s see who wins the gold at the Design Expo.”

Zora had no intention of letting Caitlin off the hook so easily,

“A design lace-off?” Caitlin asked, “And what happens to the loser?”

“The loser publicly quits the industry. No more designing-ever.”

Zora’s voice **was** cold and sharp, like she’d just signed **a** contract in blood.

This wasn't a talent contest like before. This was her turf—design. And she was ready to crush Caitlin once and for all

Caitlin didn't reply right away. Their eyes locked.

Zora sneered. "What? Silent now? Afraid to go head-to-head with me?"

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Caitlin didn't back down. "Fine, I accept your challenge. Just don't beg me for mercy when you lose."

"Hmph! As it!"

Zora's confidence stemmed from having already studied Kayla's entire portfolio. She was importantly, she knew Caitlin hadn't released anything new in quite a while.

familiar with Caitlin's design style—and more

With Caitlin so distracted by her mother's case, Zora believed it would be an easy

“Let's wait and see

Caitlin slipped on her sunglasses and walked out of the building.

Zora watched her back until she disappeared, then turned and stepped into the elevator.

Back in the CEO office, she found her mother sitting motionless at her desk.

“Mom, are you okay? That woman came to see you again what did she say? Why are you crying?”

Zora spotted the tears on Ximena's face and grew suspicious.

“It's nothing”

Ximena wiped her face. “She didn’t say much.”

“I bet this is about Teresa. **She** thinks you had something to do with her death, right?”

Zora had overheard Caitlin confronting her mother at Cloudtop Resort.

She lowered her voice. “Mom did you really do it?”

“Drop it, Zora. Go take care of your work. I need to step out for a bit.”

Ximena didn’t want to explain further. She grabbed her purse and left. No matter what, she needed to check on someone at the hospital.

Xavi returned to the car holding a cold drink,

Zinnia blinked at the cup he handed her. “**What’s** this?”

“It’s for you. Plum juice. Iced.”

Zinnia looked surprised. So that’s where the kid had gone—to get her a drink?

“And here, take this too.”

He tossed her a keychain—cute, bunny-shaped, and obviously from the same shop.

“Why are you giving me this?”

“Came with the drink. Girls usually like this kind of stuff, right?”

Xavi scratched his **head** with an awkward smile.

Zinnia didn’t care for knickknacks like this, but she couldn’t bring herself to reject the gesture. She looked at him for a long moment, noticing the sweat dripping down his face.

Something inside her stined. It had been so long since a man showed her any kind of kindness. Why did her chest feel warm?

A few minutes later, Caitlin returned.

“Drive,” she said as she got into the car.

Xavi started the engine.

Zinnia turned around. “You done talking with Ximena?”

“Yeah. We’re done.”

“It’s hot, and Xavi bought iced plum **juice**. I saved it for you.”

Caitlin smiled. “You should drink it. Don’t waste the kind thought—he bought it for you, after all.”

Then she teased, “Nice move, Xavi. You’re pretty good at this. But hey, where’s mine?”

“Ah—sorry! I forgot. Want me to go get one now?”

Xavi flushed with embarrassment.

“No need. I’m njoking. Let’s head to TIG.”

At TIG, Caitlin joined the executive meeting hosted by CEO Garrett.

Department heads gave their reports, **and** Garrett presented a newly prepared financial summary.

Since 4EVER Capital took over, TIG had gone from loss to profit. The numbers were climbing steadily.

Besides the operational updates, Garrett raised a key decision. “Caitlin, we’re finalizing the seasonal collection. The design team has narrowed it down to two candidates. I’d like your final word.”

Caitlin reviewed the concepts.

One was from veteran designer Justin—polished, upscale, and very much in line with TIG’s signature style.

The other was from newcomer Wade—fresh, bold, and unconventional, but lacking finesse in some key areas,

Caitlin made her decision. “We’ll go with Justin’s design. Push production immediately—we need to be ready by Tuesday’s product launch

“Agreed,” Garrett said. “Justin’s concept fits the theme best.”

The decision was made, and Garrett relayed instructions to get the samples finished on time.

But Caitlin had one more request.

“Bring Wade in. I have a few notes for him,”

Of course.

Garrett called down to design.

News **had** already spread: Justin’s designs won. As congratulations poured in, many took the opportunity to belittle Wade.

Wade, being part of the younger design crowd, didn’t say much. He knew his work **had** flaws and accepted the decision without complaint

Still, he didn’t expect Caitlin herself would ask to see him.

He

e walked into the meeting room, nervous and full of awe. Seeing Caitlin in person—she was even more stunning than in the media. Elegant, poised—utterly breathtaking.

“Caitlin...”

“Come in.”

He lowered!

d his gaze a

and stepped forward.

“You asked for me?”

“I reviewed your work, Wade. It’s full of potential—very original.”

That praise stunned him. From someone like her? He couldn’t believe it.

“But,” she continued, “your design has a critical flaw. You need to shift your perspective slightly. For **instance**, this sketch—here are three changes I made.”

She handed him the revised draft

Wade looked it over—and was blown away. “This is... brilliant”

She’d solved the exact problem he’d been stuck on. Her edits opened the whole concept up.

“A true collection expresses one idea, even if each piece looks different. You need visual variety but conceptual unity. And always include a hook—something unforgettable.”

Caitlin’s feedback was insightful. Wade nodded, eyes lighting up. I get it now! Thank you so much! Look—if I tweak it like this, does that work?”

He was sharp. He’d already m

adjustments, and now the piece looked polished and cohesive.

As the two of them discussed design, Sebastian arrived at the door holding a bouquet of roses.

He was about to surprise Caitlin—until he saw her deep in conversation with a young, very attractive designer.

A fresh-faced, handsome kid,

Sebastian froze.

She's still mad? And now she's moved on to a boy toy?

Alright then—who's hotter, me or the pretty boy?

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Chapter 432

Knock knocki

Sebastian didn't storm in like he might've in the past. He didn't lose his temper or punch the young guy in the face. Instead, he simply

knocked on the door.

Inside, both Caitlin and Wade looked up. The moment Wade recognized the CEO of VEG, his face turned pale, and he shot to his feet.

Caitlin saw Sebastian and turned to Wade. "Make the changes with this approach, then hand the revised concept to Garrett."

"Got it. Thanks, Caitlin"

Wade

didn't dare

Wade didn't dare linger. As he passed Sebastian, he greeted nervously, "Mr. Vanderbilt, sir."

Sebastian's ice-cold presence made Wade shiver involuntarily. Even after walking past, he could still feel the piercing gaze on his back. It was like being stabbed by invisible thorns, and he quickened his **pace** in fear.

Only after watching the “pretty boy” flee like his life depended on it did Sebastian turn his attention back to the room and walk in.

He stepped up to Caitlin and handed her a bouquet of roses

“These are for you.”

Caitlin stood up, leaned in to sniff the petals, and smiled. “What’s the occasion? It’s not a holiday.”

“Do I need a holiday to give my wife flowers? I’m here to apologize for last night. I shouldn’t have gotten drunk or made you worry.”

Hearing this, Caitlin knew he must’ve learned about what had happened the night before. He’d come to apologize—probably after finding **out** the full story.

Truthfully, she hadn’t taken it to heart. He hadn’t actually done anything wrong. **But** since he was here, taking the initiative to admit fault, she figured it was the perfect time to set a rule.

“Alright, apology accepted. But from now on, you’re not allowed to drink if I’m not there. Not even for business dinners—and definitely not to the point of getting drunk.”

“Alright, I promise.”

They held each other’s **gaze** for a moment before Sebastian wrapped an arm around her shoulder.
“Come on, babe. Our son’s got competition this afternoon. Let’s go cheer him on.”

“What competition?”

Caitlin hadn’t heard a word from the kids.

“Howard made it to the finals of the National Youth Piano Competition.”

“What?! No one told me! He’s in the finals already?”

“We wanted it to be a surpri

Caitlin quickly grabbed her things, holding the bouquet as she left TIG with Sebastian

On the **way** to the venue, Caitlin’s phone rang. It was Felix

“Caitlin, we searched Knox’s rural home like you said. Found a woman’s body inside the water tank
Based on pri

his wife. Once DNA confirms it, we'll move forward with charges. We wouldn't have cracked this without you, on behalf thank you."

"You're too kind."

They kept it brief. Caitlin wasn't looking for credit. If she could help the world just a little, that was more than enough

At the hospital, Zeke lay in bed, still nursing his injuries—and a growing anticipation that Caitlin would come visit

He'd been counting the days. Surely she should've arrived by now. Why hadn't she shown up? Was Sebastian keeping her away?

As he brooded, there was a knock at the door followed by the click of high heels.

Zeke's heart leapt. He sat up excitedly. "Caitlin!"

But the door opened—and it was Zinnia.

"Zinnia?"

Disappointment flickered in his eyes.

Zinnia walked in carrying a food container. "Caitlin asked me to bring you something to eat."

Now that they were both out of Shadow Moon Pavilion, there was no need to call him "Young Master" Zeke stared at the contain

heavily. "Why... didn't she come?"

"She's busy," Zinnia said plainly.

"No-she's not it's Sebastian. He won't let her come, right?"

Zinnia paused, then said, "Why hold on to something that doesn't belong to you? Caitlin and Mr. Vanderbilt are in love. Why force yourself into their story?"

The words struck deep-and not in a good way.

Zeke's expression darkened. A chill spread across the room.

Zinnia set the container down. “This was made especially for you. Please eat.”

But just as she placed it within his reach, Zeke swatted it to the floor.

Zinnia stared at him, stunned.

He was furious. That much was **clear**. And she realized her words **must’ve** hit **a** nerve.

“I’m sorry if I said something harsh,” Zinniaald. “But I meant what I said. Think it through—I’m just looking out for you.”

She knew Zeke well enough to understand he didn’t mean to lash out

Zeke clenched his fists, but his anger eventually dimmed, giving way to pain.

“I **know** you mean well... but do you really think emotions are something you can just turn off? You underestimate how much I love Caltiin. You don’t know what kind of world I grew up in Caillin, she showed me that the world isn’t all darkness.

“She was the light that made me want to crawl out of that abyss, I built SY Capital Partners from the ground up, hoping that someday. could stand next to her.

“She means everything to me. Zinnia, you’ve never had someone light up your life. You can’t possibly understand what she is to me

Zinnia didn’t know much about love—but at this moment, she could feel his heartbreak,

Zeke wasn’t just in love. Caitlin had become his reason to live.

If she was his rope out of the pit, what would happen if he lost it? Would he fall again? Would he shatter completely?

Sigh.”

Zinnia let out a soft sigh. **What** else could she say?

There’s only one Caitlin in this world.

After lunch, Sebastian and Caitlin arrived **at** the New **York** Arts & Culture Center.

The National Youth Piano Competition was being held there. Talented young musicians from across the country had gathered to compete

Tour buses were parked outside the entrance. Contestants and their families filed in one by one.

Inside, in a first-floor lounge, Caitlin and Sebastian found Quincy Faith, James, and the rest of T

The Vanderbilt Family gathered with the kids.

Raymond and Eliza were there **too**, along with Vincent, Hazel, Molly, and Simon.

“Everyone’s here!”

Caitlin greeted them cheerfully. The four kids saw her and Sebastian walk in and ran over with excitement

“Daddy! Mommy!”

She ruffled their little heads, then turned to Howard.

The boy was dressed in a tiny black tuxedo for the competition, looking sharp and polished.

Caitlin knelt to straighten his bowtie. “Howard, you’re really in the piano finals? I didn’t even know! We’re all here to cheer for you **today**- good luck!”

“Thanks, Mommy!”

Howard grinned from ear to ear. He had specifically asked the teacher not to tell her he wanted to surprise his mom.

“I’ll take him over now.”

“The competition’s starting

Faith came over to lead Howard away.

The boy waved at Caitlin one more time, beaming.

He was going to put on the best performance of his life—for her.

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“We can head to the auditoriums now Let’s go, let’s port

Molly urged everyone toward the audience seating Caitlin walked with the group, and in the hallway, they can into the Xenos family.

Telix and Madison had brought their son Kyle, and with them were Paul, **Leal**, and Yasm,

Kyle was also a contestant in the competition, dressed in a crisp little suit, exuding confidence and charm

“Felix!”

They’d just spoken over the phone, and now here they were face-to-face again...

“Mr. Vanderbilt, you’re here too!”

Felix greeted them warmly. He and Madison had rushed over straight from a case just to make it in time for their son’s performance.

Madison greeted Caitlin with unusual warmth, “Caitlin, fancy seeing you here. Looks like our Kyle and your Howard are competing in

same event today. What a coincidence.”

Back in the day, Madison might’ve used this as an opportunity to show off, but now, she simply appreciated the shared experience.

“Yes, Kyle is so talented—both brains and brawn,” Caitlin replied with a smile.

Kyle politely nodded. “Thank you, Caitlin.”

As the two families exchanged pleasantries, Yasmin stood nearby, watching coldly. She couldn’t understand why Madison was now so friendly toward Caitlin, while being more distant with her.

Regardless of the reason, she had one clear goal: Howard must not outshine Kyle. Kyle had to win first place—no matter what

“We’ll take Kyle backstage to get ready,” Yasmin said sharply, clearly annoyed by Caitlin’s presence. She led Kyle away along with the teacher.

“Let’s head inside and watch the performances. **Afterward, we** can all grab a meal together,” Madison suggested cheerfully. The group moved

toward the main hall.

Backstage, all 24 finalists were preparing. After multiple rounds of selection, these young pianists were the best of the best. Each child waited with their teacher or guardian, ready for their moment,

Yasmin escorted Kyle in, who immediately spotted Howard and ran over to play with him.

Yasmin shot a glance at the Vanderbilt kids, then pulled the teacher aside to keep an eye on Kyle while she went to find one of the judges.

In the judges' lounge, she spotted Zora—one of the competition's key panelists.

Zora, an acclaimed pianist with national championships under her belt, had been invited to judge the finals.

“Miss Harris!”

“Yasmin?” Zora was surprised to see her.

“Miss Harris, could we speak in private? I have something I'd like to discuss.”

Once alone, Zora already had a **hunch** what Yasmin was about to say.

Chapter 433.

“You know the competition rules. As a judge, I have to be impartial. I can’t play favorites.”

“I understand! We’re not worried about Kyle–his skills are top–notch. But Caitlin’s son is also competing, Did you know that?”

Zora scoffed, “Of course I did.”

“She’s here too. I ran into her in the hallway earlier. She was s absolutely insufferable.”

strutting around like the owns the place. If her son wins today,

she’s going to be

Yasmin cut to the chase. “So I’m begging you–not to let her son quality. Please don’t give him a high score.”

Zora was silent for a moment, then smiled stylishly. “I see what you’re getting at. Do you really think I’d give her kid a high score? Don’t worry. He won’t be getting any favors from me.”

“Perfect. That’s all I needed to hear” **Yasmin** gave a satisfied nod and hurried off,

The finals had already begun. The emcee walked onstage to kick things off.

Up in the second floor VIP box, the Vanderbilt family had the best seats in the house, facing the stage directly.

“It’s starting! My nephew’s the best!”

Molly clapped excitedly. She was especially happy because Simon had managed to take time off to **join** her.

The children leaned forward, eyes glued to the stage.

Suddenly, Caitlin asked, “Why isn’t Patricia competing in the piano contest?”

She remembered that the Harris family had made Patricia learn piano from a young age, and the girl played quite well.

Patricia turned to explain herself. “Because I don’t want to i don’t like playing piano!”

Having been forced into lessons when she was little, Patricia now hated it. No matter how well she played, she had no desire to compete.

Caitlin understood. She wouldn’t force her kids to do anything they didn’t love.

After the opening remarks, the emcee invited the five judges on **stage**, introducing each one with their professional credentials.

Every judge **was** an accomplished musician. When Zora was introduced **as** a two-time national piano champion, Caitlin looked up sharply

From behind the curtain, Zora stepped into view. It really was her.

Caitlin frowned. Zora? She’s one of the judges?

“That’s Auntle!”

Patricia waved enthusiastically.

Zora **gave** a light wave from the stage, then took her seat. Once all judges were in place, the first contestant was invited to pen. Performance order had been determined by a draw. Kyle was number 19. Howard was number 24—the final contestant

They'd have to wait quite a while to see both kids perform

The first child came on stage, but nerves got the best of him. He stood frozen until his teacher prompted him from the audience.

One by one, the children took their turns. Beautiful piano pieces echon

They were all skilled so much so that to the average person, the differences were almost imperceptible. That's where judges came in.

After a flurry of applause and performances, it was finally time for contestant number 19 Kyle

Dressed smartly, Kyle walked on stage, bowed politely, then took his place at the piano.

New York's number one prodigy did not disappoint. His playing was graceful, expressive, and full of life. Confidence radiated from his face and his music had the power to move the entire audience.

When he finished, the applause was thunderous.

The judges gave their scores—and Kyle earned the highest total so far.

The Xenos family beamed with pride. Kyle was, without a doubt, their shining star

Two more performers followed. Then finally, It **was** time—contestant 24 was called.

The Vanderbilt family grew excited.

Molly rubbed her hands together. “It’s Howard’s turn at last!”

AD

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Soon, the dashing little boy walked onto the stage. With a confident bow to the audience, Howard made his way to the plans.

Molly watched her handsome nephew and casually whispered to Simon, “Simon, let’s have a baby this cute in the future, okay?”

The sudden comment made Simon flush with embarrassment.

He didn’t reply, but Patricia overheard and chimed in, “Auntie, you could also have a girl like met Girls are great tool

“Yes, yes, we want a little girl too.”

“My mommy and daddy are going to give me a baby brother or sister soon. You guys better catch upt

The little guy giggled, making everyone around them burst into laughter,

Sebastian, in a good mood, pulled Caitlin close and planted a kiss on her cheek. Together, they turned their attention to the stage.

Their eldest son—once withdrawn and lacking maternal love for five years—was now confidently performing in front of a crowd. This

transformation was all thanks to Caitlin’s return.

Everyone could see how much Howard had changed. He was becoming more cheerful and self-assured, likely because the presence of a mother **gave** him strength and confidence.

Howard began to play, and a graceful melody flowed from the piano. As the music carried on, the child grew more immersed and expressive, practically glowing with passion.

His chosen piece wasn't easy—Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu in C-sharp minor.

His tiny hands danced rapidly across the keys with precision and flair. The performance was so flawless and emotional, it was hard to believe a five-year-old could deliver such a rendition.

He was the youngest contestant of the night—and yet this performance showcased extraordinary musical talent.

If Kyle had elevated the competition, then Howard had pushed it to new heights.

As his piece neared the end, many audience members began to rise to their feet, clapping and cheering. When he played the **final** note, the entire hall stood in ovation.

Applause thundered for a long time.

The Vanderbilt family also stood, cheering for their brilliant young star,

*Howard played beautifully! I had no idea he was so good at piano!” Molly exclaimed in delight.

“What do you expect? He’s my son,” Sebastian replied, pride radiating from his face.

Caitlin’s eyes shimmered with emotion. Her heart swelled—who wouldn’t be proud of a child like this?

From the crowd’s reaction alone, Howard’s performance clearly rivaled, if not surpassed, Kyle’s.

But then came the scoring.

When Howard’s total score flashed on the screen, it was shockingly low—several points below even the average performers from earlier.

Gasps of disbelief rippled through the audience..

“What’s going on? Why is my nephew’s score so low?” Molly asked, frowning

“Seriously? This must be a mistake. Howard was clearly the best!” Simon said, just as confused.

Even the Xenos family looked surprised, Felix and Madison both knew Howard outplayed Kyle.

“Howard definitely played better than Kyle. Why is his score so much lower?” Madison asked, puzzled.

Felix shook his head. “I don’t know. Maybe it’s just how the scoring system works?”

Most of the audience couldn’t understand it either. Many were whispering about the blatant unfairness—Howard’s score placed him at the very bottom.

The Vanderbilt family sat stunned, while Caitlin and Sebastian exchanged a knowing glance.

They understood what this was

“I’m go

“I’m going to ask,” Caitlin said.

She had a strong suspicion. The only explanation was Zora—and this score was no coincidence,

This

is was personal.

Howard, still backstage, hadn't looked at the scoreboard. He didn't know how poorly he'd scored.

He stepped down after his performance, making way for contestant number 25.

That child played a safe, standard piece—nothing spectacular. But somehow, he received a much higher score than Howard.

Once the last performance concluded, the host returned to the stage.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please look at the screen. Tonight's top three scorers are.

Kyle and two other children were invited up. Kyle **was** announced as the champion, followed by the first and second runners-up.

There were murmurs from the crowd, but no one dared question the official results. Most were just spectators—not experts

The award ceremony began. The event organizers came onstage to present the prizes.

Backstage, Howard looked up:

up at **Faith**.

1. **h.** “Was I not good?”

“You

were wonderful, Howard.”

“But... I didn’t win any prize.”

Howard had really wanted to show Caitlin his trophy.

Faith knelt to his level. “It’s okay not to win. What matters **is** that you performed with heart. Your mom and dad are so proud everything.”

Howard looked down quietly.

Worried he’d feel sad, Faith quickly **added**, “Come on, let’s go **find** your mommy.”

-they saw

“Okay,” Howard nodded, holding her hand.

Not far away, Yasmin watched Howard leave her expression smug

After the ceremony, Caitlin stepped out of the VIP box and ran into Madison in the hallway

“Mrs. Jones, congratulations. Kyle really earned that trophy”

Madison smiled modestly. “Honestly, I think your Howard was better. He should’ve been at least runner-up. I don’t understand how his score was so low. Aren’t you going to ask?”

“Lam,” Caitlin replied.

She made her way back into the auditorium. The crowd hadn’t completely cleared yet, and the judges were still chatting in their

Caitlin walked straight down the aisle, stopping in front of the judging panel.

Zora was in the middle of laughing with another judge but fell silent the moment she saw **Caitlin** approach

“Excuse me, esteemed judges. I’m the parent of contestant 24, I’d like to ask how the scores were determined.”

Caitlin wasn’t causing a scene. Her tone was calm **and** composed.

Two male judges looked surprised to see her. Recognition flickered in their eyes—clearly, they’d seen her in the news.

Zora, anticipating this moment, took the lead.

“We grade based on five categories: accuracy, fluidity, completeness, expressiveness, and difficulty. Why, is there an issue with the results?”

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“And what, exactly, did contestant 24 lose points on?” Calilin pressed,

to let the matter go.

“Sorry, that information is confidential and not for public disclosure,” Zora replied curtly.

“I thought this competition valued fairness, openness, and transparency. So why can’t the scoring be made public?”

Caitlin’s tone was calm but firm. Zora, caught off guard, responded imitatively, “Fine, you want to know? I gave him the lowest score

“He had decent fluidity, but everything else was w

as weak. That’s why he couldn’t get a high score. Satisfied?”

Caitlin’s eyes glinted with a touch of ridicule. “I seriously question your standards and your understanding of music, for that matter.”

Zora's face darkened as she stood abruptly, confronting Caitlin head-on. "So now you're saying I don't know what I'm doing?"

Several audience members, halfway to the exits, turned around in interest, sensing drama.

"You think it's appropriate to harass the judges just because your kid didn't score well? Our evaluations are professional and objective if your child didn't score high, maybe it's time to reflect instead of blaming the judges"

Zora's voice rang out loudly, drawing even more attention. Some in the audience sat back down, eager to see where this was going

"I'm not asking for a higher score," Caitlin said coolly. "I'm questioning the integrity of the evaluation. If you have a problem with me, fine- come at me. But don't take it out on a child.

"Everyone here saw and heard my son's performance. So how do you explain his score being "that" low? Something smells off."

Her piercing gaze bore into Zora's. They both knew exactly what was going on.

"So now you're accusing me of being unprofessional? Zora snapped.

"You call that professional?" Caitlin scoffed. "If you had any real skill, **you** wouldn't have embarrassed yourself with that kind of score."

Zora laughed coldly. “Acting like you’re t

the expert here? Fine then—let’s settle this right now, on this very stage. I’ll show you what real skill

looks like.”

Without waiting for a response, Zora turned to the audience and spoke into the mic, “Ladies and gentlemen, parents, teachers—this woman believes I’m unqualified to judge her child and wants to challenge me. So I accept. Let’s put our skills to the test, right here, right now.”

This showdown between a judge and a contestant’s parent had the whole venue buzzing with excitement.

Back in the VIP suite, both the Vanderbilt and Xenos families watched intently. Sebastian’s gaze narrowed—he knew exactly what Zora was up to. But challenging Caitlin? That was a mistake she was going to regret.

As everyone turned their attention to the stage, Zora glanced at Caitlin and smirked, “What’s the matter? Getting cold feet?”

“I don’t even know the meaning of fear,” Caitlin replied, her voice calm as ever. “We’ll play the most difficult piece. Show me “e thing” you’ve got.”

“You asked for it. Don’t blame me when you’re humiliated in front of everyone”

Zora brushed past Caitlin and strode to the piano, where she sat down with confidence and **flair**,

The children’s competition was over, but this unexpected duel had completely reignited the crowd’s energy

Chapter **435**

Caitlin motioned for Faith to bring Howard over. He arrived quickly, slipping his hand into hers. Caitlin firmly and encouragingly squeezed his tiny fingers.

They would face this together.

Zora began her performance—Liszt’s “La Campanella, a notoriously difficult piece meant to show off advanced technique and emotional control.

Her fingers flew over the keys, each note crisp and clean. Her expression shifted with the rhythm, and her dynamic control was nearly flawless. Even the other judges nodded in approval.

Even non-musicians could appreciate the skill on display. Her performance was textbook perfect.

When she finished, the audience clapped loudly. Zora stood and gave a proud bow before turning her

“Your turn, contestant 24’s mom.”

The room hushed.

Would she really go through with it? Did she even know how to play?

But Caitlin picked up the mic and said, “I’m not playing. My son will take my place.”

rgare to C

Caitlin

The crowd erupted into whispers. Zora’s eyes widened. “Are you serious? This is a competition between **adults**. You’re sending a “child” to play in your place?”

“If you’re too afraid to face **a child**, then you’re not qualified to face me either,” Caitlin said. “I want everyone to see that my son’s performance was never the problem—your blas was

Zora scoffed. “Such arrogancel Fine. But don’t blame me when your son gets humiliated.”

Ignoring her, Caitlin led Howard to the stage and gently lifted him onto the bench. “You’ve got this, sweetheart. Show them how amazing you

are.”

She kissed his cheek and stepped aside.

The spotlight lit up the piano.

Howard placed his small hands on the keys and began to play. The melody filled the hall it was “La Campanella“.

Gasps rippled through the audience. He was playing the “same piece” Zora had just performed.

And he was playing it well.

His tiny fingers moved with astonishing speed and precision, gliding over the keys with a light, graceful touch. Every note was clear, every phrase expressive.

A five-year-old, playing a Liszt showpiece... flawlessly?

No one could believe it. But here it was—undeniable, radiant talent.

Unknown to the public, Howard possessed a rare auditory memory. He didn't need years of training. Once he heard a piece, he could remember it and replicate it—exactly.

Just minutes earlier, he had quietly absorbed Zora's performance. Now he was giving it back, with heart and **flair**.

Even Zora couldn't smile anymore.

Her face fell, **eyes** foxed on the boy as disbelief settled in. This wasn't apposed to happen. That boy the one labeled antisocial and unruly— was now stealing her spotlight.

And he was doing it better.

As the final note faded into silence, Howard lifted his hands and gave a polite bow. The hall exploded in applause.

The sound was deafening.

This was the kind of applause reserved for greatness. For a child denied his due.

When it finally quieted, Caitlin turned **to** Zora, her voice calm but cutting

“So, what did you think of my son’s performance?”

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Zora’s expression remained dismissive. “Sure, he played the notes, but does a child that young even understand what the music is trying to express? I’ll admit he’s good at imitation, but it’s all just mimicry—soulless and meaningless”

Whispers broke out across the audience. Many couldn’t understand why this judge was so determined to discredit contestant **24. The boy**

had clearly played beautifully

Caitlin thought Zora’s argument was absurd. The only way to deal with people like her was to fight back with skill.

“Fine,” Caitlin said. “If you still can’t acknowledge my son’s ability, then I’ll play the same piece myself—let’s see who does it better,”

She put down the microphone and walked toward the plans. Those who didn’t know her were stunned—what kind of parent would dare challenge a professional judge onstage?

Zora lifted her chin arrogantly, watching Caitlin’s back with narrowed eyes. She was itching to see how far this woman thought her talents could go.

Caitlin’s pale, elegant hands floated to the keys. The first notes rang out—fluid and confident.

It was the third time the audience had heard the piece, and many were familiar with its melody by now. To the untrained ear, all three renditions—Zora’s, Howard’s, and now Caitlin’s—might have sounded equally impressive.

But true professionals knew better. Subtle differences revealed true mastery.

Caitlin’s performance wasn’t just technically flawless—it was at a master level. **Her** control, precision, and musicality far exceeded Zora’s. Every note was rich with intention and emotion,

If Howard could be forgiven for not yet fully grasping the piece’s deeper meaning due to his age, Caitlin suffered no such limitation. She not only understood the emotional **nuances**—she embodied them.

As her fingers danced across the keys, the entire hall seemed to fall under her spell. The atmosphere changed. Every ear tuned in. Every heart **was drawn** into the story her music told.

On the second floor, members of the Vanderbilt family listened in awe. Caitlin's talent **was** nothing short of breathtaking.

Even the Xenos family was impressed. It was no wonder Howard had such talent—his parents were gifted. This was pure, generational genius. Zora's expression darkened as the music continued. She hadn't expected this. Caitlin's abilities left her with no place to hide.

Why did this woman seem to excel at “everything“?

Caitlin's fingers blurred during the most intense passages, her tempo racing with controlled passion. As the final note landed and faded, she pressed her **fingers gently** against the keys—then stood and bowed.

The audience erupted.

Thunderous applause **filled** the room like **a** storm breaking loose. No one could deny what they had just witnessed

Caitlin turned to face Zora, her eyes sharp. The two women stood across from each other—one in white, one in black, like night and day.

“I believe music that moves people is true music. The audience’s response says it all. Do you still have anything to say?”

Zora didn’t respond. She had no argument left. The truth had spoken louder than her pride.

At that moment, the head of the event’s organizing committee stepped onto the stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, there’s been an unfortunate misunderstanding tonight. After thorough discussion, we’ve decided **to** re-evaldata to final results. We ask all the young contestants to please return to the stage.

The committee had learned exactly who contestant 24 was—Howard, son of the Vanderbilt family in New York. Offending them wit something they could afford.

The committee head turned to Caitlin with a smile of appeasement. “Ma’am, please stay with your child onstage. We’ll give **you a fair** and proper resolution shortly.”

It was clear they

they knew who she was—and who stood behind her. Their tone practically dripped with flattery.

But Caitlin had already made up her mind.

“There’s no need,” she said coolly. “We won’t be participating in any re-evaluation. A trophy from a rigged competition means nothing to us

She took her son’s hand and calmly walked off the stage.

The committee head stood frozen, sweat beading on his neck. What now? They had just thoroughly offended the Vanderbilt family.

The rest of the audience, still present, was stunned. Most could only admire Caitlin’s courage.

She had stood up against bias, exposed injustice, and when given the chance to accept a hollow apology—she walked away with grace.

It was power. It was dignity. And it was satisfying as hell to witness

In the end, the event organizers stuck to the original results. Kyle remained the champion. But anyone who had seen Howard perform that day knew he was the real winner.

Outside the cultural center, Caitlin reunited with the rest of the Vanderbilt family, Raymond and Eliza scooped Howard up, kissing his cheeks

with pride.

He hadn't won the trophy, but to them, he was a **star**.

Molly ruffled his hair. "You little rascal, when did you learn to play piano like that? Been hiding it from us?"

Howard puffed up and folded his arms. "Not telling."

"Aww, my poor heart," Molly exaggerated dramatically. "So mean!"

Howard suddenly grinned. "Simon can fix it."

There was a beat of silence—then everyone burst out laughing. Even Simon turned bright red from head to toe, cracking up despite himself.

Everyone knew by now that things between him and Molly had gotten very... sweet.

At that moment, the Xenos family emerged from the venue, still beaming. Kyle held his trophy proudly as relatives showered him with praise

When Kyle spotted Howard, he ran over.

“Howard!” he called out.

Howard turned but said nothing. Kyle held out his trophy, “You should take this. You played better than me.”

Kyle was proud, but he was also honest. He knew what he had heard.

Howard shook his head. “No need. I’ll win next time”

He didn’t care about the trophy anymore. What mattered was that his family had seen him. The

Cheered for him. That was more than enough.

“Kyle, that’s your trophy. Why would you give it away?” Yasmin stepped in, snatching the award from his hands. Her eyes flicked smugly

toward Caitlin and her group.

No one knew what she and Zora had discussed earlier, but it was clear she was pleased with the outcome.

Madison, smiling awkwardly, said, “Since everyone’s here, how about we all go out for dinner? Our treat.”

Felix nodded eagerly. “Yes, we’d love to have you.”

“Maybe next time,” Caitlin replied. “We’ve got something else we need to take care of **today**.”

“Alright then. Let’s plan for another time.”

Caitlin declined graciously, not because of the contest drama—but because she had one more important thing to do

It was time to close the net.